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R. Oltean on W. Raussert & R. Isensee's (eds)  
*Transcultural Visions of Identities.*

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### REFERENCES

#### WORKS CITED

Fisher-Fishkin, Shelley. "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies – Presidential Address to the American Studies Association."

- 1 Wilfried Raussert and Reinhard Isensee. Eds. *Transcultural Visions of Identities in Images and Texts*. American Studies. A Monograph Series vol 175. Universitätsverlag Winter Heidelberg, 2008.
- 2 The papers in this volume are the outcome of an international conference in honor of Günter H. Lenz, held at the Humboldt University, Berlin, February 2005. As the editors note in the introduction, the conference was intended to provide possible answers to the question posed by Shelley Fisher-Fishkin, "What would the field of American Studies look like if the *transnational* rather than the *national* were at its center?" (Fishkin 21). In this sense, the papers collected in the present volume form part of and give a further twist to the transnational turn that has been challenging the paradigm of American exceptionalism at least since John Carlos Rowe put forth the concept of "New American Studies," which both proved to confirm a new current in American Studies and rang a prophetic tone, opening hitherto unheeded paths of reading and research, taking American Studies in a postnationalist direction.
- 3 It is the merit of the present volume that it brings a fresh perspective to the question of the transnational dimension of American Studies, one source for this perspective being the European standpoint or counterpoint that influences many of the readings proposed here, from John Carlos Rowe's interpretation of Mark Twain's critique of European and American imperialism and globalization in *A Journey Around the World* (1897) to Rob Kroes's discussion of the many imaginary Americas inhabiting Europe's

public spaces. In this sense, one of the most challenging problems posed by the present volume stems from the comments made by the editors in their introduction, who regard “America” – inevitably in quotation marks – “as a signifier that is configured both inside and outside the borders of the United States.” Although some of the responses address the specific context of the Bush administration and the war on terror – and, in this sense, some of the comments may seem context-bound – it must be stressed that the theoretical issues addressed in this volume hold relevance in the changing international context.

- 4 Indeed, “America” is the signifier explored from inside, outside and from the threshold by all the essays in the present volume. A key thematic note is struck in Donald Pease’s paper on Günter H. Lenz’s “transculturation” of American studies, discussing in particular the scholar’s concern with the consequences of critical comparison and more specifically the interaction between German and U.S. American studies. Pease, moreover, shows how Lenz’s transcultural perspective in particular sought to counter dominating discourses of American exceptionalism, reinforced by Cold-War discourse, to point to heterogeneity, conflicting faultlines and a world of what Pease calls “incompatible modernities.” Pease concludes by noting the return of American exceptionalism, in view of the war on terror declared by the Bush administration, insisting on the urgency of Lenz’s project as a corrective to Americanists’ habit of “averting relationship to cultural otherness”; whether the U.S. is returning to a Cold-War exceptionalist paradigm is, of course, to be confirmed or infirmed by the Obama administration.
- 5 A key historical perspective to the question of transculturation is illustrated by John Carlos Rowe’s reading of Mark Twain’s *Following the Equator. A Journey Around the World*. While not attempting to skirt what he himself terms the “objectionable” notes of racism, J.C. Rowe shows how Twain tries to capture the new imperial realities he encounters in his journey around the world but, at the same time, to challenge and compete with the new storytellers’ talents, namely the narratives of empire and globalization. The extent to which Twain is successful in the latter, and literature’s own capacity to resist and compete with other regimes of representation, notably those of imperialism and of corporate America, points opened up by J.C. Rowe’s paper, are questioned in Rudiger Kunow’s response.
- 6 A challenging perspective of transculturation is also offered by Robert Kroes, who shows how “Europe” and “America” are overlapped as imaginary constructs denoting an (often deceptive) paradise of freedom and how they can be involved in a transatlantic process of reflection to the extent that, as the author argues, it is Europe, rather than the policies of the Bush administration, that now holds “neo-Wilsonian promise.” A similar view of a Euro-American space is envisioned by Liam Kennedy’s recasting of European American Studies “under the sign of empire,” but also taking into account intellectual regionalisms.
- 7 Opening American Studies to transnational perspectives is a question that also reaches into teaching practices and “signature pedagogies,” as explored by Matthias Oppermann’s analysis of digital storytelling as one possibility consonant with the methodologies and programmatic markers of the field of American Studies, or as suggested by Randall Bass’s discussion of new digital media and its capacity to form critically minded citizens through the discipline of American Studies as a site for resistance. Reinhard Isensee also addresses the issue of new media and the need for

additional conceptual insights and practical skills in processing knowledge, in addition to a refinement of, rather than replacement of, older skills, promoting a model of participatory engagement “with the reconstruction of history and culture.”

- 8 Another issue raised by the interest in placing the transnational rather than the national at the center of American Studies is the ethnic and racial dimension of (hyphenated) American identities. A cluster of articles thus addresses the inevitable hybridity informing both canonized versions of American selfhood as well as hitherto marginalized, sutured identities. Thus, while Gabriele Pisarz-Ramirez traces roots of transnational identities as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the Haitian Revolution and its impact upon the formation of an African-American consciousness and consequent activism, and while Karl-Heinz Magister analyzes the migration of the West-Indian Carnival and its explorations of cultural hybridity as an instance of transnational challenges to fixed cultural and gender norms, Susan Datz offers an interdisciplinary critique of African American art, only recently introduced in discussions of transcultural models, with African American women artists conspicuously missing from mainstream representations, postulating the need for this type of research in order to articulate some of the most important transcultural perspectives, such as feminism and anti-racism.
- 9 Ethnicity is also placed in a wider context that includes the postethnic, as in Wilfried Raussert's reading of the works of women writers of South Asian descent, where post-ethnicity and ethnicity become complementary in an analysis of the complex process of identity formation, by combining the (utopian, post-ethnic) view of identities formed out of optional possibilities with the longing for a familiarity which is ethnically infused. Spatial metaphors are the subject of similar relocations both inside and outside national identity in Dorothea Löbbermann's rendering of Japanese-American identity, while two further articles show two historical identities that can be used as models for transnational encounters: Jules Chametzky's case-study of Jewish identity in America shows an example of an identity that has always been transcultural and transatlantic, while Maryemma Graham's analysis illustrates the way African American identity – and, more specifically, the African-American novel – displays a heightened sensitivity towards race, implies a predisposition to the creation of transnational communities and can serve, in this sense, as a model for the new world novel, which also reinterprets the relationship between marginality and culture.
- 10 As the wide range of articles shows, transculturation as a mode of cultural reading proves to be a powerful tool of interpretation, shedding light on issues ranging from food cultures and global gourmets investigated by Sabine Bröck to a re-reading of José Martí in a transnational context in Markus Heide's analysis of the Cuban poet's vision as an early example of a comparative, inter-American perspective that has recently brought valuable contributions to contemporary American studies. A case in point is Klaus Millich's reading of Roth's *The Plot Against America*, showing how the margins between inside and outside are eroded and reconstructed, and illustrating how fighting the enemy outside leads to the creation of a version of the enemy within.
- 11 To return to the highly challenging comment made by the editors, that “America” is a signifier configured “outside” and “inside” the United States, one cannot but wonder how, and to what extent, the transnational turn of American identity that has been staged in these essays in response to the self-enclosed myth of American exceptionalism is not in fact itself contained by the early (transnational) dream of a

New World invented and ideologically invested before it was discovered. Configured both from “inside” and from “outside,” “America,” these papers seem to re-assert, has always been an over-rich narration, to which the transnational turn is capable of adding a new reading by showing how “America” is an inevitable fiction in the post-nationalist age.

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