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MICHAEL BUTTER AND PATRICK KELLER

None Dare Call It Continuity: The Politics of Conceptualizing 9/11 as Rupture in American Studies

On September 11, 2001, the story goes, the world changed. When terrorists steered hijacked passenger planes into the World Trade Center, they allegedly caused not only the twin towers to collapse but brought down the entire world order. At least, this notion of a rupture on the local and personal as well as the global and collective level was at once projected by the media. Newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic suggested explicitly that history would never be the same in countless articles, commentaries and eyewitness reports the day after the attacks. The *New York Times*, for example, wrote that the previous day "was, in fact, one of those moments in which history splits, and we define the world as 'before' and 'after'" ("The War Against America"). In Germany, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* ran a chronicle of the events in the U.S. under the headline "Hours that Change the World" ("Stunden"). Politicians who immediately after the attacks stressed endurance and continuity later picked up on this notion for a variety of reasons. By the time the 9/11 Commission presented its report three years later, the opening sentences of the "Executive Summary" only summed up what was now common knowledge: "At 8:46 on the morning of September 11, 2001, the United States became a nation transformed" ("9/11 Commission Report" 9).

In addition, the conceptualization of 9/11 as a caesura—indicated graphically, one could say, by the slash separating the "9" from the "11"—has to a considerable degree also been forged within the academia. In literary and cultural studies there is already a plethora of essays that address the impact of 9/11 on all dimensions of the disciplines, with the epithets "post-9/11" and "after 9/11" alone generating by now more than one hundred hits in the MLA database. There is work on post-9/11 poetry, fiction and film; there are explorations of topics as diverse as the current situation of Arabs and baseball in the U.S., and there are re-readings of authors like Woolf, Naipaul and even Cervantes. These articles thus not only address questions such as the impact of the attacks and their aftermaths on identity constructions, the

thematic and formal development of literature, cinema and the arts, on our understanding of older cultural artifacts as well as on their study and teaching. They are also based on and enforce the idea that 9/11 changed "everything."[1]

This notion of a rupture is prevalent among political scientists as well. From the extensive analysis of the terrorist attacks and their political implications derive three common insights that are challenged by remarkably few dissenters: First, 9/11 fundamentally changed the threat perception among U.S. security experts. The terrorist attacks exemplified a new kind of (global) warfare; U.S. political and military strategy had to adjust accordingly. Second, the attacks and the subsequent developments in international affairs signify a change in the global power structure. Due to the increasingly effective backlash of rising authoritarian states and anti-American international terrorist organizations, the days of U.S. hegemony are over or at least numbered. Third, in their ill-advised reaction to these new threats and developments, the Bush administration has embarked on a course that marks a sharp break with American foreign policy traditions—thus inadvertently further undermining U.S. strength and the stability of the international system maintained by U.S. leadership since 1945.[2]

As we will discuss, the conceptualization of 9/11 as a political sea-change of the same magnitude as 11/9[3] has been propagated by critics and supporters of the Bush administration alike—albeit for very different reasons. Advocates of Bush's policy instrumentalized the notion of an unprecedented situation to justify controversial measures, whereas others claimed that it was exactly this controversial reaction to 9/11 that engendered a fundamental shift in international politics to the worse.[4]

1 See, for instance, Bird, "Mourning in Post-9/11 Fiction," Rich, "Cinema Studies Post-9/11," Butterworth, "Baseball and the Rhetorical Purification of America," Salaita, "Arabs Before and After 9/11," Bellamy, "Addressing Virgina Woolf after 9/11," Weiss, "Naipaul after 9/11" and Véguez, "Don Quijote and 9-11." Similarly, Donald Pease also projects the notion that 9/11 and the government response it triggered constitute a rupture when he insists on the continuing legitimacy and relevance of the New Americanist project: "But why should the Bush administration's alteration of the geopolitical order have authorized efforts to periodize the New Americanists' project as an academic project that had been superseded at this historical turning point?" (77).

2 Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay make the most elegant case for these three propositions, culminating in the thesis of a "Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy." See also Halper and Clarke.

3 November 9, 1989, the day the Berlin Wall fell, is usually seen as the final day of the Cold War.

4 See, for instance, Ikenberry for the critics and Krauthammer, "Neoconservative Convergence" for the supporters.

While the vicious debate about the virtue and wisdom of U.S. foreign policy over the last eight years has brought little agreement, it nevertheless contributed to quickly and firmly establishing the notion that September 11, 2001 changed the world.

It is this understanding of 9/11 that we wish to contest here. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon do not, we contend, *really* constitute a caesura. They have surely performed a catalytic function in various areas, accelerating and intensifying older developments and trends and increasing their visibility and public perception, but they have not brought about a new world order or radically transformed the cultural sphere. Rather, media and politics as well as academic disciplines have, for a variety of reasons, produced and are constantly reproducing this notion of a rupture. Accordingly, we first challenge the idea of a fundamental break by emphasizing continuity both on the cultural and on the political level. American film and fiction, we argue in the first section, staged terrorism in general and its Islamist version in particular as a major threat to the U.S. long before 9/11 and even before the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993. Likewise, in the area of foreign policy the three developments described above either have been underway since the end of the Cold War or are expressions of even longer-standing political traditions.

In the second and longer section we then investigate why the concepttualization of 9/11 as a rupture is so ubiquitous, appealing and, for many, also convincing. Identifying certain cultural and political factors we will pay special attention to the reasons why academics both in literary and cultural studies and political science have been promoting this conceptualization as well. We will end by suggesting that, due to institutional conditions, European American Studies scholars might be better suited to resist such a short-sighted understanding than their colleagues in North America.

Let's Speak of Continuity

Almost immediately after claiming that 9/11 changed the country, the *9/11 Report* significantly declares that the attacks may well have been a shock but "should not have come as a surprise," as "Islamist extremists had given plenty of warning that they meant to kill Americans indiscriminately and in large numbers" ("9/11 Commission Report" 10). And yet, it has been claimed or at least implied by various academics that the threat of terrorism only entered the political and cultural imaginary on September 11, 2001. Scholars in literary and cultural studies, for example, have focused on how American film and fiction have engaged the

issue of terrorism after 9/11, and so have journalists in their reviews. Of course, these studies and appraisals do not entirely deny the existence of novels and movies revolving around Islamist and other forms of terrorism written or filmed before the attacks occurred. However, they tend to emplot films that stage terrorist attacks on the U.S. such as *Collateral Damage* (2002) or *The Sum of All Fears* (2002), whose releases were postponed due to 9/11, in very specific fashions. The same goes for novels such as Don DeLillo's *Mao II* (1991), in which both the World Trade Center and the photographer Brita's fears of being on a plane hijacked by terrorists figure prominently (see, for instance, 40-41). While the movies' sensibility for the theme is often downplayed and projected as rather accidental, novels like DeLillo's are imbued with the power of anticipating the future.[5] Thus, *The Sum of All Fears* appears in these accounts, as Joe Queenan puts it in his review for the British *Guardian*, as "the usual cold war Clancy fare," whereas *Mao II*'s "eerily prophetic chain of associations" (Hardack 390) is said to testify to the visionary sensibility of a great artist.

Quite apart from unwittingly perpetuating a problematic binary of high and low culture, such accounts seem inadequate insofar as they tend to misread the cultural contexts from which these artifacts emerged. These films and novels do neither accidentally nor prophetically draw on the issue of terrorism. Rather, they reflect and simultaneously contribute to a considerable and steadily growing awareness of terrorism emerging as the major security threat to the Western world after the demise of communism. *The Sum of All Fears* and *Mao II* are only two of the many films and novels of all kinds revolving around terrorism released and published since 1989.[6] In fact, if there is a rupture in recent global and American history, it surely is the end of the Cold War, which left the United States as the sole surviving superpower, and therefore, among other things, "looking for enemies" (Beisel) that could function as the Other necessary for identity constructions and the affirmation of one's own values. Robbed of the communist foe, American culture, as Stefan Butter has recently shown, turned back to the Nazis, tried out South American drug dealers and several "internal others" and then quickly settled, in accordance with the administration, on Islamist and other terrorists.[7]

[5] Movies are loaded with such prophetic power vis-à-vis 9/11 only with regard to the images of destruction that films like *Independence Day* (1996) have anticipated according to critics such as Slavoj Žižek.

[6] Stefan Butter lists around 50 such films for the period in question. Even his impressive list, though, is surely incomplete.

[7] For a more detailed version of this argument see the comprehensive study by Stefan Butter.

Consequently, terrorism figures prominently in films as diverse as *Passenger 57* (1992), *Patriot Games* (1992), *The Pelican Brief* (1993), *True Lies* (1994), *Die Hard With a Vengeance* (1995), *Face/Off* (1997), *Air Force One* (1997), *Arlington Road* (1999) and *Agent Red* (2000). Terrorism also propels the plots of the television series *24* and *Alias*, whose first seasons premiered after 9/11, but were conceived and filmed before. The fact that several of the films mentioned here are based on novels by Tom Clancy indicates that, contrary to Queelan's argument, neither Clancy nor fiction in general remained caught in a Cold War paradigm during the 1990s. Rather, the blending of a Russian and a terrorist threat in several of Clancy's novels—and various other texts of the decade—testifies to American culture's desire to link the new to the old enemy and to conceptualize them in analogous fashion.

This attempt to contain the impact of the end of the Cold War by way of constructing continuity is particularly apparent in David B. Charnay's *Operation Lucifer: The Chase, Capture and Trial of Adolf Hitler*, a novel that was published in summer 2001 and then re-issued with an added epilogue in spring 2002. Charnay, a journalist, Hollywood producer and adviser to several conservative politicians, received extensive counseling from Pentagon officials and military judges while planning and writing the book.[8] His novel therefore at least hints at how at least some policymakers and their advisers perceived the world at the turn of the millennium. *Operation Lucifer* is an alternate history based on the premise that Hitler staged his death, escaped from the bunker and continued his fight against the U.S. by supporting Communists and terrorists after 1945. The novel opens in 1952 with the CIA learning that Hitler is still alive. On the following 1,000 pages, he is arrested in Havana and extensively questioned and tortured at Guantanamo, before he is finally tried and executed in the States.[9]

The reason for this harsh treatment is not only revenge for the carnage

[8] In his "Acknowledgements" Charnay particularly thanks "Judge Wilford H. Ross, Administrative Judge of the Defense Office of Hearings and Appeals" (n. pag.).

[9] By having Hitler imprisoned in Guantanamo before 9/11, the novel confirms Amy Kaplan's observation that "the 'legal black hole' of Guantánamo did not suddenly appear after September 11, 2001, but is filled with a long imperial history"—an observation also reflected in movies such as *A Few Good Men* (1992). Kaplan is one of the scholars who have resisted conceptualizing 9/11 as a rupture and who consciously work to stress continuities. For her, and the novel *Operation Lucifer* proves her right, "[t]he government's argument that the United States lacks sovereignty over the territory of Guantánamo has long facilitated rather than limited the actual implementation of sovereign power in the region" (837). Unlike Kaplan, though, we have decided to write "Guantanamo" without the accent on the second "a" to indicate that we are dealing with a U.S. imperial space that must be distinguished from the Cuban Guantánamo.

of World War II and the Holocaust but also that Hitler, besides supporting the North in the Korean war, has planned terrorist attacks on political and cultural symbols throughout the Western world such as Westminster Abbey or the Pentagon. To perform these attacks, Hitler supports virtually every existing terrorist group, among them the Hamas as well as the ETA. That these organizations were, in reality, only founded after the events described in the novel (the ETA in 1959, the Hamas as late as 1987) indicates the narrative's presentist orientation quite clearly. The novel projects concerns of the late 1990s back to the 1950s, an increased awareness of the threat of terrorism being one of them. That Hitler cooperates with Communists and terrorists alike suggests that with the transitions from World War II to the Cold War and then to the "war on terrorism" the enemy only changed its garb but not its nature. The Manichean struggle between pure good—embodied by the U.S.—and pure evil—embodied by its various foes—continues. The phrase "war on terrorism," however, albeit coined by Ronald Reagan during the 1980s, is not used in the version of the novel published before 9/11. It appears, though, in the epilogue with which the book was later reissued. The epilogue relates how the officer who caught Hitler in the 1950s is now called to the White House to assist in the hunt for Osama bin Laden. And since Islamist terrorism has been projected as a threat to the U.S. in the main body of the narrative already, this newest development can be seamlessly integrated into the story; the template was available and the cultural climate had been prepared.

Accordingly, while *Operation Lucifer*, especially with the epilogue added after 9/11, explicitly aims to support the Bush administration's reading of the events, it also implicitly challenges the conceptualization of 9/11 as a rupture that changed everything, testifying to a cultural climate that existed in the U.S. well before September 11, 2001, and that was strengthened but not created by the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. For the novel—as well as for the culture as a whole—the war on terrorism had begun long before 9/11, continuing the fight against the evil that Hitler prototypically represents.

The terrorist threat fueled creative minds in Hollywood and elsewhere for an obvious reason: After the demise of Soviet Communism, international (mostly Islamist) terrorism became *the* main threat to U.S. security. The bombing of the World Trade Center (1993), the destruction of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania (1998), and the attack on the *USS Cole* (2000) were only the most visible in a series of actions by al-Qaeda that eventually led to 9/11.[10] The fight against terrorism was a

[10] For a comprehensive account of al-Qaeda's activities, structure and strategy, see Corbin.

priority of the Clinton administration already, says Tony Lake, National Security Advisor from 1993-1997: "[T]he war on terror hadn't fully emerged [yet]—although God knows we were working on terrorism" (qtd. in Keller, *Eindämmung* 148).[11] So while the attacks of 9/11 were unprecedented in scope, they did not represent a new threat.

The more knowledgeable adherents of the rupture thesis, however, make a larger point. They interpret 9/11, as does the Bush administration's National Security Strategy from 2002, as terrible evidence of a transformed international security landscape. According to their analysis, there is a nexus forming between networks of fanatical (that is: suicidal) terrorists, rogue states supporting them, and the increasing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The true nightmare of security analysts is not another 9/11, but a 9/11 involving nuclear, biological or chemical agents. This threat scenario differs considerably from the years of the Cold War, when nuclear deterrence established a fragile but lasting peace between the superpowers. A suicide bomber, however, cannot be deterred.

There has thus indeed been a sea-change in international security policy. The age of nuclear deterrence, which had succeeded the age of European balance of power, is now giving way to something new that is not yet identifiable. The entire Bush foreign policy—the strategy of preemption, the concept of incarcerating enemy combatants in Guantanamo and other measures—can be understood as the attempt to find a new framework for international security, to re-shape the international system in the face of fundamentally altered circumstance. 9/11 enforced this development, but it did not trigger it—it has been coming since the demise of the Soviet Union changed the global power structure and the rationale of nuclear deterrence.

By the same logic, American hegemony is not in crisis because of or even since 9/11. Again, the relevant date is 11/9—the end of the Cold War marked the passage from a bipolar to a unipolar international system. Most international relations theorists never believed such a global power structure could last longer than a "moment" (Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment"), and in fact international order has been creeping towards multipolarity ever since.[12] China, Russia, India, and the European Union have emerged as new power centers, challenging or at least limiting U.S. influence in global affairs. This would have happened without 9/11, and was indeed happening well before 2001. Still, 9/11 did

[11] The most detailed account of the Clinton administration's counterterrorism measures is Clarke. Clarke served as the National Security Council's Counterterrorism Chief from 1992 to 2003.

[12] The most notable skeptics of unipolarity are neorealists such as Waltz and Layne.

expose American vulnerability, and its reaction to 9/11 left the U.S. bogged down in prolonged wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Hence, the notion of waning U.S. power—and the political limitations of military power in particular—has gained much currency in the aftermath of 9/11. The terrorist attacks therefore had a catalytic effect on the global distribution of power (or at least the perception of that distribution),[13] but they did not cause the shift.

As we have seen, the first two "conventional wisdoms" about 9/11 and U.S. foreign policy accurately describe actual ruptures but fail to recognize that these developments have been caused by the end of the Cold War rather than by Islamist terrorists. The third thesis—Bush abandoned the principles and traditions of U.S. foreign policy, giving in to an "imperial temptation" (Snyder)—is even more mistaken.

The "Bush Revolution" thesis hinges on two concepts: preemption and unilateralism. Preemption denotes military strikes against an opponent who is not yet threatening to attack but who must be expected to do so in the future. This "forward defense," as exemplified in the Israeli airstrikes destroying Iraq's nuclear reactor Osirak in 1981, is not in accordance with international law. Yet the Bush administration made preemption a central part of its National Security Strategy, arguing that given the threat of terrorism involving weapons of mass destruction it was irresponsible—and ineffectual—to wait until the enemy had struck; self-defense had to start sooner, international law had to be revised. The Iraq war was the first and only case of preemption under Bush.

The concept of unilateralism is closely related to preemption but much broader in scope. In short, it calls for an American foreign policy unrestrained by the laws, regimes and opinions of the international community. Unilateralists postulate that legitimacy of U.S. action in international affairs can only be derived from the Constitution, not from international law. Waging the Iraq war without UN authorization was a case of unilateralism, as was U.S. withdrawal from the International Criminal Court or the Kyoto agreement.

Most observers agree that this "Bush Doctrine" of preemption and unilateralism was brought about by 9/11 and that it led to an erosion of the international order—the U.S. had turned from the custodian of the international system into a revolutionary, imperial power. In fact, as historians have shown, preemption and unilateralism have been crucial parts of American foreign policy since the founding of the Republic. In the

[13] To speak of the "End of the American Era" (Charles Kupchan) is as fashionable these days as it was in the late 1980s. See Zakaria and Haass for observations of U.S. decline. However, Lieber as well as Brooks and Wohlforth present convincing arguments for why unipolarity will continue for at least another generation.

strife for hegemony, John Quincy Adams, for example, did pursue strategies of preemption and unilateralism just like most of his successors, including Truman, Kennedy, Clinton and Bush in modern times (Gaddis 16-30, Mead 109). Moreover, what is often decried as new American imperialism (Bacevich 2002), is maybe the most persistent continuity in American foreign policy of all. Jefferson's "empire of liberty" has always comprised a missionary streak. From the Monroe Doctrine to the present day, America has always sought to remake the world—if not necessarily in its own image, so at least according to its own interests and ideals.[14]

Contemporary observers tend to overstate the impact of 9/11 on international affairs. The terrorist attacks put a spotlight on changes in the political landscape and even accelerated some of these tectonic shifts. But they did not initiate or compound any of these developments. They were happening before 9/11 and they would have continued without 9/11. The notion of a rupture, while persistent and popular, is inappropriate.

Why Is the Notion of 9/11 As a Rupture So Persistent?

There are numerous reasons why the idea that the world changed on September 11, 2001 is so ubiquitous in the United States as well as throughout the world. From the perspective of international affairs, it is particularly tempting to accept this idea. After all, 9/11 was the point of reference for a number of events that shook the international order: two major wars that turned into much longer campaigns than anticipated, thus displaying American weakness; the deepest rift within the Atlantic alliance since its founding in 1949; and the implementation of the first comprehensive U.S. strategy since containment of Soviet communism. The contrast to the "holiday from history" (Krauthammer, "Unipolar Moment Revisited" 6) of the Clinton years is striking.[15]

9/11 was not the *fons et origo* of all this, but it offered a political opportunity—if presented as a world-changing event. American policy-

[14] There is a vast amount of literature on America's peculiar imperialism. For some of the most recent studies see Ferguson, Mandelbaum, and Kagan. While all three authors come from very different parts of the political spectrum, they all argue in favor of a continuation of America's "liberal imperialism." For a more detailed discussion of the "New American Imperialism" see Keller, *Neokonservatismus* 224-34.

[15] Although only at first glance—as we have argued, war, disagreement among allies and mounting backlash against U.S. hegemony have also characterized the 1990s. Nonetheless, for many in Europe and other parts of the world, the constant comparison of the Bush years with a dubious interpretation of the 1990s helped to foster the impression that 9/11 had indeed been a historical turning point.

makers seized this opportunity on at least four interconnected accounts: First, it was an opportunity to strengthen the floundering Bush presidency by turning the bumbling minority president into the courageous leader of a wounded nation at war against evil. The fear of further attacks led to a bipartisan rally-around-the-flag effect that provided the basis for everything that followed. Second, 9/11 allowed for a series of domestic reforms related to homeland security (such as the PATRIOT Act) that would not have passed Congress before and that had long been on the wish list of the Republican Right.[16] Third, 9/11 opened a window of opportunity in international affairs. Neoconservative intellectuals and security experts had been publicly calling for a forceful regime change in Iraq since at least 1998, and the Clinton administration had been developing plans on how to topple Saddam Hussein.[17] However, it was not (yet) politically expedient to act on the conviction that the Iraqi dictator had to go. By instrumentalizing 9/11, this was changed. Fourth, Karl Rove and his political machine sought to build a lasting Republican majority on the ruins of the World Trade Center. With some justification, Democrats were painted as weak on defense, as unwilling and/or unable to accept djihadism as an existential threat and fight it accordingly. As we know, the lasting Republican majority is in shambles—but that probably would not have been the case had the Iraq war not turned out to be such a political disaster for the Bush White House.

Policymakers had much incentive to establish 9/11 as a political watershed and they did not waste any time doing so. But these rather pragmatic or even cynical calculations notwithstanding, one need not forget that 9/11 came as a true shock to the American body politic. It was the first foreign attack on the American homeland since the British burned down the White House in 1814. The American sense of physical security at home—untarnished by the many losses in two world wars and wars in Korea, Vietnam and many other places—was shattered. That alone demanded a political and military response, a demonstration of strength. In turn, it facilitated the conceptualization of 9/11 as a rupture.

In addition to such strategic considerations, there are various cultural factors that make this idea especially prevailing in the United States. Although it borders on the stereotypical, it must nevertheless be stressed that the belief in the possibility of radical and sudden change for better and worse is particularly widespread in the U.S.—a nation forged, after all, by immigrants who came to the new world seeking exactly such a transformation of their personal lives. Their convictions that change can

[16] Now that the domestic impact of 9/11 is subsiding (not even ten years after the event!), many of these reforms are being scaled back.

[17] For an extensive discussion of the history of the Iraq war see Sifry and Cerf.

occur at any moment and that it can be brought about by acts of will has been handed down from generation to generation and become deeply ingrained in the American cultural imaginary. For Americans, it constitutes a narrative template which structures people's experiences and allows them to render them meaningful, a template that has been continually reproduced by various cultural practices.

The American sentimental novel of the nineteenth century, for instance, typically begins *in medias res* and stages an occurrence that substantially alters the lives of the protagonists and those close to them on the very first pages or at least in the first chapters, devoting the remainder of the often bulky narratives to the effects of this initial transformation.[18] Thus, in Harriet Becher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) the whole argument that slavery as such is evil and that not only certain forms of it must be condemned hinges on the notion that change can occur at any moment. According to the novel, even the slaves of benevolent slaveholders might suffer eventually, as the fate of such good masters can shift instantaneously, forcing them to sell their slaves to cruel traders and slaveholders. Therefore, as Stowe puts it in her preface, "a system so necessarily cruel and unjust as to defeat and do away the good effects of all that can be attempted" under it for the slaves must be abolished (xviii). The novel then reiterates this understanding continuously both by voicing it explicitly and by dramatizing the inhumane suffering of Uncle Tom, Eliza, or Cassy.

The idea that the life of an individual can be altered on the spot by an act of fate or bad fortune is of course reflected and fostered by many other cultural forms as well. It can, for example, be found in most of the films about terrorism we discussed above, in the superhero stories of the twentieth century, in Joan Didion's recent *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005) and it is constitutive for the conspiracy narratives so virulent in the U.S. at the moment.[19] At the same time, however, the culture also

[18] According to Phil Fisher, the sentimental novel tends to "avoid the roots of action in the past" (116). We are indebted to Thomas Claviez for drawing our attention to this observation. In fact, in an essay entitled "Pragmatic Transcendence," Claviez brings Fisher's argument to bear on Robert Kagan's bipolar view of the world and, formulating the same argument we make here, concludes: "A U.S. that creates itself ever anew might in fact be the oldest one known" (15).

[19] In different ways, the terrorist films, the superhero stories and Didion's memoir all revolve around an act of violence or a tragic accident that affects and changes the life of the protagonist. The conspiracy narrative, as Mark Fenster has convincingly argued, "turns on a particular moment in which the central character, through investigative skill or by sheer luck, uncovers evidence of a conspiracy. This discovery, and the realization that comes with it, deeply affect how the character perceives the world" (111). It is of course not our intention to claim that the lives of individuals and groups cannot "change in the instant," as Didion puts

strongly projects the belief that acts of immediate improvement and reinvention are possible on both the personal and the collective level. It is this conviction that lies behind Stowe's effort to expose the horrors of slavery in the 1850s as well as behind concepts like "reborn Christians" or even "reborn virgins" that have become fashionable among the Christian right over the past decades. And it is this confidence in transformation that explains the popular appeal and eventual success of Barack Obama's slogans "Change We Can Believe In" and "Change We Need." In fact, one might argue that Obama's whole presidential campaign capitalized on the idea that true change is possible on several levels: It built on the idea that a black man would become president for the first time, that he can make a difference, and that the rules of governance may be substantially altered.[20] This promise of political change, of course, is not at all new. Because it resonates with such a large number of people it is hardly ever absent from political campaigns in the U.S. In Obama's case, it echoes in particular the notion of a "New Covenant" between people and administration that Bill Clinton proclaimed in his acceptance speech to the Democratic Convention in 1992 and thus, ironically, marks Obama's connection to the very establishment he has pledged to break with.[21] Moreover, with Obama echoing Clinton and Clinton echoing the Puritan notion of the covenant our argument about the long-standing cultural power of the notion of change and its immigrant roots comes full circle.

Since the rhetoric of change is that prominent in the United States, it is hardly surprising that it also affects academics and influences or even determines their take on cultural phenomena, political and historical developments. However, we would like to suggest that there is a further reason why many scholars both in North America and Europe, but in particular in the U.S., have favored the conceptualization of 9/11 as a rupture. First, just as all other areas of society, the academia has in recent decades been increasingly affected by what German philosopher Georg Franck calls the "economy of attention." According to Franck, in affluent postindustrial societies, publicity is being assigned an ever higher value with the result that getting noticed becomes a currency that at times even supersedes financial success. Since this development does not stop short of the academic world, scholars across the disciplines are under pressure to generate attention for their works and ideas. Just as the mass media,

it (3). Nor do we mean to question or downplay the suffering that can arise from such events. We draw on these diverse examples to demonstrate to which degree the template of change and rupture has permeated U.S. culture.

[20] A Google search on "Obama AND change" generated the amazing number of 61,500,500 hits on August 14, 2008.

[21] Clinton gave this speech on July 16, 1992.

then, whose treatment of 9/11 we took as our point of departure, academics today are in constant need to say something new. And on the global market of ideas, the identification of the events of September 11, 2001 as a rupture is, at least at first sight, certainly both "newer" and "better news" than emphasizing continuity and longer developments.

Franck's general observations about societal developments thus tie in with Winfried Fluck's more specific analysis of the current state of the humanities. Fluck explains the tendency of scholars to exaggerate and overstate their results by the need to "[catch] people's attention" and achieve "visibility" (214). "[I]n a professional culture of institutionalized difference," he argues, scholars have to constantly come up with new and ever more radical interpretations, as this is the only way by which they can mark their difference from others and gain "professional advancement" (213). The best way to project one's own identity in that fashion and to position oneself on the academic marketplace, he suggests, is to offer a radical reinterpretation of a canonical text that has been analyzed numerous times before—with fatal consequences for the field as a whole, since it thus becomes impossible "to set up relations between [different interpretations] in order to sort out their respective strengths and weaknesses" (211).

While Fluck focuses on reinterpretation in this essay, his observations also help explain another, even more recent trend in the humanities and in American Studies: the almost obsessive desire to identify new turns. A case in point in this respect is Doris Bachmann-Medick's *Cultural Turns: Neurorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* (2006). On the one hand, the book is a concise and well-written overview of developments in cultural studies in recent decades. On the other, though, it testifies to scholars' tendencies to cast and sell any slight shift of emphasis as a turn in order to increase their own visibility as those who first named and identified the respective turn. And what is more: Bachmann-Medick's own analysis, especially in the last chapter, is palpably driven by the desire to gain credit for identifying emerging and future turns.[22] Exactly the same logic, we contend, underlies many analyses of 9/11 as rupture—with the sole difference that, instead of a theoretical turn, a turn in history is proclaimed. Overstating the importance of this—no doubt important—day allows scholars to strategically set themselves apart from their peers and garner recognition for being that quick in theorizing and describing the consequences. Moreover, and here Fluck's emphasis on reinterpretation and our stressing of turns converge again, the assertion of the significance of the event then serves as justification for a rereading of

[22] On a few pages Bachmann-Medick predicts an "economical turn" (385), a "religious turn," a "(neuro-)biological turn" (386) and finally a "global turn" (395).

canonical texts and a self-reflexive meditation on the future of (sub)disciplines as such.

With regard to the situation of American Studies scholars in North America, Fluck's insistence on the need to differ seems to entail a second, even more important dimension relevant in this context that he does not spell out, as his focus is on the humanities in general. Our colleagues on the other side of the Atlantic do not only need to set themselves apart from those publishing on the same periods, authors or texts, or those drawing on the same theories. In the highly specialized academic system with huge departments for English, political science, American history, and, sometimes, American Studies, scholars also need to find a niche for themselves, an area to specialize in. Constructing 9/11 as a rupture that has significantly transformed cultural production or brought about a new world order produces exactly such a niche. It thus seems only a matter of time before we encounter North American scholars who are specialists for post-9/11 cinema, novels, poetry or politics. And their very field of expertise will finally cement the conceptualization of 9/11 as the beginning of a new epoch in both cultural and world history.

Conclusion: A Chance for European American Studies

There are two interrelated reasons, a theoretical and an institutional one, why we believe that European American Studies scholars might be especially well equipped to resist such an emplotment of 9/11—despite the fact that their (academic and personal) lives are of course equally permeated by the economy of attention we described above and that they are therefore under the same pressure to produce original and new insights continuously. First, European Americanists, and maybe German ones in particular, have to a considerable degree always favored synthetic, comprehensive and diachronic approaches over those by North American academics that often highlight the synchronic, rupture and discontinuity. This can be observed particularly well with regard to the way in which the New Historicism, emerging in the United States in the 1970s, was received on this side of the Atlantic. As Sabine Sielke puts it, German academics—and we are convinced that this holds true for most European American Studies scholars—give the "New Historicism credit for most attractive readings of arbitrarily connected cultural material, [but] find the focus on synchronical analyses, which tends to relegate continuities to the periphery, too exclusive" (80). As a consequence, European scholars have tried to have their synchronic take and diachronize it too, exploring ways to reconcile these contradictory demands and

often favoring, in the end, continuity over rupture.[23]

This European tendency to emphasize *longue durée* over break may well be the result of different mentalities and cultural values which we cannot explore any further here. However, we hold that the tendency is also fostered by the specific institutional conditions under which European Americanists work on the United States and its political system, cultures and histories. Whereas departments dedicated to studying North America in the U.S. usually host a considerable number of scholars, in Europe departments of history, political science, or English in most cases feature only one or two Americanists. If North American scholars need to find a niche to specialize in, their European counterparts cannot afford to do this to a comparable degree. In both their research and their teaching, they may have their special fields of interest and expertise, but they "need to be generalists" (Sielke 81), knowledgeable about the Puritans and postmodernism as well as the Constitution and the counterculture. And while this might be a severe disadvantage when it comes to competing with American colleagues about publication space in highly specialized, peer-reviewed journals, it also puts European scholars in a position to emplot 9/11 as a (by all means, significant) event in a larger narrative and to resist the shortsighted conceptualization of September 11, 2001 (and other events) as a rupture.

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23 See, for instance, the essays by Mackenthun and Reichardt which Sielke references as well. With regard to 9/11, however, various German scholars have joined their American colleagues in stressing that the event constitutes a rupture. This notion permeates, for example, the collection of essays edited by Matthias N. Lorenz, who even writes on the first page of his introduction: "Ausgangspunkt für die in diesem Band versammelten Überlegungen ist ein Satz, der leicht variiert am 12.09.2001 einstimmig in der Bild-Zeitung und FAZ—und nicht nur dort—zu lesen war: 'Es wird nichts mehr so sein, wie es war'" (7). Moreover, a research network investigating "9/11 als kulturelle Zäsur" is currently being set up at the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Mainz.

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