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# Concurrency in Transnational American Studies

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NINA MORGAN

Powerful and challenging, the essays that comprise issue 4.1 of the *Journal of Transnational American Studies* are a testimony to the journal's mission to serve as a "critical conduit that brings together innovative transnational work from diverse, but often disconnected, sites in the U.S. and abroad." As a step forward in this mission, we are happy to bring readers of this issue two select collections or "Special Forums" in addition to our regular sections: "Charting Transnational Native American Studies: Aesthetics, Politics, Identity," featuring four superb essays, and "Redefining the American in Asian American Studies: Transnationalism, Diaspora, and Representation," honoring JTAS board member and UC Berkeley Professor Emeritus, Dr. Sau-ling Wong. Pushing the definitions, strategies, and expectations of our developing discipline, both Special Forums articulate and represent the diversity and range of what transnational American Studies can be.

One immediate impact of transnational inquiry is that it shifts our dominant paradigms from imperialisms and binarisms toward an analytical practice that is counterhegemonic and aspirationally democratic. But what is the shape of such inquiry? Is it fundamentally comparative, or does it also require new methods, forms, or terms of analysis?

In Edward Said's proposed "contrapuntal" analysis (based on a musical metaphor), the nonharmonic juxtaposition of different perspectives, voices, histories, and discourses should lead us "to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationship," and thus to include what staunch, ideological positions or unconscious blind spots may have excluded.<sup>1</sup> A "contrapuntal reading" strategy in its approach to cultural studies is intended as a form of connection, a logic that comprehends the value of analysis that brings complex, diverse, and even antithetical issues and questions together in a moment of examination and interpretation.

Historians, however, come to American Studies with their own terms and forms; Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann's concept of *histoire croisée* "focuses on empirical intercrossings consubstantial with the object of study, as well as on the operations by which researchers themselves cross scales, categories, and viewpoints."<sup>2</sup> According to *JTAS* editor Thomas Bender, for historians the concept of "entangled histories" has become particularly important in transnational American Studies research.

What many of the essays in this issue of *JTAS* describe when addressing the fraught incongruity or complexity or flow of factors coexisting (harmoniously or not) in the experiences of transnationalism or indigeneity, for example, may be understood as the condition of "concurrency."<sup>3</sup> Particular to the idea of "concurrency" is the recognition that what is happening "at the same time" occurs in unequalizable measure both to whatever else is currently manifest or present and also to what has yet to be realized. Unequalizable manifest presences—identities, ethnicities, histories, land issues, racisms, forgotten treaties, technologies, mythologies, capital, texts, weather, art, toxins, kinship, maps, essays—might be calculable, but they are always attended and transformed by what is as yet unarticulated. Because "concurrency" is always at work, the context of our analyses—and our lives—is always shifting. To ignore concurrency is to hold to essentialisms, universalisms, and the totalizing effects of binaries. Contrapuntal reading, *histoire croisée*, and concurrency serve only as examples of the philosophical structures that support the many and different discourses and disciplines that have a role in the work of transnational American Studies.

In their beautifully written introduction to the Special Forum on Native American Studies, the forum editors, Philip J. Deloria, Hsinya Huang, John Gamber, and Laura Furlan, point to significant gaps in recent American Studies research—gaps that absent the Native. Calling for studies that provide enough of a paradigm shift to build critical insights that are "mutually illuminating," the editors review a trajectory of Indigenous Studies that marks a path beyond essentialisms and that invites readers to transform their sense of transnational American Studies by way of a recognition of the Native nations that exist within the geography of the modern nation-states—the United States, Canada, and so forth. Complicating the values of an autochthonous, authenticity-based identity politics, as well as challenging outwardly transnational inquiry to include the inwardly transnational in American Studies, the editors have collected four compelling essays, which alongside their introduction could easily form the foundation for a brilliantly illuminating graduate course in transnational/Native/Indigenous/American Studies. These thought-provoking essays by Joni Adamson, Chadwick Allen, Joseph Bauerkemper and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiiik Stark, and Jessica L. Horton—elegant yet forceful in their analyses—represent the best of Indigenous and Native American Studies scholarship.

The editors of the second Special Forum celebrate the commitment and influence of Sau-ling Wong in the field of Asian American Studies by presenting a

series of essays that speak to Wong's diverse interests and to the ways in which scholars have applied her theories to their objects of study. The essay topics range from Michelle Peek's insightful essay on the taste of queer diasporic longing in her analysis of Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt*, to Jeanne Sokolowski's reading of the test of hospitality in Gish Jen's *The Love Wife*, to studies of pop Chinese singers born in the USA in Grace Wang's "The ABCs of Chinese Pop: Wang Leehom and the Marketing of a Global Chinese Celebrity." Of special note is the sophisticated and moving analysis of the relationship of diasporic Chinese writers Chiang Yee and Yang Lien-sheng in the article "Let Us Remember *Fengliu* instead of *Miseries: Dayou Poems and Chinese Diaspora*" by Da Zheng, who argues for the importance (as well as in terms of their transformation) of native forms and traditions to the diaspora. Warren Liu's "Posthuman Difference: *Traveling to Utopia with Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries*" offers a thoughtful discussion of Wong's analysis of denationalization and argues for a rethinking of the human subject and subject/object formations in the face of capital and technology's "dissolution" or "deconstruction" (here used in a non-Derridean way) of the Asian American subject. *JTAS* readers will note that this Special Forum includes some essays, one on the Korematsu case (Heidi Kathleen Kim) and another on Asian American cinema (Ju Yon Kim) that focus on specifically Asian American themes, as well as some that are experimental in form (Sean Metzger) or in how they configure their transnational subject matter (Michelle Har Kim, Judith Misrahi-Barak). As Sau-ling Wong's work is addressed in each essay in the manner of a tribute, we understand the editors' interest in including these essays in the Special Forum, and although it is not part of our journal's profile, we have also taken the unusual step of allowing a book review (Christopher Capozzola) to be included as well. We are also delighted to have the opportunity to publish transnational essays in this Special Forum by Shirley Jennifer Lim (on philosopher Walter Benjamin's interview of actress Anna May Wong), Christina Lux and Hee-Jung Serenity Joo (on language in *DICTEE*), Xiwen Mai (on Kimiko Hahn's poetry), Serena Fusco (on *Mulberry and Peach*), and Xiaojing Zhou (on migration and the multi-media art of Ming-Yuen S. Ma).

Forward editor and editorial board member Greg Robinson does double duty in this issue of *JTAS* by sharing an excerpt from his own newly released study, *After Camp: Portraits in Midcentury Japanese American Life and Politics* (introduced in Forward by editorial board member Tom Bender), a scientific and political study of the postwar policies regarding race, migration, and relocation (imagined and otherwise) of FDR. The other eight excerpts from new publications highlighted in Forward offer new analyses of the influence of race and cultural exchange on American art and architecture in Gordon H. Chang's piece from *East/West Interchanges in American Art* and William A. Gleason's *Sites Unseen: Architecture, Race, and American Literature*; studies on important individuals in *Queer Compulsions: Race, Nation, and Sexuality in the Affairs of Yone Noguchi* by Amy Sueyoshi and *Judah L. Magnes: An American Jewish Nonconformist* by Daniel P. Kotzin; collections on the

cultural perspectives gained through transnational experiences in *Bridging Cultures: International Women Faculty Transforming the US Academy*, edited by Sarah R. Robbins, Sabine H. Smith, and Federica Santini, and in *Transnational Russian-American Travel Writing* by Margarita D. Marinova, as well as in *Trans-Americanity: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico* by José David Saldívar; and a literary study (a timely addition in light of the first Special Forum) by Birgit Brander Rasmussen, *Queequeg's Coffin: Indigenous Literacies and Early American Literature*.

In the main section of this issue, *JTAS* features two articles that explore the philosophical underpinnings of two short-lived, socially and politically transnational movements, one that hoped to produce a different value system for marriage via a critique of property rights, and the other that hoped to develop a different kind of affective community—a planetary loyalty—that would reconfigure international life. Both authors (Carla Hustak, writing on Emma Goldman, and Samuel Zipp, writing on E. B. White) create the contexts of their analyses by focusing on what they both define as the “felt” nature of the political formations and ideological conditions that characterize these transnational yet intimate discourses.

In “Saving Civilization from the “Green-Eyed” Monster’: Emma Goldman and the Sex Reform Campaign against Jealousy, 1900–1930,” Carla C. Hustak traces the notorious career of Goldman whose commitment to a different “emotional economy” where sexual rights and property rights are not in conflict evolves into a larger transnational effort to sustain a sentimentalized idea of civilization in the face of its sensual depletion by the capitalist imperative to accumulate more property. Conflating monogamy with monopoly, the sex reformers and philosophical circles in both Greenwich Village and the Bloomsbury Group joined forces to publish their social and political critiques widely. Hustak examines how the proliferation of writing on sex, varietism, experimental marriage, love, and jealousy grew out of and into a set of established transnational identifications between members of the intelligentsia whose own bodies and hearts could hardly resist the exploitation of their own affections.

Samuel Zipp’s “Raising *The Wild Flag*: E. B. White, World Government, and Local Cosmopolitanism in the Postwar Moment” reveals the fascinatingly subtle yet deep attachment to the idea of global fellowship and government within White’s political writings, now much overlooked if not entirely forgotten in the face of his long career as a writer for the *New Yorker* and more prominently perhaps as a favorite writer of children’s books. Explaining the rationale behind White’s many hesitations to promote a political agenda despite the fact that “world government was one current in a larger climate of internationalism” in the mid-twentieth century, Zipp explores the context in which White’s “no war” stance was founded on a proposed mutual respect for humanity’s love of place. Zipp’s reading of White’s questioning of the privileging of “nation” alongside White’s call for a “planetary loyalty” (quite a bit before Spivak’s “planetary”) as depicted in the story of the wild

flag makes the history of the world government movement, surprisingly, something we can feel.

*JTAS*'s Reprise section offers a selection of previously published texts on transnational American Studies to bring our readers essays that might not otherwise have come their way. Jeffrey Gray's 1994 analysis of Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* is appropriate in terms of its discussion of the role of "Europe" and its impact on the novel's protagonist, on the author herself, and on African American celebrities. A resurgence in interest in Larsen's biography (after George Hutchinson's 2006 study, *In Search of Nella Larsen*) makes this a timely choice. Sarah Robbins and Ann Ellis Pullen's study on the American missionary Nellie Arnott's work in and writings on early twentieth-century Angola as well as *JTAS* advisory board member Yuri P. Tretyakov and TyAnna K. Herrington's joint study of the Global Classroom Project trace the histories of transnational educational endeavors. The last selection in Reprise comes from Lillian S. Robinson's oeuvre, a contribution to the current debate over migrant and immigrant labor as it applies to women's bodies and the transnational sex trade.

Issue 4.1 is special in that it marks the development of *JTAS*'s cross-country network with three years of pledged support from the CUNY Graduate Center. We are excited about this new connection and grateful to Duncan Faherty, Coordinator of the CUNY Graduate Center's American Studies Certificate Program. We'd like to welcome Chris Eng (PhD candidate in English, CUNY Graduate Center) and acknowledge the work of Chris Suh (PhD candidate in History, Stanford University), and to thank both of these graduate student editorial assistants for all of the effort, time, and care they have given to *JTAS*; likewise, we appreciate and thank both of our associate managing editors Dr. Steven Sunwoo Lee and Dr. Nigel Hatton. Our ever-diligent managing editors, Dr. Eric L. Martinsen and Dr. Caroline Kyungah Hong, handle every "issue" in every issue: it's a difficult job in addition to their other lives as assistant professors, and we are enormously grateful for them. We are grateful, as well, for the many efforts of Dr. Yanoula Athanassakis, the associate managing editor for Special Forums, who will soon move to Rutgers University as the American Council of Learned Societies Faculty Fellow in Women's and Gender Studies.

Publishers are encouraged to send electronic proofs or review copies of outstanding new publications in American Studies with a transnational theme to the Forward section editor Greg Robinson for consideration. Please send books to the following address:

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Finally, it is only fitting that I close this introduction with a note of acknowledgment in celebration of Dr. Shirley Geok-lin Lim's retirement from the University of California, Santa Barbara at the end of June 2012 (or I should say "so-called retirement" because Shirley will maintain a presence at UCSB as Research Professor in the Department of English). Shirley, whose intellectual passion, collegial commitment, and tireless support are known to students and scholars; readers, writers, and editors; and family and friends across the world, has been a devoted nurturer of words and thinkers for decades. Her intensity, energy, generosity of spirit, and relentless pushing toward whatever she imagines is possible have meant that she's made the rest of us go further, try harder, work longer, and (in the wee hours) laugh louder. A dear friend and colleague, Shirley will spend the next year in Singapore as the Ngee Ann Kongsi Visiting Professor and in Hong Kong as Visiting Professor at the City University of Hong Kong, though she will still, thankfully, continue with her responsibilities and role as a founding editor of the *Journal of Transnational American Studies*.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 32.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: *Histoire Croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity," *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (2006): 30.

<sup>3</sup> "Concurrency" is a term coined and developed by Nina Morgan and Mina Karavanta, originally appearing in our *Edward Said and Jacques Derrida: Reconstellating Humanism and the Global Hybrid* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008). Concurrency describes, for us, an aspect of deconstruction that is highly relevant to transnational studies. Concurrency as a term acknowledges not simply the coexistence of different places (events, identities, etc.) in the world but rather the co-occurrence of their mobilities and developments—even their disappearances—in addition to their already existing but still unacknowledged or unarticulated or unpredicted connections. As a concept, concurrency shifts the paradigm of analysis from binaries (local/global, dominant/minor, center/margin) to the reciprocities that these binaries and the politics that have enforced them paradoxically created. Beyond this, concurrency acknowledges that the dynamics at play (whether we are talking about power, race, sexuality, language, capital, events, etc.) are always unequalizable presences in their co-occurrence, not only to one another (and other others), but also in the face of what is to come as well as in light of the spectral past. Inside the word "concurrency" one should hear echoes of the meanings of "con" related to "to come to know"; "together, with"; and "against"; as well as hear the metaphors in "currency" as related to currents, circulation, and flows; to money and systems of exchange (certainly unpredictable in nature); and to presences. While there is a mathematical term "concurrency," which describes the meeting point of several lines, as well as "concurrency" in computer science, our term comes out of our readings of Derrida.