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AND WHY 'TRANS' ALL THE TIME? A TRANSNATIONAL FORUM

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To judge from congress titles, 'trans' is certainly the current name of the game: *Trans/American*, *Trans/Oceanic*, *Trans/lation* is the title of the IASA Congress in Lisbon, and *The United States from Inside and Out: Transnational American Studies* was the name of the annual meeting of the American Studies Association, 2006. The ubiquity of the prefix may raise suspicions. It certainly did so for the organizers and participants of the session called 'Academic Crossroads: Debating Transnationalism's Second Phase' at the ASA meeting in 2006. The addition of the 'second phase' tried to underline just that: there should be time for a second phase to consider the conceptual and epistemological consequences of the use of 'trans', considering the fact that it has been the code word for quite some time now, signalling an opening up of participation and a loosening of boundaries.

Nevertheless, 'the second phase' may denote a sense of stable categorization. The first phase is over; now it is time for the second. This risk was articulated in the discussion after the session, and therefore the idea came up that the original contributions could be condensed and published as a forum for a consideration of transnational implications. The juxtaposition of different texts would make them resonate to make new ground for the interpretation of 'trans', and a forum could also invite more scholars to join the discussion.

So, here they are: **Laura Bieger** considers the methodological potential of translation in cultural studies and transnational American studies in her text "'Living in Translated Worlds": A pragmatist approach to transnationalism'. She finds that the relational structure of the three intersecting mechanisms she identifies at work in translation adds to the study of the dynamics of transnational studies, and she finds that the poetic aspects of translation—the underlying operational mechanisms—are utterly neglected. Translation is, she claims, a cultural practice, rather than a textual, and Homi Bhabha's transitional notion of the 'third space' has become the homeland for the criticism of such cultural practice.

There is a lack of attention, among transnational Americanists, to the relation between transnational formations and the changing constellation of state power, **Johannes Völz** argues in 'Transnationalism and the Realignment of State Power: Two sides of the same coin'. If transnational American Studies is described in opposition to

state power, such a description is symptomatic of the lengthening distance between the state and its citizens. Ways to scrutinize such complicity should be the topic for transnational American Studies. A location for such transnational scrutiny is the public sphere.

In 'Towards a Genealogy of Transnational Perspective' **Jeffrey Hole** finally addresses the idea that the state's hermeneutic functions through a national lens and that a transnational perspective can exceed the state's hermeneutic. He thinks that there are important and genealogical questions to be asked in order to address how the transnational perspective, invoked for critical work, may be historically attendant with the intensification of globalization and with transnational configurations.

Finally, in his text called 'Transnationalism: The American Challenge' to, **Frank Kelleter** suggests we need a re-engagement with the notion of American exceptionalism in order to confront the anti-imperialist imperialism of the concept of 'America'. Kelleter considers the belief that to speak transnationally means to speak in a counter-hegemonic way. If we were to take the insights of transnational studies for granted, he remarks, studies of America and American aesthetics could be based on more realistic and less sentimental conceptions.

Now, the curtain is up: read, consider, let the texts resonate, respond!