

## Reviews

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Birte Christ, Christian Kloeckner, Elisabeth Schäfer-Wünsche and Michael Butter (eds.), *American Studies/Shifting Gears: The Futures of (European) American Studies* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2010, \$39.12). Pp. 451. ISBN 978 3 8253 5733 7.

Funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), a new generation of Americanists in Germany started a network that allowed them to reflect on current trends in their field of academic expertise. The network, entitled The Futures of (European) American Studies, continued for three years, beginning in 2005. It hosted six conferences, with invited guests. It also produced the collection of essays reviewed here.

As the network's name suggests, the participants took their cue from discussions and debates among US scholars in American studies, from Donald Pease and Robyn Wiegman's volume (*The Futures of American Studies*) or the Dartmouth series of annual summer conferences, convened under the same name, and more generally from what became known as the new American studies. The German group was aware of the intricacies involved: "We thus took over a name for our own use, but with it also its own critical deconstruction" (2). If the field in the US is known for its "rites of dissent," while shunning the serious study of what Sacvan Bercovitch not all that long ago called America's "rites of assent," many contributors to the volume under review engage in a balancing act. They explore the many paradigmatic turns that US American studies is undergoing, with its calls for internationalization; interdisciplinarity, if not transdisciplinarity; and a methodology centrally geared to a cultural-studies approach, with its defining constructionism. If, in its American guise, this is an intellectual game played by self-hating Americans with a fine sense of the subservience of older forms of American studies to the interests of American imperialism, the contributors to this volume see it as their task, and more widely that of a European American studies, to preserve what the US new Americanists have thrown out of court: the meanings and readings of what the idea of America evokes in people's minds, in Europe, in the US or elsewhere.

If Donald Pease is one towering intellectual presence in the volume, Winfried Fluck and Walter Benn Michaels cast their own shadows. Both are present with chapters of their own, while inspiring the writing of other contributors. Fluck is foremost among those who formulate a critical response to the radical deconstructions brought to the field, subtly exploring the lasting pull of what he calls the romance with America, much as the vectors of the romantic pull may shift over time. Fluck thus develops an articulate individual version of Bercovitch's rites of

assent, a version of particular relevance for the reading of non-Americans' romances with America.

While Fluck's view is typical of an American studies centrally geared to the critical reading of things seen as meaningful texts, typical one might say of an American studies grounded in literary criticism, Michaels reintroduces sociology and history. He reminds us that the concept of class sits uneasily alongside race and gender as its partners in the mantra of an American studies seen as cultural studies. Unlike race and gender, he argues, class is inherently hierarchical. He urges Americanists to return to the study of social and economic inequality and the research agenda that it sets. His plea ties in with a chapter by two historians about the tenuous relationship between present-day American studies and history as academic fields. As a political scientist I would like to make a similar plea for a reanimated study of power, neglected by Americanists since the days of C. W. Mills and Christopher Lasch, a plea, in other words, for a return to an older Weberian triad of class, status and power.

In summary, this is a timely volume. It offers critical introspection in language that with a few exceptions is accessible to outsiders. It is not, however, as the title seems to promise, a book that speaks in the voice of a European American studies community. The non-German contributors are American, and the references in the various texts do not evoke a world of conversation and exchange among European colleagues. It is my sense that there is actually more of that than appears from this volume.

*Universities of Amsterdam/Utrecht*

ROB KROES

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Ulla Haselstein, Andrew Gross and Maryann Snyder-Körber (eds.), *The Pathos of Authenticity: American Passions of the Real* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2010, £42.00). Pp. 294. ISBN 978 3 8253 5706 1.

*The Pathos of Authenticity* is the product of a 2007 conference held at the JFK Institute in Berlin, and its primary focus is on how questions of "authenticity" in American culture have been reconfigured in the wake of 9/11, although some essays, such as Andrew S. Gross's piece on John Berryman's *Dream Songs*, do look back to an earlier period. Indeed, the editors do a good job in their introduction of putting the genealogy of authenticity into a broader American intellectual context, from ee cummings's modernist understanding of it as a "rebellion against authority" (9), through Lionel Trilling's differentiation between the romantic self-authentication of an inner self and an earlier form of sincerity that involves "congruence between avowal and actual feeling" (11), to the renewed communal nostalgia for emblems of memorialization in the age of homeland security. There are excellent contributions here from conference keynote speaker Bill Brown (of the University of Chicago) on "Commodity Nationalism and the Lost Object," and from Erika Doss (University of Notre Dame) on ways in which the question of authenticity is inextricably interwoven with questions of national security. The other contributions are mostly from German-based scholars, and they are nearly all critically well informed and