



## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

August 17, 2015, Seoul, South Korea

I

**D**ear congress participants, as president of the International American Studies Association I have the privilege of opening our Seventh World Congress. This is the second time we are holding a IASA World Congress in Asia, and I want to begin by thanking our Korean colleagues for the terrific work they have done on all fronts in order to make sure this meeting would be as successful and intellectually stimulating as our previous ones. They began by putting together an incredibly well crafted, rich, and detailed congress proposal, which the IASA Council accepted enthusiastically. Then they moved forward by working in close contact with the IASA Council and Officers, making sure that the idea of bringing together the IASA and the American Studies Association of Korea, on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding, would be realized to the benefit of both organizations. I have strong hopes that this collaboration will continue in the years to come. I cannot mention all the people who, here in Korea, worked hard to make sure no detail would be overlooked, but I do wish to express my special gratitude to Professor Chulwon Cho, the President of the American Studies Association of Korea, for ably supervising the on-location organizers that made this congress possible. Another person who deserves a very special thank you is Eui Young Kim. She has proven to be both a tireless organizer and the kindest of contact persons. She replied to the hundreds of emails I sent her

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promptly and gracefully. Her patience and courtesy have been remarkable, and we should all be grateful to her for having devoted so much of her time to the organization of this event.

We should all, likewise, be thankful to the IASA Officers and Executive Council members for the crucial support they provided. They helped to select paper proposals, they worked on the program committee, they served as judges for this year's edition of the Emory Elliott Prize. This is a prize the IASA cares about a great deal not only because of Emory's invaluable role in supporting the cause of international American Studies (both inside and outside our organization), but also because Emory was a friend of so many of us. Unfortunately, as you already know, over a year ago, we lost another dear friend who, like Emory, played a key role in building and consolidating the IASA, and at the time of his passing was still a member of its Executive Council. Tatsushi Narita was a remarkable scholar, whose important work on T.S. Eliot in an international and transcultural perspective generated a great deal of interest, and won him invitations to lecture and pursue his research at a number of distinguished institutions, including Harvard and Oxford. Tatsushi was also the author of the Wikipedia page on the IASA in Japanese and in this, as in any other endeavor he undertook, he displayed immense care and attention. I know former IASA President Jane Desmond will not mind if I quote a few lines from the message she sent to the Council when the sad news arrived. These lines express, I am sure, what many of us felt: "I enjoyed working with Tatsushi on the Executive Council of IASA for many years, and know too that he was a strong advocate for his students and junior faculty joining the profession. I remember especially with affection his hand-made New Years cards that he mailed to several of us ... each year a different design and crafted with his artist's eye. It was so generous of him to keep us together in this way across so many national boundaries. American Studies has lost one of its key interlocutors on the national stage." I would like to ask you to observe a moment of silence to remember Tatsushi Narita, the scholar, the artist, the friend.<sup>1</sup>

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1. A list of Tatsushi's major publications, along with a bio, can be found at <<http://www.amazon.com/Tatsushi-Narita/e/B0089V3D9C>>.

Two years have gone by since I had the honor of opening another IASA congress in Szczecin, Poland, and 12 years have passed since the historic first IASA congress in Leiden, the only one, I must admit, I had the misfortune of not attending. Since then, as we met in Ottawa and Lisbon, and then in Beijing and Rio, I have been involved with the governance of our association, first as Council Member, then as Vice President under Jane Desmond's wise leadership, and, finally, for the last four years, as President. As you can imagine, it is with mixed feelings that I speak to you today. It would be simply dishonest on my part not to admit that I am experiencing a sense of relief at the idea that, in a couple of days, I will no longer have any managing responsibilities, and I will go back to being a simple "grassroots" IASA member. It would be equally hypocritical, however, to make no mention of the slight sadness I feel at this moment, knowing that an experience to me as significant and intense as the IASA presidency has ended. It is not for me to say whether I have been up to the task. What I can, and what I indeed wish to say today on my years as president, are essentially two things. First, I wish to thank all the people who helped me in manifold ways over the course of these four years. I cannot mention all of them here as the list would be way too long. Let me at least say thanks to all the IASA members who served on the Executive Council from 2011 to 2015, to our current Executive Director Manju Jaidka, and our current Vice-President and Treasurer Manuel Broncano, and to former IASA presidents Djelal Kadir, Paul Giles, and Jane Desmond, and to *RIAS* editor-in-chief Cyraina Johnson-Roullier. Their counsel and advice has been invaluable. But what is even more invaluable and long lasting—what is the most truly rewarding part of my presidential experience—are the bonds of friendship I have formed with so many of the people I have just mentioned as well as with many others. These friendships will go on, I hope, for many years to come. I also wish to take this opportunity to thank my graduate assistant Pilar Martinez Benedi, who, besides helping me in all sorts of ways, has devoted so much time and energy to ensure the survival of our website after our old server was hacked.

The second topic I wish to touch upon is, of course, the state of the IASA. Let me begin by saying that, in terms of sheer

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numbers, our membership has slightly but constantly increased over the years. Most importantly, we have acquired new members in areas of the globe where we were formerly absent. I am thinking in particular of Africa. We now have members in Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, but also in Senegal and Ghana. Moreover, we have also put pressure on our members to pay their dues regularly each year. Our efforts have met with some success, and I trust the new governing board of the association will persist along this road. For an organization that relies only—let me repeat it, *only*—on its members' dues, and enjoys no institutional support whatsoever, the modest, scaled-by-country-and-academic-rank contribution we ask, is simply vital. And let me remind all of you that the money we collect goes entirely, and exclusively, to support IASA collective activities. It is used, that is, to publish our journal *RIAS* (of which I will say more in a minute), to pay for our website, and to fund the Emory Elliott Prize. Not one single penny thus far has gone to reimburse the work or travel expenses of the members of the governing body of the association, whose President, officers, and council members must all seek outside funding to take part in IASA activities such as the World Congress.

We should be grateful to the friends and colleagues who have kept the IASA alive and well over the years, in an age of aggressive, ruthless neo-liberalism that has seen the slashing of higher education budgets nearly everywhere. Academics, in most of the many countries I have some contact with, have often seen their workload increase considerably but not their paychecks. Moreover, they are often presented by politicians and the corporate media as belonging to a privileged caste, reluctant to embrace the principles of competitive globalization. Under these conditions, it is hardly surprising that many academics, including many IASA members, are hesitant to take on responsibilities that cannot be of use to the advancement or consolidation of their careers. Unfortunately, in many academic venues working for the IASA is not, or at least not yet recognized as a form of service to the profession deserving official recognition. This is most likely one of the reasons why some of our initiatives have not met with the quick success we hoped for. The case of our journal, *RIAS—The Review of International American Studies*, is in many ways paradigmatic. *RIAS*, as many

of you know, started out as a newsletter, but the IASA Council later decided to turn it into a full-fledged, peer-reviewed journal. This decision was initially greeted with excitement, but moving from project to actual production was more difficult than we expected. I will not go now into all the details of a story to which we will have to go back during the IASA general assembly, at the tail end of this Congress. Here I only want to say that, leaving aside the technical, logistical, and of course, intellectual problems connected to the production of a scholarly journal, the *RIAS* project has proved difficult to manage because it requires a level of continued commitment that is not easy to reconcile with the other professional responsibilities we all have. I do hope, however, that after signing a contract with the University of Silesia Press, thanks to our colleague Paweł Jędrzejko, and with the journal now on the Open Journal System platform, all the basic production problems have been solved. With the help of all of you—I want to say it again, by slightly raising my voice—*with the help of all of you*, of all the IASA members who are here today, and the many who are not but very much wished they could be here, *RIAS* will not only survive, but prosper as the excellent scholarly journal we all wish it to be. In this connection, let me add that a new issue of *RIAS* has just come out, and it can be read on the journal's website, where you can also download either the whole issue or individual articles, and archive them on to your pc. This issue, I am happy to say, includes the three plenaries from our Sixth World Congress.

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II

*Have you seen the stars tonight?  
Have you looked  
At all the family of stars?*

—Paul Kantner

Moving now from logistical to more properly intellectual matters, as I did in my previous presidential address in Szczecin, I would like to take this opportunity to share with you some thoughts on the theme of this year's world congress. I do not have the inordinate ambition, with what will be for the most part rather sketchy and unsystematic remarks, to offer an intellectual template for the days to come. All I wish is to present you with some

observations on one or two of the several interesting points raised in the text that introduces this congress's Call for Papers. Let me begin by saying that, when I read this nicely constructed text, the first thing that came to my mind was that we were leaving behind the sea-imagery of the Szczecin congress to embrace the starry heavens above. From the boundless oceans, our critical eyesight was being redirected to the even larger, infinite sky over our heads. From a liquid space, difficult to map and yet, as I suggested in my address of two years ago, by no means impenetrable by economic, national, and transnational forces, we were now being asked to project our critical imagination onto the ungraspable, airy skies, and to borrow our metaphors no longer from seafaring but from astronomy and, perhaps, even from its degraded twin, astrology. Constellations, galaxies, stars, and orbits: these are some of the extremely suggestive keywords we have been asked to think about in relation to the field of American Studies and, in particular, of international American Studies.

Yet the ocean and sky imageries are less distant from each other than one may at first realize. In fact, a beautiful literary passage joining the two immediately came to my mind as soon as I read the Seoul Congress Call for Papers, and I thought of it in relation to the Szczecin one. It is a passage from, guess what?, *Moby-Dick*, of course—the one in Chapter 110, where Ishmael describes Queequeg's sudden fever, and his request that the ship carpenter build for him a coffin-canoe similar to the ones he had seen white people buried in.

[T]he fancy of being so laid had much pleased him; for it was not unlike the custom of his own race, who, after embalming a dead warrior, stretched him out in his canoe, and so left him to be floated away to the starry archipelagoes; for not only do they believe that the stars are isles, but that far beyond all visible horizons, their own mild, uncontented seas, interflow with the blue heavens; and so form the white breakers of the milky way. (418)

Long before science fiction would replace exotic islands with remote planets, and the uncharted seas with interstellar space, Melville was already fantasizing about canoes turning into starships and the sea foam transfigured into nebulas.

This is not the first time in the novel that Ishmael sees the watery world as an analogue to what Ralph Waldo Emerson referred to in *Nature* as “the City of God” (9). In chapter 57, “Of Whales in Paint; in Teeth; in Wood; in Sheet-Iron; in Stone; in Mountains; in Stars,” Ishmael insists that “a thorough whaleman” can discern images of whales where others would see none. Thus, if graced with a lucky point of view, while travelling through the mountains, you might be able to “catch passing glimpses of the profiles of whales defined along the undulating ridges.”

Nor when expandingly lifted by your subject, can you fail to trace out great whales in the starry heavens, and boats in pursuit of them; as when long filled with thoughts of war the Eastern nations saw armies locked in battle among the clouds. Thus at the North have I chased Leviathan round and round the Pole with the revolutions of the bright points that first defined him to me. And beneath the effulgent Antarctic skies I have boarded the Argo-Navis, and joined the chase against the starry Cetus far beyond the utmost stretch of Hydrus and the Flying Fish.

With a frigate's anchors for my bridle-bitts and fasces of harpoons for spurs, would I could mount that whale and leap the topmost skies, to see whether the fabled heavens with all their countless tents really lie encamped beyond my mortal sight! (245–46)

By projecting the hunt for the whale into the skies, Ishmael emphasizes how much his oceanic adventure is both real and metaphysical—a hunt for a marketable commodity, and a search after knowledge and the very foundations of Being.

Of course one can be hardly surprised by Ishmael's intense attraction to the arabesques of the night sky, which is shared by writers and poets of all times and countries, as my colleague at Sapienza, Piero Boitani, has recently illustrated in his monumental *Il grande racconto delle stelle*—the great story of the stars—a six-hundred page account of how, from antiquity to postmodernity, both literature and the visual arts have looked at stars in order to articulate human beings' hopes and utopias, their fears and terrors, their sense of beauty and their existential dread. However, I want to resist the temptation to dwell on the many wonderful instances of what the Latins used to call *contemplatio coeli*—the contemplation of the sky—in the literatures and the arts of the Americas, in order to focus, instead, on the hermeneutic impulse that shapes our relation to the celestial bodies in the first place, and which

is so well illustrated by images like that of Ishmael's "starry archipelagoes." I wish to do that by asking a few questions on what I take to be the most important word in the thematic description of our congress, the word *constellation*. What is so attractive for literary and cultural studies in the image of the constellation? Why of late do many of us like to refer to the texts we choose to study together, or the ideas we strive to bring in conversation with one another across continents as well as across disciplines, as constellations? Why, while in the past it was customary to speak of canons and traditions, nowadays many scholars often prefer to speak of constellations?

The comparatist Mads Rosendal Thomsen, for example, has proposed that we map world literature as a series of literary constellations comprising "very different texts [that] share features that make them stand out on the literary canopy" (4). The notion of the constellation allows critics to mediate similarity and difference, the near and the far. Constellations, as astronomers like to repeat, are not "real," by which they mean of course that while the stars we see at night are unquestionably real, concrete objects whose existence is independent of our point of view, constellations are indeed products of our imagination, invented lines connecting dots that are distant in both time and space—some of the stars we contemplate, for all we know, might have died a long time ago, though we still see them shining. There is, simply put, nothing "natural" about a constellation. Whereas canons are supposed to be the expression of some underlying national *geist*, constellations seem to be indifferent to notions of totality and can draw together different cultural objects heedless of their provenance, their time of production, their status. Even though, as Theo D'Haen, one of the founding fathers of the IASA, has observed, Thomsen does not mention Walter Benjamin, it is virtually impossible not to think of Benjamin's, and perhaps also Theodore Adorno's reiterated use of the term, as being an inspiration for Thomsen's concept of the literary constellation (D'Haen, 2012: 160). As Martin Jay has written, the concept of the constellation was important to the two German thinkers because it signified "a juxtaposed rather than integrated cluster of changing elements that resist



reduction to a common denominator, essential core, or generative first principle” (14–15).

By allowing for the drawing together of disparate elements not on the basis of some common “essence” or origin, the concept of the constellation is especially attractive to both comparatists and international Americanists, who, as suggested by the drafters of the congress’s Call for Papers, have employed it—either implicitly or explicitly—to reconfigure the field of comparative American studies. To quote another example, in an essay tellingly titled “Against Totality,” Florian Sedlmeier proposes the tracing of what he calls “intermedial literary constellations” as “a microscopic foil to the literary historiographies of planetary totality” (64), which he sees as the shared goal of the opposite yet complementary methodologies of theorists of world literature Gayatri Spivak and Franco Moretti. Literary constellations would then stand in the same relation to the millions of extant but panoptically unknowable texts comprising the universe of world literature, as astronomical constellations do in relation to the millions of known and unknown, visible and invisible stars of the unmappable, infinite skies over our heads.

One of the most interesting embodiments of a constellational strategy might be found in a work, which, while often quoted as exemplary of the transnational turn in American Studies, actually never mentions the word constellation. I am referring to Wai-chee Dimock’s *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time*. Though Dimock never claims to be “constellating” American texts with texts and cultural artifacts from other parts of the world, and from ages as remote as ancient India and Egypt, by connecting Henry James to *Gilgamesh* and Thoreau to the *Baghavad Gita*, she compellingly and boldly reconfigures the landscape of American literature with the aim of reviving “our very sense of connectedness among human beings” (5). What distinguishes Dimock’s literary transnationalism from the one practiced by the majority of other participants in the transnational turn, is that, as Bruce Robbins has noted, its aim is to combine cosmopolitanism in space with cosmopolitanism *in time*. The concept of “deep time” is meant by Dimock to facilitate the creation of new literary and cultural constellations subverting not only older, institutionalized notions

of what a “national” literature might look like, but also somewhat conventional comparativist canons built around homogenous time frames. It is one thing, in other words, to study, say, Whitman and Dickinson by resituating them within the transatlantic context of English and European Romanticism, and quite another to connect them to ages and countries as remote and heterogeneous as the stars forming a constellation are from each other.

Dimock’s work has been both praised for its erudition and visionary imagination, and criticized for, among other things, unwittingly colonizing the whole planet under the banner of American literature. According to Djelal Kadir, for example, while Dimock intends to show how American texts are traversed by deep time, the reverse movement implied in the subtitle of the book grants American literature an appropriative capacity so that “her book betrays a record of inadvertent complicity, reflexive appeasement, and expedient collusion with her own imperial time” (372). This is not the right occasion for an in-depth analysis of Dimock’s work. My intention, in calling attention to her book, is simply to show that even in a praiseworthy attempt to rethink literature beyond customary geographical as well as chronological boundaries, there is always the risk that, as our Call for Papers reads, American Studies will remain “very much within the bounds of a single constellation centering on the US.” More importantly, perhaps, her study shows that even a constellational notion of literature and culture—a notion of literary and cultural space not only as wide as the planet, but thousands of years “deep”—presents problems of its own. Indeed, as Frank McGurl has written, if Dimock’s idea “is to plumb the depths of deep time, why not scrap the idea of ‘American literature’ altogether?” And why not radicalize—as McGurl himself aims to do with his own project of the “posthuman comedy”—“Dimock’s expansion of the timeframe in which we view the institution of literature, reclaiming the term deep time from her essentially Braudelian usage [...] measured, at most, in thousands of years” and returning it to “its original geological meaning” (537–38)? The question, of course, is what might be the fate of American Studies from a post-human or even a non-human perspective—what would happen, in other words, if rather than thinking of ourselves as the tracers of constellations, we

were to gaze at the stars and found ourselves, as McGurl puts it, “unable now to shake the knowledge that reason, too, is sure to be engulfed in a larger darkness” (539). These are questions that go well beyond the already ambitious scope of our Congress—questions we might want to explore in future gatherings of the IASA. If I raise them here, it is only to emphasize that the constellation can be much more than a fancy name for bringing together the small and the large, the close and the distant, the high and the low. Simply put, there are philosophical, cultural, and of course ethical implications in the idea of constellation that need to be explored as much as the actual constellations we draw on our scholarly canopies.

One of the most obvious places to begin such exploration, as I already hinted, is Walter Benjamin’s and Theodore Adorno’s work. What Susan Buck-Morrs has written of Benjamin’s constellations, in particular—that they were “discontinuous” and “[...]like atoms, like cells, like solar systems they each had their own center: without hierarchy, they stood next to each other ‘in perfect independence and unimpaired’” (94)—resonates beautifully with our Call for Papers’ invitation “to re-center American Studies on separate, parallel and/or intertwined histories of [...] diverse constellations.” One of the greatest attractions of the concept of the constellation is in fact that—as I have insisted thus far—it can aid the project of thinking and feeling beyond the nation that is of course one of the main *raison d’être* of the project of international American Studies in general, and of the IASA in particular. For both Benjamin and Adorno, the dialectical process of constructing constellations was a way—to quote Buck-Morrs again—“to juxtapose seemingly unrelated, unidentical elements, revealing the configuration in which they congealed or converged” (99). Drawing constellations was a way, that is, to preserve the contradictory nature of the world and illuminate both how similar objects might in fact be radically heterogeneous, and how different, or even opposite ones, could coalesce into unexpected similarities. What is especially significant for our purposes is that this process would allow the seemingly paradoxical invitation to re-center American Studies without, however, reneging the de-centering project so crucial to transnational and international American Studies.

If I have chosen to stress in the title of my talk this need to re-center explicitly mentioned in the Congress Call for Papers, it is not so much because I think that, like all critical “turns,” also the “transnational” or “international” one has its ebbs and flows, so that after much de-centering and de-constructing it is now time to search for an origin around which to begin rebuild a disciplinary field now in ruins. The way I interpret the call to re-center American Studies along a potentially endless number of discrete, yet perhaps—but only perhaps—parallel or tangentially connected constellations, is not as an appeal to return to *one* centered system, but as a request to claim responsibility for the centers that we create as international cultural critics. Let me try to say this a bit better. In a famous, wonderful line of his often-opaque book on German Baroque drama, Benjamin writes that, “Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars” (34). The first thing to say about this comparison, in my view, is that it preserves the materiality of objects. Just as you would have no star-maps without stars, ideas could not take shape without things. Ideas, however, belong to a different order as compared to objects. Ideas, as Benjamin insists, “are neither their concepts nor their laws.” “Ideas are, rather, their virtual arrangement, their objective interpretation” (34). Ideas, as the Italian critic Romano Luperini puts it in his comment on this Benjaminian passage, impart a meaning to things that is both “objective” and “virtual” in the same way that also a constellation is both objective and virtual (Luperini, 1990: 102). No constellation can exist without an objectively given configuration of stars; however, for the pattern to take shape you need the meaning making gaze of the interpreter, whose outlook is of course in turn shaped by social and cultural conventions, though it cannot be simply reduced to them.

To re-think American Studies under the sign of the constellation, therefore, means not only to be constantly reminded that all the traditional configurations of old were conventional, debatable ones, but also that the new ones we have been able to draw, depend on the erection of new stargazing posts that are ultimately arbitrary too. While a center-less American Studies is not only a practical impossibility, but, at least to my mind, more a dystopia than a utopia, a polycentric disciplinary field would be

one in which we accept full intellectual and ethical responsibility for the constellations we create.<sup>2</sup> I realize I am not saying anything new. Jane Desmond, some years ago, was already arguing eloquently in favor of what she called “prismatic American Studies”—a disciplinary field shaped by “multiple points of view and scholarly standpoints” in which all participants would be at one and the same time “insiders” and “outsiders,” “near” and “far.” In her essay, however, Desmond was also careful to emphasize that whatever conversation one wished to create between culturally, methodologically, and even linguistically diverse points of view would not be necessarily a smooth, easy undertaking, but one likely to be fraught with frictions as much as with intellectually stimulating exchanges. That is why, I submit, when the Congress organizers call simultaneously for a re-centering of the field that would be consistent with the promotion of “center-less multidirectional exchanges,” the image of heavenly bodies orbiting one another, might be a touch too idealistic in its quasi-Dantesque evocation of a well-balanced rotation of celestial spheres. This might indeed be the moment to mention that constellations can be as liberating as they can be constrictive. It is surely no accident that the first occurrence of the word “constellation” in this Congress’s Call for Papers is from the Flag Act of 1777, as if to remind all of us that any “new constellation” can sanction rebellion (against the British Crown, in this case) as much as oppression (of slaves, Native Americans, women, lower classes). The US Flag has been, especially since the Civil War, a totem pretty much up for grabs, brandished in turn by both the Left and the Right, by pacifists and warmongers, by Klan members and Civil Rights activists. Several books and countless essays have been written on the flag wars, and all the legal and political controversies related to the public use of the flag: an eloquent testimony to the fact that constellations can be put to widely different cultural uses. They might be—as Walter Benjamin hoped—instruments for redeeming a world

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2. My idea of the literary constellation may be close to what Shu-Mei Shih describes as a “literary arc.” “Instead of aiming for global synthesis, the notion of a literary arc links multiple nodes, and a text can enter into relation with other texts anywhere along it, illuminating specific issues within a time period or across time periods” (434).

of ruins and violence, but we need never lose sight of the fact that stars have been often pasted on flags waved in calls for bloody national sacrifices, thus helping to usher in the violence and ruins from which we then need to be redeemed.

The remapping of American Studies we hope to accomplish with our Congress—to stick to the metaphor of the night sky that has reigned over my talk—will of course be a provisional one. There will be many stars that will not be captured by our constellations and others that will belong in more than one star map. Moreover, just as we know that there are literally millions of stars that remain invisible to the naked eye even on the clearest night, we should always bear in mind that our constellations can capture only a small part of the starry heavens. They are but partial maps, and always in the making. The stories they tell us, like the myths of old, are forever shifting and changing. This, far from being a source of discouragement should be a healthy reminder that while our business as critics and scholars has to do with the production of knowledge, the desire to know often begins with a sense of wonder and bafflement, so similar to the one we experience as stargazers. The fear that science might erase what, in another but I think ultimately related context, Francis Scott Fitzgerald described as “something commensurate to [man’s] capacity for wonder” has been registered in so many poems and stories featuring night skies. Perhaps the best-known example from US literature is Walt Whitman’s “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer.” Ultimately “tired and sick” (228) not so much by learning as by science’s suffocation of man’s penchant for the sublime, the poet leaves the lecture-room and wanders off “in the mystical moist night-air” to look “in perfect silence at the stars.” Complicating further Whitman’s scenario, Benjamin would note in his essay “To The Planetarium,” that

[n]othing distinguishes the ancient from the modern man so much as the former’s absorption in a cosmic experience scarcely known to later periods. Its waning is marked by the flowering of astronomy at the beginning of the modern age [...]. [T]he exclusive emphasis on an optical connection to the universe, to which astronomy very quickly led, contained a portent of what was to come. The ancients’ intercourse with the cosmos had been different: the ecstatic trance. For it is in this experience alone that we gain certain knowledge of what

is nearest to us and what is remotest to us, and never of one without the other. This means, however, that man can be in ecstatic contact with the cosmos only communally. It is the dangerous error of modern men to regard this experience as unimportant and avoidable, and to consign it to the individual as the poetic rapture of starry nights. (92–93)

Though it is rather unlikely that the community of Americanists gathered here for a few days—diverse and exciting as it surely is—will produce the intoxication of those collective rituals that made cosmic experiences possible, I hope that our being together *as a community* in Seoul will allow all of us to experience something richer and more rewarding than an individualized frisson. By sharing our knowledge and comparing our star maps, we might be able to reach a communal ecstasy of sorts: not the ecstasy bordering on insanity of saints and seers, but, more modestly, that of finding ourselves, if only for some brief moments, “displaced” and “out of place,” both etymological meanings of the Greek *ekstasis*. I wish all of you, all of us, an ecstatic congress, full of wonders and surprises to be enjoyed collectively.

Thank you.

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