Ulla Haselstein, Andrew S. Gross, MaryAnn Snyder-Körber

Introduction: Returns of the Real

e.e. cummings establishes what he takes to be the basic principles of authentic art in his first book:

> there is and can be no such thing as authentic art until the *bons trucs* (whereby we are taught to see and imitate on canvas and in stone and by words this so- called world) are entirely and thoroughly and perfectly annihilated by that vast and painful process of Unthinking which may result in a minute bit of purely personal Feeling. Which minute bit is Art. (309)

The book was *The Enormous Room* (1928), Cummings's fictionalized account of his incarceration in a French prison for foreigners suspected of spying during World War I, and the "feeling" and "Unthinking" he praises as aesthetic criteria were important not only for his writing and drawing, but in his quiet revolt against prison authority. Indeed, Cummings's revolt against authority becomes a metaphor for art's rebellion against all sorts of convention: pictorial, syntactical, and ultimately typographical. Cummings's trademark style—with the irregular typography, punctuation, and syntax still in its infancy in this prose volume—is thus not only "purely personal" but also explicitly oppositional. The style may also be an expression of Cummings's traumatic experiences in the prison—something Robert Graves hints at in his introduction to the volume (14). Taking cummings as an example, we might characterize authenticity as a rebellion against authority, linked to pathos or feeling, and expressed primarily in the first-person.

cummings's post-Romantic account of "purely personal Feeling" and aesthetic rebellion articulates a version of authenticity that is typical for twentieth-century accounts of art. A standard avant-garde strategy for "authenticating" expression is to link it to personal or group experience in opposition to coercive authority; this particular constellation of experience and opposition produced a number of manifestos around the previous *fin de siècle* and testimonials around this one. But this observation already confronts us with a fundamental paradox. If authenticity is a representational convention, how personal is it? The *pathos* of authenticity can be a "purely personal Feeling," but it also

flirts with affectation and rhetorical posturing. This was R.P. Blackmur's point when he assigned cummings to the "anti-culture group," whose common dogma he defined as "a sentimental denial of the intelligence and the deliberate assertion that the unintelligible is the only object of significant experience" (317-18). What troubles Blackmur most is how quickly unintelligibility forges a new unanimity; authenticity, understood to be the personal rejection of the conventional, can just as easily become another trend. The semiotic field opening itself between these two axes— 1) authenticity vs. convention and 2) emotion vs. rhetoric—is what this volume addresses under the rubric of "the pathos of authenticity."

Authenticity and Convention

The pathos of authenticity encompasses a set of representational concerns, strategies, and dilemmas that have repeatedly come to the fore in debates concerning modernism and the avant-garde (cf. Howe 9-10). It would be possible to compose a long list of artists and movements advocating the authority of experience over tradition. Authenticity is the "personal," the "subconscious," the "primitive," and the "new" for the modernists; it can involve "race consciousness" for the members of the Harlem Renaissance, and "class consciousness" for the proletarian writers and muralists; it is related to "process" for the action painters and abstract expressionists, "voice" for the confessional poets, "spontaneity" and "dropping out" for the beats, "identity" for the literatures of feminism and ethnicity emerging in the 1950s and 1960s and in the canon debates that were the concomitant of postmodernism. There is an equally long list of critics suspicious of the performative and ritualized aspects of authenticity: the sentimentalism of spontaneity, the marketability of the personality cult, and the populism implicit in discourses of identity and victimization. Authenticity is a central and recurrent issue in these critical debates; the disagreement is not over the prominence of the term, but about whether to understand its pathos as feeling or rhetoric.

What, however, makes authenticity prominent in the first place? The term expresses certain problems central to modem concepts of individualism, autonomy, and uniqueness. A brief glance at the history of authenticity shows it struggling on two fronts—the subjective and the objective—against two perceived sources of the inauthentic—convention and imitation. Lionel Trilling's *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972),

focusing primarily on convention, begins by placing the two terms in his title in chronological relation. In Trilling's genealogy, sincerity is the conceptual precursor to authenticity; it involves a "congruence between avowal and actual feeling" (2) and requires "arduous effort" (6) on the part of those who perceive society and their own place in it as stable and self-contained. It is a form of decorum, in other words, striving for personal congruence with period style. Sincerity is the convincing personal expression of a social or cultural convention.

Beginning in the late eighteenth century and coming to full force in Romanticism, authenticity came to displace sincerity as a standard of representation and behavior. Trilling points to the functional differentiation of bourgeois society as the primary cause of this paradigm shift. Romantics tended to perceive society as an abstract and unremitting force limiting individual self-expression, and the self as something inexorably opposed to social and representational conventions. Rejecting decorum as conformism and sincerity as self- deception, they constructed authenticity as a counterforce to the alienating demands of society which, by imposing the necessity of taking roles and dictating a circumscribed way of life, prevented the subject's realization of its autonomy. The concept of authenticity assumes that each of us has, in Trilling's adaptation of Hamlet's words, "that within which passeth presentation" (10). This emphasis on the obscure interiority of the true self brings together oppositional aesthetics and bohemianism in an affective revolt against all sorts of constraints—political, social, and cultural. Self-expression, true to itself in its defiance of social norms, becomes the key figure in the struggle for psychological and artistic independence.

Authenticity and Technique

Authenticity may be fashionable, but it is also inimical to set styles, evincing instead characteristic attitudes, feelings, and techniques. The rebelliousness at the heart of authentic technique activates the oppositional logic characteristic of avant-gardism. Each generation of artists distinguishes itself from its predecessors through acts of filial rebellion; as a result even opposing artistic practices can qualify as equally authentic, depending on the terms of rebellion and the context. Trilling follows the conceptual trajectory of authenticity to the *fin de siècle*, when Friedrich Nietzsche and Oscar Wilde resisted the pathos of authenticity by pointing to the pervasiveness of masks and the social

imperative of performance. Some years later Filippo Marinetti celebrated the machine as the source of authenticity in an age of mechanical automation. Countering the pieties of art as an ersatz religion, modernism has invoked war, violence, contingency, and play as modes of authenticity. Practices of montage and collage re-articulated the Romantic concept of authenticity as destructive subjective energy, directing it against ossified social forms and their concomitant notions of reality. The psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious as the expression of undomesticated drives was another key term in the modernist redefinition of the authentic, as was the nostalgic idea of an unalienated pre-modem society that presumably could be studied in the colonies, whose artistic productions were turned into models for modernist primitivism. In Trilling's view, the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s was heir to both the Romantic and the modernist version of authenticity, combining ideological iconoclasm with subjective experiences of deprivation and marginalization as the sources of individual and collective resistance to the status quo.

Miles Orvell's *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* (1989) offers a useful supplement to Trilling's subject-oriented analysis, both for the attention it pays to objects (rather than subjects) and for its classical American studies approach to the problem of authenticity. Focusing primarily on the last *fin de siècle* as the moment of a paradigm shift in the culture of authenticity, Orvell points to developments in consumer culture that militate against not only the individuality of social agents, but also seem to compromise the uniqueness of cultural artifacts. He argues that machine production led first to a culture of imitation, typified by overstuffed Victorian parlors crowded with reproductions of early Americana, and only subsequently to a modernist aesthetic committed to placing authentic objects in streamlined settings. This turn towards authenticity did not constitute a rejection of assembly-line production and consumer society; on the contrary, it attempted to use the machine to wrestle authentic objects away from the reproductions characteristic of low-brow consumerism (xv). Orvell represents artists as responding not so much to personal alienation, as to a more general need to forge a "unity" of expression that could bring together culture and industry, the genteel tradition and the business world, high-brow and low-brow values, in a Whitmanesque project of speaking to all the people (153).

"The culture of authenticity," as Orvell defines it, involves a "balancing act" between individual objects and mass production: "one might define the culture of authenticity in the early twentieth century as

one that would restore, through the work of art, a lost sense of 'the real thing'" (155). This interest in the real thing corresponded to changing models of subjectivity, evident, for instance, in new advertising aesthetics and shop-window designs. Instead of presenting goods in the Sears catalogue-style, i.e. as a collage of overabundance, advertisers insinuated an individual relation between consumers and particular commodities. Authenticity, in Trilling's genealogy, is a mode of self- expression linked to political and cultural rebellion. Orvell understands it as a design challenge best met by making built form an accurate reflection of streamlined production techniques.

Postmodern Irony and the Nostalgia for Authenticity

Modernism is nostalgic for authenticity, or utopian about the cultural practices that might someday make authenticity possible. Postmodernism, as Linda Hutcheon (cf. *Irony's Edge*) and many others have argued, abandons nostalgia for irony, consigning itself, either with *jouissance* or resignation, to the realization that everything is pseudo-reality (Daniel Boorstin), simulacrum (Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*), or pastiche (Fredric Jameson). Authenticity does not make much sense in a culture of copies. The self, once assumed to surpass presentation, turns out to be a performer; the well-designed artifact reveals itself to be a commodity; rebellion is just a pose. The derivativeness of all gestures and objects calls into question the filial logic motivating avant-garde rebellion, and it vitiates the historical sense, which depends for its orientation on locating attitudes and objects in their appropriate places and times. In postmodernism, history ceases to provide normative or aesthetic orientation and is replaced by a critique of the ideological functions of historiography or an ironical affirmation of the ever-shortened cycles of retro-fashions posing as novelties. There are, however, at least two exceptions to this logic of repetition and simulation. One seems to be the musealization of artifacts, which even at the height of postmodernism still generated a sense of historical authenticity through the linked emotions of loss and nostalgia (cf. Home, Stewart). Another exception: the literatures of race, gender, and ethnicity, which gained in popularity and institutional presence in the years following the civil rights movement.

In "Postmodern Blackness" (1990) bell hooks articulates the relation of ethnicity to postmodernism in the following rhetorical question: "Should we not be suspicious of postmodern critiques of the 'subject'

when they surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time?" (2482) This is not a rejection of the postmodern understanding of the role played by imitation and performance in the production of identity, but a radical reformulation of what performance means in terms of politics. In fact, hooks's invocation of ethnicity is an updated version of the oppositional logic discussed by Trilling, with the important difference that she locates authenticity in group identity rather than self-discovery and personal feeling, hooks argues that identity can be both a social construction and an authentic group experience. Authenticity no longer involves discovering that part of the self beyond social coercion but in elaborating how the subject is constructed *through* coercion (defined in terms of projection, interpellation, and ideological indoctrination). Postmodern identity, understood as a social construct, becomes the new locus of political and cultural resistance.

Post-Postmodernism and the Return of the Real

It is the premise of this volume that authenticity has made another comeback over the course of the last decade. There were "authentic" elements to postmodernism, such as the interest in museum artifacts and ethnic literatures; the "post" to postmodernism unites these interests in memory and marginalization to emerge as "traumatic realism" (Michael Rothberg) and "the return of the real" (Hal Foster). Assuming our premise is correct, a series of questions follows: What historical, social conditions have brought the authentic once again to prominence? What does the question of/quest for the authentic in recent U.S.-American culture express? In which conceptual constellations is authenticity discussed or demanded? How has the longing for "the real" been put to use for political ends, from the culture wars to the war on terror?

Today, these questions inevitably converge in reflections on an event whose significance has rendered it a numerical icon: 9/11. The date evokes a visual narrative of trauma which has often been read as a turning point in American politics and culture. In the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the journalist Roger Rosenblatt controversially announced "the end of irony" (79). This wasn't the first time such an announcement was made (cf. Hutcheon, "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern"), but it seemed to confirm a suspicion, shared by many, that an epoch had come to a close. That epoch was postmodernism.

Whether the notoriously ambiguous term was taken to refer to cultural relativism, textual play, the widespread suspicion of political ideologies, or the performance of identities, the spectacle of destruction changed what was at stake in the game, draining the "play of signifiers" from its residual *jouissance*. The attacks seemed to be authentic in a way that postmodernism denied. In their immediate aftermath, even prophets of postmodernism such as Baudrillard reverted to materialist typologies and biological metaphors of contamination to explain terrorism as "globalization struggling against itself' ("The Spirit of Terrorism" 136). Something fundamentally real seemed to emerge in direct response to the hyperreality of symbolic systems: "Terrorism is an act that restores an irreducible particularity in the middle of a generalized exchange system" (135). Don DeLillo, perhaps the pre-eminent postmodern novelist in the United States, also turned to anachronism in his attempt to express terrorism's relation to long-held beliefs in technological progress:

> Technology is our fate, our truth....
> But whatever great skeins of technology lie ahead, even more complex, connective, precise, micro-fractional, the future has yielded, for now, to medieval expedience, to the old slow furies of cutthroat religion.
> Kill the enemy and pluck out his heart. (37)

Is Baudrillard apologizing for terrorism? Does DeLillo believe terrorists think in such primitive terms? How literally we should take such pronouncements is open to debate, but there is no denying the literalism distinguishing them from postmodern pronouncements about textuality. For these influential postmodernists, 9/11 heralded the return of the real and marked the limit of semiotic play.

It is worth pointing out that however convenient it is to treat 9/11 as a periodizing marker, authenticity was already making a comeback before the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. It emerged, for instance, in the guise of the memory trace in Foster's well-known 1996 book *The Return of the Real*. Foster, whose earlier anthology *The Anti-Aesthetic, Essays on Postmodern Culture* (1983) helped define the previous epoch, narrates the return of the real as a traumatic after-effect of postmodern play. His argument is analogous to Baudrillard's, although its focus is more narrowly concerned with the representational strategies of the neo-avant-garde. Foster's example is Warhol's Car Crash series, with the trademark repetition of frames resembling a comic strip, a contact sheet, or length of cinema film. Foster points out that when we regard the series sequentially, a blotch slowly emerges from the

margins of each frame, like a scratch or a bum mark expanding as film moves through a projector. This deliberate flaw in the two-dimensional surface of the series increasingly threatens the three-dimensional illusion of the individual pictures. This, according to Foster, marks the return of the materiality excluded by photography's three-dimensional illusion, a materiality that becomes legible as repetition, formal distortion, and disturbance (130-36). His analogy is the return of the repressed. The series acts out as formal flaw and material trace what cannot be expressed as content. In other words, the "wounding" of the picture frames "remembers" the pain and suffering trivialized by mass media and parodied by Warhol's serial technique.

Following Foster, Rothberg turns to the metaphors of "wound culture" and "the return of the real" to explain the current interest in literature of the Holocaust, and to explore how this literature expresses a past whose horror would seem to place it beyond the limits of representation (186). The genre he calls "traumatic realism" is, strictly speaking, neither realist nor expressionistic; central to Rothberg's argument is the claim that the representational forms characteristic of modernism are inadequate to the task of representing the Holocaust. Postmodernism is also inadequate, but in a symptomatic way, as it "is precisely what remains after the wounding of the referential and metahistorical claims of other moments" (186). The current interest in testimonial literature "points to what is missing from most discussions today: concern with the referential components of discourse and with the course of history" (6). Rothberg's material account of reference is related to hook's political invocation of group subjectivity. Both are interested in a reality that manifests itself as a symptom of repression; hooks understands this repression to be political, and Rothberg understands it to be psychological. However, while hooks calls for a "postmodernism of resistance," Foster, Rothberg, and other trauma theorists claim that the subject was "always already" there. The authenticity cummings defined in terms of subjective expression has been transposed, though trauma theory, onto culture as a whole, which is characterized as a vast subject—the subject of history—functioning according to psychoanalytic principles. The postmodern aversion to reference turns out to have been a form of forgetting. In Rothberg, as in Foster, reference returns as the material trace of what has been repressed by necessarily inadequate representational conventions. Or, to put it more succinctly, history returns as cultural memory.

Trauma discourse, in its re-reading of postmodernism as a symptom of collective memory, is perhaps the most important showplace in the

staging of authenticity's return. Memory has evolved into such a dominant issue in critical theory that Ana Douglass and Thomas A. Vogler argue, "[t]he notion that authority and authenticity are grounded in traumatic stories has become so pervasive that all of Western culture can now be seen as a post-traumatic narrative" (11). The centrality of trauma in contemporary criticism has given rise to widespread skepticism of "trauma envy," or the vicarious enjoyment of other people's suffering (12). Is the spectacle of suffering merely an attempt to lend a sense of historical reality to the "factitious" culture of copies? Geoffrey Hartman has suggested that the current fascination with tales of personal suffering should be understood as an attempt to compensate for a general lack of historical knowledge; such attempts are often unsuccessful because they cannot "expunge a lingering fear of personal inauthenticity" from contemporary audiences who were not witness to the actual events (65). Other critics, aware of the spectacular quality of other people's suffering, hope that the current fascination with trauma could lead to a new sense of community. Alison Landsberg, characterizing contemporary culture as a culture of "prosthetic memories," is optimistic that some contemporary films, narratives, and memorials do succeed in establishing an "experiential relationship" between actual victims and contemporary spectators and readers (135). Hartman is also cautiously optimistic, and he suggests that the recognition that traumatic suffering is incommensurable could serve as the basis for a new model of sympathetic community. With this argument, Hartman tries to push trauma theory beyond identity politics, which instrumentalizes suffering to define group membership ("our pain," "our memories") to a more generalized ethical awareness of the pain of others.

Hartman is not alone in what might be termed an ethical turn from trauma theory to a generalized theory of suffering. Recent work by Susan Sontag and Judith Butler also attempts to ground moral principles in an awareness of the pain or vulnerability of others (cf. Sontag, Butler). Charles Taylor, arguing in a similar vein, has called for the formal recognition of incommensurable cultural difference as the foundation of a pluralistic "ethics of authenticity" in multicultural societies. In these various formulations, recognition rather than rebellion has become the key issue in establishing authenticity. The main threat to authenticity is no longer conformity or imitation but empathy's universal scope, i.e. its tendency to minimize historical and cultural difference in forging a sympathetic community grounded in common feelings (cf.Miller/Tougaw).

These ethical developments are evidence of a renewed interest in authenticity across the disciplines. However, contemporary authenticity, in contrast with its previous theoretical manifestations, seems more concerned with re-establishing connections between individuals and society than in advocating individual protest and autonomy. Putting this in Trilling's terms, we might say that contemporary theory redefines authenticity in terms of sincerity. This may involve a different kind of social performance, as Orlando Patterson recently argued in the *New York Times*:

> Sincerity rests in reconciling our performance of tolerance with the people we become. And what it means for us today is that the best way of living in our diverse and contentiously free society is neither to obsess about the hidden depths of our prejudices nor to deny them, but to behave as if we had none. (A35)

Other thinkers, rejecting the need to choose between sincerity and authenticity, have begun to explore the relations between the two. In the last book published before his death, *Truth and Truthfulness* (2002), the moral philosopher Bernard Williams highlighted the continuities between the ideal of expressive authenticity laid down most persuasively by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and sincerity. According to Williams, while self-revelation in the mode exemplified by Rousseau allows for the expression of momentary feeling, a stabilization of interiority requires interactions with the central projects, ideals, and traits constituting the social context. *Truth and Truthfulness* does not, as Charles Guignon points out in his own reflections on authenticity, restate the "postmodern chestnut that our selves are socially constructed." Williams's claim is rather "that what we call our authentic self ...is at its deepest level shaped and defined by society" as an incommensurably individual and unconscious interiority (154-55). Theodor W. Adorno had made the same point many years earlier, albeit in a much more critical vein. His commitment to individualism, which intersects with but is not identical to a commitment to authenticity, is useful for its formulation of the deeply constructed self:

> Not only is the self entwined in society; it owes society its existence in the most literal sense. All its content comes from society, or at any rate from its relation to the object....The discovery of authenticity as a last bulwark of individualistic ethics is a reflection of industrial mass-production. (154-55)

The realization that authenticity is itself produced, that it depends constitutionally on a prior articulation of sincerity, opens the way for

new reflections in ethics and aesthetics. If authenticity is understood, for instance, as the perceived convergence of representation with its referent, theories of literary realism could open a path to analyzing how the social production of reality is linked to the introjection of the "authentic" inner- self. The assumption here is that by referring, on the one hand, to a reality of shared experience and by elaborating, on the other, the coincidence of an "I" with its narrative double, realist fiction and autobiography produce their referents performatively and at the same time lend these referents credibility and semantic stability (cf. Neumann). Such theories depend on a fully articulated concept of authenticity, but they are a far cry from first-person manifestos for "authentic" works of art.

Authenticity is making a comeback, in the guises of memory, ethics, religion, the new sincerity, and the renewed interest in "real things." Although sometimes envisioned as the rejection of postmodernism, the "new" authenticity remains profoundly shaped by postmodern skepticism regarding the grand narratives of origin, telos, reference, and essence. The new authenticity involves more than a nostalgic return to the concept which Trilling and, following him, philosophers such as Williams and Taylor trace through readings of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Denis Diderot, and most important for all three, Rousseau. Rather, it offers a revision of postmodernism based on 1) the re- conceptualization of culture and cultural history as memory, 2) the redefinition of authentic feelings as cultural products (rather than "merely" personal experiences), and finally 3) a reassessment of the role played by materiality in the construction of subjectivity and social structure.

The Essays in this Volume

In "Commodity Nationalism and the Lost Object," the keynote lecture at the conference and the first essay in this volume, Bill Brown analyzes the production and circulation of various 9/11 memorabilia, from remnants of the twin towers and victim mementos to Christmas ornaments depicting fire fighters and other rescuers. Against the broad backdrop of recent interdisciplinary inquiry into material culture and following Baudrillard's insight that we collect objects in order to collect ourselves, Brown explores the social use of material objects in what he terms, following Mark Seltzer, the "pathological public sphere": a public sphere in which traditional forms of community have disappeared, and

injury seems to provide the only opportunity for engaging in rituals of public togetherness. The attacks of September 11th, orchestrated and perceived as attacks on the nation, seemed to necessitate performing rituals of community on a national scale. Within this context memorabilia and other "things" have become the privileged locus for materializing the mass subject of the nation, holding out the elusive promise of "metonymic contact with the dead." Brown argues, however, that the current significance of things ultimately has less to do with the anxiety about terrorism than with the more general anxieties about transience and change typical of modem capitalism; indeed, things have been made to bear the symbolic weight of community and nation for at least a century.

Authentic Objects - Real Things

The next group of essays continues to pose the question of what things tell us about subjects and society. This involves the issue of why some things seem more significant than others. An earlier essay by Brown— "Thing Theory" (2001)—is helpful here, providing a useful distinction between things and "mere" objects. Brown points out:

> We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us....when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily....the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation. (4)

Things are more than broken objects, of course, but the fact of their fragility implies specific functions and values that "mere" objects do not share. Exploring these functions and values leads beyond material sciences such as physics to anthropology, psychology, and cultural studies. However, some branches of cultural studies, such as literary criticism, have tended to dismiss "thingness" by "bracketing" the problem of reference or by assigning a distorting role to culture through concepts of sublimation, repression, and ideology. The contributors to this volume attempt to revisit the materiality of culture by asking questions like, how do narratives describe and constitute things? How is art or literature itself a thing? Do different kinds of things call for different genres and forms?

Catrin Gersdorf explores how culture is implicated in the things we eat in her analysis of Ruth L. Ozeki's *My Year of Meat* (1998). Situating this novel in what she sees as a general resurgence in food literature,

Gersdorf draws attention to how the widespread interest in nutrition, part of an interest in materiality generally, is helping to transform the well-established tropes of ethnic literature into an ethical or even ecological literature—one committed to exploring how identity is related to global processes of food production and resource management. The subject of the novel is a fictionalized but recognizable national beef industry, which advertises its product as wholesome, American, and natural, while pumping cows full of hormones on factory feed-lots. The novel functions like a documentary exposé, showing how the advertised "naturalness" of beef serves to mask industrialized production processes; it also dramatizes the impacts of beef production on working-class Americans and international consumers. The ethical thrust of Gersdorf s analysis involves a concept of authenticity that has little to do with the nostalgic images of nature so easily abused in advertising. Instead, she evokes a model of sustainability that takes seriously the complex relations between nature and culture, and in doing so draws attention to the multiple links between practices of representation and those of production and consumption.

In her contribution "A Soap Bubble is as Real as a Fossil Tooth: Physical Objects and the Presence of the Past," Bärbel Tischleder draws attention to the changing relations of subjects to objects in post-industrial society, especially as explored in Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* (2001). She defines authenticity as a "spatiotemporal nexus in which objects become meaningful points of crystallization in human biographies and histories." Meaningful objects, however, lead a precarious existence in a throw-away society, which discards treasured possessions as quickly as it forgets histories and biographies. Tischleder takes this connection between discarding and forgetting—the material and temporal forms of obsolescence—to be the characteristic concern of neo-realism, which displays many of the features of traditional realism, except that it seems constantly on the verge of disappearing behind its own settings and props. This precariousness marks an important difference from the realism of the famous Barthian "reality effect," in which seemingly useless objects perform the important narrative function of bolstering verisimilitude. Neo-realism, as Tischleder sees it operating in Franzen, is not a fiction of verisimilitude but a fiction of clutter, and clutter threatens the individualism, the domesticity, and the economic values enshrined in traditional realist novels. Insofar as traditional realism can be construed as a celebration of middle-class ethics, one might expand on Tischleder's arguments to classify neo-

realism as an elegiac mode, tracing the dissolution of middle-class identities into things and things into mere objects.

A distinctive elegiac form emerging after 9/11 is the topic of MaryAnn Snyder-Korber's essay, which explores how the missing persons notices posted immediately after the attacks assumed a commemorative function once it became clear that there would be no survivors. In a way the notices were useless, but they also seemed to go "beyond representation," partaking of the events and lives they describe. This was due to the urgency of their initial purpose, but also to their layered, gritty, and pasted-together quality. Mechanical photographs and photocopies serve as markers of authenticity in a digital age in much the same way as anecdotes and testimonials emerge as privileged historical genres after "the end of metanarratives." Snyder-Korber argues that the obituaries for the victims published serially by *The New York Times* allude to the missing persons notices in their attempt to "move" readers, or put them in proximate contact with their objects of mourning. The essay ends on a cautionary note, pointing out that such proximity has a form and a rhetorical function; thus it can be instrumentalized in ways that have less to do with the memory of the victims than with present politics.

Trauma

The next group of essays deals with trauma and its relation to representation and remembrance. Trauma discourse, as Douglass and Vogler have noted, "seemingly reconciles the opposition between the poststructuralist emphasis on the text with the real understood as an effect of representation, and 'the real' understood as an event" (4). Events are said to be traumatic when they shatter the norms and forms of representation and imagination. Representations of trauma therefore function as powerful social tropes of loss and suffering. However, what makes trauma authentic also constitutes its illegibility: imagination must be brought to bear on its place of absence, and representation must struggle to evoke its decomposition. Trauma, insofar as it is understood as occurring beyond the limits of representation, can never be depicted; it must rather be reconstructed retroactively, out of memory traces. The contributors to this volume understand these memory traces variously: as fragments of damaged identity, as opportunities for empathy, and also as the privileged tropes of a new sentimentalism, bent on manipulating audiences through their emotions.

Addressing the marketing of Holocaust suffering for mass audiences in her essay "Laughing at Pain," Susanne Rohr takes issue with the long-standing discussion on the moral, epistemological, and ontological limits of the representation of the Holocaust. In her view, contemporary Holocaust "comedies" (Slavoj Zizek) and Holocaust art using strategies of the grotesque deliberately sidestep issues of authenticity in an effort to counter the commodification of Holocaust images and thus work against their putative function as screen memories for contemporary atrocities. Holocaust comedy, in other words, responds to the limitations and instrumentalization of Holocaust tragedy in order to shock contemporary viewers into remembrance.

The question of remembrance—its forms and functions—is also at the center of Erika Doss's contribution. In "Terrorism Memorials, Security Narratives, and Public Feeling: Fear and Anxiety in Post 9/11 America," Doss focuses on the role well-established memorial conventions play in representing recent historical traumas. Specifically, she discusses various 9/11 memorials as recent examples of contemporary "memorial mania" in the United States. A phenomenon which express itself in provisional roadside "altars" as well as high profile and highly contested official memorial sites. As diverse as these memorials are, their architecture reflects popular conceptions of heroism, trauma, and healing in the face of disaster. Often making use of the old motif of American innocence, they signify a turn toward an authenticity of affect in tune with what has been analyzed as "American therapeutic culture" (cf. Illouz). While most memorials are designed to counter widespread fear and anxiety, others go further, demanding vengeance through what Elaine Tyler May has called images of "reinvigorated manhood" (50). Such images are the privileged symbols of America at war, and they inform, as Doss demonstrates, both the remembrance of recent events and contemporary images of nationhood.

Ethics of Authenticity/Authentic Ethnicity

In his attempt to philosophically justify multiculturalism, Taylor has called for a model of identity and interaction which grounds the authentic "discovery" of the self in the equally authentic "recognition" of the other. This reciprocal model of discovery and recognition links authenticity with difference in attempt to 1) steer between the extremes of cultural homogeneity and ethnic separatism on the one hand, and 2) avoid essentialist conceptions of identity on the other. The latter aim

proves to be the most difficult. If we follow Walter Benn Michaels's argument in *Our America: Nativism, Modernism and Pluralism* (1995), accounts of identity cannot avoid being essentialist, even if emphasis is placed on the multiple and hybrid rather than the unitary. It is not so much the description of identity which essentializes, Michaels argues, as the practice following this description (181).

This line of argument complicates thinking about "ethnic" identities which have historically been determined, in terms of definition as well as (imagined) practice, by legal and ethnographic discourses claiming to speak of and for the ethnic group. Countering the presumption implicit in speaking for others, particularly others whose lives are marked by the double trauma of particular violence and general exclusion from social privilege, Kali Tal has argued that the traumatized must speak in their own voices (7). From this perspective, all forms of proxy writing, fictionalization, and over-identification with the oppressed are ethically questionable: at the very least paternalistic, such uses of ethnic identity can further serve, as essayist Stanley Crouch argues in *The Artificial White Man* (2004), to lend credibility to certain discourses by affiliating them with the disenfranchised (5).

The volume's consideration of ethnicity and ethics begins with essays by Ulla Haselstein and Andrew S. Gross who analyze uses of fictionalization that engage questions of the ethical. Perhaps no other group in North America has been so systematically and catastrophically spoken for than Native Americans. Gerald Vizenor has decried primitivist visions of an authentic Native American culture and pointedly critiqued what he terms "simulations of tribal identities in the literature of dominance" (59). Instead, he demands a "new ghost dance literature" capable of bringing out contradictions, counter memories, and repressed histories (105). In "Ghost Dance Literature: Speciality in James Welch's *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*" Haselstein links Vizenor's call for such a literature with notions of speciality to be found in recent interrogations of the post-colonial and reads James Welch's last novel through this double conceptual prism. In writing a narrative which moves between compositional modes as it engages different dimensions of cultural memory, history, and fiction, Welch produces not merely a Native American historical novel and *bildungsroman*. As Haselstein demonstrates, he generates a powerful allegory of a "postindian" identity.

In "Imaginary Jews and True Confession: Ethnicity, Lyricism, and John Berryman's *Dream Songs*," Andrew S. Gross examines a particularly controversial case of speaking "for" the traumatized other:

the assumption of the persona of "the Jew" in post-World War II American writing and particularly in the work of the poet John Berryman. His analysis contextualizes Berryman's writings in mid-century theories of prejudice and ultimately argues against the grain of current scholarship on Berryman, which is nearly unanimous in its critique of his appropriation of an "ethnic" voice. Gross sees Berryman's impersonation of "The Jew" as the construction of a discrepant identity that both challenges and brings out the racist commonplaces underlying modernist lyricism in T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Reassessing Berryman's deployment of the persona also provides Gross with the opportunity to review assumptions about voice and identity prevalent in contemporary theories of identity, or what he calls "the hidden lyricism of contemporary ethnic identity."

In her contribution "Grounds of Whiteness: White Male Claims to Authenticity," Sabine Broeck concerns herself not with the lyricism of ethnic identity, but rather with the claims to be made via what she terms "a new semiosis of whiteness": white maleness is currently being re-envisioned as a beset identity demanding public acknowledgement. In its evocation of the virile white male body, the use of the immigrant narrative, and calculated stylistics, Anthony Giardina's novel *White Guys* (2006) offers Broeck a case study in the re-installation of whiteness as a privileged category in contemporary American culture. Novels such as Giardina's are, Broeck notes, marked by nostalgia for an imagined golden age of masculinity, untroubled by current critiques of white male privilege. The problems of Giardina's protagonist, which range from familial humiliation to homicidal acts, suggest that there is no return to the (imagined) homogeneity of the 1950s: neither in terms of social conditions nor in terms of theoretical models of identity and authenticity.

In her analysis of two very different novels—Richards Powers's *The Time of Our Singing* and Jonathan Lethem's *The Fortress of Solitude* (both 2003)—Ruth Mayer considers constructions of identity linking authenticity and hybridity in a paradoxical "pure hybridity." Her starting point is an intriguing but underdeveloped reflection of Homi Bhabha's linking the "desire to emerge as 'authentic'" with the practice of mimicry (88). Mayer explores this possibility, which counters the common assumption that authenticity and hybridity are opposed terms, in her readings of Lethem's and Powers's fictions. She sees both novels working within, but also going beyond the representational repertoire of neo-realism. In moving away from more conventional neo-realistic modes and towards another realist variant, magical realism, Lethem and Powers link the utopian goal of a world "beyond race" with momentary

escape from the everyday and its accepted modes of representation. "Only then," Mayer concludes, "can identity momentarily figure as a category of self-recognition rather than a demarcation of masquerade and make-believe."

The Pathos of Religious Experience

In *Authentic Fakes* David Chidester has described religion as "discourses and practice that negotiate what it is to be human" (vii-viii). This negotiation entails a relation to superhuman transcendence which William James so famously described in *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) as the encounter with a powerful "realness" "more deep and more general than any of the special and particular 'senses' by which current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed" (58). James's interest in religion as the revelation of a deeper reality is heir to a long tradition of antinomianism in American thought: inner faith stands in opposition, at least potentially, to external power structures and dogmas. This has often perplexed social critics, especially Europeans who feel themselves distant from the tradition of revealed truth. Making no effort to conceal his agnostic perspective, Alexis de Tocqueville already noted in the nineteenth century that "religious insanity is very common in the United States," and added, "I should be surprised if mysticism did not soon make some advance among a people solely engaged in promoting their own worldly welfare" (134-35). While the evangelicals see the personal communion as a (re)birth into a new life with Christ, organized church life has formed this religious experience in ways which parallel secular self-help culture from Dale Carnegie to "Dr. Phil" McGraw (Cf. Guignon).

Sociologist Eva Illouz has recently followed the ramifications of this self-help culture or, as she terms it, "American therapeutic culture" in another direction, namely by highlighting its convergence with psychoanalysis and its panoply of "symbolic tools and categories with which to address the ambiguities and contradictions of modernity" (56). In both religion and psychoanalysis, revelation—personal and divine—is linked to an institutional structure that demands full confession, or what might be called the tyranny of intimacy. In his own study of the wide range of religious experience in the United States, Chidester directs attention to the religious dimensions of American popular culture. He argues that cultural practices such as baseball or Star Trek fandom "do religious work by negotiating what it means to be a human...forging a

community, focusing desire, and facilitating exchange in ways that look just like religion" (viii).

In "Religion in the Contemporary USA: Everything But Authentic," the late Gary Lease takes up the distinction between what Chidester terms "real" religion and "fake" religion doing "real religious work" (viii). The pertinent context for Lease is postmodernism and particularly its celebration of performative play, which generates uncertainty about the "real" and provokes an ongoing quest for direct experience and moments of origin. Lease works out the connection between the quest for the real, the religious sphere, and the American national project in examples which range from Jim Jones and the People's Temple to Joseph Smith's "translation" of the Book of Mormon. In the religious marketplace which Lease sketches out, success hinges on the assertion of one's own "good faith" and the concomitant "bad faith" of others. This, Lease concludes, renders religion in American public life "anything, but authentic."

The ongoing importance of religion and religious experience in the full range described by scholars such as Chidester and Lease calls into question the secularization thesis central to theories of modernity. American modernity is hardly secular. It is rather marked by a sacralization extending into discursive realms which seem, at first glance, improbable candidates for a religious turn. Gunter Leypoldt explores such an unlikely merger in his investigation of pragmatism's interaction with religion. His essay "Neo-Pragmatism and the 'Turn to Religion'" describes how the work of Richard Rorty follows in the tradition of William James and James Dewey in its attempt to mediate between secular and quasi-religious frameworks. The result is, Leypoldt argues, a "re-enchantment" attaching the numinous to new objects and practices. This "pragmatist sublime," as he provocatively phrases it, sacralizes political discourse while linking religion to a vision of social utopia. Such connections demonstrate the continued importance of the religious in contemporary American culture and prompt questioning of the assumptions we bring to analyzing U.S. political culture. The equation of left-leaning politics with secularism and religion with political conservatism, Leypoldt concludes, demands re-examination.

Authenticity and Autobiography

What makes some writings more autobiographical than others? Autobiography is deeply bound up with the problem of authenticity. The

theory of sublimation suggests that all art is more or less autobiographical insofar as it expresses, however covertly, the desires and thoughts of its authors. Against this psychological view, and more explicitly its Romantic predecessors, Paul de Man's "Autobiography as De-facement" (1979) offers the classical deconstructionist argument that autobiography is merely a set of rhetorical conventions, more closely related to other literary conventions than to a "real" life or mind: "Autobiography veils a defacement of the mind of which it is itself the cause" (930). The psychological view, according to which all texts are more or less autobiographical, makes authenticity a matter of honesty or emotional intensity; this is similar to the position cummings articulates in the passage cited at the beginning of this introduction. The deconstructionist view, according to which autobiography is merely one literary convention among many, demotes authenticity to the status of trope in order to focus on procedures of authentication, i.e. those conventions and institutions authorized to establish rules of evidence and provenance.

Peter Schneck builds on the post-structuralist argument in his account of the rise and fall of the best-selling author JT Leroy. Lawsuits have determined that Leroy's texts are neither autobiographical nor authentic; their alleged author—a former child prostitute and recovering drug addict—is made up. The fabrication of Leroy, and his subsequent literary fortune, offers a glimpse into what Schneck provocatively calls "the hustle for authenticity." This hustle can be traced back to eighteenth- century concerns (and scandals) over authorial identity, but it has even more to do with the contemporary fascination with suffering. Authentic suffering is a valuable commodity in literary markets, establishing the topicality of certain books while at the same time justifying the passions (in both the old and new sense of the term) of their purported authors. The nexus linking these two intersecting narratives (the biographical and the fictional) is an experience whose personal intensity is assumed to be beyond question. Schneck's essay is a cautionary tale about how such "experience," and the "personality" behind it, can be designed, constructed, and marketed.

That autobiography can be fictional is a postmodern truism. Hanjo Berressem sets out to show how fiction can also be autobiographical. His essay does not attempt to return to psychological models of sublimation. Instead, it develops the theories of Wilhelm Dilthey to explore how some narratives bear relations to life trajectories that cannot be dismissed as "mere" convention or rhetoric. His object of analysis is Bret Easton Ellis's Lunar Park (2005), a novel that does not pretend to document the

author's life in anything approximating accuracy or even verisimilitude, but that nevertheless offers a moving and in some sense authentic expression of the author's relation to his father. The novel, in other words, is authentic even though it is not true. Berressem's innovation lies in detaching the concept of authenticity from issues of accuracy. The result is a post-subjectivist account of autobiography that understands "author" and "text" to be intertwined expressions of a single cultural system, which Berressem characterizes in terms of "flows" of energy and information.

Questions involving material culture, trauma discourse, ethnic identity, religious experience, and autobiography play a central role in current negotiations of the authentic in U.S.-American culture, whether that culture is understood to be oppositional or hegemonic. With this volume we hope to contribute to an exploration of these returns of the real.

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