



# Imagining Culture

Norms and Forms of Public Discourse in America

June 26-28, 2009

Organized and Hosted by the Departments of  
Culture and Literature

John F. Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien  
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## PROGRAM

### Friday, June 26

17:00-18:00 Welcome & Introduction

18:00-19:15 Wanda Corn  
(Stanford University)  
"America is my country and Paris is my hometown." Gertrude Stein as Transnational Modernist"  
Introduction: Laura Bieger  
(Freie Universität Berlin)

Afterwards Opening Reception

### Saturday, June 27

09:00-9:15 Welcome by Peter Claussen  
Cultural Attaché of the U.S. embassy,  
Berlin

09:15-10:30 Walter Benn Michaels  
(University of Illinois at Chicago)  
"Real Toads"  
Introduction: Thomas Claviez  
(University of Stavanger)

10:30-11:00 Coffee

11:00 -12:15 Ramón Saldívar  
(Stanford University)  
"The Transnational  
Imaginary in Postrace America"  
Introduction: Sieglinde Lemke  
(Universität Freiburg)

12:15-13:30 Lunch

13:30-14:45 Mark Seltzer  
(University of California at Los Angeles)  
"Parlor Games"  
Introduction: Frank Mehring  
(Freie Universität Berlin)

14:45-16:00 Ulla Haselstein  
(Freie Universität Berlin)  
"Poses of Fiction"  
Introduction: Simon Schleusener  
(Freie Universität Berlin)

16:00-16:30 Coffee

16:30-17:45 Heinz Ickstadt  
(Freie Universität Berlin)  
"Imagines of American Modernism"  
Introduction: Hannah Spahn  
(Freie Universität Berlin)

17:45-19:00 Eva Illouz  
(Hebrew University of Jerusalem)  
"Imagination, Love, Modernity"  
Introduction: Susanne Rohr  
(Universität Hamburg)

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## Norms and Forms of Public Discourse in America

An international conference organized by the  
Departments of Culture and Literature of the  
John F. Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien,  
Freie Universität Berlin

## June 26-28, 2009

### Sunday, June 28

09:00-10:15 Christa Buschendorf  
(Universität Frankfurt)  
"The Shaping of We-Group Ideals: A  
Sociological Perspective on the Imaginary"  
Introduction: Martin Klepper  
(Humboldt Universität Berlin)

10:15-10:45 Coffee

10:45 -12:00 Herwig Friedl  
(Universität Düsseldorf)  
"William James vs. Charles Taylor:  
Philosophy of Religion and the Confines of  
the Social and Cultural Imaginaries"  
Introduction: Kirsten Twelbeck  
(Universität Hannover)

12:00-13:30 Lunch

13:30-14:45 Hortense Spillers  
(Vanderbilt University)  
"Some Thoughts on the African Diaspora"  
Introduction: Stefan Brandt  
(Freie Universität Berlin)

14:45-16:00 Paul Giles  
(Oxford University)  
"The Transnational Imaginary: A Reply to  
Winfried Fluck"  
Introduction: Christof Decker  
(Universität München)

16:00-16:30 Coffee

16:30-17:45 Donald Pease  
(Dartmouth College)  
"Barack Obama: Changing America's State  
of Fantasy"  
Introduction: Johannes Völz  
(Universität Frankfurt)

Afterwards Closing Reception

## NOTES

## CONFERENCE THEME

The concept of the imaginary has preoccupied the humanities for the last thirty years. The term's lasting attractiveness may best be explained by its promise to throw light on the relay between the realm of the individual and that of the collective, as well as on the relation between normativization and re-valuation. Recently, the debate has shifted to collective imaginaries which are inscribed into subjects by processes of identity formation, such as national, postcolonial, to transnational imaginaries. These imaginaries organize the norms and values shared by all individuals belonging to a certain social entity; these norms and values in turn inform the imagination of the individuals and structure their actions and their fantasies. Yet, this recent focus on collective imaginaries seems to risk reducing the imaginary to an instrument of subject positioning. To what extent is it possible to enrich this recent shift by the insights provided by earlier theorists of the imaginary coming from such traditions as phenomenology, existentialism, and psychoanalysis? By the same token, in what ways can the proliferation of "imaginaries" in recent criticism be used to build on these philosophical traditions? For instance, the emphasis on transnational and environmental imaginations have suggested that questions of spatiality must figure in theories of the imaginary more prominently. A renewed theoretical rigor would allow us to deepen our understanding of the conditions of the imaginary in a world in which communal and spatial boundaries are increasingly becoming disparate.

## LOCATION MAP



## CONFERENCE LOCATION

Freie Universität Berlin  
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Lansstr, 7-9, 14195 Berlin  
(U-Bahn Dahlem Dorf)