

Preface and Acknowledgements

The exploration of possible futures of the study of culture is more than a prognostic effort, diagnosis of trends, or progressive elaboration of theories and methods. It also requires the critical consideration of possible future topics, transformations, and potentials within an interdisciplinary and international research field that faces contested futures in a rapidly changing global world. This volume discusses recent developments, emerging directions, and concerns for the study of culture from a wide range of national and disciplinary contexts, while addressing pressing challenges and crucial issues found in contemporary public discourse.

The articles in this volume have been written and edited well before there were any signs of the current global Covid-19 pandemic that has rapidly brought death, fear, and unforeseen challenges to individual lives and cultural systems. We, of course, do not know what the future will bring or hold in store for our world, but we sincerely hope that we will find ways to cope with all the challenges resulting from this global pandemic. What the corona crisis shows us already, however, is that we depend not only on political and economic systems, but also on ideas, common values, and cultural practices to shape a common future. We need the perspectives of the humanities and social sciences to understand and to create our society, culture, and global world.

We have rarely experienced this fragility of our globalized world and such uncertainty of any future outlook. In times when human lives, economies, and political systems are at stake, we grope our way forward taking very small steps at a time as the very foundations of future expectations seem radically shaken. Yet, although written well before this global crisis, the articles in this volume have approached the topic of ‘futures’ rather cautiously and with nuance. Instead of generating a global prognostic vision, this collection pursues incipient approaches that try to expand the limits of our established but often ill-suited conceptual settings and disciplinary and institutional arrangements. It aims to open up new horizons for the study of culture by bringing changed conceptual tools and research practices in sight that could perhaps make us better equipped for dealing with urgent concerns and future issues yet unknown.

With the generous support of the University Library Giessen, we have made the book available through Open Access to maximize the accessibility and potential of its contributions to spark debates worldwide. Our goal was to produce a collection that is not only multidisciplinary but also multi-voiced, as exemplified by our two-perspective introductions and an interview with Peter L. Galison.

Most of the contributions originated at the international symposium held in 2016 to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Giessen Graduate Centre for

Humanities (GGK) and the 10th anniversary of the Excellence Initiative-funded International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC).

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