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- 1 It has become commonplace to attest that the past few years have been marked by a wide-ranging epistemic crisis. Not least since January 2017, when then Counselor to the U.S. President Kellyanne Conway referred to “alternative facts” regarding the size of the crowd at Donald Trump’s inauguration, scholars in the fields of philosophy, media studies, and American cultural and literary studies have reoriented their research agendas towards analyzing and potentially dissolving that crisis. Concerns about “truth,” “reality,” “factivity,” and “facticity” have unabatedly gained an agenda-setting role beyond academic discourse, extending into the fields of art, literature, journalism, and politics. The validity and impact of these concepts determine a wide range of current discussions inside and outside academia, and they draw attention to the cultural and philosophical history of those ideas. The vilification of respectable journalism as *fake news* is taken to erode the foundations of democratic societies, and belief in ‘truthful representation’ in the media, art, film, and literature becomes more and more conspicuous. Many scholars, public intellectuals, commentators, and politicians argue that we may indeed have come to live in a “post-factual” age, i.e. an age of “post-truth” (Alloa; McIntyre). So, when tackling the issues of reality and what is factually “real” and “true,” are we (still) doing so with the goal to validate some sort of factual or existential truth, or are we already launching our inquiry from a perspective that is grounded in a world ‘after truths’ invested in the production of affects and emotions rather than facts? This special issue emerges from these and other related questions that currently concern the fields of philosophy, literary studies, media studies, and cultural studies.
- 2 A number of debates in the humanities and the social sciences—not least those concerned with matters of truth and reality—have been shaped by a renewed interest in two philosophical approaches, that of (a) American pragmatism and (b) continental

hermeneutics (Gessmann; Rohr and Strube, *Revisiting Pragmatism and Pragmatism's Promise*). And after decades of scholarly neglect on both sides of the Atlantic, scholars in various disciplines have begun to reestablish pragmatism and hermeneutics as paradigmatic tools within the methodological framework of their respective fields (Breitenwischer; Case; Richardson). In recent discussions about a “new materialism” (Coole and Frost), a cultural-anthropological “thing theory” (Bennett), and a revitalized “return of the real” (Gabriel, *Why the World Does Not Exist* and *Neo-Existentialism*), numerous scholars have yet again begun to focus on the phenomenon of *reality* as a centerpiece of social-scientific and philosophical debates. But in order to reconsider the validity of truth, the editors and the contributors of this special issues are convinced that with regards to debates about truth, reality, and the world of facts, pragmatism and hermeneutics are particularly promising cultural-philosophical premises to come to terms with present and future challenges in the humanities and beyond.

- 3 In pragmatism, truth is no longer deemed timeless and in absolute correspondence to the world “as it really is,” but as essentially dynamic, contingent, and dialogical (Strube). In the wake of 1970s and 1980s poststructuralist philosophy and postmodern aesthetics on the one hand and the most recent populist attacks on the validity of claims about truth and facticity on the other, new perspectives in pragmatist thinking may gain all the more significance in attempts to reflect critically upon the current erosion of humanist values and epistemic ethics, and to re-establish an understanding of “truth” and “truthfulness” in productively dynamic and ultimately intersubjective, i.e. communal, manners of discourse and practice. In the last few decades, the philosophical rationale of American pragmatism has gained significant momentum—not only in philosophy, but in cultural and literary studies as well (Fluck; Friedl; Gaskill). Under the heading *Pragmatism's Promise* (2013), the afore-quoted Miriam Strube and her Americanist colleague Susanne Rohr, a contributor to this issue, have impressively delineated the future of pragmatist thinking within and beyond the field of American Studies, drawing on the wide-ranging array of revisions of classical pragmatism and the works of canonized thinkers such as Charles S. Peirce, William James, John Dewey, W.E.B. Du Bois, Richard Rorty, and others.
- 4 These current and recurrent investments in revisions of pragmatist thinking clearly stem from a radically post-metaphysical understanding of pragmatism as a philosophy that is both truth- and reform-oriented. In its countless perspectives, pragmatism has always dedicated its truth-debating notion to the creative and praxeological dimensions of reality-shaping action (Breitenwischer; Glaude; Joas; Livingston). Scholars like Strube and Rohr, but also Richard Shusterman, Georg W. Bertram, Herwig Friedl, Ross Posnock, Cornel West, Joan Richardson, and many others have relied on the action-based, intersubjective, and emphatically indeterminate modes of pragmatism's understanding of reality and reality-shaping dynamics. Accordingly, they have dedicated much of their work to the cause of establishing pragmatism and pragmatist ideas as impactful forces in discourses such as aesthetics, literary studies, or political philosophy.
- 5 Numerous of the contributions to this special issue are indebted to and set in close dialogue with these and other lines of pragmatist and neo-pragmatist thinking. In this issue, scholars in the fields of philosophy and American literary and cultural studies from Germany and the United States thus broaden the scope of humanist inquiry by

revalidating, reassembling, and reconceptualizing “truth” as it is embedded both in the transformations that make up our shared present and modernity as a whole, and in the changing formations of hermeneutic and pragmatist philosophical inquiry. The articles collected here thus investigate the phenomenon of truth within current research projects related to or steeped in hermeneutic and pragmatist philosophy. As each of the articles provides a particular lens for processing truth, the contributors to this special issue consider the productive dimensions and potentials of engaging with truth rather than to fall back into the skepticism of poststructuralist thought. In fact, much in line with recent cultural-critical commentary (Koschorke), some of the contributions challenge the maxims of poststructuralist thinking by way of arguing that the narrative of non-existent truths may be partially responsible for the current erosion of trust in institutions like the factual and truthful. The rejoinder, of course, is to point out that this confuses the diagnosis with the sickness, and that the mere observation that knowledge claims are made in a field structured by relations of power is not in itself to blame for an abuse of that power. That protagonists of a post-truth politics use post-structuralist theory to their ends (Marantz) is not in itself an argument against those theories. But it does raise the question anew: how, then, should we think about the relation of truth and reality or objectivity?

- 6 In many ways, the discussion of hermeneutic objectivity matches this line of thought. Hermeneutics typically links the concept of knowledge with the concrete experience of everyday life and historic processes of understanding. Although recent critiques of a constructivist understanding of knowledge, be it in the name of “speculative realism” (Meillassoux), “new realism” (Ferraris, *Manifesto of New Realism* and *Introduction to New Realism*; Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*; Kanev), or scientific naturalism (Sider; Boghossian) have in part been directed against a hermeneutic epistemology, these modes of critique miss their target. In the fields of metaphysics, epistemology, and aesthetic theory, phenomenological and hermeneutical approaches have always resisted constructivism. To scholars working in the tradition of philosophical hermeneutics, represented by Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, a “realist” orientation both in epistemology and metaphysics has always been commonplace (Carman; Dreyfus, “Heidegger’s Hermeneutic Realism”; Dreyfus and Taylor; Dreyfus and Wrathall). A more recent argument that the proper topic of hermeneutics is nothing but objective truth, under the banner of “hermeneutical realism” or “phenomenological realism” (Figal, *Objectivity and Philosophy as Metaphysics*; Keiling; Koch), merely highlights a basic conviction common to most authors working in this tradition. Although constructivist approaches have been *en vogue* within the hermeneutical tradition in the wake of post-structuralism (Rorty; Vattimo, *Weak Thought* and *Of Reality*), they have more recently come under quite fierce attack by those making explicit hermeneutics’ realist orientation. Both with regard to the pragmatist and the hermeneutical tradition, the idea of a “true” description of reality as foundation of knowledge is neither given up nor is it equivalent to the idea that truth is only achieved in a complete and adequate description. With both naturalism and constructivism out of the picture, the question for a “realist” hermeneutics is not how to make good on the promise of the one true description but how to interpret the undeniable plurality of truths, and how to relate different epistemic cultures and standards.
- 7 Against this backdrop, this special issue of the *European Journal of American Studies* sets out to frame and accelerate the fruitful connections between the philosophical schools

of U.S. pragmatism and continental hermeneutics as paradigmatic systems of thought to tackle the debate about truth and post-truth. In doing so, it is not interested in a mere history of mutual influences but in the dynamic interrelation of two curiously similar frames of thinking within current works of European and American scholarship. Such an international and interdisciplinary undertaking appears particularly urgent in times of an epistemic crisis as we witness it today.

- 8 The variety of this special issue's essays shows that truth and reality always appear within the tension of their openness towards the experience and new events as well as their creative appropriation in arts and culture. This special issue engages in the recently returned questions concerning facticity and reality, language and referentiality, truth and post-truth, and it will try to answer them in the productive sphere of an interdisciplinary framework. In this regard, the issue understands itself as another crucial enterprise within the dynamic of a number of past and recent humanistic discussions: while American pragmatism marks an ever-growing influence within the works of predominantly European-based humanities and social sciences, and while a number of pragmatist philosophers have shown strong interest in the tradition of philosophical and literary hermeneutics, many strands of cultural and literary scholarship, especially within the realm of so-called transnational American Studies have become increasingly invested in philosophical premises—not least, of course, those of pragmatism and hermeneutics, the two traditions whose elective affinity and shared concerns we have attempted to sketch. The editors have been keen to bring together these different frames of interest. International scholars whose works are invested in finding ever-new ways to think pragmatically and hermeneutically have been brought together to engage in a discussion of truth, reality, factivity, and facticity that will undoubtedly shed some light on the turmoil of our current crisis-ridden age.
- 9 The editors would like to thank Miriam John and Eleni Patrika for their diligent help in formatting the issue.

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