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Introduction
Transnational American Studies: Histories, Methodologies, Perspectives

For several decades—notably, since the turn of the twenty-first century—the field of American studies has been expanding beyond its long established intellectual framing by adopting a consciously transnational approach, as well as a more determined interdisciplinary approach. This change is not just one in scope, but one in political orientation. The "transnational turn" is above all a turn away from American exceptionalism. Each of the essays included in this thematic cluster addresses transnationalism: some do so explicitly, as their theme, others rely on it as a conceptual frame. They all originated as papers presented at the conference of the Polish Association for American Studies titled *Transnational American Studies: Histories, Methodologies, Perspectives* held at the American Studies Center, University of Warsaw in October 2016. The present introduction begins with a brief overview of the various "turns" that preceded and led to the transnational turn; it offers a definition of transnationalism as a theoretical perspective in American studies and goes on to ask what the field's evolution has implied in the cultural/intellectual/political context of post-1989 Europe, especially Poland. To what extent has it affected hierarchies of knowledge production and distribution? How has the promise of transnationalism resonated with Polish Americanists? Have we accepted the political impulse behind it—its anti-exceptionalism, critiqued by some as anti-Americanism? Our aim is not to offer conclusive answers to these questions, but rather to provoke critical reflection and debate. It is our belief that scholarship benefits from occasional methodological self-scrutiny and that the transnational turn has had sufficient resonance to occasion such historicizing reflection and discursive re-constitution of the field. Needless to say, the meaning of transnationalism in American studies depends on who is asking, as well as when and where the question is asked.

Paradigms, Turns, Perspectives Prior to the Transnational Turn

Vernon Louis Parrington wrote in *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927) that he has "chosen to follow the broad path of our political, economic, and social development, rather than the narrower belletristic" (xvii). Thereby, he prospectively defined American studies as interdisciplinary while implicitly affirming the primacy of U.S. perspectives and assuming that the audience would be American, as well (consider the pronoun "our" in this quote). The project was thus quite different from

José Marti's "Nuestra America" and even opposed to it. The field has since fared particularly well at the crossroads of literature and history, without usually venturing to other disciplines, as evidenced also by the work of the generation of scholars that followed the founders, including the literary scholar F.O. Matthiessen and the historian Perry Miller. History and literature were the unquestioned center of scholarly interest for the myth-and-symbol school, whose founders include Henry Nash Smith, Leo Marx, and John William Ward—their main preoccupation was to capture and define what made American culture special, different, in short—exceptional.

Revisionary positions adopted by Annette Kolodny, Richard Slotkin, and Alan Trachtenberg critiqued the myth-and-symbol style of doing American studies for neglecting minority perspectives for the sake of a unifying national vision, especially as embodied in the frontier myth and the pastoral tradition, and for reiterating the notion of American exceptionalism.[1] With the notable exception of Trachtenberg, these critics remained firmly rooted in literary studies. A shift towards interdisciplinarity began in the 1970s: as sociology and anthropology gradually rose in significance within American studies, the concept of "culture" inherited from literary studies was being displaced by the anthropological understanding of "culture" as a way of life. This change, to a large extent owed to the influence of Raymond Williams, was one in both method and object of scholarly interest: popular culture, media, film, and material culture joined the classics of American literature as "texts" worthy of serious study. It was also an institutional change: literary scholars were now cohabiting the field and exchanging ideas with academics trained in anthropology and sociology, as well as media and film studies.[2]

Theoretical paradigms (some would say: fads) followed one another rapidly. Structuralism came to American studies in the mid-1970s—thus rather late—giving a "scientific" underpinning to arguments that had heretofore been framed in myth-and-symbol terms.[3] As a latecomer, structuralism was soon overshadowed by post-

1 If *Virgin Land* by Henry Nash Smith (1950) remains the classic foundational text, then Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* (1975) appears to us as the single most noteworthy revisionist text from the 1970s. A powerful re-thinking of the pastoral tradition, it also remains remarkably readable and teachable even after nearly half a century. Its significance is also as a classic in American gender studies; Kolodny demonstrated the centrality of gender in shaping U.S. myth/ideology, thus anticipating many later developments at the intersection of American studies and gender and queer studies.

2 For a self-narrative about Americanization of cultural studies, see: Grossman, Denning, "Culture and the Crisis"; Budd, Entman, Steinman, "The Affirmative Character of U.S. Cultural Studies." A good mainstream guide to the directions of the constant development of American (cultural) studies is an ongoing project by NYU Press—an ever expanding version of the publication by Burgett, Hendler: http://keywords.nyupress.org/american-cultural-studies/.

3 One brilliant example is Will Wright's *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (1975). The book remains remarkably readable today as a perceptive reading of Westerns, despite its dated methodology.

structuralism and, by the mid-1980s, the entire "linguistic turn" had been displaced by the "cultural turn," i.e. by approaches drawn from ethnography, socio-anthropology, and various brands of neo-Marxism.[4] Feminism became influential not only as a way of re-reading the tradition but also as a force that redefined it; to re-read the great male authors with gender in mind and to add women authors to the canon was to reconsider the meaning of what has made America "exceptional" and to put this very idea in perspective.[5]

By the late 1980s American studies had fully joined the UK-born international intellectual movement known as cultural studies. "Ideology," "discourse" and "hegemony" were now key conceptual tools; Foucault, Althusser, Hall, and Gramsci became unavoidable points of reference. The business of searching for what makes America different from the rest of the world was giving way to a new pursuit: that of tracing and interpreting the dynamics of power as it manifests itself in U.S. culture. The concept of social construction of identity and a new approach to race (or "race," as some scholars insisted), eventually resulting in critical race studies, were major preoccupations.[6] "Transnationalism" had not yet been named as a theoretical perspective, but the various "turns" were already pointing in that direction by questioning the paradigm of a naturalized national identity.

Defining the "Transnational Turn"

The transnational turn was predicated on a critique of American exceptionalism and a rejection of an imaginary homogeneity of cultural memory that the field had produced. Central to it was a call that scholars acknowledge, on the one hand,

4 Michael Denning's provocative essay "'The Special American Conditions': Marxism and American Studies" (1986), very influential at the time, is perhaps worth mentioning here as both a survey of Marxian approaches to U.S. culture produced up till then, and an important Marxist argument against American exceptionalism (notably, against the idea that there is no class struggle in the United States).

5 Let us mention two 1980s texts that constitute both feminist classics and fascinating meta-texts of the masculinist bias of what was then American studies: Nina Baym's "Melodramas of Beset Manhood" (1985) and Jane Tomkins' "Sentimental Power: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Politics of Literary History" (1985).

6 Emblematic of this stage are two collections: *Ideology and Classic American Literature* edited by Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen (1988) and *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, edited by Henry Louis Gates (1986). Many of the essays collected in these volumes remain classics of American studies, but they also testify to the intense political engagement that accompanied the mid-1980s preoccupation with discourse, ideology, and the social construction of race. Arguably, the single most influential book of the period was Michael Omi and Howard Winant's *Racial Formation in the United States* (1986). Since then critical race studies has occupied a central position in (transnational) American studies. Another related study, paving the way towards critical whiteness studies, was George Lipsitz's *The Possesive Investment in Whiteness* (1998).

the plurality of histories obscured by the term "American" and, on the other hand, the imperial status of the U.S. along with the ways in which exceptionalism served this status and shaped culture. In a useful survey of these developments published in 2012, John Carlos Rowe demonstrates that the shift towards "New" American studies was essentially the result of a critique of American studies as Cold-War area studies. This critique had been brewing for quite a while, as the above overview illustrates. Rowe credits especially the work done in the mid-1980s by Donald Pease and others, who showed "how American Studies participated in Cold War ideology, especially its articulation of an American Exceptionalism" (89). And yet, however far we search for its intellectual roots, that critique led to a paradigm change only when Americanists took note of the relevance of postcolonial theory to U.S. history. The mental map was re-drawn thanks to Paul Gilroy's seminal *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). In Rowe's words, Gilroy "fundamentally challenged 'area studies' definitions of Caribbean, African American, and black British communities, directing us both literally and figuratively to the 'Atlantic world' in which transnational flows of people, goods, and cultures moved incessantly and diversely" (101).

Two programmatic texts by leading U.S. Americanists seem worth mentioning here: Amy Kaplan's 1993 essay "'Left Alone with America': The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture" and Janice Radway 1998 presidential address to the American Studies Association. Kaplan demonstrated how, from Perry Miller's "errand into the wilderness" onwards, American studies had evaded the fact that the United States is an empire. This blindness, she argued, had been crippling to the field, as the imperial status had an enormous impact on cultural productions.[7] Radway's presidential address raised the question of the exceptionalism inscribed in the field's very name and explored possible alternatives. Reprinted as the opening text in the New Americanists' signature anthology, *The Futures of American Studies*, the essay is thus introduced by the volume's editors:

> Radway's essay challenges the naturalization of such categories as the nation-state and questions the reification of the American studies movements as a single unitary culture.… *America, Americanness, and Americanization*: all these terms have their own intelligibility. By raising the question of the name, Radway challenged practitioners in the field to account for how the unintelligible and unrepresentable can be brought to bear on the field. (Pease and Wiegman 23-24)

The transnational turn, then, grows out of a need to redirect and re-orient scholarly work: away from previously assumed coherence of what used to be called the

7 Kaplan eventually developed her argument into a book-length study: *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (2002). The book shows how U.S. imperialism—from "Manifest Destiny" to the "American Century"—shaped American culture.

"American mind" and away from the complacency brought about by the comforting idea that America is a "stable container of social antagonisms" (Radway 53). The challenge was to truly acknowledge the problems posed by American exceptionalism and imperialism; to confront their consequences for the field of American studies. The very idea of "the common ground" at the heart of liberalism had to be rejected because, to cite Radway again, "the liberal solution to the question of difference has increasingly been made untenable, by the new work on race especially, but also by work on sexuality, ethnicity, gender, and class" (52).

At the heart of the transnational turn is thus an anti-national and anti-liberal political orientation, one that has been celebrated by many on the left while it has also been critiqued as anti-American.[8] The movement's valorization of academic work with explicit political commitment is exemplified by the section titles in *The Futures of American Studies*: Posthegemonic, Comparativist, Differential, and Counterhegemonic.

Transnationalism received renewed impetus with the 2000 election of George W. Bush as President and with U.S. interventions in Asia in the wake of 9/11. Prompted by these developments, sometimes in an overt gesture of protest, scholars revived the debate about America's exceptionalism. The 2004 American Studies Association Presidential Address by Shelley Fisher Fishkin provides one of the examples of the beginning centrality of the term "transnationalism" in American studies. The founding of major American studies journals with a new transnational focus is another prominent example: *Comparative American Studies* dates back to 2003 whereas *Transnational American Studies*, co-founded by Fischer Fishkin, started appearing in 2009. Speaking from the standpoint of Polish American studies, it is worth noting that that the initial issue of *Transnational American Studies* featured an article by a Polish scholar, Andrzej Antoszek.

As the above historical sketch suggests, the debate was not exactly new to Americanists. What was new was the sense of political commitment and urgency. If the U.S. was violently re-asserting itself as an empire with exceptionalism legitimating military interventions, Americanists were responding by tracing the roots of these developments in U.S. culture and situating the U.S. in determined political, social, economic, and cultural contexts. Rowe devotes an entire chapter to recent productions of the culture industry which strove to justify U.S. military interventions. He argues that

> there is an important relationship between the emergence of U.S. military power, along with the complementary threats of inequitable and repressive policies toward peoples (especially but not exclusively non-U.S. citizens) at home and abroad, and the capitalization of

8 Alan Wolfe, "Anti-American Studies," *The New Republic* (February 10, 2003). For a discussion of this text, see Rob Kroes's article in this issue. More recently, a dismissal of liberalism has been practiced by the right as a boost to nationalism.

> 'cultural exports' ranging from Hollywood entertainment and television programming to digital technologies and their protocols for communication, work, and social 'networking.' (111-112)

Concluding his analysis, Rowe articulates an explicitly political aim for "new" American studies:

> It is time for us to think differently about how 'history' is and has been made, to count the 'local' as well as the 'global,' and to develop new institutions, not simply interpretive methods, to negotiate the inevitable conflicts of such histories. Without such critical knowledge, there is likely to be unending terror from all sides in a new era of global warfare only one stage of which is being enacted in the U.S. invasion of Iraq and its ongoing war in Afghanistan. (130)

Writing in 2012 Rowe may not be entirely representative in his sense of urgency or in his prophesy of "unending terror from all sides." For the most part, Barrack Obama's presidency provoked more positive intellectual responses because of an apparent return to multilateralism. But how do we think of transnational American studies vis-à-vis the vehemence of Donald Trump running against Hillary Clinton? What difference does the Trump presidency make to the debates on American exceptionalism?

In October 2016, just before our conference took place, a commentator for *The New York Times*, reflecting on the upcoming U.S. elections, expressed his view of how the ongoing campaign had left behind the old cultural wars, replacing them with a new divide, one that is already familiar in Europe but less so in America: "This election is a hint of one way things could turn next: a new split between the beneficiaries of multicultural globalism and the working-class ethno-nationalists who feel left behind, both economically and culturally. It wouldn't divide the country as much by region and religion, but more along the lines of urbanization and education" (Cohn). We are presented here with an idea which in 2016 was still scrambling for the best terms in which to express itself, i.e., the question of economic versus cultural factors' impact on the election. Were the disillusioned voters indeed working-class, or were they perhaps also former members of the middle class? Is an "ethno-nationalist" code for a white supremacist, or does it mean something else, an isolationist perhaps? What are the structures of feeling of those who felt left behind? How exactly do urbanization and education match up, if they do? And what about the hoary term "multicultural globalism," whose alleged beneficiaries are being opposed to "working-class ethno-nationalists"? Such questions are at the heart of Arlie Hochschild's enormously influential study *Strangers in Their Own Land* (2016). Her ethnography explores the structures of feeling behind the rise of right-wing populism, white angst, and white resentment that would lead Trump into the White House. A remarkable effort to understand what has happened to America, the book

was an immediate bestseller and remained one for months. But given Hochschild's determination to search for a coherent explanation of what had happened, is the book in tune with recent developments in American studies that have resisted any presumption of national coherence? Or should we perhaps be asking whether American studies, as defined by the "transnational turn" of the mid-1990s, with its vehement rejection of liberalism, remains an adequate response to the crisis of liberalism experienced (not only) by America today?

European Perspectives on the Transnational Turn

European Americanists had, of course, participated in all the shifts and transitions that preceded the transnational turn, contributing theoretically informed and innovative scholarship. The new development meant that our position *as* Europeans became significant because we were affording an outside perspective. The transnational turn brought the question of location into the center. The project of escaping "the tenacious grasp of American exceptionalism," as Kaplan put it in the title of a 2004 essay, implied a serious invitation for outsiders, a call for comparative perspectives.

The new framework appeared promising. It invited discussions of American influences on European unification. It placed the current immigrant crisis against the backdrop of American history, political system, and the way the U.S. has integrated some of its constituent minorities. Conversely, the U.S. was to be regarded not as unique but as occupying a determined place in the global economy and in the international system. Transnationalism also implied a re-assessment of critical readings of America by outsiders—a long-standing tradition that includes Alexis de Tocqueville and a multitude of others, Henryk Sienkiewicz and Bernard-Henri Lévy among them. Europeans might have things to say just as did American expatriates, such as Henry James, Gertrude Stein, Henry Miller, and James Baldwin, and as did those Americans whose perspective was influenced by their travels abroad, such as Herman Melville and Mark Twain. Indigenous dissenters have offered and inspired a range of critical insights that might lend themselves to comparative readings and to being discussed from the vantage point of transnational American studies.

Such an invitation was in fact extended. Among the several suggestions for a new name for the American Studies Association offered by Radway two decades ago was "International Association for the Study of the United States." This name, she suggested, would "acknowledge the fact that analysis of the United States and its history, people and cultures is not carried out solely within the borders of this country" (61). Yet, as Radway goes on to admit, "the work of international scholars is still often cordoned off in special international panels rather than integrated with panels that feature United States-based scholars" (61). This, we are sad to say, has not changed all that much since then (and neither, by the way, has ASA's name). Moreover, few U.S. based scholars grace American studies conferences outside the U.S. with their presence. Though this may not be a matter of choice or bias, but

rather of funding and the distribution of prestige, the fact remains that "transnational American studies" may be anti-national in theory but remains a U.S.-based pursuit.

The transnational turn is thus not a happy ending to a turbulent story; rather, it is itself a phenomenon at the intersection of politics and academia, one that needs to be contextualized and historicized. The transnational approach means placing the U.S. squarely in the global context rather than beginning with the premise of its special role, but European scholars have been somewhat skeptical about the U.S. relinquishing its central position in the seeming gesture of self-divestiture. Some have suggested that the 'transnational turn' is, paradoxically, a remarkably American phenomenon, one provoked by and implicated in political debates and developments of the last two decades. For instance, Winfried Fluck asks about the uses of the transnational perspective and notes its necessary, however critical, co-dependence with the national:

> The transnational can… not be separated from the national from which it takes its point of departure. In effect, one constitutes the other, and both remain interdependent. Seen from this perspective, transnational American studies, despite their own programmatic claims to go beyond the American nation-state, also imply theories for and about 'America.' (366-367)

Also, writing in 2011, Fluck already advocates for examining the diverse uses of the transnational perspective that "can hide very different agendas" (366) instead of only celebrating its potential. His article testifies to the maturity of the field that can be re-categorized in its vastness and diversity, and appreciated, but at the same time critically assessed.

Also other prominent Western European Americanists, including Heinz Ickstadt and Rob Kroes, have been skeptical, sometimes even ironic, of the New Americanists' mission to abolish coherence, which they refer to as "a form of ideological (and methodological) exorcism… [designed] to drive out the bad spirits of nationalism, to get out of the national frame, which, in a sense, is the very frame in which American studies developed" (Ickstadt interview, 21). Kroes makes a similar point in the present volume: "adherents of the New American Studies set upon the 'de-construction' of their own academic field with a vengeance. At times their efforts showed a vehemence as if the issue was a matter of exorcism, of driving out all the evil connotations of the word 'America,' in an act of linguistic voluntarism, as if changing the language one used would change the world."

Interviewed in 2006, Ickstadt was hopeful about what he called the ongoing internationalization of American studies, wherein scholars from Europe, Asia, and Latin America were finally being invited into a dialogue with U.S. Americanists on equal terms "and not merely [as] imitators, followers from the Americanist provinces or diasporas" (21). Over a decade later, we might ask whether a true internationalization has taken place. From the standpoint of the Polish academy,

two aspects of the transnational turn seem problematic: its interdisciplinarity and its political engagement. Most Americanists attending the annual conferences of the Polish Association for American Studies come from English departments and are literary scholars, some of whom have ventured into film studies or cultural studies. Efforts to attract social scientists—sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists—have been only moderately successful, even though three American studies departments (at the University of Warsaw, the Jagiellonian University, and the University of Łódź) include social scientists among their permanent faculty and offer social science curricula. Nonetheless, the sheer numerical prevalence of literary scholars determines the field's character as predominantly literary, prompting the few social scientists working on the U.S. to attend conferences in their respective fields rather than the specifically Americanist gatherings. An annual graduate conference on U.S. history takes place outside the framework of the PAAS, for example.

Little emphasis has been placed on extending the field beyond the study of the U.S., and almost no bilingual or multilingual programs exist. Most American studies curricula are offered in English or in Polish (or a combination of both), typically leaving out Spanish and the other languages of North America and of Latin America. Canadian studies is a notable exception, although the curricula are usually minimal and rarely include both anglo- and francophone courses. The Jagiellonian in Cracow has recently begun to offer a hemispheric American studies curriculum at the BA level that is taught in Polish, and the University of Warsaw will soon implement a hemispheric curriculum at the MA level, taught in English and Spanish. These are the most notable harbingers of a transnational approach to American studies, however differently conceived from the transnational turn that remains focused primarily on the U.S.

As for political engagements, the debates and silences engaging West European Americanists may have been motivated in part by anti-American sentiment prompted by George W. Bush and by American anti-Europeanism. The position of Eastern European Americanists has been different for obvious historical reasons. At the risk of oversimplification, a generational split may be observed. A number of scholars remain attached to the literary paradigm of American studies because they are highly skeptical of the politicization of academia. Formal literary readings, even if combined with a historicizing approach, are well enough entrenched to offer the kind of intellectual autonomy that has been invaluable in the face of Cold War era ideology and that may still be important today. Moreover, these scholars are often skeptical of what Rob Kroes in his article in this volume critically describes as 'linguistic volunteerism': the conviction that calling things by new names can significantly change the distribution of power, or even of knowledge. By contrast, a number of mid-career scholars and many younger ones are pursuing critical race studies, feminism, queer studies, and so on. They are actively participating in the new American studies paradigms of which transnationalism is a facet. Their intellectual preferences—as well as, to a growing degree, their education—predispose them

to these pursuits, making it almost unthinkable that an Americanist earning her doctorate in Poland today might opt for a formal reading of cultural texts without engaging some political angle. Recent publications show the engagement of American studies scholars working in Poland with various iterations of the transnational approach (cf. e.g. Ferens; Desmond and Dominguez).

The above distinction is approximate at best, but it gets at the point of the debate. To illustrate the kind of discrepancy at work here, let us recall an anecdote, related by Marek Wilczyński in his contribution to the Politics of American Studies issue of *The Americanist* (2006): "When at the… EAAS conference in Nicosia, Cyprus, Donald Pease made a reference to Stalin as a precursor of today's critique of American exceptionalism, an elder colleague of mine, who was sitting in the audience behind me, whispered right into my ear, 'He is insulting us.' Indeed he was, no matter if totally unaware of the problem" (50). This exchange indicates that historical determinations cannot be simply ignored or escaped. Moreover, the recent turn to illiberalism in Poland and elsewhere suggests that one would only ignore them at one's peril.

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The five articles in this thematic section mirror these various modes and points of evolution of the transnational perspective on American studies sketched above. They include more theoretically-oriented contributions directly resonating with the issues raised in this introduction; such is the case with Rob Kroes's and Tadeusz Rachwał's articles. The remaining articles—by Piotr Skurowski, Grzegorz Welizarowicz, and Florian Zappe—provide case studies of various iterations of the transnational. Together they are an illuminating illustration of how the way we think and write is inevitably affected both by geographical location and institutional and disciplinary contexts.

Rob Kroes's contribution "Transnational American Studies: Exceptionalism Revisited," with which this section begins, is a critical appreciation of the field of transnational American studies. Kroes's argument proceeds in three steps: he traces the contemporary use of "American exceptionalism" first in political discourse (notably its critical usage by Barack Obama), and, second, in American studies since the 1990s. By engaging these two spheres, Kroes is able to showcase the political engagement inherent in self-understanding of American studies in the U.S. and a considerable part of (Western) Europe. Also, focusing on scholarly criticism on American exceptionalism, Kroes provides a narrative of the recent development of transnational American studies that is complementary to that present in this introduction. However, he also directly points to the aporias present in this approach that he terms "linguistic voluntarism"; thus he self-reflexively interrogates the limits of political agency of discursive procedures. In the third step, Kroes—drawing on his own recent work—projects a vision of "methodological transnationalism" or "mental intertextuality." Kroes alludes here to phenomenology talking about "forms

of transnationalism inherent to the workings of the human mind" in which various linguistic and visual texts are juxtaposed beyond the constraints of a national exceptionalist imaginary.

The essay by Tadeusz Rachwał "Where East Meets West: On Some Locations of America" is an interesting effort that implicitly brings together the two styles of thinking about American studies characteristic for American and, to some extent, Western European on the one hand and post-socialist East-European academia on the other (as we suggest above, in Poland, it is also a matter of generational differences). Rachwał engages in an exploration of the metaphoric (aesthetic) forms of discourse about territorial expansion, examining the aesthetic dimension of political imagination. Rachwał's position is close to Kroes's critique of linguistic volunteerism, but they are also different in that they address different academic audiences. Rachwał remains focused on aesthetics because he is writing in an academic context in which the field is defined as that of aesthetic, rather than overtly political, analysis. In other words, while Kroes is speaking to Americanists who have accepted the politicization of their field as inevitable and necessary, and who want to address political issues directly, Rachwał functions in an academic environment which traditionally shuns political engagement, regarding them as ideological and reductionist. The ethos of the humanities in post-socialist Eastern Europe involves a careful avoidance of instrumentalization of culture for historical reasons. The academic field perceives itself as a guardian of transhistorical values against the violence of politics. Rachwał's essay may be read as an effort to break through this paradigm but in a way that respects the discursive protocols of the field in the region.

The third article in this sequence—Piotr Skurowski's "Looking Back, 2018-1916: The Cosmopolitan Idea in Randolph Bourne's 'Transnational America'"—revisits Bourne's titular essay, which features also in the conclusion of Rachwał's contribution. Skurowski performs what we could call an empathic reading of Bourne's essay, trying to disentangle how his original contribution reads in the context of the times which he, referring to Mitchell Cohen, puts into to rubric of "rooted cosmopolitanism." Significantly, Skurowski puts Bourne in dialogue with his contemporaries, namely Horace Kallen, but also with W.E.B. Du Bois. Hence, Bourne emerges as a highly ambivalent figure that can be read as a "forerunner" of today's "transnationalism," but whose texts also showcase a decisive class, gender, and racial bias.

Grzegorz Welizarowicz's "Feel Like a Gringo: Transnational Consciousness in Los Angeles Punk Rock songs," may be read as a variation on the theme of rooted cosmopolitanism, but engages a very different type of cultural texts. Analyzing a regional assemblage of punk rock songs written and performed by local bands, including Chicano/a artists, Welizarowicz speaks to American studies in the tradition of (British) cultural studies focusing, among others, on subcultures. Yet, the brand of transnationalism employed in this article is not about the transatlantic connection to British punk rock, as the author makes explicitly clear, but rather is located in the

very material analyzed. He argues that the borderlands help to produce "a radical transcultural sensibility" that found its vehicle in punk rock, both in its diasporically transnational guise and as a transnational political self-critique of the white mainstream.

In his contribution titled "The Other Exceptionalism: A Transnational Perspective on Atheism in America," Florian Zappe returns to some of the theoretical considerations of "transnationalism" that are at the heart of Rob Kroes's contribution while looking at the position of religion and the tradition of disbelief in the U.S. Relying on Robert Bellah's concept of "American civil religion" and viewing religion in terms of cultural imaginary (Castoriadis), Zappe analyzes the distinct version of atheism that developed in America. He reads the soft or negative atheism embodied by the writings by Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson, and then examines hard or positive atheism, here linked with immigrant social reformers, such as Ernestine Rose and Emma Goldman. It is thus a transnational lens that allows Zappe to complicate claims about the exceptional status of religious belief in the U.S.

"For an outside observer, the most surprising thing about current transnational American studies in the United States is that they hardly focus on such transnational reconfigurations of power"(380), concludes Winfried Fluck in 2011, suggesting that despite the assumed politicization of the field, it nevertheless falls short of the expectations of its transnational political interventions. As we see from the various articles collected here, despite the global networking of scholars, the horizon of expectation of the scholarly work in American studies in various parts of the globe and various parts of Europe may still be quite different—also depending on their very positioning within the transnational flows of power.

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