
Christian Kloeckner, Simone Knewitz and Sabine Sielke (eds.) in Collaboration with Björn Bosserhoff. *Beyond 9/11: Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Twenty-First Century U.S. American Culture.* Transcription: Cultures – Concepts – Controversies 6. Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2013, 432 pp., 33 figures, 1 table, € 41.00.

After more than a decade, the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks of Sept 11, 2001, appear as a watershed moment in U.S. history and in global memory. In the humanities, ‘9/11’ has been read as the end of postmodernism; in a larger context, it marks the beginning of a new era of racial profiling, the ‘war on terror(ism)’, and a breach of civil rights that extends well beyond the U.S. and into the everyday life (such as, for instance, with the most recent NSA scandal). In 2014, it seems that almost any headline can be linked to ‘9/11 and the aftermath’ in some way, and all too frequently the roots and significance of the term itself fall prey to oblivion. What remains as a desideratum in and beyond the academy is a critical questioning of the historiographic troping and epistemological grounding of ‘9/11’, a project undertaken in transdisciplinary manner by the volume discussed here.

Compiled from the contributions to a conference held by Bonn’s North American Studies Program in 2011, *Beyond 9/11: Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Twenty-First Century U.S. American Culture* engages critically with the legacies and epistemologies related to ‘9/11’. Its aim, the editors state in the introduction, is both to examine how ‘9/11’ affects “historical, political, and social processes,”

and to challenge the notion that this event presents a turning point that splits our perspectives in two, before and after (14). Its central contention is that, rather than the singular ‘day that changed everything’, ‘9/11’ should be viewed on a larger scale as symptom of a slow “climate change” (16). This approach allows for an intriguing double take on the attacks as a framing device for social and political processes on the one hand, while on the other questioning its very event-status. The latter, ‘meta’-inquiry is linked to a (self-)reflection of scholarly practice: Americanists looking at the U.S. in the 21st century may find in ‘9/11’ a new *raison d’être*, but they are also challenged to reconsider their own disciplinary constraints and practices when “our research questions turn out too big even for American boots” (14).

Beyond 9/11 answers this challenge with four sections of essays, a valuable working bibliography and, an intriguing artist interview. The volume groups contributions from a multi-disciplinary background into four themes: the first section reiterates the epistemological framework of ‘9/11’, proposing to view it as a climate change; the second section examines “The Costs and Commodification of 9/11”. This is followed by a part titled, with Baudrillard’s influential coinage *Spirit of Terrorism*, “The Spirit of 9/11” about the transcendent and material after-maths in spiritual matters, and the last section, “Looking Beyond Ground Zero”, which (re)locates the U.S. in foreign policy, international relations, and in cultural production.

The contributions span an impressive transdisciplinary spectrum, coupling literary and cultural studies projects with political science topics of international relations and foreign policy, law studies subjects and torture discussions, economic debates surrounding the globalized oil industry, the costs and success calculation of terrorist efforts, as well as religious studies, spirituality and religious conflict, trauma and border studies – a list that illustrates the editors’ agenda of bringing into dialogue the many views on the topic. Hence, the overall reading impression offers enriching insights into transdisciplinary trajectories and research interests. It also sharpens, maybe defends the disciplinary contours at a time when academics frequently face the embattled territory of a politically fostered interdisciplinary research agenda. The book’s showcasing of transdisciplinary work marks its overarching strength.

The sections create correspondences between contributions from different disciplines, such as in the part “Looking Beyond Ground Zero”. This section groups two political science papers with two literary studies analyses and is rounded off by an artist interview with Christoph Faulhaber. The contributions by Patrick Keller and Andreas Falke treat intersecting notions of power (hard and soft) as well as international relations with regard to their future development; Sascha Pöhlmann’s concept of future-founding poetry and Birgit Däwes’ argument about the

haunting qualities of “Ground Zero Fiction” enhance this perspective and canvas the importance and productivity of an interdisciplinary look at this topic: Alongside economic calculations and political prophesying, the aesthetic interlinks past, present, and future, imagining what might be and thus creating an epistemology for self-affirmation and -location in a globalized present. Additionally, the essays in the “Beyond”-section point to the meaning of present agency and emplacement, of power and empire. Patrick Keller’s lucid discussion of U.S. primacy contends that “the U.S. has not abused its eminent position to create imperial relationships of dominance and exploitation” (317), and yet when looking beyond the narrow sense of the term as employed here, recent developments such as the NSA and the U.S.-German spying scandal or the aftermath of U.S. involvement in Iraq and the destabilization of the Middle East appear to counteract this statement: It seems that, in the 21st century globalized world, the very concept of empire is in dire need of rephrasing.

The mesmerized gaze at the U.S. as some sort of empire and the impact of ‘9/11’ on its symbolic and political *gestalt* becomes obvious across the volume in topical trajectories; for example, Greta Olson’s assessment of presidential masculinities in “Recovering the Men We Loved to Hate: Barack Obama as a Representative of Post-Post-September 11 White House Masculinity” intriguingly outlines the transatlantic (dis)enchantment with the Bush and Obama presidencies. It also reverberates with Simone Knewitz’ contribution “9/11 and the Literature Industry” as well as with Birgit Däwes’ “Haunted Fiction: The Ghosts of Ground Zero”: all of these contributions contain a commentary on a particular medium and its cultural work. This particular vector is completed by the interview with Christoph Faulhaber, a German artist whose risqué “bioperformance” (398) as ‘Mr. Security’ outside state institutions have earned him critical acclaim but also discrimination and extensive visa trouble in the U.S. His oeuvre and life story chronicle the artist’s embattled status and the censorship exercised upon art (a cherished concept in the ‘free world’) by the U.S. nation state. Thanks to the interviewer’s informed questioning, the interview turns into an intriguing conversation, and a truly great read: It frames the collection by talking back to the introductory claim that the terrorist attacks keep “challenging us in our comforts” (25); it articulates a sophisticated response to the ‘end of irony’-label attached to ‘9/11’ that humanities scholars grapple with; ultimately, it encapsulates the intricate relation between art, politics, and life in our times, broadening the vision in a crucial move.

Finally, for readers with an English and American Studies background, *Beyond 9/11* is enriching not only because of its transdisciplinary scope, but also for the close readings and genre discussions in the contributions by literary and cultural studies scholars. They open up ‘9/11 literature’ for other questions: Sylvia Mayer’s “‘Dwelling in Crisis’: Terrorist and Environmental Risk Scenarios in the

post-9/11 Novel” remaps the field of analysis to include global concerns of ecocriticism; Georgiana Banita’s “Writing Energy Security After 9/11: Oil, Narrative and Globalization” discusses petrofiction. Similarly, the articles by Birgit Däwes on fiction, Andrew S. Gross on the counterfactual novel, and Sascha Pöhlmann on poetry, indicate ways in which future scholars may use the tools of their trade to explore the corpus of ‘9/11 literature’. From this perspective, the selection seems a little narrow, since it leaves out a variety of cultural products, including film, TV, and drama (even though, granted, the phenomenon of ‘9/11 literature’ has been covered in other collections that are concerned with cultural studies and products exclusively). Likewise, with regard to the topics covered, the ‘post-9/11’ political protest movements like the Tea Party, Occupy or the Anonymous group would have been a promising phenomenon of inquiry. These minuscule shortcomings also resurface in the rich bibliography of sources from the fields of theoretical/philosophical, literature/culture/media, and politics/law/economy/society. If it is possible to make this volume even more complete, it would be with the help of, first, a list of novels, films, and other cultural products to compliment the secondary sources listed in the literature/culture/media section (or with a reference where to find such a list); and second, with additional bibliographical annotations that cluster discussant texts *across* the categories listed here. Yet these complaints can hardly tarnish the overall impression of this volume, which, with the bibliography and very readable introduction, positions itself successfully as an ordering device of the expanding and multifaceted “9/11 archive” (15) – far from pretending to be definitive.

Beyond 9/11 is part and parcel of an ongoing debate about the events of 2001, and its scope and focus make it an outstanding reflection on the topic. Examining the shapes and forms of contemporary debates, questioning the very notion of ‘9/11’ as discursive lens through which our lives and actions become tinged, and finally, prioritizing a look towards the future over analyzing trauma, it is a valuable and important read for audiences within and beyond American Studies. As the fruition of the long-standing commitment of Bonn’s American Studies Department, it structures and conducts the many-voiced chorus that echoes ‘9/11’ in and beyond the academy.