Spot the Stereotype!

Stereotype (Greek στερεός stereós = firm and durable and τύπος týpos = shape or pattern)

How demanding would it be if we were unable to recognise an object, such as a chair, quickly for what it is, but had to determine its shape and purpose every time, before we could confidently settle on it? Categories and stereotypes help us grasp situations rapidly and classify and process different perceptions and information from our surroundings, so that we can react and interact within a "reasonable" time frame. Epistemologically, stereotypes comprise fixed forms or conventional patterns (see etymology, above), which draw on our existing knowledge and values, and help us cope with everyday life.

Stereotypes are extremely convenient but they are by no means neutral. Not only our everyday life is affected by our subconsciously stereotyping different social situations and roles, academic discussions are also tainted by implicit assumptions, established canons, and interpretative models, which are rarely questioned. As the journalist and media critic Walter Lippmann stated in the earlier part of the last century, stereotypes are not "pure" syntheses or objective representations of the character or essence of an object or even a person. Rather, they are *modelled* and can be highly influenced by our prior beliefs and thus always entail some form of value judgement. They reflect collective and individual experiences, social labels, political positions and expectations - in short stereotypes are not *objective*, reliable or precise formulas. Because they operate at a deep cognitive level, they are often accepted uncritically and act as powerful and unquestioned categories. They create distinctions systemically and systematically - between genders, age and occupational groups, nationalities, cultural traits, traditions and behaviours, modes of communication and mediation, and much more.

"Spot the Stereotype!" is an interdisciplinary conference focusing on understanding the creation of different recognition patterns in several spheres of life, including politics, society, art, and science. The goal is to find stereotypes exactly where one would not expect them. To this end, we invite scientists from disciplines such as literature, linguistics, ancient studies, art, culture, media studies, history, and sociology to examine potential stereotypes within their subjects, research questions and methods, and to be ready to be surprised by their findings and discuss them in an inter/trans-disciplinary context. We encourage young researchers as well as established colleagues to engage with stereotypes in their fields, to challenge concepts which by now may appear very familiar and to gain a completely new perspective.

In order to tackle the underlying role of stereotypes within research, the conference focuses on two closely interlinked "sounding areas": **1) Stereotypes in history and history of science**: Where do powerful stereotypes, i.e. those that have reached full maturity throughout the history of these academic fields, tend to "hide" in their respective research questions and methods? How do we as scientists come to terms with them? **2) Stereotypes and forms of representation**: How do such concepts arise and how are they transmitted into different forms? What (or who) promotes these transfers, how can we describe them critically and evaluate them? How can we counteract these processes in terms of structure and content?

In general, we invite you to question explicitly traditional patterns of thinking and to look for stereotypes where you would not expect to find them: *Spot the Stereotype!*

Sounding Area 1) Stereotypes in history and history of science

Inventories of knowledge and their study are often legitimised by implicit claims of scientific validity as to what constitutes actual "knowledge". But which research questions, methods, and results have acquired historical validity and why? How do we award scientific excellence to research, according to which criteria and, moreover, who benefits from this the most? Research claims, past and present, are legitimised in different ways. A common feature is that they are always supported by more or less subtle mechanisms of inclusion, but - above all - of *ex*clusion.

How is knowledge validated, implicitly and explicitly, and how do such claims gain lasting effect in protocols and routines and become institutionalised? How do these mechanisms determine which *knowledge* enters the (disciplinary) "canon" or is dispensed with? Which *déformations professionelles*, which potential misreadings and "blind spots" do we deal with when confronted with any form of standardisation? How do our personal experiences, today's norms and values help us to classify our research results and which ones obstruct a clearer vision of history? To what extent does differentiating others make us more aware of ourselves, how are different social conditions discussed and what are the disadvantages in doing so?

In this section, we intend to focus on methods that can help us not only identify stereotypes but also question their influence.

Sounding Area 2) Stereotypes and forms of representation

Throughout time, stereotypes have become entrenched in iconic images, monuments, rituals, and in artistic and socio-political forms of representation. In turn, these representations promote stereotypes and shape them - while, at the same time, they reveal them to us, sometimes simply by annoying us, so that we may start to question them. On the one hand, literature, dance, theatre and film, painting, sculpture and architecture invoke stereotypes in order to counteract them purposefully or perhaps shatter them through irony; on the other, they also perpetuate them more or less willingly. For this reason, we want to draw attention to the ways in which stereotypes are (re-)presented and to discuss their origins and functions and how they are mediated. How are stereotypes identified and reflected upon? Our emphasis here is on questions of inter- and transmediality, of image politics, materiality, artefacts and their perception, authorship, narrative theory, as well as on understanding how (stereotypical) figures are created and arranged. The focus should be on interpretive patterns and claims, canonization, and thus mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion should be addressed.

The conference "Spot the Stereotype!" is a joint initiative of seven inter-institutional research networks: the Berlin Antiquity College with the Berlin Graduate School of Ancient Studies and the Cluster of Excellence "Topoi. The Formation and Transformation of Space and Knowledge in Ancient Civilizations", the research group "Discursivisations of the New.
Tradition and Innovation in Medieval and Early Modern Texts and Images", the Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School of Literary Studies, the Collaborative Research Centre "Episteme in Motion. Transfer of Knowledge from the Ancient World to the Early Modern Period", the Centre for Advanced Studies "BildEvidenz. History and Aesthetics", and the Cluster of Excellence "Temporal Communities. Doing Literature in a Global Perspective".

The conference will take place on 6th and 7th June 2019 in the Topoi-Haus of Freie Universität Berlin (Hittorfstraße 18). This open call for paper is aimed at researchers at any stage of their career (abstracts max 300 words).

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