

– Call for Papers –

New Sincerity

Self-Expression in North American Culture

An International Conference

January 25 – 26 2019, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena

In 1993, David Foster Wallace called for a new generation of sincere literary rebels who would be “willing to risk the yawn, the rolled eyes, the cool smile, the nudged ribs, the parody of gifted ironists, the ‘How banal.’” If the logical conclusion of postmodern irony had been apathy and solipsism, Wallace argued, writers now had to find different ways of self-expression. This reevaluation of sincerity struck a nerve. Its repercussions were not just limited to the domain of literature, however. In varying forms, sincerity has also become a trending aesthetics in music, film, and visual art. This cultural movement has come to be called the New Sincerity. It is characterized by a yearning for interpersonal connection, affect, trust, and belief. Despite poststructural proclamations of the “Death of the Author,” the New Sincerity reframes the artwork as a medium of communication between artists and their audiences.

Our conference brings a transdisciplinary approach to the New Sincerity movement. We would like to discuss not only what the New Sincerity stands for, but also what conceptual foundations it is built on. Why did sincerity emerge as an alternative to postmodern conventions of representation? How does the history of the concept influence its present use? Are there different understandings of sincerity at work in the New Sincerity? Is the movement still productive? Can we agree on a canon of works, or a canon of ideas? Last but not least, we intend to inquire how the New Sincerity is embedded into a specifically North American social and political context.

Contributions can address, but are not limited to, the following topics:

- sincerity in contemporary North American literature: How is the aesthetics of sincerity incorporated into, e.g., the prose and poetry of David Foster Wallace, Jennifer Egan, Dave Eggers, Ben Lerner, Sheila Heti, Tao Lin, Maggie Nelson, Teju Cole, and many more? How do these authors construct sincerity effects, and to what end? How do they trace the permeable boundary between reality and fiction, authenticity and irony?

- the films and TV series of, for instance, Wes Anderson, Spike Jonze, Miranda July, or Lena Dunham as well as the “Mumblecore” cinema of Lynne Shelton, Joe Swanberg, and others: How can sincere affect be conveyed through images? How does sincerity interact with the aesthetic category of the “quirky”?
- the music of indie bands such as Arcade Fire or the “New Weird America,” including folk acts like Sufjan Stevens, Bon Iver, or Devendra Banhart: How do these artists combine instrumentation, lyrics and paratexts to create sincerity effects?
- sincerity in the visual arts: Is there a current in American art that parallels the international performance art collaboration of Shia LaBeouf, Nastja Rönkkö, and Luke Turner, or the artworks of Tao Lin or Mira Gonzalez? How can intimacy and affect be enacted across different media?
- the philosophical underpinnings of the New Sincerity: How do artists position themselves towards irony and reference? Can the New Sincerity be understood as an actualization of Romantic irony, or is it an effort to excise irony altogether? How do the ideas and motifs of the New Sincerity overlap or contrast with other periodizations (such as metamodernism, post-postmodernism, new realism or digimodernism)?
- the cultural context of the New Sincerity in North America: How does the resurgence of sincerity and trust in the arts dovetail with discourses about privacy and surveillance? Can the reliance on sincerity effects by public figures such as Donald Trump be explained by the same cultural shift that initiated the New Sincerity movement?

Please send an abstract (ca. 300 words) and a short biographical note by February 15, 2018, to

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