

IRINA BAUDER-BEGEROW and STEFANIE SCHÄFER, eds., *Learning 9/11: Teaching for Key Competences in Literary and Cultural Studies* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2011), 302 pp.

This is a fascinating collection of essays. Simultaneously, it is a puzzling conglomerate of didactic and educational contentions and hypotheses. The very title, *Learning 9/11*, seems to state a necessity for an overhaul of traditional learning systems and methodologies in the wake of fundamental changes wrought by the effects of the 9/11 attacks. Not that there is unanimity about the importance of 9/11: Michael Butter and his co-editors have claimed that 9/11 did not change the world, and Stephan Packard and Ursula Hennigfeld have bid farewell to the catastrophe<sup>1</sup> that had originally triggered a plethora of cultural responses and a subsequent host of scholarly commentaries. Many of these cultural responses displayed a self-conscious (or unself-conscious) sense of inadequacy to begin with, and most of them have duly been forgotten by now. Most of the scholarly assessments will probably meet a similar fate. Case closed?

Not necessarily. The present collection, edited by former research assistants Bauder-Begerow and Schäfer, at least partly in response to their own training in the Hochschuldidaktik program of the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg, looks like a resolute response to the lurking suspicion that more than just the towers of the World Trade Center fell that day. Arguably, the ensuing (inter-)national paranoia in the United States and at least for a while also in parts of Europe still calls for a realignment of whole systems of teaching and learning. So the editors “propose to revive the connection between ‘learning about culture’ in higher education and ‘learning culture’ as a competence-based path to life-long learning and participation in society” (10). Which sounds good. And ominous.

Good, because one rather obvious reason for the efficacy of the 9/11 assassins was the breathtaking lack of cultural competence on the part of cultural analysts, researchers, and ultimately security personnel in identifying and eliminating the threat that eventually led

to the spectacular success of the attacks. The first instance of “Learning 9/11”, one might claim, took place on board Flight 97, where a handful of passengers and crew gained a tragic insight into the limited agency they still had regarding their own lives—and acted on that.

Ominous, because more often than not the editors and contributors alike seem to share the basic twenty-first-century German fear to tread in any other mode than softly. The response offered in the introduction is the focus on “key competences” that are identified as “reading, writing, intercultural and media competences” (14, cf. 10). Is that really all? Almost as if in spite of their own insight into the necessity notably for intercultural competence, the editors remain bound to a basically Humboldtian ideology of autonomous individualism, and the “traditional strength” of “personality development and identity formation” (13)—as if the Second World War, and definitely Vietnam, had not already cast a serious shadow of doubt over the viability of these concepts.

Both the introduction and the following articles display this odd mixture of insight into the inadequacy of traditional models of learning and education in dealing with the dangers of high-risk finance capitalism, Islamist extremism, and other forms of transnational terrorism on the one hand, and on the other hand the reluctance to abandon the traditional belief system that our assessment of ‘truth,’ ‘reality,’ and ‘history’ (19) is the correct one after all. And that a proper application of “knowledge-based constructivism” (14) will garner that insight in the long run. Consequently, the articles by Martina Wolff, Philipp Löffler, and Christine Schwanecke remain rather fixed in their interpretations of texts that were generated according to the model already exemplified by the American responses to the Vietnam War, which dealt almost exclusively with American views and sentiments and invented their few attempts at ‘Vietnamese’ perspectivity according to necessity. In her very interesting contribution, Ellen Redling at least attempts to give credit to that largely inaccessible voice of extreme otherness that is usually made to resemble the ‘enemy.’ Redling’s “Trainingsprojekt” (211), however, is saddled with two successive cultural gaps: German students were supposed to flesh out a storyline developed by a Scottish playwright fantasizing about an un-named country infested by rebels that have captured

<sup>1</sup> Michael Butter et al., eds., *9/11: Kein Tag, der die Welt veränderte* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2011); Stefan Packard and Ursula Hennigfeld, eds., *Abschied von 9/11? Distanznahmen zur Katastrophe* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2013).

a downed U.S. pilot. That the students gained an insight into their own likelihood to fall prey to preconceived notions and prejudices deserves credit, but everybody seems to have missed out on the ironic reference to the Pocahontas myth in the story. As long as they do not get the basic American myths, how are students supposed to understand cultures that are as accessible to Euro-Americans, such as Yemenite, Pashtūn, or Kurdish?

The other group of texts that tackle the subject from a didactic point of view show a similar division. Laurenz Volkmann shows convincingly that and how media competence can be gained using media material related to 9/11. Corinna Assmann and Maria Eisenmann operate on a similar basis, offering insights into how specific 9/11 texts can be analysed and taught using the tools and methods they have mustered into service. Several of the other articles actually mainly provide insights into the didactics of university teaching, academic writing, and the general keys to key competences in higher education—but without any 9/11-related topicality or messages. As such, they are useful contributions to on-

going discussions, such as for instance Silke Weiß's report on *Hochschuldidaktik*—one of the main sites where teaching excellence still has room for improvement. However, as far as 9/11 as a concrete incision in the history of the world is concerned, the impact of many of the contributions in this ambitiously titled volume will likely be that of the German *Bundeswehr* in Afghanistan: most of them never got out of their compound, which had been set up in one of the safest areas of the country. As long as the “intercultural” in “intercultural competences” (15, et passim) means, in practical terms, learning about the other through a prescreen of mediated filters, the results are predictable. What is still missing is a serious discussion of cultural polyperspectivity, post-9/11 migration, and the challenges to education systems arising from a widening variety of linguistic competences. Ultimately, we also need to figure out ways by which teaching and learning in higher education can contribute to the kind of societal resilience that will be necessary to deal with future 9/11s.

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