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Transatlantic Perspectives on Don DeLillo.*Eds.Peter  
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# *Terrorism, Media, and the Ethics of Fiction: Transatlantic Perspectives on Don DeLillo.* Eds. Peter Schneck and Philipp Schweighauser.

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## REFERENCES

New York and London: Continuum, 2010. Pp 255. ISBN: 978-1-4411-3993-1 (hardcover)

- 1 Far from being yet another collection of critical essays in a long array of references on Don DeLillo, *Terrorism, Media and the Ethics of Fiction* is a valuable addition to the already extensive bibliography on one of the most prolific writers of our times. What differentiates this book from previous collections is its premise, already indicated in the subtitle: *Transatlantic Perspectives on Don DeLillo*. Indeed, as editors Schneck and Schweighauser state in their introduction “Don DeLillo’s work has met with very different perceptions on opposite sites of the Atlantic” (2). In order to detect the convergences and disparities between the European and American perception of DeLillo’s work, the articles compiled in this edition focus on the author’s portrayal and critique of modernity and, more specifically, on his treatment of terrorism and the media. Interestingly, as the editors submit, “the U.S. – European comparison shows that DeLillo’s fiercest American critics attack precisely what European reviewers value: the writer’s cultural and media critique” (10). And they contend that the exploration of DeLillo’s reflections on terror and media as well as the role he assigns to novelists in a world so deeply influenced by these two necessities “a broader investigation of the ethical dimension” (1) in his work. The contributions to this book, therefore, are not simply analyses of DeLillo’s political thought or his – usually fierce – critique of mediatic culture; they are also about bringing the author’s suggested method of resistance forth, and underlining the importance he attributes to language and literature as a counter-

measure of equal power. More importantly, they are indicative of the complexity surrounding DeLillo's work as they echo different receptions, which sometimes celebrate while others scrutinise his positions.

- 2 The book consists of five parts and a Coda. The first part of the book, "Memory Work after 9/11," engages with DeLillo's literature of remembrance to question the possibility of mourning 9/11 and to seek the most appropriate method to do so. Linda S. Kauffman writes on "the repression of memory and the memory of repression" and reads "In the Ruins of the Future, Baader-Meinhof and *Falling Man*" with a view to demonstrating how the author devises a counter-narrative to destabilise the story told through the media, to upend the cultural amnesia bestowed, and to represent an event that is intricately linked to other historical instances and examples of totalitarianism. Silvia Caporale Bizzini narrows the frame further and elaborates on the ways in which *Falling Man* can be read as a study of personal histories and reactions to terror on an individual basis, rather than as a comment on the spectacle of terrorism and the impact on society. Bizzini seeks the ways towards healing in the re-establishment of traditional forms of narration and communication and, like Kauffman, positions herself favourably when probing the DeLillo-esque mass-mediated representations. The opposing view in this section is voiced by Sascha Pohlmann who expresses a concern about the depiction of the terrorist in *Falling Man* and criticises DeLillo for failing "to leave dominant ideological frameworks" and eventually for creating yet another Orientalist stereotype.
- 3 In the second part, "Writers, Terrorists and the Masses," Mikko Keskinen, Leif Grossinger and Julia Apitzsch return to the widely discussed parallel between terrorists and novelists and DeLillo's engagement with "the society of the spectacle" and the prevalence of images. In "6,500 Weddings and 2,750 Funerals: *Mao II*, *Falling Man* and the Mass Effect", Keskinen centres his analysis around the mass as a connecting thread in these novels and argues that the images of crowds actually function as a synecdoche for the individuals engulfed in them, thus signalling a turn towards ethics. This motif is also taken up by Grossinger in "Public Image and Self-Representation: Don DeLillo's Artists and Terrorists in Postmodern Mass Society," with the intent to explore "the similarities and divergences between the self-portrayals of writers and terrorists in both their cognitive and their material manifestations" (81). Grossinger, however, adopts a more critical stance and seems to deem the author's attempt to dissociate these images from the societies that generate and encompass them unsuccessful. Julia Apitzsch's "The Art of Terror – The Terror of Art: DeLillo's Still Life of 9/11, Giorgio Morandi, Gerhard Richter, And Performance Art" returns to the idea of creating a counter-narrative and establishing a "literary visibility" (97). For Apitzsch, DeLillo achieves this by employing simple yet striking, "surprising" art images that will counter-act and counter-balance the spectacular traumatic images of the terrorist act.
- 4 Part 3, entitled "Don DeLillo and Johan Grimonperez," consists of two articles by Eben Wood and Martin Colebrook tracing the connections between DeLillo and the Belgian video-artist who has incorporated textual fragments from *Mao II* and *White Noise* to create the experimental documentary *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*. The dialogue continues in this section as Wood emphasises the challenges presented by the combination of verbal and visual narrative with a view to a resolution, whereas Colebrook embraces the concerns expressed by Grossinger in the previous section to maintain that the artist is eventually effaced as a changing factor in society. The fourth part, "Deathward and Other Plots," is dedicated to the use and importance of plot in DeLillo's novels. Paula Martin Salvan

traces the ascetic structures in DeLillo's fiction and discusses the connections between this pattern and terrorism to conclude that asceticism can be seen as a type of "ethical writing," a viable attempt to balance the terror and commence the process of working through the singularity of a terrorist act such as 9/11. In "The End of Resolution? Reflections on the Ethics of Closure in Don DeLillo's Detective Plots" Schweighauser and Wisnicki discuss *Libra* and *Mao II* in the context of the Victorian detective plot conventions; for the authors this paradigm functions as the most eloquent example of the disruption and fragmentation established with terrorism given that even when traditional patterns are applied to such events - which most imperatively call for a resolution - the outcome is different and closure remains unattainable.

- 5 The final part of this collection is the one which deals most directly with the ethical implications of fiction in the context of terrorism. Peter Boxall's "Slow Man, Dangling Man, *Falling Man*: DeLillo and the Ethics of Fiction" and Marie-Christine Leps' "*Falling Man*: Performing Fiction" both contend that the response suggested in DeLillo's fiction is that of "slowing down," a decelerated pace that will counteract the effects of U.S. politics and global terrorism. For Boxall this is achieved in *Falling Man* through the actual figure of a man dangling in mid-air; the "slow weightlessness" involved offers an "ethical response to the fall of the towers, and to the darkened world into which their unending falling has delivered us" (183). For Leps, the slowing down generates a space where history can be personalised through fiction, the readers are actively involved to develop and derive meaning and so an alternative form of apprehension is triggered, and repressed memories re-emerge. The part closes with Peter Schneck's "The Great Secular Transcendence: Don DeLillo and the Desire for A Numinous Experience," an investigation of the author's "secular spirituality," his use of the mystic and the metaphysical as they emerge from the juxtaposition of the secular and the sacred and their overlapping "as the inescapable correlation of the rational and the irrational dimensions of experience" (205).
- 6 *Terrorism, Media and the Ethics of Fiction* closes with a coda where David Coward sketches the "DeLillo Era" and traces the common threads and interests between the author and the younger generation of contemporary American writers. All in all, although the majority of the articles in this collection stems from one of DeLillo's most recent novels, *Falling Man*, many of the dominant themes in his earlier fiction are revisited as well, new light is shed to previous novels and greater depth is revealed. As a result, this book is of special interest to students and scholars approaching DeLillo from various viewpoints: it offers a detailed picture of his political and cultural thought and an enlightened review of his writing technique and vision. Most importantly, it creates a refreshing opportunity to study terrorism and the literature of 9/11 in the pure context of literature and language, unburdened by the theories of trauma.

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