

Press release – Düsseldorf, 3 July 2008

How can we achieve a fulfilled life? Richard Sennett is awarded the 2008 Gerda Henkel Prize

The Gerda Henkel Foundation has chosen to award this year's international Gerda Henkel Prize to the American sociologist and cultural historian Professor Richard Sennett. In so doing, the Foundation's Board of Trustees acknowledged the recommendation of the jury, as chaired by Lord Dahrendorf and made up of top names from the fields of science and politics, and the members of the Foundation's Academic Advisory Council. The Gerda Henkel Prize is awarded biennially for outstanding achievements in the field of historical humanities. With prize money of 100,000 euros, it is one of the most highly endowed awards in its field. The award ceremony will be held in Düsseldorf on 10 November 2008.

The jury substantiated their decision as follows: "Richard Sennett is one of today's leading thinkers. In his widely read books, he effortlessly transcends the boundaries of the humanities, in particular the disciplines of sociology and history, psychology and philosophy. While his immense knowledge and his theoretical consciousness show he is a true academic, his life experience, his spirit and his style prove him to be an artist. He first and foremost addresses the issue of how we can live a fulfilled life in the face of the trend towards the disintegration of modern-day society. Sennett focuses in particular on the spheres of the city and labour. In both of these spheres, the task in hand is to develop anew the time-honoured virtues of self-realisation through skills, cooperation incorporating flexibility, and respect, including among the unequal. Sennett is a social critic who does not wallow in cultural pessimism. Like his tutors Hannah Arendt and David Riesman, he acts as a mentor, and occasionally as a prophet. But throughout, he, like his friend Michel Foucault, continues to stimulate the humanities."

Richard Sennett was born in Chicago, Illinois, on 1 January 1943. He started his career by studying musicology and the cello at the Juilliard School in New York, but following a failed operation on his hand, he changed direction and set out on a career in the sciences at Harvard University. On completing his studies in urbanism, Sennett founded a sociology research centre, the Cambridge Institute, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. As the founding director of the prestigious New York Institute for the Humanities at New York University, established in 1975, he has promoted cooperation between the fields of science, politics, business, the arts and media. Richard Sennett serves as an urban planning consultant for UNESCO. He divides his time between New York University and the London School of Economics, where he has chairs.

His cutting-edge research and his very own style of expression have made his books hugely popular. His best-known works include "The Fall of Public Man" (1977), "Authority" (1980), "The Conscience of the Eye. The Design and Social Life of Cities"

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(1990), "Flesh and Stone. The Body and the City in Western Civilization" (1994), "The Corrosion of Character. The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism" (1998) and "Respect in a World of Inequality" (2002), to name but a few. Sennett still believes in a better future, as borne out by his 2008 book "The Craftsman", which explores the relations between making concrete things and thinking about them; this book consummates Mr. Sennett's long-standing explorations of the culture of work.

"We are absolutely delighted with this decision," said the chairman of the Board of Directors of the Gerda Henkel Foundation, Dr Michael Hanssler. "The Gerda Henkel Prize sponsors excellent academics whose research and international cachet generate important social impetus. In this respect, the works of Richard Sennett transcend the boundaries of nation states in a very special way."

Professor Sennett is a member of numerous international associations and scientific academies, such as the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Royal Society of Literature, and the Royal Society of the Arts. In 1998, he was awarded the European Amalfi Prize for Sociology and Social Sciences, followed by the "Das politische Buch" (The Political Book) prize endowed by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in 1999. In 2006, he was the winner of the Hegel Prize awarded by the city of Stuttgart.

The Gerda Henkel Foundation

The Gerda Henkel Foundation was founded by Lisa Maskell in June 1976 in memory of her mother Gerda Henkel as a private, non-profit organisation in Düsseldorf. Its sole purpose is to promote the sciences, focusing in particular on historical humanities. The foundation is active both in Germany and internationally. In its 32 years of existence, around 70 million euros have been awarded to some 4,500 research projects. Last year, the Foundation provided funding worth more than 6.7 million euros to 346 different projects.

Information

All the information relating to the winner can be viewed and downloaded at <http://www.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de>. We would also be happy to send you a press kit.

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