

## THE PATHOS OF AUTHENTICITY: AMERICAN PASSIONS OF THE REAL

There is a growing consensus that postmodernism ended with the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Criticism is thus faced with the task of providing assessments of the contemporary cultural situation in the United States and the West in general. Scholars and journalists have proposed various names for the current state of affairs such as “the return of the real” (Foster), “the end of irony” (Rosenblatt), and “the passion for the Real” (Badiou). The broad outlines of the transformation are becoming clear: if postmodernism was the cultural fascination with the symbolic and the imaginary (simulacra, fake, pastiche, jouissance), then what follows is the nostalgia for the real.

Our conference sets itself the task of analyzing the pathos of authenticity in contemporary American culture. Some of the key questions are as follows: How is authenticity invoked in historical and political representations of the real? What is the function of authenticity in contemporary fiction? How do critics differentiate between the authentic and the rhetorical, and how is this distinction inflected in the current political debates? Do we accept critical claims about the “collapse” of the symbolic? The historical resonances which the terms “pathos” and “authenticity” carry with them as well as the current nostalgia for the real necessitate an examination which takes the larger historical and cultural contexts into account.

The conference will begin on Thursday, June 21st with a keynote address by Bill Brown (University of Chicago), followed by a reception at the John F. Kennedy Institute. Five sections will provide a framework for discussion from Friday, June 22nd to Sunday, June 24th.

## CONCEPTION & ORGANIZATION

Professor Dr. Ulla Haselstein  
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## CONFERENCE COORDINATION

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## INFORMATION & REGISTRATION

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## The Pathos of Authenticity: American Passions of the Real

June 21st - 24th, 2007



## THURSDAY, JUNE 21ST

### Opening of the Conference

18:00 *Introduction*

Ulla Haselstein  
(JFK Institut, Freie Universität Berlin)

*Keynote Lecture*

Bill Brown  
(University of Chicago)

*Commodity, Nationalism, and the Lost Object*

20:00 Reception

## FRIDAY, JUNE 22ND

### Authentic Objects - Real Things

Chair: Rüdiger Kunow  
(Universität Potsdam)

10:00 Catrin Gersdorf  
(JFK Institut, Freie Universität Berlin)  
*Meat, Potatoes, and the Things We Eat: Authenticating the Natural*

11:00 Bärbel Tischleder  
(Universität Paderborn)  
*"A Soap Bubble is as Real as a Fossil Tooth": Physical Objects and the Presence of the Past*

12:30 MaryAnn Snyder-Körper  
(JFK Institut, Freie Universität Berlin)  
*And Susan Sontag Wept: Portraits, Grief, and the Gritty Grain of the Real*

### The Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse: Trauma, Testimony, Authenticity

Chair: Ulla Haselstein  
(JFK Institut, Freie Universität Berlin)

15:30 Ulrich Baer  
(New York University)  
*Is Trauma More Real Than Reality? Remarks on the Category of the Real in Contemporary Theory and Photography*

16:30 Erika Doss  
(University of Colorado, Boulder)  
*Memorial Mania: Affect and Commemoration in Contemporary America*

18:00 Susanne Rohr  
(Universität Hamburg)  
*Laughing at Pain: On the Popularity of Holocaust Comedies in the 1990s*

## SATURDAY, JUNE 23RD

### Ethics of Authenticity/Authentic Ethnicity

Chair: Thomas Claviez (University of Stavanger)

10:00 Sabine Broeck  
(Universität Bremen)  
*The Grounds of Whiteness: White Claims to Particular Authenticity*

11:00 Ruth Mayer  
(Leibniz Universität Hannover)  
*A "Rage for Authenticity": Richard Powers, Jonathan Lethem, and the Turn to Race*

12:30 Andrew S. Gross  
(JFK Institut, Freie Universität Berlin)  
*Imaginary Jews and True Confessions: Ethnicity and Non-Conformity in Post-War American Modernism*

### The Pathos of Religious Experience

Chair: Harald Wenzel  
(JFK Institut, Freie Universität Berlin)

15:30 Gary Lease  
(University of California, Santa Cruz)  
*Religion in the Contemporary USA: Everything BUT Authentic*

16:30 Klaus Milich  
(Dartmouth College)  
*In Pursuit of Authenticity, or Where Emotions Meet Religion*

18:00 Günter Leypoldt  
(Universität Tübingen)  
*Neopragmatism and the "Turn to Religion"*

## SUNDAY, JUNE 24TH

### Documentary Impulses: Neo-Realism, the Detail, and the Camera's Eye

Chair: Christof Decker  
(Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München)

10:00 Dietmar Schloss  
(Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg)  
*Don DeLillo's Underworld and the New Hunger for the Real*

11:00 Peter Schneck  
(Universität Osnabrück)  
*Faked Lives, Real Literature: J.T. LeRoy and the Hustle of Authenticity*

12:30 Hanjo Berressem  
(Universität zu Köln)  
*"Father, Can't You See I'm Writing?" Eigenvalue, Authenticity, and Pathos in Bret Easton Ellis's Lunar Park*