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Horizons of Enchantment

Lene M. Johannessen

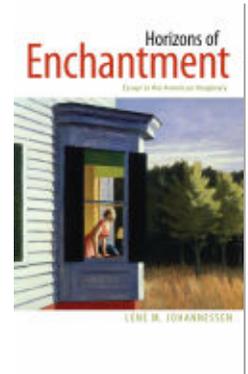
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FOREWORD

THE APTLY TERMED “transnational turn” has resulted in the most significant reconfiguration of American Studies since its inception. Transnational American Studies grew out of the conceptual transformation generated by a newly globalized world order and therefore demands an understanding of America’s embeddedness within global *and* local processes rather than scholarly re-affirmations of its splendid isolation.

This emergent field has inspired projects that ascribe different significance and valuation to the word “transnational.” As it shifted in its significance from the representation of an exceptional national identity to the conceptualization of multinational and trans-local interactive processes, the transnational acquired a broad range of multiple and at times contradictory meanings. For some scholars transnational constituted an accurate representation of the United States’ unusual demographic and geopolitical identity. For others it invoked the transnational as a concept with which to undermine the area studies model that presupposed the isomorphism of the object of study with the continental United States. These scholars dis-associated their research from the imperial agency of “America,” resituating Americanist research practices and objects of study within cross-national and transcultural circuits of production, translation, consumption and transformation.

Many of the most important works on Transnational American Studies do not presuppose the model of America Studies that developed in the United States. Scholars working outside the United States have situated Americanist research practices and objects of study

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within cross-national and trans-cultural circuits of production, translation, consumption and transformation. But Americanist scholars within the United States have not had access to many of the works on Transnational American Studies published outside the United States.

Dartmouth College Press's new series, *Re-Mapping the Transnational*, grew out of the desire to ameliorate this situation by fostering the cross-national dialogues needed to sustain the vitality of this emergent field. *Re-Mapping the Transnational* was founded on the premise that non-U.S. Americanists (for example, German, Swedish, Asian, Afro-Caribbean scholars) use models for thinking and writing about American Studies that are different from those deployed by United States scholars. The importance to Transnational American Studies of Lene Johannessen's monograph *Horizons of Enchantment: Essays in the American Imaginary* is evident in the cross-disciplinary dialogue it generated in its U.S. Americanist readers.

Some readers may fault Johannessen for failing to follow the lines of argument laid down by scholars of American literature based in the United States. They may specifically criticize her for using Cornelius Castoriadis's conceptualization of the Cultural Imaginary rather than, as have most United States Americanist scholars, Benedict Anderson's or Jacques Lacan's formulations.

The potential criticisms may in fact locate the fault-line distinguishing the viewpoint of U.S. based American Studies scholar from that of a "non-American" americanist. In criticizing Johannessen for introducing unconventional pairings of authors, and refusing to base her understanding of the American Imaginary on the now canonical opposition to American exceptionalism, we demonstrate how U.S. American Studies scholars can exercise the prerogatives of what might be described as disciplinary exceptionalism. When we shift the terms of our response from a description of what Johannessen has done to articulate prescriptions concerning what transnational americanist scholars should instead do, we tacitly presuppose that the relations of knowledge production that are now prevalent in U.S. academic institutions could (and should) be universalized as the normative scholarly attitude of americanist scholars worldwide.

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American readers may question use of Benedict Anderson's (or Lacan's) definition of the "national imaginary" (rather than that of Castoriadis or Charles Taylor). This instruction amounts to the demand that Johannessen submit her framework of analysis to U.S. Americanists' scholarly protocols. But in Europe, Castoriadis's theorization of cultural imaginaries is considered superior to that of either Benedict Anderson or Jacques Lacan. Indeed scholars throughout Western Europe in particular consider Castoriadis foundational to the understanding of the U.S. imaginary upon which Benedict Anderson depends for his accounts of Imagined Communities.

Like other American Studies scholars working outside the United States, Lene Johannessen brings a set of academic protocols to her understanding of U.S. culture that differs from those of many United States Americanists. If these different interpretive frameworks were made to conform to existing disciplinary orthodoxies within U.S. American Studies, the entire purpose of the series would be subverted. The commentary that *Horizons of Enchantment: Essays in the American Imaginary* has already solicited from its readers discloses the critical difference that transnational scholarship perspectives can affect in the field of American Studies. I look forward to participating in this important cross-cultural conversation.

Donald Pease

