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Intermedial Representations of 9/11 in U.S. American and German Newspapers
The courage, discipline, and selflessness demonstrated by the New York firemen who on September 11 spontaneously put their lives on the line to save others is admirable. But why do they need to be called “heroes”? Perhaps this word has different connotations in American English than it does in German. It seems to me that whenever “heroes” are honored the question arises as to who needs them and why.

Jürgen Habermas

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 on the U.S. seemed to be ideally put on stage for media coverage. The crash of the second plane into the World Trade Center,² the smoldering fires in the towers and the Pentagon, the collapse of the Twin Towers, the plumes of smoke pressing through the streets of Manhattan, the people running and bleeding, the firefighters rushing into the buildings and not coming out again – all that unfolded live in front of a global audience. The day of the attacks certainly was the day of television; the day after was the day of the print media (Beuthner 2004: 18). While the broadcast media provided people with live coverage and the latest news, the press, i.e. the newspapers, evaluated and interpreted the events. “The print medium took on its traditional role as a provider of analysis and extended information, a role which was further consolidated in the days following the attacks” (Zelizer and Stuart 2002a: 7). On TV, information and new developments came rushing in, often with no time for the news anchors to reflect what was happening. The journalists were witnesses themselves and often not able to communicate confirmed facts. On September 11, 2001, some newspapers like the Washington Post printed special issues to provide first analyses. The day after, newspapers all over the world were full of pictures and news reports on what happened in the U.S. “The events of September 11 are now routinely described as the most widely documented tragedies of all time” (Brown et al. 2003: 103).

The pictures particularly dominated the coverage because they provided supposedly unmediated and authentic material of what happened on 9/11.³ Their immediacy and expression of drama and trauma exerted a huge effect on people (Buttler 2003: 27). In the newspapers, the readers were given the possibility to recapitulate the events and sink into the photographs that let all the horrors unfold. The audience could choose its own pace to visually understand the attacks. The accompanying texts explained and analyzed the events and thus determined how the pictures should be assessed. However, the dramatic impact of the photographs also exerted its influence on the stories. A rush on newspaper stands

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1 The quote is taken from an interview with Jürgen Habermas in Borradori (2003): 43.
2 In the following study, the World Trade Center will be referred to as WTC.
3 The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, have commonly been referred to as 9/11. The following study will adopt this abbreviation.
proved the necessity to understand and see. The circulation of many newspapers jumped, in some cases even doubled, like that of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Wiebersiek 2002 qtd. in Neverla 2003: 158). This often came along with a change in layout and many special sections after the attacks. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* published pictures on its front page, which was a rare thing at that time. The *New York Times* ran the special section “A Nation Challenged” over many months and provided readers with the latest news about the aftermath of the attacks and the unfolding war in Afghanistan. Pulitzer Prizes were awarded to the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* for their outstanding coverage. In short, 9/11 significantly shaped the coverage of the global press.

Though the news on the attacks rushed around the world and dominated the media, a local accent was given to their interpretation:


In other words, the attacks were adapted according to local needs and expectations of the people, be it to those of a TV audience or of newspaper readers. Many versions of 9/11 circulated around the world, had specific effects and served national functions.

The need to functionalize the coverage was surely greatest in the U.S. The country, particularly the citizens of New York City and Washington, D.C., was traumatized and had to deal with the aftershocks of the attacks. The media heavily contributed to a production of cultural meaning (Beuthner 2004: 17). This aspect links up to the epigraph by Habermas at the beginning of this section. The production of cultural meaning is different for each nation. Consequently, the American people and the media, as their public voice, turned, for example, the firefighters into heroes because this transformation answered a specific need within the population. The fact that Habermas talks about the different connotations of the expression “heroes” in the U.S. hints to the activation of specific cultural narratives engrained in American society. Consequently, this activation has a specific social function in the aftermath of 9/11. Though Habermas does not talk about the media, but about social constructions after 9/11, his comment is also applicable to the newspaper coverage. The printing press participated in creating these social constructions and wove them into their

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4 "American" refers *passim* uniquely to the U.S. if not specifically indicated.
stories. Habermas further hints at the rift between these social constructions in the U.S. and Germany (or consequently also other countries) and explains that the concept of specific ideas and the resulting representation of the events are different.

Focus of the Study

An analysis of newspapers from the U.S. and Germany promises to disclose the productiveness of 9/11 in the mass media, which centers on cultural-semiotic representations of U.S. American culture at that specific point in history. They are constructed and shaped by narrative structures, which present a topic from a specific angle and are never objective accounts of reality. The following study reflects the global and transnational impact of 9/11 on the U.S. American and German cultures. The focus lies on an intermedial analysis of the newspaper coverage and the consequent interaction of text and picture(s) in a single article. The resulting potential effect and function of such a representation for the readers stands in the center of interest and reflects potentially diverging accounts of 9/11 in the U.S. and Germany. Such alternative views on U.S. American culture have become particularly viable after 9/11 and find their programmatic form in the transnational turn announced by Fishkin (2005). The representations therefore move on a transnational borderline. This borderline is no clear distinction, but a blurry hybrid zone where versions of 9/11 and the U.S. are constructed. In many cases, differences between the U.S. and Germany are not monolithic, clearly distinguished blocks, but rather move on a continuum of representations. These representations are based on U.S. American cultural grand narratives in the sense of Lyotard (1979/1984), which constitute U.S. American identity and are massively activated in the context of 9/11.

These various representations culminate in the weeks between the day of the attacks and the beginning of the war in Afghanistan, which concludes with reflections on the catastrophe and directs the readers’ attention to a new phase. Therefore, this study looks at the newspaper coverage running from special editions on September 11, 2001 to October 15, 2001, one week after the beginning of the war, when the transition phase of the attacks and the military actions come to an end. It is particularly interesting to look at the coverage of leading quality newspapers of each nation because of their reputation for objective and distanced reporting. The New York Times and the Washington Post are the newspapers of choice on the American side, not only because they are two of the most important newspapers in the U.S., but also because one is the leading newspaper in the city of the primary attack and the other is the leading newspaper in the nation’s capital, which was the target of the second attack. The
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and the Süddeutsche Zeitung\(^5\) as leading papers in Germany provide the comparative basis. Roughly 1,900 newspaper articles were analyzed for this study.

Analyzing a multitude of narratives and plots in the newspapers’ coverage additionally documents the large number of issues about 9/11 that are important to the media. This overview of the main topics shows the density of coverage and provides insight into the multitude of the material. The recurring effects and functions within such a large number of stories and a seeming disparateness of topics show the limited repertoire of representations, which are based on national grand narratives.

This analysis, however, does not purport to be an imagological study, in which images and stereotypes of one’s own and foreign nations are explored. The interest does not lie in exploring set images of nations and their occurrence in the coverage,\(^6\) but in finding out a repertoire of representations based on cultural grand narratives, which constitute U.S. American identity. “These narratives – which we recognize even as we read them – are full of symbolic characters who represent what seem to be shared values” (Kitch 2005: 2). The comparison to the German coverage is crucial in this context as it reveals the productiveness of specific recurring narrative patterns in the U.S. American newspapers and their different treatment in the German papers.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 provides the theoretical and methodological framework for the study. Chapter 1.1 talks about the transnational turn in American Studies, explains its emergence and meaning for the discipline and connects the concept to the events of September 11, 2001. It highlights the transnational elements of the terrorist attacks and the global news coverage.

Chapter 1.2 gives an overview of the literature that emerges after the attacks. It deals with responses to 9/11, such as films, exhibitions, conspiracy theories,

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\(^5\) The four newspapers will be abbreviated in the following study. NYT stands for New York Times, WP for Washington Post, FAZ for Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, and SZ for Süddeutsche Zeitung.

\(^6\) A multitude of works deal with German-American relations and the resulting images both have of each other. A special focus always lies on German stereotypes of the U.S. Studies on these images exist for all epochs in history. The spectrum ranges from popular works such as Harpprecht (1982) and Leggewie (2000) to thorough scholarly analyses like Depkat (1998), who analyzes the image of the U.S. in German magazines from 1789-1830, and Schmiese (2000), who explores the image both nations have of each other in the U.S. American and German press between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the first Gulf War. A number of anthologies elucidate a multitude of aspects on stereotypes both countries have of each other, e.g., Bredella (1988, 1991), Weigelt (1986), Adams and Krakau (1985).
etc., and with academic literature about the reactions of the media. First, the chapter intends to show the cultural reactions on a broad scale, which proves the radical impact of the attacks. Second, the main focus lies on academic analyses of the media with a special emphasis of studies dealing with the newspaper coverage after the attacks. Though an abundance of material on newspapers exists, only few analyses go beyond contributions in anthologies.

Chapter 1.3 is introduced by a section on representations, (meta-)narratives, narrative structures and plots, which elucidates the concept of constructed cultural representations. It furthermore explains the concept of the implied reader, which is central to this analysis. The study postulates an implied reader who deconstructs all the visual and verbal cues to build a specific representation of 9/11.

Chapter 1.4 provides the theoretical basis for the concept of intermediality. It explains its origins and the applicability of the term to a range of phenomena involving at least two media. A large part deals with a typology of intermedial phenomena in order to set the framework in which text-picture relations in newspapers operate and with methodological challenges of this concept. However, it becomes obvious that a detailed methodology for relations between texts and pictures, which gives consideration to the specificities of each medium, does not exist in a form which would be suitable for an analysis of newspaper coverage.

Therefore, chapter 1.5 presents different theoretical approaches to the analysis of texts and pictures. The part on textual analysis provides an overview of approaches like semiotics and Critical Linguistics. Because textual analysis has to a large extent a much longer tradition in academia, the possible ways of textual deconstruction are presented merely in a rough overview. The interpretative potential of pictures, however, has only more recently received attention in what Mitchell (1994) announces as the pictorial turn. The emerging paradigm of Visual Culture Studies provides the framework for pictorial analyses by assigning a specific meaning and effect to pictures. It is therefore given heightened consideration in this section.

Chapter 1.6 provides a detailed repertoire of elements in text and pictures that constitutes specific representations. The analytical categories of narrative structures, characters/setting, focus, and intermedial interactions look at specific structural elements of texts and pictures (e.g., headlines, stylistic devices, pictorial arrangement, angle) as well as at their potential effect on the readers.

The main part of this study is constituted by chapter 2. It analyzes the newspaper articles according to the narratives provided in the coverage. The narratives about the impact of 9/11, the heroes, and the reactions to 9/11 by an enactment of political leadership, by an enactment of patriotism, and by an enactment of grief dominate the coverage. Each of them is split into several plots that build these narratives.
Chapter 2.1 is about the impact of 9/11 and deals with the situation in the cities as well as with the symbolic implications of the attacks.

The rescue teams who perished on the day of the attacks, the recovery workers searching for the dead and clearing up the rubble, and the passengers of Flight 93, which crashed on a field in Pennsylvania, are included in the coverage because of their outstanding achievements (chapter 2.2).

The main figures of leadership after the attacks are President George W. Bush, the U.S. Congress and New York City’s Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. In chapter 2.3, they are considered to be the most important actors to lead the American people through the crisis.

The enactment of patriotism is split up into several phases in chapter 2.4. First of all, the newspapers report about the people volunteering in the recovery efforts and trying to help in any way they can. Then, the focus is on those who deliberately go back to their normal lives and routines as a sign of their unbroken spirit. In the coverage, this culminates with the growing willingness to punish the people responsible for the attacks. The U.S. American flag, patriotic songs, and further national symbols are presented as crucial elements in the aftermath of 9/11.

Chapter 2.5 centers on the enactment of grief. The coverage focuses on the victims, on impromptu memorials in Manhattan and Washington, and on memorial services and funerals of the victims. The representations of 9/11, their effect and function emerge out of the detailed analysis of all these narratives and plots.

The American articles consisting of a text and one or several photographs form the basis of the analysis. The German versions of the narratives and plots are then compared to the U.S. American coverage. In some cases, no intermedial interaction takes place in the *FAZ* and *SZ* as either text or pictures are missing, which, however, also has a function in the coverage. Though the newspapers present a multitude of plots and narratives, the effect and function of these representations can be reduced to a few. The conclusion (chapter 3) will thus elaborate on the effects and functionality of the representations and the contributions of this study to further research.