



THEORIES OF THE GLOBAL, GLOBAL LITERATURE, AND AMERICAN LITERATURE IN A GLOBALIZING AGE

I want to begin my reflections by briefly looking at the mission of international American Studies.¹ The advantage of such an approach to American literature and culture may be located in the view from outside onto the United States and its culture and society. Critics from various countries around the globe study the United States and are, at least ideally, able to recognize specifically US-American presuppositions and premises that tend to go unnoticed in US-American “American Studies.” One example is the deeply entrenched individualism we can even find in books that are critical of the American ideology. Sacvan Bercovitch has emphasized, for instance, that Frederick Douglass’s model of emancipation is possessive individualism (371). A spectrum of external views might help to put interpretations of American culture from within into a critical perspective, allowing for pluralism and making unacknowledged premises visible. Of course, non-US-American critics bring their own biases and presuppositions that themselves can only be made visible and useful in dialogic exchanges and open-ended negotiations.

What are the ramifications of international American Studies for the question of world literature?² I do not want to rehearse again the shift from national literature as a container to American

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1. This essay is based on my earlier publications in German “Globalisierung, Mondialisierungen und die Poetik des Globalen” (2008) and *Globalisierung: Literaturen und Kulturen des Globalen* (2010).
2. See also my essay “American Studies and Globalization.”

literature as intersection of various cultures and ethnic experiences that are constellated and negotiated in American literary texts, usually discussed under the rubric of transnational American Studies. I want to focus instead on the question of world literature in relation to literature in the age of globalization and literatures of the global, and relate these to literary texts written in the United States that target global constellations. In order to designate the field of global and/or world literature, I want to look at some parameters that are useful for a theory of globalization.

The first topic I will discuss concerns theories of the global and approaches to the concept of the world. The second part of my paper will offer a few definitions of literature in a globalizing age, and then address some definitions and proposals how to approach world literature in literary scholarship. Here we will encounter qualitative as well as quantitative methods, ones that presuppose world literature as a system and ones that use a hermeneutical approach which focuses on individual texts and close reading. In my concluding section, I will venture the somewhat bold claim that in today's digitally restructured knowledge world we have to consider contemporary novels and other literary texts that reflect on the transformations of media and of knowledge formation as versions of world literature as well.

What is globalization, and why should we care in the context of the debate about world literature? Globalization is a fact, a catchword, a *passé-partout* term, and an intellectual challenge. It has been going on since humans, or better the species *homo sapiens*, left Eastern Africa and began populating the surface of the earth, it took many of the forms we know today with the beginning of Europeans' taking dominion of non-European territories since about 1500, it accelerated immensely in the nineteenth century because of new media as well as modes of transportation and as a result of an intensified world economy, and it reached its so-far latest stage with decolonization, neoliberal economics, the recent great migratory waves and the internet, that is developments that occurred since the second half of the twentieth century. Globalization first became an area of research in economics and the social sciences, and was picked up as a concept in the humanities only later. While transnationalism and transcul-

turality are seen as positive developments, globalization continues to have the *haut gout* of neoliberal economics, implying, for instance, outsourcing, the privatization of water resources, and highly speculative transactions in the financial industry. What has only rarely been attempted, however, is to propose a theory of these developments, a model which allows us to navigate and operate in a highly complex world characterized by globalizing processes.

Why do we need a theory of the global, and what does it mean to think globally? The first point to mention is that, as the empirical conditions of our daily life, our societies, forms of communication and geopolitics have changed, the concepts we use to navigate in this world have to be adjusted as well. As many concepts emerged in the context of the nation state since the nineteenth century, they are coeval as well as intricately linked with this order, not only of state and interstate politics, but also of academic disciplines and basic theoretical assumptions. The late sociologist Ulrich Beck speaks of “methodological nationalism” (46). As these terms were developed to capture and explain a situation which no longer exists, they have to be modified, adapted, and we need, moreover, new terms and models for describing and mapping a globalizing world. Examples are the German term “Nationalökonomie” (the older term for the discipline of economics), the concept of society based on the nation state, the idea of culture as national culture (linked to the emergence of the nation state), or the belief that one can ground the idea of justice exclusively on modern Western values, values that have come down to us within a very specific and local history.

The second level of theorizing concerns what I want to call globalization as an analytic category. Armin Nassehi speaks of globalization as a “cognitive pattern” (196, my translation) and points to the necessity that we look at contemporary phenomena from a global perspective. The decisive distinction necessary for thinking about “globalization as a philosophical issue” (Jameson) concerns the one between globe and world. One of the reasons why philosophy proper has been reluctant to approach the topic is that it is rarely concerned with the areas traditionally ascribed to globalization, such as economics, migration, media, and society. The philosophers’ concept of the world focuses on human

cognition and action. Yet lived as well as thinkable worlds are not independent of the changing conditions of the empirical globe, a statement which is also true in reverse. We have to think globalization and “mondialisations” (see Badura) together, empirical changes that can be found in migration patterns, global cities and cultures, in media, trade, money flows and in climate change, as well as human-made, lived, and thought or conceptualized versions of the world. Globalization is a development made by humans, yet individuals do not act within circumstances they have chosen.

Lived worlds have to do with the worlds humans imagine, know, or believe to be living in. These differ strongly between individuals, and even more between cultures. Nassehi has given us a felicitous formulation to capture this situation when he stresses the “many worlds within the one world” (200, my translation) which make up the contemporary global situation. But we can also go back to William James and his notion of a “pluralistic universe” or a “pluriverse” (1907) to grasp the fact that all humans belong to the globe and are bound to it in every respect. Yet at the same time everyone has a specific and different view of this world, such that we have a multiplicity of worlds within the one world. “Pluralistic universe” is an appropriate formulation, as the one universe is seen, understood, or imagined in many different ways and cannot be unified on the conceptual level. We have to think wholeness, unity, and even totality together with multiplicity and irreducible difference. The main stress here is on the “and,” as globalization tends to be associated with homogenization in the sense of a standardized unity and to be criticized with reference to difference. Yet it is the combination and intricate link between the two which constitutes the basis for any thinking in the mode of the global. Nassehi emphasizes:

For it is not merely these differences which constitute the social of the world but rather the mutual observability of the perspectives and places; the reciprocity of difference. (197, my translation)

The wholeness and coherence of world society is made up of a myriad of differences which nevertheless are linked and know of each other. In this sense, the global and the local presuppose each other. Unity and diversity complement each other.

“Why the world does not exist”—*Warum es die Welt nicht gibt*—is the title of a recent bestseller in philosophy written by the young German philosopher Markus Gabriel. He does not claim that things do not exist; rather, he argues that everything exists, except such an entity as the world (9). There is nothing that may contain everything.³ What, then, does the “world” in “world literature” mean, and what do we mean when we speak of the world? First of all, the term implies an open horizon of possible conceptions of worlds as well as possible forms of existence. World also refers to the entirety of what can be thought, imagined and perceived, a concept that is, of course, historically and culturally contingent. From a European perspective, well into modern times, the earth was still grounded in a numinous unity which gave security and a sense of home to humans. As Niklas Luhmann writes:

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Until far into modern times the world had been understood cosmologically as the entirety of the visible as well as the invisible, as partitioning [“Ab-Teilung”] of things which then can be found at the places to which they belong in nature In all relevant dimensions of meaning the cosmological concept of world and with it the ontological metaphysics of [modern times] have broken apart. (“Weltkunst” 7, my translation)

At least in the modern West, one does no longer posit a numinous instance as an external observer. Jean-Luc Nancy therefore writes, “globalization [*mondialisation*] had to be preceded by a worlding [*mondanisation*]” (35, my translation). Globalization, then, has to be understood in the context of secularization, of conceiving of the world in empirical terms. The conceptual impact of the exploration of the globe has not only been the radical extension of space on earth, but also the compression of the world to just this space of the globe. Before about 1500 the numinous sphere—think of Dante’s system of celestial and terrestrial spheres—was real and ultimately immeasurable, yet with the expansion of the known globe its influence on most people’s vision of the world radically

3. Rather, we can know areas of reality, and know them as really existing, but we can know no all-encompassing coherence, at least not in a non-theological or non-metaphysical manner. For Gabriel, this view is a version of a “new realism” (9).

shrank (Sloterdijk 15). Today's internet and World Wide Web are as immense as they are limited at the same time.

To define world horizons, Luhmann employs the notion of 'possibility.'

[...] in every moment the whole world is present—yet not as plenitudo entis, but as the difference between actualized meaning and the other possibilities accessible from there. (*Gesellschaft* 142, my translation)

In terms of formal logic, he describes the doubling of the world and respective specific worlds as the form of operating “in the context of complexity” (*Gesellschaft* 144, my translation). “World” in the times of modernity does not only comprise what is happening, but also a field of possibilities surrounding every actual reality. As a consequence, the world can no longer be grasped as a fixed entity or substance, but rather as a sequence of observations. The ways in which we see the world depends to a large degree on the observer, and thus on his or her context. In its sameness, therefore, the world cannot be observed; in so far as it can be specified, it is not the same for everybody, because every person will use different frames of reference. In other words, we can only observe or think the world from within the world and from a specific position which constitutes merely one version of the world among others (Reichardt “Globalisierung” 23). As a consequence, we are always confronting other versions of the world when we communicate, and we have to negotiate the differences.

I have to emphasize that the focus on the whole globe as our common world involves a decisive paradigm shift. Particularly since the times of deconstruction and the focus on difference, any notion of wholes, unity, and totality has been seen as suspect, if not totalitarian, and thus a concept to be rejected. Theodor W. Adorno famously declared that “the whole is the untrue.” (55) Yet if we wish to think in terms of interconnected networks, if we aim at de-provincializing our thinking, including Western philosophy, and wish to make claims that are valid worldwide, we have to include the whole globe as the horizon of our thinking. With regard to complexity theory, Mark C. Taylor has pointed out that we should think of “the nonlinear dynamics of systems that act as a whole but do not totalize” (65), implying that the globe has

to be thought of as a complexly interconnected unity, even while we can never observe it as a whole. Such a view implies conceiving of the earth as an open system, not only in terms of empirical changes, but also conceptually, as an open horizon including conceivable as well as not yet thinkable possibilities in the sense of unpredictable emergence. The world is what is as well as what could be, and the realm of the possible is part of the horizon we have to include in our thinking. Difference is thus constitutively inscribed into the notion of the globe itself. The irreversible focus on the one earth enforces the conceptual effort to always think difference and connection together, and thus to reconnect any local description to the larger whole, even if it can only be named tentatively, having a specific, yet provisional perspective inscribed into it.

The third move I want to propose can be subsumed under the title of a shift of perspective. Postcolonial studies have stressed the necessity of “provincializing Europe” (Chakrabarty) and the North Atlantic region. This argument mainly refers to power and values, to the power of issuing interpretations, that is, to truth claims. Yet in a truly globalized world and from a verily global perspective, we have to acknowledge the plurality not only of cultures, but also of basic assumptions and presuppositions. There is a cognitive multiplicity, and highly different world views in the sense of “ways of worldmaking” (Nelson Goodman) exist simultaneously. If we wish to acknowledge and recognize this constellation, we have to decenter Western thinking by comparison with other forms. François Jullien speaks of a change of place from which to think in order to achieve a distanced perspective on the categories which underlie the often unacknowledged assumptions we use in our descriptions. His approach is to compare Chinese and European presuppositions and ways of thinking. One could call this a form of epistemological globalization—or, as Walter D. Mignolo calls it, of “de-westernization” (3). However, no culture and no cultural form has ever been pure. Hybridization thus also concerns categories. They travel and mix and can no longer be seen, if this has ever been true, as completely separate and independent. Thus we have to take into account the processes of mixing and hybridiza-

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tion, of reinterpretation and adaptation, as is well known of global processes in general.⁴

The main difference, then, is the one between the globe and the world. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to refer them to different spheres, the one being kept for the practical affairs of the present and the other merely for conceptual entities. It is crucial to regard them as mutually dependent. The factuality of a globalizing world does indeed have immense ramifications for ways of conceptualizing life, society, and art, while, on the other hand, notions of globalization also have to acknowledge that they are partaking in (re-)describing the world. In the context of real-world globalization, theories of world-making can no longer distance themselves from the effects and processes of interconnectivity and simultaneity. If culture and thoughts, images and sounds (and people, for that matter) from all corners of the world coexist and are synchronized today, then thinking can no longer be positioned in one single place, at least if it aims at offering propositions that are not only valid locally. Dipesh Chakrabarty's call for "Provincializing Europe" implies that European forms of knowledge are grounded in Europe's history and cultures and thus might not be valid elsewhere, even while he also acknowledges that European concepts have become the world's (16). But then they no longer exist in their original form but have been translated into and accommodated to new and different contexts. Peter Sloterdijk sums up: "Since 1945 it has become evident that the history-making power of the European carriers of expansion has expired. [...] The look at Europe's past no longer has any significance for the projection of the future of the world as a whole." (258, my translation) Accordingly, he reconceives the history of globalization not only as philosophy's context, but as the concrete precondition of what can actually be thought in the present, and he claims that the undeniable facticity of globalization should be taken as the starting point of any serious reflection today:

4. With regard to "Americanization" as an important dimension of global popular culture, Mel van Elteren speaks of "selective borrowing and appropriation, translation and incorporation into the indigenous cultural context" (62).

[The] terrestrial globalization [is], comparable to an axiom, the one and only precondition, from which a theory of the contemporary epoch has to take its start. (218-19, my translation)

Jean-Luc Nancy speaks of the irreversible immanence of the world (“être-au-monde,” 35). The decisive move, then, is to take the whole world as the horizon of reference. As such a view is not directly possible, it is necessary to constantly shift one’s perspective, to regard every position as situated and open to revision.

Next, I want to delineate some models of conceptualizing globality in more detail. I will begin with concepts which concern actual contemporary developments. Sociologists studying globalization point to changes in social relations and argue that these can no longer be captured by a concept of society which is structurally grounded in the nation state. Institutions, forms of daily life, and communication are no longer limited by the boundaries of states. Therefore, the concept of society has to be modified and adapted to accommodate global interactions. A concise formula has been offered by Robert Robertson: “Globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole.” (8) This definition nicely captures two crucial aspects. The world is becoming smaller in the sense that distances are easier and faster to traverse, and thus there is an intensification of communications, metaphorically a compression of space. At the same time, these objective developments lead to the subjective experience of living not only in one’s own region or country, but also of being a part of and being connected to the whole world. It is important to point out that Robertson regards objective as well as subjective developments as interdependent.

Time and space are affected by globalization as well. David Harvey, in an often quoted phrase, speaks of “time-space compression” (240). With relations of time and space, basic categories of our life-world and experience are transformed. Marshall McLuhan coined the term “global village” to refer to changing forms of communication as a result of the new electronic media in the early 1960s already (31). Nowadays we are living in a global communicative space. The most important term is interconnectivity which refers to the links between everybody who has access to a computer

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as well as to the increasing interdependence of all humans living today. As electronic media transmit information (almost) immediately, most places of the earth are synchronized and people there can communicate in real time.

If distances lose in importance, then people and goods as well as data will travel fast and arrive without much time for accommodation. The term glocalization, a hybrid of the terms global and local, attempts to capture precisely this fact. Globality and locality do not exclude each other. Rather, global developments have to “take place” (in the strict sense of the term) and be experienced somewhere, and most often they do this in a concrete local place. Glocalization then means that global flows and globally circulating forms, goods, institutions etc. will be interpreted, adapted, accommodated, and thus also modified in specific cultural and social contexts. As a consequence, they will not stay the same. Re- and decontextualization signify processes in which the specifics of one environment lose in significance; the compressed, abstracted form travels and is readapted somewhere else for somebody else.

The best abstract model for globally interconnected exchanges, I want to suggest, is complexity theory. The dominant metaphor is the network which refers to the fact that we have to shift our focus from the object, the text or phenomenon, to the relations between objects, texts, and phenomena. These are reconceived as nodes in a network, no longer as substances, but as relations, as being constituted within exchanges. The metaphor of the network allows us to conceive of an interdependent unity which does not neglect the particular node. One can say that the traditional substantialist way of thinking—we try to get at the unchanging singularity of a thing—is exchanged for a dynamic way of thinking which attempts to describe an entity with regard to the interplay with its environment. The meaning of a node is the result of its links with other nodes, such that the relations become more important than the thing itself (see Taylor).⁵ John Urry stresses that a globalized world cannot be understood within descriptive models which remain static (X). As there cannot be any single

5. Taylor writes: “... networks consist of interconnected nodes, which are able to communicate with each other. Each node is constituted by its interrelations with other nodes and its place in the overall network.” (154)

one position from which the global system could be observed, and as any position will be within the complex global network, complexity with regard to globality implies a constantly moving system that changes with the parts and their relationships.⁶

Debates about world literature, then, have to take into account the empirical constellation characterized by interconnectivity and synchronicity as well as the irreversible fact of plurality, difference, and multiplicity of perspectives, of world views, and cultures. Linked in network fashion, the relations between texts and literature become as important as the text itself. All texts within world literature belong to the same globe and humanity, yet none refers to the same world, or few of them do. This multiplicity, nevertheless, can never be seen at once and in totality either. Therefore, world literature is either an all-inclusive category or one shifting with the respective observer's position.

Let me now discuss a few proposals concerning world literature. First, I want to offer my own attempt at defining versions of a literature of the global. My first category is world literature which comprises virtually all written or oral texts from everywhere on the earth; it is an all-encompassing category which pays tribute to the dissolution of national boundaries and of the Western focus dominant even within comparative literary studies. My second category is global literature. Here I am referring to literary texts presenting encounters between members of different cultures and societies, cultural contact, and transcultural hybridization. The term refers to texts that foreground the permeability of national or cultural borders, staging transnational and transcultural flows. It concerns travelogues and stories of migrants as well as intergenerational *Bildungsromane*. Such literary texts are often subsumed under the term transnational literature, for example transnational American literature. My third category is the literature of globalization, texts that present concrete elements, moments, or events of the process of globalization, for example Walt Whitman on the opening of the Suez Canal, Herman Melville on the whaling industry and world knowledge, Alexander von Humboldt's *Kosmos*, and more recently novels about financial speculation, to name

6. See also my essay "Complexity—a Truly Transdisciplinary Concept?"

just a few well-known instances. Here globalization is presented metonymically, if not directly mentioned.

My last category is what I want to call world-creating literature, that is texts projecting images and stories about “the whole world” and the ways in which it is conceived. Here I am thinking about historical texts like the grand epic poems, but also science fiction stories and theoretical narratives like the ones by Jorge Luis Borges. My favorite example is the text by Borges famously quoted by Michel Foucault in the opening sequence of his *The Order of Things* about a “certain Chinese encyclopedia” that categorizes the animals in the following ways:

(a) belonging to the emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *etcetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies. (Foucault XV)

Our ideas about the world depend on what we include and exclude, on the categories we employ to distinguish among its elements, and these are arbitrary in the sense that different times and cultures use different distinctions.⁷

The concept of world literature has already been used by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as well as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels⁸ in the nineteenth century and by Erich Auerbach in the 1950s. I will not repeat their propositions as they are well known, even while they are still relevant today. An important contemporary definition has been proposed by David Damrosch (2003):

I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language [...]. [Yet] a work only has an *effective* life as world literature whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture. (4)

He adds that “world literature is multitemporal as well as multicultural. Too often, shifts in focus from classics to masterpieces

7. The previous two paragraphs are based on Reichardt 2010, p. 151; pp. 163–175.

8. “World literature” is mentioned on p. 466.

to windows on the world have underwritten a concomitant shift from earlier to later periods.” (16) Therefore, “all periods as well as all places are up for fresh examination and open to new configurations.” (17) As can be seen in the *Longman Anthology of World Literature* which he co-edited, “world” in Damrosch’s usage encompasses texts from most areas of the globe and historical times and is thus an inclusive concept. The principle of selection is the representativeness of texts and their significance beyond their original locale of production and reception. The Mahabharata and the Bible, Homer and Shakespeare are still read today in various regions of the globe.

French critic Pascale Casanova has proposed a different model to chart the flows of global literature by claiming the existence of a world literary space, which she calls the world republic of letters (2004). It is a hypothetical model distinct from political borders. World literature in her view is not formed by the sum of texts. Rather, it is a sum of positions that have to be conceived in relational terms. Casanova uses Fernand Braudel’s concept of an economy-world and Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of the literary field. Literary works have to be deciphered “on the basis of the whole of the composition [...] Each work that is declared to be literary is a minute part of the immense ‘combination’ constituted by the literary world as a whole.” (3) For Casanova, world literature refers to the world’s subsystem of the world republic of letters which is made up of texts from a large part of the world circulating through the literary marketplace of Paris. This world republic is a system of inclusion and exclusion based on power, dominance and prestige.⁹

Franco Moretti, finally, proposes a radically different approach when he takes his start from the “great unread” of literature (2000, 55, he quotes Margaret Cohen). Most novels are forgotten and no longer part of the corpus. Traditional notions of world literature thus comprise only a miniscule section of the literature

9. “The internationalization that I propose to describe here therefore signifies more or less the opposite of what is ordinarily understood by the neutralizing term ‘globalization’ [...] In the literary world [...] it is the competition among its members that defines and unifies the system while at the same time marking its limits” (40).

that has been published globally, let alone the non-published, for example oral literature of non-modern cultures. To fill this lacuna, Moretti suggests an approach which can be subsumed within the sprouting field of the digital humanities. He wants to detect and analyze trends within the largest corpora digitally available, for example of the English novel in the nineteenth century. As a result of his quantitative research, he will get correlations triggered by algorithms. (This implies, if I am correct, search orders such as “Find all usages of the word ‘painter’ and correlate them with the frequency of the terms ‘art’ and ‘woman’,” for example). He speaks of “trees,” the curve of distribution within national developments, and “waves,” typical of transnational dissemination (66–68). Moretti no longer believes in close readings but calls for a statistical approach using big data. While he cannot access all novels, he can trace long-term and wide-range developments of concepts such as the novel form. His aspirations are democratic—going beyond the selection of relevant texts based on the taste and interests of mostly national elites—but he also has to select the terms he uses to trace constellations, and these are neither objective nor innocent. What I find interesting is that he is using the tools for “reading” that are increasingly becoming, for better or for worse, the dominant ones of literary analysis. He regards world literature as a system, and is interested in larger and more abstract developments and flows. The concept of the “world” is again inclusive, for example all novels written during a certain time. The main impetuses are decentering and dehierarchization, which have been the implicit political ideas behind quantification in science, the desire of no longer having certain quasi- or post-theological authorities declare what is important and good.

I find Damrosch’s inclusive notion of world literature most convincing, even if it still continues to transport power structures sedimented in selection processes—which Casanova (selectively) foregrounds and Moretti wants to go beyond by way of quantification. Ultimately, it can be regarded as an inclusive form of enlarging the canon, one that still maintains the focus on the individual text as opposed to regarding it as data. Moretti’s suggestion aims at a radical decentering, yet is restrictive at the same time, as it has to use terms such as the novel to navigate big data.

In all of these approaches, “world” appears selectively constructed, and this is true for all concepts of world literature. We have to accept the many worlds within the one world as a shifting and contested field of overlapping and clashing views on the world.

In my last section, I will follow some of Moretti’s conjectures, yet direct them into a different direction. I want to propose that Dave Eggers’s novel *The Circle* (2014), while not world literature with regard to its literary merit, deals with questions that seem highly important to contemporary investigations of world literature, and particularly those with an American inclination. I am interested in the changes within knowledge worlds that result from the increasingly digitalized and monopolized ways of knowledge formation in contemporary data-based information societies. If we wish to think about world literature today, I want to suggest, we also have to take into account the new tools and media in which literature is increasingly mediated and made available worldwide.

Focusing on a corporation that is easily recognizable as an only slightly fictionalized version of Google, the novel tests the possibilities and dangers inherent in technologies that already exist or are close to their realization in the near future. The main topics and problematics are privacy, transparency, sharing as a constant challenge, and the tipping over of deliberate participation into domination by a few. One of the implicit arguments of the novel is that most of the innovations introduced by the corporation are meant to improve people’s lives, yet carry the danger of tipping over into oppressive mechanisms that precisely negate the increase in freedom they were meant to establish. Moreover, creativity and self-management also become more than a challenge; they turn into an oppressive duty, the non-deliverance of which is heavily sanctioned. Thus neoliberal subjectivity is conjoined with corporate existence.

In Eggers’s view, the doubling of one’s life into a digitalized copy implies the danger that somebody else, for example a corporation, will own the copy. “Possessive individualism” (MacPherson), owning oneself as the basic concept of liberal humanism since John Locke, would be radically reversed. Self-determination is radically shot through with external challenges, but it appears as if the protagonist who is working for the corporation as an “employed

entrepreneur of herself" (Voß and Pongratz 131, my translation) actively and deliberately wishes to conform and further the Circle's control and power. Her conformity is an effect of her creative participation. The novel is interesting precisely as a fictional experiment for "thinking through" the spectrum of possibilities inherent in recent technological innovations and developments.

The Circle makes strong claims about future developments which will concern literature on a worldwide scale as well. As many technological trends issue from the Silicon Valley, they are culturally based in US-America but reach every place on the globe, strongly influencing the ways in which the world is understood. And in this sense, international American Studies might be called upon to critically observe the digital world and think about which specifically US-American premises and presuppositions are being inscribed into the media that determine our knowledge production more and more. A novel such as Eggers's that foregrounds already existing developments and problems, moreover, can itself be analyzed from an international standpoint and investigated for specifically American cultural ideas to be detected even in the critique of internet corporations.

While in different ways the same could be said about Melville's *Moby-Dick* and DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*, for example, *The Circle* underlines the dialectical relationship between the local and the global. It is set in California and describes American ideas and values involved in the organization of the corporation. At the same time, it negotiates globally effective developments instantiated worldwide. Even while Eggers writes critically about digital monopolies, he does so from within American culture and society. We may thus read his novel in order to understand what will become reality in Europe and elsewhere soon, and also to analyze what is US-American about it, culturally and in terms of the knowledge ecology it is situated in. Through the Google- and Facebook-world, US-American presuppositions are implicitly and often invisibly inscribed into the world's knowledge landscapes. International American Studies, then, has a whole new set of objects to be investigated in today's new mediascapes.

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