Crossing Borders, Shifting Paradigms: New Perspectives on American Studies

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The following essay focuses on recent developments in American Studies. It addresses the paradigmatic shift in the focus and method of analysis from a nation-state based type of area studies to a transnational American Studies which accounts for the many multidirectional flows of people, ideas, and products and the social, political, economic, linguistic, and cultural interconnections generated in the process. Arguing for a comparative American Studies that drawing on Cultural Studies theories operates with a transnational consciousness and pays attention to the multiple crossroads of cultures in the Americas, this article provides a rationale for a new approach to American Studies in Austria. It also proposes a variety of ways in which a transnational perspective can be incorporated into the teaching of American Studies at Austrian universities.  

Introduction

In her much-debated presidential address to the American Studies Association (ASA) in November 1998, Janice Radway questioned the usefulness of the name ‘American Studies’ in times of globalization, postmodernism, and conceptions of postnational identities. As she provocatively put it, “If the...
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The concept of ‘redrawing the boundaries’ alludes to Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (eds.) (1992). Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies. In their introduction, the editors argue that “[t]he boundaries to be reckoned with in literary studies range from national, linguistic, historical, generation, and geographical to racial, ethnic, social, sexual, political, ethical, and religious” (Greenblatt and Gunn 1992: 4).

in view of the revitalization of American exceptionalism, cultural closure, Anglo-American ties and ‘nation building’, in view of the New Cold War that has been waged since 11 September 2001, Radway’s grave-digging was certainly premature.

September 11, most U.S. Americanists believe, has underlined the importance of American Studies, but I agree with Sielke that if this discipline is to survive, “we might want to reconsider its scope” (Sielke 2004: 276). In this article, I intend to do precisely that: I will look at some new directions of the project of American Studies, offering a survey of recent revisionist theoretical stances and critical practices that have contributed to a reconceptualization of this field. Providing a brief summary of the history of the discipline of American Studies, I will elaborate on a paradigm shift that has occurred in the field in the 21st century. The ‘transnational turn’ in American Studies has effected a redefinition of the field, which has entailed a redrawing of the conceptual and geographic boundaries of ‘America’ (cf. Fisher Fishkin 2005 and also Gross 2000). Emphasizing the need for American Studies to become even more international and comparative in Austria, I want to pursue two aims in this essay: First, I want to argue for the use of certain critical models that take into account the global and transnational dimensions of the study of the literatures and cultures of the United States. In particular, I want to show how the various methodologies and theories of Cultural Studies can provide new conceptual tools with which to analyze ‘America’. Secondly, I want to propose a shift in the meanings of ‘America’ from a Eurocentric understanding to a pan-American global framework that seeks to study the confluences and divergences of social, economic and cultural exchanges between the Americas. The name American Studies, as I want to show, can only be retained if we abandon the rhetorical malpractice of equating ‘America’ with the United States and redraw the boundaries to include other nations in the Western hemisphere. Such a remapping of American Studies

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that crosses borders may seem problematic in the daily reality of academia, as the traditional concepts of the discipline as well as the institutional organization of American Studies itself need to be reconfigured. In the last part of this paper, I will, therefore, turn to some practical implications of the preceding descriptions and explore in what ways such transnational American Studies approaches can be applied and practiced in classrooms at Austrian universities.

History of American Studies

As an interdisciplinary field of inquiry into the ‘Americanness’ of U.S. American identity, the rise of American Studies as an academic discipline in the United States is closely related to the emergence of the United States as a global power after World War II. From beginning on, it has focused on cultural issues, analyzing the fundamental question of “What is American?” The rise of [...] American Studies”, as J. Hillis Miller has argued, was part of an attempt “to create the unified national culture we do not in fact have” (Miller 1998: 59). With its focus on the problematic nature of American national identity, American Studies in its early form focused on the literary tradition. “America”, as Sacvan Bercovitch explains, was seen to have “a literary canon that embodied the national promise” (Bercovitch 1993: 363). In fact, the early studies in American Studies, Henry Nash Smith’s Virgin Land (1950), R.W.B. Lewis’s The American Adam (1955), Leo Marx’s The Machine in the Garden (1964), and Alan Trachtenberg’s Brooklyn Bridge (1965) operated from within a national paradigm of the United States as a bounded geographical and political space. They also attempted to stress those characteristics of American identity that they considered unique national features. The approaches of American Studies scholarship that focused on the Puritan past as the origin of ‘American culture’ (see, for instance, Perry Miller’s

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4 Michael Denning has identified this question as the founding question of American Studies (cf. Denning 1996: 360). The question of the Americanness of the United States has, of course, deep roots within American history. Famously asked in 1782 by J.H. St. John de Crèvecoeur when he inquired “What then, is the American, this new man?” (Lauter 2006: 930), the definition of the ‘American character’ has preoccupied critics of American culture since.
project to study America’s “Errand into the Wilderness”) or established a set of myths and symbols that constituted a model of democratic nationality were fundamental in establishing the paradigm of ‘American Exceptionalism’, which dominated the study of American culture for a long time.

In its early forms, American Studies, as Shelley Fisher Fishkin has observed, “had little room for the dissenting voices of minorities and women, and a fixation on American innocence blinded many scholars to the country’s ambitious quest for empire” (Fisher Fishkin 2005: 19). The redefinitions that followed during the 1970s were responses to the ideological pressures coming from Women’s Studies, Ethnic Studies, Cultural Studies, and postcolonial theories. As a result, the field has changed significantly since, and curricula and scholarship, especially in the United States, have responded adequately to the demise of the mythical cultural ‘consensus’ theory of early forms of American Studies. Understandings of American culture shaped by the anti-Vietnam War movement, the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, and other movements for social justice and change in American society have contributed to a new conception of ‘culture’. At the same time, however, the establishments of interdisciplinary programs such as Women’s Studies, African American Studies, Chicano Studies, Native American Studies, Asian American Studies, and so on, at U.S. American universities have in some ways led to a falling apart of ‘American Studies’ as academic programs or departments.

In Europe, American Studies has often been pursued as area studies, located primarily in traditional disciplines like English or history. Efforts to establish American Studies as separate departments or degree programs in Germany and Austria have been rather slow. At the same time, however,

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5 The crisis of American Studies following the late 1960s triggered a series of self-reflexive writings. Starting with Gene Wise’s essay “Paradigm Dramas in American Studies”, which was published in 1979, several articles and books have focused on the history of American Studies. In particular, the presidential addresses to the annual American Studies Association Meetings delivered by former ASA presidents, which are reprinted in the journal American Quarterly, have offered provocative statements on the various moments of crisis of American Studies. Commenting on the breaking apart of the coherency of American Studies in the US, German Americanist Heinz Ickstadt has observed that on an institutional level American Studies has “sacrificed itself […] for the benefit of its numerous off-spring”. As he adds, “With some polemical exaggeration one might say that it regains visible existence only once a year when participants in the convention of the American Studies Association shed their identities as members of English, history, ethnic studies, African American studies, Chicano studies, Native American studies, popular culture studies, women’s studies, gay studies, film studies, or performance studies departments or programs and out themselves as Americanists” (Ickstadt 2002: 551).

6 Clearly, the different institutional landscape of American Studies in Austria is related to the fact that students who study English and American Studies often pursue a teaching degree in EFL, which explains why American Studies is mostly taught in English departments.

7 In Austria, there are separate American Studies departments at the universities of Innsbruck and Graz. In Vienna, Salzburg, and Klagenfurt, ‘Amerikanistik’ is a subsidiary of larger
since fields of study like ethnic studies, Women’s Studies, African American Studies, Chicano Studies or popular culture studies were not institutionalized as programs or departments at Austrian universities, Austrian Americanists have been able to move into these fields under the guise of American Studies.\(^8\) Especially within the contexts of multiculturalism and Cultural Studies, the studies of minority cultures and popular cultures have become of great interest to many scholars and have attracted many students. The proliferation and the popularity of Ethnic Studies, Gender Studies, and Film Studies in Austria have, therefore, also greatly contributed to a rise of interest in ‘Amerikanistik’ or ‘Amerikastudien’, as American Studies is called in German.

To be sure, ‘Amerikanistik’ at many Austrian universities has not been identical with American Studies; it has often meant American literature. Still, there has always been a focus on cultural issues in U.S. American society in Austrian American Studies classes, and the interdisciplinary approach to the study of the United States has been stressed.\(^9\) For a long time, ‘Landeskunde’, even though an appendix to the mostly literary studies and linguistics oriented English departments, has offered a space in which to study ‘American culture’. As I will show, however, the rise of Cultural Studies in English and American Studies departments has offered new possibilities for the study of ‘American culture’.

The Common Ground of American Studies and Cultural Studies

Methodologically speaking, with its interdisciplinary focus, American Studies, one could argue, has from its beginning on been culture studies. It has always focused on cultural issues and has been preoccupied with the definition of ‘American culture’. Even before the cultural turn affected literary

\(^8\) Nicole Waller has made a similar observation about the situation of American Studies in Germany. As she says, “Ironically, the German academic conservatism which precluded the nationwide institution of ethnic or women’s studies thus indirectly nudged German Americanists to take in what would otherwise have been left out completely, thereby crossing disciplinary boundaries with comparative ease and creating a field which was becoming more dynamic, experimental, and suspect” (Waller 2005: 233–34).

\(^9\) In their Orientierung Anglistik/Amerikanistik, Nünning and Jucker stress this focus on cultural issues in ‘Amerikanistik’: “In Teilen der Amerikanistik herrscht bis heute ein anderes Selbstverständnis vor als in der Anglistik, die sich bis vor nicht allzu langer Zeit vor allem als eine Fremdsprachenphilologie verstand. Bereits der Begriff American Studies verdeutlicht, dass sich die Amerikastudien nicht nur mit Sprache und Literatur Nordamerikas, sondern mit der gesamten amerikanischen Kultur beschäftigen” (Nünning and Jucker 1999: 141).
studies in the late 1980s and 1990s, American Studies was concerned with the vexing issue of the relationship between literary texts and the contexts from which they come. As many critics have pointed out, by offering cultural readings of literary texts, the development of American Studies anticipated many of the interdisciplinary concerns that became important in contemporary cultural criticism (cf. Ickstadt 2002: 546 and Lipsitz 1990: 622). As Heinz Ickstadt (2002: 546) explains,

[...] the first and second generations of American studies scholars, although ideologically at odds with the formalism of the New Critics, nevertheless used their strategies either to practice close reading of the literary text as a form of cultural analysis or to recognize the text’s cultural meaning in the analysis of its mythic structure.

While scholars of the so-called myth-and-symbol school, like Henry Nash Smith and Leo Marx, explored mythic frameworks offering rather conservative accounts on ‘American’ national myths, they nevertheless asked “critical questions about the relationship between the social construction of cultural categories and power relations in American society” (Lipsitz 1990: 622). More importantly, they offered descriptions of American culture “as a modern culture with a specific potential for subversion and negation” (Fluck 2007: 62). Probing into the possibility of resistance in American culture, the founding fathers of American Studies identified a series of myths, but, as Winfried Fluck stresses, on a deeper level they also showed that “the major works of American literature are characterized by a unique potential for radical resistance” (Fluck 2007: 63). It is this view of the importance of ‘culture’ as a site that opens up the possibility of resistance that aligns the American Studies project with the tradition of Cultural Studies. Identifying the common ground of American Studies and Cultural Studies, Michael Denning observes that the obsessive “concern for the character of Americans” of early American Studies could be seen as “the original ‘identity politics’” of the United States (Denning 1996: 273). The search for the ‘American character’ inherent in the works of the founding generation of American Studies scholars led to the importance of the revolutionary potential of the marginal subject in the analy-

10 J. Hillis Miller refers to an “almost universal” shift in literary studies from language “toward history, culture, society, politics, institutions, class and gender conditions, the social context, the material base in the sense of institutionalization, conditions of production, technology, distribution, and consumption of ‘cultural products’” (Miller 1987: 283).

11 Fluck cites the example of Leo Marx’s The Machine in the Garden (cf. Fluck 2007: 63). In his afterword to the 35th Anniversary edition of this key American Studies text, Marx himself refers to the cultural radicalism of this work: “The Machine in the Garden emphasizes a fundamental divide in American culture and society. It separates the popular affirmation of industrial progress disseminated by spokesmen for the dominant economic and political elites, and the disaffected, often adversarial viewpoint of a minority of political radicals, writers, artists, clergymen, and independent intellectuals” (Marx 1999: 383).
sis of cultural identities in the new American culture studies in the 1970s. Seen from this perspective, American Studies and Cultural Studies share the general view of culture as a site of radical critique.

Even though the early generation of American Studies scholars did not develop an explicit methodology concerning the approach to culture, Henry Nash Smith started a debate in the 1950s on the theory and practice of American Studies. In his “Can ‘American Studies’ Develop a Method?” he not only offered his well-known definition of the new “non-discipline” for which it would be impossible to devise an interdisciplinary method, but he also defined American Studies as “the study of American culture, past and present, as a whole” (Smith 1957: 1). In 1961, Sigmund Skard, one of the European founding fathers of American Studies, put more emphasis on national concerns in his definitions of this emerging interdisciplinary field. He called for “efforts to build up a systematic knowledge and understanding of America and its civilization as a connected whole, particularly in those fields – human geography, history, politics, law, religion, and literature – which constitute a national culture” (Skard 1961: 7). Both definitions point to a social understanding of culture that does not limit the study of culture to the works and practices of artistic and intellectual development, but views cultural analysis very much like British cultural materialist Raymond Williams as a “description of a particular way of life” (Williams 1961: 57). Famously using the word ‘culture’ to mean “a whole way of life” (Williams 1958: 6), Williams insisted that the state of a cultural period could not be studied by only reading acclaimed works of literature but also by analyzing the “structure of feeling”, the cultural values and attitudes that a group or society shares (Williams 1961: 48).

Through the analysis of a wide range of cultural topics, the identification of some governing principles and myths through which national identity could be defined, and the incorporation of an oppositional perspective within American society, American Studies had, therefore, always been concerned with the analysis of ‘culture’ as a way of life. Stressing the democratization of culture through the participation of common people, American Studies from its inception has had similar concerns as European cultural theory. As George Lipsitz (1990: 622) explains,

ethnography and folklore studies by New-Deal-supported scholars, the ‘cult of the common man’ pushed by Popular Front Marxism, and the use of ‘American Exceptionalism’ to stem the country’s drift toward involvement in World War II, all combined to focus scholarly attention upon the contours and dimensions of American Culture.

However, as Lipsitz is quick to point out, for all their sensitivity to the function of language as a metaphorical construct that is laden with ideological meanings, the early scholars of the myth-and-symbol school made “sweeping
generalizations about society based upon images in relatively few elite literary texts, and they never adequately theorized the relationship between cultural texts and social action" (Lipsitz 1990: 623).\textsuperscript{12} Despite its strong focus on interdisciplinarity, American Studies in its early phase lacked a clearly defined theoretical approach and identified the distinctive features of what was taken to be a homogenous ‘American culture’.

When in 1979 Gene Wise reviewed the emerging anthropological approach within American Studies in his seminal article “‘Paradigm Dramas’ in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement”, he called for a new American Studies that would be pluralistic, self-reflexive, comparative, and cross-cultural. Wise expressed his faith in “the promise of perhaps another generation in the ‘new culture studies’” (Wise 1979: 336). He was certain that the new American culture studies, as he termed it, would have a more differentiated view of the concept of ‘culture’:

\begin{quote}
We have moved beyond the block assumption that there is a single holistic ‘American Culture’, expressed in ‘The American Mind’, to a more discriminating consciousness that contemporary cultures function on several different levels, and in several different ways. We are less inclined now to take readings from a single vantage point on \textit{The American Experience}; instead, we look upon America from a variety of different, often competing, perspectives – popular culture, black culture, the culture of women, youth culture, the culture of the aged, Hispanic-American culture, American Indian culture, material culture, the culture of poverty, folk culture, the culture of regionalism, the culture of academe, the culture of literature, the culture of professionalism, and so on. (Wise 1979: 319)
\end{quote}

Wise’s predictions of a more pluralist approach to ‘American culture’ that would be comparativist and cross-cultural were prophetic. In the 1980s, “the spectre of European cultural theory” began to haunt American Studies (Lipsitz 1990: 616). Poststructuralist theory, new historicism, feminist theory, critical race theory and postcolonial theory have radically transformed the study of ‘American culture’. These theories have not only broadened the scope of cultural texts but have also enabled new approaches to their study. As many scholars have pointed out, the relations between American Studies and European theory were uneasy at first, but British Cultural Studies, as Günter Lenz has put it, “seemed to offer new answers to the political and theoretical questions that deconstruction, poststructuralism, and the various

\textsuperscript{12} Bruce Kuklick’s 1972 article “Myth and Symbol in American Studies” was one of the first texts to offer a critique of the myth-and-symbol school. Kuklick, according to Gene Wise, was an important early voice in the criticism of “the concept of culture itself, and its usage in American Studies” (319). In his article, Kuklick “was to take on the symbol-myth-image school of explanation, particularly its habit of reading the whole culture from inside literary texts” (Wise 1979: 320).
modes of literary theory had posed, provoked, and left unresolved" (Lenz 2002: 461–62).

American Studies as Cultural Studies

The Cultural Studies approach from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), which became popular in the U.S. with the famous ‘Cultural Studies Now and in the Future’ conference at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1990, affected the study of American culture in crucial ways. There were significant connections between British Cultural Studies and the American culture studies that Wise had proposed, but Cultural Studies provided new tools with which to analyze ‘America’ as a multi-faceted, pluralistic place in which ‘culture’ is seen as being produced and received in different ways by different groups of people. It also contributed to the much-needed abandonment of the traditional notion of exceptionality that had previously dominated the study of American culture.

For Lawrence Grossberg, one of the key practitioners of Cultural Studies in the United States, “cultural studies is built upon a conflicted and conflictual theory of culture” (Lawrence 1997: 294). The study of ‘American culture’ within a Cultural Studies framework, then, entails a view of ‘American culture’ as contested, consisting of different histories by different groups of people that struggle to be heard and involves the analysis of these different cultures by identifying patterns of power, inequality, domination, and resistance. In this context, the works of British Cultural Studies theorist Stuart Hall have become important. Building on the structuralist implications of Lacanian and Althusserian criticism and blending them with the concept of hegemony as advanced by the Italian Marxist critic Antonio Gramsci, Hall’s works, for instance, have enabled forms of cultural criticisms that constitute cultural interventions by engaging dominant discourses and ideologies at specific sites where they may be articulated. As a result, Americanists are now concerned with questions of representations, power, discourse, hegemony and identity as factors in the construction of ‘America’ as an ‘imagined community’ whose cultural identity is, following Hall, “not something that already

14 Hall’s anti-essentialist position concerning identity stresses that cultural identity is organized around points of difference which include identifications of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality nationality, political position, etc. Following Hall, the meaning of Americanness then is unstable and subject to continual change. The apparent unity of identity is achieved through the articulation of different elements that under other socio-political and historical circumstances could be re-articulated in different ways. For the notion of articulation, see Hall’s (1986). “On Postmodernism and Articulation”.

exists, transcending place, time, history and culture … fixed in some essentialized past, [but] subject to the continuous `play' of history, culture and power" (Hall 1990: 225). Concomitantly, Benedict Anderson's concept of national identity as a construction that is assembled through symbols, rituals and administrative categories has greatly contributed to the analysis of the various narratives of nationhood that have created this ‘imagined community'.

Interestingly, the institutionalization and subsequent commodification of Cultural Studies at U.S. American universities is viewed by many Cultural Studies practitioners with suspicion, as this success may threaten “its viability as a political and intellectual project” (Grossberg 1996: 131). Grossberg, for instance, has repeatedly referred to a crisis in Cultural Studies, as this has become an umbrella term, referring to a wide practice of cultural analysis without any clear agenda.15 Some of the shortcomings of the ways in which Cultural Studies has operated in the predominant approaches in mass communication studies is the equation of culture with communication, which “fails to understand cultural studies' more radial attempt to locate cultural practices within their complexly determined and determining contexts” (Grossberg 1996: 141). Benjamin Lee has accused Cultural Studies of being “relatively Eurocentric and noncomparative”, being nationalistic concerning issues of multiculturalism and the canon and lacking “any comparative or cross-cultural perspective” (Lee 1996: 220). Speaking of an international Cultural Studies that provides the basis for transnational collaborative work, Lee calls for a “more culturally sensitive international studies” as “the internationalization of culture and communication is producing a situation in which local and transnational issues are being brought into closer and faster contact” (Lee 1996: 231). The current debate about the need for a ‘radical contextualization’ of Cultural Studies has also led to what Denning (1996: 273) calls, a "national turn" in Cultural Studies. Paradoxically, the troubled state of Cultural Studies at U.S. American universities has led to the “revival of ‘American Studies’”, turning the latter once again into a site of “radical critique” (Denning 1996: 273).

I have fleshed out the interconnections between American Studies and Cultural Studies in such detail because I believe that the institutionalization of the latter at Austrian universities offers a possibility for a new American

15 In his (1991). “Always Already Cultural Studies. Two Conferences and a Manifesto”, Grossberg lists fourteen points that map out a Cultural Studies enterprise for literary studies. Primarily addressing English departments, Grossberg states that Cultural Studies “often arrives in English departments in the form of an easy alliance between debased textuality and recent theory” (Grossberg 1991: 31). Calling for a more historically oriented Cultural Studies that “destabilizes and de-essentializes categories of race, class, gender, and nationality while simultaneously keeping them at the forefront of debate and definition” (Grossberg 1991: 31), Grossberg believes that English departments have much to gain from expanding their syllabi to include Cultural Studies.
As is well-known, ‘Kulturwissenschaft’ is not an exact translation of Cultural Studies. In many ways, the concepts of ‘culture’ of Cultural Studies and American Studies have been incompatible with the German notion of ‘Kultur.’ As Sabine Sielke has pointed out, ideas disseminated by the influential Frankfurt School concerning the culture industry and mass culture made it difficult for American Studies in Germany “to place a highly successful, yet supposedly inferior culture center stage, thereby necessarily renegotiating the privileged position of European and, more particularly, of British culture” (Sielke 2005: 65). Given the dominance of the meaning of “critical theory’s modernist notion of Kunst and Kultur, it is evident why cultural studies did not get off the ground easily – if at all – in Germany, but has

Area studies typically emphasizes space or geographical locale over time and therefore has tended to uphold a constant idea of national identity. However, once we recognize that the nation is not the realization of an original essence but a historical configuration designed to include certain groups and exclude others, we are able to see the nation as a relational identity that emerges through constant collaboration, dialogue, and dissension.

American Studies as Cultural Studies, I believe, can situate the teaching of critical awareness of ‘culture’ so as to address the cultural realities of the shifting relevance and nature of ‘place’ and ‘space’ in the contemporary world to what Homi Bhabha calls the “locations of culture” (Bhabha 1994: 1).

However, in spite of the success of Cultural Studies and ‘Kulturwissenschaft’ in Austrian academia, the national paradigm of the United States as a clearly bordered geographical and political space has still remained intact in the daily reality of university.16 The synecdochic identification of ‘America’

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with ‘the United States’ is commonplace. Despite the rise in interest in multicultural U.S. literatures, many U.S. American literature survey courses in Austria continue to rely on a Eurocentric model of culture, focusing on the melting-pot model of ethnic cultures rather than the cultural hybridities that the different literatures have produced. The notion that the history of North America begins with the arrival of the Puritans is still very much prevalent among students, and the idea that ‘American’ literature begins with John Smith and William Bradford is persistent. How do the theoretical redefinitions offered by the new American Studies and the recent critique concerning contextualization and historicity posed by the Cultural Studies movement rephrase the vital question of “What is American?”

Towards a Transnational American Studies

When in 1991, Gregory S. Jay polemically stated that it was “time to stop teaching ‘American’ literature” (Jay 1991: 264), his essay inaugurated several attempts to reconceptualize the field of American Studies. In “The End of ‘American’ Literature: Toward a Multicultural Practice”, Jay argues that the “history and literature of the US have been misinterpreted so as to effectively underwrite the power and values of privileged classes and individuals” (Jay 1991: 266). Introducing the terms “Writing in the United States” and “Comparative American Literature” (Jay 1991: 268), Jay proposes the establishment of courses and programs in North American Studies that “would integrate the cultural history of the US with those of Canada, Mexico, the near Latin American countries, and the Caribbean” (Jay 1991: 268). Carolyn Porter’s 1994 review essay “What We Know That We Don’t Know: Remapping American Literary Studies” built on Jay’s argument and suggested that a new American Studies would confront (at least) a quadruple set of relations between (1) Europe and Latin America; (2) Latin America and North America; (3) North America and Europe; and (4) Africa and both Americas. The aim here would not be to expand American studies so as to incorporate the larger territory of the hemisphere, but rather to grasp how the cultural, political, and economic relations between and within the Americas might work to constellation the field itself, reinflecting its questions in accord with a larger frame (Porter: 1994: 510).

In the wake of Jay’s definition of a comparative American Studies and Porter’s attempt to model a new comparative American Studies, a series of...
José Martí, a Cuban intellectual living in New York City, published his essay “Nuestra América” in 1891. Distinguishing between two Americas, Martí uses the phrase “our America” to refer to Latin America, which he positions against “the other America which is not ours” (qtd. in Saldívar 1991: 6–7). For more information on Martí’s concept of ‘America’, see Porter 1994: 502 and Muthyala 2001: 100.

Theoretical texts by renowned American Studies scholars in the U.S., such as Paul Lauter, Donald E. Pease, John Carlos Rowe, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, and Werner Sollors, and German Americanists, like Heinz Ickstadt and Günter Lenz, have appeared that have urged scholars to study American culture transnationally. Taking cues from Chicana/o borderlands scholars Gloria Anzaldúa and José David Saldívar, who have theorized border spaces that resist being reduced to one ‘national tradition’, and making use of Mary Louise Pratt’s metaphor of the ‘contact zone’, these scholars are increasingly paying attention to the ways in which hybridities and fluidities have shaped cultural spaces. “The U.S.”, as Fisher Fishkin has reminded us, “is and has always been a transnational crossroads of cultures” (Fisher Fishkin 2005: 43). “And that crossroads of cultures that we refer to as ‘American culture’ has itself generated a host of other crossroads of cultures as it has crossed borders” (Fisher Fishkin 2005: 43). The field of American Studies, therefore, has to be reconceived in a dialogic manner to include the different cultural encounters between various peoples.

The borders between these nations are, however, “less the origin of our history than the products of it” (Jay 1991: 268). Native Americans, African Americans and Latinos/as, for instance, have constantly crossed borders. As Gloria Anzaldúa wrote, “I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory). I have been straddling that tejas-Mexican border, and others, all my life” (Anzaldúa 1999: Preface to the First Edition). When published in 1987, it was soon clear that Borderlands/La Frontera would become a key text in the theorization of the border. In fact, the main impetus at the beginning of the 1990s for the theorizing of a new comparative American Studies came from the field of Chicano/a Studies. According to Porter, the perspective of Chicano/a Studies is especially salient because of the permeability of the U.S.-Mexican border. The remapping of cultural space undertaken by Chicano/a critics and the resituation of cultural identity within the larger history of what José Martí called “nuestra América” had been at the center of Chicano/a Studies from early on. Porter, for example, discusses José David Saldivar’s Dialectics of Our America as one example of the view of ‘America’ as “plural and contestatory in its reference; because of their permeability as national boundaries, geopolitical borders are foregrounded as regions, borderlands that in turn reveal and renew cultural networks linking the Caribbean and Latin America to the

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Much has been written on the reconfiguration of American Studies from a nationalist to a global analytic frame. For the most recent publication in Europe on the implications of the transnational paradigm for the study of American culture, see the collection *Transnational American Studies*, edited by Winfried Fluck, Stefan Brandt and Ingrid Thaler (2007).

Along similar lines, Amy Kaplan has suggested the replacement of the ‘frontier’ as the dominant spatial metaphor in American Studies in favor of the site of ‘the borderlands’, which is a transterritorial conception of space. Borderlands, “not only lie at the geographic and political margins of national identity but as often traverse the center of the metropolis” (Kaplan 1993: 16). The metaphor of borderlands thus transforms “the traditional notion of the frontier from the primitive margins of civilization to a decentered cosmopolitanism” (Kaplan 1993: 16–17). In his articulation of a comparative American Studies, Rowe, in turn, elaborates on the model of the contact zone, which Pratt defines as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (Pratt 2000: 575). As Rowe states (1998: 18),

> We can begin to reconfigure such borders by establishing intellectual and cultural ‘contact zones’, where a certain dialectics or dialogics of cultural exchange is understood to be a crucial aspect of how the field of ‘American Studies’ is constituted and how the related territories of ‘the Americas’ and ‘the United States’ ought to be understood.

These fundamental reconsiderations of the field have called for a need for seeing ‘America’, as part of a world system, in which the exchange of commodities and the migrations of people know no borders. As a result, scholars have come to speak about ‘postnational’ American Studies (e.g. Rowe’s edited collection *Post-Nationalist American Studies*) or ‘transnational’ American Studies or an American Studies that “embrace[s] actively a paradigm of critical internationalism” (Desmond and Domínguez 1996: 475). These scholars agree that a comparative American Studies also has to cross linguistic borders. In his recent “The Multilingual Turn in American Studies” and his project to republish non-English language works of U.S. literature, Werner Sollors, for instance, has vehemently argued for the study of U.S. literature as a polylingual as well as multicultural body of texts. The new American Studies, most proponents agree, “must address the multilingual reality of the United States in the curricular and scholarly reforms now under way in the field” (Rowe 1998: 13).

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18 Much has been written on the reconfiguration of American Studies from a nationalist to a global analytic frame. For the most recent publication in Europe on the implications of the transnational paradigm for the study of American culture, see the collection *Transnational American Studies*, edited by Winfried Fluck, Stefan Brandt and Ingrid Thaler (2007).
At this particular historical juncture, American Studies thus offers exciting perspectives on the connections between the global and the local, the transnational paradigm and the reality of the organization of countries into nation-states for the current generation of emerging Americanists. What are some implications of the critical models for developing a post- or transnational curriculum for American Studies?

The Futures of American Studies in Austria

While the terms ‘postnational’ and ‘transnational’ signal that American Studies is becoming increasingly comparative and global in outlook, they also clearly point to a contradiction in terms, which is difficult to negotiate in the daily realities of our classrooms. How can a discipline that was founded on the premise of national identity be studied post- or trans-nationally? The reconciliation of the national with a global view certainly lies at the heart of the problem in the current discussion around new reconfigurations of American Studies. Heinz Ickstadt has called this dilemma “an impossible redefinition of American studies as an at once locally decentralized and globally comprehensive field” (Ickstadt 2002: 553). Insisting that American Studies should “accept its name as its limitation and its boundary – that it cannot be a global and postcolonial, not even an international American studies in the sense of inter-American or intra-continental investigation” (Ickstadt 2002: 554), he calls for American Studies as “a comparative study of the U.S. and Canada” (Ickstadt 2002: 554). Indeed, one way to solve the problem is to accept the limitation of the national paradigm, but then, I suggest, we change our area studies courses to ‘U.S. Studies’, or ‘North American Studies’. Ickstadt, however, also has another suggestion to incorporate the new paradigm of the transnational into our studies. As he says, Americanists could ask the questions that the paradigm of the global has generated “without leaving the territory of American studies behind – that is, to do national American studies with a transnational consciousness: postcolonial studies may in this case not expand the borders of our discipline but the horizon of our questioning” (Ickstadt 2002: 555–56).

A focus on the national combined with a transnational perspective is probably the best way out of the conundrum and serves as a viable solution to the teaching of American Studies at Austrian universities. Doing American Studies with a transnational consciousness constitutes a good way of negotiating the current dilemma. On the one hand, we can transnationalize the United States, and, on the other, we can take up the challenge and remap the boundaries of ‘America’. In this relational approach to national identity, then, the attempt to move beyond the U.S. nation does not mean that we abandon the concept of the nation altogether but rather that we adopt new
perspectives that allow us to view the U.S. beyond the terms of its own exceptionalist and imperialist self-imaginings. Such an approach also views the nation as a historically produced construct, which allows “not only a broader definition of what the United States includes but also a more historically complex view of the creative tensions and interdependencies that are embedded within and threaten to undo any fixed notion of ‘America’” (Levander and Levine 2008: 7).

One way to engage this transnational perspective is to take up a transatlantic paradigm by pursuing what William Boelhower has called “Atlantic Studies”, which focuses on the so-called ‘circum-Atlantic world’, an oceanic space triangulated by the land masses of Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Viewing the Atlantic world as a “fluid, decentered space of cultural interaction” (Waller 2005: 237), Atlantic Studies explores the interaction and interdependencies of Atlantic cultures from Africa to Europe and across the Americas and the Caribbean. Clearly, the study of ‘America’ within Atlantic Studies establishes a transcultural dialogue between the two hemispheres by offering new comparative dimensions, thereby contributing to the globalization of American Studies.19

Another example of a productive way of extending the implications of an American Studies that operates with a transnational consciousness is to engage the hemispheric paradigm. As Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine point out, a hemispheric framework offers comparative and dialogical approaches to the study of the Americas. Decentering the U.S. nation, it examines “the intricately intertwined geographies, movements, and cross-filiations among peoples, regions, diasporas, and nations of the American hemisphere” (Levander and Levine 2008: 3). This approach yields new insights into colonial literatures, refiguring the field of Early American literature in crucial ways by reconceiving it in a dialogic manner to include the different cultural encounters between various peoples. An analysis of the hybridities and fluidities that have shaped cultural spaces in the early Americas can, for instance, include the vast body of travel narratives and chronicles that were written by French, English, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish explorers. By comparing the accounts of Columbus, Gaspar Pérez de Villagrá, Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, Jacques Cartier, Samuel de Champlain, and John Smith, we can see that these early writings share the experiences of contact with Native Indian peoples. Yet, the descriptions of the encounters with the Amerindians differ vastly. While all of these texts draw the attention to the manner in which the encounters challenged the perceptions of the explorers as Europeans, the different accounts also reveal the


cultural and ideological differences separating the Spanish, French, and British empires. A hemispheric approach thus holds significant promise for further enriching American Studies – and in particular the field which has traditionally been called ‘Early American Studies’ – by providing a frame of reference that, on the one hand, “configures the Americas as a hemispheric unit sharing certain common histories and New World encounters” (Muthyala 2001: 105), and, on the other, foregrounds the Americas as a set of interlinked continents with different histories of conquest and settlement. It shows that European imperial powers have local histories, and it highlights the specific cultural and historical consequences of encounters and clashes, and the different literary interpretations in the American hemisphere. As Ralph Bauer puts it: “Only from such a wider comparative perspective will we ultimately be able to decide what is particularly ‘Spanish American’ or ‘British American’ about colonial cultures that formed in the New World during the early modern period” (Bauer 2003: 296).20

While the hemispheric paradigm seems particularly useful for the study of colonial literatures, other transnational approaches may seem more fitting for the study of contemporary global American culture. One possibility is heeding the advice that Paul Lauter has offered. To him, the question of a ‘postnational’ American Studies reflects “one way in which the very globalization of American culture seems to require an increased localization of its study” (Lauter 2001: 17–18). Clearly, the question here arises what the “localization of its study” can mean. The way I understand it, a localized analysis of ‘American culture’ can only operate with the term ‘America’ in quotation marks. Focusing precisely on the meaning of this term, a localized ‘American’ culture studies should be the “critical study of the circulation of ‘America’ as a commodity of new cultural imperialism and the ways in which local knowledges and arts have responded to such cultural importations” (Rowe 1998: 17). In other words, studying the globalization of U.S. American culture would entail the study of the local appropriations of ‘American culture’, the analysis of the patterns, effects, and rearticulations of what Reinhold Wagnleitner has termed “coca-colonialization”21.

While I remain convinced of the need for Americanists to develop a more comparative approach to U.S. American literatures and cultures, on the one hand, and expand the territorial imagination that limits the meaning of ‘America’ to the official borders of the United States, on the other, I suspect that


these ideas may be realized in many small steps. Clearly, the new paradigms in American Studies that call for a comparative perspective should be accompanied by adequate theoretical investigations of our methodologies for conducting research, which involve a combined reframing of the traditional questions of “What is American?” and “What is culture?” The reformulations of these questions should then also affect our teaching. My emphasis on American Studies to cooperate with Cultural Studies therefore suggests the need for greater reliance on cultural theory than has been the case among those doing traditional U.S. American literature. Following the paradigms discussed above, we could establish courses in American Studies that integrate the cultural history of the U.S. with those of Canada, Mexico, other countries of the Americas, and the Caribbean. We could also pay more attention to the multilingual reality of the U.S. and not only focus on the Anglophone tradition. Continuing to bring in guest lecturers from different departments and other universities will contribute to an increased internationalizing of American Studies at Austrian universities.

Clearly, American Studies will gain future strength if we build coalitions with other departments. The newly founded ‘Center for the Study of the Americas’ (CSAS) at the University of Graz is a good case in point. Directed by U.S. Americanist Roberta Maierhofer and co-directed by Klaus Dieter Ertler, a specialist in Canadian and Latin American literature, this center links various departments and institutions and aims at investigating the many cultural areas of the Americas. The ‘American Corner Innsbruck’ (ACI), which is directed by Gudrun Grabher at the University of Innsbruck, is a new institution in Austria that is funded by the U.S. Embassy. Establishing links between the humanities and various other disciplines like law and medicine, this center is truly committed to transdisciplinary work. The various ‘Centers for Canadian Studies’ at the University of Vienna, Innsbruck, and Graz involve research co-operations between Canadianists who are located in English and American Studies departments and departments of Romance Languages and Literatures. Interestingly, in Salzburg, ‘The Salzburg Seminar’, which in 1947 hosted the first Salzburg Seminar in American Studies, recently changed its name to ‘Salzburg Global Seminar’ in order to reflect the global reach of their programs.

These institutions are healthy signs that point to the fact that American Studies in Austria is a rich and engaging field with increased possibilities for becoming more comparative and transnational. The absence of separate American Studies departments at some universities thus need not indicate a

22 For more information on this center, see: http://www-gewi.uni-graz.at/csas/englisch/index_engl.html
23 See, http://www.uibk.ac.at/americancorner/
lack of vitality of the study of the literatures and cultures of the Americas, especially if the analysis of the Americas anticipates its future strength as a consequence of co-operations and coalitions between scholars from various departments, disciplines, and academic backgrounds.

**Putting Theory to Practice:**
**Doing American Studies With a Transnational Consciousness**

In light of the current discussions around the inclusion of American Studies in the new B.A./M.A. curricula and the ever-present reality of tight budgets, I think that is imperative that we find alternative ways of incorporating American topics into our classrooms. American Studies provides an excellent home for the methods and theories of Cultural Studies. Or, to reverse the order so as to more aptly reflect the current trend in Austrian universities, Cultural Studies classes can house American Studies. They can foster the study of the different cultures of the United States, of the Americas, and the various borders and contact zones. Since Cultural Studies conceives of culture as relational and is committed to the study of the production, reception, and varied use of texts, it can help generate the transnational consciousness required for a global study of U.S. cultures and the variegated processes of interaction of cultures in the Americas.

“What topics and questions become salient if we reconceive our field with the transnational at its center?” asks Fisher Fishkin (2005: 21–22) in her presidential address to the American Studies Association in 2004. “What roles might comparative, collaborative, border-crossing research play in this reconfigured field?” (Fisher Fishkin 2005: 22). German Americanist Günter Lenz, for instance, has proposed that “envisioning American studies in truly international perspective means enacting the transnational and intercultural discourses in real dialogues and debates among scholars from different parts of the world” (Lenz 2002: 98). Jane Desmond and Virginia R. Domínguez also believe that a comparative perspective can be fostered through critical international dialogues (Desmond and Domínguez 1996: 485). In her long list of measures that could be taken to bring about a transnational perspective in American Studies classrooms, Fisher Fishkin also talks about the various possibilities of student-faculty exchanges and team-teaching. She mentions the various study abroad programs run by many U.S. universities, which she believes are “sites of potentially fruitful cross-border communication” (Fisher Fishkin 2005: 40). In Austria, our students have long profited from the benefits of exchange programs. Many students are taking advantage of exchange programs – be they organized through the university or through the Fulbright Commission – and research grants to study in the United States. The mere fact of studying abroad does not, however, automatically lead to a transna-
tional consideration of ‘America’. Establishing a dialogue between students with different cultural backgrounds on transnational aspects, however, does involve a comparative perspective.

As an Austrian Americanist teaching at the University of Vienna, I wanted to put theory to practice and introduce a transnational perspective to my American Cultural Studies classroom. Thus, in the summer term 2007, I decided to engage in a team-teaching project that I conducted with Klaus Heissenberger, a colleague from the University of Vienna and Timothy Conley, a U.S. American colleague from Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois. Through this team-teaching experience I have not only gained valuable insights into the transnational character of ‘America’, but have also seen how important it is for students at the University of Vienna to talk about ‘American culture’ with U.S. American students.

As Timothy Conley, Klaus Heissenberger and I have talked about the ways we teach American Studies at two universities – one in Austria, the other in the U.S. – we have discovered that despite being located in different national backgrounds and different educational systems both faculty and students at Bradley University and the University of Vienna share a common interest in learning about and arriving at a critical understanding of processes of the transcultural. When people in Austria speak about the effects ‘American culture’ has on their lives, they rarely think of novels, paintings, or theater. Therefore, we decided to teach a class on popular culture in order to account for the various ways in which ‘American culture’ is consumed, rejected, and appropriated in Austria. Our class entitled “Often Only a Place in the Mind: The Americanness of Popular Culture” aimed at conceiving of ‘American culture’ as complexly situated in a global context. Americanization, as Richard Pells has pointed out, generally refers to “the world-wide invasion of American movies, jazz, rock’n’roll, mass circulation magazines, best-selling books, advertising, comic strips, theme parks, shopping malls, fast food, and television programs” (Pells 1997: 495). Thus, concerns about “America” are frequently linked to the on-going debate about the effects of popular culture.

Following the novelist Richard Brautigan’s definition of America as “often only a place in the mind,” our class set out to analyze the ‘Americanness’ of popular culture in all its conflicted meanings (Brautigan 1973: 116). The ‘Americanness’ of culture, students soon discovered, did not lie so much in the cultural text or practice, but was rather an effect of the diverse ways in which this text or practice was interpreted by people, which, in turn, was contingent on a variety of factors and contexts. In the Austrian context, ‘American’ texts have been appropriated in multiple ways, and the focus of our collaboration with students from Bradley University was the analysis of the various cultural crossings of popular culture in Austria. Assuming that a direct cultural exchange furthers differentiated understandings of such processes
of cultural crossings, we established a dialogue between students at the University of Vienna and students from Bradley University. From May 25 to June 9, 2007, thirty-four Bradley students came to our class to talk about the meanings and pleasures of popular culture.25 Looking at the ways in which ‘American’ products have been reinterpreted and recontextualized in Vienna, students analyzed ‘American culture’ in its contested relationships with other cultures and also paid attention to how cultural products had been recodified differently in different contexts. The Vienna students interviewed the Bradley students and they included their experiences of this cultural exchange in their term papers. Providing accounts of how their dialogues with the Bradley students had influenced their papers, the Vienna students were supposed to reflect on how this cultural encounter had impacted their views of the topic they had chosen, how their perspectives had changed (or had not changed) through the co-operation, and how the meanings of ‘Americanness’ of their topics had become more differentiated or complex.

While the U.S. American students when faced with the challenge of reflecting on their own ‘Americanness’ very much reconsidered their positions as U.S. Americans in Austria, many University of Vienna students remained confirmed in their evaluation of popular culture. Applying the theories of Cultural Studies to their objects of research, our students carefully tried to locate the ‘Americanness’ in the various ‘moments’ of Stuart Hall’s ‘circuit of culture’, but they generally believed that most Austrians consumed these products without consciously perceiving any ‘Americanness’26. At the same time, however, they thought that many people in Austria equated globalization with Americanization, considering the growing popularity of popular culture abroad as a rise in U.S. American cultural hegemony.

What we realized in this class was that the generation of students who is now beginning to study at Austrian universities have grown up being surrounded by the discourse of Anti-Americanism. President George W. Bush is the only President they actively remember. Having grown up in the 1990s, Austrian students seem to have absorbed U.S. American culture to a point at which they no longer perceive it as ‘American’. Globalization and patterns of migration have created a transnational culture in which students often per-

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25 The Bradley students came to Vienna as part of their summer study abroad program. They were accompanied by four faculty members who taught four courses: two professors were from the English dept. and they taught travel writing classes, one professor was from the Business School and he taught a leadership class, and one professor was from Communications. For more information on Bradley’s Study Abroad Program, see http://studyabroad.bradley.edu/

26 Stuart Hall’s ‘circuit of culture’ describes a process whereby culture acquires meaning at five different ‘moments’: representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation. These ‘moments’ are interlinked with each other in an ongoing process of cultural encoding and dissemination. See Paul duGay (1997). Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman.
ceive themselves as transnational subjects. Still, despite global views of the world and the disparaging attitude that many Austrians have towards ‘American culture’, for the younger generation, the U.S. still serves as ‘Leitkultur’. Regardless of globalization, Coca Cola, McDonald’s, and Starbucks, for instance, have remained symbols of ‘America’ in everyday life in contemporary Austria. Especially Starbucks stands for a hip ‘American coffee culture’ that enjoys great popularity among students at the University of Vienna. As a deterritorialized signifier, ‘America’ is perceived as ‘cool.’ As the papers of our students revealed, young adults consume Hollywood movies, popular music, and other cultural productions as part of a global popular culture, which is, curiously enough, not regarded as ‘American’ yet very ‘American’ at the same time. It is this paradoxical situation of contemporary ‘American culture’ that lies at the heart of American Studies in a global world.

Conclusion

I want to end this essay with a rephrasing of my argument and a caveat: Even though the changing paradigms of American Studies call for a comparative and transnational focus in the study of the Americas, it is important that we do not neglect the study of the United States. As we widen the scope of American Studies and decentralize U.S. history and literature, we should also continue to focus on the United States as a nation. However, the study of the United States should not be seen in isolation but should be pursued with an awareness of the global interconnections of this nation. In their second edition to American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture, Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean (2006: 1) point to the particular significance of the study of the United States in times of the so-called ‘war on terror’:

At a time when the United States of America is at the centre of world events, engaged in a global “war on terror,” and coming to terms with the many effects of the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, there has, perhaps, never been a more important period in which to study ‘America’. At this time ever-popular concepts in American history like ‘nation’, ‘empire’, ‘homeland’, ‘freedom’, and ‘patriotism’ have been given new meanings and interpretations, contested from the perspectives of those critical to the political project of President George W. Bush and celebrated by those who support him.

It is our task as Americanists to address these “ever-popular concepts in American history” and analyze and critique the multiple discourses that have shaped the U.S. and its relation with other nations. In similar terms, Catherine A. Warren and Mary Douglas Vavrus also call for the importance to continue to analyze the United States. As they put it,

despite globalization and diasporas, despite the Internet and cyborgs, despite the communications revolution that has overseen the seeming breakdown of
any boundary one might image, those of us who live in the United States are subject to its history, its crime and violence, its racism, its media structures, its education, its economy, its communities. As scholars and intellectuals, we are also deeply implicated in its shape, present and future. (Warren and Vavrus 2002: 1)

As I have shown, as a field of study, American Studies emerged out of the historical crises of the 1930s and 40s and if the field at the close of the 20th century, which Henry Luce famously called the ‘American Century’, faced a crisis, this crisis was aggravated by September 11. In Austria, the current equation of ‘America’ with the politics of U.S. government has made the study and teaching of U.S. American cultures difficult. The understanding of ‘America’ that many students have often comes from the media, popular culture, and the internet. When they enter universities, their opinions about the United States are clearly shaped by the current discourse of Anti-Americanism as propagated by the media and popular opinion that propagate essentialized views of culture. What September 11, however, has shown is that we are in dire need of more differentiated views on culture. More than ever, I believe, the goal of American Studies, as Shelley Fisher Fishkin has stressed, is not “exporting an arrogant, pro-American nationalism but understanding the multiple meanings of America and American culture in all their complexity” (Fishkin 2005: 20). Scholars who teach American Studies should “provide the nuance, complexity, and historical context to correct reductive visions of America” (Fishkin 2005: 20). The future of American Studies in Austria should build upon and shed new light on traditional approaches, should offer more comparative perspectives on ‘American culture’ in all its diverse meanings, and should operate with a transnational consciousness that offers a more global perspective on the United States. It should also broaden the scope to include other cultures and their histories in the Americas. Most importantly, as foreign American Studies scholars we should also, I think, investigate our own positionings in the interchanges between U.S. American cultures and our own local cultures. This is exactly what we can do in our classrooms: by analyzing global localisms and exploring local perceptions of the global meanings of ‘American culture’, we can turn universities into sites of exchange between different groups of people who are engaging in a critical dialogue of American cultures.

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