

Staging Authority

Presentation and Power in Nineteenth-Century Europe. A Handbook

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Staging Authority: Introduction

Abstract: This handbook focuses on how the presentation, embodiment, and performance of authority changed in the long nineteenth century. It examines how the diversification of authority led to new forms and expressions of authority, how traditional authority figures responded and adapted to those changes, and how the public increasingly participated in constructing and validating authority. The handbook's fourteen chapters draw on innovative methodologies in cultural history and the aligned fields of the history of emotions, urban geography, persona studies, gender studies, media studies, and sound studies. This Introduction reviews the main concepts that guide the individual chapters. It explains what the term 'staging' means in all its facets: physical spaces, embodiment, choreography, dramaturgy, impression management, and media presence. It then reviews the conceptual difference between authority, power, and persuasion, drawing on works by Max Weber, Hannah Arendt, and Pierre Bourdieu. It provides an overview of the diversification of authority over the course of the nineteenth century and finishes with a synopsis of each chapter.

Keywords: authority, media presence, staging, charisma, embodiment, persuasion, soft power, Herrschaft, habitus, cultural hegemony, cultural history, emotional communities, embodied communities, mass media, authorization practices

This handbook started with the words: "Yes, but what about Louis XIV?" We were at the American Historical Association conference in Denver, discussing the nineteenth century's pivotal role in the commodification of visual technologies and the development of new media practices: newspaper printing, photography, and film. One of us noted that these new forms of media influenced how traditional authority figures presented themselves, expanding their repertoire of representational strategies but also putting them on the defensive. Another of us pointed out that Louis XIV had also staged himself in multiple media. As Peter Burke notes in *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*: "The king himself and his advisors were very much concerned with the royal image," and "the selling of the king" could be seen as foreshadowing the "manipulation of public opinion" by the likes of Richard Nixon and Margaret Thatcher.¹ How far did we want to go in claiming that there was something new to the nineteenth century?

¹ Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 2, 4. Burke also notes, though, that the "danger of anachronism is obvious enough" in regard to the 'selling' of Louis XIV. Burke, *Fabrication*, 4.