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AMERICA/AMERICAS: CULTURES, CANONS AND COURSES

The advent of Inter-American Studies has not only opened up an alternative discourse in the study of 'American' culture; it has also produced a discourse that suggests an alternative practice, through the struggle to address the numerous questions it raises concerning issues as diverse as language, translation, transnationalism, immigration, race, ethnicity, national identity, gender, cultural inclusion vs. exclusion, politics, geography, history, economics, and a whole host of other topics. As an approach that speaks not to one discipline but many—and whose primary emphasis is this interdisciplinarity—Inter-American Studies addresses a way of understanding that, because it suggests a radically different geo-political mapping at its core, demands a concomitant alteration in any disciplinary approach to the study of American culture. In its hemispheric re-articulation of the notion of America, it points to all that is silenced within singular conceptions of American culture. Such conceptions would often seem to imply the construction of a hegemonic and all-important United States, while denying or eliding all consideration of the socio-politico-historical interrelationships that pertain between the United States and its hemispheric neighbors. But because these interrelationships also form the central foundation of Inter-American Studies, no recognition of their importance can take place without a concomitant transformation in perspective with regard to the mode by which American culture is to be studied. In most disciplines, this transformation must, necessarily, entail an engagement with what Masao Myoshi has called the myth of the nation state, a 'nostalgic' and 'sentimental' understanding of the state that 'offers an illusion of a classless organic community of which everyone is an equal member', in the spirit of Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities' (744).

When considered in the context of the Americas, such a view of the nation-state becomes immensely problematic. Viewed in terms of the historic economic, cultural and linguistic hegemony of the United States in relation to its hemispheric neighbors, or the oppression of various indigenous populations in many nations throughout the hemisphere, such considerations of the nation-state may often serve to camouflage the underlying cultural tensions existing below the surface to which the hemispheric approach can provide access. Through the process by which 'America' becomes 'Americas' then, all that is implied in this reconfiguration must come to the table and be counted. Yet, despite its insistence on the plural, the hemispheric study of American literature, history and culture does not seek to deny the importance and value of American Studies, conventionally conceived. Rather, it seeks a reconsideration of the terms upon which American Studies has been founded, something that would allow

for a complementary give and take between the two perspectives, in the interests of a certain enrichment of both.

It is with the terms of this reassessment that the current issue of *RIAS* is concerned. What does it mean to consider the object of study, America, in the plural, as 'Americas', rather than 'America'? What issues of language, translation, history, politics, culture, nation, ethnicity, race, gender, identity, geography, etc. are at stake in this transformation? How are these issues to be understood and accounted for? More fundamentally, how do these issues reflect on the current state of knowledge and knowledge production regarding the study of America? What problems will need to be addressed as a result, and what changes will need to be made in order to do justice to their implications? How does consideration of the United States in relation to its hemispheric neighbors change our understanding of both the US *and* its neighbors? How might studying the United States in relational context alter our understanding of the United States and our conceptions of 'America' and 'Americanness'? Finally, what does it mean to study 'America' in the plural? What changes must be made in the object of study?

These are just a few of the questions that come to the fore when considering the larger intellectual significance of Inter-American Studies as an approach to the study of 'American' culture. But their implications are clear: they move toward a conception of the field that is radically different from many disciplinary perspectives, and one which ultimately begins to question even the method and manner in which knowledge itself has traditionally been organized. As a result, developing as it has either within or in relation to the more established institutional context of American Studies, one of the most important challenges of Inter-American Studies has been to reconfigure the object of study—American culture—in relation to that discipline. What this means is that Inter-American Studies has been called upon to consider its relation to American Studies—where it differs, where it is essentially the same, in what ways it might interrogate and in what ways it might appropriate the canon of American Studies, in whatever discipline. One of the most important questions for Inter-American Studies is, then, what of cultures, canons and courses? What is the relationship between Inter-American Studies and the cultures it recognizes, its own or already existing canons, and the courses in which the knowledge it organizes may be disseminated?

The contributors to this issue have all sought in some way to speak to these problems. In his address to the IASA Congress in Lisbon in September, 2007, Paul Giles considers the notion of 'America', how this must be fundamental to our understanding of the object of study, and all that this implies. Outlining the coming into being of IASA, Giles offers an understanding of the pivotal role it plays (and has played) as an organization singularly placed to participate in the continued institutional development of Inter-American Studies as a new discipline, and to foster the ongoing conversation about the relation between Inter-American and American Studies.

The issue's forum, 'Institutionalizing Americas/American Studies' features Americanists from all over the world who are engaging with the relation between Inter-American and American Studies in a variety of geopolitical climates and contexts. Mary Louise Pratt offers an overview of the global political significance of American Studies, considered between its relation to the Cold War period's institutionalizing of area studies and the new cultural realities of the post-9/11 global community. Seyed Mohammad Marandi, Patrick McGreevy, Liam Kennedy, Li Jin and Sun Youzhong offer perspectives on American Studies in the Mid-



dle East, Europe and Asia, emphasizing the politics often involved in doing American Studies in countries where the political relation to the US may be strained, and where hemispheric considerations may be overshadowed by the ascendancy of the United States in articulations of America and 'Americanness'. They describe the parameters of their various programs in the context of, or despite, such politics, analyzing the role of US governmental funding of American Studies organizations outside its borders.

In 'Finding the Americas in American Studies', the current issue's feature articles set the stage for debate on these and other topics. Earl Fitz explains in detail one way of envisioning what a doctoral program in Inter-American Studies would/should look like, as well as the difficulties in implementation that such a program might face. First and foremost, Fitz discusses the importance of language to the effort to embark on Inter-American Studies as a serious undertaking. Silvio Torres-Saillant cautions against a too hasty embracement of pan-Latino identity within a hemispheric frame, examining intra-Latino racial and ethnic tensions that may be obscured and/or silenced when a hemispheric perspective of Latino identity is adopted. Finally, Djelal Kadir and Paweł Jędrzejko offer a dialogue on the future of American Studies as it grapples with the advent of the Inter-American approach to the study of American culture. For Kadir and Jędrzejko, American Studies sees not its demise in the emergence of the Inter-American perspective, but rather a rich and productive expansion, one that takes it far beyond what it has been into the realm of what it can be. In their rich and wide-ranging encounter, they affirm that the future of American Studies is one to which all can look forward.

Cyraina Johnson-Roullier
Co-Editor

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