

CHRISTIAN KLOECKNER, SIMONE KNEWITZ, and SABINE SIELKE, eds. *Knowledge Landscapes North America* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2016), 305 pp.

The recent endeavors of the Trump administration to instigate reforms regarding political, educational, and ecological programs (to put it very mildly), as well as its attempts to recalibrate what knowledge is and how knowledge is produced and circulated, signal the urgency in American Studies to analyze and interpret the dynamics of knowledge construction and circulation in the twenty-first century. The timely volume *Knowledge Landscapes North America* aims at examining these processes “from institutional, structural, and conceptual angles,” and likewise stresses how knowledge comes to “matter for individual agents and within collectives” (16). The edited volume comprises fourteen essays and one interview with Rivka Galchen and Joseph O’Neill, originating from the 62nd annual conference of the German Association of American Studies in Bonn, 2015. By examining institutions and the social patterns they produce and circulate, the bodies they exclude, and the doctrines they postulate, the volume highlights the economics of knowledge and hence exemplifies a shift towards a meta-contextualization in and of American Studies. The volume suggests that knowledge is increasingly seen as an economic resource (and in some contributions possibly a commodity), marked and scarred by related processes of globalization, neoliberalism, and capitalism. This “economic impact of knowledge—and thus, implicitly, its economic dependency—has been of central importance in scholarship for a long time” (8) and can be taken to gain new momentum in the twenty-first century vis-à-vis de-funded educational programs, public institutions, and academic scholarship (i. e., Trump’s proposition of the eliminating of the arts and humanities endowment). The first half of 2017 alone has seen a sudden re-shaping and re-configuration of the stratification of knowledge(s) (i. e., post-truth rhetoric) and the malleability of truth (i. e., alternative facts). Knowledge, its production and circulation, as well as its economization and hegemonic potential, will remain a contested field of inquiry in the humanities in the following decades. It will be indicative of shifting geo-political dynamics to come—and of knowledge that will be either canonized or further marginalized.

The scope of objects of inquiry of this collection showcases the conceptualization of knowledge as a *spatial* concept—described by the editors Christian Kloeckner, Simone Knewitz and Sabine Sielke as knowledge environments. These environments afford a foregrounding of the interactions of “local conditions and specific agents” that are always already embodied as well as site- and time-specific (9). By mapping knowledge as contested, dynamic, shifting environments, the editors place emphasis on spatial formations and transformations of fields like the academy, the literary market and pop-culture, political institutions as well as production companies or public institutions like libraries. Knowledge, hence, is a concept of both spatial and time-specific dimensions, but also unfolds as an elusive and malleable category of academic and political inquiry that can be traded and capitalized upon on the global market.

The volume is elegantly structured into four dynamic fields of investigation that acknowledge these shifts and critically examine the reciprocity of political, cultural and social actors and spheres. The first of these fields focuses on both the emergence of knowledge institutions and their increasing intertwining with the economic sector. By investigating (public) spaces such as the university and the library, scholarship is able to trace the “increasing dependence of knowledge [...] on economic utility and cash value” throughout the history of knowledge production and circulation in the United States (11). What the first three essays demonstrate is the constant re-calibration of institutions in political, economic, cultural, and even personal force fields, and thus achieve nuanced investigations into the (public) educational system ranging from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. Chris Newfields’s essay helps contextualize the debate over the historical shift from knowledge society to knowledge economy, for he outlines the challenges and opportunities at stake in the humanities. By choosing the focal point of a spatial/architectural analysis, Alexander Starre’s essay on emergence of Carnegie libraries as epistemic spaces helps constitute a shift towards a “potential to decenter the position of the literary in knowledge-oriented humanities research” in order to “reveal wider networks of discursive practices that transcend the domain of literature and art” (80). If and when we put such epistemic spaces “at the center of an inquiry into historical modes of

knowing, we multiply the range of discourses and artifacts that need to be accounted for” (*ibid.*). Particularly since the digital revolution has done away with many *physical* spaces of knowledge production and circulation and replaced the college book store with online retailers, the campus café with a coffee chain, or the library with illegally downloaded PDFs, we need to pay closer attention to institutions such as the library, the campus, and the classroom as chronotopes in the twenty-first century. Such a chronotopic reading of knowledge gives further indication of the structural exclusion and discrimination against women, queer people, people with disabilities, and people of color in these environments; these inquiries beg for socio-geographical attention towards campus politics and the policing of the student body.

This line of inquiry of the “landscape-grooming” and streamlining of knowledge and its institutions, ranging from access via exorbitant enrollment fees to structural racism and exclusion, helps acknowledge issues of access to and privilege through knowledge environments. These questions reverberate in the next section of the volume on pedagogies, which turns to four historical objects that range from early-life learning to campus life. The essays offer complex and often surprising readings of tactics of pedagogies and the proliferation of tacit knowledge over the course of different lived environments (i. e., the parlor, the school, the campus). Mahshid Mayar explains how dissecting maps and puzzles of the nineteenth century shaped the (self-)conceptualization of the nation through toys and childhood as a bourgeois “institution”; a quaint pastime turns into a geo-political exercise and a stage for possible imperial indoctrination, because dissection maps could “empower” regions, nations, even continents, as the essential building blocks of the world in the child’s spatial imagination” (105). These combinations of cartography and knowledge were “as much about zooming in and essentializing borders according to U.S. geopolitical priorities as they were about zooming out, essentializing the pieces and, ultimately, idealizing the whole” (116). Mayar draws attention to the socio-cultural dimension of these pastimes, for they were mostly coded as upper-class activities (101). In a similar vein to Mayar’s article, the question of access, privilege, and elitism is at the centerfold of Sophie Spieler’s essay about Owen Johnson’s novel

Stover at Yale (1912). She highlights the habitus of the Ivy League student body and the genre of campus novel, and her article spotlights urgent questions on the self-fashioning of a higher educational institution that resonate within today’s knowledge environments. A recent interactive article in the *New York Times*¹ visualizes how higher education enrollment data has changed within the last 30 years—these data may be indicative of Spieler’s questions towards access and privilege. When contrasted with Heinz Ickstadt’s article on the sleeper hit *Stoner*, Spieler’s essay treats *Stover at Yale* as an intervention, reading it as a story “about distinction, about hierarchies, about competition; college here is not primarily concerned with the production or dissemination of knowledge, but instead serves as a space to foster the actualization and accumulation of social capital” and the distribution of power on campus (121). Yet her reading of *Stover at Yale* offers a critical intervention on elitism as a structuring principle and on the necessity to rethink its dominance (136). This begs the question of both the economization as well as the politicization of the student body and/on the campus, as well as of the shifting socio-geographical tendencies of access to knowledge—global and digital influences notwithstanding.

“What does literature know?” asks Antje Kley—and inaugurates the third section of the volume that investigates how fields produce competing and contested forms of knowledge—crudely put, what counts as knowledge. The essays turn to cultural ecology and new materialism, border concepts, natural sciences, and the news and places them in conversation with core interests of American Studies. Kley’s essay illuminates the intertwining of social sciences and literature and affords a ‘view from somewhere,’ meaning how the social perspective on sciences must be understood as an enriching crosspollination, and not a competing perspective of fields foreign from another (see also, if approached from a different angle, Newfield’s essay in the volume). Kley argues that “knowledge in the humanities [...] always implies an explicit entanglement between the

¹ Ashkenas, Jeremy, Haeyoun Park and Adam Pearce. “Even With Affirmative Action, Blacks and Hispanics Are More Underrepresented at Top Colleges Than 35 Years Ago.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times, August 24, 2017. Web. September 18, 2017.

socially embedded subject and the object of knowledge production” and socially situated knowledge (153). She thus underlines the culturally and historically particularized individual and collective scenarios (156). Fiction, Kley argues, “selects, accentuates, combines, and inflects partial bodies of knowledge from particular, historically changing discourses and areas of expertise, and it renders them relevant within particular frames of reference” (156). Explorations of social perspective and communication through the particular are signature strengths of literary knowledge production, but this also calls attention to “the formative role of the person who gains knowledge as well as of the protocols used in the processes of knowledge production” (159)—Kley’s observation ties to how competing concepts of knowledge are individualized processes, embedded within daily routines, like news consumption. Particularly in today’s post-truth era, the news offers an arena of the emotional, subjective, dispersed construction of information, facts, and opinions. In his contribution, Frank Kelleter understands the news as a crucial sphere of modern knowledge, for it is not “about something in the world, but also always about itself” (211). Altered frameworks and the shifts of the development of media technologies and practices help outlining “the practical indication and self-referential expression of modernity. Our own contemporary assumption that knowledge is dependent on innovation has (one of) its roots here” (213). The essay gives an outlook on the self-performance of contemporary news institutions and how these very institutions come to rethink themselves. Kelleter draws a parallel to a meta-medial turn of contemporary agents, such as fiction and film, indicating a careful re-assessment and self-understanding of media.

The last section turns to questions regarding forgotten and marginalized knowledge and the bodies in these very environments, paying attention to tacit, embodied, and gendered knowledge and cultural memory. The essays pay closer attention to individual agents and dynamics within collectives. They illuminate the aforementioned questions of access and privilege from another angle, for they acknowledge how environments produce

and negotiate epistemic injustices for marginalized groups and minorities. As Christa Buschendorf’s essay exemplifies, a reading of knowledge landscapes in relation to slavery in the novel *The Known World* helps question “why systems of domination, particularly those based on fundamental injustice as in the case of slavery, exhibit such remarkable stability and duration” (17). Jeanne Cortiel’s essay employs the movie franchise *Resident Evil* as a vehicle to illustrate and recognize epistemic injustice within knowledge structures and the relationship between scientific knowledge and gendered bodies; she probes in what way the series is capable to “destabilize ways of knowing space factually or even knowing space at all” (251). These relationships exemplify the affects the “individual in her capacity as knower, either by doubting the credibility of what she says [...] or by limiting her ability to interpret her social experience” has within the gameplay (249). The series, Cortiel argues, “lays bare the links between gender, self-ownership, and disavowed ways of knowing space and self” (265f). Turning towards the question of how knowledge matters for the individual—alone as well as embedded within collectivities—underlines how the “forces of tacitness in structures of racial, ethnic, and gendered dominations” are expressed and negotiated in cultural productions such as the *Resident Evil* franchise (257).

It hence remains imperative to highlight how economic and political forces at play in the twenty-first century come to landscape forgotten, contested, shifted, and tilting vistas of knowledge today. Yet it also comes to show how quickly common beliefs can be dismantled and superseded by “new knowledge” and paradigm shifts. It is safe to say that in 2015, neither the attendants, contributors nor organizers of the annual GAAS conference could have anticipated the extent and form that debates surrounding knowledge would take in the wake of the 2016 Presidential election. The publication of this volume occurs at a crucial moment of political momentum and may inspire and arm the discipline in the presently changing landscape of American knowledge.

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