



ABANDONING AMERICA THE BETTER TO SAVE AMERICAN STUDIES

A Proposal

Following the victory of Donald Trump in the US presidential elections, an American friend of mine, a scientist living in the Netherlands, posted a triptych of “Diatribes” on Facebook. The first one began:

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We’re in Crete at the moment to celebrate our anniversary, but of course the timing means we’re mostly talking about the election. In contrast to most people we know in the Netherlands, many people we have talked to here are fairly pro-Trump. When asked why, the answers mostly cluster into three groups: those who think Trump is an “outsider” and will provide a well-needed shakeup to the “corrupt” government, those who think he is a successful, “self-made” businessman who will fix the US economy, and those who just think Hillary is a “bitch.” The people we are speaking to are not American, so it’s almost like a spectator sport for them and everyone in the world feels they have a right to an opinion on the US, which to be honest is fair because as a “superpower” our decisions will ultimately affect them as well. [...] But anyway, because these people are not directly responsible for Trump’s win, I somehow I [sic] find it easier to rationally try to consider and discuss with them their points of view, which obviously echo many of the reasons people give for voting for Trump in the US, and to think a bit more about how these viewpoints have leaked across the ocean. (14 November 2016, 1:15 pm)

Captured in a very informal fashion here are some essential aspects of what we might call “demotic” international American Studies: the everyday, variously banal and heated practice all across the world of watching what happens in the US, with the imperative feeling that you—whatever and wherever you might be in this world—“have a right to an opinion on the US” because what

happens in the US will extend across oceans, continents, borders and media to shape your life.

What is unusual in the post is the window it offers onto an American directly and personally engaging this global perspective. It appeals to her at this moment precisely for the distance it offers, the breathing space, as it were, from US developments that are otherwise too painful and distressing. While her US citizenship enables and impels her personal participation in the election process, the Cretan setting allows her to temper her affect and, for an extended moment, take on the role of a spectator. Crete allows her the distance from cascading emotion and intensifying politicization, from the direct confrontation with “America,” the better to undertake critical analysis.

At the same time, for the Cretans with whom my friend is discussing Trump—as for most other global spectators—there is only limited possibility for finetuning the distance at which they engage the US. The political imbalance between the US and the world translates into a corresponding imbalance in directing closeness and distance at every level, from the most intangible to the most brutal. Since the Cold War, the US has asserted a mandate to intervene anywhere in the world its interests are at stake; the rest of the world, however, has few such possibilities to “close the gap” at its own initiative. By necessity there is limited room to act, primarily by reacting to the vagaries of changing US desire and fears, administrations and interests. Osama Bin Laden’s attack on 9/11 was an attempt to disrupt this logic by piercing US space at his own instigation, not only physically but also ideologically, semiotically and affectively. As such, he was exceptionally effective, even as US hysterical overreaction plunged the Middle East into an exponentially fracturing and expanding terrain of gruesome civil wars.

Correspondingly, the world’s “distance” from or closeness to the gaze and impact of US power is a political, ideological, identitarian and affective process more than a geographic one. While this sounds obvious in an age of globalized technology, media and politics, the effects are striking. The consequences become immediately apparent, for example, if we consider the very different structures of power, intimacy, accommodation and aversion

that the US maintains with distant Israel versus with neighboring Mexico. The US shares with Mexico an entangled history older than itself, a vast borderland stretching two-thirds its length, more than half a trillion dollars in trade and millions of citizens. While relations on the ground are dynamic, creative and richly textured, the border is at the same time in Gloria Anzaldúa's words *una herida abierta*, an open wound, a scab hemorrhaging. Here a combination of physical, geographic intimacy and political distancing become the perfect incubators for inhumane exploitation. So even while the US and Mexico form a vast tapestry of social, cultural, artistic and economic relations—the “Greater Mexico” of Américo Paredes' incisively visionary formulation (Paredes and Bauman)—*formal* US relations with Mexico have entailed an asymmetry forcefully imprinting on that tapestry practices of harsh extraction and exclusion (Weintraub, Contreras, Huntington, Piccato, Gould, Thelen “Democracy in Mexico,” Aguayo, Valdés-Ugalde). This has birthed a complex blend of lived intimacy, vibrant syncretism, negotiated hierarchy, institutional exploitation, carceral and militant alienation, and inhumane violence, whose effect is to position Mexico at once “too close for comfort” and “too far for agency” relative to the centers of US culture, identity and power.

The development of Hemispheric American Studies has produced rich and critical bodies of work addressing these developments. Crucially, however, it has done so by reconfiguring the “America” in American Studies into a regional/continental conception. This is essential and critically cutting-edge relative to persistent national, exceptionalist conceptions of the United States in US political, social and cultural imaginaries. And yet there is a fundamental weakness relative to current events insofar as a hemispheric approach fails to fundamentally engage the place of continental regionalism in an intensely globalized world. This is a world in which questions of distance and nearness, entanglement, identity and aversion increasingly hopscotch across the planet, no more bound by continental boundaries than they are by national ones. In such a world, US fears of immigrants while consistently anti-Hispanic, for example, are at the same time hysterically anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, anti-Syrian and anti-refugee.

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Some years ago, in 2009, the New Southernist Jon Smith writing a review of Levander and Levine's anthology *Hemispheric American Studies* argued:

If the work on such spheres is as brilliant as so much of the scholarship in this volume, I certainly look forward to [the] emergence [of unknown "other spheres"]. Yet I cannot help thinking that as a theoretical and practical matter, the hemispheric approach to American studies [...] may have reached its apogee [...]. The reasons are embarrassingly obvious, and I am hardly the first to observe them: the supplanting, across disciplines, of postcolonial discourse by globalization discourse [...]; the question why, comparatist and transnational possibilities having been revealed, one would limit oneself to merely hemispheric incompatibilities and connections [...]; and the point (again) that, no matter how much the editors intend their title to "put pressure on the word 'American,'" the practical effect is to put pressure on the word "hemispheric," which in the present context remains the new *new*, the latest adjectival satellite to orbit the unchanging phrase "American studies." (Smith)

While recognizing the richness of the interpretations offered in the specific collection under review, Smith rightly questions if a hemispheric framework is adequate to the condition of our world. This is a world that is, in crucial though not all ways, more global than hemispheric. The critical relevance of this point becomes particularly clear when we juxtapose the place of Mexico in US history, politics and imaginary to that of Israel. Deeply embedded in the Middle East, it is at the same time a country that in practice is constituted by US society and administrations as "closer" to the US and whose responses to and activism within the US—institutional and individual—far exceed the formal impact of neighboring Mexico. Even as Mexico's geographic closeness to the US entails not only syncretism but also a critical and at times vicious distortion of the nature of those relations and Mexican perspectives, Israel's geographic distance allows an ideological and cultural sense of intimacy (though one, at moments, equally distorted).

Located a continent and more than 7,000 miles away in western Asia, with less than one-tenth the trade with the US (\$35 billion) compared to Mexico, even as the US Jewish population (6 million) is less than one-fifth that of Mexican-Americans (33 million), Israel has nonetheless for decades experienced not just consistent and comprehensive bipartisan US support but strong affective

identification in which informal lines of entanglement between the US and Israel (social, religious, cultural) and formal political ones reinforce one another (McAlister, Ben-Zvi, Tov, Inbar & Gilboa, Little). This conjunction has translated into three billion dollars of annual foreign aid; an extremely close military and intelligence relation; US silent assent to Israeli nuclear weapons and acceptance of legalized land grabs, military occupation, and discriminatory laws for non-Jewish Israeli citizens; dozens of UN Security Council vetoes protecting Israel; and one of the closest international alliances, even as sizable portions of US and Israel populations strongly identify with one another.

Not only do Israeli and US Jews continue to have a sense of shared destiny despite significant political, cultural and religious divergences (“American and Israeli Jews: Twin Portraits from Pew Research Center Surveys”) but support for Israel is even stronger among US Evangelicals than among US Jews (Lipka). Much like overwhelming support among evangelicals for Donald Trump in the presidential election (Shellnutt, but see also Carter), support for Israel, while often framed through a Biblical and Judeo-Christian discourse, entails most strongly of all a more general alignment of affect and identity that in the US still largely crosses religious, political and economic lines (even as they are becoming more important in shaping attitudes towards Israel). Quite similarly, and notwithstanding significant differences in experience, sensibility, and history, Israelis overwhelmingly perceive the United States as their closest ally and friend (Physical distance is both erased and essential to this intimacy of identification, while religious, cultural and political differences are flattened along the way).

It is crucial to note, however, that US emotional identification with and sense of closeness to Israel—in part through the concerted efforts of the constellation of organizations, religious leaders, publicists, scholars and media platforms encompassed by the “Israel Lobby” (with AIPAC’s influence in Washington ranked second only to that of the NRA)—dovetails both with the powerful interests of the US arms and oil industries and with the US will to project power in the Middle East (Hamdan). The intensity of the US-Israel “closeness” depends, then, on the ways in which identarian, realist, religious and liberal concerns reinforce one another in a rather

exceptional fashion under conditions of high politicization, polarization and regional conflict. Crucially, at the formal political level, the process is reciprocal. So, when Donald Trump recently signed an executive order to expand the border wall between the US and Mexico—under highly politicized and polarized US domestic conditions—Israel’s right-wing nationalist Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu tweeted his unvarnished support, citing the wall that he himself had erected between Israel and Egypt.

In doing so, Netanyahu’s tweet enacts a political and ideological “closeness” to an explicitly pro-Israel Trump/United States while creating “distance” and fury from Mexico’s Jewish community (Woody), a range of Israelis (Ravid), and North American Jews threatened by Trump’s flirtation with anti-Semitic standpoints (Dawsey, Silow-Carroll), angered by Trump’s discrimination against Muslims (Dolsten) and now moving to create sanctuary synagogues (T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights). The latter, rather significantly, follow in the footsteps of the sanctuary church movement that first emerged in the 1980s to protect Central American refugees crossing the Mexico-US border to escape state violence but denied asylum by the Reagan administration for political reasons.

As in the case of US identification with Israel, in which “hard” interests line up with “soft” identifications, Netanyahu’s tweet aligns with Israeli economic interests enthusiastically offering their expertise and products to expand and further securitize the US-Mexico border fences (“Israeli Technology to Keep US Borders Safe,” Christopher, “Texas and Israel Finding Solutions for Border Security,” Ferziger). At the same time, US militarization of its border is used to legitimize Israel’s own walls in the West Bank and at the border with Egypt. That is to say, we today confront the ironic, counter-intuitive situation where the intensified construction of securitized borders in the name of *national* security and the exclusion of alien threats becomes at the same time a means to perform, argue and materialize a particular *international* political, cultural and economic solidarity. It is a situation that engenders, reproduces and internalizes precisely that which it seeks to prevent: a further diffusion of the national and the global into each other. Even as the particular arguments for such borders

are nationalist, increasingly today their legitimation is the extent to which they are part of what is in fact a highly globalized reactionary response. Our condition today is such that technology, multinational capitalism and global migration have permanently disrupted the nation-state both as horizon of (moral, social, economic and political) community and as a fantasized possibility of pure, homogeneity. If in the 19th century, the consolidation of nation-states was part of the forward-looking trajectory of innovative modernization (*even when national origins were anchored in hoary, mythic pasts*), today the vector of rising authoritarian, right-wing nationalism is nostalgic, backward-yearning, fearful. It seeks to protect and return us to an imaginary recent-yet-impossible-to-locate past as a way of fleeing the present: to stop time as it were. Unable to stop time, it seeks to prevent movement: of people, culture, welfare and democratic participation.

Where does this leave American Studies—as a field and as a demotic global practice? In order to answer this question, it is useful to consider the ways in which such border regimes and anti-migrant securitization more generally entail the simultaneous intensification and disruption of national sovereignty. On the one hand, our nation-states make ever more extravagant attempts to secure absolute control over territorial demographics in the name of safeguarding democracy, social relations, and the nation's existential future from pollution, corruption and capture by a feared and despised (migrant/ethno-racial) minority. This control can only come, however, through weakening, bracketing, ignoring or repudiating the rule of law as a neutral and objective practice applied equally to all regardless their social status, power, or place in society.

Then tension between these—securitization at the expense of the democratically egalitarian and inclusive rule of law—is conjoined with a second tension. In theory, liberal democracies are committed to recognizing and protecting universal human rights as such: universal. At the same time, however, the nation-state system explicitly is based on a fundamental distinction between the citizen and non-citizen. The result is that our states feel less compunction to enforce the rights of non-citizens and great pressure, often, to violate them. At the same time, geopolitical

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inequality means that some nation-states will have great impact on the lives of people living far beyond their territorial borders. Correspondingly, the prime institution that we have to enforce human rights—and more generally engender democratic societies—are the very same ones that are most active in violating them domestically and internationally.

Given the global power and influence of the United States, it is time for American Studies to engage this fundamental social, political, legal, ethical and existential challenge of our time. The question is: drawing on the traditions of critical thought within American Studies how might we imagine what comes after the nation-state [...] even as this may entail imagining what comes after “America”? This entails, among other things, a critical reassessment of the place of the world, and of demotic global analyses of the United States, in American Studies. It also requires considering the place of the world in not just the academic discipline but also the actual political practice, organizations and formal institutions of the United States. Currently, the highly-evolved global demotic American Studies aflow across our planet lacks formal global political representation. At the most basic level, regardless of the impact of US foreign policy on the world, the world cannot shape or find itself formally represented in the political system of the US. In this sense, the world’s demotic American Studies is anything but democratic. Quite the opposite: foreign nationals—whatever the influence of the elections on their lives—are formally excluded from the political process even as within the US itself the mass of global responses to US events play a drastically understated role in politics, as in the news, media and popular culture.

Over the course of the most recent elections, for example, Trump along with other politicians and pundits certainly referenced China, Russia, ISIS, Iran, Israel, Mexico and Europe. Yet these were overwhelmingly one-dimensional caricatures, cartoon figures used to make campaign arguments by staking out one’s own position rather than engaging another. On occasion—most notably after one or another of Trump’s more extreme comments regarding making Mexico pay to build a wall, the possibility of the US withdrawing from NATO or unleashing a trade war with China—there might have been a quick glance to see what the response outside

the US had been, but rarely more than that. Within the frame of the elections, the role and significance of the world was various but underwhelmingly insubstantial: a broad canvas, the set against which US economic, military and moral action could unfold; or alternatively a fuzzy and faded lifeworld overshadowed by polychrome US political fireworks; or a set of specific but chimeric targets (i.e. “terrorists,” “Syria,” “Mexico”) for one or another muscular nationalist project. In short, within the US election process and the horizon of its imagination, the world functions much as a colony.

The irony of this is that Trump and his election are preeminently the outcome of and a response to global developments rather than their impetus. His call to “make America great again!” is nothing if not reactive—and a relative latecomer at that. For much of the past two decades, after all, we have seen a rise across Europe and Asia of populist nationalism paired with a succession of authoritarian strongmen, highly skilled in political performance, promising to defend their countries in the face of international threats and humiliation; to make them great again; to clean out corrupt elite and stand up for the common people; to root out domestic and alien threats; to restore order and all this while safeguarding the welfare and economic development of their countries. The most notable of these currently include Turkey’s Erdogan, Japan’s Abe, China’s Xi, the Netherlands’ Wilders, Hungary’s Orban, France’s Le Pen, Poland’s Jarosław (and the late Lech) Kaczyński, Israel’s Netanyahu, the Philippine’s Duterte, India’s Modi, Russia’s Putin, and even Britain’s Theresa May. And after all these, comes Trump.

Some commentators have noted the resemblance. The vast majority of analyses, however, have sought to read Trump’s success within an overwhelmingly US context: on the one hand, in terms of the ideological, strategic or organizational failure of the Democratic Party or of Hillary Clinton or of urban coastal progressives and, on the other hand, as the backlash against a Black president in a still fundamentally racist country, a highly polarized and distorting media machine, and/or a backlash against three decades of neoliberalization and the (socio-)economic precarity it has produced among middle and lower class whites, all in the context of decreasing US stature, influence and success in the world. American Studies

certainly has within itself extremely rich resources for understanding these different elements, most especially the cultural, racial, gendered and sexual political fields—and media industry—within which Trump's vulgar, brutal public persona have taken shape alongside his racist, bankruptcy- and lawsuit-driven, business and real estate practices. Regarding the rural and suburban white underclass and squeezed middle classes, American Studies will have to scramble more—as anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, journalists and pundits have had to—but here too there is a rich tradition of studying marginal and rural cultures, histories and folkways that can offer insights and understanding.

Quite striking in all this, however, is the absence of a corresponding scramble, in public and in academic domains, including American Studies, to understand and engage the global context—most especially Trump's embeddedness in a rising host of strongmen who have finetuned an ability to effectively blend neoliberal economic ideologies, nationalist chauvinisms, aggressive masculinity and media-savvy, populist-authoritarian governance. There appears to be a deep existential drive to understand Trump's success as a sign of US social and political crisis. This is not complemented, however, by an equally deep existential drive to understand the global socio-economic, political and identarian dynamics undergirding Trump's success and the international crises/crises this marks with a correspondingly detailed, attuned and tangible incisiveness.

In certain respects, this is simply a reflection of the fact that the global does not yet have a grip on our existential sensibilities in a fashion that the national does. Existential feeling is not something willed, after all, though like all feeling it is social and learned. The absence of it, then, is the conjoined effect of a persistent institutional nationalism in our educational systems; of methodological nationalism in our scholarship, journalism and punditry; and of persistent exceptionalist sensibilities in the entire political spectrum from Right to Left. While conservatives may hail the US as, in their eyes, the most democratic, most free country in the world, even those progressives most inclined to critique chauvinistic nationalism and exceptionalist sensibilities have at the same time exhibited regular inclinations to export US identity politics and US

critical and scholarly practices across the world in the name of universal liberation and justice (about which, more below). For many, though certainly not all of those writing and debating within the US setting, this is undergirded by a profound lack of concrete knowledge and experience of the worlds beyond the US specifically and beyond the Americas more generally.

Crucially, this extends to a widespread lack of knowledge and familiarity with the significant immigrant communities *within* the US. This is especially the case when it comes to those that are not Hispanic, including Indian, Chinese, and Filipino communities that constitute the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th largest immigrant nationalities-of-origin in the US after Mexicans. So, for example, Loren Glass in a review of Brian T. Edwards' *After the American Century* argues that Edwards' fails to account realistically for the limited resources of Americanists when he exhorts Americanists to expand their close reading of US cultural expression to encompass the full global field in which such expression circulates. Certainly, as Glass points out, few Americanists will spend extended periods in Iran and Morocco as Edwards has. And yet there are a multitude of possibilities in a country such as the US with significant vibrant immigrant communities (including Iranians and Moroccans); with universities well-endowed with libraries, expertise, technologies and networks that offer significant virtual, multi-medial and textual access to distant worlds; and with scholarly incomes (among the tenure-tracked), schedules, grants, and awards that entail a relatively privileged wealth of resources, infrastructures and possibilities, particularly compared to those of scholars outside the US.

Loren Glass, for example, is a scholar affiliated with the University of Iowa (my own alma mater), located in Johnson County, Iowa. In the 1990s, Johnson County was home to one of the two largest concentrations of Iranian immigrants in Iowa, most of them in Iowa City and enough to sustain a study of Iranian immigrant adaption to US society and culture (Chaichian). More generally, the immigrant population of Iowa has been growing significantly since then, playing a crucial role in compensating for the departure of young Iowans and preventing predicted labor shortages, particularly following the automatization of meat packing plants ("Map the Impact of Immigration Across the Nation"). Towns

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with plants, such as for example Marshalltown, may today have populations that in fact are more than 25% Latino (Barabak), even as the state-wide population of Asians (primarily Chinese and Indian) has increased to the point that Asian-owned businesses employ more than 10,000 Iowans. In complementary fashion, more than 11,000 students in Iowa are foreign-born, with more than 4,000 attending Glass's institution, the University of Iowa ("New Americans in Iowa"). More broadly yet and just across state lines a few hours to the east of Iowa City, the Chicago metropolitan region continues to be one of the great immigrant destinations in the US, home today to nearly 10 million foreign-born residents, making this the 4th largest population of immigrants in the US ("US Immigrant Population by Metropolitan Area").

The problem, by way of counterpoint to Glass' claim, is not one of means in a time of shrinking humanities budgets. Even a (tenure-track) scholar of limited means can find the resources to study either recent immigrant communities within the US or conduct research abroad through a combination of language study and strategic short-term international visits, complemented by virtual networking and research, interviews, digital archives, social media and so forth. Indeed, in the social sciences, ethnic studies and American Studies itself there exist a long tradition of studying immigrants in the US as well as, to a lesser extent, their worlds and cultures of origin across the world.

Rather than the problem being one of means, it is one of conception. American Studies has come to a crossroads as it were, brought there by the culminating effects of developments within the field itself, within the United States and in the larger regional and global dynamics within which the US is embedded. Fundamentally at the core of this development is the issue of whether "America" will remain central to American Studies. Recurring criticisms of the transnational turn in American Studies have been that it makes its object of analysis too "large" and encyclopedic, encourages amateurism or, as paraphrased by John Carlos Rowe "abandoned the study of the US nation in the very historical moment that US nationalism was powerfully reshaping public discourse and international relations" (Encyclopedia). Even an advocate of transnational approaches such as Shelley

Fisher Fishkin, responding to the possibility that this might make American Studies too centrifugal, declares:

When we do research centered on cultural forms, processes, or products not born in the US or on events that didn't happen in the US, our focus remains on the ways in which those forms, processes, products, or events had an impact on America or Americans in some way (either materially or intangibly or both, shaping their understanding of the world). (Fishkin)

Crucially, Fishkin declares rather than argues the point. As such, agreement depends on a certain fetishization of the term "America": because it is enshrined in the name we have inherited for the field from generations past, the nation-state to which it is assumed and declared to refer must remain its prime point of orientation, the anchor holding the field together as such. But this is in fact far from obvious. To begin with, given the shifting, fragmented, contested and at moments incoherent meanings assigned to "America," the asserted self-sameness between the "America" of American Studies and the field's putative core object of study is a misleading sop. It entails relying on the indexical "America" as if it referred to a real object, in an age when the phantasmal, fragmented and centrifugal process of nation-states is part and parcel of the challenge we face. The point then, is to embrace our understanding of the fictive nature of nation-states rather than flee in consternation. It is precisely attempts to maintain and safeguard that fiction as real lead to horrid violence. Holding on tight to an outdated concept the better to magically ensure coherence of both a field and its object, however, will not change the direction of history only make it more difficult to analyze.

Correspondingly, the argument of the remainder of the paper will be that to flourish as a force for incisive sensibilities, commitments, aesthetics and politics (rather than conserving ones), American Studies must leave room at its core for a strand of thought that anchors its conceptual apparatus not in the lodestone "America" but in concepts and commitments that exceed it as a nation-state, just as geopolitically, culturally and existentially the US is more than ever part of a world that exceeds it. The argument here will be that central to American Studies, implicitly as well as explicitly, has been a commitment to and grappling with the existential para-

doxes of democracy as a fundamental element of the American Experiment. The US was one of the earliest countries to develop mass democracy, driven in the first instance by universal suffrage for white men decades before this was common in most other countries. This suffrage depended on the structural disenfranchisement, objectification, extraction of profit and brutalization of Blacks, Indigenous peoples, women and the land itself. Today, even as the US struggles to achieve comprehensive suffrage in practice within the territorial bounds of its state, it re-enacts globally the logic of profitable disenfranchisement through a range of undemocratic instruments from transnational corporations, to multi-national political organizations, to military intervention.

A host of global economic, political and technological developments mean, however, that US preeminence is increasingly de-naturalized, alongside more generally the de-naturalization of the nation-state as the preeminent political community, cultural, economic and existential horizon. At a time of structural interpenetration, syncretism, and inter-dependence, the nation-state is not feasible—even as for the moment it remains our most powerful form of socio-political and moral community. While for some this condition raises the specter of dissolution as traumatic loss—of national coherence, power, relevance and identity—it marks, in fact, that we are in a transitional moment. A new system of global relations is emergent, without having yet taken shape clearly. This spurs some to hang on all the more tightly to what they imagine we were; but it also creates imperatives to become what we would have liked to have been: comprehensively democratic and just at a scale and to an extent never yet achieved. The United States and the “America” of American Studies can be critical elements of this, even as they are not the defining ones. From this angle of approach, it is possible to do American Studies without necessarily referencing “America”—just as it is possible to do a feminist analysis without (necessarily) referencing women. Some will disagree, perhaps fiercely, with the first and/or the last assertion, but this is the intent of my paper: to open discussion, suggest possibilities that have not yet been explored sufficiently. Is it time to make the project of “America” subject to projects of global justice such as (but not limited to) that of “democracy” (as this includes

debates about the meaning and politics of “democracy” itself)? Is this not the only way to break with the legacy and the continuing structures of imperialism and extractive hegemony embedded in the DNA of the international system of nation-states?

American Studies, as a field centered on a national imaginary enacted globally, has been circling around this issue. Correspondingly, others before me have made elements of this argument: the centrality of democracy, the importance of citizenship, the need to reimagine American Studies in light of globalization, anti-imperialism and so forth. Given constraints of space, I can only touch episodically and selectively on a few of these, with the intent, however, of pushing the argument just a bit farther than it has been. The point here is not to do this comprehensively and irrefutably, but by way of suggestion, the better to open a path to discussion and debate.

A good starting point is to consider the ways in which Winfried Fluck critiques recent developments in American Studies with the intent of returning it to its historic project. In an article entitled “Theories of American Culture (and the Transnational Turn in American Studies),” Fluck tracks shifting reiterations of resistant, critical Americanism from the early iterations by highbrow (white, male) elite as these influenced the earliest academic Americanists, to post-1960s critical revisions of the myth and symbol school via everything from New Historicism to anti-imperial New Americanism to highly politicized identity politics focused on race, gender, and (Foucauldian-infused understandings of) power. As Fluck correctly points out, these developments pinpointed the problem of grounding resistance—the possibilities for resistant subjectivity—in hegemonic systems. Lacking such a ground, and the possibilities for such subjectivity, raises the specter of precluding all possibilities for agency. This, according to Fluck, explains how “the idea of multiple or hybridized identities has become the new mantra in Cultural and American Studies” (Fluck 69–70), foregrounding questions of borders, rims, diasporas and encounters. Crucially, Fluck conceives of this as a process of “continuous retreat” in which one possibility for resistance after another is discredited leaving American Studies practitioners increasingly “desperate”

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[...] for a configuration or location that would still be able to provide an oppositional perspective. In that context, transnational studies can be seen as yet another attempt to escape the deadend of cultural radicalism's power analysis. Since, theoretically speaking, all potential resources of resistance within American society have been used up, the only possibility that remains is to go outside of the nation-state and to transcend its borders. (Fluck 71)

Fluck's analysis is striking for its rather too easy dismissal of American Studies' commitment to engaging minority, marginal, borderland, and transnational subjects as various romantic, desperate or dogmatic. That is, Fluck clearly has read widely and understands the arguments he distills, but lacks perceptive sensitivity to the existential imperatives at stake here—notably the wrenching question of how the US might create a society that does justice to fundamental ideals of equality and freedom that it cannot seem to stop violating with great brutality and hypocrisy at every historical turn. Rather than engaging this, Fluck instead concludes his essay with the call to drop the search for resistant subjects and scholarly practices and instead recognize the US as a “paradigmatic, agenda-setting modern society” whose global power will persist, though as an empire whose international dominance is “barely visible.” Correspondingly, the task of American Studies should be to analyze US sources of cultural power according to the method of De Tocqueville, dissecting the “particular set of economic, social [and] cultural conditions” giving shape to US society, arts and politics (Fluck 74).

Fluck's analysis, while certainly a bracing fillip to consider possible analytic shortcomings in centering American Studies on resistance, minorities, margins, flows and borderlands, ultimately is something else: the nostalgic call to return to structures of thought, forms of scholarship and critical intellectual politics inadequate to our times. Fluck argues that transnational American Studies entails the dissolution of the study of the sources of US power and as such is a “serious mistake.” Correspondingly, he wants American Studies scholarship to go “back inside” the US. This is, of course, impossible precisely because what is “inside” and “outside” is increasingly and by now comprehensively unclear. To return to the question presented in the introduction: is Donald Trump a phenomenon of US society or a US example of a decentered, highly globalized

process? What of the pro-Israel lobby in the US as it recently aligned itself with Netanyahu and against Obama? What of the popularity of South Korean Hallyu stars, music and media among a growing global fan-base that includes North Americans; the success of media formats (such as Idols and Telenovelas) conceived and purchased from abroad; and, most recently, the influence of Russia-mediated news items, hacking and leaks in shaping the views of US voters? What about the fact that today one in seven US residents is foreign-born, many linked in real-time to homelands, politics, economic, social and cultural circuits across the world? And what about US susceptibility to reconceiving its identity, interests, security agencies, laws, imaginaries and global military mission along lines deeply responsive and reactive to the narrative of a global war proposed on September 11th by a Saudi Arabian activist called Osama Bin Laden?

One could suggest that, increasingly “desperate” to hold onto the “romantic” figment of the clearly bounded nation-state, Fluck argues for an approach that current events make clearly untenable. Yet the core concern Fluck foregrounds near the end of his article, the problem of US power in the world, is one I share. At the same time, Fluck’s sense that current Americanist methods leads to a dissolution of the study of the sources of American power is equally accurate. This is, however, not a problem. Rather it is a reflection of the larger geopolitical process challenging all societies as a result of the combined effects of neoliberal globalization, mass migration, new technology and media. All these ensure that the figment of the territorially-border nation-state is visible and in plain sight as just that: a figment. To restructure American Studies in a fashion intended to ignore this, will not change the condition of our scholarship, arts and politics of the moment, only our (in)ability to analyze it at its most critical, challenging and disruptive junctures.

One of these entails the fact first raised at beginning: that global vernacular American Studies is demotic but not democratic. As such, it overwhelmingly marks the exclusion rather than participation of those globally impacted by US politics and society. This enacts a fundamental divide when it comes to the study of US society and politics between those privileged as US citizens and residents able to translate their critique into social, political,

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intellectual and aesthetic influence on the society they engage and those disenfranchised from any such agency and influence, notwithstanding the comprehensive global influence of the US as it variously intervenes, brutalizes, negotiates and seduces across the world. Indeed, those who are the object of US actions without recourse to any means of shaping them, the geopolitically disenfranchised, constitute the majority of those engaged in demotic American Studies. This majority is the object of US policy, corporations, militaries, NGOs, media, and consumer culture—and thus acquires both an expertise and an interest in critically reflecting on it—without, however, the possibility of ever becoming its subject. They are destined to observe and be acted upon, without being able to act or speak in such a fashion as to be felt and heard. (9/11 can usefully be understood as a highly exceptional disruption of this logic, but one that in its brutal inhumanity obviated any serious possibility for productive and democratic engagement subsequently.)

In part this is a simple matter of geography; but it is also both a side-effect and an enabler of the persistence of a global power imbalance in which the US remains culturally, militarily and economically preeminent, despite its significant loss of allure, persuasive power, status and dominance of the international system and of multi-national organizations, norms and narratives. Developments elsewhere are ignored because of the very basic fact that they can be, more even than because of the centrality of US exceptionalist thought as such. Power creates its own exceptionalism, related to yet different from the exceptionalism of national narratives and identities.

Donald Pease touches on this in his contribution to Brian T. Edwards and Dilip Gaonkar's *Globalizing American Studies*. Drawing on the work of Laura Stoler in the process of engaging Djelal Kadir and Amy Kaplan, respectively, he points out that not only nation-states but empires too produce their own exceptionalism. In this sense, US exceptionalism is itself anything but exceptional. As Stoler remarks, all "imperial states operate as states of exception that vigilantly produce exceptions to their principles and exceptions to their laws [...]. [As such, the US is] a consummate producer of excepted populations, excepted spaces, and its own exception

from international and domestic laws” (quoted in Pease 57). It is this that leads Donald Pease to propose a project of comparative imperial exceptionalisms as one possible solution to exceptionalism’s apparently ineradicable persistence in both US global politics and in an American Studies dedicated to contesting it.

While this offers an elegant solution at the intellectual level, a critical analysis of US exceptionalist imperialism relative to that of other empires leaves the project of anti-imperialism itself hanging. In that particular sense, Pease’s proposal is a solution that is promising but incomplete. US imperialist exceptionalism is certainly embedded in a larger global history; yet what this makes clear is that the challenge is neither national (US) exceptionalism nor imperialist exceptionalism as such. Rather it is the imperialist relations of the global domain in and of themselves. These, in turn, overlap with and disrupt the structured anarchist-realist logic of competitive nation-states as it has evolved since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. To be effective and intellectually consistent then, an engaged, critique of exceptionalism (in the rich, complex range of formations discussed by Pease and Stoler) has to be embedded in a project conjoining anti-imperialism to a rethinking of the hegemony of nation-states as the preeminent form of political institution under modernity.

Donald Pease’s discussion of Kadir and Kaplan makes clear that any such critical project requires an alternative, Archimedean point as it were, from which to push and critique. In Pease’s account, Kadir enacts this via critically activating a “good exceptionalism,” while Kaplan does this through seeking to discipline Kadir for what to her are the dated insular, white, male, Euro-American norms of the exceptionalism he references, in the interests of her own conjoined anti-exceptionalist and anti-imperial commitments. In the process, Kaplan however implicitly activates a form of “disciplinary exceptionalism” that reaffirms her particular US Americanist norms, values and methods as preferred and hegemonic ones in order not only to dismiss Kadir’s argument but also to claim the authority to tell international Americanists, many of them already rather critical of their marginality to “American Studies” proper, what their proper international project ought and should be. Kaplan reenacts as it were the classic logic of the imperial

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metropole, judging, sidelining and silencing the purported inferior, the better to civilize and uplift those still in the “waiting rooms of [disciplinary] history.”

In place of the project that Kaplan proposes, a comparative study of imperialisms, Pease argues that imperialism produces its own exceptionalism and what is called for, then, is a comparative study of imperial state exceptionalisms. The shortcoming in Pease’s approach is the way in which this centers, and in that sense reifies, the imperialist dimension *at the expense of offering an alternative*. However incisive, sensitive, rigorous and comprehensive the critique, at the end of the day we are and will be still be left with a system of imperialist internationalism in place as the horizon of our analyses. Certainly, we will have deepened and enriched our understanding of it, in the process of historicizing and denaturalizing it. The question of what will take its place, however—the better to limit the violence that set the analysis in motion—is unasked and unanswered.

At its most specific, the instigating context for Kadir, Kaplan and Pease is the post-9/11 violence of a self-consciously resurgent, even celebratory, US imperialism encapsulated in the Bush Doctrine. All too clear, however, is the extent to which this specific context is an imperialism that moves comfortably along and extends the primal violence of the American project mapped so powerfully by Richard Slotkin since the 1970s, along with the primal exceptionalism dissected by Pease a year earlier in *The New American Exceptionalism* (2009). Correspondingly, as Edwards and Gaonkar note in their introduction,

Pease’s magisterial essay may be seen as a cleansing gesture rather than a substitutive gesture [...]. For Pease, American studies is so deeply compromised and contaminated by the exceptionalist interpretive tradition that one has to go through a cleansing process before relocating and renewing American studies.” (Edwards and Gaonkar 4)

Edwards and Gaonkar’s *Globalizing American Studies*, then, can be read as consciously meant to build on the space cleared by Pease’s analyses of US exceptionalism. Within the covers of their book, following Pease’s essay, they present a set of chapters by authors of highly diverse plumage. The collation of their multiple locations,

languages, disciplines and interests in this one nodal book seeks to embody and enact—through the book’s cumulative effect of synecdochal globality—that relocation and renewal of American studies for which Edwards and Gaonkar call in their introduction. This is a renewal able to break with the structuring exceptionalism so distinctive, still, for both the field and the larger American Century in which it came into its own.

Edwards and Gaonkar’s anthology is, among other things, part of a larger movement towards a comparative American studies, though carried out with a range of voices and critical approaches that make it noteworthy and striking. And yet, the question lingers: what then? Where does this critical alternative to exceptionalist narratives leave us? If exceptionalism, brought back to its most basic elements, is the conceit that “America” does not obey the laws of history to which all others have been subject, is not the ultimate effect of an effective critique to simply make the US a country and empire like all others? As riven by factions, by inward and outward violence it dares not face, by failures of justice, all for the sake of making some sort of political and moral community possible, some of the time, for some of its people (but not others)?

The core problem here, in fact, is neither exceptionalism nor nation-state imperialism as such, but rather the fact that we have reached the limits of the nation-state system as a whole. Emerging out of Westphalia, crystalizing fully in the (late) nineteenth century and globally hegemonic in the post-colonial, post-war period, the nation-state as institution and as narrative able to organize our practical and existential lives has reached its horizon of possibility. It is increasingly unable to summon our most creative and ambitious collective energies; to organize the most transformative dynamic means, processes and pathways for the future; to bring into being coherent collective militant, moral and socio-economic structures and activity. It remains an institution and force with which to reckon, and will most likely for the coming century and perhaps longer, but its most vibrant, powerful creative moment, as a global institution, is spent. Where we see it most visibly at work today, it is a reactive and retrenching entity, conservative rather than innovative. We turn to the nation-state increasingly as a brake on change, rather than as its instigator. While the process is too pluriform and too

complex to ever be linear, uniform or straight-forward, its overall direction is increasingly clear. As far as the preeminent institution for organizing our socio-political, economic and ethical life goes, we are in a transitional age, where the old is in decline even as we do not yet know what the new will be.

It is not so much the American Century that is ending—the framing context from which the arguments of Edwards and Gaonkar emerge—but rather the preeminence of that world system of states within and in relation to which “America” as imaginary, as exception, and as a military, economic and cultural empire became more powerful than any before; not as a self-made entity, but rather as one produced in a fashion at once contingent and overdetermined by the forces of that system. Embedded here is a complex argument about causality, agency and history; one too complicated to develop and rehearse here. In brief, however: if indeed we accept Benedict Anderson’s argument that nations—as this includes the United States—are first and foremost figments, are *imagined* communities, then they cannot at the same time be agents of history, as such—though indeed, imagining them as agents may itself produce real historical change in our social, material and existential lives. Correspondingly, a nation-state like “America” giving birth to itself, being the agent of its own history, is rather like pulling yourself up by your bootstraps: pleasurable in cartoons, impossible in practice. Where the core of our concern and our allegiance must lie, then, is not with nation-states—including the idealized versions of them in the name of which we critique their failures in practice—but instead with those processes shaping our societies and world.

This, in fact, is what happens implicitly in the critiques of exceptionalism, imperialism and imperialist exceptionalism that the Americanists discussed above, among others, develop. Sustaining and driving these critiques is an implicit ideal of a world not organized by the violence, exclusion and expropriation so typical of imperialism, notably that of the George W. Bush years into the present. What that ideal, that alternative actually might be, however, is not named as such.

It is possible to propose, however, that we name it. One plausible candidate is that of “egalitarian pluralism.” Certainly, this is a fairly

safe description of one of the prime ideals that has marked American Studies since at least the 1960s (even as aspects of it could be traced back to earlier periods). Until now, this is an ideal that has been most critically articulated and embraced in relation to diversity within the United States and attempts to achieve an inclusive justice through vibrant activism, political organization, legislation, affirmative action, transformation of the arts, along with institutional, epistemic and curricular reform. At the same time, this ideal is clearly also a core element of the transnational, international and comparative turns in the discipline. Yet in that regard these wings of the American Studies field have not allied themselves obviously or consistently with any actual set of movements, specific political projects or organizations, legal issues, artistic developments, institutions or innovative academic or epistemic practices.

Rather strikingly, the engagement of US American Studies with the Boycott, Divest, Sanctions Movement (BDS) offers further support for this. Deeply felt and hotly contested, both by those for and those against the official alignment of the American Studies Association with BDS, the debate extends to and corresponds with a much larger field of politics on US university campuses related to Israel-Palestine relations. All this is further enflamed by the fact that, on the one hand, the US is either directly or indirectly involved in multiple wars and conflicts in the Middle East (Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Syria and Israel) and has a highly conflicted relation with Iran while, on the other hand, the US domestic political field is deeply polarized in part around these issues of international war and relations. This means that there is a “natural” correspondence between campus debates and mobilizations and national political debates—as this in turn extends into classrooms, departments, research and publications. In other countries, less involved in the Middle East and/or less polarized and/or with less politicized university cultures, this fit is less natural.

Certainly, international support for BDS includes many critical progressive and politically engaged scholars in other English-speaking settler countries (Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand) along with the UK and Ireland. Beyond the Anglophone

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world, however, its reach is much thinner, to the point even of being strongly repressed in continental European countries like France and Germany (notwithstanding that the EU has voted to label Israeli settlement imports differently than those from Israel proper, much to Israel's extreme displeasure). Even in those countries, such as the Netherlands, where the largest pension fund PGGM has withdrawn investments from Israeli banks, visible support entails tiny pockets rather than a movement as such. The result is that BDS and the ASA's support for it are either simply unknown or rejected by the majority of European American Studies scholars.

One of the distinctive features of American Studies in the US has been its deep, explicit and explicitly political relation with the society beyond the university, having been particularly strongly shaped by identarian, anti-war, student, civil rights, folk culture and urban renewal movements since the 1960s. Institutional American Studies outside the US has been similarly entangled, though this has taken a different shape where the most important infusions have come from US government support via embassies, scholarships, networks, cultural exchanges and businesses. The drastic (though selective) reduction of such infusion after the Cold War, in conjunction with significant geopolitical and geo-economic shifts, means that international American Studies departments and scholars have to scramble for both funding and relevance. Crucially, this relevance is most likely to come through the expertise they have to offer national governments, businesses and audiences in "how America works." The effect of answering such national needs, however, is to drive Americanists back into the folds of the classic disciplines constituting what in effect becomes US/American Area Studies: international relations, history, literature, popular culture, and sociology. This can ensure relevance to political and policy elite; public recognition of scholars and departments; and corresponding funding and protection amidst university cutbacks and reorganizations. When successful, however, all this comes at the expense of cutting-edge academic innovation (as this overwhelmingly cuts against disciplinarity) and at the expense of critical engagement with political issues against the mainstream grain (as this cuts against professional and public authority). Within such contexts, the relevance and significance of committing to something

like resistance to imperialism and imperialist exceptionalism or active support for global justice and egalitarian pluralism are far from obvious.

So, for example, someone like Heinz Ickstadt argues that American Studies “should accept its name as its limitation and its boundary—that it cannot be a global and postcolonial, not even an international American Studies in the sense of inter-American and inter-continental investigation” (Ickstadt 554). Ickstadt’s concern is on the one hand the problem of overreach leading to superficiality and on the other hand the question of academic organization and politics. As his own experience in Germany has shown him: the national focus of the Kennedy Institute ultimately made it a much more successful institution than the multinational centers of Latin American and Eastern European Studies, precisely because they were not able to reconcile their national differences within the centers. Crucially, however, this argument of Ickstadt’s is an institutional one, not a substantive one. In other words, there is a tension between the substantive development of a need for a globalist American Studies adequate to our times and the institutional possibilities for such a development.

At the same time, Ickstadt’s argument misses a crucial component of American Studies historical character, namely its distinctive fusion of the scholarly with the political. So, to begin with, the support for BDS follows in the footsteps of the deep momentum let loose in the 1960s by the Radical Caucus of the ASA—opposed to the Vietnam War & demanding the inclusion of Third World scholars—and sustained in the 1970s and 1980s by the turn to fully incorporating Women’s Studies, African-American Studies and more generally the whole pallet of (radical) Identity Studies—this whole complex of fiercely critical scholarship is deeply committed to transforming the United States’ relations to and within itself, but also to the world. In line with this, and extending it yet further, the ASA’s vote to align with BDS was in explicit contravention of long-standing US international policy and the larger social imaginary’s intense identification with Israel. Indeed, the public fury with which this position was greeted by university administrations, politicians, pundits and pro-Israel activists was one of the developments that helped to turn BDS into a highly visible

national issue, to the point that today US politicians are not only passing legislation within the US against BDS but attempting to strong-arm European governments into repressing BDS movements within their own territories.

That is to say, the stance for BDS inserted American Studies once again into US geopolitics, but now in direct opposition to the desires and projects of the State Department, where 70 years ago Americanists were loosely, though not always comfortably, in alignment with the State Department and where 45 years ago—at height of the Vietnam War—many were opposed but in a fashion that reflected larger opposition in US society as a whole, while not taking it so far that the organization as such took a formal stance in explicit contravention of US government policy.

So BDS builds on, yet goes much farther than, certain radical traditions within American Studies that link scholarship to activism, research to citizenship. This has been a fundamental element of American Studies from the beginning, including at the time of its “elite white male” beginnings in the 1950s. As Alice Kessler-Harris puts it: “The heart of American Studies is the pursuit of what constitutes democratic culture” and as Heinz Ickstadt elaborates:

[...] [this is] the radical heritage of an American studies movement that had always aimed at having more than a purely academic agenda and that had always wanted to be more than another professional organization since it was committed, as Gunter Lenz recently wrote, “to reunite the ‘scholar’ with the ‘citizen’ in a truly democratic society.” That the “pursuit of what constitutes democratic society” has to be seen as an ongoing process is self-evident. [...] French theories (and their feminist and post-colonial variants) may have sharpened the tools of this process but its drive comes from this logic of subversive democracy that lies at the heart of American studies itself. (Ickstad 548)

And yet crucially, even as the imperative for such a project linking scholar and citizen in a drive for subversive democracy is as intensely necessary as it has ever been, it is also handicapped by a crucial inheritance from the 19th century: namely that democracy has been understood, developed and contained within the territories of particular nation-states. We have a system in place that has restricted democracy to the domestic political sphere while leaving the international sphere the domain of what in international

relations is called anarchy. It is full of rules and conventions, yet lacking any higher authority to impose justice or ensure that states abide by their commitments, much less that they move toward a democratic globality. The result, to this day, as we see around us, is a world in which notwithstanding a virtually global commitment to democracy, the conditions of globality remain those of a lawless rule of the most powerful—whether these be states, corporations, militaries or violent extremist movements. The effect of this has been to largely exclude the project of radical, subversive democracy from our discussions of American Studies, including anti-imperial, comparativist and international American Studies.

At the same time, a second crucial obstruction to the radical project of a globalist democracy, is the fact that even when American Studies goes international, the focus remains on the ways in which the gaze from elsewhere is directed at America. The fact that this gaze at America is one of many gazes directed both within and abroad—in relation to one another—that is, that a gaze is embedded in a tapestry of gazes, *including ones directed elsewhere than at America*, is insufficiently incorporated. So, for example, from my own location in the Netherlands comes the question: how does the Dutch response to America relate to the Dutch encounters with and responses to Indonesians, Southern Africans, British, French, Germans and, most recently, Muslim migrants—as these occur and have occurred in conjunction, collaboration and tension with the gaze directed at America? The methods, archive and scholarship we have, as they are currently constituted, make it difficult if not impossible to answer such questions even as they are of direct current relevance.

Invariably, then, the emphasis on American Studies as fundamentally about “America” has the effect of reinforcing the centrality of America as an ethical, political and social project in a fashion that distorts its place and role in the world. By way of developing an alternative, a particularly useful place to start is with the work of Günter Lenz on the politics of transnational and transcultural American Studies. He develops a very rich discussion that builds not only on transnational American Studies, but also draws on theories of cosmopolitanism such as those of Appiah and Mignolo,

on the one hand, and of political philosophies of democracy on the other—such as those of Seyla Benhabib and Iris Marion Young. This brings him to make the questions of democracy and of globality central to those of the American Studies project, arguing:

What is needed is a genuinely *dialogic* and *transcultural* notion of cultural critique and of inter-, post-, or transnational American Culture Studies in order to bring into view the—always two- or multi-directional—processes of transculturation and rearticulation of the political role of, e.g., American media and of the products of the popular mass culture in various parts of the world and of the cultural repercussions and preconditions of the different processes of what is summarily called globalization. (Lenz et al.)

At this point, I would take Lenz's argument even one step further: not only in support of a dialogic, transnational American Studies rearticulating the role of America in the world, but more broadly and deeply investing in creating globally just relations. It is an American Studies deeply invested in an argument for dialogic, cosmopolitan democracy as a global project, fully in line with the historical American Studies tradition of scholarship in the interests of radical democracy. "Democracy" here, it should be noted, is a question more than an answer: another way of asking "how might just and flourishing global relations look from the perspective of inclusive, egalitarian pluralism?"

The proposal here, as I conceive it, is not to comprehensively displace either American Studies in its classic De Tocquevillian guise, nor as a form of international area studies, nor as a practice of critical engagement with deeply national, yet globalized, globalizing and anti-imperial identity politics and painful conflicts on how best to speak truth to power. Rather the argument is to add a further, and today essential, critical strand. This is to approach the question of the subject, object and method of American Studies from an explicitly pluralist, democratic sensibility that subsumes "America" to the "global" and to global projects for just pluralist relations as mediated through what Lenz, following in the footsteps of Aihwa Ong foregrounds as "flexible" transnational citizenship. As in the public, political field, the relations between these approaches to doing American Studies may range from col-

laboration to fierce agonism (in the sense elaborated by Chantal Mouffe). This indeed is the point: to structure the field as we seek to structure the world, in the interests of justice and along the lines most suitable to our emergent age. Even if that may mean, at least at moments, abandoning “America.”

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