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## American studies at the crossroads: a dialogue

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## AMERICAN STUDIES AT THE CROSSROADS: A DIALOGUE <sup>1</sup>

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### 1. TOWARD DECENTRALIZED AMERICAN STUDIES

American Studies does have a future. It is an inexorable future dictated by historical necessity. When necessity dictates, the outcome is not necessarily any more predictable than when the results might be dictated by chance or contingency. While human ingenuity has attained some success in preconditioning results, the law of unintended consequences is far from being domesticated to suit human intention, however.

While a future for American Studies may seem to be inevitable, then, the shape of that future is far from certain. A modest quotient of certainty in this regard might consist in the plausible likelihood that the future of American Studies will be different from what its past has been. The measure of this difference can be attributable to two factors: 1) the transformations in the object of study and, 2) the transformative character of the disciplinary and discursive instruments with which American Studies carries out its labors as scholarly and pedagogical institutional formation. The changing morphology of the first (America) outpaces the morphing parameters of the latter (the Studies).

Academic endeavors have tended to be in a reactive mode, devoted as they are to diagnosing phenomena after these manifest themselves in their particularities as subjects of diagnostic observation and analysis. The case of American Studies is doubly imperative in this regard, because the object of observation not only precedes the analytical, scholarly, and pedagogical labors of those who study the American phenomenon. In addition to this traditional primacy of the object of study, in the case of American Studies that object has historically determined the parameters, focus, language, and ideological determinants by which it has been studied. Thus, American Stud-

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<sup>1</sup> This dialogue first appeared as a part of the debate on 'The Politics of American Studies' in: *The Americanist: Warsaw Journal for the Study of the United States*, Vol. XXIII, eds. Agnieszka Graff, William Glass (Warsaw: The American Studies Center at Warsaw University). We wish to extend our warmest thanks to the Editors of *The Americanist* for their kind permission to reprint the 'Dialogue'.

ies have been foremost American more than anything else. It is here, in this anomalous relationship that trumps the scientific and analytical *modus operandi* of scholarly investigation and pedagogy, thereby making the primacy of the object of study doubly primal and determinative, that the future of American Studies will undergo the greatest transformation.

This transformation has, in fact, already begun in earnest with the founding of the International American Studies Association in 2000, with the Association's first world congress in Leiden, the Netherlands, in May of 2003, and with the galvanizing effect IASA's endeavors have already had on the field of American Studies. The symptoms of those effects can be documented in the defensive reaction-formations of already existent organizations such as the USA's national American Studies Association (ASA) and its 'International Initiative' launched in 2004, as well as in the activities of the European Association of American Studies (EAAS) toward consolidating its hold on its affiliate national American Studies associations in Europe, as well as in its energized campaign to ensure the incorporation of the new national associations in post-Soviet eastern Europe.

IASA, constantly challenged to justify its existence and to differentiate itself from already existent and officially sanctioned American Studies associations, views these reactions to its own endeavors to redefine the field as a scientifically more credible and analytically more rigorous international field of investigation in historical perspective. It would appear that it is an automatic reflex for such defensive action on the part of existing institutions whenever a paradigm shift appears on the horizon. Historically, the tendency in these reactions has been retrenchment, 'circling the wagons' as the American saying goes, or a rearguard reaffirmation of jurisdictional authority over turf that such entities have traditionally considered exclusively their own. This reassertion of territorial claims reiterates the unquestionable legitimacy of the existing structures and their institutional power as beyond question and as the privilege of priority, of having already been in existence no matter the changing character of reality. Simultaneously, this defensive self-assertion aims to de-legitimize and de-authorize any new formations—discursive, institutional, organizational, ideational, intellectual—that emerge as part of new realities.

This, then, is the current status of American Studies as the old formations try to fend off the reformations represented by the new. The end result of such counterpoint between vested interests of the already existent and exploratory ventures of the newly emergent tends to be some form of accommodation by which the old organizational structures and their discursive formations undergo certain inevitable adjustments necessary for survival in a new environment. The emergent structures and new paradigms slowly suffuse and transform the old. The International American Studies Association finds itself at the forefront of this counterpoint as harbinger of a changing reality and, at the same time, as target of those existing interests that inevitably feel threatened. The best course for a new organization such as IASA under these circumstances is constancy in adherence to rigorous intellectual standards, an unyielding congeniality and collegiality toward those who feel on the defensive as a result of its activities, no matter the slurs, barbs, vilifications, and rudeness those defensive reactions may direct at the new endeavor.



The future of American Studies, once these rearguard actions have burnt themselves out, will more than likely be less American, which is to say, they will be transnational and hemispheric, with the parameters of the object of investigation extending beyond the national borders of the USA. American Studies will also be multilingual, with the other major languages of America—that is, Spanish, Portuguese and French—as well as principal indigenous languages emerging as indispensable instruments for archival research and for diagnoses of cultural practices in the Western Hemisphere. The future of American Studies, as heralded by the International American Studies Association, will also be international. This means that the fulcrum and compass point of encompassing the parameters of what constitutes American Studies, as well as the perspectival focus from which America is observed and studied will no longer be exclusively America itself, or situated in the USA, as hitherto has been the case, with the object of study having been setting the intellectual agenda and investigative parameters of its own investigation. In this regard, organizations such as the US national American Studies Association will come to realize that no matter its good intentions for internationalizing American Studies, as a US institution and itself an object of case study, its efforts will succeed not in internationalizing American Studies, but its success in this regard will only mean the further Americanization of the international community of Americanists. Likewise, the European Association of American Studies, in re-drawing its parameters as a contained continent of Americanism, will only succeed in reiterating its morphology as a product of American history in Europe following World War II and now, as an emphatic reiteration of that history as sequel to that War and as a consequence of America's Cold War with the former Soviet Union. The incorporation of those post-Soviet national formations, in other words, re-define Europe's official American Studies as instituted within the fortress of EAAS as an American extension of American history in Europe in a post-Cold-War New World Order.

It is important to understand that the future of American Studies as announced and practiced by the members of the International American Studies Association are not anti-American. They may well be considered 'un-American', but this is part of their virtue, not a shortcoming, unless the infelicitous history of US persecution of what is deemed 'un-American' should resurface as revenant of the McCarthy Era that indelibly marked the mid-twentieth century. Intelligent human beings as serious professionals and committed intellectuals do not commit themselves to what they hate. There may well be pathological cases of obsessive-compulsive engagements with what certain individuals abhor, but these are decidedly aberrant instances of pathology. In fact, far from being anti-American, the emergent International American Studies takes America seriously enough to do more than serve as sycophantic echo, celebratory mirror, or acclamatory resonance of what America itself thinks it is.

The future of American Studies will have greater intellectual honesty and scholarly rigor than to succumb to the promptings of its object of study, whether these promptings be in the form of materials, money, access, or political validation. The emergent international American Studies, in fact, is already wary of such emoluments and of the validation that comes from America itself, whether through such American institutions as the US American Studies Association, or historically US-engendered

formations such as the EAAS. This is not to say that the International American Studies Association cannot engage productively in collaborative efforts and constructive cooperation with colleagues from the ASA or from the EAAS. It simply means that IASA must operate independently and as a self-critically alert intellectual agency outside of the aegis or hegemonic embrace of its object of study and its governmental institutions, including the ASA.

The future of American Studies, especially as a studiously un-American intellectual enterprise, will not be easy. The measure of the difficulty and the impediments put in front of that future, however, will be an index of the significance of that very future. Intellectual independence and professional integrity are not a concession. They are to be constantly attained through perseverance, commitment, and through the solidarity of the field's practitioners. While academic solidarity has often been considered as just that, 'purely academic', American Studies will be realizing more and more in the future that it is more than an 'academic' discipline in the pejorative sense. American Studies is already consequential in the sense that how America is investigated, taught, and written about matters very much to the reality of the world and to the world life not only of Americans, but of the rest of the world. Thus, the future American Studies particularly as envisioned and already practiced by the International American Studies Association, is not only international, it is worldly. It is worldly in the sense that the disciplinary hierarchies that have hitherto defined the field, with the humanities and cultural studies taking precedence over the analytical social sciences and the critical natural sciences, are already being subjected to a readjustment. The future American Studies is also worldly in the sense that America will not be dealt with as isolate, as exceptional, as incomparable. Rather, America is already being subjected to a relational treatment, in juxtaposition with historical realities and contemporary dynamics of realpolitik that circumscribe and define America as much as being defined by America. The International American Studies Association, as international and as global, occupies an optimal position for this relational and comparative treatment of the object of study. As the only global association of American Studies, IASA occupies a unique position from which an American Studies of the future can continue to be redefined as new realities emerge and as the transformations in the world require commensurate transformations in the discipline itself. This is the openness of the International American Studies Association as an intellectual enterprise, an openness that extends to its receptivity and inclusiveness of the diversity of practices among Americanists around the world.

*Djelal Kadir*

2. TRANSFORMATIONS OF AMERICAN STUDIES  
IN THE POLISH CONTEXT

It is impossible not to notice that the stance worked out by the founders and leading ideologists of the International American Studies Association characteristically inscribes itself into the discourse of decentralization, rooted in the tradition of post-structuralist thought. Likewise, it comes as no surprise that, while retaining intellectual consistence, such a stance assumes the necessity of reevaluating the paradigms of



thought. Such a reevaluation would respect not only factors sanctioning existing organizational structures, but also the character of a wide variety of disciplines of research, of which the common founding principle is most frequently the decentralization of discourses traditionally determining frames of research and its objects. (Such is the case of the discipline called 'Cultural Studies', from which domain the majority of original IASA membership derived).

Such a 'deconstructive' self-consciousness would not probably be considered unique if not for the fact that in most (if not all) activities endeavored by IASA it is the basis of the implemented and constantly corrected research perspective. Hence, such a framing has an immediate bearing upon the shape and direction of research practice. It seems that it is this perspective that accounts for the attractiveness of such organizations, especially for Americanists from outside of the United States, and particularly for researchers of the more junior generation. Still, to attempt an explanation of this phenomenon as pertaining to the context of the evolution of Polish American Studies, it seems useful first to illustrate some of the assumptions presented in the first part of the present dialogue with reference to concrete examples drawn from cultural practice—and then to offer a critical juxtaposition of the vision of the future of American Studies as offered by IASA against the developmental potential of the Polish American Studies in the light of factors conditioning everyday work of a Polish Americanist. This, also, is the central objective of the present reflection, which, perhaps, ought to begin with the clarification of elementary terminological distinctions: it is the popular usage of defining terms of the discipline that indicates the uniqueness of the perception of what 'American Studies' is in Poland.

As in the case of many Americanist discourses in Europe, in the Polish context 'American Studies', if not attributed specific qualifiers, would be predominantly (albeit in many cases incorrectly) associated with studies dedicated to problems related solely to the United States. American Studies understood 'hemispherically' is still a budding discipline. The reasons underlying such a state of affairs could be traced to a few complex phenomena, partly rooted in the history of Poland, partly related to the country's geopolitical location, largely dependent on the shape and evolution of Polish system of higher education and largely stemming from economic relations of the past and of the present. In a nutshell, American Studies in Poland is an academic discipline which evolved from the domain of English Philology (with which it is still frequently associated, both conceptually and institutionally) and from such disciplines as political science, history, art history, law and economy (as it is in the case of American Studies Centers in Łódź, Warsaw, or Cracow). Nonetheless, even though American Studies Centers in Poland (all of which are university-based) more and more frequently involve in their projects research done by scholars and scientists representing disciplines other than philology, the focal point of their activities remains, predominantly, the United States.

Also, the common usage of the term of 'American Studies' ('amerykanistyka') in Poland seems to indicate that in the Polish cultural practice the concept itself is synonymous to that of 'US Studies' rather than 'Studies of the Americas'. It is easy to observe that such disciplines as 'Canadian Studies', 'South American Studies', or 'Latin American Studies' still tend to function as 'separate', and that research on languages/cul-

tures of Polynesia, done by a handful of individual scholars, is usually developed within the structures of departments of Oriental, not Occidental, Studies. This conceptual (and cartographic) separation of fields testifies to the uniqueness of the 'optics' of the overall Polish scholarly perceptions of where America 'begins' and where it 'ends'. This perspective becomes comprehensible when one realizes that the majority of Polish Americanists—mostly associated with the Polish Association of American Studies (PAAS), which in itself is institutionally tied to the European Association for American Studies (EAAS), supported by the US administration and concentrating primarily upon research respecting the United States—are almost exclusively English philologists. The majority of Polish Americanists resort to various forms of research support offered by American or Polish-American institutions, such as the Batory Foundation (financed by the George Soros Foundation), the Kościuszko Foundation, or the Polish-American Fulbright Commission. At the same time, it is important to realize that in recent years, a group of Polish scholars specializing in American Studies understood broadly, have joined IASA, and that their numbers increase from year to year. At that, it must be noted that in their work most of these scholars focus upon problems related to the US and Canada and, not unlike their American or Western European colleagues, most of them usually retain double or multiple organizational membership for reasons to be addressed in detail in the end of this part of the present dialogue.

Bearing in mind the essentially US-focused orientation of the Polish American Studies, it is obvious that the problems emerging as an effect of the conceptual crisis resulted in a breakthrough in the ways of thinking about the United States. The crisis, which gained a global dimension and certainly exerted tangible impact upon the transformations of the conception of American Studies in the West, seems to be of central importance in the context of the evolution of this discipline in Poland, too. The above notwithstanding, the particularity of circumstances in which Polish American Studies evolve might decide about the fact that the future of the discipline, although it may unfold along the same general lines as has been that of American Studies in Western countries, may still take a unique evolutionary path. To shed more light upon these phenomena, it seems worthwhile to return to problems sketched out in the first part of this dialogue and to illustrate them with particular examples.

There is no doubt that the vision of the future projected by IASA and aspired to by its members became especially attractive when the Americanist world was left with no other option but to face a serious ethical choice. After September 11, 2001 it was no longer possible to retain a neutral stance with respect to the foreign policy of the United States, or not to reflect upon the status of Americanist institutions, whose activities have for years been legitimized by the American administration. The Americanist milieu were placed in a position in which they had to resist the rhetoric of polarization, especially that a vast majority of intellectuals in the US shared (and continue to share) a strongly critical understanding of the discourse of the 'ethical United States' as created in the media by a variety of institutionalized factors. Yet, the urge to take a stance and declare one's allegiance to one of the camps, the separation of which became especially clear in the light of the rhetoric fostered by the US administration, proved burning. The American government, reverting to the well-tested lan-





guage that largely resembled that of notorious totalitarianism,<sup>2</sup> officially redefined the historical concept of patriotism.<sup>3</sup> After the tragedy of the World Trade Center, the 'exiling' of the awareness of dangers resulting from the American foreign policy into the soothing sphere of 'potentiality' as well as the retention of the idealistic (or comfortable) faith in the essential correspondence of the values preached by the American political elites and their practice became too difficult, since both demanded from individuals and groups an intellectual and moral compromise of an unacceptable scale. The gaping abyss between the 'good America' and the 'evil America' could no longer be 'discursively liquidated': the wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq have become tangibly real. When their 'pretextual' character eventually became publicly known, the long-shaped model of thinking, talking, and writing about America, preferred and fostered by the official factors, collapsed. It was no longer possible to read the self-deconstructive, yet evidently harmful game of appearances, upon which the broadly propagated 'mediatized vision' of American international relations (i.e. that in which other countries were presented as US partners and in which the world was not located in the periphery of the United States), as a discursive strategy alone.

The first armed conflict, resting, as may be suspected, upon economic foundations (to which the maps of natural resources and the geopolitical location of Afghanistan seem to testify) began as a political act of retaliation: it served the purpose of satisfying the demand of the American public anxious to see the success of an immediate counterstrike against the terrorists responsible for the attacks of September 11, 2001. And even though according to official declarations the military action in Afghanistan was supposed to mark the beginning of the war against terror, it is difficult to resist the impression that it served as a political ersatz, a substitutive gesture. In terms of international relations, the aggressor in the conflict was, in fact, the world's superpower, while the object of the attack (and of long-lasting political manipulation before it) was a destitute, desert country, exhausted by guerilla wars, a state whose citizens were suffering extreme poverty and in which (possibly) the Al Qaeda terrorists found their shelter. The second conflict, also economically driven, and also transmuting into a war waged against an opponent incomparably weaker in terms of affluence or military power, escalated soon afterward. The war was declared without the acceptance of the United Nations, beyond the structures of NATO and on the excuse of the prevention of the development of the alleged Iraqi mass-destruction arsenal. This time, however, the war was 'marketed' with the use of a catchy slogan of 'Iraqi Freedom' and, in the tone of the propagandist lingo adopted thrice before, as 'war on terrorism'. Still, to most specialists and many non-specialists it is clear that even though the two military acts failed to efficiently counteract the actions of terrorist organizations responsible for the attacks against the US, they allowed America to gain and keep control of the vital energy resources, to fortify its military outposts in the strategic points of

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<sup>2</sup> I developed this concept in a short popular article 'The 2004 Election—Opinion', *Newsday*, Tuesday, November 2, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, a controversial piece of legislature, the USA Patriot Act, whose full title reads: 'Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA PATRIOT) Act of 2001'. Especially important is the debate the passing of the Act triggered in various milieux, as documented in numerous Internet forums and websites.



the world and facilitated the efforts the US administration would take to retain public support and to pass laws severely limiting the civic freedoms constituting the ideological foundations of its own country.

The costs, as is always the case in the time of war, continue to be paid by countless innocent people on both sides of the conflict; the profits, as one can imagine, are becoming the share of corporations. The world confirmed its doubts as to the real significance of the United Nations and, consequently, lost its sense of safety as soon as it realized the non-existence of efficient mechanisms to control international affairs within the geopolitical structure of the dynamics of power after the downfall of the Soviet Union.

It came as no surprise, however, that the image of the 'good America', the America unblemished by any serious errors in the long-term practice of its foreign policy, 'America-the Partner' fighting for the 'common good cause', continued to be fostered in the media and through the political rhetoric employed by the spokespersons and leaders of the administration of the United States. Still, even though this image has become by far the most popular object of critical analyses, it is because it has been institutionally sanctioned and legitimized by the military and monetary power of the state that it has come to constitute an important component of one of the most easily predictable (and, in the context of a military conflict, the only efficient) strategies of shaping the international and internal reception of the United States. The strategy employed by the US government seems to be deeply rooted in the philosophy of political realism, which, exploiting the efficiency of the idealist propaganda, departs from the ideals themselves. It rests exclusively upon the relations derivative of the economic and military power of the country, as well as upon the effectiveness of lobbying and of the overall home policy as measured by the number of votes. The rather blatant legibility of the principles of 'Realpolitik' introduced into the public space, however, deepened the already profound dilemma of world-wide Americanists, whose activities suddenly gained additional, thus far unnoticed or neglected, ethical and methodological dimensions.

Undoubtedly, the breakthrough that affected the public discourse of America caused a serious crisis in the Americanist *Weltanschauung* as well, which not only yielded results in terms of the increase of membership of the organizations independent of US financing and offering a vision of reality wherein the discourse of values is no longer an effect of the central position of the United States in the world, but also produced a crisis of self, that affected predominantly researchers affiliated with ASA, EAAS and other 'established' organizations institutionally supported by the US administration. The doubts were inevitable: is it possible to foster scholarly activities which would not be ethically dubious while financing them from the purse of the American governmental institutions, whose long-term political strategy seems to question the values preached and results in conflicts bringing death and suffering to thousands of innocent people? How far would the intellectual and ethical compromise have to go if one were to logically assume that the financing institution might not be interested in the promotion of stances critical with respect to itself? How can one be sure that America as an institution funding research dedicated to itself will not tie its granting policy to methodologies with which it prefers to be researched and to the language



in which it chooses to be described? Would such a policy not disqualify or stall alternative approaches? Ultimately, would it be realistic to hope that the 'established' organizations may become internally transformed in a way which would allow their members to eventually bring about a real, tangible change in the styles of thinking of America and, finally, in America herself?

Answers to these and similar questions, however, are rarely simple. Most importantly, it is clear that the Americanist organizations funded by US institutions are bodies associating thousands of more or less influential intellectuals, of whom a grand majority refuse to accept the principles of the US foreign policy adopted by the administration. It does not seem unusual, then, that many of them, declaring themselves as opponents of the militaristic politics fostered by George W. Bush's administration, have taken action leading toward the reform of the 'old' established institutions, which is facilitated by the fact that these institutions, as 'democratic' bodies, are capable of self-transformation and constantly evolve. Owing to the fact that these organizations have developed a complex infrastructure, they are also influential enough to be able to exert impact upon the consciousness of younger generations of Americans as well as, to a degree, upon the current actions of politicians.

Initially, however, in order to keep functioning within the frames of the government-subsidized organizations without ethical misgivings, it seemed inevitable to develop a unique, theodicy-like discourse, which would explain and justify one's own presence within the structures funded by a state perceived as a rogue state. This, in turn, triggered the necessity of solving more complex dilemmas of methodological nature, concerning primarily the consequences of the traditional assumptions of a) the central position of the United States in Americanist research and, in effect, the marginal position of remaining countries of both American continents; b) the central position of the English language as that in which scholarly reflection finds its expression, in which most Americanist studies are published and from which texts are translated into other languages, and c) the relationship of primacy between America as the institution financing research and America as the object of such research.

The task of seeking and arriving at convincing solutions to thus-formulated problems is not a simple one. Therefore, it is not surprising that many scholars, both within and outside of the US, often long-term members of the 'established' organizations, have chosen parallel membership in the independent organizations, such as IASA, whose assumptions, at least today, do not require of their members any ethical compromise and warrant the freedom of conscience. Importantly, these scholars have usually never ceased to be members of the US-centered organizations: the majority of the members of the IASA Executive Council are not only members, but also high officers of the governing bodies of such associations as ASA. As such, their *Weltanschauungs* are central in the process of shaping and transforming these organizations, as is clearly visible in the ASA Resolutions signed on October 12, 2006, sent out to participants of the ASA Annual Meeting entitled 'The United States from Inside and Out: Transnational American Studies', which was held in Oakland, CA. The text of both documents is quoted *in extenso* below:

## RESOLUTION ON THE IRAQ WAR

(Adopted by the National Council of the American Studies Association on October 12, 2006)

WHEREAS the American Studies Association is an organization dedicated to the preservation of free academic inquiry for peoples the world over; and

WHEREAS the US invasion of Iraq and the consequent stifling of civil liberties threaten academic freedom and compromise scholarly integrity; and

WHEREAS the American Studies Association is committed to promoting education opportunities for all students here and beyond our borders; and

WHEREAS military recruiters are disproportionately enlisting working-class students and students of color, and interfering with their completion of secondary and higher educations;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the American Studies Association calls for the end of the war and the withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq.

## Resolution on Intellectual Freedom in a Time of War

(Adopted by the National Council of the American Studies Association on November 14, 2002)

As teachers and scholars of American culture and history we are deeply concerned about the storm of attacks on intellectual freedom and the ebb of open public debate, in the name of patriotism and a war on terror.

Free and frank intellectual inquiry is under assault by overt legislative acts and by a chilling effect of secrecy and intimidation in the government, media and on college campuses. This atmosphere hinders our ability to fulfill our role as educators: to promote public debate, conduct scholarly research, and most importantly, teach our students to think freely and critically and to explore diverse perspectives. Democracy is predicated on the right to question our government and leaders openly and to express dissent without fear. We are told, in fact, that our nation is ready to go to war to protect this precious freedom. The threat of war should not restrict public debate, as it often has in our nation's past. Vigorous debate and the widest possible discussion are crucial to the health of our democracy.

We would like to draw attention to the following developments since September 11, 2001:

\*The FBI and INS are asking universities and colleges to monitor and provide information about students from countries outside the US. This creates a climate of intimidation and suspicion inimical to free participation and exchange of ideas. Government contracts for scientific research now specify that international students be excluded from funded projects. Such conditions discourage international students from participating in our long tradition of international academic exchange crucial to the development of US higher education. We applaud those universities that turn down these contracts and challenge the legality of FBI collaboration, and we encourage all administrations to follow suit. Denying equal rights and due process to foreign students creates an atmosphere of suspicion and fear for all of our students and drastically limits their intellectual universe

\*The justice department's new limits on the Freedom of Information Act jeopardizes our rights as scholars and citizens to have access to government information. For scholars seeking to understand our nation's history, this law has been profoundly important in providing documents from all branches of government. These documents have shed especially important light on the history of movements for social change and American intervention abroad, histories which can better help us understand our own times. Access to documents also helps citizens make informed decisions about current policy and keeps government accountable. The FOIA was intended to reverse what now seems an alarming trend toward unprecedented government secrecy. It is imperative today that scholars and journalists in all fields have the widest possible access to information generated by our own government.

\*The USA PATRIOT Act severely limits our most important tasks as scholars and teachers. Books and CD-ROMs are being removed from Federal depository libraries, and web sites are being closed for presumed terrorist ties. The ability of librarians to do their work is threatened by federal agencies that demand they turn over patron records. The rights of library users and book buyers are at risk when



federal agencies can request these records, and our right to privacy—even to our own thoughts—is at risk when the government can monitor what we read. We urge the repeal of this act, which threatens to erode the foundation of intellectual freedom.

\*University administrations are under pressure to silence faculty and researchers who take unpopular political positions. Organizations such as Campus Watch publish lists of faculty and students critical of US foreign policy, especially vis-à-vis Israel. They represent a broad trend among conservative commentators, who call for the censorship of faculty dissent and equate criticism of the government with being anti-American and anti-patriotic. We call on colleges and universities to resist external pressure to curtail academic freedom and to stop aiding federal agencies in the surveillance of teachers and scholars with scholarly or familial ties to other countries.

History teaches us that we must reflect on who the 'we' of the American polity is and who the 'enemy' is, especially in a time of war when lives are at stake at home and abroad. As students of American history and culture, we hear disturbing echoes of World War I and the McCarthy era, when the government imprisoned its critics, and institutions of higher learning dismissed antiwar or 'subversive' professors. The presumption that foreign students and teachers and Americans of Arab, Muslim, and South Asian descent are either 'terrorists' or 'the enemy' evokes shameful memories of the deportation of political dissidents during WWI, and the internment of Americans of Japanese descent during WWII. The intimidation of political dissidents and those perceived as foreign threatens the right of free speech for all and debases our American traditions of civil liberty, tolerance and inclusion.

To avoid repeating that ignominious history, we urge our colleagues, university administrations and elected representatives to repeal those policies, laws, and acts of censorship that endanger intellectual freedom. We affirm our commitment to classrooms where ideas are exchanged freely; to libraries where scholars can work free from intimidation for their political beliefs; to laboratories where students and teachers are free from suspicion because of their ethnic affiliations; and to campuses open to the widest range of opinions. Intellectual freedom—the freedom to ask questions, to uncover facts, to speak independently without fear—is the foundation of our democracy and remains of critical importance, especially in a time of crisis.

The title of the Conference and the Resolutions quoted above evidently testify to the merit of the foresight informing the statement Djelal Kadir makes in the first sentence of his essay. American Studies does have a future, and the present day direction of the unfolding of this future seems to have largely depended on the catalytic activity of organizations such as IASA. Still, even before transformations of the 'established' organizations have achieved the moment, in which their membership declares non-ambiguously its dissent from the principles of the dominant policy, Polish Americanists, who, like other Polish scholars, have to function in the context of severely under-funded, or outright neglected system of education, have developed a rational stance with respect to the problems described throughout this bipartite reflection. As long-term members of the US-centered, 'established' organizations, they carry out research focusing on the United States, which in the Polish cultural context is of particular importance not only owing to the traditional pro-Americanness of the Polish cultural imagination, but also due to the recent transformations of the country, which used to look to America as it strove to retain its identity under communist rule and now must seek to reinvent many of its aspects in the context of its recent accession to the European Union. Bearing in mind the centrality of US studies in Poland, American institutions still remain invaluable as both catering to the intellectual needs of the Polish scholars and offering sources of funding, without which no Americanist representing a financially underprivileged country would be able to develop. Without intellectual exchange, access to libraries, exposure to American life, without up-to-date

knowledge of the practical functioning of the American language, generating valuable intellectual propositions seems to be almost impossible, unless these propositions should draw heavily on theory alone.

Still, even though the American-funded organizations understandably focus upon the USA and its relations, scholars often develop a dual perspective upon the object of their studies by becoming involved in the activities fostered by IASA and similar organizations, whose multilingual, hemispheric, transatlantic and transpacific projects offer 'a decentralized' alternative to centralistic Americanist discourses. In the light of such alternatives, the United States, being the object of research and providing a source of its financing, albeit understandably centralizing the focus of research, no longer imposes the discourse of centrality of American values upon academic reflection. Researchers often study America and its relations in a transnational perspective, which effectively decentralizes the object of research (as is the case in comparative studies) and, often, also the language in which this object is conceptualized and described.

Moreover, the milieux representing the 'established' organizations offer now what seems to be a highly unprejudiced reception of 'politically incorrect' propositions, often characterizing the non-American research perspectives. Texts expressly critical with respect to the US foreign policy receive unbiased reviews and become published in the volumes of proceedings as well as in academic journals maintained by these organizations, which definitely bridges what originally seemed to be an unbridgeable ethical and political abyss between the US-sponsored and independent Americanist discourses.

Although everything that has been written here belongs to the space of the obvious, the ultimate ethical argument against radical judgments concerning Americanist scholarship exercised within the frames of organizations sponsored by US institutions is the directionality of the transfer of values. Irrespective of the adopted research perspective, it is impossible to deny that despite the crisis, the advancement of the processes dubbed as Americanization is a fact. America still remains one of the most productive donors of values—and thus also the donor of language, under which a major (and constantly growing) proportion of the global society conceptualizes, describes, and understands the world. In the context of the cultural domination of the US, which manifests itself also in the almost exclusively centrifugal transfer of values, it is possible to hypothesize that the metanarrative will evolve in the direction of the decentralized polyphony on condition that the initial impulse comes from 'the inside', i.e., from those Americanists' organizations which possess financial means and are politically influential, but which also acknowledge the global protest against the present day state of affairs. A scenario in which the values begin to flow 'from the outside' and America is their passive acceptor seems largely unrealistic; visions based upon such a projection border upon *nad'vete*.

The 'external' stimulus, however, is the context in which the activity of independent organizations (i.e., those which have not been called into existence or are financed by American governmental institutions) emerges as necessary. Independent, open, and unrestricted activity, translating itself into publications, conferences, modern channels of thought exchange, and syllabi, and influencing everyday academic practice,



may exert direct or indirect, tangible impact upon the development of modes of self-consciousness of organizations of 'central' status, and thus perform a unique 'catalytic' function. Competing with 'hegemonic' organizations, associations such as IASA generate the impulse stimulating transformations both at the global level (by propagating their own vision of the 'decentered' American Studies) and at the level of paradigms adopted by the 'old' formations (since, as 'new' and 'competitive' they motivate the 'old' ones to implement reforms and to acknowledge the need of intellectual revisions). By opening forums for thought exchange and encouraging their members to participate in debates organized by other (frequently those established) institutions, they dynamize the language and influence the direction of the evolution of discourse. Propagating multilingualism, they remove the English language from its unquestioned central position as the default language of research, as that which supplies the discursive *instrumentarium* and, eventually, as that which 'logically' appears the most 'convenient' and most 'practical' means of communication owing to its range determined by the tragic history of colonization and expansion.

In the light of the research carried out within the frames of IASA, America becomes a double continent: one inextricably linked with islands and archipelagos of the adjacent oceans and historically shaped by its relations to all other continents of the world. Informed by such a perspective, the United States no longer is synonymous with America, an entity somewhat automatically envisaged as a continent-state at the margins of which Canada, Mexico, Central and South American countries and the islands of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans are located. Here, America is narrated in all dominant American languages—and these narratives undergo translation not only from English into other languages, but also from other languages into English. The necessity of translation is, however, moderated by the promotion of functional multilingualism among researchers and students. The traditional barriers of time and space have been bridged by the application of modern information technology: IASA has its own electronic journal, *The Review of International American Studies (RIAS)*, its own Internet Center for Thought Exchange,<sup>4</sup> including chat rooms, forums, center for book exchange, interactive bibliography of Americanist publications by members, interactive hyperlink collection, member homepages, and workspaces for working groups. The technological basis of these tools was developed by CMS Design Company 'Soft for Humans'<sup>5</sup> specifically to cater to the needs of scholars involved in transatlantic, transpacific, and transnational projects. It allows the organization of workflow and real-time communication among collaborating individuals. Thus, the rhizomatic Internet not only helps the Association to eliminate high costs related to traditional forms of communication, but also, providing the virtual workspace and a digital meeting place for international scholars, it de-centers the perspective of Americanist research even further.

This corresponds fully to other epistemological assumptions of IASA leaders. Cultural and economic relations of the America(s) are demonstrated with full awareness of the importance of relational epistemologies and hence the perspectives adopted for

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.iasa-rias.org>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.softforhumans.com>



the purpose of such studies range from hemispheric (meridian perspectives) to transatlantic and transpacific (parallel perspectives). Importantly, the 'center', characteristic for more traditional Americanist discourses, is not simply 'removed' from the US and 'relocated' somewhere else, but becomes permanently dispersed.

Still, it is clear that such a methodological stance is by no means anti-American. Conversely, by dethroning 'one and only' truth, it demonstrates a more complex, broader and more honest truth; a truth that is both changeable and evolving, prone to self-deconstruction and self-conscious of its dependence on the dynamics of the relational discourse. This is the vision of American Studies capable of shaping the generations to come: generations of wise individuals, communities and societies, cherishing the value of mutual respect, celebrating difference, abolishing prejudice, and thus building the world without wars. This is the vision of the end of the crisis that affected the United States, the Americas, and the whole Western world. That this vision has already inspired a group of followers within the most influential Americanist milieu is evident: the fact that Professor Emory Elliott, a member of the Executive Committee of IASA is now the President of ASA is symbolic of the increasing significance of the epistemological horizons worked out by IASA. The 'new' inspired the 'old' and thus the criterion of independence of the US financing is no longer necessarily valid as the basis for distinctions serving the purpose of the assessment of the character of contemporary Americanist organizations.

The transformations of the recent years allow one to harbor hope for further change. Poland, now a member of the EU and a co-signer of the Bologna Agreement, is now in the process of reconceptualization and consequent restructuring of its system of higher education. These developments serve to facilitate the functioning of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), which will tangibly influence the formula of teaching American Studies to students, who, for instance, may choose to develop their knowledge of America through the medium of two or three languages simultaneously and may focus their research on any aspect of American culture, should they wish to take courses warranting their expertise in the field.

Such changes do not seem reversible: in their light, the condition of the ethical and epistemological 'dissociation' in American Studies seems to be coming to an end. Nonetheless, the transformations already ascertainable do not disqualify the validity of Djelal Kadir's warning and do not eliminate potential dangers related to the possibility of institutional manipulation of the honesty of the academic world. They do, however, awaken hopes deeply rooted in the idealistic faith in a better, post-nationalist world, from which nobody will exclude anyone else, in which no-one will exile anyone to its margins, in which otherness will not be the underside of sameness but an order of multiplicity and variation. One day, such a world must become a fact, and this vision will most probably be dear to any Polish Americanist, whose attempts at making sense of America attempting to making sense of itself directly influence the process of the revaluation of his or her understanding of the world with America and Poland in it, and of himself or herself in the world.

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