

Challenging the Theory and Practice of Contemporary American Studies

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If we can trust to the lessons of the history of the human mind, of the history of habits of life, development does not take place chiefly by imperceptible changes but by revolutions.

—Charles Sanders Peirce

With the death of Martin Burnham, the hostage held by Muslim kidnappers in Mindanao, the southern island of the Philippines, one would expect more than 1,200 American troops (including 160 Special Forces, plus FBI and CIA personnel) training Filipinos for that rescue mission to be heading for home. No dice. Despite the most tenuous links with al-Qaeda, the Abu Sayyaf bandit group of less than a hundred men has been elevated to incredible prominence by the U.S. media.

Since September 1, 2001, the media and government publicity organs on both sides of the Pacific have dilated on the Abu Sayyaf's links with Osama bin Laden. It is generally suspected that the group received some money through channels from Afghanistan a few years ago, part of donations to various militant Islamic groups around the world. This connection became invested with ominous significance after September 11. A criminal gang that uses Islamic slogans to hide its kidnapping-for-ransom activities, the Abu Sayyaf is a splinter group born out of the U.S. war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and subsequently used by the Philippine government to sow discord among the more militant Islamic organizations. Protected by local politicians and military officials as well as local peasants, as most Filipinos acknowledge, the Abu Sayyaf's persistence betokens the complicated history of the struggle of about ten million Muslims in the Philippines for justice and self-determination dating back from the advent of the Spanish conquistadors in the mid-sixteenth century.

What is puzzling for ordinary citizens is why the U.S. has committed so many resources—troops and money—to this adventure in the far-flung and remote outpost of the empire.

Recent developments may shed light on the return of the former colonizer to what was once called its “insular territory” administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. With Secretary Colin Powell’s decision to stigmatize as “terrorist” the major insurgent groups that have been fighting for forty years for genuine popular democracy and independence—the National Democratic Front which includes the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People’s Army—the introduction of thousands of U.S. troops, weapons, logistics, and so on will be a reality once the Arroyo administration agrees to the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement. This will convert the archipelago of 7,000 islands to instant military bases and facilities for the U.S. military—not only a virtual return of Clark Air Base and Subic Naval Base that were scrapped by the Philippine Senate a decade ago, but a bonanza gift since problems of pollution, killing of Filipinos, prostitution, corruption, and criminality surrounding the former bases will no longer be the responsibility of the occupying forces. With the Filipino military officials practically managing the executive branch of government, the Philippines will prove to be more an appendage of the Pentagon than a sovereign, autonomous nation-state.

PAX AMERICANA RETURNS TO THE BOONDOCKS

Immediately after the proclaimed defeat of the Taliban and the rout of Osama bin Laden’s forces in Afghanistan, the Philippines became the second front in the U.S.-led war on terrorism. Raymond Bonner, author of *Waltzing with Dictators*, comments in the op-ed page of the *New York Times* (10 June 2002): the reason for this second front is “the desire for a quick victory over terrorism” and also “the wish to reassert American power in Southeast Asia. . . . If Washington’s objective is to wipe out the international terrorist organizations that pose a threat to world stability, the Islamic terrorist groups operating in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir would seem to be a higher priority than Abu Sayyaf.” Or those in Indonesia, a far more strategic region in terms of oil and geopolitics. As in the past, during the Huk rebellion in the Philippines in the Cold War years, the U.S. acted as “the world’s policemen,” aiding the local military in “civic action” projects to win “minds and hearts,” a rehearsal for Vietnam. Luis Jalandoni, chair of the National Democratic Front, the coalition

of anti-imperialist forces in the Philippines active since 1972, called the presence of interventionist U.S. troops a violation of the national sovereignty of the Filipino people, “a tripwire to a New Vietnam” (Press Statement, 19 January 2002). The 15,000 strong New People’s Army led by the Communist Party of the Philippines has condemned the Arroyo administration’s “unabashed puppetry to the U.S.”

Despite Secretary Rumsfeld’s reservation of maintaining a large U.S. presence in the Philippines, Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy defense secretary, is urging the Arroyo government to sign a Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA)—the next best thing to recovering the large strategic military bases (Clark Field and Subic Naval Bases) the U.S. lost in 1992 to a resurgent Filipino nationalism. One Filipino activist called Wolfowitz “the father of modern day bribery,” intent on promoting “the business of war” and “reviving America’s \$150-billion dollar arms industry” amidst recession and the anarchy of overproduction, shrinking global market, and surplus capital (www.inq7.net). The Stratfor Research Group believes that Washington is using the Abu Sayyaf as a cover for establishing a “forward logistics and operation base” in southeast Asia (Basilan Island, Mindanao) in order to be able to conduct swift pre-emptive strikes against enemies in Indonesia, a predominantly Muslim country with abundant natural resources, and in Malaysia, Vietnam, and of course China.

Overall, however, the introduction of U.S. Special Forces (Green Berets and Navy Seals) in April inflamed Filipino historical memory still recovering from the nightmare of the U.S.-supported brutal Marcos dictatorship. There is a submerged genealogy of neocolonialization waiting to be excavated here. What disturbed most Filipinos was the Cold-War practice of “Joint Combined Exchange Training” exercises. In South America and Africa, such U.S. foreign policy initiatives merged with counterinsurgency operations that channelled military logistics and equipment to favored regimes notorious for flagrant human rights violations. In Indonesia during the Suharto regime, for example, U.S. Special Operations Forces trained government troops accused by Amnesty International of kidnapping and torture of activists, especially in East Timor and elsewhere. In Colombia and Guatemala, as well as in El Salvador much earlier, the U.S. role in organizing death squads began with Special Operations Forces advisers who set up “intelligence networks” ostensibly against the narcotics trade but also against leftist insurgents and nationalists. During the Huk uprising in the Philippines, Col. Edward Lansdale, who later masterminded the Phoenix atrocities in Vietnam, rehearsed counterinsurgency techniques

justified not by counterterrorism but by anticommunism. Now that President Arroyo and her generals have approved the participation of U.S. soldiers in active combat side by side with Filipinos in pursuit of “terrorists” as defined by the U.S. State Department—which includes the New People’s Army and guerrillas of the Muslim Islamic Liberation Front and the Moro National Liberation Front—the charge that U.S. troops have intervened to nullify Philippine sovereignty and suppress Filipino progressive forces can no longer be easily dismissed as leftist propaganda.

RESURRECTING THE FRONTIER WILDERNESS?

American troops in the boondocks (*bundok*, in the original Tagalog, means “mountain”) the original hinterland, again? A “return of the repressed” in 2002? Are we experiencing an attack of *déjà vu*? Memory returns us to what Bernard Fall called “the first Vietnam,” the Filipino-American War of 1899-1903, in which 1.4 million Filipinos and thousands of Americans died. Recently, an outcry was raised against returning one of the captured church bells of Balangiga, Samar, where forty-five American soldiers were killed by Filipino insurgents in September 1901. In “*Benevolent Assimilation*”: *The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903* (1982), Stuart Creighton Miller recounts the U.S. military’s “scorched earth” tactics in Samar and Batangas, atrocities from “search and destroy” missions reminiscent of Song My and My Lai in Vietnam. But as James Loewen (1999), Howard Zinn (1980), Gabriel Kolko (1976), and others have reminded us, this episode in U.S. history is usually a blank, or accorded a token sentence or single paragraph in the textbooks.

Miller does not deal at all adequately with the U.S. campaign to subjugate the Moros, the Muslim Filipinos in Mindanao and Sulu islands. In March 9, 1906, four years after President Theodore Roosevelt declared the war over, Major General Leonard Wood, commanding 540 soldiers, killed a beleaguered group of 600 Muslim men, women and children in the battle of Mount Dajo. Mark Twain wrote a masterpiece of understated satire on this event, first published in his autobiography of 1924, and now readily available in Jim Zwick’s collection, *Mark Twain’s Weapons of Satire* (1992). Twain thought his comments were too controversial then since he wrote about the “doctor” who led the massacre, the “heroes” who acted in it, and the “savages” who suffered it. Twain could not have tolerated what followed seven years after. A less publicized but horrific battle occurred on June 13, 1913, when the Muslim sultanate of Sulu mobilized about

5,000 followers (men, women and children) against the American troops led by Capt. John Pershing. The battle of Mount Bagsak, twenty-five kilometers east of Jolo City, ended with the death of 340 Americans and of 2,000 (some say 3,000) Moro defenders. Pershing was true to form—earlier he had left a path of destruction in Lanao, Samal Island, and other towns where warlords resisted his incursions.

Anyone who resisted U.S. aggression was either a “brigand” or seditious bandit. The carnage continued up to the “anti-brigandage” campaigns of the first two decades which suppressed numerous peasant revolts. With the help of the U.S. sugar-beet lobby, the Philippine Commonwealth of 1935 was formed, a compromise mix of procedures then being tried on Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Hawaii; the islands became a model of a pacified neocolony. Mark Twain gained notoriety for caricaturing the whole campaign against Aguinaldo, the president of the beleaguered Republic, as a “civilizing mission” worthy of the Puritan colonial settlers and the pioneers in the proverbial “virgin land.” In Twain’s classic prose: “Thirty thousand killed a million. It seems a pity that the historian let that get out; it is really a most embarrassing circumstance” (1992, p. 62). One other embarrassing item was the desertion of nine black American soldiers (David Fagen is the most famous) to the Filipino revolutionary side in the course of the campaigns (Robinson and Schubert 1975).

Except perhaps for Richard Drinnon’s *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire Building* (1997), Thomas McKenna’s *Muslim Rulers and Rebels* (1998), and Michael Salman’s *The Embarrassment of Slavery* (2001), nothing much about the revealing effects of that colonial subjugation have registered in the American Studies archive. This is usually explained by the fact that the U.S. did not follow the old path of European colonialism, and its war against Spain was pursued to liberate the natives from Spanish tyranny. It signaled the advent of a modernizing U.S. humanitarian interventionism whose latest manifestation is George W. Bush’s “National Security Strategy” of “exercising self-defense by acting preemptively.”

The revolutionary upsurge in the Philippines against the Marcos dictatorship stirred up dogmatic Cold War complacency. With the inauguration of a new stage in American Studies marked by Donald Pease and Amy Kaplan’s *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (1993), preceded by the contributions of critics like Houston Baker and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the historical reality of U.S. imperialism (the genocide of the Native Americans is replayed in subjugation of the inhabitants of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and Cuba) has finally been excavated and reap-

praised. Amy Kaplan (1999) recently demonstrated how U.S. cinema itself mediated expanding imperial power (conquest of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Cuba) and racial politics at home. But this is, of course, a phenomenon brought about by a confluence of events: the end of the Cold War, the sublation of the Sixties in Fukuyama's "end of history," the interminable "culture wars," the heralding of current antiterrorism by the Gulf War and the fabled "clash of civilizations." I am not forgetting the contribution of the Sandinistas, the insurgents in El Salvador and Colombia, as well as the Mexican Zapatistas and the Palestinian intifadas. In effect, September 11, 2001, can mark both the persistence and turning-point, continuity and rupture, of certain trends toward revaluation and reconfiguring of the field of American Studies. With the tremendous changes in the global landscape since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the old frames of intelligibility—both public consciousness and scholarly sensibilities share the mode of conformity to received consensus—can no longer register the contours of recent developments nor capture the meaning and import of what's happening. Establishment ideology has to keep up with changing circumstances and the attendant vicissitudes of social practice.

SQUARING THE CIRCLE

One remedy for closing the gap between thought and reality is the pragmatic ratification of the pluralist ideal. Pluralism in late-modern U.S. society displays the streamlined garb of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism, with its many permutations and inflections, has become the academic ethos and *problematique* (in Althusser's usage) within which American Studies labors today. Multiculturalism operates as a canalizing substitute for the paradigm of class struggle within the context of globalization. Whether it is the repudiation of "white supremacy," "teaching the conflicts" or a questioning of authority by nominalist and skeptical challenges, multiculturalism still requires the "free market" of exchange-values, in fact, the social division of labor writ large in the globalized circuit of trade and business. By default, pragmatism and nominalism legitimizes the status quo. In truth, we have not freed ourselves from commodification, and the reification of social relations attendant to it. The ethnic revival, or the affirmation of ethnicity in curriculum or City Hall multicultural holidays, has proceeded in its mainstream forms as the other phase or polarity of the liberal order—late or global capitalism—that we all inhabit. We are still confined within the

problematique of liberal pluralism with its “common culture” of white supremacy premised on private ownership and individualist competition. Class inequalities have drastically sharpened—32.9 million Americans are impoverished, according to the 2001 U.S. Census Bureau (2002); hence the need for more sophisticated and wily strategies of mystification.

In our globalized milieu, multiculturalism has supposedly trumped the nation, or nationalism, as well as white supremacy. But the process of globalization, as some have argued, is contradictory and even antinomic (Featherstone, 1990). Both as cultural and socioeconomic trend, it is precisely constituted by the dialectic of the local and the global, the universalization of the hybrid and the heterogeneous, spurred on by technological innovations in electronic communication, in particular. Universal and particular, nation-states and global finance capital, can co-exist in a reciprocal or even conflicted space, provided the “free” circulation of commodities (labor-power, chief of all) is not regulated too much or blocked by revolutionary dissidents. In fact, the IMF/World Bank guarantees that everyone harmoniously conform to its “structural conditionalities,” the terms of lending banks, so that business would proceed as usual, conflict-free. But is this battering of the Chinese Wall of sovereign nation-states by finance capital an entirely novel phenomenon? Isn’t the logic of capital accumulation that of globalizing the market and universalizing commodity production for exchange? Didn’t Marx predict this in the *Communist Manifesto*: “National differences and antagonism between peoples are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto” (Laski, 1967, p. 158). Isn’t the world market pluralism incarnate, multiculturalism in action?

In my previous books I have tried to articulate at length the *problematique* of the globalization paradigm with national sovereignty, diaspora, and citizenship and spell out the implications (San Juan, 1998, 2000, 2002). Here I want to examine its resonance in American Studies. As oppositional scholars, we are all indebted to the once radical, anticanonical move of inclusion (women and minorities) accomplished by its most well-known practitioners, Paul Lauter and his collaborators. Countless students and teachers have surely expanded their knowledge and appreciation of U.S. literature as a variegated fabric of multiethnic and multigendered strands, with disparate origins and cultural histories. Aesthetics and historical contextualization, the play of diverse voices and their conversations, have projected an image

of America as “plural, complex, heterogeneous—a chorus, perhaps, rather than a melting pot.” Lauter, however, poses two questions in the preface to the fourth edition of his *Heath* anthology which the discipline of American Studies continues to grapple with: “What differences did difference make?” and “How would our understanding of *all* American culture be transformed by their inclusion in the cultural conversation?” Additions to the canon do not of course necessarily alter the theoretical hegemony of “One Creed Under God” exceptionalism (Church, 2002). The perennial engagement with the question of identity, “What is American?” cannot, I think, be displaced by Lauter’s view, expressed in *From Walden Pond to Jurassic Park* (2001), that the cultural studies approach has now become more appropriate because the United States has become “more hybrid and international.” This assumes that cultural studies is mainly dedicated to the cultivation of hybrid specimens juxtaposed serially and the preservation of their separate historical filiations. Shades of *E pluribus unum*, or “United We Stand”?

With the flattening impact of globalization, Lauter reflects, American Studies with eclectic methodologies will be reshaped by international events (“engaging American culture wherever it is found across the globe,” including Afghanistan or the remote island of Basilan, Philippines) even while the discipline is shaped and adapted in the metropolis according to local circumstances. But will these changes in the discipline affect or alter “the power of U.S.-based capitalism” which James Petras (1999) considers the matrix of imperialist globalization? While recognizing the privatization and deregulation of educational institutions, Lauter is silent about the IMF, World Bank, WTO, and their effects on the control and distribution of cultural capital, including canon revision, textbook publishing and distribution, and so on.

Lest someone accuse me of preemptorily demanding what is not there, and ignoring what is being offered, let me state that I esteem the revisionary overhauling of curriculum and pedagogy in the interest of democratization. Lauter’s reconstructionist project has contributed substantially to this reformist enterprise. This is an imperative priority for the humanities to genuinely become an “Inquiry,” to use C.S. Peirce’s special terminology. Multiculturalism—taking account of race, gender, class, sexuality, disability, etc.—has partly become institutionalized via the *Heath* and in the proceedings of the American Studies Association. The numerous Others have been invited into the public sphere to help construct a collective self—what Alice Kessler-Harris called “that unified whole called America” (1999, p. 347). Kessler’s 1991 support for a defensive multiculturalism has

modulated to the confident pluralism of Lauter as he welcomes the hemispheric, border stance of Latino artists and the cultural-studies approach as part of the democratizing agenda. And yet, we have not been able to anticipate, much less prevent, the rise of a retooled “Manifest Destiny” with its PATRIOT Act and unilateral, preemptive use of force to impose a blueprint for world domination.

RECUPERATIONS

Remarkable advances have been made. An army of American Studies experts have now, it seems to me, implemented the call for “critical internationalism,” or several variants of it, that Jane Desmond and Virginia Dominguez sounded in the *American Quarterly* of September 1996 in numerous books and research programs, some of which have been inventoried by Jim Zwick (1998) and George Sanchez (2000). Even amid the war against Iraq, voices of dissent have been sounded against authoritarian policies and secret protofascist measures. The habit or affect of pluralism may still be discerned here and there. Democratic culture as relational, processual, open, participatory, and multiple was conceived by Kessler, Lauter, and others as the ideal space-horizon of American Studies. This notion was as much a product of the civil-rights activism of the sixties and seventies as a response to the neoconservative tide of the eighties and nineties. What would be the response to this new period when the imperial nation state has metamorphosed into the “homeland” where “the first genuine prison society” (Wacquant, 2002), apartheid localized, is materializing for the bulk of people of color? How will American Studies respond to the stigmatization of American Arabs, the computerized profiling of Muslims, and the demonization of Filipino insurgents and their sympathizers among the three million Filipinos (the largest Asian contingent) in the United States?

It may be exorbitant here to ask: Has this multiculturalist advance prepared us for the reactionary onslaught—systematic surveillance, the apparatus of the Homeland security, military tribunals, extraditions, secret prisons, and the almost absolute control of the media—after September 11? The initial “war on terrorism” may have revitalized “American exceptionalism” that the “culture wars” have never succeeded in destroying. This return of the past may have been ushered by the propaganda of the besieged Homeland in a way that reveals the vulnerability to or cooptability of the multicultural project by an aggressive hu-

manitarianism with consensual backing by both political parties. Multiculturalism's limitation is clearly exposed. The reason for this may be gleaned from Cathy Davidson's response to Kessler-Harris' rehearsal of identity politics in her inclusionary agon: "If the American 'we' really is to be inclusive, then we must all admit that, in the course of our history, we have done some heinous things to ourselves. . . [and] because of *our* heinous history, *we* need affirmative action" (1999, p. 351). The call for collective responsibility is laudable (see the Afterword). But who is this "we"? And in what sense are we implicated in the all-encompassing "our"?

Questions of identity and agency intrude again with the censure of ethnic absolutism and narrow communitarian purism. In 1986, Michael Denning broached the idea that instead of repeating the traditional obsession with identity—"Who is an American?"—we should deal with questions of culture—culture as means of communication, as a way of understanding communities, as the popular or vernacular arts. This is the emergent cultural studies analytical hermeneutic. In pursuing this historicizing exegesis of American culture within "a politics of emancipation" in *The Cultural Front*, Denning has performed an invaluable service in analyzing the determinate role of intellectuals and their social effectivity at specific conjunctures. Of more decisive consequence for American Studies is his deployment of Raymond Williams' theory of cultural formation as the key to unlocking the dialectic of form and content, rhetoric/style and ideology, author and audience. The organizational modalities of the "Popular Front" of the thirties and forties, as well as the trope/idea of "affiliations," are frames of intelligibility that Denning offers for enabling mediations between organic intellectuals and the nation/people contextualized in the struggle for hegemony among social blocs of antagonistic political forces.

Denning's brilliant "anatomy of the cultural front" provides an exemplary organon for a historical poetics of any cultural epoch which is both empirically textured and structured in a verifiable totality of social relations. Grounding his hypothetical formulations of generic cultural forms, artistic trends, and collective biographies of artists and their circles is a thorough analysis of the socioeconomic crisis of the period centered on the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), various New Deal state apparatuses, the culture industry, and influential popular institutions. Focused on this dynamic interaction of various protagonists of a determinate social movement, Denning elucidates in rich detail the "formations" of aesthetic responses to the social crisis: ghetto pastorals, musical theater, migrant ethnic writing,

cartoonists, social theorists, and films—among others, the appraisal of Orson Welles' antifascist politics is quite insightful and rounded, a testimony to Denning's generously nuanced and judicious critical acumen. Prompted by Denning's reevaluation, Welles' film *noir*, *Touch of Evil*, received a rigorous allegorical reading by Donald Pease (2001) bound to provoke a fuller reassessment of Welles' prodigious accomplishment in multifarious sites of counterhegemonic subversion.

We can illustrate the originality of Denning's approach by his treatment of Kenneth Burke's participation in the popular front with his two books, *Permanence and Change* and *Attitudes toward History*, as well as his involvement in the League of American Writers, specifically his addresses to both the 1937 and 1939 American Writers' Congresses (Folsom, 1994). Burke was indeed a fellow-traveller, an idiosyncratic partisan of the left who translated the Marxist concept of ideology into rhetorical strategies for encompassing everyday situations, "strategies for selecting enemies and allies, for socializing losses, for warding off evil eye," and so on. Consequently, art forms such as tragedy, comedy, and satire were viewed as "equipments for living" (Burke, 1941, pp. 253–262). Because political struggle hinges on manipulating the power of symbols of authority to which people give allegiance, Burke emphasized the charismatic appeal of "the people" (instead of the proletariat) as the basis for "revolutionary symbolism" and propaganda in art. Denning disagrees with Frank Lentricchia's estimate that Burke's "comedic" vision was a heretical departure from the popular front, affirming "bourgeois class values as universal" (1983, 66). Lentricchia in fact reduces Burke's complex dramatism into a general theory of rhetoric or argumentation, converting him into a Foucauldian/Rortyan rhetor, this despite Burke's declaration, in 1935, that he understood communism to be "the only coherent and organized movement making for the subjection of the technological genius to humane ends" and that communism "is a cooperative rationalization, or perspective, which fulfills the requirements suggested by the poetic metaphor" (Denning, 1997, pp. 436–437). In my judgment, Denning has a more balanced and solid appreciation of Burke's organic role as a public intellectual during that period of global crisis.

Fredric Jameson's evaluation of Burke's method qualifies and delimits Lentricchia's honorific reading. What is entailed by Burke's ambiguous translation of all action as symbolic and all production as communication, a step conducting to a merely rhetorical resolution of more fundamental social contradictions and ideological antinomies? Jameson perspicuously argues that

Burke's procedure (as shown, for example, in Burke's essay on Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn") turns out to be a "strategy of containment, "a substitution designed to arrest the movement of ideological analysis before it can begin to draw in the social, historical, and political parameters that are the ultimate horizon of every cultural artifact" (1988, pp. 146–147). Jameson's reservation was anticipated long ago by Merle Brown's incisive rebuke that Burke's technique of associational reverie led to serious errors, among them the confounding of genuine dialectical thinking with a classificatory one, resulting in a pseudodialectics that yielded only "a muddled conglomeration of free-floating attributes" (1974, p. 215).

Although Brown conceded that Burke's criticism may be more attuned to the dissonance of mass culture than to the requirements of aesthetic discrimination, Jameson modulated his stance. He referred to Yvor Winters' productive historicization of Burke's formal interpretative scheme, a prolongation of the symbolic inference until it intersects with history itself. Indeed, to demonstrate the accuracy of Jameson's comment, one can contrast Burke's reduction of symbolic action to forms of "secular prayer" or rhetorical games with Richard Ohmann's (1987) penetrating analysis of rhetorical and stylistic strategies in fiction (e.g., Updike, Vonnegut) which begins from scrupulous textual analysis to a richly informed placing of the values associated with such textual details in the social and historical milieu of authors and readers alike. To be sure, Ohmann's practice of ideological literary criticism differs from Burke's because its intellectual formation is not the "popular front" of the forties but the civil-rights struggles of the sixties and seventies. The same can be said of Jameson's and Lentricchia's disparate perspectives as a function of their sociohistorical location and their distinct conceptions of their role as public intellectuals and concerned citizens.

Currently Burke's prestige as a theorist of interpretive systems and discourse far outweighs his status as a literary critic and rhetorician. As Paul Jay (1994) noted, Burke (especially in his later books, *Language as Symbolic Action* and *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology*) combined a sophisticated analysis of the formal principles of cultural discourse with a critique of their effects and their power in shaping individual attitudes and behavior.

From the vantage point of current American Studies, Denning's sympathetic estimate of Burke's intervention reflects a sagacious practice of historical materialist—not historicist in the pragmatist construal—inquiry committed to achieve what C. S. Peirce calls "concrete reasonableness" reached

through the course of interpreting “a sign’s logically controlled uses” while engaged in “purposive thinking in connection with real problems” (Gallie, 1952, p. 131). The problem of writing an intellectual history—the period from 1934 to the outbreak of World War II—from a historical-materialist standpoint is thematized by Denning as a “laboring of culture”—the “social democratization of American culture.” In doing this “history of the cultural front and an interpretation of the artistic and intellectual formations it fostered,” Denning violated the orthodox rule of reducing history to biography and the positivist doctrine of statistical averaging. Deploying the twin concepts of cultural politics as the politics of allegiances and affiliations, and aesthetic ideologies as the politics of form, Denning succeeds in executing a dialectical linkage between his central subject: the cultural front as “the result of the encounter between a powerful democratic social movement—the Popular Front—and the modern cultural apparatuses of mass entertainment and education” (1997, p. xviii). With hints from Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams, Denning is thus able to resolve the dilemmas of one-sided empiricist pragmatism that one finds, say, in the “new historicism” of John Carlos Rowe (Adams, 2001) or the rhetorical hermeneutics of Steven Mailloux (Freedman, 1996) despite their oppositional tendencies, by getting rid of linguistic fetishism and confronting events or situations not as a tissue of differences to be negotiated and eventually reconciled but as the conjoined unity and struggle of opposites—that is, as a dialectic of contradictions unfolding through cultural formations and individual lives. In short, the principles of determinate totality and historical specificity (Korsch, 1971; Lukacs, 1971), as Denning applied them in his pathbreaking work, may provide heuristic guidelines for American Studies practitioners to make their research a versatile “equipment for living” and thus connect with the reality epitomized by the Abu Sayyaf and the risks of a totalitarian *pax Americana*.

FROM NEGATIONS TO ALTERNATIVES

Now by no means is this brief estimate of *The Cultural Front* to be considered a recommendation for a nostalgic retreat to a bygone era. For one thing, Denning’s work does not shed light on the intense preoccupation with identity and subjectivity precipitated by the linguistic turn in theory and the consumption/ludic model of analysis that has swept the academy with the onset of the

post-Fordist crisis in 1973. This is beyond the scope of his project. Can American Studies be the national-popular Front of the Homeland epoch?

At present, the racial polity (Mills, 1999) is gearing up for redrawing the boundaries between civilization and barbarism. Rorty's pragmatic patriotism sounded the alarm a long time ago (Billig, 1995). The politics of identity and difference, as I tried to show in my recent works (*Beyond Postcolonial Theory and Racism and Cultural Studies*), can assuage the subaltern demand for representation denied by the racial polity and its disingenuous "color-blindness." But it cannot transcend the limits of liberalism, the ideology of what George Lipsitz calls "possessive individualism," which underlies a social system founded on private property, on the exploitation of racialized labor-power and the expropriation of its surplus-value on a worldwide scale. What is missing or displaced, as Hazel Carby (1990), Ellen Meiksins Wood (1995), and others have observed, is a recognition of the structure of dominance and subordination in the social relations of production which inescapably frames all questions of culture, ideology, and knowledge-production in late-capitalist society.

Class as a function of the division of social labor has been the tabooed and erased term in the now banal formula of cooptation underlying American Studies courses on the intersection of class, race, and gender. While the analytic category of class may be taken into account, it is simply gestural and in effect marginalizing. This has led to what Daniel O'Hara, in his reconceptualization of class according to rational-choice directives, to the two academic styles of "the archival dig" and "the cookie-cutter take" (1995). Frequently, class is perfunctorily reduced to a matter of identity or status easily amenable to accommodation, provided the existing arrangements of property-ownership and allocation of power are not touched. So far, this comparativist and redistributive reform of American Studies fails to address the ramifications of the labor-capital contradiction, that is to say, the nature of the U.S. social formation at specific historical conjunctures, and the modes in which cultural/literary production, distribution, and consumption take place within it. In other words, how will this repackaging of American Studies affect the class hierarchy in schools, offices, factories, sports, media, and so on?

At present, the theoretical framework of reformist American Studies remains fixated on the notion of cultural/ethnic difference. Its inveterate propensity is to diagnose the problems of racism, sexism, and "classism" (a rebarbative coinage symptomatic of an empiricist positivism) as a matter of stereotype, beliefs,

or an attitudinal bias that can be rectified by mental bootstrapping, or Burke's logocentric "perspective by incongruity." Despite claims to a materialist, comparatist intent, this refusal of what is alleged to be an economistic, totalizing and reductive-determinist view of class relations leads to reinforcing the legitimacy of an entrepreneurial world-view divorced from the constraints and pressures of actual social relations. The formal ideals of freedom and equality enunciated by thinkers of the European Enlightenment are taken to be the actuality of life in class-divided societies, the typical fallacy of pragmatic idealism to which most academics are vulnerable.

Recently, echoing Rorty, erstwhile radical Todd Gitlin praised American power and endorsed his brand of unapologetic "liberal patriotism" (2002, p. A11). Behind the dazzling showcases of triumphalist multiculturalism lurks a nativist fundamentalism ready to attack. A glimpse of what was wrong was intimated by Gregory Jay's response in *Crossroads* to a Turkish scholar. Inadequacies of intelligence and sensibility, if not the capacity to imagine the Other's pain, pervade the discipline. After reviewing the crisis-ridden genealogy of American Studies from exceptionalism to multiculturalism, Jay argues that the American domestication of British Cultural Studies has "resulted into a more inward looking discipline. . . since it reinforces the "conscience" model and so directs the energies toward a focus on the nation state rather than on an international perspective." Jay accuses postnational Americanists of ignoring the function of nationalism for the colonized and borderland subalterns, or the presumptuous arrogance of interventionist "border-crossing hybridities." Jay's salutary move reinforces Donald Pease's call for a counterhegemonic American Studies; but in this new post-September 11 era, it may well be that the canonization of *Casablanca* as the dominant national narrative, as David Shumway (1994) predicts, will finally be sealed. It will also neutralize the scandalous innuendo of critics like F. R. Leavis who once quipped that the idea of Americanness amounts to something "too simple and positive," if not "illusory": "What it portends, as far as it may prevail, is emptiness" (1967, p. 140).

Without second-guessing the future, it remains the case that the pivotal crux is the relation of the political economy (the neoliberal free market) to a democratic culture. Identity based on civil religion—adherence to procedural democracy and the U.S. constitution—cannot postpone or defer the question of the relation between economic needs and political/civic freedom. Given the internationalization of American cultural products via commerce and new technologies of communication and trans-

port, Jay asks provocatively: “Is it possible to speak of a global spread of American culture, or simply of the global marketing of American culture? And if culture is the expression of identity, what are the consequences of this marketing? Is the marketing of American Studies part of this economy or in resistance to it?” Jay, however, evades the question whether identity (in this case, white Anglo-Saxon) is tied with the centrality of the nation-state, as it is assumed to be the defining feature of social and cultural life in other social formations. Moreover, Jay seems naïve in taking for granted the nature of U.S. civil religion as equivalent to the actual exercise of political freedom and the enfranchisement of people of color.

This impasse of the revisionary program leads us to interrogating two recent challengers to American exceptionalism: the postnationalist cosmopolitan position of John Carlos Rowe and his colleagues, and the postcolonialist discourse exemplified in the collection, *Postcolonial Theory and the United States*, edited by Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt. I register my solidarity with both attempts to shatter the dogmatic slumber of the academy. Because of time constraints, I can only sketch here my reservations in the form of exploratory marginalia.

Postnationalist critics strive to deepen the sophistication of the multiculturalist program initiated by Lauter and others by a systematic teaching of the historical and theoretical intersections with the complementary disciplines of Ethnic Studies, Women’s Studies, and area/policy studies. Such intersectionality will hopefully supplement interdisciplinarity and relax pedagogical constraints. The aim is to avoid being used, to quote Rowe, “in the cultural imperialist agendas central to U.S. foreign policies from the Marshall Plan in postwar Europe to the multinational ‘alliance’ we assembled to fight (and legitimate) the Gulf War.” Recalling how the CIA enrolled artists and intellectuals in the Cold War front (Saunders, 1999; Neogy, 1998), we need to support this move to deprostitute intellectuals. Nonetheless, we are still confined to the universe of discourse of a “national literature” distinguished as “American” or “United States.”

The agenda now seeks to refurbish the old business of “critical internationalism”: “the critical study of the circulation of ‘America’ as a commodity of the new cultural imperialism and the ways in which local knowledges and arts have responded to such cultural importations” (2000, 28). Rowe also invokes the model of “contact zone” first proposed by Mary Louise Pratt as a semiotic site of exchanges for hemispheric and global scholars. Such contact zones have in fact become institutionalized as cross-border, diasporic, transnational, flexible-citizenship studies.

However, in designing such ambitious plans, the centrality of the exploitation of racialized labor within the boundaries of the U.S. nation-state is not addressed. Nor is there a direct, sustained confrontation of the global reach and domination of U.S. finance capital via the IMF/World Bank, World Trade Organization, and other regulatory and policing bodies. The focus is on the sphere of exchange and consumption, not the production of knowledge and social *habitus*, even though Rowe bewails the functional utilitarianism of the educational system. The international division of labor and its attendant unequal power relations among peoples constitute the absent center of gravity, the lacuna, which enables its oppositional intent to be so appealing and reasonable to genteel humanists.

ELUDING SURVEILLANCE

Postcolonial U.S. Studies has become the vogue for academics in search of “cutting-edge” prestige. Critics of orthodox postcolonialism have noted that this postal research program suffers from a premature relegation of the power of the nation-state (in particular, U.S., Russia, UK, France, Germany), nationality, and the politics of nationalism, to oblivion. One cannot postalize the reality of the U.S. nation-state, now reconfigured as the “homeland” not subject to supra-national bodies like the World Court, without taking into account the intense if sublimated class antagonisms that constitute the social formation. It is as if by some sleight-of-hand one can dismiss U.S. imperial hegemony by discarding the ideology and practice of nationalism without judging the legitimacy of the state and the ruling-class interests that it promotes. As two political analysts suggest, we need to think of “the boundaries of states more as strategies in social struggles than as preordained social facts” (Augelli & Murphy, 1993, p. 139). In short, the prerequisite of a postnationalist epistemology is precisely to work through the historical contradictions of the social relations constituting the specific nation-state and the operative hegemonic ideology undergirding its cultural institutions and practices. Lacking this necessary stage of critique, we cannot transform the traditional orientation of American Studies by nominalist strategies of inventing fancy rubrics to suit traumatized consciences. Finance capital cannot be overthrown by proclaiming the obsolescence of the “nation” and the apotheosis of a “multitude” of free thinkers, as Negri and Hardt’s *Empire* seeks to do.

Controversies on nationalism and state violence are endemic

today. Here I want to remark briefly on the Marxist understanding of nationalism. It is often said that for Marx, the working class has no nation, owes no allegiance or loyalty to any country. But this does not mean that the nation is illusory or defunct *a priori*. Again, the protagonists of history need to work through the manifold contradictions of their everyday social lives and find new viable springboards for reconstituting their metabolic exchange with nature. This is what Marx and Engels asserted: "The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself *the* nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word" (1968, p. 54). For that to happen, the class struggle needs to unfold to its dialectical conclusion. In the contest for hegemony—ideological leadership and supremacy via consent of the majority—the national-popular character of the culture of the productive classes and its effectivity as "common sense" or universal *habitus* (to use Bourdieu's term) becomes decisive in transcending the oppressive chauvinist nationalism of the bourgeoisie by replacing it with the national-popular state. The "homeland" is precisely the antithesis if not enemy of that reconstituted integral state, but the way to surpass it is through the contradictory formation of a national-popular public sphere.

As for garden-variety postcolonialism, the fallacy of classifying the United States as "the world's first postcolonial *and* neo-colonial country" (Singh & Schmidt, 2000, p. 5) aligns this theory with American exceptionalism in an unwitting move to disarm its challengers. Is this a maneuver of cynical reason? In what sense can this rhetorical strategy hide the nature of U.S. capitalism that since its founding as a settler colony has thrived on the exploitation of the labor-power of peoples in the "internal colonies" and external dependencies? Certainly, postcolonial theorists like Edward Said, Arif Dirlik, and others condemn imperialism, both cultural and geopolitical, for its barbaric violence and subjugation of indigenous peoples and heathen communities. But in no way will they endorse glamorizing U.S. exceptionalism in its neosocial Darwinist guise as the march of liberty and progress, if not their triumph over the "axis of evil." What message is this army of postcolonial United States today delivering to the peoples of the world as it marches through the desert surrounding Baghdad? And tomorrow, Iran, Cuba, and other "terrorist" outposts of the Empire?

The postcolonial version of American Studies claims to valorize the usefulness of borderlands, contact zones, as well as in-

tra-ethnic or multiracial comparisons as a way out of the “civilizing mission” of the founders. Like the postnationalists, the postcolonialists disavow the cultural imperialism of the past and seek to affirm if not celebrate the virtue of difference. They also endorse the eclectic performance of hybridity and syncretism, following the footsteps of Bhabha, Spivak, and their acolytes. But like the postnationalists in general, the postcolonialists evade the issue of class antagonism, the stigmatization of unassimilated Others, the racialization of working peoples for capital accumulation, even as they gesture vociferously against genetic or xenoracism. No doubt many do heed the call, “Always historicize!” but the procedure only leads to a further fixation of belief in nominalist pluralism, the denunciation of totalizing narratives, and the praise of the nomadic bricoleur/flaneur of cultures.

Postcolonialists claim that their approach actualizes the potential of the already tested approaches engaged with comparative historical analysis, such as postethnic, border, and diaspora studies. They concentrate on hybridity, mobility, the “third space,” the interstitial and liminal—neither assimilation nor construction of Otherness. They seek to transcend the binary opposition of tribalism or ethnic particularism versus world citizenship, of cultural stereotyping and narratives of self-determination, by the paradigm of transnationalism. Together with the notion of intersectionality based on Foucault’s view of the fluctuating and dispersed modalities of power, transnationalism, as well as the various permutation of the prefix “trans-” serve as the inferential theorem for apprehending positionalities of “dispersal and simultaneous situatedness across different axes of differentiation. . . .” In understanding the postcolonial situation, as one recent writer in *Feminist Review* puts it, “there are regimes of representation, modes of experience, discursive formations and issues about selfhood, subjectivity and identity that cannot be captured or appropriately addressed within the framework of exploitation” (Brah, 2002, p. 43). To be sure, this is the opposite of the current Manichean will-to-discriminate cultures and civilizations. But how far will it help demystify the pluralist allure of the commodity-fetish?

UNCANNY TRANSFERENCES

In the search for connections or coherence, we tend to sacrifice our overloaded sense of contradictions and incommensurabilities with which our postmodernist intuition has made us feel at home. More than “inter-“ or “post-,” “trans” is indeed the conten-

tious prefix, the handyman's special fix for all seasons. What does it signify?

The semantics of "transnationalism" is entangled in complex political, cultural, and economic processes that now circumscribe the condition of everyday life in late modernity. With the presumed collapse of the nation-state, or its loss of centrality as the defining locus of identity, or the effective machine for neutralizing class antagonisms, an urgent quest for an explanatory narrative of the present has led to the discovery that identity or subjectivity can no longer be anchored to anything coherent or stable as race, nation, nature, class, or any of the old transcendental guarantees of a permanent "human nature." The formation of the self is now framed within social relations of consumption, relations that constitute our pleasures, desires, consciousness. For Lyotard (1984), modern life is characterized by *electicism*, "the degree zero" of quotidian existence. We consume commodities, signs, spectacles, even to the point of cannibalizing our own imaginaries or simulacra. In this culture of consumption, subjectivity is constructed or performed according to the traffic of affects, whether grasped as contingent reflexes, symptoms of the unconscious, or "rational choice." The self is no longer a unitary entity stabilized by a nation with fixed borders, but a site of the play of manifold forces, forever unfinished and in flux, in which the subject takes positions according to a logic of difference or hybridity. Either it shifts from one "national" space to another, or "transgresses" such boundaries in its deterritorializing passage through phases of its indeterminate metamorphosis.

From another angle less ethical and more political, "transnationalism" is an ideological construct open to contestation. It evokes the idea that nations are equal or substitutable, that is, free contracting parties to a business transaction. One can shift identities or citizenship as easily as flying from one airport to another. This usage is reflected in the notion of transmigrants, of flexible citizens parachuting from Taiwan or Hong Kong to California, from Jamaica or Haiti to New York and Montreal, with shifting habitats and lifestyles. Does this generalization apply to everyone, including Filipinos, the largest nomadic if not diasporic nationality in the world today?

The Philippines today is the largest exporter/supplier of affordable domestics—about nine or ten million Filipino OCWs (Overseas Contract Workers), out of eighty million Filipinos at home, shuttle back and forth (San Juan, 2001). Everyday, approximately 2,600 Filipinos leave for abroad—not as tourists but as low-paid workers. Some were especially recruited to build the

metal cages of the Taliban prisoners in Guantanamo, Cuba. As I noted in my book, *After Postcolonialism*, something monstrously perverse has been inflicted on Filipinos when they are called “transnationals”: “What could be more muddled than the notion that all nation-states are equal in power and status, making the newly arrived Filipina ‘transmigrant’ indistinguishable from the white American middle-class suburbanite?” (San Juan, 2000, p. 91). Unfortunately, this is a noticeable reflex vitiating many commentaries dealing with the situation of migrant workers in the care-giving sector. In a recent article on globalization, Fredric Jameson refers to this patronizing syndrome: “American blindness can be registered, for example, in our tendency to confuse the universal and the cultural, as well as to assume that in any given geopolitical conflict all elements and values are somehow equal and equivalent; in other words, are not affected by the disproportions of power” (1998, p. 59). Part of the reason is the habit of ignoring the social division of labor as constitutive of material social relations, not just an affect of status or roles, of identity as lifestyle and consumption pattern, following the well-beaten track of neo-Weberian gospel and other not-so-polite modes of reconciling antagonistic forces.

And so we can agree on the face of bare empirical accounting that “trans” doesn’t translate into equality or parity. In the conventional sense, “trans” designates a moment or event of “going beyond,” so that “transnationalism” is used to convey the easily accomplished disappearance of the nation or nation-state despite the United Nations and other international bodies. Should we then conceive of “transnationalism” as an epochal transcendence of the “nation” and nationalism? Some offer qualifications that the national sovereignty specifically of underdeveloped formations has been usurped by global institutions expressing G-8 interests, primarily the U.S. Or, in another register, how the European Community has sublated peculiar national interests within one normative ethos despite the persistence of distinct sovereignties?

At this contentious juncture, I want to cite Virginia Dominguez’s cautionary warning that transnationalism as a social imaginary should be properly situated in the long history of U.S. racialism and nationalism, in short, the context of the actually existing racial polity we inhabit. Racist talk or racial classification surrounds the usage of transnationalism. Dominguez reminds us that “assertions of transnationalism, transnationalist sentiments, and the development of the language of transnationalism to refer to peripheralised, racially Other-ised peoples living within the context of the USA are all occurring in

the context of a U.S. society *intensely* engaged in circumscribing 'the American nation' and legitimating, indeed reinscribing, the compulsory racialism of its nationhood. . . . [Transnationalism] is a social imaginary in which the 'nation' is inconceivable without, rather than with, racial differentiation" (1998, pp. 152–153). Indeed, how can the bridging agency of "trans" fully take effect without implicating the "nations" that enable it?

Short of a cacophonous babel confounding the atmosphere, we can sum up this critique with the postcolonial semiotics of mixture and amalgamation. Should we understand "transnationalism" as a semiotic "trans-gression" in the way Bhabha, for example, conceives the subject as an invented identity realized in acts of consumption and circulation? Bhabha's central notion of "hybridity" resolves the binary outside/inside distinction by destabilizing it textually, just as Paul De Man (1983) counterposes performative and constative elements in the process of deconstruction. Ignoring epistemological protocols, Bhabha teases out textual and figurative elements to reveal figures of "prodigious doubling"—he often finds them without fail—within discursive sites in order to open up what were otherwise deemed closed, unified, and coherent systems for disruption and dismantling. Bhabha dissolves the nation thus: "In the production of the nation as narration, there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of writing the nation" (1990, p. 297). Simply translated, the discourse of national unity composed by giving pattern to serial events differs from everyday practices with their singular meanings, removed in their phenomenal uniqueness from any interpretive frame of intelligibility.

Indispensable lessons can be learned from this contraposing of the pedagogical and the performative. The accepted gap between event and thought that tries to make sense of event has been muddled by the fatuous use of Saussurean linguistics courtesy of Derrida. The world or referent vanishes in the magical teaching of one textbook: "The arbitrary relation between signifier and signified institutes a gap within the signifier that can never be reduced or simply wished away. . . . The signified is never present to the signifier. Indeed, the signified can now be seen to be purely hypothetical, the dream of an imaginary speaker's clear and accessible intention. . . . The signified will always be irrecoverable" (Fuery & Mansfield, 2000, pp. 60–61). Conflating Saussure with Charles Sanders Peirce, Jonathan Culler (1981) agrees that all uses of signs (from *langue* to *parole*) are arbitrary because

conventional; social rules and semiotic conventions govern the production of meaning and knowledge. But this ignores the fact that the discursive is “a socially constructed reality” which, while it posits the categories of the real and the symbolic, “it assigns structure to the real at the same time as it is a product and a moment of real structures” (Frow, 1986, p. 58). For the postmodernist critic, “real structures” are semiotic constructions too so that we never get beyond the universe of Saussurean signifiers.

It follows from the deconstructive hermeneutic that we cannot sensibly argue today in terms of distinguishable entities like nations, citizens, localities, or even fixed ethnic identities. The old logic of Self and Others, outside and inside, will not do. All polar and binary opposites have been destabilized by the linguistic turn; in fact, difference operates not just between individuals, but also within them. This radical difference within undermines any order premised on wholeness or self-identical meanings; all such systems are disrupted and dismantled by the doubleness or hybridity that ruins any claim to distinguishing what is true or false, right or wrong. All that is left is for each to devise strategies of self-fashioning at every moment, ways of re-inventing one’s life, according to some ideal of aesthetic pleasure or decorum.

But is it the case that the world is simply an artifice of sign-usages, life a question of performance style? How do we know that? Having already criticized the complicity of power and knowledge, the deconstructionists are not so innocent players in this game of mock-heresies. What distinguishes poststructuralist thought, among others, is (*pace* De Man) its blindness to its limitations. Its fundamental error is the nominalist one of excluding from the signifier–signified enclosure the existence of what Peirce calls token or indexical signs that point to existential physical actions and emotions, to the generality of experience.

Let us recall the elementary axioms of Peirce’s semiotics. The sign is defined thus: “Anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its *object*) in the same way, the interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on *ad infinitum*. No doubt, intelligent consciousness must enter into the series” (1991, p. 239). Peirce postulates then that the object determines the sign; meaning is not arbitrary but a function of the triadic sign relation involving object–sign–interpretant. While the object conditions the sign, the sign does not determine the interpretant (the “signified” in Saussurean terminology). The interpretant participates with the object in specifying the meaning of the sign. Consequently, the partial in-

determinacy of the interpretant (the meaning of the sign) “makes the sign relation a powerful instrument of logical discovery, contrary to “the dull and lazy brood of modern logicians” in the Cartesian tradition, who held that only ideas immediately present (unrepresented) in the mind were a reliable guide to truth” (Hoopes 1991, p. 252). In effect, Peirce posited the essence of the semiotic in the representation of one object to a second by a third, this thirdness cognized as intelligence. This thirdness is objectively real: “Intelligence is a triadic, representational relation in which one object is represented to a second by a third, a sign” (Hoopes, 1991, p. 10). Because Peirce was able to formulate his triad of semiotic categories—“something standing for something else by virtue of ever different modalities of sign production” or “changing network of semantic components” (Eco, 1985, p. 179), he freed semiotics from the “blackmail of the linguistic model” which seriously limits the explanatory capacity of poststructuralist criticism. In contrast to the nominalist tendency of modern thought to accept only the reality of atomic individual facts and dyadic relations between them, Peirce argued that “general principles are really operative in nature” (1991, p. 244). And it is “the freedom of human choice that controls meaning as theory” (Sheriff, 1989, p. 132).

The nominalist and pragmatic bias of postmodernist American Studies rejects the constitutive power of intelligence, thus exposing itself to the winds of contingency. It rejects Peirce’s semiotic realism premised on the signifying process whereby the object and its sign begets a third, the interpretant or thought grasped here as an interpretive relation, an activity of making connections by inference. According to Peirce, “Our ideas have also a causal connection with the things that they represent without which there would be no real knowledge” (1991, p. 143). Hence the meaning of a sign is not necessarily arbitrary but may be as logical as the thought or inferential mode that interprets it. Of course, the interpretant can be stupid or wrongheaded, but it is never arbitrary. Between Bhabha’s dual domains of the pedagogical and the performative, there is no room for the interpretant, which is not just arbitrary convention but a continuing process of semiosis which results in “concrete reasonableness,” with the community of critical interpretants employing logical rules of inference to test the objective validity of truth-claims.

Peirce’s theory of signs, a version of applied historical materialism, may be the best alternative for now to the nihilistic absolutism of deconstruction. As an antidote to the postcolonial absolutization of difference, Peirce proposes the theory of meaning as a relation, not Saussurean or Derridean “difference”; a

relation shaped by experience, “the brute factuality of the world in time,” by changing habits and traditions (Rochberg-Halton, 1986, p. 50). Since our knowledge of reality is general, it requires a community of inquirers working together to understand the laws of motion in society and the world. In calibrating the dialectic between freedom and constraints operating in the act of making sense of signs, the act of interpreting culture, American Studies would be properly an activity of abduction, of inquiry as the formulation and evaluation of hypotheses, a socially and historically informed inquiry with “conceivable practical effects” in the real world. As an alternative to Cartesian dualism and its variants in pragmatism and nominalism, Peirce’s semiotic realism enables us to conceive of thought as action, and of thinking, language, and culture as real effective historical forces producing significant changes in our lives.

Postcolonial hybridity has real effects, to be sure, but nothing really subversive by way of significantly altering the political economy of everyday life in the global marketplace. Unfortunately, its ethical diagnosis for the endless renegotiation of the meaning of one’s identity is touted as a mode of empowerment. But what distinguishes it from other ways of accommodating our bodies to the market? Those more attuned to the predicament of the alienated middle-class citizen can sympathize with the performative self’s strategies for refashioning identity as a hermeneutic game of switching attention between the group to which we belong, or chose to belong, and the “thing” (nation, culture, etc.) that we all share, to one degree or another. Postcolonialist, postnationalist, and borderland approaches in American Studies inflect the indeterminate and ambivalent “difference within” of the hybrid subject in order to produce versions of transnationalism, cosmopolitanism (even Rorty’s “cosmopolitanism without emancipation”), transculturalism, “critical internationalism,” and so on. For disenchanted melancholy intellectuals, it is the internal delirium of writing taken as the final social-cultural text to be deciphered before the meltdown in *jouissance*.

VOLATILE ENCOUNTERS

Inventorying all the laudable aims of the “new Americanists,” we pause to mark the fact that globalization (read: neoimperialism) under U.S. hegemony proceeds undeterred. This even as the corporate elite and its representatives in government seek to maintain the nation-state’s position as sole global military superpower despite serious economic–political liabilities, as argued by

Giovanni Arrighi, Immanuel Wallerstein, and the world-systems school (Gowan, 2002). Internationalism, or transnationalism, displays a new realignment even as it builds on old habits of domination. The severe crisis of finance capital occurs today in a transnational environment because of the close institutional bonds that tie the three principal zones of capital (North America, Europe, East Asia) from the Atlantic to the Pacific into a single compact via new forms of intercontinental enterprise and financial speculation which exceed but are parasitical on existing nation-state boundaries. However, ideologically, the official discourse of the transnational corporate Establishment is still free-market neoliberalism which legitimizes the iniquitous social order. Except that now it unmitigatedly imposes the laws of privatization and deregulation on countries indebted to its banks, via the IMB/World Bank and the WTO.

From all accounts, the historical construct of the U.S. nation-state has been refurbished and its exceptionalist ideology reconfigured. After September 11, the “Homeland” as been invoked as the imaginary community that compensates for the lack or diminution of real liberty and equality of the majority of citizens, especially people of color. But nationalism is not the weapon of the dominant class today, as Perry Anderson cogently remarks; rather, it is internationalism:

The antithesis of the two terms—internationalism/isolationism—makes clear their common presupposition: at stake was never the primacy of national interest, which formed the common ground of both, but simply the best way of realizing it. The historical origin of the couplet lies in the peculiar combination created by the American ideology of a republic simultaneously exceptional and universal: unique in the good fortune of its radiation and attraction. This janus-faced messianism, allowing either for a fervent cult of the homeland or for a missionary redemption of the world—or, in more realist style, of diplomatic admixtures of the two. . . . In practice, [internationalism] has typically operated as little more than a self-satisfied codeword for forward policies to be pursued by the American state at large. . . . Just as isolationism never meant the slightest derogation from the Monroe doctrine, the Olney declaration or the Platt Amendment—that is, sovereign U.S. command over the Western hemisphere—so, from the outset, internationalism in this American sense simply meant the readiness and will to extend U.S. power to Eurasia: Woodrow Wilson’s interventions, starting in Mexico and ending in Russia, setting its logic from the start. . . . Internationalism in this sense is no longer the coordination of the major capitalist powers under American dominance against a common enemy, the negative task of the Cold War, but an affirmative ideal—the reconstruction of the global in the American image, *sans phrases*. The tattered if victorious flag of the Free World has been lowered. In its place the banner of human rights has been erected—that is, first and foremost, the right of the international community to blockade, to bomb, to invade peoples or states that displease it: Cuba, Yugoslavia,

Afghanistan, Iraq—and to nourish, finance and arm states that appeal to it: Turkey, Israel, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan [and lately, the Philippines]. . . . (2002, pp. 23–24)

In this new historic conjuncture, as we are compelled to “shelter under the skies of infinite justice and enduring freedom,” the stakes for a reconstruction of American Studies are massive and decisively consequential. Can those engaged in American Studies challenge this “humanitarian” interventionism with ludic hybridity, cosmopolitan postnationalism, borderland transcultures, and regional multiculturalisms? Can we envisage an alternative “transnationalism” as part of a larger project of political and social transformation that will challenge the rule of bankers and money-lenders over the world’s laboring multitudes? Can the Bangsamoro people in Mindanao, the Philippines—the second front in this war against worldwide terrorism—expect comfort, help, or illumination from such a reconceived and reconfigured American Studies?

Somewhat peremptorily perhaps, I offered these questions to the Summer 2002 Dartmouth Institute on “The Futures of Americans” where I sensed the longing for transnational and cosmopolitan status pervasive and inspiring. It may take time to shield oneself from such scandalous demands, but a framework for tackling a reconstruction of not only American Studies but the humanities in general may have already been initiated by the manifesto of several thousand persons, mostly among the intelligentsia, entitled “A Statement of Conscience: Not In Our Name” against the unilateral “pre-emptive strike” against Iraq for “regime change” and a call of resistance to the dangerous policies and overall political direction of the current dispensation. I quote the opening and closing paragraphs of this historic manifesto:

Let it not be said that people in the United States did nothing when their government declared a war without limit and instituted stark new measures of repression. We believe that peoples and nations have the right to determine their own destiny, free from military coercion by great powers. We believe that all persons detained or prosecuted by the United States government should have the same rights of due process. We believe that questioning, criticism, and dissent must be valued and protected. We understand that such rights and values are always contested and must be fought for. We believe that people of conscience must take responsibility for what their own governments do—we must first of all oppose the injustice that is done in our own name. Thus we call on all Americans to *resist* the war and repression that has been loosed on the world by the Bush administration. It is unjust, immoral, and illegitimate. We choose to make common cause with the people of the world. . . .

We refuse to allow you [President Bush declaring “You’re either with us

or against us"] to speak for all the American people. We will not give up our right to question. We will not hand over our consciences in return for a hollow promise of safety. We say NOT IN OUR NAME. We refuse to be party to these wars and we repudiate any inference that they are being waged in our name or for our welfare. We extend a hand to those around the world suffering from these policies; we will show our solidarity in word and deed. . . . We who sign this statement call on all Americans to join together to rise to this challenge. . . . We draw on the many examples of resistance and conscience from the past of the United States: from those who fought slavery with rebellions and the underground railroad, to those who defied the Vietnam war by refusing orders, resisting the draft, and standing in solidarity with resisters. Let us not allow the watching world today to despair of our silence and our failure to act. Instead, let the world hear our pledge: we will resist the machinery of war and repression and rally others to do everything possible to stop it.

Widely circulated, this statement may not prevent the government's decision to unilaterally impose a *pax Americana* wherever it chooses; but at least it confronts the anti-intellectualist jihad language of "United We Stand," and opposes what Susan Sontag aptly labels "the dangerous lobotomizing notion of endless war," a pseudo-war that is just "a mandate for expanding the use of American power" (2002, A12). In the American tradition of an uncompromising critique of Establishment pieties, the manifesto unfolds with poignant eloquence the basic contradictions of our time that we need to grapple with and seek to resolve with hope, courage, and solidarity.

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