



SOAR: The Journal of the Society of Americanists Review

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SOAR: Society of Americanists Review

W356 Olmsted

The Pennsylvania State University

777 West Harrisburg Pike

Middletown, PA 17057

Contributions

Drawing on scholarship in the fields of history, literary studies, media and communication, anthropology, folkloristics, sociology, and American studies, among others, SOAR: Society of Americanists Review's mission is to bring together an interdisciplinary and international conversation on the history, culture, and social life of the United States.

As the flagship journal of the Society of Americanists, SOAR seeks to publish scholarship of the highest caliber and broadest appeal. Individual article submissions undergo a rigorous multi-tiered peer review process which includes the journal's editorial staff, advisory board members, and external reviewers. In addition to individual submissions, special issue proposals are welcomed and will receive an expedited initial review.

The journal publishes work in a variety of formats, including research articles; forum, discussion, memorial, and state-of-the-field essays; dialogues and interviews; reports on programs, organizations, and pedagogy; as well as book, exhibit, and media reviews. Multimedia content is encouraged and can be accommodated at the discretion of the editors.

To ensure that your piece is reviewed by the appropriate member of the editorial staff, please indicate the journal section to which you wish to submit. The "articles" section is intended for research-based articles of approximately 6,000 – 9,000 words. Both solicited and unsolicited articles can be submitted for review. Shorter research notes, survey articles, or commentaries should be submitted to the "Essays, Notes, and Dialogue" section. Unsolicited work can be submitted here as well, but you may wish to consult with the Features Editor prior to submission. Media and book review authors should also submit their manuscripts here, but only with prior discussion and approval from the Review Editor.

Please visit the SOAR journal website (<https://sites.psu.edu/americanist/journal>) for full submission details.

About SOA

The Society of Americanists (SOA) is a coalition of persons, organizations, and academic programs devoted to the study of the United States. SOA has as its purpose fostering integrated studies of American history, society, arts, and culture in all their aspects; providing a forum for discussion of scholarly and professional issues among its members, including an annual conference and communications; and promotion of the profession of Americanists devoted to the study of the United States in a global context. Its distinctive niche in the organizational landscape of learned, professional societies in American Studies is to represent the discipline and profession of Americanists and advance analytical approaches to the research and interpretation of the United States.

The SOA is a not-for-profit educational organization incorporated in the United States. In compliance with civil rights laws, it does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, age, ethnicity, religion, national origin, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, sex, marital status, disability, or status as a U.S. veteran. It also does not enter into boycotts or exclusionary actions against scholars on the basis of national origin, political beliefs, or academic affiliation.

Editor's Note

It is a pleasure to launch the inaugural issue of *SOAR*. For our debut, we investigate the theme of “Assessing American Studies,” to reflect on the state of the field, with various possibilities for future scholarship. As a journal dedicated to interdisciplinary, international collaboration, we are proud to feature essays which represent our mission and set the groundwork for intellectual activities to come. As many of the essays indicate, Americanists are a group both grounded in a particular moment in the formation of American Studies, but also all expansive, as each of us brings different disciplinary questions, curiosities, and geographic perspectives to the conversation. This issue presents a variety of approaches to American Studies, while also reflecting on key themes that have dominated the literature in the field: memory, context, language, and the role of American Studies outside of the United States. The issue moves through the central tasks that we as Americanist scholars have, sliding between methodologies and interests. What we have in common is a dedication to the study of American culture, but the contested nature of culture allows for many organizations, media, and outlets to thrive. We welcome you to the dialogue and encourage you to contribute to new formulations of American Studies in this exciting time for collaboration.

Table of Contents

Ready to Soar: An Americanist Journal Simon Bronner, The Pennsylvania State University-Harrisburg.....	3
Paradigm Dramas Revisited: A Brief History of American Studies as Reflected in <i>American Quarterly</i> Jeffrey L. Meikle, University of Texas-Austin.....	10
Stand-Up Comedy, Social Critique and a Few Notes on Retelling the Origins of American Studies Michelle Robinson, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.....	52
A Future from the Past: Perspectives from Memory Studies Carolyn Kitch, Temple University.....	80
Making Context Matter: American Studies and the Connecting Imagination Adam Golub, California State University-Fullerton.....	113
American Studies in the Republic of Turkey: A Journey Unfulfilled Laurence Raw, Baskent University.....	134
Book Review: Justin Gest. <i>The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in the Age of Immigration and Inequality</i>. David Stebenne, Ohio State University.....	152

Ready to SOAR: An Americanist Journal

Simon J. Bronner

The Pennsylvania State University

Harrisburg, USA

Welcome the Society of Americanists Review, or SOAR, to your screens and shelves. As its acronym implies, the digital-era journal contains ideas that gloriously ascend on the wings of fervid scholarship and compel attention to the exciting directions they take. This innovative publication reflects the goals of the Society of Americanists (SOA) embedded in its title as a forum for the profession of Americanists devoted to the study of the United States in its global as well as local contexts. Its distinctive niche in the organizational landscape of learned societies is to represent the work of Americanists and advance analytical approaches to the research and interpretation of the United States. As a publication, its special place is to represent disciplinary practice by Americanists to identify and explain beliefs, themes, patterns, trends, behaviors, traditions, and concepts that characterize the United States as a nation, an experience, a rhetoric, and peoples – past, present, and future, in and out of North America, and in thought and action (Bronner 2017). In short, as an intellectual enterprise, the society and the journal are uniquely constructed to seek an understanding of Americanness.

The keyword is “Americanist” and by extension the study of the society and culture of the United States that elsewhere has been labeled Americanistics in contrast to the more dif-

fuse, and often intellectually suspect “American Studies” (Aaron 2007; Bronner 2018; Kroes 1987; Strunz 1999; Watts 1991). SOAR is not the only one with “Americanist” in its name (see Narecki 2017), but SOAR’S ambitious plan is to develop the journal into the most far-reaching. As the booster rocket of an association for all Americanists world-wide, the journal aims to lead a renewed movement for integrative work on Americanness wherever it emerges. The diverse, international composition of the journal’s editorial board and the SOA’s governing council exemplifies this goal.

The SOA has its origins in a dialogue in 2014 among former presidents and alienated leaders of the American Studies Association (ASA) to create an innovative learned society devoted to the rigorous, unprejudiced analysis of American society and culture and to promote the profession of Americanists (see Kulik 2013). The conferences of the Eastern American Studies Association (EASA) were especially hospitable to these concerns for the direction of American Studies, but the question was raised about initiating the goals of a new society within its regional identity. In 2015, EASA organized an ad hoc committee, and appointed me as chair, to explore different administrative options. Based upon the committee’s report, EASA’s Executive Board agreed to cooperate with the creation of a separate Americanist organization that would be international in its reach, scholarly in its mission, and inclusive in its composition. The EASA board unveiled the new organization in conjunction with its spring 2017 meeting scheduled for March 31-April 1 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (with a theme of “Milestones, Markers, and Moments” which addressed organizational as well as historical and cultural milestones), a state-capital location abounding with academic and public institutions devoted to the integrative study and presentation of American history, society, and culture. The SOA

emerged as a global umbrella organization to represent the interests of Americanists, and declared goals of integrating studies of American history, society, arts, and culture in all their aspects; facilitating discussion of scholarly and professional issues among its members through activities such as an annual conference and communications; and promoting the profession of Americanists devoted to the study of the United States in global and local contexts. To help spread the word, the SOA based at the Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg, introduced a website and social media presence to foster interaction globally (<https://sites.psu.edu/americanist>).

Why distinguish Americanists? Dictionary definitions note a primary meaning of Americanist as “a specialist in American culture or history” (Merriam-Webster), “student of America” (English World Dictionary), or “specialist in American Studies” (Dictionar Roman). With the “ist” suffix, Americanist connotes a professional status equivalent to a linguist or psychiatrist, and for students and scholars with an American Culture, American History, American Studies, American Ethnic Studies, or Transnational Studies degree, the term Americanist identifies them with an intellectual legacy in the founding vision of broad-minded scholars in various countries after World War I (see Dorson 1976; Oppermann 2018).

The choice of “Americanist” has been inspired by a number of visionary public intellectuals, but I might single out Harvard University’s Daniel Aaron (1912-2016), one of the founding pioneers of American Studies, who in 2007 titled his autobiography *The Americanist*. He honored me with his time and wisdom in many Barker Center for the Humanities meetings when I taught at Harvard in the 1990s. Beyond this personal connection, Aaron had a profound influence on the evolution of the discipline, first as a student in

the groundbreaking program called “History of American Civilization” at Harvard, and later as a professor in the program mentoring aspiring Americanists. As I shared my recent experiences teaching American Studies in Japan, and the impressive colleagues devoted to the holistic study of the United States, he recalled the founding concept of globalization and inclusiveness, which had yet to be fully realized. Aaron poetically described the Americanist “snagged in a thousand snapshots and, like [Walt] Whitman, feels...to be part of the unconscious scenery of a thousand more” (2007, 4). *The Americanist* not only documented American experiences but also explored “the byways of American social and intellectual thought” to give background to the question of Americanness within the United States as well as beyond its national borders. *The Americanist*, Aaron declared, is an “all-purpose synthesizer” (2007, 189). In addition to the synthesis of cultural evidence, often non-“traditional” (e.g., popular culture, oral traditions, material culture), this sense of synthesis extends to work in various disciplines as warranted to address issues, themes, and questions involving thinking and acting that invoke, or evoke, America around the world.

I should point out that some anthropologists also apply the term “Americanist” to their work to indicate a specific focus on Native American language and archaeology. But this research-teaching area can, and should, be integrated into an inclusive study of American society and culture (see Gleach 2010). And I might say that a personal goal is to see Americanistics as reflected in the contents of the journal take on more social-scientific perspectives than has been evident in the sometimes narrow humanistic legacy of American Studies. In sum, an Americanist is a scholar with a distinctive identity related to the integration of sociocultural material and analytical approaches to investigate aspects, and the whole of, the United

States (and related areas before the nation's founding) and their local and global representations and implications. Join me and other Americanists, then, in a compelling movement, the thrill of a rousing launch, and the mind-opening lift of ideas as SOAR takes flight.

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Paradigm Dramas Revisited: A Brief History of American Studies as Reflected in *American Quarterly*

Jeffrey L. Meikle,
University of Texas
Austin, USA

Abstract: This essay revisits Gene Wise's influential "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies" by examining the American Studies movement at four key moments: publication of Leo Marx's myth-and-symbol *Machine in the Garden* in 1964; Wise's presentation of the pluralistic "Paradigm Dramas" at a meeting of the American Studies Association (ASA) in 1975; Janice Radway's ASA presidential address promoting transnational scholarship in 1998; and the ASA's boycott of Israel, confirming a turn to political advocacy, in 2013. The history of the field is assessed by informal content analysis of articles published by *American Quarterly* during the four-year period leading up to each key moment.

There was standing room only, with a jostling crowd outside the door of a mid-sized conference room, when Gene Wise delivered a much-anticipated paper entitled "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies." The venue was the fifth biennial meeting of the American Studies Association, in San Antonio, Texas, in November 1975. After twelve years of severe social, political, and cultural upheaval in the United States, the meeting reflected an ongoing process of transformation of the ASA's practices and goals by young, politically radical members. In his paper, which was widely cited at the time though not published until four years later (Wise 1979), Wise drew upon Thomas Kuhn's then popular concept of disjunctive paradigm shifts to describe four successive phases in the development of the American Studies movement. Wise's "paradigm dramas" included: first, Vernon Parrington's lone struggle to produce a foundational text, *Main Currents in American Thought* (Parrington 1927-30); second, Perry Miller's lifelong effort to define an "American mind" derived from New England Puritanism (Miller 1939; Miller 1953), which he regarded as exceptional enough to drive national spiritual and secular development; third, postwar institutionalization of American Studies as a mostly liberal, occasionally celebratory site for the study of national culture; and fourth, beginning around 1970, emergence of a generation of scholars critical of national identity who were open to multiple voices and hostile to the notion of American exceptionalism as an operational force.

My purpose in this article is to revisit Wise's concept of paradigm dramas by extending the field's chronology to the present. Much as Wise proposed four "paradigms" that for him marked stages in the discipline's evolution, I am proposing four "moments" that I regard as essential to understanding developments in American Studies. The first moment is publication of Leo Marx's *Machine*

in the Garden in 1964 (Marx 1964). Exemplifying the popular “myth and symbol” approach just before it came under attack, Marx’s book summed up the field’s original interdisciplinary project—a search for national identity. The second moment is Gene Wise’s 1975 “Paradigm Dramas” paper itself, which concluded that any definition of a unitary national culture denied expression to multiple voices of race, ethnicity, and gender—voices of previously silenced groups whose members were then seeking political power. The third moment, which further enlarged the discipline’s scope, came in 1998 at another ASA meeting, this time in Seattle, Washington. In a controversial presidential address, Janice Radway proclaimed a doctrine of transnationalism so complete that she contemplated renaming the association to exclude any reference to America or the United States (Radway 1999). Finally, the fourth moment is the pro-Palestine boycott of Israeli academic institutions enacted by vote of ASA’s membership in December 2013, thereby embracing political advocacy in place of formal scholarly neutrality. These four moments may seem unsurprising, even obvious. My intent is not merely to declare and define each moment but also to examine by a kind of thick description what was happening in American Studies just prior to each of these moments.

The major source for this review is the journal *American Quarterly*, first published in 1949 and associated with the ASA since 1952. A mission statement published in the journal’s third issue described an intention “to aid in giving a sense of direction to studies in the culture of the United States, past and present.” The journal’s “editors, advisers, and contributors” would be “concerned not only with the areas of American life which they know best but with the relation of each of those areas to the entire American scene and to world society” (AQ editorial board 1949, 194). Throughout its existence, *American Quarterly* (or AQ) has served as its founding editors intended, and

its contents yield an approximate reflection of trends in the field. To gauge the state of the discipline, I conducted informal content analysis of articles published in *AQ* during the four years prior to each of the four moments. I skimmed and summarized 650 articles and noted such details as each author's gender, geographic location, and disciplinary approach; the historical period covered by an article; the degree of emphasis on race, ethnicity, class, and gender; and the major subjects covered, methods employed, and theories followed. I wanted to see whether American Studies scholars who published in the field's leading journal were in the vanguard or whether they were caught by surprise. Did such leaders as Leo Marx, Gene Wise, Janice Radway, and the promoters of the anti-Israeli boycott represent standard practice at the time or did they call for unexpected changes? My ultimate goal is to explore how the field has changed over time.

Defining American Identity and Culture

Let's consider each of these four moments in turn. In 1964, when Marx published *The Machine in the Garden*, the discipline was composed primarily of white male academics. No matter how socially progressive they regarded themselves, there were no women on the ASA's executive council or on the journal's editorial board. As early as 1957, a list of American Studies dissertations in progress had revealed that 35 of 195 Ph.D. candidates were women (Van Nostrand 1957). Even so, a survey of American Studies programs at about the same time reported, presumably without any humor intended, that the field's "eager Ph.D. candidates" were proving themselves "very handy men around the academic house," doing well "in these days of straddle programs and cross-departmental 'fertilization'" (Thorp 1958, 487). Out of 121 articles published by *AQ* from 1960 to 1963, only five had women as authors. Both of the two most obviously feminist articles

addressed antebellum diet and clothing reform, but one of these two authors, a sympathetic male, noted with approval that reformer Lucy Stone “reputedly looked quite well in Bloomers” (Riegel 1963, 392).

As for the frequent criticism that American Studies was a tool of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War, a description of the discipline in 1950 rejected national chauvinism as a motive, maintaining that “American culture should always be presented in proper relation to other cultures past and present.” Even so, the main goal of the journal, as of the larger field it represented, remained “enrich[ing] the student’s understanding of his [sic] own country in its entirety” (Shryock et al. 1950, 287). Although early promoters of American Studies, whether they came from the humanities or the social sciences, professed a neutral objectivity in examining the culture and civilization of the United States, it was also true that many practitioners were engaged in questioning and defining American identity. As inhabitants of a relatively young nation (a condition mentioned whenever American Studies scholars congregated), Americans in general had long been obsessed with interrogating their status—a practice stimulated anew both by the rise of fascist regimes in Europe during the 1930s and by the perceived threat of Communism during the postwar era. As one contributor to *AQ* phrased it, American Studies was an expression of “our interminable quest for national self-identification” in the face of “the empty sky, the unbounded wilderness, the mobile populace, the ever-new frontier” (Kariel 1962, 608, 609). The situation of the new academic field mirrored that of the American nation it attempted to define. New American Studies programs and departments struggled against traditional disciplines, both intellectually and institutionally, and a contributor to the journal lamented that “as yet there is no generally recognized theory of American Studies, and thus we do not

really know who we are, and what we are doing" (Sykes 1963, 253).

Into this milieu came *The Machine in the Garden*, summing up what the field had accomplished and how it conceived American culture. Seeking to understand through literature the historical event of technology's intrusion into America's pastoral landscape, Leo Marx applied the "myth and symbol" approach Henry Nash Smith had pioneered in *Virgin Land* in 1950 (Smith 1950). Marx had taken fourteen years to expand his dissertation into a book, partly in order to gather historical evidence to supplement his literary examples, a "large sample of [hundreds of] technological images from paintings, newspapers, magazines, folklore, political debates, and ceremonial oratory (Marx 2000, 374)." Even so, he continued to operate on a belief that the nation's most acclaimed antebellum writers Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville had perfectly distilled the key symbols of a national imaginary that, he believed, was unconsciously shared by most ordinary Americans in the early nineteenth century and beyond. Marx's approach, which owed much to Smith's example, had already been questioned by Laurence R. Veysey, who doubted whether "a study of internal evidence in novels—when deliberately divorced from a comprehensive analysis of the society at large—[could] produce trustworthy evidence for an assertion that here lie the basic ideas, or myths, which shaped the development of that society." It seemed to Veysey that "most litterateurs," as he dismissively referred to them, were "pathetically shielded from the dominant currents of nineteenth-century American life" (Veysey 1960, 36).

Even so, Marx's focus on canonical literature was typical of the practices of many self-identified American Studies scholars. Nearly 40 percent of the AQ articles published during the four years leading up to *The Machine in the Garden* offered interpretations of

classic literature, and not always from interdisciplinary perspectives. Often, as in the articles “Richard Harding Davis: Critical Background” (Osborn 1960) and “Stephen Crane’s Social Ethic” (Westbrook 1962), the intent was more informative than interpretive, and they could just as easily have appeared in a more straightforward disciplinary journal such as *American Literature*. Another 17 percent of articles came from intellectual historians, whose work, such as an article on “Natural Selection and Utilitarian Ethics in Chauncey Wright” (Chambliss 1960), also exhibited little evidence of interdisciplinarity. Marx’s emphasis on overarching literary images, dismissed by Veysey as “great ‘given’ entities...like Jungian archetypes” (Veysey 1960, 35), had already gained traction in American Studies scholarship. In 1961, a letter to the editor of *AQ* listed titles of some thirty recent dissertations, articles, books, and conference presentations, each of which began with the phrase “image of” — ranging from “The Image of the Negro in New York State” to “The Image of America as Presented by the Voice of America,” and most of which suggested there was one common overriding image of the specific reality being considered (Maass 1961). The reviewer of a collection of fifteen new American Studies essays found each of them moving from the specific to the general. He observed that each “sees its subject,” whether Charles Lindbergh or the Oneida colony, “as embodying in some way the underlying assumptions and contradictions of a whole culture” (Sanford 1960, 111).

Marx was not alone in defining a unitary mainstream culture regarded as encompassing all Americans—one in which African Americans and Native Americans seemed to exist as an afterthought, and Latinos and Asian Americans not at all. When Marx’s book was published, the only person of color on the ASA council

was John Hope Franklin, who had served a brief term as president three years earlier. It was rare for articles in *AQ* to address minority peoples and cultures, and when they did so, the authors were nearly always white. The typical approach was to investigate how whites viewed people of color, or through which “images” they were perceived, as in blackface minstrelsy (Browne 1960) or the film *The Birth of a Nation* (Carter 1960). In one instance of a white scholar directly studying an expression of African American culture, an article on 1920s jazz, Chadwick Hansen lamented the loss of purity (or “authenticity,” as we now would say) when black musicians sought to “acculturate” to white middle-class society by playing a hybrid “sweet” music partially derived from white popular songs. His treatment was that of a white scholar judging minority cultural practices from outside, sympathetic but operating with an opinion about which marginalized expressions would best enrich mainstream society (Hansen 1960). Even Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., who contributed the only article on Native Americans, a scathing account of missionary boarding schools, focused not on Indian culture but on its destruction in the service of “an upward unilinear development of human society,” with America, understood by educators as white, wrongly conceived as “its highest incarnation” (Berkhofer 1963, 186).

More than half of *AQ*’s articles addressed the nineteenth century, especially the search for an American identity distinct from European precedents. Eleven articles defined the American character (with distinguishing features ranging from the effects of migration and mobility [Lee 1961; Pierson 1962] to a sense of isolation [Rovit 1961] and, somewhat more perceptively, a misguided belief in the discontinuity of American experience [Cunliffe 1961]). Nine articles discussed the West as the quintessentially American re-

gion, with ramifications throughout the society and culture. One contributor argued that the West's mythology of "primitive vitality" was used by the I.W.W. to motivate the labor movement (Tyler 1960, 175). Although American Studies was hardly a center of chauvinistic nationalism, most of its adherents did regard the U.S. and its culture, for better or worse, as a unique, even exceptional historical development that was trending toward coherence.

Even scholars who cast a wider documentary net than Marx, such as one who surveyed 6,000 volumes of poetry to assess "the dominant character of the age" (Walker 1961, 447), regarded themselves as working to define a single mainstream American culture. Only rarely did this general orientation toward defining a national culture slip into a mode of celebratory cultural elitism. In one exception, an article on the antebellum sculptor and design theorist Horatio Greenough echoed Matthew Arnold's elitist nineteenth-century definition of culture. According to this study, Greenough's critical writings had "set the standards for the public taste by which the world identifies us and by which we know ourselves as a nation" (Brumbaugh 1960, 417). Although most American Studies practitioners would have rejected this conclusion, arguing instead for a more democratic culture conveyed by such mass-produced artifacts as the dime novels Henry Nash Smith had analyzed, they would have accepted the notion of a general American identity recognized both at home and abroad.

Diversifying a Discipline and its Practitioners

Such a statement of American exceptionalism, based on white middle-class values, would have been impossible in 1975 when Gene Wise proposed his four paradigm dramas. As he ob-

served in his presentation, an acute awareness of race, class, and gender had come to American Studies as to all of American society during the social upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s. In 1971, the president of the ASA, Robert Walker, had minimized the degree to which the social and cultural radicalism of the Civil Rights and Vietnam War years had made inroads among ASA members. Offering a "Report from the President," Walker praised the membership for having avoided "a wasteful and destructive confrontation" as younger members, especially politically radical graduate students and assistant professors, expressed their grievances and both sides aired their differences. He claimed that a "very large majority of the membership" had "expressed a strong will that the ASA remain a professional association and avoid stands on political issues external to immediate professional concerns" (Walker 1971, 260). Although his assertion of what might be defined as a neutral academic objectivity would probably have met with the approval of most ASA members at the time, over the next forty-five years the ASA was to experience a series of changes in theory and practice driven by increasing concerns about race and gender inequities, and by a desire to protest and overcome repressive social conditions.

By the time of Wise's paradigm presentation at the ASA meeting in San Antonio in 1975, a cultural and institutional upheaval was already under way within the discipline itself. Walker reported that a national meeting held in Washington, D.C., in the autumn of 1971 had encompassed both "the persistence of traditional sessions with papers bearing the fruits of research delivered with verbal footnotes" and new experiments with panels, workshops, films, and "rap sessions" that appealed to protestors but whose "formlessness" and inflated "rhetoric" angered more conservative members (Walker 1972, 116). Despite a sense of ongoing change that was bringing

greater visibility and influence in academia to women and to members of racial minorities, white male scholars still dominated both the association and the journal. Women were the authors of only 18 percent of *AQ*'s articles from 1972 to 1975. But the early 1970s also witnessed the formation of a feminist Women's Committee that promoted faculty hiring of women "until the ratio of women on the faculty approximates the ratio of women students in programs with terminal degrees" and demanded "equal pay for equal work" as well as pregnancy leaves, parental leaves, and day care centers. The ASA council adopted these demands in a set of "Resolutions on the Status of Women" in 1972 (ASA council 1972, 550-51). In that same year, Mary Turpie became the first woman on *AQ*'s editorial board since 1954, when the anthropologist Margaret Mead, an intellectual celebrity, had completed a two-year term. By 1974, only two years later, women made up a third of the editorial board's membership and a quarter of the members of the ASA council.

An ever-increasing number of *AQ* articles addressed topics related to race and gender, with about 20 percent devoted to race and 8 percent to women's history during the four years leading up to Wise's paradigm paper. Articles on race came mostly from white scholars whose work was not likely to appeal to radical social and political sensibilities of African American activists. For example, an article that explored "the metaphor of invisibility in [the] black literary tradition" leading up to Ralph Ellison seemed mostly engaged in shoring up the myth and symbol approach by applying it to a timely topic (Lieber 1972). Another white author investigated the rhetoric of antebellum black leaders and concluded that on the whole the theme they raised with "the greatest consistency was not abolitionism or civil rights but self-improvement." He admitted that his findings countered the desire of "present-day historians"

to find longstanding “traditions which anticipate today’s concerns with revolutionary politics or black nationalism” (Cooper 1972: 605).

Although American Studies had always promoted an interdisciplinary approach, most articles were largely historical, with 8 percent delving into the colonial period, more than 50 percent covering the nineteenth century, and 10 percent addressing the years between the world wars. About a quarter of the articles dealt with the post-World War II period. Although cultural, intellectual, and social history bulked large, about a fifth of the articles continued in the formerly dominant vein of literary history. But this was no longer Leo Marx’s literary history. For example, an article on Mark Twain and phrenology did highlight the famous author and his work. But instead of suggesting that Twain’s work rose above the culture and represented what ordinary Americans could only vaguely perceive, the author found Twain to be enmeshed in a pseudoscientific outlook no different from anyone else’s (Gribben 1972). Only six articles referred to myth and symbol, usually negatively, as in a famous attack by Bruce Kuklick, who faulted its practitioners for ignoring historical facts while rummaging through elite literature seeking metaphors with present-day significance and projecting them onto the past as concerns of ordinary Americans (Kuklick 1972). Only three authors even alluded to the “American character.” Occasionally a scholar might suggest the existence of an American “popular mind,” but the phrase indicated a general impression derived by examining “the diaries, the letters and the commonplace jottings” of “ordinary people.” Such an informed impression could counter the “inferential leaps” of scholars who wrongly assumed the general applicability of written texts emanating from a cultural elite (Saum 1974, 478).

Whether or not authors made race central to their work, they mostly no longer assumed American culture was unitary and, presumptively, white. For example, instead of making grand statements about Americans in general, the author of an article on attitudes about the automobile limited the range of his analysis by focusing on three intersecting parameters: urban areas, in the South, in the 1920s. (Brownell 1972). A few scholars began to conceive whiteness as a separate racial category, as in Alexander Saxton's groundbreaking article on "Blackface Minstrelsy and Jacksonian Ideology." According to the author, this form of entertainment, wildly popular down to the end of the nineteenth century, performed a "dual task of exploiting and suppressing African elements" of culture in the "ideological" service of white "class identification and hostility" (Saxton 1975, 8, 4). Another example was a study of racial attitudes of white army officers during the late-nineteenth-century Indian wars. Their "sense of pity and compassion for the native Americans they had set out to destroy" and their "wistful appreciation" of the "folkways" of "primitive society" led the author to wonder whether there was something distinctive about how white Americans had "dispossessed" the natives, something that defined the American approach to domestic colonization as yet another "peculiar institution" (Leonard 1974, 179, 190).

An earlier generation of liberal scholars, shaped by the Great Depression, by World War II, and by postwar anti-Communism, had advanced a positive definition of American civilization, but younger scholars who had experienced the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam War, and the women's liberation movement were skeptical about America, did not identify personally with its mainstream culture, and instead sought to critique it, often citing a historical dynamic of conflict rather than consensus. For example,

one *AQ* author traced the efficiency movement of early twentieth-century reform city governments to the imperialist system devised by the U.S. military for governing Cuba (Gillette 1973). Another suggested that the “reactionary neoclassical architecture” adopted for early twentieth-century city halls, courthouses, and other government buildings reflected the conservatism of the Progressive movement (Hines 1973). Yet another, when examining voluntarist Protestant religious organizations in the late 1800s, avoided the generalist argument someone like Perry Miller might have made, that such groups expressed a dominant American quality, and instead regarded them as an expression of a particular white upper-class leadership group, powerful but embattled in a sea of diversity. In other words, they existed as “a form of ethno-class identification during a period of increasing ethnic heterogeneity and economic differentiation” (Singleton 1975, 550).

Summing up the intellectual discontent Gene Wise was soon to identify as typical of American Studies scholars in the mid-1970s, Robert Sklar advised his colleagues to ignore the “creators” of elite high culture, whose expression had bulked large in the early years of American Studies. He urged them instead to attend to “audi-ences, [to] the way the popular arts are received and used, and how they are produced.” For guidance they could turn to several new “specialities,” such as “popular culture, oral history, urban anthro-pology, women’s studies, and quantitative social history,” that were “already reshaping the study of American culture and society.” And in place of the moribund myth and symbol approach, Sklar advised scholars who needed theoretical guidance to abandon Cold War prejudices and embrace “the Marxist intellectual tradition,” which encompassed “one of the most extensive [and diverse] literatures of cultural theory in modern scholarship” — as exemplified by the theories of Roland

Barthes, E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, Antonio Gramsci, T. W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Raymond Williams, and George Lukács (Sklar 1975, 249, 246, 260-61). Just as there was no longer a unitary mainstream American culture, there was also no longer a single way of examining American cultures. The complexities of European theory were taking precedence over the more accessible “commonsense” approach of the field’s founding scholars.

Sklar’s passionate discussion did not address race. Indeed, for Sklar, there was no reason why a reliance on radically new theory required that. Although nearly everyone involved in American Studies abandoned the notion that elite culture best expresses society in general, there remained a wide belief in the existence of a mainstream as the most obvious influence on ordinary lives. This position was well articulated in Daniel Walker Howe’s introduction to *AQ*’s second themed issue, which addressed the concept of “Victorian Culture in America.” Forced to explain how the adjective “Victorian,” which derived from the name of the long-reigning British monarch, could refer to the United States, Howe postulated a “sense of Atlantic community” fueled by the “economic interdependence” and “cultural connection” of the U.S. and Britain and controlled by the “bourgeois evangelicalism” of a transatlantic “urban middle class” (Howe 1975, 507-508). Ironically, given Paul Gilroy’s famous definition two decades later of “the Black Atlantic” as a site of racially configured oppositions to the mainstream (Gilroy 1993), Howe’s formulation might be regarded as a brief description of a transnational “White Atlantic” against which those on the margins would have to struggle. But such opposition, though manifestly in the air at the time of Gene Wise’s paradigm intervention in San Antonio, was not yet standard operating procedure in the American Studies movement.

Shifting Transnational Gears

The third American Studies moment to be considered is Janice Radway's ASA presidential address in Seattle in 1998. Unlike most pro forma presidential addresses, Radway's was unexpected and controversial. The setting was a gloomy ballroom with a water-stained ceiling. She spoke from a long dais, raised above the audience and distant from the first row of seats. Council members fanned out to left and right, arranged like an anonymous politburo. Radway's message was unsettling to some who heard it, and even more so to others who only heard about it afterward, by second- or third-hand report. Conjecture spread when Johns Hopkins University Press, the ASA's publisher, refused to release the text of Radway's address prior to its scheduled publication in *AQ*.

Although Radway offered an accurate, respectful history of the American Studies movement, she also asserted it was time for a radical change in the ASA's mission. It was time, "at this particular moment, on the brink of a new century, and at the edge of the so-called 'American' continent," to focus almost exclusively on an anti-imperial transnationalism based on "critical race theory, Black Atlantic studies, women's studies, post-colonial theory, subaltern studies, and transnational feminist and queer studies." It was also time to consider renaming and thus reconceiving the discipline as "inter-American studies" or "intercultural studies" (Radway 1999, 3, 7-8). As interpreted by David Nye, a cultural historian of technology who responded publicly to Radway's remarks after hearing them in Seattle but before her text was made available online, her agenda for the discipline "placed under erasure" the "interdisciplinary combinations" that had always been the hallmark

of American Studies. In her projected transformation of the field, there would be no room for such combinations as “environmental history, literature, and art; industrialization and design; business and labor history; media studies and popular culture; anthropology and science; photography and technology.” It seemed to Nye that anyone who did not “focus on ethnic and racial minorities” was being “read out of the profession” and relegated to the traditional disciplines. The implication for Nye and some other ASA members whose scholarship did not reflect this ethnic, transnational turn was to get with the program or get out (Nye 1998).

Radway’s position radiated a degree of irony. Her own two monographs, one about female readers of romance novels (Radway 1984), the other about the Book-of-the-Month Club (Radway 1997), had emphasized the production, consumption, and especially the reception of books targeted for white middle-class audiences. Her own career was typical of what she wanted the ASA to move beyond, even to rename. “Do as I say,” she seemed to suggest, “not as I do.” Whatever the case, Radway’s transnationalism was way ahead of the four-year trajectory leading up to her controversial address. The fact that a woman was serving as president of the ASA was in itself no longer noteworthy. Radway was the tenth woman to head the organization, and only two men had been elected president since the first woman, Lois W. Banner, in 1986-87. The ASA council and *AQ*’s managing and advisory boards were fully integrated by gender and included more than token numbers of people of color. Authorship of *AQ* articles was evenly divided by gender.

More to the point, however, and a mark of the continuing relative conservatism of the field, although nearly a fourth of the articles published from 1995 to 1998 directly involved women’s

history and gender studies, there was a pronounced emphasis on mainstream white middle-class history throughout the journal. Thirteen percent of the articles examined the history of consumer culture, and 21 percent dealt with various expressions of mainstream culture. Those articles included such topics as the redefinition of manual labor as middle-class exercise (Newbury 1995), the mass production of cheap oil paintings (Zalesch 1996), the rise of do-it-yourself home repairs as an expression of middle-class masculinity (Gelber 1997), and the use of advertising to redefine bicycles as acceptable for female riders (Garvey 1995)—all in the nineteenth century. While one article portrayed antebellum business clerks as patronizing the New York Mercantile Library in their leisure time to acquire moral autonomy and self-control (Augst 1998), another described the idleness of the wealthy writer N. P. Willis not as the “maintenance of patrician privilege” but as the “formation of new ideals of mobility and acquisition” (Tomc 1997, 781). Such articles seemed to be about defining middle-class identity, admittedly no longer as a universal or general “American character” but for a particular white socioeconomic group at particular moments. The occasional exception, such as Nan Enstad’s stunning portrayal of female New York shirtwaist workers who appropriated and subverted middle-class fashion in the service of political activism (Enstad 1998), only confirmed the norm of attention to middle-class culture—however critical, even hostile, that attention often was. Just as significant to understanding American Studies at the moment of Radway’s intervention is the fact that the discipline remained mostly historical. More than half of all articles published between 1995 and 1998 addressed subjects and topics from 1800 to 1914, 21 percent treated the period from 1914 to 1945, 15 percent were on the postwar era, and only 10 percent involved contemporary topics.

To some extent, *AQ* may have been lagging behind the general state of the field. Radway's immediate predecessor, Mary Helen Washington, in her presidential address in 1997, had described a recent "sea change in the involvement of scholars of color in ASA." During this "demographic shift," the ASA had "moved from its de-racialized past, from its token invitations to scholars of color, to being nothing less than the principal gathering place where ethnic studies constituencies meet each year in our own border-crossing dialogues." In the very title of her address, Washington asked a startling but obvious question, "what happens to American Studies if you put African American Studies at the center?" (Washington 1998, 6, 20). Although the proportion of *AQ* articles oriented toward race and ethnicity lagged behind the proportion of such papers presented at ASA meetings, the number was increasing. Nineteen percent of *AQ* articles leading up to Radway's address focused on African Americans and six percent on Asian Americans, with two articles on Native Americans and one on Hispanics. As of yet, the pages of *AQ* revealed little or no awareness of intersectional complexities. An article discussing issues of race, ethnicity, gender, or class typically focused only on members of a single group.

Despite the journal's overwhelming emphasis on happenings within the United States, there was already some movement toward Radway's transnationalism, with 14 percent of articles having such a component. A theoretical piece by Betsy Erkkila in 1995 had criticized mainstream American Studies for being an "imperial" endeavor that still assumed "a single, unified, and already constituted culture," one that had expanded only slightly to "include and incorporate sexual and racial others." She further questioned the increasingly fashionable use by scholars of "the deconstructive and poststructuralist theories of Derrida and Foucault." According to

her, such theories operated as “a new form of intellectual colonization” by denying autonomy and agency to “women, gays, blacks, Chicanos, Native Americans, and other minorities,” and thus “silencing and deauthorizing their claims to a voice, a presence, and a representation in American literature and culture.” In fact, however, contemporary America was “a site of cultural conflict, struggle, and exchange across borders that are themselves historically constituted, permeable, contested, and in flux” (Erkkila 1995, 588, 565, 567, 588).

In another theoretical piece published in 1996, which seems to have directly inspired Radway, Jane Desmond and Virginia Domínguez had called for a “paradigmatic shift” to a “critical internationalism.” It was time, they argued, to turn the “looking glass” around and “create mechanisms, dialogues, spaces, and processes” by which “East and South Asians, Africans, Latin Americans, Middle Easterners, even Eastern and Western Europeans” might “gain opportunities to study those who are accustomed to studying, representing, and characterizing them” (Desmond and Domínguez 1996, 475, 483). More radical was Paul Lauter, whose 1995 presidential address generally defined American Studies “not as a discipline” with “a remote and academic standpoint” but instead as a “framework” for “changing or policing the society in which we live” (Lauter 1995, 186). At that time social advocacy was no more typical of American Studies than was transnationalism, but both were occasionally being expressed and were eventually to transform the discipline. Even so, Radway’s assertive intervention had come as a surprise, even a shock, to scholars who believed their own interests were being not only marginalized as irrelevant but also potentially excluded by definition from whatever refocused and renamed discipline might replace American Studies.

Embracing Social Activism

The fourth moment in this survey of the field came in December 2013 when the American Studies Association voted to boycott Israeli academic institutions. The move provoked considerable discussion and protest, indeed far more controversy than had followed Radway's address in support of transnationalism. The resolution prepared by the ASA council and approved by ASA membership through an on-line referendum cited Israel for occupying Palestine, denying intellectual freedom to Palestinian academics, expanding Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory, and building a wall between Israel and Palestine (ASA council 2013). The anti-Israeli boycott passed by about two-thirds of those who cast ballots. However, slightly more than two-thirds of the ASA's total membership did not participate in the referendum. Thus only about 22 percent of the full membership voted to approve the measure. Presumably some of those who did not vote did object to the measure. Some members viewed the boycott as anti-Semitic. Others pointed out that the Israeli government was not the world's most egregious suppressor of human rights. Others objected to the politicizing of an academic organization that had always been dedicated to free inquiry and the increase of knowledge. Seventy-two ASA members signed a letter to the council protesting the boycott's violation of academic freedom (Antler et al. 2013), and eight past presidents of the ASA addressed a public letter to members urging them to vote against the resolution (Fishkin et al. 2013). Wide coverage of the boycott by all segments of American media, mostly negative, rendered the ASA briefly notorious. As only the second academic professional association in the United States to enact such a boycott (after the Association for Asian American Studies), the ASA seemed to supporters of the measure to be poised in the vanguard of a movement. But very few professional organizations

followed suit, most of them representing scholars in ethnic studies. Whatever one's opinion of the anti-Israeli boycott, it seems obvious the ASA's official position contradicted its longstanding mission statement. Published by *AQ* in every issue, the statement did not mention social activism but instead pledged members "to promote and encourage the study of American culture—past and present."

Unlike Radway's transnational address, which was too far in advance of the discipline to represent it at the time, the boycott of 2013 did represent the discipline as a whole as portrayed in *AQ*'s pages. During the four years before the boycott, American Studies was no longer a mostly historical discipline. Historical articles comprised less than half the total, with 13 percent on the nineteenth century, 16 percent on the first half of the twentieth century, and 19 percent on the post-World War II era. Only two articles out of 160 addressed the colonial era. More than half of *AQ*'s articles from 2010 to 2013 addressed contemporary society and culture, and half of those articles directly engaged in social advocacy or political activism. Fifty-four percent of the articles emphasized issues pertaining to people of color, as opposed to only 29 percent during the previous four-year period under examination, thereby reinforcing Mary Helen Washington's earlier comment that American Studies was becoming ethnic studies. However, the percentage of articles addressing African Americans remained constant at 19 percent, while Native Americans, Pacific Islanders (including Hawaiians), and Latinos/as each figured centrally in about 10 percent of the articles. Asian Americans were discussed in 6 percent.

Any reader of *AQ* realized immediately that its pages reflected the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the United States—and the complicated cultural *menudo* that resulted. Unlike

the situation in earlier decades, authors often belonged to the minority groups they studied. No longer did whites write by presuming to project themselves into the psyches of others; nor did they contribute studies of white representations of other groups. As Curtis Marez, *AQ*'s editor, observed in 2010 when introducing a special issue on "the indigenous turn in American studies," the intention was "to shift the analysis...from an exclusive focus on 'first contacts' between Europeans and indigenous people in order to clear space for other kinds of critical, comparative narratives about relations among indigenous peoples and other kinds of colonial subjects, migrants, refugees, and racialized groups" (Marez 2010, v). The stories of minorities were no longer told from a mainstream white middle-class perspective. The goal in representing any ethnic group was to portray subjects "in the role of active, mobile, and even cosmopolitan actors on the world stage in ways that complicate static or incomplete definitions of...identity" (Lai and Smith 2010, 408).

Authors often addressed transnationalism or empire and post-colonialism. Such topics as film, visual culture, education, the body, queer theory, and animal studies were on the rise, while articles on mainstream middle-class consumer culture, which had dominated *AQ* during the previous moment prior to 1998, were in decline. The journal added two new special features, one known as "Forums," which brought together articles on such topics as "Academia and Activism" (Greyser and Weiss 2012), "Visual Culture and the War on Terror" (Delmont 2013), and "Chicano-Palestinian Connections" (Pulido and Lloyd 2010). Participants in the latter Forum invited readers to compare the Israeli wall with that being constructed along the U.S./Mexico border. The editors brought together an array of contemporary reflections, including the personal notes of a Latina graduate student traveling in Palestine (Saldívar 2010). All contribu-

tors invoked “the shared history of resistance of the Palestinian and Chicano people,” as phrased by a self-described “revolutionary organizer” (Criollo 2010, 847). Calculated to provoke assent from like-minded readers, such comparisons smoothed over the sorts of differences that might have emerged from taking the long view of history.

The other new special feature, known as “Currents,” offered “timely forms of writing” on “contemporary issues of importance to scholars in American studies” (Banet-Weiser 2012, 115). The first of these, “Queering Prison Abolition, Now?,” presented the views of a law professor, a graduate student, and a queer activist on that and other legal issues pertinent to the LGBTQ community (Stanley, Spade, and [In]Justice 2012). In the following year, two “Currents” essays by three professors from the University of California system responded to an incident of crowd control by pepper spray at the Davis campus (Rodríguez 2012; Maira and Sze 2012). In addition to these new features, the regular “special issues,” which had been published annually for many years, now often addressed contemporary topics such as the global subprime economic crisis of 2008 (Chakravartty and Ferreira da Silva 2012). As ASA president Matthew Frye Jacobson proclaimed in 2012, in a presidential address at a national meeting in San Juan, Puerto Rico, his purpose was no longer to inquire about “the state of our field,” as so many of his predecessors had done, but instead to ask “what is the view from where we are standing—from our historical moment, from our neighborhoods or cities, from our institutions?” Jacobson exhorted his listeners to place their scholarship directly in the service of political action (Jacobson 2013, 269).

For the most part, scholars publishing in *AQ* in 2013 rejected the search for national identity that had motivated the founders of the discipline from the 1930s to the 1950s. They denigrated

the earlier “mainstream historical narrative” for its easy dismissal of “indigenous genocide, African enslavement, colonization, white supremacy, and racism” as “blemishes” to be removed or as “anomalies” to be explained away in the service of “a more ‘perfect union’” (Criollo 2010, 847). Indeed, when Sarah Banet-Weiser became *AQ*’s editor in 2010, she invoked a “reimagining of the field and of ‘America’ itself [rendered ironic by quotation marks] through transnational, global, and hemispheric inquiries.” Reconstructing “a networked American studies” as a multidimensional array of nodes of anti-neoliberal communication, Banet-Weiser envisioned “‘America’” as “a series of migratory and mobile circuits, markets, cultures, and connections that complicate conventional maps of state boundaries and the geography of disciplines.” Within this flux, in which “categories such as the ‘nation,’ ‘race,’ ‘gender,’ and the ‘global’ are increasingly unsettled, as well as rewritten, by shifting flows of culture and capital,” American Studies activists moved, observed, intervened, and operated. Ultimately, she envisioned *AQ* as addressing the question of “what counts as ‘America’ and therefore what counts as American studies” (Banet-Weiser 2010, v). This agenda may not have reflected what the 1940s founders of American Studies meant when they gestured toward defining American identity—but how different really was the root motivation?

In conclusion, let’s consider that question of identity, or, to complicate things just a bit, identities. It goes without saying that increasing diversity in American Studies, both in its practitioners and in its topics of scholarship, has mirrored both the increasing ethnic and racial diversity of the United States and the increasing empowerment of many members of so-called minority groups. Among members of the ASA council and *AQ*’s advisory and managing editors in 2013, there were twice as many women as men, a considerable

change from even the recent past. More than half of the council and board members identified themselves as belonging to racial or ethnic minorities. Just as noteworthy is a shift in the geographic distribution of educational institutions represented by *AQ* authors. From the 1950s to the 1990s, 40 to 50 percent of *AQ* authors were located in the Northeast and mid-Atlantic regions, with 20 percent in the Midwest and 15 percent in the South. California fluctuated around 10 percent and other western states around 7 percent. By 2010, the pattern was completely reversed. Only 23 percent of authors came from the Northeast and mid-Atlantic regions, with 18 percent from the Midwest and only 7 percent from the South. But an impressive 30 percent came from California, and another 8 percent from other western states.

The location of the journal's editorial offices, which in 2003 had moved from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore to the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, may have played some role in this shift in authorship. Articles on race and ethnicity tended to focus on groups whose origins or homes lay in the Pacific region rather than the Atlantic, on such contemporary topics as the working-class backgrounds of Asian American fashion designers in New York City (Nguyen 2010), the solidarity of Vietnamese Americans and African Americans in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina (Tang 2011), and tensions between indigenous cannery workers in American Samoa and immigrants from Western Samoa, Tonga, and the Philippines (Poblete-Cross 2010). Although 35 percent of articles concerning people of color still specifically addressed African American experience and culture, the field rejected the white/black binary that had long informed socially progressive scholarship as much as popular prejudice.

The geographic center of the discipline continued to shift westward. In March 2015, a new editor, Mari Yoshihara, announced the relocation of *AQ*'s offices from southern California to the University of Hawai'i as part of the field's ongoing "turn to the Pacific." She admitted that Hawai'i, to "those on the continental United States and other parts of the globe," might not seem "the most natural center for American studies." However, she continued, its "indigenous and local resistance, regional solidarity and transnational alliances, and dynamic cultural practices" made Hawai'i a perfect place from which to "engage, challenge, or ignore 'America'" [with the word again set off by ironic quotation marks] (Yoshihara 2015, v-vi). Yoshihara used her bold, somewhat defensive rhetoric, whose tone echoes much recent advocacy scholarship in American Studies, to express a new American identity composed of diversity and dissent in the midst of social, ethnic, cultural, and geographic transformation.

This sampling of articles published by *AQ* reveals the scope of American Studies as radically different today than in the 1960s or even the 1990s. A somewhat passive goal of defining national identity has yielded to an active goal of promoting diverse, sometimes conflicting, identities. Still, emphasis on identity has remained the discipline's overriding constant. The more things change, the more, to some extent, they stay the same. However, the pose of scholarly objectivity typical of the field's early decades has yielded to a politically activist concern for representing minority positions and, as witnessed by the anti-Israeli boycott, for effecting social and political transformations within and beyond the borders of the United States. Although early American Studies scholars such as Leo Marx often expressed liberal, even progressive, political views, they did so from relatively settled positions within what they understood as a mainstream culture whose further development would alleviate and someday erase

inequalities of gender, ethnicity, and race. There was no sense of positioning oneself outside or in opposition to such a mainstream.

Everyday life in the United States today is marked by increasing ethnic and racial diversity, by obvious contrasts and frequent conflicts, and by forms of new media that promote fragmentation of popular cultures into ever smaller splinters. As revealed institutionally by *AQ*, the discipline of American Studies has foregrounded the intersectional study of multiple inequalities and has chosen to work vigorously to oppose them. One might ask, paraphrasing Mary Helen Washington's question from 1997, what happens to American Studies if the concerns of racial and ethnic minorities, the LGBTQ community, disabled people, and various other minority groups are placed at the center? The obvious answer is that scholars working in a wide range of broad areas—whether popular culture, or technology and the environment, or consumer society, or patterns of work and leisure—who choose not to foreground intersectional connections of their chosen topics with race, ethnicity and gender, or expose their connections to or complicity in imperialism, post-colonialism, or neoliberalism, are relegated to the periphery. The concept of identity, however construed, remains at the center of American Studies. In this sense, the discipline continues to provide a space for those seeking to understand what it means to be American.

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NOTES

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2 The author was among a considerable number of attendees who were unable to hear Wise's presentation because rumors of its path-breaking importance had spread in advance.

3 *American Quarterly* is abbreviated as *AQ* throughout text and notes.

4 This was a more concise version of a rambling editorial statement from the first issue. With only two or three minor edits, the statement remained the same into the 1970s.

5 Owing to changes in the typical page count per issue at varying times, each four-year period did not yield the same number of articles. From 1960 to 1963, *AQ* published 120 articles; from 1972 to 1975, there were 101; from 1995 to 1998, there were 70; and from 2010 to 2013, there were 160.

6 Initially I intended to trace changes in topics and themes in American Studies scholarship over fifty years by surveying three types of sources: *AQ* articles, titles of papers presented at ASA na-

tional meetings, and book advertisements in national meeting programs. However, there was no national ASA meeting in 1964 (the first was not held until 1971, with earlier meetings being limited to regional chapters). In addition, I could not locate the program book for the 1975 San Antonio national meeting despite a careful search in the papers of then ASA president William H. Goetzmann at the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin, and an examination of the finding aid for the American Studies Association Records at the Library of Congress. Thus I was forced to rely on *AQ* articles for the data of this survey. Journal articles probably do not register trends as quickly as conference papers, and journal articles approved by a single editor with an eye for particular topics are probably less representative of the overall discipline than conference papers approved by the diverse members of a program committee. Even so, I believe my informal survey yields significant results. On the early history of the American Studies Association, and especially a clear depiction of the differences between regional and national associations, see Deloria and Olson 2017, 79-112.

7 Even ten years later, during academic year 1974-75, only 22.5 percent of full-time faculty members in all disciplines in the United States were women, earning on average about 83 percent as much as their male colleagues (Curtis 2011, figures 2, 9).

8 See also Taupin 1963, 85.

9 Use of masculine pronouns to refer to people in general was then almost universal.

10 Veysey anticipated two more frequently cited critiques of the myth and symbol approach: Kuklick 1972 and Kelly 1974.

11 Chambliss also contributed “Chauncey Wright’s Enduring Naturalism” (1964).

12 Veysey was referring specifically to Smith’s *Virgin Land*, but his criticism was equally relevant to Marx’s *Machine in the Garden*, published four years after Veysey’s article.

13 Between 1960 and 1964 there were no articles on Asian Americans. The sole article on “Spanish Americans” (as the author referred to his ethnic group) was a straightforward literary survey concluding that the Mexican writer Luis Inclán was “akin to the American writers of the West” (Paredes 1960, 70).

14 Radway pointed out this irony, not in the original address but in an endnote to the published version: Radway 1999, 28n19.

15 For the result of the referendum see Flaherty 2014.

16 Other organizations approving anti-Israeli boycotts included the African Literature Association, the Association for Humanist Sociology, the Critical Ethnic Studies Association, the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies, the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, and the Peace and Justice Studies Association (USACBI 2013).

17 Indeed, Curtis Marez, president of ASA at the time of the boycott, had served as *AQ* editor from 2006 to 2010, so the continuity was hardly surprising.

18 Mary Helen Washington took the word menudo from John Sayles' film *Lone Star* (1996), where it referred to the cultural stew created by the meeting of whites, African Americans, and Mexican Americans in Texas. See Washington 1998, 12-13.

19 Gender and ethnicity were determined by careful searching for each individual, often on multiple websites.

20 On Marx's progressivism and activism see Meikle 2003, 152-55.

Stand-Up Comedy, Social Critique and a Few Notes on Retelling the Origins of American Studies

Michelle Robinson,
University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill, NC, USA

Abstract: This essay considers a range of ways scholars reflect on the origins and institutionalization of the field of American studies in the post-World War II era. Drawing on examples from the comedy of Mort Sahl, Jackie “Moms” Mabley, and Richard Pryor, this essay argues that post-war stand-up comedy supplies an aesthetics and an ethics that can open up new and productive ways of engaging critically with the origins of the field

Well before I was born, my great grandmother threw herself in front of a bus. The police tried to say she was committing suicide. But the family knew she was just trying to stop civil rights.

- Anthony Jeselnik, *Caligula* (2013)

On his 2013 album *Caligula*, Anthony Jeselnik confesses that a dreadful death in the family was no pedestrian suicide but an act of white supremacist terror. The comedian summons a relative only to throw her in the path of a moving vehicle--and into a bit of rhetorical slapstick. In fact, he invents an enemy of civil rights whose desperate need to seize control of the front of a bus leads to a death so bizarre the police can't fathom it as political protest. What sort of joke is this? An instance of affectionate familial misogyny and one that offers us, also, the delight of imagining justice-dealt-by-public transit for an ancestor's idiotic, self-sabotaging crusade against integration.

To Americanists, who are regularly compelled to contemplate the politics and purpose of our disciplinary predecessors, I offer Jeselnik's "bit" as an inroads into new ways of thinking, talking, and writing about our relations to the origins of the field. The post-World War II era that marked the arrival of American Studies as an academic field was contemporaneous with the emergence of varieties of comic speech that coalesced into the recognizable genre of American expressive culture we know as stand-up comedy. In this essay, I argue that stand-up, more than an object of scholarly investigation in its own right, is a rhetorical form that can open up new interpretive

engagements with the origins of American studies and our investment in revisiting its postwar origins. I am not interested in the dubious proposition that stand-up comedy from the 1950s onward offers an alternate lineage for American Studies. Instead, this essay is motivated by a curiosity about postwar stand-up as a rhetorical form and a *discrete* mode of inquiry into an “American” personality, culture, politics, and identity. Mort Sahl, Moms Mabley, and Richard Pryor (individuals whose careers spanned and surpassed the 1950s) developed rhetoric and shaped an aesthetic that generated unfamiliar, dynamic forms of analysis. Sahl’s rhetorical signature: beats, cadences, digressions and colloquial registers provided the rhythm of an open-ended, dialogic political critique. Moms Mabley’s ingenious dissembling, accompanied by light-hearted faulty-thinking and faulty-talk, could seize and shake the conscience of an unsuspecting audience, even as she made herself the butt of a joke. Pryor’s brilliant talent of giving voice to the adversary and running commentary to the audience could interleave comic slapstick with deadly serious discourse. Sahl’s, Mabley’s and Pryor’s distinct varieties of stand-up supply alternate expressive modes and a politics of form designed to nudge commonplace talk on social and civic life out of its discursive ruts.

Americanists’ standing practice of accounting for their disciplinary forbearers is mired in its own ruts. To pack it in would be catastrophic, however; this inquiry never ceases to be compulsory, principled, urgent. In his much-cited, well-worn and indispensable essay “‘Paradigm Genres’ in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement,” Gene Wise identifies an early illustration of the project so-called Americanists would pursue in the life Vernon Louis Parrington. Parrington’s *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927), Wise explains, was the work of “single mind grappling with materials of American experience, and driven by concentrated

fury to create order from them." Perry Miller's well-known Marlow-ian "jungle epiphany" in the Congo was another "representative act" or "paradigm drama" that set off what Wise calls the "academic movement" (Wise 1979, 297-299). Parrington's and Miller's efforts were characterized by "the obsession to give order, explanation to America's experience, and the will to break through scholarly conventions blocking that quest," and this enterprise was further nurtured by Yale University faculty that ventured outside their disciplinary silos in search of productive intersections between art history, literary studies, and history (Wise 1979, 303). Nevertheless, their post-war project was bolstered by the University provost's desire for a curriculum that championed free enterprise and individual liberties as the keystones of Americans' "cultural heritage," a program of study that could hold economic totalitarianism at bay (Holzman 1999, 84). Fundraising for the emerging field relied on the premise that etching the contours of a distinctly American personality and crafting discourses of American Exceptionalism were weapons against Cold War communism (Holzman 1999, 90). In the decades that followed, however, the work of these early self-identified Americanists became a starting point for revisionary scholarship that questioned the fundamental assumptions of its white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal stance. That the current field of American studies shares a lineage and affiliation with a Cold War endeavor necessitates bouts of genealogical soul-searching. Below, I present an abbreviated but not entirely overstated inventory of the places where this soul-searching has stalled. After that, I propose that stand-up rhetorics could complicate or "jump-start" its discursive logics.

**Mommy, Grandma is Starting to Breathe Again.
Shut up, and Get that Pillow Back in Place!**

Some scholars have moved to crack down on an unequivocal and impassioned censuring of postwar American Studies by steering its critics to alternative ancestries or by stressing its methodological impact in lieu of its early politics. Elaine Tyler May's "The Radical Roots of American Studies" playfully chisels a Mount Rushmore of the three Marx's (Karl, Groucho, and Leo) and so finds levity in the early field. She generously toasts the discipline's "founding fathers" - and a few "mothers" - for the "critical edge that characterized much of the scholarship of the postwar years" (May 1996, 180). The muscle of this case, however, relies on a pliable lineage that locates forerunners in such scholars as W. E. B DuBois, who might have (to paraphrase the most - or only - entertaining Marx brother she alludes to) refused to join *this particular club even if it would* have him as a member. May is only one of many patient apologists that suggests that what we call American Studies preceded its institutionalization. Along these lines, the "field" bended briefly toward justice before stumbling somewhere else.

While May's essay concedes the "myopia" of the myth and symbol school that "defined American culture as grounded in White male Protestant Anglo-Saxon traditions that were reactionary, nostalgic, stifling, and antidemocratic," not to mention oblivious of "the creativity and activism emanating from groups excluded from that tradition," she contends that a quick, irrevocable indictment of American studies neglects its meaningful achievements (May 1996, 188-189). Philip Deloria, too, has rolled his eyes at the "collective congealing of an American studies creation story," particularly the tired censuring of the "heteronormative white male

club" and "its failures to do this or that." (The "this" and "that" it is indicted for are the "uncritical celebration of an American exceptionalism that underpinned imperial and neocolonial projects across the globe" associated with Cold War containment culture.) (Deloria 2009, 10, 12). In other words, if the Cold War blunted "the critical edge" the field now aspires to, methodological innovations in post-war American studies were a vital antidote to formalist criticism. Furthermore, May maintains the field continuously supplied a "'free space' of sorts for rogue scholars of various stripes" (May 1996, 187). These reasonable pretexts could very well assuage practical objections to intellectual chauvinism, and they ought to mitigate the impulse to trot out an old chestnut about the field's Faustian bargain with American Exceptionalism. But they are also cosmetic antidotes, and there is something of the despot in therapy that withholds license to scratch a remorseless and irresistible itch.

Mommy, Why Can't I Kiss Grandma?

Shut up, and Close the Casket.

One remedy for fixating on the ancestral project in service of American Exceptionalism is the formidable practice of forgetting our disciplinary forbearers. Forgetting is one way we come to know ourselves. Then today's American Studies is a field not only sheared of its umbilical cord, but one that liberally "adopts" outsiders: ethnic and cultural studies that find no footing elsewhere in the academy, for instance. This posture prefers mergers over modest but risky self-effacing activism that would endanger our more steady footing—which is not to pretend that American studies is immune to budgetary cuts. Still, ours is a "large tent" mentality or, in less gratifying terms, we make American Studies a boarding house and the field a landlord in some (and even the dirty) senses of the word.

In 1997, Mary Helen Washington's presidential address at the annual conference of the American Studies Association asked, "What Happens to American Studies if you put African American Studies at the Center?" Washington pointed out that the "extraordinary experimental work" and interdisciplinary bent of African American Studies in the 1970s "should have made, but did not make, African American studies and American studies natural collaborators, fraternal, if not identical, twins" (Washington 1998, 3). Still, if we have at last succeeded in meeting Washington's compelling challenge to "*institutionalize* inter-ethnic, inter-racial, multi-cultural paradigms" to remake the ASA in as "liberated and liberating institutional space," are we entirely freed of Gene Wise's concern that American Studies is a domesticating, "parasite" field that recruits or rescues disciplines "which have their real base vitality in the culture at large" (Washington 1998, 22; Wise 1979, 315)? Can we exult a now-fulfilled prophecy that the old center of American Studies is a crumbled, innocuous artifact and revel in a clean bill of health? Or is there a language for unfinished business, one that admits we are host to a dormant virus that, at any moment, could flare up and infect our scholarly habits?

Mommy, Can we Play with Grandpa?

No, You've Dug Him up Enough Already.

There is still a camp that persists in the once-reflexive-now-retrograde condemnation of the early projects of American Studies and the Cold War imperative that nourished it. The honesty of this simple politics of pure loathing for the past - one that would disinter one's forerunners from the coffin only to pound new stakes into their hearts - lies in its apparently uncompromising, caustic vision. Of

course, there is something congratulatory in a cynical, self-righteous disavowal and ritual excoriation of the emergence of American Studies. To be sure, the etymology of sarcasm is to rip the flesh off of dogs, and one cannot help but bloody one's hands when flaying a dead beast and making a meal of it. But a perfect estrangement from postwar American Studies scholars is far-fetched, especially when we share the same brand. What idiom can best show contempt for the past while conceding our relation to it? Jeselnik, I think, manages something like this in a tasteless public eulogy for what we can only hope is another imaginary grandmother. He remarks that his fondest memories of her were when she cuddled up to him on the sofa and read Mark Twain, solemnly explaining that it combined her two favorite pastimes: "Spending time with her grandson and using the n-word" (Jeselnik 2015). Comedian Chris Rock's bleak suggestion that for Blacks, America is like "the uncle who paid for you to go to college, but who molested you," supplies a stronger analogy (Rock 2004). In these instances, Jeselnik and Rock agitate familial attachments without denying their own affective investments in the past, or their ancestors' persistent claims upon the present.

How can Americanists proceed with a candid account of the postwar origins of the field—an account that does not blithely dismiss the vexations of its emergence or profess absolution of its past offences, or become agonizingly mired in livid antipathy and Oedipal ire? I turn to postwar stand-up comedy to locate the rhetorical forms that may accomplish this task.

From the 1950s on, stand-up comedians launched animated attacks on figures of authority, unsettling the language of American Exceptionalism. Many of them punctured Cold War logic and

the postwar culture of containment as they explored the stratified, variegated texture of an American “personality” in crisis. My point is emphatically not that stand-up comedy inevitably short-circuited social conventions or supplied a counter-hegemonic stance. Stand-up comedy has never had a pact with liberatory history. It has frequently reinforced prevailing norms, and often been designed to entertain uncritically. Yet the 1950s marked the arrival of new comedic registers that differentiated its cultural status from existing entertainments. In this period, it became a “distinctive cultural form, separate from other modes of performance and enticing the public to support shows exclusively comprised of stand-up comics” (Krefting 2014, 37). I won’t discuss the prevalence of the cycle of jokes whose homicidal impulse protests the very notion of familial relations during this era (see above), though their macabre quality underscores the proliferation of comedy-as-grassroots-assault against Cold War containment culture (Boskin 1997, 57-59). I do point to some of the post-war developments in professional stand-up when, as Rebecca Krefting argues, “audiences were increasingly hospitable to critiques of institutionalized inequality, particularly around indices of race and ethnicity” (Krefting 2014, 37). What follows is a constellation of moments – paradigm dramas, if you will – that help us consider the rhetorical elements and performative styles that stand-up comedy has to offer to contemporary Americanists interested in rethinking and rewriting our relationship to the postwar origins of the field and its early scholarship. I focus on three examples of comedic commentary from stand-ups Mort Sahl, Moms Mabley and Richard Pryor, respectively, highlighting how their formal acrobatics and physical performance ingested the incongruities in American politics and society to arrive at a sophisticated ethics and aesthetics of critique.

“Maybe if Things go Well this Year We Won’t Have to Hold These Meetings in Secret Anymore.”

In the 1950s, Mort Sahl was one of the first of the comedians who found audiences willing to “reassert their power as individual sovereign citizens through laughter, even (or especially) if it came at the expense of those who wielded power from the distance of a high office” (Robinson 2010, 109). The many provocations of Lenny Bruce’s confrontational and irreverent humor on race relations—exemplified by his biting satire of an anti-Semitic quasi-liberal bigot in “How to Relax your Colored Friends at Parties”—would use humor to unapologetically transgress social norms (Kaufman 2012, 130). And when “race was placed squarely on the discursive table in a highly visible way,” Bambi Haggins has noted, “Dick Gregory was there” (Haggins 2007, 3). Though Gregory modeled respectability in a clean-cut dark suit, his stand-up was no less invested in dismantling Cold War ideologies and social hypocrisies. Nevertheless, Sahl pioneered a mode of delivery as he caricatured heads of state, jeered at political duplicity, and lobbed an image of the Cold War as farce. Though his take on current events was flip-pant, off-the-cuff, and highly digressive (even if he appeared to be reading the news straight off the press), his technique incorporated a constant appraisal of the utility of humor as a mode of critique.

The album *Mort Sahl At The Hungry i* (1960) is chock-full of laughs and severe groans. He notes, for instance, that during Nixon’s trip to the American Exhibition at Gorky Park, “President Eisenhower was in a new role, having been completely in charge when Nixon was out of the country,” and he pointed out that religious groups strongly favor the death penalty, “even if a man is occasionally executed unjustly. And they believe in that, even

though they made a very large mistake once" (Sahl 1960). The Jewish American comedian begins with a bit on the recent U-2 Incident, when a U.S. spy plane was discovered in Soviet airspace, promising to "reconstruct it tortuously." He ends by encouraging the audience to "break up into buzz groups and discuss the real meaning of the material," as if the general shape of his performance mimics a university lecture followed by recitation sections. In fact, through the 1950s and 1960s Sahl sported a "casual campus wardrobe (the signature cardigan sweater, slacks, loafers, rumpled hair, open collar, rolled-up shirtsleeves)" - in 1954 Terrence O'Flaherty from the *San Francisco Chronicle* called it "just the right campus touch" (Nachman, 2003, 50). But what Sahl explains will be a "10-minute review" of American history "starting last August" is breathtakingly undisciplined. His account of the American political scene is nearly eclipsed by parenthetical observations, forays into unrelated territory, and associative flights of fancy. His is a shaggy dog comedy, stippled with half-apologetic remarks, as if the comedian suddenly realizes he has gone astray: "excuse me for digressing"; "but anyway"; "now back to our theme"; "oh listen, before I forget," and so on. Sahl intermittently interrupts each routine with sudden shouts of laughter, snorts, unfinished sentences, and omissions.

But the news inevitably resurfaces in Sahl's comedy, and when it does, his bark has quite a lot of bite. When he first encountered the comedian in 1953, "avid fan" Nate Hokum heard a car salesman-by-day's "unswerving attack" that wreaked havoc "upon our entire system of order"; Sahl's bundle of caustic comments constituted a "dissertation on our sacred cows and revered institutions." This was "the antithesis of the slick comic" that slid glibly into the post-war era untouched by social change, miles away from what Gerald Nachman has labeled the "postwar pre-renaissance"

comedians: “comic craftsmen” plying their trade; “joke-tellers, spielers, showbiz brawlers” doing their thing; “one-liner salesmen, guffaw dealers, joke brokers.” These old school performers were, Nachman respectfully explains, “jovial go-along get-along guys whose mandate was to amuse; survival was their foremost worry, not social commentary” (Nachman 2003, 50, 22). Herbert Caen of the *San Francisco Chronicle* differentiated Sahl from this “chatter-and-patter” or “professional” funnyman, pointing to the strange amalgam of materials in his comedy: “Its ingredients are so twisted around and re-integrated in each performance that he successfully creates the impression of complete ad liberty.” Enrico Banducci, who owned *The Hungry i* and gave Sahl his big break, described the comedian’s riffs as a “brave exercise in the art of free speech,” filled with a spontaneity of social critique so off-the cuff that, “Sometimes, when he develops a particular rapport with this audience, he takes off and flies, and his sudden, brilliant ad-libs and inspirations would never be heard outside an on-performance recording.”

These are not merely “smart-aleck footnotes” that materialized on the daily paper that was Sahl’s casual prop, but an eviscerating graffiti on newsprint, one of those “uninvited forms of inscription”: a “subcultural ‘plague’” that marks and pollute spaces” or “excretory marking rituals” that attend, as Michel Serres points out, “the possibilities of (de)(re)territorialization” (Walton, 2017, 121). *Mort Sahl At the Hungry i* is a record of the comedian’s phonological delinquency: extemporaneous rattling of ordinary ideas, good-humored and venomous sneers, not only scribbled in the margins of the news but scrawled in capital letters on existing print. Nachman also singles out the “athletic dexterity” of Sahl’s performances: “the menacing smile, the subversive guffaw, the supple voice that can reproduce anything from party hack to

airhead starlet” and monologue shot through with his signature “barking laugh” (Nachman 2003, 67). Caen marveled at the “blinding bursts of speed” in a meandering soliloquy “about cable cars and cops and raids and politicians” and compared Sahl to “a jazz musician playing a chorus: toying with phrases, following the melody and suddenly losing it, trying for high notes that he sometimes splattered.” Sahl punctuates his insubordinate talk with unwieldy snorts and sputtering, meta-communicative signals that point to a kind of mutiny *beyond* insubordination, a secondary language that meditates on the complexion of social commentary he has to offer, that questions and finds itself always unfinished. “Is there anyone I haven’t offended?” he asks by way of closing—in the very middle of the performance. His comic mode envisions and pursues a comedy of a different order: one that really gets in the expressive muck to offer a formidable critique equal to the gravity of political life.

Michel Serres observes that, “the behavior of squatters can be understood as a radical form of interrogating ideas and practices of ownership and property rights.” From the 1950s to mid-1960s, Sahl’s was a vagrant politics turned verbal coup and an intellectual curiosity that eviscerated the headlines, ripped the skin off the body politic, and publicly feasted. Not only did he vandalize everything in his path, he marked his territory with a style of speech that was a second order of critique. On the one hand, cultural historian Peter Robinson squarely positions Sahl as a political comedian that found a public hungry for a humor that could assault the “political status quo and society’s intractable contradictions, including that between what author Susan Sontag called the two competing destinies of the age: the unrelenting banality of seemingly limitless prosperity and consumption, and the inconceivable terror of nuclear destruction” (Robinson 2010, 118). On the other

hand, Sahl's strange, uncontrolled squawks, uneven inflection, and wild detours examine the nature and effects of social critique even as that critique takes place. What Americanists might take from the ethics of this vocal syncopation, which intersperses the uttered critique with inquiry into the practice of critique, is the opportunity to move beyond "competing destinies" - that is to say, rival histories - and to call into question the role of disclaimers and dismissals when it comes to recapitulating the emergence of the field.

"Have You Been Down South at all? What do They Call You? Do They Call You Jackie or Moms? I've Never Known."

The variety show host Merv Griffin asked this question in 1969. Perched next to Griffin in red knit cap and a hideous yellow housecoat patterned with pink, white and blue flowers over an equally ugly dress, Jackie "Moms" Mabley is very much at ease. For some time, Mabley had adopted the non-threatening stage persona of an old and occasionally toothless woman in an "oversized clodhoppers, tattered gingham dresses, and oddball hats," but her performances were far from innocent (Watkins 1999, 391). Mel Watkins explains that the African American comedian's regalia was simply "the buffer or intermediary necessary to quell resistance to a woman doing a single comic routine" (Watkins 1999, 391). In this interview, she cuts Griffin off with a casual wave of her hand. "They like me down there, to tell you the truth," she explains. "In fact," she continues, tapping her finger on the table that separates the host from his guest, "they like me so well...they named me, what's that name that man got that horse in the moving pictures...that western man?"

"Who? Uh Roy Rogers?"

"Roy Rogers, they named me Roy Rogers' horse."

"Trigger?"

"Trigger, yeah."

"That's what they call you in the South?"

"Everywhere I go, hello Trigger! What you saying, Trigger?....At least I think that's what they said...."

The apparently harmless and absent-minded "Moms" first dramatizes her enthusiastic reception down South by throwing her hands wildly in the air and clasping them together. Then she clasps those same hands tightly in her lap, mouth turned down and brow wrinkled in puzzlement. She dares, no, compels her white audience to laugh at guileless "Moms"'s expense. Griffin raises his eyebrows and sits upright, suddenly the straw man and slightly alarmed at the guilty pleasure of this likely unscripted gag, not to mention the temporary gutting of his authority by his otherwise disarming guest. He is abruptly riveted by the surface of his desk. The audience, meanwhile, bursts into laughter. They have just seen "Moms" suddenly seeing herself seen.

This event belongs to a genealogy of what theorist and literary critic Lauren Berlant has called acts of Diva Citizenship, when "a person stages a dramatic coup in a public sphere in which she does not have privilege" (Berlant 1997, 223). Mom's joke relies upon "wounding words," language that, as legal scholar Charles Lawrence

has controversially argued, is no less viscerally experienced than an actual slap (Haiman 1993, 28). She painstakingly dramatizes the effect of an epithet in a succession of expressions, as uncertainty and then sorrow rise to the surface of her face. Of course, her consummate toying with incendiary remarks makes a gag of forfeiting dignity. The work of the tendentious joke, Freud has suggested, “shows itself in a choice of verbal material and conceptual situations”; pleasure stems from that temporary reappearance of what has “been repudiated by the censorship in us” and are supposed to be lost (Freud 1960, 159). And yet, he points out, “to the human psyche all renunciation is exceedingly difficult, and so we find that tendentious jokes provide a means of undoing the renunciation and retrieving what was lost” (Freud 1960, 120-121). Effortlessly eliciting a racist idiom from a theoretically dormant vernacular, Moms makes plain that stinging language, supposedly muted by the recent passage of Civil Rights legislation, can have volcanic effects. Berlant remarks that diva-auratic events “emerge in moments of such extraordinary political paralysis that acts of language can feel like explosives that shake the ground of collective existence” and call upon their audiences to act (Berlant 1997, 223). Mabley’s seismic, televised provocation, her “trigger” – here and elsewhere “encased” in the familiar, reassuring “vaudevillian-styled joke series” – destabilizes the comfortable exchange between host and guest with an uneasy laughter, obtained at the expense of her own humiliation (Haggins 2007, 150).

Here I must note that self-deprecation was among the vital comic instruments women had at their disposal during the 1950s and 1960s. While Mabley adopted a comic persona as a non-threatening, “desexualized, alternately cantankerous and kindly sort of revisionist mammy,” her entry into televised entertainments was electrified

by her signature libidinous hankering after young men blended with brilliant comic sociopolitical commentary (Haggins 2007, 150). Linda Mizejewski contends that women's access to mainstream stand-up comedy in the 1950s was tightly restricted, and argues that it was tolerable for Jewish and African American women to participate in the "male world of smut" only because their "color, ethnicity, or immigrant status marked them as not feminine" (Mizejewski 2014, 18). Jewish American stand-ups such as Phyllis Diller and Joan Rivers depended on self-effacing humor; their social critique was contraband, just below "humor's beguiling surface" (Gilbert 2004, 2). Nevertheless, women comedians sometimes offered an abrasive take on female sexuality that was otherwise "silenced, euphemized, or neglected" in an "era of Doris Day virginity and twin beds for Mr. and Mrs. Cleaver" (Mizejewski 2014, 19). Jewish American comedian Belle Barth's raunchy comedy, captured on albums like *My Next Story Is a Little Risque* (1961) and *If I Embarrass You, Tell Your Friends* (1960), included the memorable lyric: "I'm gonna line a hundred men up against the wall. / I bet a hundred bucks I can bang them all" (Mizejewski 2014, 19). And Rusty Warren's unforgettable Cold War, pre-bicentennial ditty reminded her audience that if "it's great to live in a democracy today, where freedom is everywhere," a woman's most earnest display of patriotism was to "Bounce your Boobies" on *Rusty Warren Bounces Back* (Warren 1961). Thus the genius of Mabley's televised performances was the vividly conceived, highly polished, and well-executed "Moms," whose frumpy dress and farcical penchant for handsome young men provided the perfect guise for inciting a different, discomfiting register of laughter in unwitting audiences.

Of course, it is presumptuous to assume that in every case laughter felt the keen edge of her words. For instance, Haggins suggests Dick Gregory's jokes about a black president were

met with a broad range of laughter: laughter that *could* embody “communal solidarity,” *might have* brushed off “the preposterous absurdity of a black president” or *attempted* “to obscure the serious discomfort many harbored concerning such a prospect” (Haggins 2007, 162). By contrast, Mabley’s overtly political jokes appeared eminently palatable. In her live performances, she regaled audiences with impossible tales of intimate chats with Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson—whom were all, apparently, in desperate need of her guidance. She recounted her sharp scolding to the presidential candidates on matters of national security and civil rights, and described her service to the country as a diplomat—a trade very much at odds with her lowly attire. From her nonchalant posturing and self-important airs, however, it was only a few steps to a plain-spoken activism in comic garb.

But her 1969 appearance on *The Merv Griffin Show* was one where the comedian embraced the danger of incurring her own and others’ distress and, in doing so, called upon her audience to confront the repressed currents of racism that gave shape to their social worlds. For American Studies scholars earnestly engaged with writing the origins of the field, this type of talk could capsize liberal convictions in unsullied progress, requiring both scholars and their audiences to wade, at least temporarily, into sites of serious discomfort.

I’m not Bullshitting Here, Those Motherfuckers Hurt.

Finding himself slightly short of breath during *Live in Concert*, a filmed 1979 performance, the black comedian Richard Pryor moves to tell his audience about his recent heart attack (Pryor 1979). “I was just walking along and someone said ‘Don’t breathe.’” His left arm extends away from the body at a strange angle, and the hand on

the end of it a tight fist pressed against the center of his chest twists as if turning a deadbolt. Pryor's first response is one of confusion. "I said, 'Huh?'" "'You heard me motherfucker, I said 'Don't *breathe!*'" Another turn of the fist. Pryor assures his assailant in a meek, high-pitched whimper, "Okay, I won't breathe, I won't breath, I won't breathe," only to be rebuked by that unsociable voice: "Then shut the fuck up!" But the comedian's sniveling entreaties continue, "Okay, don't kill me, don't kill me, don't kill me, don't kill me" until the low-pitched and pitiless voice hollers, "Get on one knee and prove it!" Pryor falls to one knee and faces the audience, still dramatizing the interchange between his heart and himself: "You're thinking about dying now, aren't you?" "Yes." Each new admonition is marked by another wrenching turn of the fist against his chest and a reflexive jolt of pain, "You weren't thinking about it when you were eating all that pork!" This last rebuke draws bursts of laughter from the audience but shoves Pryor onto the stage, writhing on his back, gritting his teeth in pain. "You know black people have high blood pressure," his heart scolds him. "I know, I know, I know."

At this point, a brief interregnum: Pryor raises his back from the stage, breaking the forth wall and the dramatic frame to address his audience: "You be thinking about shit like that when you think you're going to die." He revisits his desperate appeals by way of example. Pryor's supplications are, by now, frenziedly crushed into a single declaration, a frantic neologism: "Don'tkillmedon'tkillmedon'tkillme." On such occasions, the comedian clarifies, "You put in an emergency call into god." He seamlessly transitions back into character, piteously inquiring, "Can I speak to god right away please?" and then addresses the audience again, transferring the mic to his right hand. There's "always some angel like" — now imitating the nasal voice of an indifferent telephone op-

erator that elicits new peals of laughter: "I'm going to have to put you on hold." "And then," he explains, "your heart get mad if it find out you've been going behind its back to God. It say," adopting an incredulous but mildly entertained tone, "was you trying to talk to god behind my back?" but when the comedian denies it, his infuriated heart launches another attack that returns Pryor to his agonized contortions on the stage. "You's a lying motherfucker!"

Pryor's interpreters have typically focused on the punchline to the joke, which involves Pryor regaining consciousness in an ambulance to find a group of white people hovering over him. This leads him to the exasperating conclusion that, "I died and wound up in the wrong motherfucking heaven!" But the genius of the exchange that precedes this comic relief is no less revelatory about race relations. The comedian has just wrenched his heart from his body, encountered his own heart as unfamiliar "someone" and witnessed it attack him, choke him, reproach him, threaten him, assault him, and leave him senseless. What is more, that fuming, menacing cartoon villain of a heart has an already familiar disposition. It belongs to the police. Pryor incessantly references the brutality and indiscriminate violence of law enforcement against black Americans in *Live in Concert*. In fact, earlier in the performance, when recounting the bizarre circumstances under which he shot his car to keep his wife from leaving, he remarked, "Then the police came. I went into the house. Cause they got magnums too. And they don't kill cars. They kill Niggers." However, when he plucks out the vital organ that sustains him, he finds that his heart has adopted and internalized that same cruel vocabulary and propensity for violence. It was lying in wait to assault him. Pryor's account suggests that even one's vital organs may have been corrupted; the integrity of one's own body is not to be taken for granted. For Americanists who would happily throw

their postwar predecessors under the bus, Pryor's insight prompts us ask how we are both injured and animated by their scholarship. We might also ask, from time to time, who is playing ventriloquist?

You Cannot go Swimming if You Have Diarrhea.

In a 2014 performance on *CONAN*, stand-up comedian Tig Notaro speculated on the provenance of placards in public pools that cautioned visitors not to swim with diarrhea. What kind of comfort with one's body would it take, Notaro asked, pressing her hand to her stomach, for an individual to think, "I'm not feeling so well... doctor said I should probably stay at home. But you know, I think I'm going to head down to the public pool and do some laps" (Notaro 2014). Notaro's impression of this defecating Philistine, performing the backstroke in the pool with "full on diarrhea" and vindicated by the absence of any municipal prohibition against such behavior, finds its parallel in stand-up comics' frequent, ingenious violations of propriety. This bit also, inevitably, evoked what scholar John Limon has described as the "tour de force" of meta-comedy that put "aggression and excretion into form": Lenny Bruce's "I'm going to piss on you" (Limon 2000, 15). And it is worth pointing out that the comedic-diarrhetic's culturally-specific form of—to borrow a phrase from anthropologist Mary Douglas—"ritual pollution" precisely characterizes Notaro's historic performance *Live* (2012). This performance brims with the impromptu, uninhibited divulgence of Notaro's battle with superbug C.Diff and the tragic accident that led to her mother's death, not to mention her then recent diagnosis with breast cancer. But could we regard *Live* as an instance of parrhesia, not in a pejorative sense (a hemorrhagic gush of chatter), but as an agonizingly candid rhetorical form that dares its interlocutor to stifle it? And if so, does this mode of contemporary stand-up have

a place in what activist and documentarian Michael Moore called the “army of comedy” required for political dissent (Pearson 2017)?

I end with this description of the celebrated work of contemporary stand-up comedian Tig Notaro to gesture at the far reaches of stand-up comedy today, whose frequent habit is to tell everything — to pollute the pool, one might say, with every effluvia or noxious suppuration that belongs (or belonged) to the body, in an unsanitary and potentially toxic catharsis. I sometimes wonder if this expressive mode suggests the route to an agonizingly candid scholarship in American Studies modeled on the figure of the parrhesiaste, which Socrates linked to ethics and an “aesthetics of the self” (Foucault 2001, 166).

I have argued, however, that the comedic architecture Sahl, Mabley, and Pryor introduced to stand-up comedy is of a sharper, more penetrating sort and with an ethical agenda that is relevant to scholarly reflection on the history of the field of American Studies. Sahl does not hesitate to employ the contempt of the graffiti artist or the obscenities of the squatter in service of (de)(re)territorialization of hegemonic space. But this brash talk is a broken talk, intruded by formal signals that undercut the arrogance of critique *and* call into question the sufficiency of the counter-attack. Mabley, acting as diva-citizen, intermittently “triggers” moments of serious discomfort, such that the discreditable, sometimes even appalling residue of the past comes into view, and what lies below the conscious surface returns. Pryor recognizes that vital organs are shaped by violence; they are neither differentiated from nor can be undifferentiated from our bodies. They will attack, and when they do, we must pluck them out and listen to the ideological bearings of their speech. Sahl’s, Mabley’s and Pryor’s expressive modes provide different tactics for speaking of and to postwar American

Studies, and their aesthetic provocations can challenge us to transform our relationship to the past and the stories we tell ourselves.

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NOTES

1. There can be no better evidence of the interconnected influence of these three comedians on American culture than Joseph Dorison's decision to examine Gregory alongside Sahl and Bruce in a book devoted to the history of Jewish comedy. See Joseph Dorison, "Comedy's Changing Landscape: Two Jews and a Black Crossover Artist" in *Kvetching and Shpritzing: Jewish Humor in American Popular Culture* (Jefferson, North Carolina: MacFarland and Company, 2015), 109-116.

2. Nate Hokum, [liner notes] in *Mort Sahl*, Mort Sahl 1960 or *Look Forward in Anger*, Verve, MG V-15004 (1959), LP.

3. Herbert Caen, "About Mort Sahl" [liner notes] in Mort Sahl, *The Future Lies Ahead*, Verve, MG V-15002 (1959), LP.

4. Enrico Banducci, [liner notes] in Mort Sahl, *At the Hungry i*, Verve, MG VS-615012 (1960), LP.

5. Herbert Caen, "About Mort Sahl."

6. Serres quoted in David Walton, "From Piss-Communication to GraffARTi: Hegemony, Popular Culture, and the Bastard Art," 121.

7. *The Merv Griffin Show*, 1969, in *Moms Mabley: I Got Something to Tell You*, directed by Whoopi Goldberg (2013, USA: HBO 2013), DVD.

A Future from the Past: Perspectives from Memory Studies

Carolyn Kitch
Temple University
USA

Abstract: Like American Studies, the interdisciplinary field of memory studies seeks to understand symbolic expressions of social-group identity over time, the interplay of social behavior and cultural texts, and the emergence of counter-narratives within broader conversations about nationhood. This essay considers those parallels, and then surveys four recent thematic turns in memory studies—new focuses on social movements, cultural geography, ritual performance, and technology—that are strikingly similar to the original interests of American Studies. It further contends that the current resurgence of nationalism, across the globe as well as within the United States, presents important opportunities for interdisciplinary inquiry. Such developments highlight the usable past of American Studies, in service of not only other fields but also its own future.

Writing more than 15 years ago, American Studies scholar George Lipsitz proposed: “If we are to fashion an American Studies appropriate to our own era, we need to know what we want to retain from the past and what we want to discard” (2001, xvi). This essay considers his challenge in light of recent developments in another interdisciplinary area of scholarship, memory studies—an enterprise devoted to the question of what gets retained and discarded in cultural knowledge, beliefs, and identities over time. After decades of growth and diffusion, both fields are undergoing debate about definitions and directions, and their similarities may be instructive.

From their starts, the two fields have had much in common. Each seed initially was planted in particular disciplinary soil - American Studies grew out of English and history departments, while memory studies began in psychology and sociology - but then took root across the humanities, the social sciences, and the arts. Both fields focus on the articulation of social-group identity and emphasize national experience as the prism through which the passage of time is assessed. These concepts have expanded to include “imagined” communities and “invented” traditions, to honor vernacular as well as official expressions of nationhood, and to search for counter-narratives as well as grand ones (for example, Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Lipsitz 1990; Bodnar 1992; Zerubavel 2004).

Even though the groundswell of academic interest in memory studies did not occur until half a century later, its intellectual foundation was laid during the 1920s and 1930s, roughly the same time as the birth of American Studies. Both fields gained strength in universities in later decades of the 20th century, alongside the rise of cul-

tural studies and postmodernism, and amid assumptions that wars, globalization, and decolonization had shaken national identities in ways that required a reexamination of contemporary uses of the past.

Finally, both American Studies and memory studies have been simultaneously hailed as models for interdisciplinary inquiry and criticized as fields without centers. In the 2008 inaugural issue of the journal *Memory Studies*, Henry Roediger and James Wertsch described that field as “a huge tent in which scholars from many perspectives and fields can find a home” and yet an undertaking whose “bewildering diversity ... may lead to miscommunication and frustration” (12, 9). The theoretical and methodological clarity of both fields has been questioned as they have transitioned from broader and presumably unifying narratives to more specific concerns (see, for American Studies, Bronner 2017, and for memory studies, Olick 2008). Lipsitz contended in the title of his 2001 book that American Studies had reached “a moment of danger” by the start of the 21st century. The thematic turns of the 1990s—identity politics, racial and ethnic violence, global economics, and more—had widened the field’s purview while also unmooring its national orientation, Lipsitz explained, and holistic approaches had been abandoned in favor of “the situated knowledges of aggrieved racialized groups” (xvii). In order to move forward, he argued:

We need to appreciate the ways in which new social, cultural, economic, and political practices are rupturing traditional connections between culture and place, making local identities both less and more important at the same time. We need to learn from people and cultures that have been forced to make themselves as mobile, flexible, and fluid as transnational capital, yet still capable of draw-

ing upon separate histories, principles, and values (19-20).

Yet Lipsitz also acknowledged that each phase of American Studies scholarship, from “celebrations” of American exceptionalism in the 1940s and 1950s, to bottom-up social histories of the 1960s and 1970s, to the “condemnation” of 1980s and 1990s ideological critiques, has been analytically situated in the pressing issues of its own day. Thus, the field’s survival would lie in finding new perspectives “appropriate to our own era” (xvi, 20). In this last statement is the central premise of memory studies: our understandings and uses of the past are based on present-day circumstances. The same can be said about the evolution of memory-studies scholarship itself.

The Growth of Memory Studies

Like American Studies, memory studies emerged between the World Wars. The credit for its first articulation usually goes to either German art historian Aby Warburg or French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. In his explanation of what he called “collective memory,” Halbwachs argued that “the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present” and that people understand both the past and the present through “collective frameworks” of shared symbols and narratives (1992, 40, 50). Although Halbwachs was writing prior to World War II, during which he died in Buchenwald, his essays on collective memory would not be published and translated until later decades.

During the middle decades of the 20th century, very similar ideas were expressed in new American literary scholarship, notably by Henry Nash Smith (1950) and Leo Marx (1964), who laid the foundations of the “myth and symbol” approach—an understanding of

national identity as a consensus on shared narratives about origins, ideals, and archetypal characters—that was central to early work in American Studies. Smith further contended that the nation was an imagined community constructed through popular communication, an idea that directly informs memory scholarship but more often is attributed to Benedict Anderson (1983). This new academic idea took shape within a broader public culture of American nation-building projects, ranging from the creations of artists, writers, and folklorists employed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the Great Depression to the civic boosterism of Cold War-era business and tourism. Many of these expressions romanticized American history, but some of it cast new light on traumas of the past, such as the WPA's collection of slave narratives collected in the 1930s, a time when the direct experience of slavery was disappearing from living memory.

Somewhat similarly, widespread academic interest in social memory coincided with the rise of Holocaust studies in the 1970s and 1980s, when factors including the aging of survivors and the rise of neo-Nazism spurred organized testimony and public-memory projects (see, for instance, Zelizer 1998). Scholarship of the 1990s continued but expanded the focus on trauma, with attention to topics including the Vietnam War, AIDS, genocide, natural and technological disasters, and post-Communist identities. During the first decade of the 21st century, the field further broadened to address social identity amid diasporic communities, truth commissions and reparative narratives in post-conflict and post-atrocity societies, and memorialization as a response to mass murder and terrorism.

The trauma orientation of memory studies may be explained, firstly, by the disciplines in which such work has been done. Much of the first wave of scholarship grew out of the prob-

lem-focused disciplines of sociology and social psychology. The next discipline to embrace memory (while largely avoiding the word) was history, at a time when oral historians had become dedicated to recovering the silenced voices of minorities and other persecuted groups. A second explanation may be that memory studies has come of age academically in an era of widespread social displacement and the frequent occurrence of types of violence once considered unthinkable. A third explanation is that the field of memory studies has been criticized as a “soft” version of historical inquiry, an “undisciplined” enterprise whose validity still is disputed by many psychologists and historians; thus, it has held tight to serious themes.

The field itself always has been an international one, and the “memory boom” of the 1990s (Huyssen 2003, 18) was attributed to multinational European conflicts and the cultural and economic effects of migration and globalization. Yet that scholarship focused on memory consequences within specific countries, continuing the field’s “methodological nationalism” (Erll 2011a, 62). As more American scholars embraced social memory, their interpretive frame, too, was the nation, and their studies became required reading in American Studies classes. Among these were books by American historians, including Michael Kammen’s *Mystic Chords of Memory* (1991), John Bodnar’s *Remaking America* (1992), Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen’s *The Presence of the Past* (1998), and David Glassberg’s *Sense of History* (2001), and by American sociologists, including Michael Schudson’s *Watergate in American Memory* (1992) and Barry Schwartz’s *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (2000).

While some researchers have turned their attention to the construction of memory within a “new transnational public sphere” (Volkmer & Lee 2014, 50; see also Volkmer 2006; Erll 2011b;

Sonnevend 2016), other new scholarship confirms that, across the world, nation remains a key construct in understanding memory and identity. To an extent, this is because the Holocaust still is a driving force in memory studies, albeit a theme that is now understood in light of 21st century developments. Oren Meyers, Motti Neiger, and Eyal Zandberg have analyzed the multimedia and multisensory nature of Israeli Holocaust commemoration in their 2014 book *Communicating Awe*. Jeffrey Olick's 2016 book on German national memory, *The Sins of the Fathers*, explores the need for forgetting as well as remembering, and considers the interaction of multiple past "sins" over time in shaping national identity--concerns that are now shared by other nations even while Germany remains the exemplar. Holocaust scholar Michael Rothberg (2009) uses the term "multidirectional memory" to explain the relationship between Holocaust memory in Germany and post-colonial memory in other countries.

The trauma focus of memory studies seems likely to continue, as the world provides a steady stream of horrible events for study. Some research reframes victimhood, however, focusing on the constructive and agentic phenomena of empathy, testimony, and social action. In other new work, memory has been taken up as a theoretical lens in disciplines such as geography, theater, and art, which bring broader cultural perspectives to the field. Across fields, researchers are paying more serious attention to the role of mediation and technology in memory construction and circulation, a factor that has made memory an important new subfield of communication studies.

Remarkably, these developments are reminiscent of some of the earliest interests and approaches of American Studies. The rest of this essay considers those similarities while surveying four

recent thematic growth areas of memory studies: the witnessing of social injustice, the communicative aspects of landscape, the embodied performance of social identities, and the “connective turn” (Hoskins 2011, 19) through which new technologies transform memory into a networked process involving myriad interests.

Social Movements, Witnessing, and Historical Justice

In Lipsitz’s 2001 assessment of the field, American Studies should renew its focus on social movements and citizen activism as the central contenders and shapers of American identity. In memory studies, a similar call has been made to move away from texts and toward processes, to understand memory construction as an outcome not only of social identity but also of social action. Today that action occurs through interpersonal communication on a local level and digitally networked communication on a global level. On both levels, people participate in active and unpredictable ways, a realization that has inspired some scholars to rethink some key tenets of communication theory.

One theory in question is the long-held assumption that media depictions of suffering tend to diminish or co-opt the experience of those affected by war, atrocity, disaster, or disease. Instead, a growing number of memory scholars now argue that mediation of traumatic events can inspire empathy and “ethical thinking,” enabling “an intellectual engagement with the plight of the other ... whose circumstances lie far outside of our own,” writes Alison Landsberg (2009, 223). This is in part because of technological affordances and in part because, presumably, now everyone has the power to tell the story. News and other docu-

mentary media have long provided proof of protest movements that spotlight injustices across the world, but now the act of mediation is in the hands of the protesters, and sometimes the victims themselves, and its transmission is no longer merely linear.

In her study of the viral distribution of images of the death of Neda Agha Soltan during the 2009 Iranian elections, Kari Andén-Papadopoulos (2014) analyzes the special properties of citizen videography that make its viewing a visceral experience; she also traces the way in which citizen video is amplified as it is incorporated centrally into mainstream news media while continuing to flow outward through social media. Digital media give individuals and social groups the means of “testifying to [their] own historical reality as it unfolds,” write Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski (2009, 12), an act that not only diversifies the reporting of events but also promotes “an awareness of ourselves as historical actors,” as noted by John Ellis (2009, 86). These processes recently have been illustrated by the online circulation of video showing police violence against black men and of the events of the resulting Black Lives Matter movement, which itself draws on rhetorical and visual memory of the 20th century American Civil Rights movement.

Writing about race and memory, Ron Eyerman argues that while “current social movements employ protest repertoires inherited from past movements,” they also need “carrier groups,” people “who refus[e] to let memory die” (2016, 80, 82). Such “memory is the conduit through which the normative force of obligation is transmitted to the present and future,” writes ethicist Jeffrey Blustein (2015, 76). He and others stress the power of testimonial narratives to effect reparative justice in post-conflict societies, a strategy that is drawing significant attention in the memory studies field. Andreas Huyssen

describes the social-justice orientation of recent work as “a new constellation” of human rights and memory scholarship, a confluence of streams from two fields that “both are fundamentally concerned with the violation and protection of basic human rights and draw on history to do so” (2015, 27, 28). One outcome was the 2011 creation of the Historical Dialogues, Justice and Memory Network, an online resource and annual conference affiliated with the Alliance for Historical Dialogue and Accountability Program at Columbia University; another result was the publication of two anthologies of scholarship, *Public Memory, Public Media and the Politics of Justice* (Lee & Thomas 2012) and *Historical Justice and Memory* (Neumann & Thompson 2015).

Such scholarship is meant to enhance the visibility of social justice movements and truth commissions, and it is explicitly activist in nature. Its goals have been aided by the rise of citizen-video websites such as witness.org, the Human Rights Channel on YouTube, and oral-history projects with survivors. The latter kind of projects can create repositories of what Jeffrey Olick terms “collected” memory, “the aggregated individual memories of members of a group” (2007, 23) that together can form a powerful historical record. Such media testimony “travels” across not only places but also types of mediation (Erll 2011b). At the same time, social movement actors record their experiences in real time and real place in a way that is documentary and authentically local.

The Communicative Power of Place

Even while their actions are multi-mediated and globally communicated, social movements employ locality – place – in ways that construct and reshape memory. Erica Lehrer and Cynthia Milton note that protest landscapes highlight the “spatial, material, [and]

public dimensions” of memory, recasting the grounds of official history “not only as texts that visitors read, but also as sites of practice that are socially embodied and generative” (2011, 3; see also Sturken 2008). The cultural meaning of landscape, a mainstay of American Studies scholarship (for instance, Zelinsky 1973), also is of growing interest to memory scholars who echo public historian Robert Archibald’s proclamation that “place is the crucible of memory” (2002, 68).

In their 2012 collection titled *Geography and Memory*, Owain Jones and Joanne Garde-Hansen acknowledge that “memories of who we are, who we were ... are wrapped up in memories of where we are, where we were ... geography and memory [are] inseparable” (4). As cultural geographer Kenneth Foote explains, landscape is “a system of signs and symbols, capable of extending the temporal and spatial range of communication,” functioning as “a sort of ‘earth writing’ in the sense of the etymological roots of the word geography...” (1997, 33). Caitlin DeSilvey similarly stresses “the conductive properties of landscape,” the communicative power of land on which elements of the past are retained in community memory (2012, 49). In this view, landscapes are not just backdrops, but central and integrative social forces, “arenas where the differing memories of individuals, families, and larger social groups fold together in a range of ways,” write Jones and Garde-Hansen (2012, 86).

The past is an especially strong feature of local identity in places shaped by ethnicity and industry. Much concern has been expressed about the marketing of such identity through tourism that draws outsiders to physical sites branded as historically authentic (for instance, Barthel 1996 and Halter 2000). Yet more often such memory projects primarily serve the communities themselves, validating their local resilience and marking their landscape as cultur-

ally meaningful. In her study of Welsh coal-mining museums, Bella Dicks argues that such sites give local residents a means of “self-representation” on “a public platform for the past self” as well as for their present-day social identity (2003, 121, 139). Facing change, such communities reenact their pasts through symbolic and sometimes synchronized events such as holidays and festivals. When they are repeated in different places with similar “inheritances,” whether deindustrialized coal-mining communities or bustling Chinatowns, such gestures can create a feeling of connection among geographically separate places, constructing what Anthony Bak Buccitelli calls “translocal” memory (2016, 7) and extending a sense of place—of being “grounded”—even for diasporic communities. Such rituals inscribe present-day landscapes with historical meaning.

In other cases, landscapes matter because they already are inscribed with the traces of past events that must not be forgotten. Place-based memorialization is rapidly growing as generations of trauma survivors die and the sites of their suffering come to stand in for their personal testimony. A great deal of scholarship has analyzed museums, memorials, and tourism plans devoted to remembering the Holocaust and the two World Wars in Europe, but themes and locations are increasingly varied. Such memorialization encourages not only “sanctification” of sites of trauma (Foote 1997, 7-8) but also pilgrimage, through which large numbers of people seek to pay tribute to the magnitude of an event and the experiences of its victims by standing on the landscape of its occurrence. Such journeys confirm a public desire for a connection with the past that is both embodied and emotional.

Emotion, Embodiment, and Performance

Most heritage scholars today understand that historical site and museum visitors are not passive audiences but active participants in “a physical experience of performance” that inspires “emotional engagement” with both the place and the past itself (Smith 2006, 66-67; see also West & Bowman 2010 and Crouch 2015). The growing uses of interactive and immersive mediation at heritage sites heighten the participatory role of the visitor, inspiring reflexivity and engagement, sometimes in unanticipated forms.

Such phenomena have brought performance studies scholars into the memory studies tent. Their interest is in what the public does with the memory narratives that have been created for them and about them. In her 2014 book, *Performing Feeling in Cultures of Memory*, Bryoni Trezise examines unexpected tourist behavior at heritage sites ranging from a Holocaust memorial to an Aboriginal cultural park. In some situations, the local public’s continuing engagement with a traumatic experience may work against national attempts at closure. Writing about New Orleans community memory five years after Hurricane Katrina, performance studies scholars Michael S. Bowman and Ruth Laurion Bowman advocated “embodied” storytelling through which local residents can create an “anti-narrative” that “call[s] into question the established order of things” (2010, 459, 460).

Conversely, embodied performance of public memory also can reinforce participants’ faith in mainstream national narratives. Over the years, many scholars have made this case quite critically in their studies of events ranging from parades and holidays to battle reenactment and sports. Yet, as John Bodnar noted two decades ago, such “bonds of affection have always been sub-

jected to complex interpretations" (1996, 11), and national narratives can integrate protest and patriotism, especially as radicals of the past become incorporated into national ideas about freedom. Current social activists gain a sense of connection with their predecessors through reenactment of protest behavior and reiteration of "founding narratives, stories that tell who we are through recounting where we came from," contends Ron Eyerman. "Such narratives form master frames and are passed on through traditions, in rituals and ceremonies, public performances that reconnect a group, and where membership is confirmed" (2016, 80).

Membership in a mnemonic community (Zerubavel 2004) is a matter of feeling as much as fact; it is, to use David Glassberg's (2001) phrase, a "sense of history" rather than full historical knowledge of the past. Even so, our patterns of behavior—what we do about this feeling—are not random. As historians, anthropologists, and folklorists have long documented, our behavior toward the past is learned and reinforced through socialization within our own communities. Media extend this learning process, as they allow us to observe and have a sense of participation in other people's rituals, on formal ceremonial occasions and in cases of unexpected tragedy.

While certainly not a new social phenomenon, commemoration has taken center stage in public communication today, as Erika Doss argues in her 2010 book *Memorial Mania*. Writing about the "spontaneous" memorial shrines that now routinely appear after tragedies of all sorts, Doss stresses the communicative properties of material culture, calling such tributes "the creative products of profound personal and public feelings" (69) that are part of "performative public space:"

People bring things to these memorials, not only making them but orchestrating their affective conditions. They walk through and around them; they read the cards and poems that are left at them; they kneel down to caress the other things that have been brought; they photograph and videotape what they see; they cry; they are physically and emotionally moved—affected—on multiple levels (75).

Commemorative practices are performances that further involve the other aspects of memory construction discussed above. They are public statements about justice, and they take place on landscapes with a literal or symbolic connection to the remembered event. As Jay Winter writes, “Commemoration at sites of memory is an act arising out of a conviction, shared by a broad community, that the moment recalled is both significant and informed by a moral message” (2010, 313). While he is writing about war memorial traditions that began more than a century ago, his point aptly describes very recent public responses to acts of terrorism. Such rituals—in which material tribute performed in a particular place is seen by billions of people—are compelling examples of the intersections of local grief and global empathy. Emanating from site-specific tribute, these connections are made on a previously unimaginable landscape of mediation.

New Connections in a Networked World

Communicating memory is no longer merely a matter of “passing down,” but also a matter of “passing around,” a networked process that plays out on a “new circulatory memory-scape” (Andén-Papadopoulos 2014, 150). Digital technologies effect a “connective turn” (Hoskins, 2011) that requires new theoretical models for understanding the dynamics of memory

construction—the interplay of texts and their users, of storytellers and their audiences, of private and public communication, and of physical and virtual encounters with the world.

One could argue that some mediation has always been necessary for the transmission of social memory, but in the 21st century memory construction is largely inseparable from mediation. This is true even in what we think of as interpersonal communication on the most local levels, such as friends and family. Digital photography has normalized the archiving of daily life, while the ritual components of personal milestone events, such as weddings or graduations, have been restructured to facilitate the production of keepsake media (van Dijck 2007; Garde-Hansen 2011).

Partly in response to widespread interest in genealogy, online archives have made historical information and images accessible to memory-makers of all sorts. Bettina Fabos (2014) argues that the free availability of digital images allows for a more nuanced kind of historical storytelling. Web platforms have created new meeting places for popular history fans such as battle reenactors and railroad enthusiasts. In many physical places, new media have revitalized historical tourism, as virtual and augmented reality mobile technology has made past eras newly visible, even audible, on present-day landscapes. A range of societal institutions, from journalism to education to art, employ digitized iconic imagery of the past to discuss present social problems.

New technologies have both threatened and reinvigorated museums. As a new kind of repository for artifacts as well as information, online and digital-storage media compete with the tra-

ditional function of museums. Yet in their quest for new relevance and new audiences, museums largely have benefited from digital technologies, which enhance their ability to inspire historical imagination and which can bolster their documentary authority (Arnold-de Siminie 2013). One common technique in current museum practice, for instance, is remediation (Bolter & Grusin 1999; van Dijck 2007), the repurposing of old media imagery within digital presentations of historic events. Remediation also blurs the origins of cultural narratives, as what used to be thought of as different kinds of media (television, advertising, film, music, etc.) are increasingly networked, interactive, and reiterative (Erll & Rigney 2009, 2-3).

In his study of national identity in the early 21st century, Tim Edensor acknowledged the survival of “the tradition-bound ceremonies and other cultural ingredients which most analysts of national identity have concentrated on,” but noted that “their power is now largely sustained by their (re)distribution through popular culture, where they mingle with innumerable other iconic cultural elements which signify the nation in multiple and contested ways” (2002, 12). Edensor’s statement was made before the advent of social media, which have further complicated the “mingling” of “cultural ingredients” and the definitions and expressions of nationalism. On one hand, new technologies have disrupted “long-held ideas about what constitutes community,” which is no longer “limited by geographic, religious, or ethnic borders,” writes Janice Hume (2010, 192). On the other hand, technology has facilitated the creation of community among far-flung strangers who otherwise never would have “met” others with similar experiences and concerns; it also connects members of diasporic populations and promotes feelings (and activities) of “transnational nationalism” (De Cesari & Rigney 2014). Social media have created many paradoxes for community and memory: they

are conduits for both witnessing and worsening injustice, for both encouraging and inhibiting cross-cultural empathy, and for both empowering and abusing social groups. All these phenomena are historically informed and have consequences for ongoing uses of history.

Discussion: The Future of the Past in an Era of New Nationalism

The most optimistic of new scholarship embraces the broad nature of memory construction as a sign of the field's importance rather than its disintegration, noting its potential to bring new perspectives to current social problems. Astrid Erll, one of the most intellectually creative thinkers in this area, urges scholars to seek the connections among memory work being done in what may seem to be completely unrelated disciplines. In her view, memory scholarship "is developing steadily into a true convergence field" that can "[i]nspire new alliances between the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences" (2011a, 175).

While forward-thinking, such a vision is not the first attempt to find parallel intellectual threads in different disciplines and to champion an academic culture that makes it possible to weave them together. Clearly one precedent is the "intellectual movement directed toward the creation of a distinct hybrid discipline" that became American Studies some 80 years ago (Bronner 2017, n.p.). Perhaps most importantly, the seemingly new turns in memory scholarship echo the initial spirit—the mission and the methods—of a broad, interdisciplinary approach such as American Studies, which was meant to be "not just a form of area studies" but "a special way of analyzing culture, especially at the grass-roots," as Simon Bronner explains (2017, n.p.). Keeping that goal in mind, this conclusion considers some of the challenges and oppor-

tunities for interdisciplinary scholars studying nationhood today.

In recent decades, cultural scholars have resisted the national frame, instead contending that international flows of people and commerce have produced a world of cultural hybridity and global cosmopolitanism. That lens has since been adjusted to accommodate the notion of “transnational” culture, the existence of “national” conditions common across nations (Erll & Rigney 2009). At present, one such common condition seems to be nationalism itself, amid a rise of isolationism and political tribalism across the world, fueled by ideas about the past. Academic disavowal of the validity of nationhood — the insistence that there no longer can be such a thing as American or British (or other national) character — comes at a historical juncture when those concepts have been taken up and brandished like swords on a vernacular level. Surely now is a moment for scholars to re-embrace nationhood as a legitimate analytical frame, in ways that address the complexity of its articulations within as well as between nations.

That complexity is astounding in the case of Brexit, the United Kingdom’s impending departure from the European Union following a national referendum that revealed regional and class divisions within that country. During the opening ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics, the world saw a media image of the United Kingdom as a society whose past was a model for global industry and social welfare and whose multicultural present was embraced by a coalition of countries proud of their own intact traditions. Four years later, the postindustrial cities of the English midlands and north sent quite a different message, openly expressing their resentment of immigrants whose growing presence seemed to underscore their own loss of a prouder past. Meanwhile, Scotland, which voted strongly in favor of remaining European, may hold a

second national referendum on leaving the United Kingdom, and a major stumbling block has surfaced in Brexit negotiations: the possible reestablishment of a hard border around North Ireland. The latter prospect is widely opposed, in part because it threatens to undermine the peace process still unfolding after the Troubles—the long civil war between adjacent towns and neighborhoods espousing two different national identities within one small country.

Anti-immigrant rhetoric, economic loss, and living memory of past violence were driving forces behind not only the 2016 Brexit vote but also the U.S. Presidential election held five months later. That contest made regional and class divisions within the United States glaringly apparent, and its aftermath has prompted public outcry in many forms and from many sides. In several southern cities, protests led to the removal of Confederate monuments, which for nearly a century and a half had stood as tributes to white supremacy; in turn, their removal reinvigorated white supremacy itself, in the form of violent counter-protests by neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan. This time, however, their images circulated globally and instantly on social media, as have images of right-wing political movements in France, Germany, and elsewhere.

While such sentiments are communicated in new ways, they should remind us that “grassroots” rituals and their public representations work toward destructive as well as progressive ends. We cannot assume that a social protest against mainstream culture, and the resulting creation of vernacular “counter-memory,” broadens the public conversation; it may narrow it. Indeed, many of today’s “counter” memories are reactive reiterations of previously mainstream values thought to be lost in a too-tolerant world.

Yet the global circulation of such images and ideals also prompts awareness and responses from people whose experiences have not been represented or taken seriously in mainstream media. These responses are made in both cyberspace and physical space, and often they are bolstered by references to history. One example is the groundswell of national support for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe when they and other Native Americans opposed the construction of an oil pipeline that would run through their land, an issue that inspired not just a social media campaign but also the travel of many supporters to the North Dakota reservation itself. This event conjured public memory of the U.S. government's long appropriation of Native American lands and violence against resisters. Both the women's suffrage movement and the second wave of American feminism have been recalled in women's responses to the open misogyny of the Presidential campaign and the broader cultural tolerance of the abuse of women. These responses have been especially powerful because of the sheer number of women who had something to say, in public parks during the Women's Marches and online through social media hashtag campaigns such as #MeToo, which recounted women's experiences of sexual harassment and violence.

The variety of cultural forms used in current protest invites integrated approaches to the study of such discourse, while its online circulation encourages a historically contextualized and diverse consideration of national values, especially among younger generations. In his research and teaching about the history of the National Park Service, public history scholar Seth Bruggeman (2016) observed that young adults value historical authenticity and authority, but that they wish for an inclusive American narrative that is expressed with "a less brutal dose of nationalism" (205). That is a fruitful discovery for the future of the national conversation as well as for academic research.

Many present-day issues offer opportunities to once again tell “big” American stories that nevertheless are not monolithic—new narratives that, in the words of historian Peter Burke (2010) “reconstruct history or ‘re-collect’ or ‘re-member’ it in the sense of practicing bricolage, assembling fragments of the past into new patterns” (106). Such assemblages can acknowledge the popularity of narratives, symbols, and rituals of nationalism while also recognizing the real, material consequences for the people whom they represent and exclude. Current scholarship in this vein has the potential to align the goals of late-20th century ideological critiques with those of earlier social history projects and to resituate counter-narratives within (rather than against) concepts of American exceptionalism.

One last example serves to illustrate that possibility. The Tenement Museum in New York City is a historical site and cultural institution whose interpretation and activities have been informed by academics from a range of disciplines. Mainly, though, it is an extraordinarily popular tourism destination among Americans who want to physically stand inside a building where people like their own ancestors once lived. In its appeal and its interpretation, the Tenement Museum embraces every thematic trend in memory studies discussed in the sections above: historical justice, authenticity of place, emotional connection achieved through imagination, and connective remediation. This 19th and early 20th century tenement building remains largely free of furniture, so visitors are asked to imagine the lives, feelings, and fears of former occupants. There are facts as well, gleaned from census data and other historical records: certain occupants did live in these particular apartments, and visitors learn their names and nationalities. Their backgrounds were German, Italian, Irish, and Jewish, ethnicities that correspond with those of many visitors and prompt a sense

of direct connection with their struggles. But because imaginative feeling is necessary to connect with this place, visitors are primed for the guides' narrative emphasis on similar struggles of the nation's current immigrants, stories the museum also tells through social media. This interpretive strategy employs national, and sometimes regional, pride in service of transnational empathy, responses that visitors may discover are not antithetical after all.

The Tenement Museum publicizes itself as a new kind of public memory, and its coupling of digital storytelling and physical place does work to "reimagine the role that museums can play in our lives" (Tenement 2017, n.p.). Even so, its mission restates the ideal of an interpretive "shared authority" that public history scholar Michael Frisch (1990) envisioned more than a quarter-century ago, and its uses of memory thematically coincide with the interests of American Studies scholarship since its beginning. It most certainly tells an American Studies kind of narrative, a big, national story we recognize: Out of many, one, a very traditional motto that in 2018 seems like a counter-narrative.

That old phrase also could describe a renewed commitment to interdisciplinary ventures, of all sorts, as they struggle to survive within the corporate university. While this essay has sought to examine parallels between two interdisciplinary academic fields, its main argument is that both have fruitful futures, albeit ones that are likely to play out in dialogue with other scholarly interests and historical circumstances that we may not be able to predict. With specific regard to American Studies, this essay offers one answer to George Lipsitz's question about its lasting value: that it offers an intellectual model whose vision and concerns are profoundly relevant in the present moment, as well as in other academic

fields. The future of American Studies lies in its usable and resilient past, which offers a blueprint for 21st century cultural inquiry.

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Essays, Notes, and Dialogues

Making Context Matter: American Studies and the Connecting Imagination

Adam Golub

California State University, Fullerton

United States

Abstract: This essay explores the importance of context as an interpretive framework in American Studies. It lays out an interdisciplinary approach to teaching the “connecting imagination” in college and university classrooms, discussing strategies for introducing the concept of context and teaching students how to connect primary sources to their social milieu. The process of constructing context is broken down into a series of steps that include close reading of a text, identifying a network of related discourses and representations, looking at change over time, studying cultural production and reception, and making an argument about a text’s cultural work. Context is a defining element of the field of American Studies, and this essay makes the case that the “connecting imagination” should be central to its pedagogy and practice.

"Meaning is discovered in what connects, and cannot exist without development."

– John Berger and Jean Mohr, Another Way of Telling

"I think you need a lot of context to seriously examine anything."

– Gus Haynes, The Wire

In December 2016, *The Washington Post* launched an online tool designed to add context to tweets by Donald Trump. Once installed on an internet browser, the tool would "provide additional context where needed for Trump's tweets" (Bump 2016). A month later, National Public Radio began annotating Trump's tweets on their website, telling readers that "140 characters rarely gives the full context" ("President Trump's Tweets" 2017). The contemporaneous "Trump Tweet Tracker," developed by *The Atlantic Monthly*, similarly promised to "track and unpack" Trump's tweets and supply "our best understanding of their significance" ("Trump Tweet Tracker" 2017). Meanwhile, the Twitter account "Real Donald Context" (@RealDonaldcontext) was created—also in December 2016—to add "context to the tweets of @realDonaldTrump."

The age of Trump has spawned a preoccupation with the concept of context in our news and social media landscape. This concern, of course, is not just about putting the 45th president's tweets in context. Media outlets have attempted to contextualize a number of actions and statements made by the new administration: boasts about the size of Trump's inauguration crowd, for instance, were contextualized by photographic evidence to the contrary; boasts about the size and significance of Trump's electoral college win

were contextualized by hard numbers; claims by the Trump administration that Executive Order 13769 was not a travel ban were contextualized by Trump's own statements about said travel ban; and so forth. This media focus on contextualizing has presumed that locating statements by the administration within a larger framework will potentially expose falsehoods and distortions. Indeed, context has emerged as a kind of fact checking mechanism in the Trump era. Context, we are told, can provide historical perspective, "unpack" and illuminate significance, and reveal some measure of truth.

The renewed public interest in context as an interpretive tool represents an opportunity for the field of American Studies to share what it knows and does well, and to redouble its efforts to teach students how to contextualize in a meaningful way. The notion that context is key to interpretation is certainly not new to American Studies. American Studies has long been concerned with context as a constituent, if not a defining element, of its interdisciplinary mode of inquiry. Gordon Kelly argued in his 1974 *American Quarterly* essay that American Studies practitioners "would do well to begin with a concept of context that directs attention to the rules and definitions which order and govern the creation and consumption" of texts (147). In 1979, Gene Wise argued that "contemporary cultural problems require understanding in their full interconnecting context" (335). In 1989, Robert Berkhofer ventured, "If the disparate interests that comprise American Studies are united about anything, it is the necessity of contextual knowledge" (589). Philip Deloria made the case in his 2008 presidential address to the American Studies Association that the American Studies scholar "refuses to leap directly from the textual to the theoretical... and turns always to context" (15). As American Studies thinkers, we are in the habit of asking how texts shape and are shaped by context. And we typically employ a fairly

expansive definition of “text,” one that can include novels and films, fashion and food, sermons and speeches, parades and protests, landscapes and—yes—Tweets. We approach disparate sources as subjects to be read closely and to be read into a larger context. Indeed, we tend to subscribe to the notion that “the smallest topic is replete with history, significance, and consequence” (Miller and Paola 2012, 63). Or, to invoke the poet Theodore Roethke, our line of inquiry presupposes that “all finite things reveal infinitude” (Roethke 1964).

There’s little question that American Studies as a field encourages its practitioners to cultivate what Wise calls the “connecting imagination,” the ability to “probe beyond the immediacy of the situation to search for everything which rays out beyond it” (1979, 336). How do we do this? It is one thing to say context matters and to urge our students to contextualize; it’s another to break down what exactly we mean by “contextualize,” and to show—step by step—how we try to create meaningful contexts for interpreting cultural phenomena. In the introduction to her book *Epic Encounters*, Melani McAlister writes that “the task of any study of culture... is to reconstruct the larger world in which a given cultural form was made meaningful” (2005, 6). My goal with this essay is to provide students, teachers, and indeed anyone interested in why context matters, with a pedagogical primer on how to “reconstruct the larger world” and probe beyond the immediacy of the text. The approach I describe is one I have taught to undergraduates and graduate students alike, using it to contextualize songs by Bessie Smith and Nine Inch Nails, literature by Walt Whitman and Sylvia Plath, material objects like toys, clothing, and the Fender guitar, films such as *King Kong*, *Dr. Strangelove*, and *Thirteen*, as well as statues, photographs, graphic novels, amusement parks, the Lindy Hop, the quinceañera, the frozen dinner, and the second fight between boxers Joe Louis and

Max Schmeling. In the pages that follow, I lay out my pedagogical approach to teaching context and provide examples from my classroom experience to show how these various interpretive strategies can be synthesized and applied. Ultimately, it is my hope that engaging with this subject will encourage further discussion about how we can practice and teach the “connecting imagination” in a variety of American Studies contexts, both within the classroom and without.

How do we introduce students to a concept as abstract and complex as context? On the first day of the semester, I like to walk into class carrying a big bag of Tupperware. Silently, I start distributing the Tupperware around the room, giving each student a container. I ask students to look at the object on their desk, to hold it and study it from different angles. I ask them to tell me what it is and describe it in detail—its size, weight, shape, and color. I ask them to tell me what Tupperware is used for—both its intended use (food storage) and its unintended or incidental use (student responses have ranged from holding jewelry, to trapping spiders, to using the lids as Frisbees). I ask students to brainstorm the meanings we attach to Tupperware: thrift, preservation, efficiency, and home, for example. I ask them to contemplate why we tend to value these particular ideals. I then ask them to reflect on where else in our culture we might find these ideals (recycling, personal finance, collecting, and so forth). I ask them where Tupperware is sold, and I ask if they know where it is manufactured or what it is made of. I then ask if anyone can guess when Tupperware was invented. Students usually guess the 1950s. I ask why they think so, and their responses often make reference to the suburbs, or the Tupperware party, or the popular image of the white, middle class postwar housewife. At this point, I proceed to tell them the story of Tupperware: how it was invented by New Hampshire tree surgeon Earl Silas Tupper in

1942, and how Tupper initially tried, with little success, to distribute his polyethylene containers through department stores and mail order catalogues. Then I tell students how Brownie Wise, a single mother from Detroit, innovated a method of selling Tupperware door to door. When Tupper heard about her success, he withdrew his kitchenware from stores and focused on selling his products exclusively through the home demonstration party. I relate to students how Tupper hired Wise to be his vice president in 1951, how she built a predominantly female salesforce of 20,000 members by 1954, and how Tupper fired Wise in 1958 over alleged financial differences and subsequently erased her from the official company history.

After I narrate this story, I ask students to think about the ways in which the meaning and use of Tupperware has changed from the 1950s to the present. Does Tupperware still symbolize both thrift and abundance, as it did in the postwar era—a traditional value embodied in a modern design? Does Tupperware still have gendered associations attached to it? Most students answer that the plastic container is little more than an everyday object about which they give little thought. It is no longer new. It no longer carries the same symbolic and historical freight. We then talk about why this is the case. What has changed over time? We also reflect on which objects today are considered “new” and modern (the smartphone, wearable technology), and which, like Tupperware, may have lost some of their shine and become part of the taken-for-granted ecology of our everyday lives (the microwave, contact lenses). I conclude this activity by telling students that the process we just went through with Tupperware is the same process we are going to use to understand all kinds of cultural texts in this class. I explain to them that I have just modeled, in miniature, what we in American Studies call the connecting imagination. For the rest of the semester, the stu-

dents and I will converge—again and again and again—on context.

What is context? On a fundamental level, I tell my students, context is akin to setting in fiction writing: it provides a vivid sense of time and place. Context is the stage on which historical dramas are played out. Yet context is not simply decorative; we do not evoke it to just be descriptive. In American Studies, setting is central to story and meaning. We reconstruct the social milieu surrounding a cultural artifact because the milieu helps us understand the artifact's significance. Context is not just backdrop; it pulsates, it has power. Context is the ecology, the matrix that interpenetrates a cultural phenomenon and gives it meaning. Context surrounds, shapes, and can be shaped by the object of our study. Only when we consider context can we begin to study "the ways and the degrees to which any given cultural product takes hold and why" (Blair 2000, 17).

To help students think about the relationship between context and the texts we tend to analyze in American Studies—the artifacts, the phenomena, the cultural products that "take hold"—I like to introduce the concepts of resonance and porosity. Cultural texts can "resonate," I tell my students, meaning they "vibrate in sympathy with a similar frequency" in the surrounding culture (Phillips 2005, 5). If the text is a bell, for example, resonance is the vibration its chime sets off in the larger world. Resonance refers to the ways in which a text "vibrates" and connects, intentionally or not, with audiences, discourses, histories, and representations that are circulating in the broader culture. The context, in turn, also vibrates with the text, resounding just as the environment amplifies the original chiming of the bell; to resound is to be "filled to the depth with a sound that is sent back to its source" (Moore 2010, 9).

In this way, text and context are interconnected. So, for example, a film and its historical moment can resonate with one another—a specific film might strike a particular chord in the culture and the culture can simultaneously amplify the resonance of the film. The tone of the bell is intensified by the supplementary vibration.

Texts are also porous. They are permeable. They are susceptible to cultural influences, and they in turn influence other cultural expressions. A text has “no clearly defined boundaries: it spills over constantly into the works clustered around it” (Eagleton 1983, 138). The same film that resonates with its historical moment is also traversed by that moment—the culture seeps into it. Context inscribes texts. The concepts of resonance and porosity help us start to conceive of texts as agents of cultural formation, as “accumulative, intertextual, or even collaborative productions” (Wilson 1989, 469). Resonance and porosity remind us that texts are “vehicles for meaning,” and that this meaning is not generated in a vacuum (Garrett 2017, 19).

Thinking about the text as a resonant, porous “cultural informant” is just the first step in cultivating a connecting imagination. How do we begin to explore what the text might be telling us? This is where the tools of close reading and the habit of wide reading are both helpful in American Studies. Close reading is integral to constructing context, because it helps us pinpoint the relevant discourses and representations to focus on in the broader milieu. And we are better at identifying those relevant discourses when we have been reading widely in the field of American Studies, when we become more familiar with the social, cultural, and intellectual history of the United States.

Close reading often starts with the identification of themes that are articulated by the text. What are the manifest themes, the stated content, the overt focus and orientation of the text in question? Is this a story – or song, or painting, or performance, or “telling” material object like Tupperware – about family, or technology, or romantic love, or death? What narrative categories can we fit this text into? Are there patterns here, certain “repetitions and oppositions” that emerge in our reading of the text? (Scholes 1985, 32). What issues, ideas, anxieties, or controversies is the text resonating with in the wider culture?

Then, equally, if not more important, I teach students to think about the themes and perspectives that are silenced or marginalized in a cultural text. Paul Lauter refers to this close reading strategy as looking for the “ghost in the machine,” identifying the themes “that are present... but functionally unstated, not given narrative form” (2001, 106). Jay Mechling suggests we ask, “What could have happened here and didn’t?” (1997, 21). A film might overtly be about romantic love, but it can also under-examine, suppress, or otherwise push to the side important questions of gender, sexuality, race, age, class, religion, and so forth. What assumptions about romantic love are embedded in the text? Which perspectives are privileged and which are denied? When we read closely, we identify what is obvious and taken-for-granted, and then we work to deconstruct the text and its subtext. We try to discover the text’s internal contradictions, to expose the underpinnings of its cultural logic, to explicate the ways in which the text, in the words of Toni Morrison, “mystifies what it cannot bring itself to articulate but still attempts to register” (1992, 66).

Close reading is key to constructing context because it helps us start to imagine connections. Close reading turns our attention to the larger world; it prompts us to contemplate the

text's resonance and porosity. Eric Greene observes that "any cultural product... can and should be seen as a text that is suggestive of the cultural context out of which it emerges" (1996, 7). Close reading of themes and silences helps suggest that context.

After identifying themes and silences, we go about the hard work of constructing a context for analyzing the text. Where to start? Here we benefit from our wide reading, and also work to fill in what we do not know. Typically, we first get a sense of chronology. What was going on at the time when our text appeared? What were the main currents in the larger culture, the historical "headlines" with regards to politics, economics, science, arts and letters, social issues, and so forth? I tell students they need to be aware of the "big events" that shaped a particular era. What "master narratives" have been used to explain the period? What have scholars already written about this time period and about our text? In other words, what is the contextual work that has already been done by others? Working to answer these questions helps us get a handle on the general historical milieu and scholarly dialogue within which we will construct a more specific context relevant to our text—a context that may and in fact often does contradict the "master narratives."

The next step is to take the themes and silences we have identified in our text and start connecting them to related discourses circulating in the broader culture. As a side note, I find that discourse, like context, is one of the words teachers often deploy without definition, presuming students will know what it means. I explain to my students that discourse can be understood as a multivalent conversation about the same topic that is taking place among different voices across different cultural venues. For example, if a theme in a text is marriage equality—or if marriage equality is a silence in the text—

then where are the conversations about same-sex marriage taking place in the culture writ large? What is being said about this issue in the news media, in legal circles, in the popular culture, in the performance of wedding rituals, in vernacular wedding photographs? In what ways are a text's engagement with same-sex marriage resonating with the culture, and in what ways has the text been shaped by this ongoing conversation? Seeking answers to these questions requires us to look at the "network of discourses and representations which inform or inhabit texts, or... are 'inscribed' into them" (Wilson 1989, 469). Jean Howard talks about studying a text relationally, "by seeing how its representations stand in regard to those of other specific works and discourses" (1987, 19). Close reading suggests themes and silences, which in turn point us in the direction of discourse and representation, which helps us begin to construct a relational context.

Working our way through this process compels us to create what Margaret Faye Jones calls "a larger cultural picture of the historical period" (2006, 349). Along similar lines, Lauter encourages American Studies practitioners to "think about how comparable patterns in a set of historically coincident texts may be seen in relation to specific historical events" (2001, 110). At this stage, I push my students to think creatively and expansively across diverse modes and forms. A network of discourses and representations might include a song, an advertisement, a television show, a material object, a monument, a politician's speech, a legal decision. When exercising our connecting imagination, we endeavor to "connect elements in a culture without recourse to a hierarchy of high and low" (Braudy 2016, ix). This is the fun part, I tell my students. We "play with the discourse," as Mechling says (1997, 22). We crash conversations that are taking place across the culture, listen in, search for patterns, try to connect the dots. We work to

cultivate a deep understanding of the discourse, so we can try to figure out how our text might fit in. At the same time, we pay attention to power dynamics, considering the ways in which power acts upon and within networks. Context is not neutral: it is shaped by cultural politics and power relations that determine access to discourse and give voice to certain perspectives while muting others.

At this stage, I'm reminded of William Graebner's admonition about contextual analysis (which I've always read as a welcome challenge):

"One's ability to generate accurate readings depends on one's knowledge of the culture—on knowledge of the range of ideas and values it normally generates—and that, in turn, can come only from familiarity with a wide range of historical research and with numerous documents and performances, not all related in any obvious way to the text under consideration" (1991, xiii).

Have at it, Graebner suggests. If you want to make a convincing case about the significance of a text, then develop a deep familiarity with the culture—through wide reading—and chase after connections, even when they are not immediately apparent. If pushed seriously, the interpretation of any text, as Robert Scholes points out, "will lead us not to some uniquely precious exegetical act but to cultural history itself" (1985, 35).

Of course, the process of constructing context does not end with this extended stay in the cultural moment. The themes and silences of a given text have very likely been explored prior to and after the moment when the text was created or "spoken" into the culture. This means that change over time necessarily becomes

part of the context we create in American Studies. What were the terms of this cultural conversation before? How has the discourse changed? How have the parameters of debate shifted? How have the assumptions altered? Are the silences the same or have they changed? For example, how does the discourse about marriage equality that resonates with our specific text at a particular moment in time relate to the conversation that was taking place earlier? Context is not just contemporaneous. Context can comprise a far greater swath of history. For every cultural phenomenon we examine, we strive to “show not only that it has a history, but also how it has evolved” (Braudy 2016, x). Today, Tupperware is still Tupperware, but it doesn’t mean what “Tupperware” used to mean.

After becoming familiar with the timeline events, master narratives, and the scholarly literature, discovering the related network of discourses, and attending to change over time, our work is not yet finished. There are two key cohorts still missing from this construction of context. The first is the creator. Who made this text? Who wrote it, or built it, or performed it, or innovated it? When and where and why—to what end—was the cultural text produced? By what means was it made available to the public? Did the creator have an intention in mind, a theme in mind? What was the creator’s background, social location, and own cultural milieu?

We also consider audience as part of context—the everyday people who consumed, viewed, read, listened to, or otherwise made use of a cultural text. A text is a “living cultural artifact that arises out of the conflicts and contexts of people’s lives” (Jones 2006, 354). Networks of discourse can give us some sense of those conflicts, but the “everyday” dimension of context is more difficult to determine. What did a text mean to an individual per-

son—or group of people—in a given place at a given time? How was the text consumed, interpreted, rejected, or re-appropriated by diverse audiences, by non-elites who did not have the power to access and contribute to the dominant discourse? How did everyday people make sense of an artifact? The creator and audience are part of the setting; they resonate with the culture, and, challenging as it may be, we try to seek them out as we construct context.

This is admittedly a lot of work. Themes, silences, chronology, master narratives, historiography, networks of discourse, change over time, creator, audience—context spirals out, and can spiral out of control: “all finite things reveal infinitude” (Roethke 1964). After all, “What is not connected to innumerable other incidents, events, trends?” (Braudy xi). But if we have any methodological conviction in American Studies, if we are committed to any one approach to producing knowledge, it is our determination to pursue those connections, to at least reach for that infinitude. We listen for resonance, we examine for porosity, and we “find the webs attached to the subjects” (Miller and Paola 2012, 72). Constructing context is a labor of embroidery—and arguably a labor of love.

So how do we make sense of all this? Once we have done the yeoman’s task of trying to construct context, of tracing the strands of this intricate web, how do we bring our research to a conclusion and make an argument about the relationship between text and context? This is where the concept of “cultural work” is useful. In American Studies, we tend to subscribe to the notion that a text does work in the culture. As a porous, resonant text, it plays a role in the wider ecosystem; it performs a part on the historical stage. Each text is active and productive. It is meaningful in some way. It is engaged in cultural work. Trying to understand the re-

relationship between text and context helps us think about a text's possible significance. I find it helps to model potential questions for students to ask of their evidence as they begin to build a case for its cultural work. Is the text working to help construct an individual's personal identity, or a group's social identity, or our national identity? Does the text reinforce dominant ideologies, or expose them, or subvert them? Does the text offer a counter-memory of a historical moment? Does it "reframe and refocus dominant narratives purporting to represent universal experience" (Lipsitz 1990, 213)? Is the text the subject of a struggle for meaning and cultural domination? Does it invert established hierarchies? Does it represent a gesture of refusal that disrupts systems of signification? Or, is the text evidence of hegemony, of the power of a particular discourse to shape cultural production? Might the text itself be contested and contradictory, an instance of how a cultural phenomenon can at once reproduce and undermine master narratives? Or is the text an example of how audiences—everyday people—derive a meaning from cultural products far different than what is intended or widely accepted? Or is something else entirely going on here?

In American Studies, I tell my students, we try to make a bold but demonstrated assertion about cultural significance. We try to answer the "so what" question and show why people should care about a text and its connections. Jane Tompkins argues that texts should be studied "because they offer powerful examples of the way a culture thinks about itself" (1985, xi). Our job is to explain what the text might exemplify about the culture—what it can tell us about the workings of culture. In the final analysis, we try to make an argument grounded in context that shows why context matters.

If we at once conceive of American Studies as a field of interdisciplinary inquiry, a pedagogy, and a public practice, then surely context is in our wheelhouse. We spend our careers studying the vast messiness of culture. We understand that there is “complexity in attempting to define an experience” (Lawler 2008, 57). We cultivate—and teach our students to cultivate—what Howard Gardner calls the “synthesizing mind,” a mind that “takes information from disparate sources, understands and evaluates that information objectively, and puts it together in ways that make sense” (2006, 3). Contextualizing is more than just an academic exercise; it is a way of understanding the world. The connecting imagination is a habit of mind that can shape how we assimilate knowledge, how we conceptualize problems, and how we learn to see and interpret the patterns and silences and histories of everyday life. There seems no better time than the present to share our expertise and enthusiasm with a public plagued by the urgency—and impoverishment—of context.

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NOTES

1 Elsewhere I have written about the American Studies habit of mind. See "Teaching American Studies as a Habit of Mind" *Encyclopedia of American Studies*, edited by Simon Bronner, Online Forum 3, 2012 [<https://www.theasa.net/node/4919>] and "We Are What We Teach: American Studies in the K-16 Classroom," *American Quarterly* 60 (2): 443-454.

2 I have used the Tupperware activity in both undergraduate "Introduction to American Studies" classes and graduate-level theory and methods seminars.

3 In "Introducing American Studies: The Moral Ecology of Everyday Life," James Farrell writes about the need for teachers to practice "a pedagogy of connected learning" (85).

4 Along similar lines, Farrell writes that his goal in teaching American Studies is to "complexify students' lives and their perspectives on the world" (85).

American Studies in the Republic of Turkey: A Journey Unfulfilled

Laurence Raw
Başkent University
Turkey

Abstract: I trace the origins and development of American Studies in Turkish universities, from its beginnings at Ankara University to the pluralistic discipline that it is today. In the early Fifties and even in the Sixties, much of the teaching was carried out by visiting American professors, with minimal Turkish input; but since that time the Turks mostly run the departments themselves with occasional assistance from American visitors. The departments attract sufficient students, but the subjects for discussion remain predominantly in the field of literature. Perhaps local academics remain a little reluctant to embrace more popular material – for example film – for fear that they might be deemed “un-academic” by their colleagues in other disciplines. To outsiders at least, American Studies remains stuck in late Seventies curricula.

The story of American Studies in Turkey dates from the mid-Fifties when the Fulbright Commission appointed Sidney Burks to teach in the English Language and Literature department of Ankara University. Later in that decade, an American Literature sub-division was established in the English department of the same institution with İrfan Şahinbaş, a noted translator and academic, in the chair. Şahinbaş held the job until his retirement in 1982. Until the mid-Sixties, the fledgling program was supported by visiting Fulbright scholars. In contrast, many local professors believed that the idea of an independent department remained unthinkable (Aytür 1996, 60). A graduate program was established in Ankara in 1966. A decade later, the two departments (English and American Literature) were reorganized into separate departments with the American department officially named the Department of American Language and Literature (Amerikan Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü). In 1982, a new university act reorganized foreign literature departments into divisions of Western Languages and Literatures, with English and American Literature transformed into anabilim dalı (social science branches). This lasted for six years, when the American department was transformed into the Department of American Culture and Literature (Amerikan Kültür ve Edebiyatı), even though many staff members were left wondering whether the focus of the department's attention centered on language or literature. This distinction was never clarified.

During the same decade, other American Literature departments were established at Hacettepe University in Ankara and İstanbul Universities, bringing what Necla Aytür termed "a breath of fresh air" to literary studies rather than language (1996, 61). New departments followed in the subsequent decade at state institutions such as Ege and Dokuz Eylül in İzmir, and

in the private sector at Bilkent and Başkent Universities in Ankara, Kadir Has, Bahçeşehir and Haliç Universities in İstanbul. Separate courses in American Studies within the English Literature program were offered at state universities such as Boğaziçi in İstanbul, and Atatürk in Erzurum in the east of the country.

This is a description of how American Studies under its various local guises came into being in the Republic of Turkey. I want to take the opportunity to expand on the development of the discipline in the Republic, and conclude by making some tentative suggestions about how it could develop in the future. Before I begin, I had better declare my subject position as more of an insider than an outsider. Born in London, England, but a resident of the Republic for nearly three decades, I have taught in three different American Studies departments, one of them for seven years as a full-time instructor. I was secretary of the local American Studies Association of Turkey for two years, and edited the *Journal of American Studies of Turkey (JAST)* for four further years. Many of the experiences I describe here are based on personal encounters. The essay begins by discussing an alliance between the American government, the Fulbright Commission and local academics. In the post-Korean war era leading up to the Cuban Missile Crisis, the need to strengthen the Republic's loyalty to the West was a top priority for the Americans. The United States provided funding and intellectual expertise to the universities while offering full scholarships for academics to complete their doctorates in America. For local scholars, increased American involvement in education enhanced their efforts to disseminate modernist values designed to bring the Republic up to the intellectual standards set by the West.

Despite surface optimism, this strategy posed more problems than it solved that continue to this day. Most academics received their training in English Literature, and although they made great efforts to participate, they found it difficult to challenge the prevailing orthodoxy that viewed American Literature as a subdivision of English Literature. Department chairs such as İrfan Şahinbaş (at Ankara) had not only been trained in the United Kingdom – he was given a scholarship to do graduate work at Cambridge – but many of his younger colleagues also came from an English Literature background. Most English programs in state universities had been established from the mid-Thirties onwards, based on the Oxford University model. Local scholars such as Halide Edip Adıvar, who headed İstanbul's English department after a career as an activist working for Atatürk, published histories of English Literature (in Turkish) that became standard texts countrywide. Although local faculty taught American Literature, they employed pedagogic strategies characteristic of English Departments. Most syllabi comprised a series of canonical text studies in detail, with the emphasis placed on practical critical skills – identifying theme, content, and form. Supplementary courses offered surveys of American history providing the background to the study of literature.

Nonetheless, the American Embassy devoted itself to the difficult task of altering prevailing opinions. It appointed a Cultural Attaché at the Embassy in Ankara in 1943. Donald E. Webster, a journalist, educator, and close confidant of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, had been witness to the country's remarkable transformation. Writing in 1939, he claimed that the progress of reform had been so remarkable that people were "beginning to enjoy education, increasing opportunities for intellectual companionship [...] and participation in community affairs" (Webster 1939,

254). Six years later he professed a willingness to “have this small [sic] but strategically oriented country not only friendly to us, but to think things through in patterns similar to our own” (Ninkovich 1981, 52). In 1950, the Fulbright Commission established its headquarters in Ankara with the aim of participating “in the development of programs relevant to American culture in Turkey” (Ersoy 1956, 2). Note the neocolonialist syntax here: the new programs had to be relevant to the foreign rather than the local cultures. Visiting scholars came and went, initially to Ankara and İstanbul, but subsequently to other major cities around the country. Some stayed beyond the mandatory year to help create new American Literature courses, while working with graduate learners on developing thesis topics (Glazier 1971.).

Despite such initiatives, many visiting scholars found themselves within a curious situation. Their efforts to broaden American Literature initiatives had to take place within an English Literature framework to be accepted by the department. In several American Literature syllabi, there were courses such as a Survey of English Literature, Introduction to the Novel, Drama or Poetry, designed to reinforce the belief that American Literature somehow grew out of English Literature. The source of this belief can be traced back to Atatürk’s language reforms of the Twenties in which all words of Arabic origin were replaced by their Latin equivalents in a conscious attempt to transform the Republic into a secular center of European culture and civilization. Later, this policy was identified with modernism, a turning away from the Ottoman past in an effort to embrace a Western future (Berk Albachten 2015, 170). Through publications such as Adivar’s *History of English Literature* it was possible to embrace the democratic spirit, as well as proving beyond doubt that local academics could emulate their foreign colleagues if they so wished. Fulbrighters were there to accelerate the development

of American Literature programs, but had to assume a subordinate role as far as departmental politics and policies were concerned.

Such structural and pedagogical complexities persist to this day. While staff in state institutions have completed higher degrees in American Studies, in the Republic as well as abroad, this is certainly not the case in the private sector, where up to half of the faculty are English Literature majors. When I worked at two such departments, I had to declare my hand as an English graduate. The curricula for most departments in the state and private sectors contain a fair share of practical courses (speaking, oral presentations, academic writing), plus surveys of English Literature, whose inclusion is justified by claiming that American Literature's preoccupations cannot be understood without a knowledge of English Literature. Some American Literature colleagues would challenge this belief on the grounds that their curricula contain courses such as popular cultures, films, African-American and Latin@ texts, national identities, children's literature and science fiction, which superficially vindicates Aytür's claim that American Studies offers learners a "breath of fresh air" compared to their colleagues in English Literature. Yet perhaps such comments are slightly irrelevant. The courses in children's literature and science fiction exist primarily as window-dressing for a program in which comprehensiveness is identified as a virtue. It is far more important to know American Literature's relationship to British Literature as a way of understanding how the two countries differ. More practically, it means that colleagues who have graduated in English have a role to play in American Literature curricula. Some departments – notably at Hacettepe in Ankara and Ege in İzmir – reject that model and offer 100 percent American Literature courses, with courses ranging from Puritanism to contemporary race issues, but they are the exceptions to the rule.

The teaching style in most departments is roughly the same. The more information at the learners' fingertips, the better they are equipped to participate on an intellectual level with their Western counterparts. They can make judicious selections of information and present it cogently in lecture form (Raw 1999, "Reconstructing" 27-8). The education system has been committed to this form of learning at all levels. While new courses have been introduced, their structure remains the same. Each comprises a series of lectures, quizzes or discussion, with at least two mid-terms and one final examination. At the graduate level, courses require learners to do presentations followed by a thesis. Success depends on content-based criteria – the more comprehensive the thesis, the more likely it is to satisfy the jury's expectations.

Most scholarly publications acknowledge the importance of providing background information designed to enhance the reader's understanding. In a collection published in 2015, under the umbrella title *English Studies: New Perspectives* thirty-three scholars contributed pieces on British or American Literature, with topics ranging from Toni Morrison, Leslie Marmon Silko and Zora Neale Hurston. They draw on three principal methodological methods; a) an almost exclusive concentration on a single text or pair of texts; b) a tendency to provide background information; and c) a reluctance to explain their choice of material (Çelikel and Taniyan 2015, *passim*). The fact that the text has been analyzed and situated in its background context is considered sufficient. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with this approach, but it does become somewhat repetitive. A glance at back issues of the *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* reveals a similar tendency: there is a general reluctance to take up the intellectual cudgels and experiment with alternative approaches, let alone speculate about

pedagogical differences in teaching American Studies and English Literature. Hence it is hardly surprising that for some colleagues in different departments both disciplines remain on the disciplinary margins as subdivisions of English Language Learning (ELL).

Several visiting scholars from the U.S., including Fulbrighters, have tried to address this issue by introducing knowledge-based pedagogies, based on the notion that providing learners with information about the target culture will enhance their abilities to make comparisons with their home cultures. Writing in 2003, Benton Jay Komins and David Nicholls advocate the lecture-followed-by-discussion method, in the absence of any local pedagogic precedents for them to follow (72). They spent two years at Bilkent, like Stephanie C. Palmer, who claimed that “the Turkish scholars to whom I have spoken do not have strong ideological motivations for specializing in American literature” (Palmer 2002, 397), but rather spend too much time discussing the alleged “problems” of the discipline rather than discovering the “essence of American culture and nationhood” (Palmer, 396).

All three scholars misread the prevailing conditions in American Studies. Most local colleagues simply do not have the time to address any issues in information-loaded courses taught to large classes. The issue of “American culture and nationhood” is of less interest than “Turkish culture(s) and nationhood,” and tends to come up as a subject for discussion while concentrating on American texts, thereby proving the value of an intercultural approach to the subject. Foreign teachers need to be able to listen as well as teach, to understand the meaning of such discussions for learners, even if they take up only ten minutes of a fifty-minute class period. Evidently, few colleagues have been able (or willing) to make that adjustment. Gönül

Pultar and Ayşe Lahur Kıtrunç describe several of their American colleagues as global agents “not caring about its [the Republic’s] people and systems” and revealing “an ill-disguised attitude of neo-colonialism by publishing about the country, using its resources as raw material for furthering their own academic careers” (2004, 147).

This is not always true. We should appreciate the difficulties experienced by any visiting scholars visiting the Republic for the first time. Superficially, the academic environment of a Turkish university resembles that of a typical American institution, yet there are fundamental questions that are seldom discussed. For example, what is “American culture”? And how does it differ from “Turkish culture”? There are superficial answers that can be gathered through class discussion, but unless visiting scholars ask questions of their local colleagues about Turkish history and its enduring commitment to Western modernist values, they might not grasp the true significance of their learners’ replies. Simply lecturing to learners about American culture and history will not provide the answers.

One way to deal with the difficulties of cultural comparison is to approach American Studies from a transnational standpoint. Pultar believes that this strategy could prompt reflection on the intellectual and academic purpose of the discipline in the Republic: “[It can] register beginnings, discontinuations, and reveals or introduces new works not studied so far” (Pultar 2006, 244). The distinction between comparative and transnational American Studies is significant. In Pultar’s formulation comparative analysis involves one, two or perhaps three cultures – America, Turkey and the United Kingdom, for instance. Transnational American Studies requires us to ponder the significance of texts not originally written in English, as well as texts from the English-

speaking world. The local and the global are separate but represent two sides of the same perceptual coin. We understand more personally what “America” signifies to ourselves as well as others.

In 2012 Tanfer Emin Tunç (Hacettepe) and Bahar Gürsel (Middle East Technical University) published the anthology *The Transnational Turn in American Studies: Turkey and the United States*, a series of interventions in film, literature, consumerism and youth cultures. This was followed three years later by a special issue of the *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*, edited by Christopher Rivera and Jennifer A. Reimer, who worked at Bilkent. In a diverse collection of material on Transnational Latin@ Studies, we were left in no doubt that transnationalism involved far more than cultural cooperation. The contributors examined ontological issues (what does it mean to be Latin@?), as well as matters of literary form (what is deemed “poetic” in one territory might not be so in another), and translation (should we embrace alternative strategies when considering the relationship between source and target texts? Or should we approach the translational act as a mosaic of intertexts?). These two recent interventions point the way toward a brighter future for American Studies in Turkey, so long as people are prepared to set aside established concerns and rethink their intellectual positions. It is clear that the academic environment has changed permanently. The internet offers a range of source materials and critical interventions that academics could have only dreamt of a quarter of a century ago. Online communication platforms like Skype can put local scholars in touch with their American colleagues without the necessity for financial support. Projects can be planned transnationally, enabling greater interaction between scholars of different ages and subject specialisms. We might wonder whether the Fulbright program has any real future, unless it is prepared to rethink its purpose transnationally.

Perhaps we need to rethink what the value of American Studies represents for our learners. While broadening their cultural awareness remains important, we should bear in mind that access to American cultural products is far easier compared to the past. We need to reflect on the discipline's capacity to make sense of the world, and be prepared to ask why it should have an impact on learners' lives both inside and outside the classroom. We should make students responsible for their own learning through bottom-up pedagogical strategies rather than top-down. Lectures still have a place in the curriculum, but they should be accompanied by extensive group activities, enabling learners to discuss the material among themselves. For foreign faculty struggling to make sense of local cultural practices, this strategy can reveal a lot about themselves as well as their learners – for example, their capacity to listen, observe and learn as well as teach. Collaboration encourages self-direction as well as improving relationships within the classroom environment: everyone participates rather than sitting passively waiting to be force-fed facts.

This construction of pedagogy can encourage speculation on what seems to be the basic question of any American Studies program: why are we doing it? (Raw 2017, "Forging," 1-5). Experience has revealed some unexpected responses from learners. "Because I like it"; "Because we do different things," or "Because it is fun." While such responses might be deemed unacademic, they form an effective foundation for further abstract speculation on questions such as: "How can studying foreign cultures improve our sense of self-awareness?" This is a difficult question to answer, as it has less to do with knowledge acquisition and more with developing speculative perspectives measured against academically rigorous arguments. American Studies should promote personal speculation as well as historical or political inquiry by encouraging edu-

cators and learners alike, irrespective of their nationality, to share and revise their opinions, not simply discuss them in abstract terms.

Bearing in mind that we do not just engage with American Studies through face-to-face communication, we should place more emphasis on learning from online interactions through social media. We can discover more about our Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat or Instagram friends and by doing so investigate further the notion of “America” as a social, personal and cultural construction. Such knowledge forms the cornerstone of transnational projects that advances our understanding and engagement with the discipline with minimal financial expenditure

Historically, American Studies in the Turkish Republic committed itself to a unity of purpose both educationally as well as politically, as it sought to strengthen diplomatic relations with the United States as well as its European neighbors. While its commitment to American democracy might not be so strong today – owing to fundamental ideological disagreements between those in power – the Turkish Republic reveals a continuing commitment to the values of the United States (democracy, freedom, pluralism). If these values can be continually spread among learners countrywide, then the discipline has continued value, even in a changing world. We should acknowledge that transnationalism through studying other countries forges alternative constructions combining local and global issues while encouraging us to investigate difference at a psychological as well as a political level. Such awareness not only disseminates pluralism but also reminds us of the responsibilities placed on all of us, whether we are educators, graduates, or undergraduate learners. As my title indicates, this intellectual journey is a never-ending one.

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NOTES

1 The story of American Studies in Turkey has been told from a variety of perspectives. Necla Aytür, once the head of the American Department at Ankara, prioritizes her institution as the pioneer. Emel Doğramacı, who as Dean of the Division of Western Languages and Literature had presided over the opening of the Hacettepe department, claimed that her department created American Studies rather than American Literature (“Laurence Raw Interviews”). Gülriz Büken simply offers a summary of the departments offering courses (Büken 2006, 1-6).

2 Adivar was best known for her English language account of the Turkish War of Independence and the subsequent revolution (*The Turkish Ordeal*, 1928). Her literary history *İngiliz Edebiyatı Tarihi* (*The History of English Literature*) appeared in 1946. Long out of print, *The Turkish Ordeal* is now accessible online at the University of Kansas.

3 Webster (1901-2003) published a book outlining Atatürk’s reforms in detail for American readers (*The Turkey of Atatürk*). At the age of ninety-seven he appeared as an interviewee in filmmaker Tolga Örnek’s documentary on Atatürk (1998).

4 I can speak from personal experience. As a member of the British Council staff in the mid-1990s, my job was to introduce British Cultural Studies into university departments of English Language and Literature. A Master’s program was created – and continues to this day – but I was told in no uncertain terms that its structure should be shaped by local expectations.

5 At Bilkent University the American Studies curriculum has a major concentration in civilizations and cultures as well as a course on American Studies in a global context. The major claim is that learners will encounter material comparatively (2017, “Welcome”).

6 Although there was plenty of material available at the time when they wrote the article, they claim that there was “no paper trail to follow” for their research (Komins and Nicholls 2003, 72).

7 I contributed a piece on representations of the Republic during the Classical Era of the Hollywood studios (Tunç and Gürsel 2012,191-209).

Reviews

Justin Gest. *The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality*.
(New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
xiii+249 ISBN 9780190632557)

Justin Gest, an assistant professor of public policy at George Mason University's Schar School of Policy and Government, has written an insightful and engaging study of why many white working-class people in the U.S. and U.K. are deeply unhappy with the social and political status quo. Gest did field research, including extensive interviews in two representative communities: Youngstown, Ohio and Barking and Dagenham in East London. These are both excellent choices for Gest's intended purposes because they are the kinds of places that flourished in the 1940s, 50's and 60's, and then fell victim to globalization and deindustrialization thereafter.

The New Minority does a fine job of explaining why white working-class people in such places today feel ignored and even abandoned by both of their respective countries' two major parties. The most interesting chapters of this book tell the stories of Youngstown's and East London's decline, and how the older residents in particular view that process. For Youngstowners, the crucial, devastating change has been a shift from economic security built on male bread-winner jobs in the steel industry during its heyday to pervasive economic insecurity in an economy with few good jobs for those with no more than a grade-school education or special skills. For East Londoners, the focus of discontent is at least as much on the issue of displacement by new immigrants from

the U.K.'s former colonies, whose presence has transformed the look and feel of the old neighborhood. Many of Gest's quotations from the interviews are wonderfully evocative, and he skillfully weaves them into his account.

Having painted vivid portraits of both places, Gest zeroes in on why working-class whites have reacted so negatively to those changes, and the particular ways that they explain them. In Youngstown, the decline of the steel industry is understood mostly as the result of management's quest to seek higher profits in places where wages are a lot lower. Combined with that is a sense of grievance that the welfare state programs established to deal with the damage done by that shift are abused, not by the white working-class usually, but by African Americans there. At the heart of the matter is a pervasive belief among dispossessed whites that blacks are quick to accept cash assistance, which whites tend to view in moralistic terms as reflecting an unwillingness to work. Gest's research reveals that whites rely on welfare-state programs a great deal as well, but persist in thinking that they only accept in-kind assistance such as food stamps, and even then, only to supplement inadequate incomes from low-paying jobs. The extent to which this perception reflects reality is a bit unclear; what is unambiguous is that the whites Gest surveyed in Youngstown firmly believe it. The net result is a working-class community divided against itself, and a culture of corruption as the most networked people fight for scarce jobs and resources.

East London, as Gest makes clear, is not entirely different, but lacks the stark black-white binary of Youngstown. Instead, older working-class whites in East London complain about newer immigrants as overly prone to rely on welfare-state programs while declining to assimilate into traditional English folkways. The key

distinction in the minds of working-class whites there is between immigrants who came earlier and seemed eager to assimilate themselves into British society, and a more recent wave that seems determined to turn a neighborhood working class whites view as theirs into a very different kind of place. The net result in terms of political power is much the same, however: a divided community that has little clout with establishment figures of various kinds.

Having laid out that narrative, Gest goes on to try to map just how alienated various kinds of working-class whites are in both places, and the extent to which the degree of alienation affects the nature of their protest against the status quo. Gest is on familiar turf here; his previous book was a study of the extent to which Muslims living in the West are alienated from it. One very clear feature of this new study are diagrams of alienation in which Gest asked his interviewees to use a set of concentric circles to show how they see the distribution of power in their homelands. The most interesting finding is that white working-class people in both Youngstown and East London see racial and ethnic minority groups as having more power than they do, thanks to changes in law and life since the 1960s. In essence, working-class whites believe they have changed places with the minorities that they used to out-rank, socially, culturally, and politically. In their view, the people at the top of their respective societies have come to care more about minority groups than working-class whites. Gest makes clear that view has generated much of the populist energy that carried Donald Trump's presidential campaign and the Brexit referendum to unexpected victories.

This book is very helpful in many ways, especially to people who are perplexed by the intensity of white working-class alienation. *The New Minority* is not, however, without flaws. What

would have made this very good study even better, in the American context particularly, is more attention to religion. Youngstown is a place heavily populated by white Catholics, the older of whom are often strongly morally traditional. Much of their sense of blacks as profoundly different (rather than natural allies) flows from that situation, which Gest does not fully explain. Another issue that could have used more context is Gest's discussion of nationalism, which to older working-class whites in the U.S. and U.K. is seen as something very positive. It provided the glue that held those countries together, during World War II specifically, fostering a way of seeing that greatly affects perceptions, especially of recent immigrants. Gest also needed to say more about the ingrained commitment to patriarchal family structures among working-class whites, older ones in particular. Their world had been built on male breadwinning, and much of their sense of grievance stems from the decline in jobs that pay enough to make that model workable. Finally, Gest has a tendency to think that working-class whites who backed Trump and Brexit are hopelessly retrograde in their thinking, rather than consider seriously the possibility that the pressure they are putting on the U.S. and U.K. systems may well move them toward a future that looks somewhat more like the past. One need not agree with that agenda in order to take it seriously, and *The New Minority* could have done that to a greater degree. That said, Gest's study is an excellent one of an issue of great contemporary importance, and possesses a rare comparative dimension. For those reasons, *The New Minority* is highly recommended for academics and their students in history, political science, sociology, and other, related fields.

David Stebenne
Ohio State University,
USA