

**Sarah Al-Heli (University of Würzburg)**

“From the inside out’: Reality TV, authenticity, and the salvation of the reality principle”

Over the last two decades reality TV has become one of the most popular transnationally adapted TV phenomena playing an important part in the commodification of authenticity. Authenticity seems to be the currency of the real both as a subjective as well as an objective aesthetic and deliberative category for evaluating whether show participants are good performers and true to themselves.

I am concerned with tracing and assessing reality TV's direct and indirect accounts of the authentic, arguing as to how and for what purpose it is used in order to establish an apparently closer relationship to reality than other fictional TV formats.

Through a consideration of a thematic variety of reality TV shows such as American Idol (Fox), The Apprentice (NBC), The Biggest Loser (NBC), and America's Next Top Model (CW), and of their position within the wider framework of the reality TV genre, I will address this question further, also considering generic issues regarding reality TV's constant negotiation between the dichotomies of fact/fiction, real/fake, and authentic/acting up.

As indicated above, these formats frequently make use of terms like “raw”, “natural”, “real”, and “authentic”. My presentation will focus on the contexts of these references and try to show how these terms are subverted and reaffirmed through narrative strategies (e.g. the confessional monologue) and a format-specific form of realism. On theoretical grounds my presentation will be informed by a transdisciplinary canon from literary, media, and social studies, considering a wide scope of potential societal consequences of reality TV's rendering of authenticity.

**David Bousquet (University of Strasbourg)**

Poet and the Roots. Authenticity in the works of Linton Kwesi Johnson and Benjamin Zephaniah

Authenticity is a crucial concern for artists of the black Atlantic and has been intensely debated by critics over the last decades. However, in cultures whose origin was quite literally a displacement (i.e. the deportation of African slaves to the American continent) it is impossible to conceive of authenticity in an essentialist way, where it would be defined exclusively by ethnic origin and the adequacy to a stable, readily identifiable community based on the model of the nation/state. Rather, authenticity has to be seen as a negotiation process which has to be renewed in every context where cultural productions are dis/placed.

The works of dub poets like Linton Kwesi Johnson or Benjamin Zephaniah illustrate this transnational, diasporic view of authenticity. The poetry in question, though published in books, is primarily conceived to be performed: Johnson and Zephaniah tour the world to perform in a wide variety of venues and in front of always new audiences. In this context, authenticity is no longer guaranteed by the proprietary claims of an ‘author’ to a ‘text’ but has to be seen as the ability of poets and performers to relate to ‘alien’ audiences and to create cultural networks which transcend the boundaries of the nation/state.

Thus, even borrowed cultural forms of expression can become authentic because what matters is not so much their origin, or their originality but their contingent reconfiguration in the exclusive time and space of each performance. In that respect, we hope the study of such works might help trigger theoretical responses to contemporary cultural changes that challenge conservative notions of art and culture.

**Melanie Eis (University of Bremen)**

Taking It Like a Man: Hemingway's Representations of ‘Authentic’ Masculinity

Drawing on my *Magister* thesis, I would like to propose a talk on the representations of ‘authentic’ white, middle class masculinity in Ernest Hemingway's novels and short stories. Oscillating between a castrated, crisis-ridden and a virile white masculine identification, Hemingway's protagonists are shown in dire need

of exemplars of masculinity they can imitate. I argue that to find these, they seek out those whom they perceive as racial others and whom they assume to be ‘naturally’ virile, whether it be the Ojibway in Michigan, where Hemingway's *alter ego* Nick Adams spends his youth roaming the woods, or matadors in pre-World War II rural Spain, where famous Jake Barnes of *The Sun Also Rises* is part of the community of *aficionados* of the bullfight.

My discussion of white male claims to the ‘authenticity’ of racial others is meant to put the concept into a political perspective. In a US-American context, a fetishization of racial others as exposed by many of Hemingway's white male protagonists of course has to be read into the historical background of slavery. As Toni Morrison has pointed out in her influential *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), an “Africanist presence” informs the (white) American literary canon. What is always there in the American literary canon, but never quite visible, is an Africanism that has shaped its most important concepts such as masculinity and freedom. I would like to complicate the scholarly discussion of Hemingway's texts with a contrapuntal reading that I hope will make the often ignored intersections of gendered and racial identities in his texts visible.

**Irmtraud Huber (University of Berne)**

Fatal Authenticity- McCarthy's *Remainder* and the Cult of Repetition

Judging from its ever increasing presence in advertisement authenticity seems to have become one of the new values contemporary consumer society tends to subscribe to. From the authentic Thai food restaurant to the authentic mountain experience authenticity is rapidly turning into an effective sales argument and thus is becoming almost omnipresent in advertisement. In the increasingly disconnected, fragmented experience of contemporary consumer society authenticity seems to promise the possibility of establishing connections that are not purely arbitrary, but necessary and natural. The search for such a natural connection is at the core of Tom McCarthy's novel *Remainder* (2006). Authenticity becomes an obsession for the protagonist who feels detached from reality after his recovery from a near-fatal accident. Being in this feeling only “more usual than most,” as he states it, he is turned into a paradigm of contemporary experience. The novel thus turns into a perceptive depiction of some of the problematic aspects of a contemporary preoccupation with authenticity. In the novel, authenticity is both the ultimate aim and the catastrophic end-point of a development of increasing moral indifference in which the authentic experience is turned into a religious epiphany which is fanatically and ruthlessly pursued. In my paper I will therefore use it as a means to explore the fatality of authenticity, its rootedness in a capitalist framework of money and power, its quasi-religious value and its paradoxical constructedness. The authentic experience as it is here depicted is a product of meticulous planning, highly artificial and paradoxically absolutely dependent not on uniqueness, but rather on repetition. The repetition itself creates the religious aura of the cult that Walter Benjamin had famously argued the work of art had lost in the age of mechanical reproduction. *Remainder* refutes that judgment and develops an aesthetics of authenticity based on repetition that is both shocking and revealing in its ruthlessness and in its morbid appeal.

**Seth Hulse (University of Siegen)**

Games of Monolithic Authenticity: Stephen Colbert

In journalism, unlike any other narrative realm, the discourse of authenticity is paramount. Yet over the last 65 years there has been a change in the usage of authenticity due to movements ranging from New Journalism, postmodernist- and poststructuralist theories, and cultural movements including legal changes, and due to the decline of the untenable notion of journalistic objectivity. There is now no journalism code of ethics the U.S. that mentions the word objectivity. Instead you read in its place that the journalist must be

diligent in the presentation of accuracy. Journalism has become an overt game of authenticity representation, resulting in what many call a medial culture war. Whose stories are more authentic, more believable?

Although weakened by many reception theories, the Platonic view of narrative dissemination would contend journalism to be not a game but a field of shifting power that has unforeseen consequences on media consumers. While in the U.S. there are conservative- and left-leaning cable news shows as well as more traditional, objective-oriented broadcasters, the last 10 years of news narratives have had to contend with the popular rise of fake news. I aim to analyze not only how one of the most popular fake news shows, The Colbert Report with Stephen Colbert, undermines the aesthetic and textual regimes of authenticity representation in the television news medial context, but also how it parodies the monolithic interpretation strategies on all sides of the "American" culture war. Approaches employed are philosophical narratology and textual- and reception analysis.

**Zuzanna Jakubowski (Free University of Berlin)**

Authentic Representation of Family Life: Types of Sincere Expression in Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* and Bret Easton Ellis' *Lunar Park*

In my dissertation project, bearing the working title "'Homely and Real': Authenticity as Narrative Strategy of the American Family Novel", I am concerned with the emerging of neo-realist North American family fiction in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. More than just a fashionable genre, the family novel and its recurrent themes (such as loss, socio-economical decline, and intergenerational conflict) articulate an existential anxiety at the heart of what was once the dominant social model: the white, middle-class American family. I interpret the contemporary family novel's widely varying efforts at literary authentication as an attempt to react to and articulate broad cultural anxieties.

In my talk I propose to compare two paradigmatic texts of the genre: Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* (2001) and Bret Easton Ellis' *Lunar Park* (2005). Franzen's novel has been hailed by critics as the return of realism 'after' postmodernism. Ellis' novel is a playful parody of exactly this celebrated 'return of the real' in so-called highbrow literature. I want to contrast the aesthetic paradigms of these two texts with regard to their authenticity effect: *The Corrections* makes extensive use of classical realist techniques, such as the detailed descriptions of everyday material culture, in its representation of the contemporary family life of the baby-boomer generation. *Lunar Park* appropriates this literary style but continuously breaks it through metaleptic gestures. My argument will be that, while the texts seem opposed in their aesthetics paradigms (*Lunar Park* strives to reveal the authenticity of neo-realist works such as *The Corrections* as a verbal illusion), both texts ultimately achieve an authenticity effect through their differing narrative strategies.

**Daniel Schäbler (University of Kiel)**

"(De)constructing Narrative Authenticity in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*"

In 1764, a text of obscure origin appeared, called *The Castle of Otranto. A Story. Translated by William Marshal, Gent. From the Original Italian of Onuphrio Muralto, Canon of the Church of St. Nicholas at Otranto*. In the short preface, a scholar from the 18th century, the editor John Marshal, tries to situate, evaluate and understand a text from the 13th century or possibly earlier and thus make this old text accessible for 18th century readers. In the second edition, following the first within a matter of months, readers are informed that the preface of the first edition was a cover-up which the author, Horace Walpole, had devised for his main text.

One aspect that remains underestimated in the host of critical reception of *The Castle of Otranto* is the complex staging and deconstruction of authenticity in the two prefaces. My discussion rests on the assumption that paratextual framings play a pivotal role in the understanding of a literary text. As contemporary reactions to the conflicting prefaces show, the text is a prominent example of pre-romantic

awareness of the shifting function of texts depending on perspective and context. I will trace the destabilizing and disorientating shifts and turns exercised by the two conflicting prefaces.

**Sven Schmalfuß (University of Regensburg)**

Authentic Bodies. Genome(s) – Gender Norms

Scientific "discoveries" in the field of genetics during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> into the 21<sup>st</sup> century have altered profoundly the way we conceptualise ourselves and the world we live in. The human genome has become the promising spectre of a fundamental "script", which dictates the circumstances of our whole life. It has been seen for many years, as the "authentic" expression of nature, unaltered by the environment or cultural inscriptions. Genetic engineering has become one of the holy grails of modern life-sciences; it seems to offer a cure for nearly every disease which threatens humanity. Still it also provokes an enormous resistance to this human "attempt to play God" and to interfere with the "natural" order of things. An area which is strikingly unaffected by genetic "discoveries" is the binary gender norm of men and women. Even though evidence has been found for other genetic make-ups than XX and XY, these have been marginalised as "unnatural" aberrations of the "norm". Predominant social discourses become hard-wired through scientific "discoveries" and are inscribed in and translated through our bodies. Will this create a new "authenticity" of the body/bodies, or are these developments undermining authentic bodies at all?

These issues shall be examined in Margret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, it's follow-up *The Year of the Flood* and Richard Powers' *Generosity*. All three novels discuss the limits and possibilities of genetic enhancement and therefore the creation and aberration of "authentic" bodies, with an eye for gender(ed) issues.

**Antonius Weixler (University of Wuppertal)**

Dilettantes and Amateurs. Narrative Strategies for Generating Authenticity

The concept of authenticity implies the notion of being „natural“ and „real“ as well as being presented in an immediate way. Therefore Niklas Luhmann has attributed his concept of authenticity to the position of his „Beobachter erster Ordnung“ (observer of the first order). Christian Huck and Carsten Zorn have argued, that „Pop“ and popular culture present a ‚provocation‘ to Luhmann's System Theory, arguing that this appears to be the sole system of communication that transcends all ‚social systems‘. Adorno's Aesthetic Theory, however, which first brought the concept of authenticity into broad consideration, and which can be described as a ‚theory of authenticity‘ (Harro Müller), denies that popular culture is authentic at all.

In my paper I will focus on recent developments in popular culture e.g. scripted realities, mockumentaries or popular entertainment shows such as „Herbstfest der Volksmusik“. I will examine how certain narrative strategies generate an aesthetics of authenticity. Both popular culture and the concept of authenticity seem to provide strategies of identification to the audience. Both seem to compensate for a „reality“ that is perceived as being „unreal“ and „artificial“. Furthermore, historically, both seem to emerge at the same time in postmodern discourses. Finally I will discuss whether authenticity can be described as a part, or an effect of popular communication.