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## IS IASA ENTERING ITS SECOND PHASE?

The IASA Third World Congress is quickly drawing near. By the time you are reading these lines, you are probably getting ready to pack your bags or are expressing your regret that you didn't register for the conference. Since its inception in 2000, IASA has developed into a flourishing association with a committed and continuously expanding membership base. The original intent expressed in the Bellagio Charter to provide an alternative to traditional, nation-based American Studies approaches has lost none of its pertinence and urgency. We are confident that the Third World Congress in Lisbon will consolidate and solidify the careful construction work undertaken during the last seven years.

The present issue of RIAS offers an exploration of the *loci amoeni* of American Studies in our global day and age. The question of place frequently pops up in debates aiming for the decentralization of established American Studies, also on the electronic pages of RIAS (see, most recently, the excellent issue on 'Cultural Modernity in the Americas' edited by Cyraina Johnson-Roullier). But it is seldom explicitly addressed in such very pragmatic terms: What does it entail for IASA to convene in this or that locale in terms of the production of knowledge about the Americas, the organization's (intended and/or real) audience, its receptivity towards hitherto underrepresented constituencies, and its resonance in the scholarly community at large? For an association which attempts to delocalize or even dislocate established conceptions of 'America' in all of its dimensions, it is of crucial importance that it allow itself to pinpoint and reflect upon its axiomatic locations—both real and symbolic—in the world.

To promote a discussion towards this end, we have asked Teresa Cid and Teresa F.A. Alves, in name of the Organizing Committee of the Lisbon Conference, to present their views on the significance of the 'White City' as a venue and meeting ground for a global exchange of ideas on the place of America in the world. In addition, we have countered their perspectives with those of the two former Executive Directors of IASA, Theo D'haen and Patrick Imbert. 'How Far is America From Here?' was the guiding theme of the Leyden Conference in 2003. Now, four years later, it is perhaps appropriate to ask: How far have we come since then? The Conference in Ottawa further developed the themes already outlined in Leyden and has opened up the multilingual potential of IASA, which is something we want to continue to explore using the possibilities offered by online publishing. Lisbon, with its heteronymous, Fernando Pessoa-like identity, seems to constitute the perfect site to continue the conversation.



Has International American Studies entered its 'second phase'? This seems to be the organizing idea behind the forum discussion presented in this issue. Anders Olsson from Mid Sweden University in Härnösand has brought together four theory-minded Americanists from Europe and the U.S.: Laura Bieger, Johannes Völz, Jeffrey Hole, and Frank Kelleter let their light shine on the current 'trans'-fever in our field and how it compares to similar developments in other areas, such as international relations and public administration. However different their perspectives, the four forum participants univocally agree that the transnational turn, if we really want to get a grip on it, demands much deeper reflection than it has hitherto received. The 'second phase', as Olsson puts it in his forum introduction, signals 'an opening up of participation and a loosening of boundaries'. What exactly does this mean for the—disciplinary, geographic, political, technological—place of our revisionist agenda? Is 'trans' a place? Should it be? Or does every move to localize it kill that which originally called it into being, that is, the incentive to get away from the established center of American Studies and lay bare its hidden disciplinary assumptions?

Not only IASA as a professional association seems to be finding its place. RIAS, too, has modest cause for celebration after rounding the cape—if you allow this nautical metaphor as a reference to one of the conference themes—of the first year of publication, a year of often frenetic but ultimately rewarding activity on the part of our editorial team. The journal, we are glad to say, is slowly shaking off its initial growing pains and is developing into a well-oiled mouthpiece for the IASA community. For the first four issues alone we have received contributions by scholars from Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Poland, Portugal, Turkey, Spain, the UK and the US. Our statistics reveal that we have on average about fifty visitors a day, by no means a bad score for a fledgling journal! I therefore want to use this opportunity to thank the authors, my editorial associates, the referees and proofreaders, and the IT and DTP advisors for their backstage work, their dedication and patience.

In the years ahead, our team will continue to reach out to scholars from underprivileged countries who can ill afford to buy paper journals. For those who, like me, still prefer the feel of a hard copy in their hands, we are envisioning the implementation of a Print on Demand Request module, which would allow us to combine the flexibility of online publishing with the advantage of having your issue printed, bound, and shipped to you at a relatively low cost. More and more authors are now submitting their texts directly via the RIAS web interface. One of the things we hope to accomplish in the near future is a fuller integration of our website with the IASA Web services and the Center for Thought Exchange. This means that users would need just one login to have access to a whole array of connected electronic facilities, including, for instance, easy-to-use communication tools for working groups.

Historically, the modern factory has its roots in the Portuguese trading posts or *feitoria* along the coasts of Africa, Asia, and the New World. We are all aware of the impact, both positive and negative, that such premodern factories had on the ways of local cultures and on our changing conceptions of space. In an age that is sometimes—

perhaps erroneously—described as postindustrial, there may be a growing need for what one could call *feitoria* of the mind, intellectual trading posts that bring people from diverse backgrounds together to debate the complex consequences of global interchange and the role of 'America' in all of this. Lisbon, with its multi-layered history, is an ideal location for setting up such a global encounter.

**Michael Boyden**

RIAS Editor-in-chief



## LISBON AS A SITE OF CROSS-CULTURAL DIALOGUE

**Teresa Cid and Teresa F.A. Alves**

Members of the Organizing Committee  
of IASA's 3<sup>rd</sup> World Congress

From the start, the rationale of IASA has been to broaden the scope of American Studies and place it in active interagency with the world at large, beyond spatially defined boundaries and the comfort of culturally-closed systems. This project has symbolically been sustained by the organization of conferences in various parts of the world, bringing together scholars from many different fields and uniting them by their intent to revise prevalent approaches to American Studies and to privilege cross-cultural dialogue. For the 2007 World Conference, Lisbon has been selected as the preferred venue for pursuing this ongoing dialogue. In this short statement, we want to illustrate the appropriateness of the Portuguese capital for the cultural politics of IASA. In many ways, the city of Lisbon embodies the three-fold theme around which the debates during our third IASA meeting will gravitate: Trans/Nation, Trans/Ocean, Trans/Lation.

The Portuguese *caravelas* that five centuries ago spearheaded into uncharted oceans in search of new sea routes and what were perceived as new worlds, encountering in the process other peoples and other mores, often departed from Lisbon's harbor. The ensuing interactions and their lasting effects show how much of cultural otherness has been appropriated or accommodated by all sides involved in this cultural interchange and the extent of the **Trans/Oceanic** ventures that, in the words of the epic poet Camões, 'gave new worlds to the world' of that time.

Lisbon has always been a **Trans/National** meeting ground. The old Moorish or medieval quarters, the districts of Alfama, Castelo, and Madragoa coexist with the modern Pombaline downtown or postmodern uptown. Architecturally, the old Roman-style *Aqueduto das Águas Livres* stands within view of the postmodern *Amoreiras* buildings, while the Portuguese-Gothic *Jeronimos* monastery lies next to the very recent Cultural Center of Belém. In painting, the millenary Portuguese art of tiles, in itself the product of so many cultural encounters and cross-pollination, has been metamorphosed by the art of Vieira da Silva who, in turn, was influenced by the modernist revolution in the visual arts. As regards the written word, one example is probably enough and better known world-wide: Fernando Pessoa, the Portuguese modernist poet would be very likely misread if one fails to consider how South African Apartheid politics played into the very nature of his heteronymic otherness.

As in the past, contemporary Portuguese life as experienced in Lisbon and elsewhere in the country is very much the arena for the interplay of heterogeneous cul-

tural forces which vie with the more standard products that result from a process that we often reductively label globalization. A site of change and cultural interfacing, Lisbon is thus, in our view, an ideal symbolic location for IASA's pursuit of localizability—finally the third component of the theme—as a dialogical mode of **Trans/Lation** between different realities situated at interface location.

It is now opportune to consider how American Studies translates in Portugal as a sort of wrap-up for the choice of location for the 2007 IASA World Conference, and of the Faculty of Letters, University of Lisbon, as the local host. In the aftermath of the changes brought about by the Bologna Process, the American Studies program at Lisbon has undergone a radical transformation within the English Department where, heretofore, it had been located at the borderlands, at least at the undergraduate level, and remained generally restricted to the study of literature and culture. Before two years, a Portuguese student wishing to specialize in the study of the USA had to wait for the MA or a PhD to be able to study American society independently. And then s/he was still mostly confronted with either a literary or a cultural orientation. Nowadays the courses offered by the English Department branch out in three different directions: English Studies, North-American Studies, and Anglo-American Studies (a combination of the above areas in equal proportions allowing for different emphases according to students' preferences). The three courses are offered at all university levels, ranging from undergraduate to post-doctoral degrees. More specifically in the case of American Studies, a broad approach to this field includes the study of literature, culture (including popular culture), music, film, visual arts, history, philosophy, social studies, political theory, and cultural geography. Even if mostly USA-oriented, the program opens up to Canadian Studies and connects, in interdisciplinary dynamics, to other courses inside or outside the Faculty of Letters. American cultures, canonical or peripheral, are no longer enclosed in the exacting spatial boundaries of the USA but are evaluated in intra- and intercultural perspectives that bring these studies into the larger focus of the cultural diversity that characterizes the world in this age of globalized perceptions and realities.

The pursuit of diversity has engaged Portuguese scholars, not only in American Studies, but in the several Departments and Programs of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon in a longstanding dialogue with colleagues from all over the world. Their presence has been felt both in their participation at innumerable international conferences, colloquia, seminars, etc., and in the number of international events which they have promoted, organized and hosted over the past decades. IASA's 2007 World Conference will afford another excellent opportunity to test whether Lisbon, the sought-after city for many who have taken to the road in quest of unfathomable futures for many centuries, is still at the crossroads of knowledge in this era of renewed trans/oceanic, trans/national, and trans/lational intercultural relationships.



## TRANSCULTURAL AMERICA

**Patrick Imbert**

Organizer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> IASA World Congress,  
University of Ottawa, August 18-20 2005

Pico Iyer emphasizes in *The Global Soul* that we are 'on our way to somewhere else' (Iyer, 2000: 44). The Canadian writer Douglas Coupland explores the modalities of the new legitimacy of displacement through rituals pertaining to the X generation and its link to media discourses, as well as the consequences of that new legitimacy for the public sphere. This means that in a quarter century, the Canadian perspective has changed from one that demonstrated a consensus based on protecting its own identity to one that privileges an expansive dynamic promoting its multiple self-images in a transnational context. This transformation is linked to the project of globalization and to a new awareness that displacements open manifold opportunities, particularly in the context of the Americas and of the expansion of the knowledge-based society.

This new frontier leading to new contextualization, as Néstor García Canclini emphasizes (Canclini, 1999), is potentially full of win-win situations that closely intertwine social, economic and cultural dynamics. In a world of permanent transitions and of productions of significance whose combined impact does not originate in their origins but rises from their shared consequences, American Studies has become the study of the Americas from the North to the South pole. Moreover, American Studies concerns the whole planet's population, which for centuries has dreamed of this continent where many immigrants and their children have accomplished and still accomplish their goals and fulfill their worldly potential. This is clearly demonstrated by Jean-Robert Cadet, an immigrant to the USA from Had'ti, in his book entitled *Restavec: enfant esclave en Had'ti*. All this indicates that the perspectives on the Americas vary greatly depending on the geographic, social or symbolic locations of the writers and researchers who invent their own Americas.

In this context where territorialized identities have become relational self-images shared by individuals and groups from very different backgrounds, Canada, with its multicultural policies, its official French/English bilingualism and its free Medicare system, is at the forefront of helping people invent new lives in evolving cultures that are open to a democratic future. This future allows for the possibility to combine social-democratic perspectives within a liberal economy fostering cultural and economic innovations and the creation of new wealth.

Having the 2<sup>nd</sup> IASA World Congress take place in August 2005 at the University of Ottawa, one of the biggest bilingual universities in the Americas, has stimulated a reconsideration of American Studies as a transnational field constantly being reinvented by writers and researchers from across the planet. At the Conference, participants not only were allowed to communicate in the three widely spoken languages of the Americas (English, French, and Spanish); they also had access to such personalities as the President (speaking in Cree and in English) of a very successful company (Air Creebec) controlled by the Cree community. Hence, the public was able to surpass stereotypical images of problematic indigenous issues that are constantly being disseminated by superficial media discourse.

This possibility to bypass media stereotypes, as well as traditional canonical and bureaucratic-nationalistic conceptions of American Studies, is what permits us to go beyond established conflictive positions and to reevaluate the Americas in the context of contemporary economic and cultural shifts; a feat which provides the opportunity to set new parameters for what is acceptable or not acceptable in democratic, free-from-fear multicultural societies based on the desire to foster the development of individuals.

Thus, as Pico Iyer underlines: 'America's great and lasting significance is its existence in the mind' (Iyer, 2000: 229). However, this time the mind projection is not based on a Manifest Destiny linked to a single nation. It is connected to a dream of being able to cooperate with others in order to build a decent life for all through the access to democratic knowledge-based societies. These societies put together the 'know-what' (capitalization of information) and the 'know-how' (tacit knowledge) in order to have a positive impact on human and natural environments. As highlighted in 2003 by Carl Raschke in *The digital revolution and the coming of the postmodern university*, the human environment is linked to the expansion of 'digital intelligence [that] feeds on the explosion of heterogeneity' (Raschke, 2003: 83).

The challenge of cultural as well as scientific and theoretical heterogeneity involves new opportunities related to efficient multidimensional democracies, which is something already attempted in different constellations by Lincoln in the USA, Sarmiento in Argentina, Vargas in Brazil, and Trudeau in Canada. This new semiotic dynamic is now operative in the Americas, which should result in the creation of new hyper-textual links between scientific, cultural, socio-economic, pedagogic, media, ethical and spiritual discourses. Hence the need of various and complex perspectives on the future of the whole continent.

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## HOW FAR IS AMERICA FROM HERE?

**Theo D'haen**

Organizer of the 1<sup>st</sup> IASA Conference,  
Universiteit Leiden, 22–24 May 2003

In the various meetings leading to the founding of the International American Studies Association it was decided that the official birth of the new association would coincide with the organization of a World Congress to be held at Leyden, the Netherlands, in 2003.

Leyden, the oldest and most famous university of the Netherlands, founded in 1575, has shown an interest in American Studies as of the emergence of the discipline in Europe right after WWII, with a Chair in American History and another in American Literature. From early on, in Leyden there has been a pronounced interest in US minority cultures, particularly African American and Jewish, as well as in the immigrant experience, particularly the Dutch experience, in the United States. It was only logical, then, that these Leyden interests found perfect expression also in the theme of IASA's First World Congress: 'How Far is America From Here?'

The aim of 'How Far is America From Here?' was to approach American nations and cultures from a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective. It is very much at the heart of this comparative agenda that 'America' be considered as a hemispheric and global matter. It discusses American identities relationally, whether the relations under discussion operate within the borders of the United States, throughout the Americas, and/or worldwide. The papers given at the Congress interrogate the very notion of 'America': which, whose America, when, why now, how? What is meant by 'far'—distance, discursive formations, ideals and ideologies, foundational narratives, political conformities, aberrations, inconsistencies? Where is here—positionality, geographies, spatial compressions, hegemonic and subaltern loci, disciplinary formations, reflexes and reflexivities? These questions were addressed with regard to the multiple Americas within the USA and the bi-continental western hemisphere, as part of and beyond inter-American cultural relations, ethnicities across the national and cultural plurality of America, mutual constructions of North and South, borderlands, issues of migration and diaspora. The larger contexts of globalization and America's role within this process were likewise discussed, alongside issues of geographical exploration, capital expansion, integration, transculturalism, transnationalism and global flows, pre-Columbian and contemporary Native American cultures, the Atlantic slave trade, the environmental crisis, US literature in relation to Canadian or Latin American literature, religious conflict both within the Americas and between the Americas and the rest of the world,

with such issues as American Zionism, American exceptionalism, and the discourse of/ on terror and terrorism. In short, the Leyden Congress acted both as a summa of what had spurred on the institutionalization of IASA in the first place, and as a prefiguration of future IASA Congress themes.

The Leyden Congress counted some 300 participants, the core of what in later years would become IASA's regular membership.

A selection of the papers given at the 2003 Leyden Congress appeared with Edns Rodopi (Amsterdam/New York) as *How Far is American From Here* (2005). The volume can be ordered via [www.rodopi.nl](http://www.rodopi.nl)—for a direct link see <http://www.rodopi.nl/functions/search.asp?BookId=TEXTXET+47>.



## AND WHY 'TRANS' ALL THE TIME? A TRANSNATIONAL FORUM

**Anders Olsson**

Mid Sweden University, Härnösand

To judge from congress titles, 'trans' is certainly the current name of the game: *Trans/American*, *Trans/Oceanic*, *Trans/lation* is the title of the IASA Congress in Lisbon, and *The United States from Inside and Out: Transnational American Studies* was the name of the annual meeting of the American Studies Association, 2006. The ubiquity of the prefix may raise suspicions. It certainly did so for the organizers and participants of the session called 'Academic Crossroads: Debating Transnationalism's Second Phase' at the ASA meeting in 2006. The addition of the 'second phase' tried to underline just that: there should be time for a second phase to consider the conceptual and epistemological consequences of the use of 'trans', considering the fact that it has been the code word for quite some time now, signalling an opening up of participation and a loosening of boundaries.

Nevertheless, 'the second phase' may denote a sense of stable categorization. The first phase is over; now it is time for the second. This risk was articulated in the discussion after the session, and therefore the idea came up that the original contributions could be condensed and published as a forum for a consideration of transnational implications. The juxtaposition of different texts would make them resonate to make new ground for the interpretation of 'trans', and a forum could also invite more scholars to join the discussion.

So, here they are: **Laura Bieger** considers the methodological potential of translation in cultural studies and transnational American studies in her text "'Living in Translated Worlds": A pragmatist approach to transnationalism'. She finds that the relational structure of the three intersecting mechanisms she identifies at work in translation adds to the study of the dynamics of transnational studies, and she finds that the poetic aspects of translation—the underlying operational mechanisms—are utterly neglected. Translation is, she claims, a cultural practice, rather than a textual, and Homi Bhabha's transitional notion of the 'third space' has become the homeland for the criticism of such cultural practice.

There is a lack of attention, among transnational Americanists, to the relation between transnational formations and the changing constellation of state power, **Johannes Völz** argues in 'Transnationalism and the Realignment of State Power: Two sides of the same coin'. If transnational American Studies is described in opposition to

state power, such a description is symptomatic of the lengthening distance between the state and its citizens. Ways to scrutinize such complicity should be the topic for transnational American Studies. A location for such transnational scrutiny is the public sphere.

In 'Towards a Genealogy of Transnational Perspective' **Jeffrey Hole** finally addresses the idea that the state's hermeneutic functions through a national lens and that a transnational perspective can exceed the state's hermeneutic. He thinks that there are important and genealogical questions to be asked in order to address how the transnational perspective, invoked for critical work, may be historically attendant with the intensification of globalization and with transnational configurations.

Finally, in his text called 'Transnationalism: The American Challenge' to, **Frank Kelleter** suggests we need a re-engagement with the notion of American exceptionalism in order to confront the anti-imperialist imperialism of the concept of 'America'. Kelleter considers the belief that to speak transnationally means to speak in a counter-hegemonic way. If we were to take the insights of transnational studies for granted, he remarks, studies of America and American aesthetics could be based on more realistic and less sentimental conceptions.

Now, the curtain is up: read, consider, let the texts resonate, respond!



## 'LIVING IN TRANSLATED WORLDS'— A PRAGMATIST APPROACH TO TRANSNATIONALISM

**Laura Bieger**

Freie Universität Berlin

'The history of all cultures is a history of cultural borrowing', Edward Said once said—a thought that could be rephrased as: the history of all cultures is a history of translation. This paper is about translation and its methodological and critical potential for theorizing transnationalism. To unfold this potential we need to understand this term in the broadest possible sense: as a principle and agent of transformation; a principle we find at work on the production as well as on the reception side of any instance of signification; and which operates through any kind of medium and in any semiotic register. Such an understanding goes well beyond the general use of the term which ties it to processes of linguistic transfer in a much stricter and more limited sense. In the following pages I will make some rather speculative remarks and far-reaching suggestions about the methodological potential slumbering in the concept of translation, and in this sense I would like the following thoughts to be understood as an open invitation for further speculation and discussion. And yet I don't want to expose them to debate without mentioning that they are grounded in a long and intense period of research which I did around the concept of translation and which, for the sake of brevity, I will scarcely be referencing here.

To study cultural formations in a transnational perspective is to encounter various and complex dynamics of exchange and transformation; dynamics which breach across a wide array of borders between as well as within cultural formations formerly perceived in a national paradigm; which materialize through all different media as attempted acts of communication; which might be written, painted, photographed, filmed, sculptured, built, tailored, spoken, sung, danced, gestured, etc.; and whose trajectory might very well be ruptured, contain gaps, take detours, lead elsewhere. One thing can be safely assumed without further specifying the spectrum of exchange dynamics at stake here: to become operational as a comprehensive methodological tool apt to deal with this range of different processes, the broadening of our understanding of translation beyond its traditional linguistic borders mentioned in the beginning needs to go hand in hand with developing a new systematization of the concept itself—a task which I suggest to meet by dealing with it on the formal and operational level addressed above.

Understood as this principle and agent of transformation, the concept of translation rests upon three intersecting mechanisms: a transformative movement of cultural/material expressions which is situated in a specific context; a strategy which lays out the trajectory of transformation (often, but not necessarily, defined as at least temporarily leading from one pole to another); and a specific mode of realizing and articulating this strategy (and which in this creative sense can be seen as the poetic side of translation). As I already indicated, these three parameters are defined in relation to one another; they are not separable entities or vectors, but overlap and bring about one another. We might think of them as indicating three different perspectives from which to approach the transformative work realized in an instance of translation. And just as there is no such thing as an empty sign, these parameters need to be thought of in relation to the (virtual or actual) material which is being processed through them. In their relational and interdependent structure the parameters offer a compound analytical tool which is at once highly flexible and yet in application immediately becomes specific.

With this potential in sight, the larger suggestion I want to make is that this translational analytic *could be* but so far *hasn't been* used to study the numerous dynamics that are constantly modifying the cultural formations which constitute our life-worlds. And this, although it seems to me especially well suited as a methodological framework for a transnational approach to American Studies, or Cultural Studies in general, since both have come to understand culture in equally dynamic and transformative terms. Thus it comes as no surprise that since the 1990s there have been exchange processes across the disciplinary borders of Cultural and Translation Studies; borrowings which for me simultaneously indicate the usefulness of those applications and witness the half-heartedness with this they have so far been pursued.

'It was only a question of time', writes Sherry Simon, 'until cultural studies "discovered" translation'. She continues:

After all, the globalization of culture means that we all live in 'translated' worlds, that the spaces of knowledge we inhabit assemble ideas and styles of multiple origins, that transnational communications and frequent migrations make every cultural site a crossroads and meeting place. These ideas have become accepted truths of our contemporaneity. (Simon, 1996: 135)

In line with this reasoning, cultural formations are perceived as intersections of meaning which can be located neither in a spatial nor a temporal moment of origin, and thus one might say that Homi Bhabha's transitional notion of the 'third space' has become the (con-)temporary homeland for much of today's cultural criticism. Bhabha was also a leading figure to make the notion of translation applicable to the field of cultural studies. As he writes in a well-known passage:

The language of critique is effective not because it keeps forever separate the terms of the master and the slave, [...] but to the extent to which it overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a *space of translation*: a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, neither the one nor the other, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moments of politics. (Bhabha, 1994: 25; emphasis mine)



I am merely restating the already familiar when saying that this postcolonial perspective has been especially influential in generating transnational approaches to studying cultural formations. To draw on the concept of translation as Bhabha does in the statement above works especially well in this respect because it allows for evoking both the dynamic, unstable and hybrid nature of cultural formations, and the regulatory (power) aspects of cultural signification within them. Beyond these familiarities, two further aspects of Bhabha's use of translation make it especially useful as methodological framework for a transnational perspective: its embeddedness in specific spatial situations resonates strongly with the emphasis on regional cultures which are of major concern in transnational scholarship; and its close ties to negotiating subject positions—which also play out in Salman Rushdie's well-known phrase 'I am a translated man' (Rushdie, 1991: 13)—make it apt to reflect issues of identity politics, another major concern, from a perspective of (re-)production and exchange.

And yet despite these clever appropriations and their promising implications I see a major problem in the way in which Cultural Studies has taken interest in the concept of translation. In the respective discourse it usually functions as a rhetorical figure, a metaphor, and not as a further systematized analytical tool. And thus the use of the concept typically derives most of its critical impact by means of toying with the broad range of associations which it generates, but without sorting out its further methodological implications. This bias is noteworthy because the associations evoked in this fashion tell us something about the function assigned to the concept of translations in the wake of its cultural studies 'discovery'. This function draws heavily on the *strategic* implications of translation, and in this regard it compellingly connects the cultural studies discourse with recent works from the field of translation studies; works which have stressed the deep ideological roots this concept has within its larger epistemic field. To point out just one example, for Lori Chamberlain the 'metaphorics of translations' are nothing less than

[...] a symptom of larger issues of western culture: of the power relations as they divide in terms of gender; of a persistent (though not always hegemonic) desire to equate language or language use with morality; of a quest for originality and unity, and a consequent intolerance of duplicity, of what cannot be decided. (Chamberlain, 2000: 66–7)

While I find myself in deep agreement with the points that Chamberlain raises here, her critical intervention also sheds light on an aspect about this strategic bias which I find highly problematic: namely, how well this metaphorical use has been serving the discursive needs of Cultural Studies. In and by itself this observation might only seem to have minor consequences regarding the critical potential the concept can enfold within the critical logic of contemporary Cultural Studies; it is, however, tied to and symptomatic of a larger, and in my understanding much more serious problem: due to this strategic bias the *poetic* aspects inherent in the concept of translation—that is: the specific modes and mechanisms which actually *realize* the strategies and thus materialize the transformative and creational work of producing cultural formations and the respective realities they embody—are utterly neglected. If at all, these aspects are implied in the most general or intuitive sense; however, I don't know of a single case in which the application of the concept of translation goes along with

a systematic study of the rhetorical means through which it becomes operative within a cultural formation. I emphasize this point so strongly here because I believe that translation could do much more for us working in the fields of American and Cultural Studies if we began to spell out the underlying operational mechanisms I suggest to specify by means of the three parameters mentioned earlier. Guiding questions to work with this approach would be: What exactly is happening along those pathways drawn out by the transfer and transformation of cultural material which we intuitively subsume under the label of translation? What can be said about the specific processes conceptualized through the translational parameters and their interaction within a specific cultural context? How do we trace the processes of transformation which they bring to our attention? And what do they tell us about the cultural formations through which they are operating?

Let me indicate a possible way of addressing these questions from the meta-level which has been the site of this argument throughout. Recent attempts to 'rethink' the concept of translation (Venuti, 1992) have proposed to substitute for the former model of translation as a movement *between* different languages by the notion of a movement *within* language. The decisive impulse behind this reconception is, of course, the poststructuralist critique of a representationalist understanding of language which (in its deconstructivist variations) goes along with claims that no line can be drawn between one language and another, that no language can ever be complete by itself but only exists as an incoherent part of an ever modifying texture of articulation. What would happen if we took a similar approach to our understanding of processes of cultural production and signification in general? Instead of dealing with translational movements *between* cultural formations, semiotic fields and attempted acts of communication we would then think of such movements *within* one comprehensive and ever-changing force-field of forms, shapes and meanings; a field, I should add, which does contain fissures and ruptures, gaps and holes and which thus produces translations as well as 'mistranslations' as two species of this productivity which are impossible to tell apart.

What I want to indicate with these last remarks is the need to understand translation as a *cultural* rather than a *textual* practice; a practice which, at least in my understanding, cannot be thought of without a model of intersubjectivity for which the subject is more than a mere effect of signifying/power structures; and which turns the deconstructivist contingency to arrive at a desired meaning into a phenomenological contingency of (mis)perception. In other words, if we are to take the deconstructivist cue that translation operates within rather than between cultural formations we need to modify this approach in a way that conceives of the material of translation as only being destructed, transformed and re-created if it produces any kind of creative resonance in some-*body* articulating or perceiving it. A blueprint of this reconfiguration already exists in the pragmatist semiotics of Charles S. Peirce for whom 'a sign is not a sign unless it translated itself into another sign' (Peirce, 5: 594). Using Peirce rather than the deconstructivists as a touchstone to rethink translation and systematize its analytical potential seems like the right choice to me because not only does his triadic conception of the sign embrace the intersubjective dimension needed to concep-



tualize translation as a comprehensive and effective cultural practice but he also conceives this practice as being utterly creative and experiential.

It would go too far to fully elaborate the foundational logic of translation implicit in the Peircian semiotics and their further implications here, and thus I will leave this task aside and conclude by taking the suggestion to make use of his approach as a cue to spelling out the pragmatic dimension of the model of translation I have been sketching out here. Like pragmatist philosophy this model of translation is rather a method to be applied to a certain problem than a self-sufficient theory; it derives its theoretical insights from its application to specific and practical problems. Since its primary interest concerns the transformative nature of translation, it is rather more interested in strategic questions about means and ends than in those about truths and origins (along these lines it would make quite a bit of sense to think about the *cash-value* of a specific translation). And as a target-oriented practice it is genuinely site-specific and within these situations turns to the experience inscribed into the material of translation; thus it approaches cultural formations phenomenologically: as lived structures of meaning that affect us and are constantly modified ('affected') by us.

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## TRANSNATIONALISM AND THE REALIGNMENT OF STATE POWER: TWO SIDES OF ONE COIN

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The transnational turn in American Studies has focused almost exclusively on the emergence of new identities that reach across national borders. Although a common description of transnational American Studies claims that it examines the flow of ideas, goods, and people(s) across states and national cultures, it is really 'the people(s)' that gets the largest share of the attention. The articulation of selves that are not yet fully co-opted by power takes center stage. In this regard American Studies is merely an extreme case of what is also visible in other disciplines. Much of the literature on globalization in other fields—such as political philosophy, law, political science, and sociology—is also preoccupied with new forms of postnational citizenship.

There are many good reasons for this attention to newly emergent forms of political and personal subjectivities, the most convincing being the simple fact that these developments are now more prevalent than ever before. And if cultural formations such as the 'Black Atlantic' today catch our eye, surely it makes sense to investigate their histories. There is, however, a problem with this approach of historicization. By constructing a continuous lineage of subaltern positions, the specific context in which today's postnational identities have taken shape is lost. The ruling idea seems to be that in tracing the histories of these postnational formations, one can assume that their relation to established and dominant identities remains largely unchanged, namely, oppositional. Four hundred years of Black Atlantic thus comes to stand for four hundred years of opposition. It is this presumption of a stable relation of hegemony and opposition that pushes this kind of historicism to the brink of ahistoricism. What I want to argue here is that this historical ahistoricism is visible right at the heuristic starting point for most of these projects, i.e., the relation of today's postnational formations to the state.

The ruling paradigm of transnational American Studies assumes that it makes sense to focus our work on postnational formations not only because these movements—and thus, by proxy, the scholars who study them—are oppositional, but also because the arena of the transnational has recently gained so much importance. In other words, while one can show how oppositional and subversive these formations were in the past, the attention paid to the transnational is legitimated by the alleged fact that the state has become a less important object of study in the face of globalization.



Today's state is largely perceived as weakened by external pressures ranging from environmental problems to the reduction of tax revenue to global terrorism. If these are problems the individual state cannot handle, the argument goes, this shows that the nation-state has become weakened, that it is only a matter of time until many vital decisions will be transferred to regimes of global governance, and that nation-states are losing their power to influence the identities of their citizens.

In fact, however, I take it to be a mistake to portray the state as weakened by globalization. While it is true that international interdependencies (environment, crime, etc.) have increased, states have been able to reconfigure themselves (the U.S. is the paradigmatic case here) by a range of measures that effectively undermine liberal democracy. While I do not want to claim that transnational American Studies are somehow directly complicit with the realignment of the state, I want to highlight an uncomfortable link: In so far as transnational American Studies celebrate non-formalized kinds of political citizenship across national boundaries (legitimized by the felt necessity of opposing the liberal nation-state), they do take part in the larger development of which a less democratic exercise of state power is but one facet. In other words: The onset of the global age—I locate it in the early 1980s with the Reagan administration and its deregulation policies—is marked by a wide range of ways in which politics become increasingly deformed. This includes the privatization and outsourcing of government oversight, the concentration of power in the hands of the executive branch, the stripping of citizens' rights—and it also has come to encompass the shift of political engagement away from established polities towards 'oppositional' movements across national boundaries. All of these changes are connected in a larger global logic (and global here does not mean the superseding of the state), although they do not necessarily support the same goal (indeed, they oppose each other in their intentions). My point is that the increase in non-formalized political subjectivities and the increase in non-formalized governance techniques by the state are two sides of the same coin. From this perspective, describing transnational American Studies as oppositional (and meaning by that the field's dominant identity-centered strand) becomes a self-delusion that dangerously neglects the way the development in the field is itself part of a larger process.

My analysis is largely informed by Saskia Sassen's recent book *Territory, Authority, Rights* (2006). Sassen looks at non-formalized ways of political engagement and new types of citizenship with great sympathy—according to her understanding, the 'multiplying of informal political subjects points to the possibility that the excluded [...] also can make history' (Sassen, 2006: 321)—but she also underlines the link I have been trying to make here, though not with American Studies in mind: 'If there is one theme that brings together today's many different citizenship dynamics it is the lengthening distance between the citizen and the state [...] Among the more familiar transformations is the shrinking welfare state that is part of the neoliberalizing of liberal states: in eliminating a range of citizens' entitlements, it reduces the number of relations/interdependencies between citizens and their states' (319). To put it succinctly: Where transnational American Studies has looked away from the state in order to focus on the oppositional transnational sphere, it has itself been symptomatic of the lengthening distance between the state and its citizens.

This does not at all mean that the project of American Studies with a transnational perspective is to be abandoned. However, transnational American Studies must find ways to examine the wide range of developments of deformalization, and scrutinize how they interact. A transnational perspective should not be mistaken for one that blinds itself to the ways transnational developments take place inside the state and take part in a larger transformative process that affects the state as much as transnational formations themselves. In other words, conducting scholarship on transnationalism that is seriously political must confront the lengthening distance between state and citizen that Sassen points to. The relation of the state to the citizen remains the prevalent concern for democracy in our global era, even if democracy cannot be limited to this core axis any longer.

To conclude, I want to raise the issue of public intellectuals. One way in which the distance between state and citizen must be countered is by reinvigorating the public sphere. Today, most Americanists—at least those who identify themselves as belonging to the left—seem to have given up the hope of working effectively as public intellectuals (there are exceptions, among them Michael Bérubé and Walter Benn Michaels). Instead, they have explained at length that the idea of ‘the public sphere’ is instrumental in excluding minorities. I share some of these concerns, and I agree that the public sphere is not accurately described as a space in which a consensus is found rationally. And yet, I maintain that the public sphere—even if we conceive of it as an antagonistic meeting ground of a plurality of diverse publics—is essential for keeping the executive in reign. It is a mistake to underestimate how much power the public still can wield, and it is ironic that in recent years the right, which has been less skeptical about mobilizing the public, has been much more successful in this regard than the left. Of course, their claims on the public have largely been in the service of neutralizing that public from within.

Needless to say, the issue of the public intellectual must itself take the global age into account. While we cannot speak of an existing global public sphere at this point (even in the European Union a common public sphere is no more than rudimentary), national public spheres are capable of opening into each other, and thus of making audible and open to discussion what Amartya Sen calls ‘global voices’ (Sen, 2006: ??). Fostering a public sphere in which the transnational becomes legible as a force inside the national might be the most necessary work of a politicized transnational American Studies in the face of radical de-democratization.

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## TOWARDS A GENEALOGY OF TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Over the last decade, American Studies scholars from the US have attempted with much regularity and critical force to disassociate the present discipline from the practices and ideologies of its exceptionalist past. Having been authorized within the historical and political context of the US's expansive Cold War strategy, the ASA has often had to address its institutional relationship with US state power as well as the ostensibly nationalist impulse of this power. Simply put, Americanists broadly and ASA presidents particularly have posited various counter tactics in order to differentiate their own knowledge production from that of the US nation-state. This has been the case at least since Janice Radway's question 'What's in a Name?' (Radway, 1999) and continues to resonate in Shelley Fisher Fishkin's (Fishkin, 2005) and Emory Elliott's (Elliott, 2007) more recent presidential addresses at the ASA's annual meetings. These tactical endeavors are too numerous to explicate here, but with my colleagues from Göttingen, Berlin, and Härnösand I aim to tarry with American Studies' critical 'turn' toward the transnational. I am specifically interested in using this forum to begin raising a set of questions that examine the historicity of the 'transnational perspective', particularly as it is taken up as a category for critique. I use the title 'Towards a Genealogy of Transnational Perspective' as a beginning intention for what really obliges an extensive and weighty (if not overly ambitious) project that can account for knowledge production in our current moment—that is, account for an order of knowledge that makes possible the transnational as a perspective.

The 'turn' to the transnational in American Studies underscores a preoccupation with global and globalizing arrangements, the US's role (whether constitutive or not) within these arrangements, and how American Studies should therefore produce knowledge under these conditions. This was made evident in Shelley Fisher Fishkin's 2004 Presidential Address, 'Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies', wherein she called Americanists to make central the transnational as an analytic of culture. More importantly, though, Fishkin begins the address by engaging in an apologetics on behalf of American Studies as a still-yet-important field of knowledge, claiming principally that its aims are not to export 'an arrogant, pro-American nationalism' (20). Against this nationalist impulse, Fishkin cites a perspective that looks 'beyond the nation's borders', that actually interrogates 'borders both within and out-

side the nation' (20). For Fishkin, the instrumentalization of this perspective makes possible a critical and epistemological break from 'American foreign policy', which 'is marked by nationalism, arrogance, and Manichean oversimplification' (20). This formulation posits the transnational as the antipode to US state power, a power which seemingly exercises force more often than not through nationalist modalities and for national interests. By proposing or making central the transnational as an oppositional point of view, we in American Studies, as Fishkin's argument goes, can resist repeating the 'arrogance' of the US's exceptionalist vision of itself in the world.

Fishkin's thoughts follow generally from works in American Studies that have invoked the transnational perspective as an oppositional tactic to American exceptionalism. These works are too numerous to cite here, but we might recall at least two essays: the first by Donald Pease, 'C.L.R. James, *Moby-Dick*, and the Emergence of Transnational American Studies', and 'America and Its Studies' by Djelal Kadir. These essays are memorable for their critical and imaginative interventions. More importantly, though, they now seem instrumental in inaugurating the emerging fields of transnational and international American studies. For Pease, C.L.R. James's reading of *Moby-Dick* through the 'perspective' of the mariners, renegades, and castaways instantiates a reimagining of American Studies as 'a postnational space', a field 'that engendered multiple and collective identifications and organizational loyalties' (Pease, 2000: 119). These transnational 'associations', through the 'shared condition of postnational migrancy', as Pease wants to argue, resisted the state's hermeneutic tendency to read 'cultural identity' through a national frame (118–19). In concluding his essay on the emergence of Transnational Studies, Kadir, echoing Pease and in some ways prefiguring Fishkin, argues that 'our perspective must be translocal and relational, rather than fixed or naturalized. Our discursive locus must be supple, mobile, transnational' (Kadir, 2003: 22). By citing these essays (though all too briefly), I want to note that the call for the transnational emerges for these critics as a response to 'America's official, nationalist mythology', as Kadir states it (22). In other words, like Fishkin, both Pease and Kadir direct their critique of American power toward its nationalist articulation of power, and they further posit the transnational as the critical and antipodal response to the national 'myth'.

Fishkin, Pease, and Kadir seem to accept a priori that the state's hermeneutic for reading and engaging with culture functions through a national lens and that the 'transnational perspective' and the transgressing of national boundaries (however these are imagined) can exceed the state's hermeneutic. I want to recognize the potential belatedness of this critique, however. In other words, if the transnational perspective in American Studies enacts a 'looking beyond the nation's borders', attempts to study or interrogate how the borders 'in and out of the US' flex with transnational flows (populations, commodities, capital), it behooves us to ask whether or not this perspective is always-already isomorphic with American power. With my other colleagues on this forum, I've been trying to ask what is at stake in the 'turn' to the transnational, particularly as the transnational constitutes a 'perspective'. What is this perspective? What order of knowledge or intelligence can perceive transnationally? How do we differentiate our work in American Studies with the modalities of thought and knowledge



production found in the fields of policy, economy, finance, and state strategy which also want to perceive globally and transnationally?

As a possible line of inquiry towards a genealogy of the present discourse on transnational perspective—and to complicate American Studies' relationship to knowledge production within transnational arrangements—I want to draw attention to the U.S. military's new Counterinsurgency Doctrine. I do this not because I think American Studies is complicit with the U.S.'s monopoly on violence but because American Studies has need to further interrogate how it inaugurates particular new field formations in relationship to this violence. If we read the new doctrine, the emerging model for the military is not necessarily coded in nationalist victories carried out by overwhelming conventional military strength. Success is being redefined in terms of a larger transnational context, whereby the U.S. maintains an interest in integrating populations with liberal markets. Or, as the document states, 'This is a time when "money is ammunition"' (*Counterinsurgency*, 2006: Ch. 1, 27). In this context, the US military's newly understood role is to secure this order of integration through various applications of force—taking into account the 'political, economic, military, paramilitary, psychological, and civic' dimensions of this force (Ch. 1, 1).

While the counterinsurgency doctrine doesn't mention military analyst and strategist Thomas Barnett, author of *The Pentagon's New Map* and a similarly themed work, *Blueprint for Action*, the new doctrine seems to carry his imprint. For Barnett, who according to one article in *The Washington Post* (Tyson, 2005) is being acclaimed as an important strategic military mind in the age of globalization, the priority of the US should be to support the integration of populations into the global network (Barnett, 2004: 2–8). Like the counterinsurgency doctrine, though, Barnett understands that military force has the responsibility to eradicate 'transnational insurgencies' (*Counterinsurgency*, 2006: Ch.1, 12) which resist global integration or, in Barnett's terms, 'connectivity' (2004: 3–4). It's no surprise, then, the term 'culture', mentioned nearly ninety times in the document, becomes as much a part of the lexicon of military strategy as it does for our own sense of oppositional critical practices in Transnational American studies. The military needs—in fact, sees as a priority—an intelligence that is capable of reading culture and the spaces where cultures intersect, not only with each other but with a political economy that makes possible the transnational configurations of commerce and global flow. As chapters one and three of the doctrine seem to suggest, 'culture' becomes for the military—as it has already for the World Bank, UNESCO, among other organizations—a category for indexing a population's threat or integration potential.

I want to reiterate again that I do not think American Studies has a direct and willful complicity with US state violence; I do, however, want to admit the possibility that the recent turn to the transnational in American Studies as a mode of knowledge production and critique of the US may not fully take into consideration how American power has likewise re-orientated knowledge with twenty-first-century strategy. I've hinted at the *Counterinsurgency Doctrine* as one instance of this re-orientation. And still the question remains: what's at stake in the call for a transnational perspective? And how do we begin to account for an intelligence capable of perceiving transnationally? The US military has provided an institutional and doctrinal account

of its production and exercise. For our work in American Studies, we must further ask whether the perspective of the transnational migrant (Pease), the cosmopolitan intellectual (Kadir), the global citizen (Kenichi Ohmae—another name that complicates this further), or other subject/identity positions emergent with globalization are adequate for responding to this order of US power? If we recall, Antonio Gramsci had traced out an earlier formation of the cosmopolitan figure, one who emerged with the centralization of intellectual power under the Roman Empire and developed with the spreading influence of the Church (Gramsci, 1971: 14–23). Gramsci's account of this movement provides an apt lesson on questions regarding intelligence and knowledge coincident with particular arrangements of power. In the field of American Studies, I think we need to ask important and genealogical questions (as I've only begun to do here) that address how the 'perspective' that we've invoked for critical work may, in fact, be historically attendant with the intensification of globalization, with transnational configurations, and with the production of knowledge. Rather than beginning with perspective as a category upon which knowledge is based, a genealogy of a 'transnational perspective' must try to document its emergence, trace out its effects, and examine the conditions that make possible such a perspective.

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## TRANSNATIONALISM: THE AMERICAN CHALLENGE

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Much of what distinguishes the so-called 'transnational turn' in American Studies is encapsulated in Janice Radway's influential suggestion to re-think and maybe even abandon the name of our discipline so as to make it less dependent on nation-centered perspectives. To the extent that the label *American Studies* continues to identify the word *America* exclusively with the United States at the expense of all other Americas north and south of that country, this is a legitimate proposal. One would think, therefore, that greater accuracy could do the trick, such as changing the name of the discipline to *US Studies*. But chances are that Latin Americanists will not be satisfied with this far too simple solution. Neither is Radway. Correctly she notes 'the apparent lack of self-consciousness' with which we use the term *America* to denote the United States (Radway, 1998: 7). My claim in this paper is that transnationalizing American Studies in the sense proposed by Radway and others will not necessarily advance our understanding of this 'lack of self-consciousness'. I sympathize with Radway's uneasiness about the imperialist implications of this unthinking semantic habit. I sympathize, too, with her political project of turning parochialism into self-awareness. But I believe that if we want to understand the peculiar, indeed unique, status of the word *America* among national names in the world today, we need more than merely a desire to overcome national perspectives or to supplant them with supposedly more advanced models of trans- or even post-national hybridity. This is not because transnational approaches are somehow 'wrong', but, as I will argue, because in their current form and institutionalization they trigger critical practices unable to answer—and sometimes even to ask—the relevant questions. In other words: While there may be little wrong with what transnational approaches are saying, a lot may be wrong—or at least questionable—with what they are doing.

Radway, for instance, writes that to transnationalize American Studies means 'to show that American nationalism is neither autonomously defined [...] nor [...] internally homogeneous. Rather, it is relationally defined and historically and situationally variable' (Radway, 1998: 18). There is little that can be said against this statement. In fact, this is a supremely *unproblematic* statement in the sense that hardly anyone currently working in the field will disagree with it. In other words, this statement provides no problem: it contains no program of research, no question that points beyond its own self-verification. Radway's statement provides no question, I say, because it presents itself as an *answer* already—and, what is more, as an answer that claims to



supply radical and dangerous knowledge. This easy iconoclasm leads to academic practices that frequently belie their own best intentions of critical understanding.

In the foregoing paper in this forum, Jeffrey Hole questions Donald Pease's and Djelal Kadir's portrayal of the transnational as an antipode to US state power. I would like to take up this idea and relate it to the issues of territorial and semantic coherence in the construction of America. As we all know, nations and national borders are constructs: they establish, in Benedict Anderson's phrase, imagined communities. Few recent scholars of nationalism would debate this. And yet, transnational scholarship often finds it hard to imagine ways of studying the nation that are not indebted to organic conceptions of identity. What is lost here is the question of what it means to say that something is imagined or constructed. Obviously, to say that a border is a construct is not to say that a border is a fantasy. Borders exist; they produce powerful effects of reality. So do nations. Imagined communities are no less real for being imagined. Little is gained, therefore, by simply 'uncovering' or 'demystifying' American nationhood or American exceptionalism as imaginary constructs. Certainly it is important that we recognize American exceptionalism as an ideology—and not as a fact of nature—but the next question inevitably is how these effects of unity, how these fictions of territorial coherence, specifically emerged from competing ideologies of American identity, and from often violent contestations at the level of the sub-national and the regional.

These issues require more than a well-intentioned desire to get rid of US exceptionalism and US imperialism; they require that we analyze the history, the conditions, and the specifics of US exceptionalism and US imperialism in their *differences* from non-US histories and non-US manifestations of exceptionalism and imperialism. These, I maintain, continue to be the genuine concerns and responsibilities of the discipline called American Studies—and this research program is not to be confused with a narrowly national or even nationalistic agenda. On the contrary, if taken seriously, it will force us to reassess our own motives in searching for a *trans*-national perspective. In particular, it will make us question some of our most routine ideological convictions, such as the widespread belief that to speak transnationally, or to evoke the transnational, automatically means to speak in a counter-hegemonic way. Similar to my colleagues on this forum, I consider it crucial that we doubt such knee-jerk assumptions, rejecting the myth of transnational living conditions as by definition more dissident—or even more real, in the sense of being less constructed—than national ones.

If my argument is valid, we should affirm (and have much to lose if we don't) that American Studies as an academic discipline is concerned with the specific histories, representations, meanings, and aesthetic constructions that have accumulated in and around this name: *America*. For the historical usages of this name are anything but self-evident, and the process by which *America* was appropriated by a self-aware culture within the territorial borders of the United States has been without historical model and is bound to remain without replica (a point that should serve to frustrate all missionary hopes of exporting US democracy abroad).

Thus, concerning the name *America*, I find it important that we ask *how* this term came to denote, in the ordinary speech of most people in the world today, the United

States of America. This was not achieved by a simple imperialist imposition, as much recent scholarship seems to imply. Neither is the word *America*, in our modern understanding of it, a direct heir to Renaissance conceptions of America as a 'New World'. True, the idea of American exceptionalism in its broadest, hemispheric sense is a European invention. But the seventeenth-century roots of modern American exceptionalism have been routinely exaggerated in the history of our field, chiefly by those who have been trying to trace a consistent American 'mind'—be it puritanical, capitalistic, ethnophobic or imperialistic—from the days of the early settlers to the Constitutional Convention and beyond.

At the risk of simplifying matters that I have tried to outline elsewhere in a more detailed manner, I hold that the modern notion of *America*, in the sense that we nowadays attribute to the term when we rally against American exceptionalism, surfaced in the late 1780s, when a new *trans-colonial* elite laid the ideological and institutional foundations for the first large-scale constitutional nation-state in the world (Kelleter, 2002). This nation-state became successfully aware of itself as *American* when it was forced to react to the most momentous *inter-national* event of the late eighteenth century, the French Revolution. The concept of American nationhood that emerged from this reaction was unique in the sense that it engendered practices of national invention, modes of national contestation, and ideologies of national distinctiveness that were markedly different from contemporary European conceptions of nationhood and national identity. To give just one example, again in an abridged manner: After it was no longer possible to legitimize US nationhood by taking recourse to established European models of cultural identity—that is, after the British Whig model had been discredited in the course of the Revolution (in the 1770s), after the classical Republican model had been thoroughly re-negotiated and effectively dismantled by the Federalists (in the 1780s), and after the French model of modern revolutionary universalism had re-introduced the fear of God in American politicians and intellectuals (in the 1790s), in other words, after various competing European conceptions of cultural identity had failed in North America, a victorious Jeffersonian party systematically *Americanized* the United States (mostly by expanding on strategies of self-invention already devised by the Federalists in the late 1780s). Central among these strategies was the public doctrine that the United States was no longer subject to the laws of European power politics, and that US politics therefore had to renounce European-style colonialism and imperialism.

This is explicitly not to say that the early US was a peaceful or non-imperial nation. Rather, it is to say that the ideological rejection of various European concepts of international strife culminated in entirely new, nationally distinct practices of political and cultural power—practices that in the long run have proven more successful, indeed more powerful, than most pre-American forms of dominance. What are these practices? Among other things, it bears mentioning that the cultural semantics of *America* confronts us with a phenomenon not easily accommodated within the clear-cut, often sentimental, matrix of contemporary identity studies: The cultural semantics of *America* confronts us with the phenomenon of a post-colonial imperialism—and even more remarkably: an anti-imperialist imperialism. My argument here is that most forms of US self-identification in the late eighteenth century, particular-



ly in the wake of the French Revolution, were driven not by *classically* imperial aspirations but by a double desire for national distinction and national isolation. Under these circumstances, union really meant and necessitated extension (as in Madison's unheard-of concept of an 'extended republic'). US post-revolutionary politics essentially aimed to escape from the violent entanglements of European national rivalries by conducting foreign policy as if it were conducting domestic policy. What this implied was spelled out in plain language by Joel Barlow in 1801, the first year of Jefferson's presidency: 'War [...] after the example of the states of Europe [...] may be avoided as long as we are out of the neighbourhood of independent nations' (Hyne-man and Lutz, 1983: 1122, 1125). This, of course, referred to the territories bordering on the U.S in the West, North and South. What Barlow meant is that a truly post-European form of national existence is possible only if the United States acts as the unrivaled power on the American *continent*.

After the French Revolution and throughout the nineteenth century, this thought became a powerful topos in the cultural self-imagination of the American republic. I think that this is not a trivial development, and I think it is worth our notice and worth studying: The post-colonial desire to escape from European-style imperialism inevitably ended up imaging the United States as a hemispheric nation. As soon as independence was sought no longer just from England or Great Britain, but from Europe, the United States was bound to declare itself the single representative of 'America'. More than just implicit in this gesture is the linguistic omission of Canada, Mexico, and all of South America. And to the extent that US exceptionalism, including its vision of non-imperial imperialism, has become a global reality today, this omission still determines our languages worldwide and our mental maps of the globe.

In sum, I propose that as Americanists we re-engage with the unpopular notion of American exceptionalism, and thus with those aspects of US culture that are indeed unique to it. The question, of course, is what we mean by *exceptional* and *unique*. Certainly there can be no return to essentialist notions of national identity—and no-one is seriously suggesting this. But it may be worth mentioning that in the case of American Studies, well-intentioned pleas for trans- or even post-national approaches are often based on a curious logic of wishful thinking. Disgusted with America's economic and military hegemony, today's anti-exceptionalists frequently refuse to face the very thing they object to. As if hoping to theorize the United States out of existence, they *dissolve* America's truly exceptional global position within any transnational constellation that comes in handy. In this manner, theory promises to do what is impossible to achieve in practice: to rid the world of US power. It seems to me that a sensible way of dealing with this dilemma is to recognize the hybridity of national histories as a self-evident starting point, and not as the subversive result, of our inquiries. Once we take the insights of transnational studies and postcolonial theory for granted, instead of fetishizing them, we can base our inquiries of globalization, cultural intermixtures, and 'entangled histories' (Lepeniez, 2003) and also our studies of America and American aesthetics on more realistic and less sentimental conceptions of national and regional distinctions. The United States of America appears to be a promising object of research in this regard, not only because US history invites a transnational and postcolonial reading, but also because the ideological orthodox-

ies of transnational studies and postcolonial theory are put to the test by the provocative example of this strangely post-European yet exceptionally powerful nation and culture.

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## ALL ROADS LEAD TO THE AMERICAN CITY

Edited by Peter Swirski, Hong Kong UP, 2007, ISBN: 9789622098633, 162pp

**Selina S.L. Lai**

University of Hong Kong

Peter Swirski, author of the bestselling *From Lowbrow to Nobrow* (McGill-Queens UP, 2005), has another excellent book on offer. Where *From Lowbrow to Nobrow* explored literary taste cultures and categorizations of art, *All Roads Lead to the American City* (2007) is a collection of interdisciplinary and intercultural essays on the urban culture in America. Investigating literature, films, cultural myths, history and social geography of the United States, as Swirski writes in the introduction, the interlinked essays put

some of the greatest as well as the 'baddest' American metropolises under the microscope. Examining the role of the roads that crisscross and connect the cities, it looks for ways to understand the people who live, commute, work, create, govern, commit crime and conduct business in them. (2)

The central chapter of the book, written by the editor himself, 'A Is for American, B Is for Bad, C Is for City: Ed McBain and the ABC of Police and Urban Procedurals', focuses on Ed McBain, the late great American mystery writer, and his connection to New York City. Swirski brings his readers to the heart of the city from the hardboiled era where private-eyes meandered the mean streets, to the present-day scenes of organized crime and organized police work. McBain has drawn praise from both the mass audience and the literary mavens for the world's longest running crime-fiction soap, the 87<sup>th</sup>-Precinct police procedurals, which provide perhaps the best urban perspective of the American metropolis. The most tantalizing illustration of the city as both intriguing and menacing, the editor enthuses, is McBain's personification of the city as femme fatale: 'Ritzy and glitzy one moment, cheap and downright sleazy the next, she still seduces all white belonging to none. Only now she's no longer a player making her moves in the city. Now she *is* the city' (57).

On either side of the central chapter are essays by Priscilla Roberts, Gina Marchetti, Earle Waugh, and William Kyle. The first three authors share the common theme of the American dilemma in search of identity on the individual, communal, and national level. In chapter one, Priscilla Roberts asserts that the agglomeration of city life gave rise to a 'perennial ambivalence' of Americans towards the city. Echoing McBain's tableaux of the city as femme fatale, Roberts brings into discussion the conflicting

emotions toward 'the attractive but dangerous opportunities urban life potentially offered' in North American history (8). The closing of the frontier worried many as 'the end of the sturdy American spirit of self-reliance, individualism, and physical hardihood' (12). Entering the twentieth century, taylorization and proletarianism of workers began to undermine individuality and personality. As represented in the road movie, it is not the urban life that is celebrated, but what Roberts observes as the nostalgic 'lone ranger facing the wilderness and his own weaknesses' (25).

In line with Roberts, Earle Waugh notes the gradual departure of the American spirit from the religious notion of betterment as the nation moves itself toward the capitalistic world of machinery: 'Gone, now, is Kemble Knight's rugged road to Boston, gone is the City of God, gone the New Jerusalem, gone the grandeur of vision' (94). Rather than by moral and physical betterment of the community, the new roads are increasingly defined by official 'state' need, and by 'those who control the cultural priorities of public space' (84). Exploring the work of American writers from the colonial time to the present, Waugh remarks that while symbolizing the American triumph over the unruly continent, the road creates tension and ambiguity concerning the variegated American identities. Between 'the wasteland of the human soul and the heart of the American city', Waugh sees 'madness' and 'conspiracy', and 'the loss of a unifying destiny' in the literary representation of city streets (95). The decaying American city, writes the writer in his denouement, 'is enshrined in literature precisely as that city becomes the image of the global mega-city—and that without the refined constraint of betterment' (95).

In chapter two, Gina Marchetti states that the ambivalence of the American identity comes from encounters with the 'other'. Whereas Roberts and Waugh address the problem of race especially within the African American community, Marchetti depicts the struggles of Asian Americans after the Second World War through Tajima-Peñas's 1997 movie *My America... or Honk if you Love*. Instead of freedom and status symbol, the road and the city for the ethnic minority mirror the perennial search for identity and civil rights. Although there is an increasing domination of the immigrant working class in urban politics, the modern society is fraught with the prevalence of stagnating racial inequality. The question is, quotes Marchetti from Tajima-Peñas, 'not how people become real Americans, but how America has become its people' (33). Studying the work as the road movie as well as the city film, Marchetti believes that the road does not end in the city. Rather, the road is (to use the title of Waugh's chapter) 'just a passin' through'.

The concluding chapter, William Kyle's '*Urbs Americana—A Work in Progress*' is an enthusiastic guide into the socio-graphical restructuring of the US from pre-1830 to the present day. Continuing Roberts's socio-cultural account of the road and Waugh's essay of 'space' and 'place' in the modern city, Kyle bases his discussion on John Borchert's five epochs of the evolution of US transportation, William Kaszynski's four phases of the history of American roads, and John Adam's four eras of intra-urban structural evolution. The chapter solidifies topics addressed in the previous chapters: the interplay between (im)migration and settlement, continental expansion and (sub)urbanization, urban ethnic communities and employment patterns, as well



as change of social structure under the continuous alteration of the geographical limits and human resources throughout the nation's history.

Cities, as Swirski writes in the introduction, 'for the most part, *are America*':

Their values and problems define not only what the United States is, but what other nations perceive the United States to be. They are the tone-setters and pace-setters for the country and the continent, if not the entire world. Roads, on the other hand, and their impact on the American culture and lifestyle, form not only the integral part of the historical rise-and-shine of the modern city but a physical release from and a cultural antidote to its pressure-cooker stresses' (1).

Whereas traditional academic discussion focuses on either the road (from Hilaire Belloc's *The Road* to Michael Sweeney and Janet Davidson's *On the Move: Transportation and the American Story*) or the city (from Lewis Mumford's *The Culture of Cities* to Howard P. Chudacoff and Judith E. Smith's *The Evolution of American Urban Society*), *All Roads Lead to the American City* combines these thematic threads, which has yielded a highly original book. Drawing on an eclectic array of sources (popular fiction, movies, poetry, popular songs, and case studies), this interdisciplinary and intercultural study runs through the vein of the American city with a socio-cultural and geo-historical sweep. Evocative, observant and edifying, *All Roads* is a rewarding read for both academics and the public at large.

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## HEARTS OF DARKNESS?

**Paweł Jędrzejko**

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Hearts of Darkness: Melville and Conrad in the Space of World Culture 4–7 August 2007 Szczecin, Poland The Melville Society's Sixth International Conference.

Co-hosted by The Melville Society, The Joseph Conrad Society (UK, US), The Tall Ships' Race Szczecin 2007. Institutional Organizers: The Institute of British and American Culture and Literature of the University of Silesia in Katowice—Poland, Centre College—Danville, Kentucky, USA, The City of Szczecin—Organizers' Office of the Tall Ships' Races Szczecin 2007.

### THE IDEA OF THE CONFERENCE

Both Herman Melville and Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski assumed that the existential human condition necessitates a 'universal squeeze of the hand.' Beautifully conceptualized by Melville, it is this idea of friendship as the sine-qua-non of existence that provided the obvious connection between the Organizers of the Conference and the Organizing Office of the Tall Ships' Races Szczecin 2007. All sailors know that at sea, all men and women are part of a commonwealth. At sea, friendship beyond prejudice is a sine qua non of survival: the liquid reality of the human condition, tangible to those sailing the oceans, unconditionally affects everyone.

In June of 2005 the Organizers of both events met in Szczecin and decided to cooperate. The Conference, concentrating on the oeuvre of the two greatest mariners in literary history, provided an intellectual backdrop for the joyful meeting of international sailors and fans of maritime culture. The result: a gam of rare scale and a memorable cultural event. The complementary character of the theory and practice of friendship proved unquestionable: with its 80 papers and presentations, the Conference, attended by almost 150 persons representing nearly 20 countries made a serious contribution to the understanding multilayered, complex, and deeply humane message of Melville's and Conrad's.

Organizing the Conference in the year 2007—the Conrad Year—the Co-Chairs of the Conference, Paweł Jędrzejko and Milton M. Reigelman, strove to create an opportunity for Melville and Conrad scholarship to go beyond the boundaries of national literature and to enter a serious humanist debate on the cultural heritage



of both excellent writers, whose contribution to the world culture has rarely been considered jointly. Such a unique meeting of international literary scholars focusing on common themes will help to promote individual and institutional cooperation among Conradian and Melvillean scholars world-wide.

The publication of two books inspired by the debate in the academic year 2008/2009—a tangible results of such a gam—will certainly be one of many of its desired outcomes. The exchange of e-mail addresses and telephone numbers, which inevitably ensued, will result in individual growth and, at a more general level, in the international promotion of Conradian and Melvillean Studies. It is hoped that the organization of the event in Poland will prove to have exerted an energizing effect upon Polish, German, and Scandinavian Melville and Conrad scholarship, but also de-center the traditionally 'national' discourses. To non-Americans, Melville often seems to be monopolized by American scholarship; Conrad, traditionally, is claimed by the British and the Poles. Conference Participants and those following the conference in the Polish media certainly had an unrepeatable opportunity of gaining a greater understanding of connectedness of Melville and Conrad and of the interconnectivity of all peoples.

The conference program and detailed information concerning the event are available at the conference website: [www.melville.us.edu.pl](http://www.melville.us.edu.pl).

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## MIGRATION MATTERS: IMMIGRATION, HOMELANDS, AND BORDER CROSSINGS IN EUROPE AND THE AMERICAS

6<sup>th</sup> MESEA Conference, June 25–28, 2008,  
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Call for Papers

The Society for Multi-Ethnic Studies: Europe and the Americas



Largely driven by economics, migration today is a global and globalizing phenomenon that renders national borders obsolete and calls into question the viability of nation states and national identities. Yet precisely because it undermines national structures, migration also has contributed to the reinvention of the historically highly problematic concept of 'homelands' and the reconstruction of increasingly impenetrable borders. It is, moreover, in local situations and contexts that the impact of global migration is experienced, debated, and contested most directly and urgently. This conference, then, aims to focus on the ways in which migration matters locally as well as transnationally and globally, in the realms of politics and culture, history and sociology, economics and law, language, literature and the arts in Europe and the Americas. The following list of topics is meant to be suggestive rather than restrictive:

- › Migration and the reinvention of (national and transnational, real and imaginary) 'homelands' and/or the reconstruction of (external and internal, national, ethnic and racial, cultural and mental, political and economic) borders.
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- › Cultural production (literature, film, visual art, performance, music, blog-culture, web-art) by or about migrants.
- › Migration and the reinvention of religious identities.
- › Emerging identities/identity fashioning; ethnic refashioning: conflict and/or reconciliation.
- › Historical case studies of migrancy and diaspora; evolving diaspora cultures.
- › Migration and gender.
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- › Forced migration and historical/contemporary slavery or bonded labor Migration and linguistic diversity Immigration and educational reformation(s)

Please submit three hard copies of a 300-word abstract (including a maximum of five keywords) or full panel proposals (including a description of the panel, chair, respondents, and individual abstracts) as well as an electronic copy to MESEA's Program Director, Yiorgos Kalogeras, Department of English, Aristotle University, 54124 Thessaloniki, Greece by November 15, 2007: (kalogera@enl.auth.gr). Inter/transnational and inter/transdisciplinary proposals and panels will be given preference.

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- Cited publications are referred to in the text as follows: ' ... ' (Surname, date: page reference).
- Use double quotation marks for quotations within quotations.
- Longer quotations exceeding three lines should be indented and single-spaced.
- Use single quotation marks around words used in a special sense.
- All punctuation marks should appear outside the quotation marks.
- As to abbreviations, use neither periods nor spaces after and between letters, except for initials of personal names.
- Use em dashes without spaces before and after.
- Footnotes should be numbered automatically 1, 2, 3, ...
- Please enlist your references in alphabetical order of authors' names (type: Works Cited) at the end of your document and format them as follows:

## Book

Surname, Initials and Surname, Initials (year) Title: Subtitle. Place of publication: Publisher.

## Article in book

Surname, Initials (year) 'Title of Chapter', in Initials Surname and Initials Surname (eds) Title of Book. Place: Publisher, page number(s) of contribution.

## Article in journal

Surname, Initials (year) 'Title of Article', Title of Journal volume number (issue number): page number(s) of contribution.

## Website

Surname, Initials (year) Title. Place of publication, Publisher (if ascertainable). <http://xxx.xxxx.xx/xxx>

## Article in e-journal

Surname, Initials (year) 'Title of Article', Name of Journal volume number (issue number) <http://xxx.xxxx.xx/xxx>

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