Editorial Introduction: Forging New Collaborations

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At least two volumes have appeared recently, signaling a shift in the American Studies agenda towards transnational and/or transcultural issues. The European Association for American Studies (EAAS) has issued several volumes in the "European Views of the United States," published through the Universitätverslag Heidelberg; the most recent of these ("The Changing Images of America") surveys what the idea of "America" represents, both inside and outside the United States, focusing especially on ideas of "youth" and "rebirth." Imelda Martín Junquera's piece shows how the border between Mexico and the United States remains "forever young" in terms of its significance – especially to would-be emigrants from Mexico – offering the promise of wealth and prosperity. Yet this is seldom anything more than a pipe-dream: many people (especially young women) are reduced to surviving on drugs on prostitution. Junquera argues that this image of the border has been deliberately disseminated by the Mexican and American governments in an attempt to increase "the profits provided by the exploitation of the workers of the 'maquiladora' plants for the sake of progress in economic terms" (249).

Tanfer Emin Tunç moves back in time to reconstruct the Turkish media's response to John F. Kennedy's efforts to cement Turco-American relations during the early 1960s. His policies were so effective that he became "almost a mythic force," symbolizing "democracy, freedom, hope, the limitless potential of humankind, and a strong ally who confronted the perils of communism" (87-8). Even today there are numerous bloggers in the Republic of Turkey who are preoccupied with conspiracy theories of the period, centering on Lyndon Johnson, the CIA, and the Cuba Missile Crisis; only Kennedy, it seems, could provide those leadership qualities necessary to engage – and perhaps resolve – such issues (88).

Tunç's edited collection *The Transnational Turn in American Studies* (2012) contains a series of interventions showing how aspects of American culture and politics have been reinvented in the Republic of Turkey for various purposes – ideological and/or economic. Ever since Jack Kerouac's seminal *On the Road* appeared in 1957, various creative talents have appropriated the road-trip as a metaphor of discovery, both psychological as well as geographical. Erik Mortensen cites Yılmaz Güney's *Yol*/ *The Road* (1982) as an example, a film that focuses on travel as well as embodying "the significant life choices that the convicts [i.e. the protagonists] are forced to make" (128). Annessa Ann Babic's piece looks at how consumerism has impacted on the modern Republic of Turkey, with the gradual erosion of traditional coffee shops, and the corresponding growth of franchises. Babic believes that, while drinking a white chocolate mocha in Starbucks "will not make you American," it nonetheless operates one of a series of "imaginary portals of momentary communication" between two cultures. Starbucks is a prime example of the free market's attempts to provide "an eternally elusive and intangible ideal" of freedom or self-determination (269).[i]

While both anthologies contain fascinating insights into the ways in which "America" has been reinvented across time and space, we are not convinced that they are either transnational or transcultural in focus; rather they offer cross-cultural accounts of how a target culture has appropriated elements of a source culture for specific ideological purposes. I suggested in a recent book written with Tony Gurr that the term *transnational* – in common with its synonyms *transdisciplinary* and *transcultural* – implies the bringing together of material from several different cultures, disciplines or nationalisms in a methodological framework (ch. 3). It might be argued with justification that Tunç's *Transnational Turn* is better described as *interdisciplinary*: the bulk of its contributions confine themselves to comparisons between just two cultures, the United States and the Republic of Turkey. Its disciplinary focus is likewise interdisciplinary: out of the fifteen chapters, seven confine themselves to literature-based analyses. The EAAS collection also contains a disproportionate amount of literature-based material. While not opposed to this kind of work *per se*, we do believe that it perpetuates what Toby Miller has defined as the distinction between Humanities One and Humanities Two approaches to academic writing and publishing. Humanities One can trace its lineage back to Arnold, Leavis and their acolytes, and is based on the assumption that literature is the "key center" of the moral and development of individual readers (40). Miller quotes the historian

Richard Rorty, who insists that book-readers do so "in order to change their sense of what is possible and important – either for themselves or their society" (41). Humanities Two is the humanities of everyday state education, focusing on job-related material; among the subjects covered by this category are media and communication studies, journalism, and foreign language teaching and learning (109-10). Miller calls instead for a more all-encompassing view of the humanities – which he calls the Third Humanities; one that cuts across disciplines and incorporates economics, politics, textual analysis, gender theory, ethnography, history, material objects, and policy. For Miller this transdisciplinary approach provides "a positive intellectual polyphony that draws out contradiction and dissonance," (108), based on schemes of work that emphasize "*collaborative* (not competitive), and *learned* (not leeched) forms of work" (121, italics mine). The task is an onerous one, which can only be achieved through deconstructing issues such as "how meaning is made […] in all media," as well as in all disciplines (122).

For this model to work in practice, however, it is important to have a shared sense of purpose. This applies to any organization: the more people embrace a vision of where that organization and its research agenda are going, the more they are prepared to collaborate on its future direction. Richard Sennett draws no distinction between academia and the societies they serve; both are "complex and full of difference." Such differences can be transformed into "active engagement" to a communal ideal, either through informal means, or through an emphasis on "mutuality" that transforms technical competence into sociable experience (62-3). A commitment to mutuality involves a willingness to adapt to changing circumstances, while believing in the possibilities of experiment. Tim Harford comments: "The lesson is that pluralism [both psychological as well as intellectual] encourages pluralism. If you want to stimulate many innovations, combine many strategies" (113). Applying this model to American Studies, we propose that a truly transdisciplinary or transnational approach should involve as many colleagues as possible from a variety of disciplines, who share the desire to understand the contradictions and dissonances lurking beneath the idea of "America" (understood in this sense as a transdisciplinary construct), by drawing on their own particular academic or technical competencies.

This approach might seem fundamentally flawed in the sense that, while promoting the value of experimentation, it nonetheless implies a willing subjection to American values, whether constructed inside the country or elsewhere. This is one of the principal criticisms leveled at so-called "country studies" as (re-)constructed in the west; such disciplines prioritize certain ways of life over others for ideological and/or colonialist purposes. In their introduction to the collection *The Theme of Cultural Adaptation in American History, Literature and Film*, Tunç and Raw addressed this issue: beginning from the premise that there are no consensual views as to what "America" represents, they suggested that a transdisciplinary approach to American Studies should foreground the ways in which texts – understood in this sense as any form of cultural product – express the psychological desires of their writers. To look at texts in this way shifts the critical focus away from issues of motive, agency, and interpretation (the characteristic preoccupations of Humanities One), on to the cultural, social, and material concerns that shaped their production. This methodology treats American Studies as a site of negotiation between representatives of different disciplines as well as between representatives of different cultures, in a desire to continue "stirring the pot, [oftentimes] providing a welcome outburst of diverse work," as well as encouraging a rethink of the reasons why we are conducting our researches (Raw and Tunç 2). Not only can we discover new and exciting ways of approaching canonical texts (and thereby experience the kind of life-changing experience that the writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o enjoyed while reading T. S. Eliot in late colonial Kenya (3-4)), but we might be able to envisage a new future for the humanities, reaching out to colleagues and fellow-travelers in all parts of the world, or on other parts of university campuses – scientists, publishers, librarians, tenured faculty, graduate students and other learners.

While recognizing the contribution that the *Journal of American Studies in Turkey* has already made to scholarship in the discipline since its inception in 1995 we will endeavor to try and move it in a more transdisciplinary direction, focusing not just on "American Studies" (understood as the study of the United States past, present, and future) but examining the idea of "America," and how it continues to shape our lives, irrespective of where we might reside. The *Journal* will provide a forum for anyone, irrespective of their disciplinary specialisms, who is concerned with transdisciplinary or

transnational issues, in an attempt to foster an atmosphere of "mutuality" and collaboration essential to the success of this kind of work. While the journal's principal focus of interest will continue to center on full-length contributions, we also welcome shorter pieces – akin to opinion-columns in the news media. Our book and film review sections have been expanded to incorporate a variety of texts written by colleagues worldwide: transdisciplinarity should involve everyone, irrespective of their academic background and/or their countries of origin.

Bearing these objectives in mind, we begin this issue with a commentary written by Güven Çağdaş Gündoğdu. Although not concerned with "American Studies" *per se*, he emphasizes that transdisciplinary and/or transcultural awareness can be acquired through *learning* as well as research. This is a very important point: if we believe that learning emerges through cooperation, we must also acknowledge the importance of this point in our pedagogic practice, as well as in our academic encounters. We should *listen* to our learners; for it is only by listening that we can begin to understand the complexities of transcultural exchange. Gündoğan believes that this ability is fundamental to the ways in which we acquire cultural as well as linguistic knowledge.

Allen H. Redmon's discussion of the Coen Brothers' work deals with similar points: to understand their films, we should set aside our generic and/or cultural expectations and approach the texts on their own terms. Drawing on the constructivist theories of Jean Piaget, Redmon argues that the films mean different things to different types of filmgoer: "No definite meaning can ever be reached […] [hence we should examine] the discourses users have to make sense of it." Such discussions help us to arrive at some kind of consensus as to why the Coens' work seems so significant, while at the same time recognizing that such consensual views are perpetually open to renegotiation.

Reka Mihalka's contribution looks at the ways in which Ezra Pound produced his own versions of Japanese Nō theatre plays. He had a dual involvement with the source texts, producing both translations and adaptations for different artistic purposes. Mihalka suggests that the texts reveal as much about Pound's preoccupations as those of the Nō dramatists; hence it is important to understand the socio-political conditions that shaped his views, rather than evaluating the finished texts for their presumed artistic merits. Lance Eaton likewise examines issues of textual reshaping, this time in a transmedial context, with a particular emphasis on the lucrative audiobook industry. To date radio and/or audio studies remains a comparatively neglected area of academic research: Eaton's lucidly written article shows how adapters have had to keep various criteria in mind – the use of a narrator, or which sound-effects to choose – while transforming source texts. With the spread of the internet, radio programs have the potential to become more and more transnational in terms of their appeal: many sites, notably the Internet Archive (www.archive.org) offer extensive libraries of material, both ancient and modern, for download. Eaton takes great pains to explain the growth of such popularity.

Turning once again to the cinema, Peter Labuza considers how the director Christopher Nolan's oeuvre has infused an established genre – film noir – with contemporary significance. Perhaps his films seem a little less cutting-edge in terms of impact, especially when compared with thrillers such as Robert Siodmak's *The Killers* (1946), but perhaps this can be attributed to the changed circumstances in which Hollywood films are conceived and created. Most studios are now part of multinational conglomerates; to ensure box-office success, they often render their products as accessible as possible to global audiences. Labuza's piece alerts us to the downside of transnationalism, especially when viewed from a commercial perspective.

On the other hand individual viewers of an artistic text don't necessarily have to respond in the ways that their producers expect. Nicola McCartney and Julia Lane offer complementary views as to how this process works in practice. McCartney suggests that many artists consciously invite plural responses to their work by disregarding such concepts as "the author" as a controlling presence of the narrative – whether visual or written. By such strategies they hope to deconstruct the Humanities One conception of art (to return to Miller's phrase), and acknowledge the validity of all responses, whether from representatives of Humanities One or Humanities Two. Lane argues that all arts-based research should follow a similar path by becoming more fluid, more open to challenge and interpretation, while refraining from making absolute distinctions – so characteristic of some areas of interdisciplinary studies, notably adaptation studies – between "fidelity" and "infidelity" to a specified source-text.

This issue rounds off with substantially expanded book and film review sections, incorporating a variety of interventions. In keeping with the journal's title we survey recent publications on Turco-American relations part and present, as well as considering recent publications written in English by Turkish authors. We survey recent publications on Francis Coppola and his family's work in films, as well as director Ridley Scott; and complete our book review section with reviews of recent publications on media studies issues – not only relating to the United States but to other contexts as well. We look in particular at the ways in which viewers treat the media – both broadcast as well as print – with suspicion, not just in the United States but worldwide. In Great Britain, for example, the recent Leveson inquiry into the culture, practices and ethics of the press has thrown up some interesting questions about the limits of intrusion into individuals' lives.

Our film and television review section begins with two reviews – one written by an American, the other by a Turkish colleague – of a fascinating documentary about Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, presented by legendary anchor Walter Cronkite, originally broadcast in 1958 on CBS, and now freely available to view on YouTube. Such views demonstrate the ways in which the same text can be approached in different ways by viewers in different contexts; this kind of contrastive approach, we believe, lies at the heart of the mission of the *Journal of American Studies in Turkey*. Other reviews look at recent releases in both the "mainstream" and "independent" sectors, written by colleagues from a variety of socio-cultural backgrounds.

Some readers might object to some of our submissions, on the basis that they do not strictly relate to "America" – as a social, political or economic construct - or "American Studies" as a discipline (we use the parentheses deliberately here). While acknowledging their views, we argue that if we are going to establish effective frameworks for transnational as well as transdisciplinary analysis, we have to provide a variety of opportunities to explore the implications of such terms: what does "America" represent to different people in different contexts, and how does this (re-)shape the way in which "American Studies" might be viewed in the future? We do not offer any hard and fast answers to such questions, but rather try to approach them from a pluralist perspective, both in terms of academic research as well as classroom practice. We aim to provoke as well as to please.

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[i] My own contribution to this anthology, "Hollywood's Turkish Films 1930-1960: A Nation Looks at Itself," examines the ways in which Hollywood studios represented the Republic of Turkey for propagandist purposes during the Cold War era (191-209).