

Recovering 9/11 in New York
edited by Robert Fanuzzi and Michael Wolfe

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In a collection of essays edited by Robert Fanuzzi and Michael Wolfe, *Recovering 9/11 in New York*'s contribution to 9/11 scholarship is one that primarily contests the dominant nationalist narrative of the September 11th attacks through the promotion of socially-engaged, local interpretations from New York City. In doing so, Fanuzzi and Wolfe resolve to avoid the 'more sweeping invocations of national identity and national resolve' (2014, p.1) that has defined reflections on the September 11th attacks for one that presents a less homogenised, readily more complex embracing of social, cultural and racial perspectives. Fanuzzi and Wolfe's publication within 9/11 scholarship can be viewed in the context of two recently published texts, Ken Booth and Tim Dunne's *Terror in Our Time* (2011), which focused on international security responses to 9/11, and Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn's *Literature after 9/11* (2008), which mobilized a theoretical approach to the impact that the September 11th attacks had on literature. *Recovering 9/11 in New York* employs an equally expansive methodology, utilising literary, scientific, historical, pedagogical and aesthetic analyses, and in doing so extending scholarly focus on the impact of the attacks within metropolitan New York. The 'distrust of nationalist representation and manipulative uses of commemoration' (p.5) of the September 11th attacks in part unites the variety found within this interdisciplinary collection, where with

contributions from writers, clinicians, educators and professionals, an attempt is made to counter national memorialisation with local.

After an introduction from Fanuzzi and Wolfe, the main content of the book is divided into four sections: local expressions of 9/11, memorialisation of 9/11, responses to 9/11, and representations of 9/11. The initial section comprises of iconographic, semiotic and literary analyses of the attacks, from Joanne Robertson-Elleto's examination of the spontaneous literature of prayers, makeshift banners and messages that New Yorkers left in search of their loved ones (p.10-27), to Carmen Nanko-Fernandez' analysis of the religious qualities American baseball assumed after the attacks, and the sport's complicity in promoting state policies such as the War on Terror (p.68-87). In the second section, Kenneth Womack discusses the omission of the role of immigrant workers in commemorations of the North Tower's famous Windows on the World restaurant (p.90-102), and the third section examines the pedagogical implications of teaching 9/11 within academia in a paper provided by Sean Murray (p.195-210), which is further highlighted in the same section with Nerina Rustomji's examination of teaching Middle East history after September 11th (p.211-225). In the final section of the book, Christopher Vanderwees discusses the role that James Marsh's documentary film *Man on Wire* (2008) played in reinforcing American triumphalism through the masculine heroism of Philippe Petit's tightrope across the World Trade Center, and how this interacts with a national inability to face the reality of falling bodies witnessed during the September 11th attacks (p.228-247). The volume concludes with Jennifer Travis' analysis of the failure of American literature to effectively convey traumatic events in the United States, which she

accomplishes through a comparison between post-Civil War era and post-9/11 literary treatments (p.281-293).

A major strength of the volume is the fusing of academic examination with popular cultural events and ideas, with a number of chapters building their arguments upon a framework of literary, cinematic and philosophical analysis. This is exemplified in examples such as Fernandez' discussion of American baseball after 9/11, Karen. A Franck and Philip Speranza's analysis of September 11th memorials, and Jason Steinhauer's examination of the popular iconography of the World Trade Center. The personal element of the papers is reinforced through the generous number of photographs of Ground Zero, September 11th memorials and New York culture spread throughout the volume. One criticism of the collection however might be the occasional references to questions of authenticity to support the actuality of the contributor's own experiences against that of the artificiality of the larger, state-promoted interpretations. This promotion of an unclear authentic and inauthentic dichotomy through local and national interpretations goes largely unanalysed. However, this is perhaps countered by a regular cautioning against treating any account of the September 11th attacks as absolute truth. Vanderwees warns his readers against embracing any 'new meaning' of the attacks too dogmatically, and his paper in part deals with the incomprehensible element of the attacks that eludes interpretation (p.247, p.235). Rustomji reinforced a similar caution by noting the lack of historical treatments of the September 11th attacks, arguing that due to the discipline's cautiousness in analysing the recent past, there has been an absence of contemporary analyses of the attacks outside of a journalistic framework (p.224).

Within the context of previous scholarly works such as *Terror in Our Time* and *Literature after 9/11*, *Recovering 9/11 in New York* provides a thought-provoking contribution to 9/11 academia by focusing on the personal and local experiences of New York City residents. The indefinable quality of the attacks emerges as the text's major strength. One example of this quality can be seen in the avoidance of combining the perspectives of the volume into a homogenous interpretation, or the refusal to use romantic concepts such as the use of "New Yorker's spirit" (p.6) which is often found in the dominant narrative of the September 11th attacks. Rather, the collected writers are aware of the complexities of trying to find meaning within the attacks, and how often racial, social, political and cultural differences clashed after the attacks and continue to do so in contemporary commemorations, making it difficult to establish a coherent and unanimously agreed verdict outside of the artificialities of the larger nationalist account.

Recovering 9/11 in New York approaches these complexities by the fusion of an academic analysis with an accessible writing style, a compliment to the contributors and Fanuzzi and Wolfe's editorial skills. In addition, although critical analyses of the dominant nationalist narrative form the basis of the volume, the strength of *Recovering 9/11 in New York's* subdued degree of political exposition is in its elucidation, rather than imposition, of perspectives which have been overlooked. Unlike previous collections such as Rachel E. Utley's *Ten Years After: Perspectives and Problems* (2012), which is a predominantly political examination of the attacks, *Recovering 9/11* seeks to provide a source of alternative perspectives outside of the political arena that have come to dominate popular perceptions of September 11th. In a context of political, social and cultural

antagonism towards national accounts of the September 11th attacks, the contributors skilfully provide a variety of perspectives on the event that prior to this publication were rarely investigated, but do so within a coherent academic structure that avoids imposing absolute interpretations on an indefinable national event. It is these strengths of Fanuzzi and Wolfe's publication that make it an impressive contribution to contemporary September 11th academia. In terms of a recommended readership, I would advocate this text to anyone interested not just in seeking out alternative perspectives of the September 11th attacks, but also for anyone interested in politics, narratology, race and gender issues, and cultural studies. Fanuzzi and Wolfe's analysis of nationalist and personal narratives within the September 11th is one that takes in a broad range of subjects and issues, and in doing so has the potential to reach a large audience from a wide range of disciplines.

Bibliography

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