

Trans/American, Trans/Oceanic,
Trans/lation

Trans/American, Trans/Oceanic,
Trans/lation:
Issues in International American Studies

Edited by

Susana Araújo, João Ferreira Duarte
and Marta Pacheco Pinto

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

Trans/American, Trans/Oceanic, Trans/lation: Issues in International American Studies,
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INTRODUCTION

THE HAUNTS AND HOMES OF INTERNATIONAL AMERICAN STUDIES

SUSANA ARAÚJO

I

The selection of articles gathered here is the real face of International American Studies Association as it reached Lisbon for its third world congress in 2007. As the title indicates, *Trans/American, Trans/Oceanic, Trans/lation: Issues in International American Studies* points towards IASA's aims to promote cross-disciplinary study and teaching of the Americas regionally, hemispherically, nationally and transnationally. But it also reflects, less strategically but more forcefully, the heterogeneous and often unexpected themes, topics and motifs addressed in this forum.

These articles are revealing for the way they give face and expression to the evolving trends and preoccupations in the field. In various ways and from different disciplinary angles, the essays explore key questions in International American Studies: what have been the symbolic and material relations between the "Americas" and the "U.S.A.," and between "America" and the "World"? What are the meanings and workings of these four entities when examined across nations, cultures and languages? In what ways does American experience contribute to the global (re-)production of social, cultural and economic practices?

The first chapter, "Displacing American Studies: Updates and Debates," looks at the current situation of institutionalized American Studies as regards its different disciplinary, political and geocultural locations in the United States as well as in Europe, the Middle East and Japan.

The second chapter, "Representations of Nativeness and Métissage," focuses on the representation of Métis and Native Americans as they live through the legacy of oppression and creolization brought about by the colonial encounter.

Chapter three, “Transoceanic Exchanges and Cultural Translations,” deals with the transoceanic migration of practices, discourses and ideologies, and thereby with their translation by foreign cultural agendas which they help to reshape.

The fourth chapter, “Performing the Americas and Challenging Americas’ Performance,” takes the previous chapter one step forward by using the concept of “performance” to display the shifting positions of “America” and the ways these can be actively challenged by cultural and political practices worldwide.

The sum of these articles, celebratory as it may be about the potentials of these new approaches to American Studies, also raises crucial questions about the future of international approaches, highlighting problems and cruxes faced by this changing field. This is what the second part of this preamble will challenge you to do.

II

In his presidential address to IASA’s first world congress, Djelal Kadir poignantly suggested that the creation of the Association could be seen as a response to the changes brought about by the Bush doctrine, and in particular to the invasion of Iraq. In this sense the organization should be understood, both historically and strategically, as an endeavor capable of facing those wider changes head on, while resisting being reabsorbed into “a national and nationalist project of U.S. Americanism” (2004, 135). This was, and continues to be, an important and forceful proposition. However, to understand both the promises and challenges of such a venture as we enter a post-Bush era and as IASA prepares to have its first congress in Asia,¹ I invite you to explore ongoing points of political resistance within the international approaches to American Studies.

Amy Kaplan’s response to Kadir’s presidential address, “The Tenacious Grasp of American Exceptionalism,” acknowledged significant traps in this transnational project such as the danger of reifying the international sphere, the problem of restoring white male canons, and the trap of paradoxically sustaining an exceptionalism paradigm (2004, 153-160). The present introduction is informed by both Kadir’s address and Kaplan’s response but it also attempts to critically engage with their ideas in order to take forward this important debate. By placing itself within the international field and consciously embarking on the project represented by

¹ This introduction was written before the 4th IASA World Congress which will take place at the Beijing Foreign Studies University, in September 18-20, 2009.

IASA, this introductory essay warns scholars worldwide about other visible tendencies of transnational and hemispheric approaches which can lead to intrinsically complacent and self-righteous positions. Yet this preamble also concludes by suggesting new ways in which self-criticism can play an important role in adding critical rigor and social validity to the international trends we are now forging and being forged by.

Let me start with Walt Whitman. Although the good gray bard has been a figure intricately tied up to images of U.S.A. democracy and is perhaps the most canonic figure associated with “American” nationhood, Whitman scholars have been attentive for some time to the poet’s international reception and the ways he has been translated “abroad.” Far from homogenous, that process of internationalization has encountered disparate responses. Such translations and appropriations can be found in countries as varied as China, India and Russia. In Europe, for instance, we find readings which implicate Whitman in opposite ideological positions. The celebratory international expansiveness of Whitman’s “Salut au Monde,” has been tied up, on the one hand, to 19th-century revolutionary movements and, on the other, to the growing expansion of U.S.A. economic and cultural empire. Indeed, whereas Walter Grünzweig’s examination of Whitman’s influence on the German expressionist poet Armin T. Wegner convincingly read the poem in the specific context of the European revolutions of 1848, Irene Ramalho Santos has been not less persuasive in reading the poet in light of Fernando Pessoa’s work and therefore of a more problematic colonial and imperial ideology, which connects both poets with mystical notions of Atlanticism (Grünzweig 1996, 238-250; Santos 2003).

This disparity of perspectives is not in itself negative nor unproductive, nor are they, for that matter, exclusive of international approaches. They highlight, however, issues and challenges that transnational fora such as IASA can face when dealing with ideological transnationalisms. Let me pursue with Whitman and the way he has been translated into contemporary contexts. Ed Folsom, one of most recognized experts on Whitman’s work, has incisively demonstrated how this poet has been recently appropriated for political agendas, namely by supporters of the Bush administration (2005, 112-113).² Interestingly, Whitman also inspired several European writers working on the post-9/11 context and his poems were used as epigraphs to a number of contemporary novels, as I will show next. It will be, thus, aiming for an international perspective but still within the limits

² A response to this appropriation can be found in Michael Cunningham’s perceptive re-reading of Whitman in his 2005 novel, *Specimen Days*.

of a European focus on a canonical white male U.S.A. author that this introduction will depart. The acknowledged limits of this focus presupposes that the following readings should be seen as symptomatic—rather than as exemplary—of the challenges we face as we plunge into transnational waters.

Elsewhere I have written at length about the novel *Windows on the World*, by the French writer Frédéric Beigbeder (2007, 27-47). I will refer to this text again here to comment on the notion of transnationalism implicit in the evocation of Whitman conveyed by the novel. Beigbeder's novel presents itself as a French-American tale about 9/11. It is structured around two parallel (in fact, twin) narratives: one of the set in the New York (at World Trade Center the day of the attacks), the other set in Paris (at the top of the Montparnasse tower, where the narrator is writing from). This is a semi-autobiographical portrait of Euro-American anxieties, where the narrator makes use of provocations to challenge his angst about the new geopolitical landscape. As a sign of his appreciation for U.S.A. culture, Beigbeder presents us, in the beginning of the novel, with a list of U.S.A. writers and directors he admires. Among these is Whitman—whose verses are also used as an epigraph to the novel. In the middle of his narrative, Beigbeder includes the last stanzas from Whitman's "Salut au Monde!":

You vapors, I think I have risen with you, moved away to distant
continents, and fallen down there, for reasons,
I think I have blown with you you winds;
You waters I have finger'd every shore with you,
I have run through what any river or strait of the globe has run through,
I have taken my stand on the bases of peninsulas and on the high
embedded rocks, to cry thence: Salut au monde!

What cities the light or warmth penetrates I penetrate those cities myself,
All islands to which birds wing their way, I wing my way myself.

Toward you all, in America's name,
I raise high the perpendicular hand, I make the signal,
To remain after me in sight forever,
For all the haunts and homes of men. (2005 [2004], 16)

Claiming to evoke here "not the thrill of power but of pride" (2005 [2004], 16), Beigbeder responds thus to the "bigoted Anti-Americanism" (2005 [2004], 16-17) which he feels is spreading around him. He leaves us nevertheless with a very uncomfortable image. What are we to make of the central couplet: "What cities the light or warmth penetrates I penetrate

those cities myself/All islands to which birds wing their way, I wing my way myself.” Mishap or provocation? It is possible to read these verses without juxtaposing Whitman’s discourse of penetration with the invasion of Iraq—an event which as the author notes is taking place at the very moment the novel is being written?³ Beigbeder does not explain his quotation. Iraq is, via Whitman (but not only in this way), a haunting presence in the novel—one which the narrative fugitively addresses but never engages with.

This haunting can perhaps be better answered comparatively, in light of another novel written around the same time, which also contains an epigraph of Whitman. Widely acclaimed in both the U.S.A. (where it received a PEN/Faulkner award) and in Europe (in the U.K. it was long-listed for the Man-booker prize), Joseph O’Neill’s book, *Netherland*, has been hailed an international success. Recently it also received a great amount of attention in international media because President Barack Obama announced he was reading the book, which he praised as “an excellent novel.”⁴ Centered on the pervasiveness of old mythographies of success in contemporary U.S.A., *Netherland* is, in fact, a fitting read for a president who, for better or for worse, has engaged directly with traditional rhetoric associated with that national ethos and was, himself, the author of a book entitled *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*.

O’Neill is of half-Irish and half-Turkish ancestry, grew up in the Netherlands, studied in Cambridge, U.K., and now lives in the U.S.A.—this cosmopolitan background suggests an interesting transatlantic perspective, though far from an unproblematic one. Like many other post-9/11 novels (by writers such as Beigbeder, McEwan, Safran Foer, McInerney, DeLillo) *Netherland* focuses on the white western middle-class family, where anxieties about normative masculinity disclose other sorts of crises. In

³ Beigbeder includes several pictures in the novel which both support and betray his narrative. One of the pictures included in the novel is a photograph taken at the UN sculpture garden, a photo of St. George slaying a dragon which had been a gift to the UN from the USSR in 1990. After describing the picture, Beigbeder notes that, in the building that faces the statue, “the members of security council are gathered to vote on a resolution about the war in Iraq” (2005 [2004], 250); the issue of the war in Iraq is, however, never verbalized or properly developed in the text. For a thorough analysis of these images and the significant textual ellipses in this text see Araújo 2007, 31-33.

⁴ The interview with Barak Obama was aired internationally by BBC World service in June 2, 2009; its transcript can be found at http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/news/2009/06/090602_obama_transcript.shtml.

O'Neill's novel anxiety is deliberately let loose, verging on depression. Psychological, political and economic depression, all come together in the pages of this novel.

Following the 9/11 attacks, the narrator, Hans van den Broek, a Dutch equity analyst decides that he and his family should leave their flat in TriBeCa, lower Manhattan, to live further uptown in the Chelsea Hotel. Exposed to the post-9/11 disquiet, his marriage slowly disintegrates. His wife, Rachel, an English woman, decides to return to London with her son, as she becomes more and more uncomfortable in New York. The announcement of the war in Iraq transforms Rachel's unease into an active repudiation for the U.S.A., which she starts seeing as an "ideological diseased country" (O'Neill 2009, 92). Hans, however, is left in a state of emotional numbness. This becomes a psychological mirror through which his own blindness about politics both past and present is viewed and acknowledged. Hans, whom a reviewer called "a latter-day 'Dutch sailor' washed up on the ragged shores of lower Manhattan" (Corrigan 2008), is unable to de-romanticize his own musings about U.S.A.'s colonial history, the same way that he is incapable of facing current political events with anything but apathy: "Did Iraq have weapons of mass destruction that posed a real threat? I had no idea; and to be truthful, and to touch on my real difficulty I had little interest. I didn't really care" (O'Neill 2009, 96-97). Hans's aestheticized disengagement or romanticized apathy, otherwise praised by reviewers, is picked upon by Zadie Smith who notes that in *Netherland* "the nineteenth-century flaneur's ennui has been transplanted to the twenty-first-century bourgeois's political apathy—and made beautiful" (2008, 55). Hans's disengagement is, however, usefully indicative of a wider social dilemma which, as I will show, can also figure in transnational American Studies.

Hans's friendship with Chuck Ramkissoon dramatizes some of this predicament. Chuck, an inescapable reference to Jay Gatsby in Fitzgerald's canonical novel, is a Trinidadian entrepreneur, involved in a small unlawful business. Chuck holds on to the promises of the American dream, simply and unselfconsciously. Cricket presents him with a green field where American promises are bound to flourish. Chuck wants to create a New York Cricket club. By building the first New York cricket stadium, he believes he can lay down new ethical ground: "Cricket is instructive, Hans. It has a moral angle. I really believe this. Everybody who plays the game benefits from it. So why not the Americans?" (2009, 204). Paradoxically, the game seems to hold for Chuck the promises of a successful multicultural society: "I say, we want to have something in common with the Hindus and Muslims? Chuck Ramkissoon is going to make

it happen. With the New York Cricket Club, we could start a whole new chapter in U.S. history. Why Not?" (2009, 204). The energy of this other "green light" infuses Hans's empty soul. Indeed, Chuck's tales, his Trinidadian narratives, interrupt momentarily and refreshingly Hans's transatlantic domestic drama and Euro-American narration (populated by conflicting references to European expansion and colonial history of the U.S.A.), if only to be taken over and silenced again towards the end of the novel. Chuck's social discourse on cricket may remind some of us of C. L. R. James's theories on the re-appropriation of the Victorian sport. In the words of Kenan Malik, "James saw cricket not simply as a building block of empire, but also as a vehicle for forging an anti-imperialist consciousness and a sense of national pride" (2001). Chuck, however, is not an anti-imperial activist, the same way that Gatsby is no socialist. As an emigrant in the U.S.A., Chuck places upon himself the "responsibility to play the game right" (2009, 13). He does so, feeling as noble in white, as Gatsby felt in glamorous shirts. Hence, when we find out that Chuck, like Gatsby, was actually a gangster, the irony of his narrative unfolds. Chuck's premature death—a murder possibly related to this shady activities—takes place not because he did not play the "game right" but simply because he was a small player attempting to survive in a game in crisis. Chuck's death announces that crisis. Chuck and his betting operations become a sardonic symbol of larger gamble which controls world markets at large—the financial game or "casino economy," which through so-called processes of "securitization" had since the seventies been controlling markets worldwide revealing the first signs of collapse in 2008, the year the book was published.

Hans hints at the crisis throughout the novel. As a "result of [his] work" he tends to see corporations as "vulnerable, needy creatures" (2009, 19). This apprehension is translated with immense clarity, when Hans describes the financial agreements of his separation from Rachel, compensating with technical detail the precision of one type of bond for another: "The loft would be sold and the net proceeds, comfortably over a million dollars, would be invested in government bonds, a cautious spread of stocks and, on a tip from an economist I trusted, gold" (2009, 28). The precision of such investments is only appropriate: Hans is an expert in finance, an expertise that intersects with the imperial angst which underlies the novel. This is, in fact, a motif which gains center stage in other 9/11 novels. The protagonist of Mohsin Hamid's *Reluctant Fundamentalist*, for example, is similarly a management accountant, who recognizes that his trade, his acquired values and beliefs, have turned him into "a modern-day janissary" (2008, 173).

O'Neill's narrator, however, is not capable of such self-inspection, most likely a "symptom of moral laziness" (2009, 231). Therefore, he treads and trades cautiously, exasperating his wife Rachel who finds in his lack of engagement an unacknowledged conservatism. When Hans realizes that Chuck was using him in his illegal business, the polish of identity politics that had allowed for the aggrandizement of Chuck in Hans's eyes disintegrates. Hans's disillusionment is aggravated because Chuck represented the possibility of moral bonds in a threatening and culturally fragmented world. The first encounter had opened up that fantasy when, as an umpire, Chuck deals nobly with a dispute on a cricket field which could have ended in a gun-violence. Ironically Chuck was the umpire that held Hans' empire together, "securing" the image of New York despite the growing anxieties about race and religion exacerbated since 9/11. Whitman's quotation, the epigraph to the novel, can be understood in light of such a need:

I dream'd in a dream, I saw a city invincible to
The attacks of the whole of the rest of the earth;
I dream'd that was the new City of Friends.⁵

In his epigraph, O'Neill may obligingly offer us to read this "city invincible" as a universal metropolis, a utopian global metropolis, a space uniting all cities stretching from New York to Bagdad. But the novel's path is more selective, as it follows Hans's limited sort of cosmopolitanism. The same way that Chuck's corpse is acknowledged in the media but not truly visited, felt or faced, the few visions we have of Bagdad lack authenticity: "on television dark Bagdad glittered with American bombs" (2009, 118). The only tragedy truly mourned here is that 9/11, a privileged trauma which intersects directly with Hans's private narrative. The novel depends upon several transatlantic movements: from London to New York and back again. Hans's attempts to track his family in London, via Google maps exhibit one of these movements:

[...] flying on Google's satellite function, night after night I surreptitiously traveled to England. Starting with a hybrid map of the United States, I moved the navigation box across the North Atlantic and began my fall from the stratosphere: successively, into a brown and beige and greenish Europe bounded by Wuppertal, Groningen, Leeds, Caen (the Netherlands is gallant from this altitude, its streamer of northern isles giving the impression of a land steaming seaward): that part of England between Gran-

⁵ "I Dream'd in a Dream" from *Leaves of Grass*, as cited by O'Neill.

tham and Yeovil; that part between Bedford and Brighton; and then Greater London, its north and south pieces, jigsawed by the Thames, never quite interlocking. From the central maze of mustard roads I followed the river south-west into Putney, zoomed in between the Lower and Upper Richmond Roads, and, with the image purely photographic, descended finally on Landford Road. It was always a clear and beautiful day—and wintry, if I correctly recall, with the trees pale brown and the shadows long. From my balloonist's vantage point, a loft at a few hundred metres, the scene was depthless. My son's dormer was visible, and the blue inflated pool and the red BMW; but there was no way to see more, or deeper. I was stuck. (2009, 119)

From the post-bohemian nostalgia of the Chelsea Hotel to the affluent borough of Richmond U.K., Hans's vision is flat. His difficulty to see beneath the signs of middle Europe or of white upper-middle class reality is made clear. Hans acknowledges that there is something else beneath that surface. There are other (social, political, economical) realities concealed from view below that dormer perhaps haunting the dreams of his son. These are, however, visions which he cannot face. Indeed, until the end of the novel Hans is unable to actually "see" his son, in the fear of finding in the boy's vulnerability fears that go beyond his own, demanding engagement and commitment.

Hans's inability to see deeper, more profoundly, reflects a generalized problem, a dilemma that International American Studies should acknowledge and attempt to counter. In the virtual materiality provided by both digital technology and the stock market, Hans knows himself to be a privileged player in a special type of transoceanic movements, but he cannot understand the deeper economic and geopolitical realities of those crossings, nor can he grasp, more specifically, his small but significant role in the "special relation" which unites the U.S.A. and the U.K.

The last image of the novel reenacts this nexus, through a movement which is a reversal to that described above. We travel from London to New York, via another optical tool, the London Eye. The Eye is the biggest Ferris wheel in Europe, and the most popular tourist attraction in the United Kingdom. At the end of the novel we find Hans, Rachel and their son reunited and traveling together in one of the Eye's pods. There is little coincidence in the fact that another popular 9/11 novel, *Saturday* by Ian McEwan, should also finish with a vision from the "Eye." If the narrator of McEwan's novel attempts to enact a controlling vision of preemption in order to conjure a safer vision of London, here the more or less phantasmatic signs of imperial power—the "Tower Bridge" now stands behind the "Natwest Tower" (2009, 245)—take the narrator, nostalgically, back into past. This is a double vision of loss where memories of both Hans's

mother and the New York Towers come together. The narrative remains enclosed within Hans's private reality and privileged trauma. Other ghosts are more difficult to exorcise: Chuck, the legacies of colonial experience, the devastation in Iraq and Afghanistan and their imperial connotations are kept away from the circular movement with which the novel seems to end. However, the very last sentence of the novel breaks through the self-serving circularity, as Hans's son forces him to look elsewhere, challenging his inward drift and demanding his attention. Cautiously, Hans tests his immediate alliances "looking from him to Rachel and again to him" (2009, 247). Then, as he tells us, he dares to do the impossible: "I turn to look for what it is we're supposed to be seeing" (2009, 247).

This final challenge, this demand for focus is one we may want to make in the crossroads in which we now stand. As International American Studies scholars, we should test and challenge comfortable visions, as well as apparently innocent alliances. Obedient attachments and dissociations are exacerbated by fear. 9/11 exacerbated those positions in the dichotomous discourse of the "war on terror." The horrific military enterprise in Iraq and Afghanistan is, however, only part of a larger process of power strengthening and expansion. The current economic crisis discloses other means through which established power has been reinforced and enlarged perhaps more subtly but no less grotesquely. What was seen yesterday as the proud transnational trading of "bonds" and "securities" is now the path to obvious global dissociations and insecurities: mass unemployment, heightening hunger, tightening immigration policies and protectionist measures across nations and continents. Destitution always hits some people, some nations, some regions more than others: this is secure universal knowledge, no gambling matter. This also uncovers the logic of a system whose economic structures have been supported and embraced by institutions, nations, individuals, not only in the U.S.A., but around the world. This is what we can, dangerously, find if we "turn to look for what it is we are supposed to be seeing." As scholars of American Studies, many of us may make our living by criticizing U.S.A. power. But our countries, places, positions may reveal us as accomplices more than as victims. Sustained power depends on both. To face such revelations may be an uncomfortable path, forcing us to deal with awkward images—such as that of imperial Whitman(s). But such self-criticism is pressing in International American Studies. This is a path which we should not overlook if we want to make this transnational journey our home rather than our haunt.

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CHAPTER ONE

DISPLACING AMERICAN STUDIES: UPDATES AND DEBATES

CONVERGENCES: IASA IN 2007
PRESIDENT'S REPORT, LISBON, 21 SEPTEMBER

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The first thing to report about the International American Studies Association is that the Association has now consolidated and stabilized itself. There are nearly 350 participants here at this Congress in Lisbon, a slight increase from the numbers in Ottawa two years ago and also from Leiden two years before that. We are very grateful to João Ferreira Duarte, Helena Buescu, and the organizing committee here in Lisbon for all of their splendid efforts. IASA has also been active in producing publications, both in the two impressive volumes of conference proceedings edited by Theo d'Haen and Patrick Imbert, and in the excellence of the new online journal, the *Review of International American Studies*, or *RIAS*, edited by Michael Boyden and Pawel Jedzrenko. All of those involved in these undertakings deserve our profound thanks, but the success of IASA has, I believe, derived fundamentally not just from the efforts of individuals, but from a larger sense of its being the right project for the right time. The story of its provenance is outlined on the IASA website, with the Association having been formed initially out of discussions held in Bellagio, Italy, in June 2000. I myself was not present at that meeting, but rumors about its contentious and combustible nature have been circulating ever since. The point I would make, however, is that the growth and development of IASA has been at heart not a question of personalities or professional feuds, but of what Fredric Jameson would have called historical necessity. When future chroniclers of academia look back in 50 or 60 years time, they will surely see that the shift to an international version of American Studies around the turn of the 21st century was brought about by a change in social, economic and cultural conditions that facilitated a convergence of three academic disciplines: Comparative Literature, Area Studies, and World History. Fifteen months after Bellagio, the jolt of 9/11 brought the conditions of globalization into more immediate and urgent focus, so that by the time the first world congress of IASA assembled in the Netherlands

in May 2003, the intellectual landscape of American Studies had changed dramatically.

When IASA first appeared, some, particularly in the traditional American Studies community, asked where on earth it had come from. In fact, the organizational model for IASA had been drawn clearly from that of the International Comparative Literature Association, founded at Oxford in 1954, which was designed to act as an umbrella or partner for many comparative literature associations around the world; thus, on the ICLA website today, the American and the Indian and the German Association and so on are still rather patronizingly designated as “regional associations.” The ICLA has held regular congresses every three years, starting in Venice in 1955, though these rotated on an exclusively European and North American axis—Montreal, Budapest, New York, Paris, and so on—until 1991, when the ICLA first went to Asia, to Tokyo, since when it has convened in South Africa, Hong Kong, and Rio de Janeiro. The transition here from being merely a European and American to being a global organization is significant; as Rey Chow has observed, the old version of Comparative Literature tended to privilege European languages and literatures and to marginalize the rest as a mass of undifferentiated others, but the field itself has gradually evolved from being one driven from a universal center to one more respectful of alterity. Nevertheless, the specter which still haunts Comparative Literature is that of a top-down system of philosophical idealism, within which local or regional variations are referred back to some central point of theoretical authority. We see this in Pascale Casanova’s recent book *The World Republic of Letters*, with what seems to me its most peculiar assumption that Paris is what Casanova calls “the capital of the literary world [...] the chief place of consecration in the world of literature” (2004, 127). Although Casanova’s theme is the way in which Paris functions as a kind of symbolic center through which authors are “made universal” (2004, 127), there is, as the author herself observes uneasily, something “paradoxical” about adopting such a “Gallocentric” position to describe how literary capital circulates (2004, 46). We also see such centripetal inclinations further back in the religious propensities of comparatists such as Northrop Frye, who sought in the 1950s to dissolve material difference into ordered mythical archetypes. Such nostalgia for universal order also manifests itself in the hub and spoke organizational model of the ICLA, which in the period after the Second World War fitted well with the scholarly impetus of Comparative Literature to assimilate itself within universalist paradigms.

This Neoplatonic idiom of essence and accident is, however, much less obviously compatible with the phenomenon of Area Studies, which is

where IASA has sought to make its intervention. Area Studies, which emerged in the geopolitical circumstances of the Cold War with the aim of fully comprehending (and therefore containing) particular, bounded areas of the world, is much less amenable to any kind of universalizing temper. In addition, since Area Studies had succeeded in establishing and institutionalizing itself so firmly within the academy in the second half of the 20th century, this meant that the idea of an International American Studies Association in the year 2000 was bound to be more controversial and difficult to countenance than the idea of an International Comparative Literature Association had been in 1954. Fifty years ago, the field was, comparatively speaking, a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate; but recently there have been many more entrenched professional investments to negotiate.

One of the best discussions of these issues in recent years has been Gayatri Spivak's book *Death of a Discipline*, published in 2003. Here Spivak charts the strengths and limitations of both Comparative Literature and Area Studies, and she calls for a new form of intellectual dialogue between them. In Spivak's eyes, the specificity of Area Studies, its close attention to foreign language and social context, might help to reinvigorate Comparative Literature, which is the dying discipline of the book's title, since in her eyes "Comp. Lit." is in danger of being reduced to the empty homologies of global literature or of world literature in English translation. At the same time, the systematic commitment of Comparative Literature to theoretical issues, to tracking undecideable meanings and irreducible rhetorical figures that confound notions of "immediate comprehensibility by the ideological average," might help to renovate what she calls "the arrogance of Area Studies where it retains the imprints of the Cold War," that in-built conservatism within the Area Studies community which would seek to exclude anything threatening the bounded circumference and secure platform of its own power. This idea of an interface between Comparative Literature and Area Studies seems to me a much more promising direction for IASA than the old centrist hub and spoke model. Such a direction is commensurate as well with recent developments in world history, a subject which until recently tended to be dismissed by academic historians as genteel and amateurish—recalling, for example, the attempts of Arnold Toynbee and others 100 years ago to encompass all of history within a grand narrative sweep—but which is now again becoming increasingly important, as scholars recognize the ways in which national histories necessarily intermesh and overlap, so that the description of any tightly circumscribed field risks appearing simply delusory. Thomas Bender and others have written well about the need to recontextualize American history, to position it within a wider global framework, while

for example Ian Tyrrell's work on environmental history, a field that by definition crosses national boundaries, has traced the constant contacts between California and Australia in the second half of the 19th century over irrigation issues, thus raising the question of how uniquely "western" the California experience really was. To rotate the old maps on a transpacific axis so that the American West becomes an American East, or to re-examine slavery on a hemispheric basis by juxtaposing Mississippi with Brazil so that the Old American South becomes the new American north, would seem to me precisely the kind of provocative perspective that an International American Studies Association should be raising.

Internationalization is now of course a buzz word in many scholarly organizations, as well as in many Dean's offices in university campuses throughout the world. Within the mobility of the new global economy, international students have become a prized commodity. There are all kinds of problematic ethical and political issues associated with this kind of fluid movement across national borders, and quite how internationalization will play itself out within an academic framework will, I think, continue to be a matter for intense scholarly debate. Indeed, one of the interesting things about being involved in the administration of the last three IASA Congresses is to see the disjunction between what the organizers have conceived of as the central theme of the event and what participants have actually wanted to talk about. These disjunctions and contradictions are creative, I believe, since no Association of this kind can or should seek to be excessively prescriptive or programmatic about the nature of its agenda. The field itself is much too wide for what Hans Saussy, in his excellent essay in a recent report on the state of Comparative Literature, called "delusional questions of identity" (2006, 22). Rather than seeking prescriptively to lay down the proper object of study, argued Saussy, we should acknowledge the pragmatic and experimental quality of our comparative critical engagements, the kinds of things we might learn that would have remained obscure to us if we had continued to regard individual objects within the conventional frame of a traditional discipline.

The crucial questions here are strewn throughout this conference: what does "America" mean, how does the idea of a nation intersect with the idea of a continent, how can American Studies interface with globalization (or "planetarity," as Spivak calls it), how do transnational issues of ethnicity, race and gender interact with the national idea, how do controversies around the environment and global warming factor into this equation, how is history to be reconceptualized within an international framework, what is the role of language in foregrounding questions of difference? This last issue of language is, I think, a particularly thorny one: there was a very