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**Eva Boesenberg, Reinhard Isensee & Martin Klepper (eds.).** *American Economies*. American Studies – A Monograph Series 219. Heidelberg: Winter, 2012, viii + 455 pp., € 66.00.

Exploring the intersections of literature, culture, and the economy, the volume *American Economies* attends to a highly pertinent topic in current American studies and cultural studies. During the last decade at least, literary and cultural scholars have pointed to the urgency of addressing economic matters, questions that had previously been overshadowed by the discipline's intense engagement with issues of identity. In 1999, Martha Woodmansee and Mark Osteen coined the label "new economic criticism" to designate a then emerging perspective in literary studies. In many respects, the volume *American Economies* follows the path delineated by Woodmansee and Osteen; it presents an update on the state of economic criticism, which has gained additional currency in the aftermath of

the financial crisis of 2007/8. The proceedings of the 2008 annual conference of the German Association for American studies at Humboldt University in Berlin, *American Economies* testifies to the timeliness of the topic and illustrates the significance of economic approaches in current research in American studies in Germany.

The editors Eva Boesenberg, Reinhard Isensee, and Martin Klepper have divided the book into five sections. As a first part, economist James K. Galbraith's conference keynote lecture contextualizes the 2008 financial crisis by critically interrogating the dominant disciplinary self-conceptions in economics. The remaining four sections address questions of theory, economics and politics, health and the political economy as well as economies of literature. The volume includes 21 contributions, three among these written (in one case, co-written) by economists. All other authors are scholars in American studies, predominantly working on literature and culture. This setup determines the collection's perspectives and the problems these essays address. If economic matters have become highly relevant for American studies, this critical approach remains a relatively new field of inquiry with many original and unresolved questions. An interdiscipline, comparable, for instance, to the field of "Law, Culture, and the Humanities", which engages with the intersections of legal and cultural studies, has not (yet) been constituted, as Eva Boesenberg notes in her contribution to the volume (60).

Entitled "Economics, Culture, and Theory", part two assembles theoretical reflections on the interdisciplinary exchange between economics and cultural studies. Boesenberg's essay, "Discourses of Value: Reading Literature through Economics and Vice Versa", is a particularly fruitful resource for readers seeking to gain an overview of the present state of economic criticism as well as an insight into current research questions at the interface of literary studies and economics. Economic and cultural issues are mutually constitutive; Boesenberg's essay shows how economics has been informing research in literary studies and vice versa. In literary texts, we may look at monetary transactions on the level of the plot, or investigate monetary imagery in works as diverse as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, or Louise Erdrich's *The Bingo Palace*. We may also understand narrative itself as a form of economy. Conversely, concepts of literary and cultural studies have been informative for economic research that self-reflectively critiques the alleged objectivity of economic models. Feminist economists in particular point to the ubiquitous gendered tropes within economic models and contest the still dominant concept of the *homo oeconomicus*, with its implicit assumptions of economic actors as rational, male, white, and heterosexual. For Boesenberg, the exchange between the two disciplines, which are both invested in value judg-

ments, could serve to address “processes of gendering and racialization” in order to generate “more differentiated, self-reflexive research in the two fields” (57). As Boesenberg suggests, the concept of “cultural capital”, deriving from Pierre Bourdieu and expanding and complicating the idea of financial capital, is crucial for the conversation between economics and cultural studies. With the help of Bourdieu’s theory, we may understand the economic value of distinct social positions, as for instance Cheryl Harris has shown by examining whiteness as a form of symbolic capital (63). Boesenberg argues that the dialogue with cultural studies could help to further develop economic models that, for instance, do not rely exclusively on money as a symbol of value and help to broaden concepts of value and of resources.

The contributions by Boesenberg, feminist economist Julie A. Nelson as well as Winfried Fluck and Fabian Lindner all fathom possibilities of interdisciplinary exchange between economics and literary and cultural studies, and look for possible ways in which the disciplines’ distinct methods can enrich and challenge each other. Hannes Bergthaller’s essay takes a more implicit approach, yet one which lends itself to a critical self-interrogation of premises in both disciplines, as he examines the allegedly antagonist fields of economy and ecology. Though, in present discourse, the aims of economic development often appear as incommensurable with goals of environmental preservation, Bergthaller shows that both fields originated as a single domain of knowledge. Rather than opposed to the idea of self-regulating markets characteristic of classical liberal thought, the modern environmentalist movement is based on the same tropes, and the idea of nature’s intrinsic value is itself rooted in the philosophy of liberalism: “The intrinsic value of nature is the mirror image of the liberty and dignity which classical liberalism accords to the individual person. The American attachment to free markets and the cult of wilderness issue from the same underlying set of metaphysical premises” (105). Both society and the world are seen as self-equilibrating. Thus borrowing tropes from economics, the environmentalist movement could argue that nature was best left alone and thereby advance conservation policy while at the same time defending liberal social theory. Bergthaller illustrates this with the example of Aldo Leopold’s seminal text *The Sand County Almanac* (1949). This reigning belief, he suggests, is a “truncated version of the old *oeconomia naturae*” (117), in which nature is best left alone and no longer includes human beings whose intervention has unforeseeable negative consequences. Yet, like the idea of the self-regulating economy, from the point of view of ecology, the concept of self-regulation has been proved false. For both domains, a liberal metaphysics has become unsustainable.

Historically broad in their scope, sections three and four bring together essays using the methods of political science, history, sociology, and cultural stu-

dies to illuminate aspects of the American political economy and, in part four, matters of health. Thus Mary Pattillo, a sociologist, examines the social consequences of urban redevelopment in her case study of Chicago; Eric Erbacher focuses on the narratives employed to sell urban imaginaries. Christian Lamert contextualizes Obama's health care reform in the history of American health care. Marc Prieue and Mischa Honeck offer case studies in the history of the American political economy. Prieue examines the medical marketplace in the New England colonies; Honeck reevaluates the role of anti-slavery activism in the expansion of liberal capitalism in mid-nineteenth century America.

The seven contributions in the last section, entitled "Economies of Literature", explore the intricate negotiations of economic issues in literature in individual case studies. One underlying theme of the section is the implicit question of the status of literary texts in a capitalist market society. How do these texts position themselves, as products that are subject to both aesthetic and market economies? In how far can individual texts resist the logic of capitalism, for instance by presenting alternative economies? In other words, the scholars in this section fathom the relationship between aesthetics and economics. Johannes Voelz most explicitly raises these questions in his article on Emerson's lyceum lectures. The lyceum as an institution co-emerged with the market revolution in early nineteenth-century America; Emerson's lyceum lectures have been understood as an integral part of the new capitalist order. Voelz, in contrast, argues that this view is too reductive. Though the lectures would not exist without the ideological tenets of the lyceum, he suggests, the aesthetic experience they created for their audience surpass the market function and to some extent also contradict the logic of capitalism. In a different perspective, Katja Kanzler shows how discourses of money in the mid-nineteenth century could also serve to authorize subject positions to marginalized members of society in her study of the *Lowell Offering*, a literary magazine edited by New England "factory girls" in the 1840s. In the texts in the *Lowell Offering*, Kanzler argues, these working-class women contested their subordinated social status by shifting the focus from the money they made to the money they spent, envisioning personhood and agency.

If one considers these essays' interest in alternatives to the hegemony of capitalism, it comes perhaps as no surprise that utopian and dystopian texts constitute the subject of a number of contributions. Alexandra Ganser, Sebastian Schneider, and Dorothea Löbbermann discuss literary texts belonging to this genre. Reading A.O. Exquemelin's novel *Buccaneers of America* (1678/84), Ganser critically interrogates the idea of piracy as an allegedly alternative economy of excess, a notion that has featured prominently in contemporary discourses attempting to resist capitalism. She shows that a nuanced interpretation

of this and other texts in the piracy genre brings forth a more complex understanding of the cultural work of these narratives. Löbbermann's essay reads Samuel Delany's novel *The Mad Man* as a "pornotopia", a novel that "is characterized by an economy of pleasures and excess" (389). Schneider interprets *The Village*, M. Night Shyamalan's 2004 movie, as a film which investigates the (im)possibility of utopia in general, while also critically commenting on twenty-first-century American capitalist society. He shows that in *The Village* three different economies – the economy of desire, egalitarianism, and the economy of the village – work to question the idea of utopianism. He concludes that the film may be described as an "ambiguous utopia", as it "neither wholly embraces nor completely rejects the utopia it depicts" (446).

As a whole, the volume *American Economies* offers the reader a complex and nuanced picture of the operations of capitalist culture in the United States. Many of the essays set out to complicate previous understandings of the relationship of economics with other parts of culture that were either too reductive or overly optimistic in terms of granting "culture" the ability to resist the logic of the economy. The volume, however, also illustrates the challenges of productive interdisciplinary dialogue, not least in the fact that most contributions were written by literary and cultural scholars. Ultimately, its most successful essays may be those contributions that try not to overcome the disciplinary gaps but address economic questions on their own terms, showing that the economic and the aesthetic are inextricably linked in culture.

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