

E Pluribus Unum? – Interdisciplinary Perspectives on National and Transnational Identities in the Americas

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El desdén del vecino formidable, que no la conoce,
es el peligro mayor de nuestra América.

The disdain of the formidable neighbor who does not
know her is our America's greatest danger.

—José Martí, “Nuestra América”/“Our America”

1. Transnational Identities and Hemispheric Integration

On January 1, 2005 the fate of the Americas was supposed to change. Long-fostered plans to spread democracy, good governance, free trade, cultural integration, and economic prosperity to all parts of the Americas – except Cuba – were to be implemented in the new millennium. The homepage of the Free Trade Area of the Americas, www.ftaa-alca.org, the collective voice of the heads of state of the Americas, gave the impression that a utopia boasting the grandeur of Bolívar's *magna patria* had a chance to become reality: “Our rich and varied traditions provide unparalleled opportunities for growth and [invite us] to share experiences and knowledge and to build a hemispheric family on the basis of a more just and democratic international order” (“Québec”). The failure of negotiations, however, has proven this narration of inter-American integration to be merely a piece of official fiction, scarcely veiling the over-ambitious economic interests of business and government sectors at play.

A Google search for “FTAA,” at the time, listed a little below the FTAA's official site an entry that provided an answer to the question why the U.S. administration had failed to impose the FTAA on its Latin American neighbors. On the webpages of the Hemispheric Social Alliance, the devastating social and economic consequences of the planned agreements are listed, and readers find out who stood up to the challenge: “This unprecedented challenge [of the FTAA negotiations] led to the birth of the Hemispheric Social Alliance (HSA), a grouping that promotes the broadest level of unity with which to obstruct the FTAA, under the slogan ‘another America is possible’” (“Hemispheric”). Serving as a platform for a wide range of social movements from all over the Americas, the HSA channels the resistance

against the FTAA in a hemispheric campaign with a recognizable public image, especially on the World Wide Web. The “inspired” foundational idea was to mobilize forces and promote action against the FTAA on a hemispheric level, relying on what the HSA calls “transnational civil-society networks.” Apart from opposing the FTAA, the HSA postulates the “construction of new routes for hemispheric integration based on democracy, equality, solidarity, respect for the environment and respect for human rights.”¹

These two texts represent two political positionings among many that have been trying in the last decade to define the future of inter-American integration. They are recent contributions to the long history of discussions on hemispheric integration, which began during the consolidation of the independent nation states in the Americas in the early 19th century with two opposing concepts: Simón Bolívar’s utopian project of a *Patria Grande* comprising all of the newly founded Latin American countries, and its Anglo-American counterpart, the Monroe Doctrine, which at first aimed to keep European powers out of the Americas but ultimately – especially after Theodore Roosevelt’s “Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine” was geared toward extending the United States’ influence to the rest of the hemisphere. Despite the polemical rhetoric of Samuel P. Huntington’s book *Who Are We?* and of many essentialist Latin American counterparts, numerous factors suggest that, in contrast to earlier stages of inter-American relations (cf. Holden/Zolov), the current strife is starting to break up the conventional North-South division, as transversal hemispheric movements are becoming more and more important.

One of the major factors in this context is the massive inter-American migration, which produces profound demographic changes both North and South and creates a myriad of translocal and transnational communities with growing political and economic influence both in the host and in the home countries. Globalized Post-Fordism, with its free flow of capital, the mobility of production sites, transnationally organized lean production, and immaterial labor, also has profound repercussions on the livelihoods of the working population in both North and South America, and shifts the organization of labor struggles to a transnational level – as, for example, the widespread Latino resistance against the migration bill in the U.S.A. in the spring of 2006 illustrated. There is a growing understanding among social movements that the emergence of political institutions on a supranational level, which lessen the influence of the nation-states and representative democracies, cannot be countered effectively by isolated organizations on a regional or national level. Furthermore, transnational mass media and the Internet create transversal consumer

¹ At the First People’s Summit of America, organized by the HSA parallel to the Summit of the Americas in Santiago, a counterproposal to the FTAA called “Alternatives for the Americas” was prepared. The document has since been revised several times at subsequent People’s Summits. This shows that the HSA – although strongly opposed to neo-liberal goals – sees hemispheric integration as a goal to be pursued.

cultures and expand the reach of the formerly mostly national attention markets for news and cultural production.²

All of these phenomena related to processes of transnational integration are reshaping civil society in all parts of the hemisphere, transforming the way people relate to the imagined local, national, and regional communities and the way they construct both individual and collective cultural identities. These processes of transformation in the construction, narration and performance of cultural identities are addressed in this interdisciplinary collection of essays by American, Latin American and European scholars from the fields of cultural, literary, film, and media studies, linguistics, law, anthropology, sociology, history, and musicology. Most of these contributions were originally presented as conference papers at the Second International Conference of Inter-American Studies at the University of Bielefeld, Germany in 2005. The United States' motto "E pluribus unum" ["out of many one"], followed by a question mark, served as a suggestive frame of reference for this interdisciplinary conference, which analyzed and questioned the impact of transnational integration on cultural diversity in the Americas while taking into account the underlying struggle for defining the hemisphere's political, social, and cultural future.

2. □ Constructing a Hemispheric Public Sphere: The Power of the Media, the Role of National Cultures, and the Challenge of Transnationalism

What, then, do the two sample texts from the FTAA and the HSA tell us about formations of cultural identities in the context of transnational integration? One important aspect, symptomatic of the profound changes the *Age of Information* (cf. Castells) brings with it for strategic positionings in transnational contentions, is the use both texts make of the Internet as a public forum. There is an acute awareness manifest in the FTAA negotiations that digital information technologies play a decisive role in the construction of a hemispheric public sphere, as the Declaration of the Heads of State at the Summit of Mar de Plata in 2005 acknowledges: "Our collective hemispheric efforts will be more effective through innovative uses of information and communications technologies to connect our governments and our people and to share knowledge and ideas." This conviction is underscored by another declaration made at the Summit of the Americas in Québec (2001), titled "Connecting the Americas":

We, the democratically elected Heads of State and Government of the Americas, meeting in Quebec City, recognize that a technological revolution is unfolding and that our region is entering a new economy, one defined by a vastly enhanced capacity to access knowledge and to improve flows of information. We are convinced that the promotion of a Connectivity Agenda for the Americas will facilitate the beneficial integration of the hemisphere into an increasingly knowledge-based society. ...

² Univisión, CNN, MTV, and Telesur may serve as examples of the transnational market and appeal of TV networks to transnational publics.

Connectivity will open new opportunities to our society in all areas, for which equal access and appropriate training are necessary. (“Connecting”)³

The FTAA’s vision of a medial utopia with its unifying effect on workforce and citizens comes close to the concept of a neoliberal digital panopticon. This vision is clearly opposed to the way in which the role of the Internet is perceived by groups with counter-hegemonic agendas, like the HSA; for them the Internet is a tool for social mobilization by means of counter summits, unofficial plebiscites, hemispheric action days, and elaborate media campaigns. Although action by grassroots movements is important to the struggle, it is on the Internet – as an increasingly transnational public sphere – that meanings are constructed and contended, information becomes accessible, and a wider public is addressed that does not have access to the local activities of the respective social movement.

Taking into account what Benedict Anderson says about the close relationship between the imagined communities and the dominant media at the time of nation building at the beginning of the 19th century (cf. *Imagined*), the question arises of how the political semantics of integration, which both contending agents draw upon, produce narrations of new regional and transnational “inter-American” identities or “imagined communities” and how these collective identities will be shaped by the dominance of the new electronic media? What kind of public space will the new media like the Internet or satellite television construct? How will the forms of medial (re-)presentation influence the contents of transnational pedagogy?

Although the two webpages of the FTAA and the HSA represent different ideologies, contrasting locations within the hegemonic system, and diametrically opposed claims to truth and power, they share a subject, a text genre, and a certain kind of media aesthetics. Thus, what we need to ask is if these factors do not lead to a common conceptual framework, because the conventions and restrictions of both medium and text genre significantly contribute to shaping the underlying concepts of temporality, cognitive mapping of social space, narrative instances, textual authority, cultural representation, and social interaction. Seen in this light, it becomes apparent that both webpages seek to trigger support or action among their audiences on an inter-American basis.

While the World Wide Web has a certain archival function, it also represents the constant threat of digital memocide. The contents placed on a webpage can be easily stored, accessed, cross-linked, and even reproduced on multiple sites, but once a certain organizational, institutional or collective frame is lost, contents are ‘taken off the web,’ and they are no longer accessible.⁴ Both the archival function and the threat of oblivion play an important role in how temporalities influence the produc-

³ Note the semantic slippage in the use of singular for “our society” and the ambivalence of “knowledge” used as a geopolitical category.

⁴ This threat of oblivion is as characteristic of the World Wide Web as is the seeming lack of hierarchies in the digital public space, and the peril of an information entropy (which again produces the need for search engines creating hierarchies of contents and policing the public space).

tion of meaning on the Internet, i.e., at a time when information can be easily generated and easily erased, and narrative authority is contested (cf. Heike Mónica Greschke's essay in this volume). When historicity is abolished by the medial acceleration of events, "invented traditions" (cf. Hobsbawm/Ranger) assume all the more a legitimating function for the claim on narrative authority. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that both the above-mentioned websites (on both sides of the FTAA issue) display a common strategic plotting of temporality and space. The summits and counter-summits create a virtual Inter-American *via crucis* of the negotiations on the Americas' future: Santiago, Québec, Monterrey, Miami, La Habana, and Mar de Plata, where events unfold from 1994 to 2005, are converted into nationally decontextualized and deterritorialized *lieux de mémoire* of the negotiations and of the scenes of police violence against civil society. The narration of the historical stages of the negotiations – i.e. the "making of" – constitutes for both sides an important (and contended) frame of reference for identity construction both for the in-group and for the inter-American target audience.

The screenshot shows the official website of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). The header reads "Free Trade Area of the Americas - FTAA" and "Welcome to the Official Website of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA)". The left sidebar contains a navigation menu with items like "About the FTAA", "Summits of the Americas", "Ministerial Declarations", "Draft FTAA Agreement", "Trade Negotiations Committee", "Negotiating Groups", "Special Committees", "Hemispheric Cooperation Program", "Civil Society", "Business Facilitation", "Trade and Tariff Database", "Links to FTAA Countries", and "Countries". The main content area is titled "FTAA Issues" and lists various topics: Market Access, Agriculture, Government Procurement, Investment, Competition Policy, Intellectual Property Rights, Services, Dispute Settlement, Subsidies, Antidumping and Countervailing Duties, Smaller Economies, Civil Society, Institutional Issues, and Electronic Commerce. Below this, there are sections for "Candidate Sites for the FTAA Secretariat", "What's NEW?" (highlighting a "Joint Communiqué of Co-Chairs February 24, 2005"), and "Invitation to Civil Society". The "Invitation to Civil Society" section includes a quote from Ministers Responsible for Trade in the FTAA participating countries from March 1998. On the right, there are sections for "Press Communiqués" and "Key Documents", listing various agreements and programs.

Imagined hemispheric community: the invitation to civil society at the center of the FTAA homepage

The most important question for our context, however, derives from the (still ambiguous) concept of transnational community that comes to bear in both texts and serves as a frame of political legitimation. Although there is a recurrent reference to national contexts as well, the projected transnational (civil) society – a sort of “trans-

nation people” – is conjured up in both texts, although the two texts adhere to very different notions of cultural and political representation. While the HSA professes to represent the “people of the Americas” at counter summits and in plebiscites,⁵ the FTAA includes participatory features – an “invitation to civil society” – as a sort of mimicry within the framework of the highly monological structure of the declarations made at the Summits of the Americas. As a closer look at the inter-active feature of the page reveals, the civil society invited to participate is to a considerable degree made up of the business sector, whose interests are at stake. However, civil society does play an increasing role in the official imagination of the Americas from the summits of Québec and Miami onwards. Although the struggles over inter-American integration are still bound to a topography of existing places, where politics are fought over by political elites and social movements, the sample texts give a series of indications of how important the World Wide Web is for imagining the formation, mobilization, and political participation of a community of transnational citizens. For the first time in the history of inter-American relations the new media offer the possibility of conceiving the emergence of a public space which constitutes a broad basis for transnational identitarian imaginations (cf. Castells). The access to this public space is still limited (cf. Featherstone), and identitarian narrations will most likely be expressions of transversal social or ethnic group identities or linked to hegemonic discourses. Nonetheless, there is already a notable shift in what kind of identitarian narratives are being produced as well as who is producing them, as García Canclini states in his study on *Imagined Globalization*:

Aunque la escuela, los museos, los libros siguen conformando la mirada sobre los otros, los actores de la cultura letrada son desplazados por la comunicación audiovisual y electrónica, los organismos públicos de cada nación por empresas transnacionales. ... Se tratará, en alguna medida, de entender cómo esas narrativas condicionan las prácticas, facilitan alianzas o las entorpecen. (*Globalización* 77)

Both the construction of this new public space and the production of affirmative or counter-hegemonic identitarian narratives play a key role in defining the processes of political and economic integration of the Americas and the future of the nation states. These developments are closely linked to notions of multiculturalism, hybridity, heterogeneity, and postcolonial cultural criticism, which all have largely challenged the concepts of homogeneous and essentialist national communities in the last decades throughout the Americas (and elsewhere).

To be sure, the Internet is only the most recent medium through which inter-American issues are being negotiated. In the two centuries preceding the advent of the Internet other media – from literature and periodicals to visual arts – fostered inter-American dialogue and integration, often linked to travel and explorations of culturally othered spaces. José Martí’s journalism about life in New York City and

⁵ Herkenrath shows in an empiric research project (“Coalition-Building”) how important the notion of a common historical experience of the American peoples is for the group identity of HSA activists and for the overall sustained effort of a decade-long campaign which this transnational narration of identity has made possible.

the United States, literary constructions of Mexico by Katherine Anne Porter, Cormac McCarthy or Sandra Cisneros, Langston Hughes's texts about Cuba, Elizabeth Bishop's poetic depictions of Brazil, the perspectives of writers like Jorge Luis Borges, Isabel Allende, Octavio Paz or Carlos Fuentes on intercultural North-South relations have created common literary imaginaries appealing to transnational publics. Hollywood's long domination of Latin American movie theaters, and the success of Latino music in the U.S. (cf. Steven Loza's essay in this volume) are two more examples which illustrate that national American cultures have long had transnational, inter-American components.

Yet, in a variety of contexts, these transnational tendencies have been slowed down, if not counteracted, by a number of restrictive cultural policies and marketing strategies. Regarding the book industry in Latin America, for instance, one can still observe a segmentation into national markets, and even the global players like Planeta and Bertelsmann refrain from publishing "national" authors internationally – except for a few bestsellers. The effect is that one can hardly speak of a Latin American reading public since most of the Latin American literary production is virtually unknown outside national borders. It remains a question whether this national segmentation does not rather hamper cultural self-representation since it restricts "national" authors to fragmented markets and small print runs, while international bestsellers dominate the transnational markets. Thus, paradoxically enough, transnational cultural policies need to be adopted in order to protect national cultures in this context.

The importance of these policies is obvious when we consider that there *are* shared consumer habits and values – at least within the cultural elites which traditionally take on the role of national "self"-representation. As Fuguet and Gómez propose in their manifesto-like projection of a Hispano-American imagined cultural community called *McOndo*:

Latinoamérica es el teatro Colón de Buenos Aires y Machu Pichu, 'Siempre en Domingo' y Magneto, Soda Stereo y Verónica Castro, Lucho Gatica, Gardel y Cantinflas, el Festival de Viña, el Festival de Cine de La Habana, es Puig y Cortázar, Onetti y Corín Tellado, la revista *Vuelta* y los tabloides sencionalistas. ... Temerle a la cultura bastarda es negar nuestro propio mestizaje. ... Latinoamérica es, irremediablemente, MTV latina, aquel alucinante consenso, ese flujo que coloniza nuestra conciencia via cable, y que se está convirtiendo en el mejor ejemplo del sueño bolivariano cumplido, más concreto y eficaz a la hora de hablar de unión que cientos de tratados o foros internacionales. (17-18)

In a playful, self-ironic and post-avant-garde manner the text attempts to invoke a common cultural ground, a "bastard culture" for a new generation of Latin American writers that is profoundly influenced by the goods of North and Latin America's cultural industries. This "Generation McOndo" conceives of itself as "post-todo: post-modernismo, post-yuppie, post-comunismo, post-baby-boom, post-capa de ozono" (10), but, more importantly, it positions itself as a post-national elite. Fuguet and Gómez refer back to Latin America's literary *boom* generation of authors like Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa and Julio Cortázar, but try to break the mold by irreverently flirting with popular culture and the market-

ing mechanisms of the book industry. Their literary manifesto states the necessity of a new organization of the book industry in order to give voice to literary newcomers silenced by the editorial policies of national publishing houses. They propose that it is only by means of transnationally operating publishers that national literatures in Latin America will have a future in a globalized world. It is interesting to note in this context the establishment in 2001 of Rayo, the bilingual and Spanish-language outlet of HarperCollins that specializes in Spanish translations of U.S. Latina/o fiction for the Latin American market (cf. Jens Martin Martin Gurr's essay in this collection). The role played by a smaller press like Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe should also not be underestimated.

National cultures will have to adapt to the challenges of a globalized world and so will both the discourses of nation as well as the institutionalized structures of power which ultimately shape the nation. Although the nation as a concept has, without a doubt, entered a critical phase, the aftermath of 9/11 – with the resurgence of fervent nationalism in the political arenas of both the U.S.A. and Latin America – shows that all suppositions about an imminent post-national era have so far been proven wrong. The discourse of nation, and the forms of identification it channels, are adapting to the new geographies of post-Fordist production, the existence of translocal communities and diasporas, as well as the global reach of mass media and its impact on cultural identities.

3. Towards Inter-American (Post-)Area Studies

In recent years there has been a notable shift within the humanities in the Americas, which acknowledges that these phenomena and the overall growing cultural, social, and political interconnectivity cannot be sufficiently explained within national container models of traditional social science or literary studies. William C. Spengemann had appealed to scholars of American literature as early as 1978 to overcome national boundaries and a focus on comparing U.S. writing with European literature. Regretting that “American literature” – the way it is commonly practiced in American English Departments – considers only highbrow works written in English by authors living within the borders of the United States, he cautioned that if we use such blinders, we

forgo any possibility of comparing the developments of English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese literatures in the New World, although some knowledge of these parallel developments would seem indispensable to our expressed aim of measuring the impact that America has had upon literature. (124)

It seems that in the late 20th and early 21st century positions like that of Spengemann are increasingly being put into practice as we interrelate national specificities with inter-American developments. That the Americas have grown together socially and culturally much more since the days of Spengemann's critique has certainly contributed to the readiness to consider the inter-American, transnational components of our fields of study.

Transnational approaches prove fruitful both in studying and in evaluating phenomena like the diasporic and translocal cultures of mass migration in the Americas, the cultural impact of transnationally organized mass media or economic and political globalization, and the inter-American exchange between writers or artists.⁶ While cultural phenomena such as literature, the visual arts, or popular culture, had been until recently the domain of academic studies with national(ist) outlooks, they are now increasingly being analyzed in transnational contexts (cf. José E. Limón's essay in this collection). In addition, the common (post-)colonial legacy of the Americas – which produces specific hemispheric resonances with regard to the identity politics of, for example, indigenous or African American movements – also calls for inter-American perspectives and comparative analyses. Such considerations have contributed to discussions about Inter-American Studies as a methodological and theoretical framework for transnational, hemispheric studies of New World cultural, social and political phenomena.

Inter-American Studies are currently taking shape under specific conditions influenced by the global geopolitics of knowledge (cf. Mignolo), which place Anglo-America ahead of Latin American or European universities in terms of funding and institutionalization. The development of Inter-American Studies has been accompanied by fervent discussions about issues like the international division of intellectual labor – mostly within the academic organizations of American and Latin American studies centered in the United States. The call for Inter-American Studies comes at a time when both American Studies and Latin American Studies show signs of profound change as manifested in the turn to Post-American Studies (cf. Rowe; Pease; Kaplan; Fishkin; Elliott) and the debates on the supposed end of the *Estudios Culturales Latinoamericanos* (cf. Mignolo; Mato; Yúdice; Zimmerman; Moreiras) at the 2003 LASA conference. Up to now, these discussions have been mainly shaped by the institutional logics of U.S. academia and the underlying politics of multiculturalism.

Although Latin American scholars have made prominent incursions into U.S. academia (Ariel Dorfman, Néstor García Canclini, Jesús Martín Barbero, and Daniel Mato, among others), the mutual reception of ideas by scholars in North America and in Latin America is still rather one-sided (with a U.S. dominance). This hampers a truly international dialogue. At Latin American universities academic departments are still organized mostly around national concerns. Departments of *Estudios Latinoamericanos* or *North American Studies* with a transnational orientation are of only very recent creation, even in Latin America's leading institutions of higher learning. This lack of institutionalization makes it difficult for Latin American

⁶ Ilan Stavans's collection *Mutual Impressions* gives a good first insight into writers of the Americas reading one another's work, reviewing it, and responding to it. In this context one may also think of numerous other examples, for instance the two-way influences connected to Jorge Luis Borges. While Borges's *Introduction to American Literature* (1971) presents an approach to U.S. writers from a South American perspective, the extensive use U.S. writers have made of Borges's fiction constitutes an influence in the reverse direction (cf. Raab).

interests to strategically position themselves within academic debates abroad other than in isolated manner or – as a consequence of the Latin American brain drain to the U.S. – from within North American institutions. At European universities the general lack of contact or joint research projects between U.S. Americanists and Latin Americanists continues with only few exceptions. Moreover, the common practice of subsuming North American Studies under “English Studies” (or German “Anglistik”) with their focus on Great Britain and Latin American Studies under “Romance Studies” (or German “Romanistik”) with their focus on France and the Iberian peninsula (with a little bit of Italy sprinkled in) has also not helped in establishing Inter-American Studies as an academic discipline. Hemispheric Area Studies of the Americas are only slowly and very recently being institutionalized in the Old and New Worlds.

The Anglo-American academia has dominated the research agenda of Inter-American Studies, influencing methodological, epistemological and semantic questions. The field of study is, moreover, divided by the “territorial” claims of certain institutions or departmental structures within academia and beyond.

First of all, there has been a push to differentiate Inter-American Studies from research traditions of Area Studies on Latin America. As Daniel Mato points out in his critique on Latin American Cultural Studies, area studies may tend to contain a legacy of expansionist thought within the metropolis: “por la herencia que cargan los *Area Studies* de su origen asociado a proyectos imperiales, a la producción de conocimientos para uso en la metrópolis acerca de pueblos y naciones dominadas, o que se proyecta dominar” (392). Inter-American Studies should therefore constitute themselves as hemispheric (post-)area studies, in which the reciprocity of academic dialogue includes both centers and peripheries, academic observers and those who are being studied.

In addition, there exists a marked division between Area Studies – which have been the domain of economics, anthropology, social and political sciences – and Cultural Studies – which were spearheaded by the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies but, in the United States and Europe, are mostly practiced in Literary Studies departments. Cultural Studies have broadened the scope of subjects for cultural analysis (focusing on media and popular culture) and they have greatly influenced the understanding of how culture is related to cultural policies and the market. In the last decade, however, Cultural Studies have met with strong criticism for their alleged tendency to leave aside the cultural production of elites traditionally addressed by literary studies and to neglect questions of aesthetics. This has led to a claim of comparative literature departments over Inter-American Studies (cf. Pérez Firmat, *Common*; Fitz, *Rediscovering*; Kadir, *Columbus*; Fitz/McClennen, *Comparative*).⁷

⁷ Volumes like those by Buchenau/Paatz and Buchenau/Messmer (although they primarily contain essays by scholars who are not in comparative literature departments) go in the same direction.

Sophia A. McClennen's article on "Inter-American Studies or Imperial American Studies?" exemplifies the embattled state of this rediscovered field of research in the United States. McClennen foregrounds a certain methodological approach as central to Inter-American Studies:

For Latin Americanists who work in the humanities this [displacement of the U.S. as central signifier of the region, which Inter-American Studies brings about] should mean that the literatures and cultures of the region finally find their comparative counterparts among texts from the United States. ... One of the key contributions of a critical field that is not driven by ties to a nation-state lies in the possible foregrounding of comparative methods. (393f., 408)

At the same time, however, she dismisses as imperialist the proposal in Sarah Radway's 1998 presidential address at the annual conference of the American Studies Association to rename the association the "Inter-American Studies Association" in order to better connect the study of U.S. history and cultures to the study of North, Central, and South America.⁸ As academia is subject to an incessant re-invention of traditions of thought which legitimize and authorize one's voice and positioning in today's entropic production of knowledge, it is of crucial importance for the negotiation of cultural capital to control the history of disciplines; as McClennen observes, there is a "need to recognize the importance of history and historicizing in inter-American studies" (401).⁹ McClennen claims Herbert Eugene Bolton's 1932 presidential address on "The Epic of Greater America," Henry Grattan Doyle's 1943 article on "Effective Inter-American Cooperation" as well as Victoria Ocampo and Gilberto Freyre's *Journal of Inter-American Studies* (founded in 1961) as milestones in the pre-history of today's resurgence of Inter-American Studies in the U.S.A.¹⁰ It is telling that McClennen only footnotes Latin-American authors in this context, although the whole article deplores the problem of "imperialist" tendencies within U.S. academia.¹¹

⁸ McClennen writes: "Radway's comments also need to be read in light of recent shifts in American studies, or the 'New' American studies, that represent themselves as post-national, but which ultimately have no cultural referents beyond the borders of the United States, and consequently are not postnational in any meaningful way" (402).

⁹ This holds even more true as the humanities are not a Borgesian garden with constantly bifurcating methodological paths but play an important role in identity politics and the debates on multiculturalism in the Americas.

¹⁰ The sociologist Waldo Frank should certainly also be mentioned in this context (cf. Ogorzaly), as should the anthropologist Arthur P. Whitaker and his book on *The Western Hemisphere Idea* (1954).

¹¹ The essay closes with a founding myth (rhetorically charged with pathos) for the newly created International American Studies Association: "a young organization, its future is as yet unwritten, but it does suggest a hopeful venue for inter-American scholarly collaboration" (410). On the one hand, McClennen tries to counter Anglo-American imperialist appropriation of foreign academic territories; on the other hand, she defends the Anglo-American institutional hold over Inter-American Studies.

From a Latin American perspective, these rifts within U.S. academia are less important than the underlying geopolitics of knowledge (cf. Mignolo) – i.e. the epistemological problem of the projection of Anglo-American paradigms of thought onto Latin American contexts and the underlying politics of multiculturalism. This postcolonial dependency on foreign epistemologies has been criticized since the late 19th century. In his programmatic essay “Nuestra América,” the Cuban modernist and revolutionary José Martí had already warned against exploring Latin America solely through the epistemological “spectacles” of foreign academia:

¿Cómo han de salir de las universidades los gobernantes, si no hay universidad en América donde se enseñe lo rudimentario del arte del gobierno, que es el análisis de los elementos peculiares de los pueblos de América? A adivinar salen los jóvenes al mundo, con antiparras yanquis o francesas, y aspiran a dirigir un pueblo que no conocen. (*Ensayos* 161)

Although the “foreign spectacles” of which Martí speaks are still a poignant metaphor for the way in which academic regimes of representation work in terms of Latin American studies, it would be wrong to draw too close a comparison between Martí’s comments on the pre-history of the modern Latin American university system and today’s situation, in which there are a great many institutions dedicated to the humanities, sociology, political sciences, etc. This would draw a false picture of victimization and subalternity in an academic context whose elite intellectual practices present in their respective national contexts similar problems in relation to the academic regimes of representation of “margins.” The fact that scholarship in transnational studies is underrepresented even in those Latin American countries that emphasize the humanities is related only in part to a lack of funding or the closure of international academic communities to Latin American intellectuals. It is also related to the function Latin American academic elites play within the reproduction or renegotiation of national hegemonies and the consequent predominance of national frames of thought.

Latin America has, nonetheless, brought forth a number of outstanding, internationally renowned scholars and canonic texts in postcolonial, postmodern and transnational inter-American Literary and Cultural Studies – even before Cultural Studies, Postcolonialism, Postmodernism or Inter-American Studies had been recognized institutionally in the Anglo-American world. It is certainly time to call attention to this fact in the pertinent international discussions and show how they form part of a common history of the emergent field of Inter-American Studies. Only a relatively small number of these authors – writers, scholars and intellectuals alike – have had access to a wider academic public in the U.S. because translations have been scarce. Daniel Mato rightly foregrounds the role of English, the predominant language of scholarly exchange, as one of the key elements of epistemologic expansionism (390), but Spanish is still the language of one of the major linguistic communities and should offer enough potential for strategic positioning in hemispheric (post-)area studies, if the academic publishing market in Latin America functioned differently.

What happens when key concepts of Inter-American Studies migrate linguistically and institutionally from North to South or from South to North? Inter-American relations have been dominated by a set of narrations largely based on dichotomies related to the imbalance of power between centers and peripheries (cf. García Canclini, *Consumers* 77-88). One of the most influential narrative tropes in the context of postcolonial and Inter-American studies was coined in the heyday of Reagan's and Thatcher's neo-imperialist foreign policy by Mary Louise Pratt. In *Imperial Eyes*, a study on travel writing in colonial and postcolonial situations, Pratt defines the concept of "contact zones" as a

space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.
(6)

Cultural contact refers back to one of the founding myths of post-medieval European societies: the first encounter between two cultures, namely European discoverers and the inhabitants of a world "completely new." Adopted from linguistics, the term "contact" assumes a spatial metaphoric that thinks of cultures as fairly homogeneous linguistic and socio-cultural systems, whose homogeneity is imperiled by the triple chronotope¹² of encounter, conquest, and discovery and is subjected to constant processes of transculturation. "Cultural contact" refers to the interactive processes of communication, understanding and everyday practice, conceiving of both colonizer and colonized, traveler and "travelee" as subjects.

Pratt's concept of the "contact zone" is highly suggestive when applied to the Mexican American culture in the Southwestern United States, which explains its popularity in Mexican American Studies.¹³ Here the spatial and colonial metaphoric of the contact zone materializes in what José David Saldívar calls the "transfrontera contact zone" (13). Saldívar refers explicitly to the colonial legacy manifest in ethnicist discrimination against Chicanos and the low intensity war against the undocumented migrants (x). The tropes of colonialism are widespread in the narration of intercultural contact; post-national identities (cf. Gabriele Pisarz Ramírez's essay in this volume) are part of a rhetorical strategy of taking a stance against lofty theories of postmodern nomadism.

Theories of "cultural contact" have focused on relations between groups of unequal power. They tend to foreground cultural differences, while leaving out the shared values and cultural consumer habits that have emerged over two centuries of inter-American transculturation. The problem with this approach is that most intercultural situations today are constituted not only in relation to differences between

¹² I.e., according to M.M. Bakhtin, the "time-space" or spatio-temporal matrix that governs narratives and other linguistic acts.

¹³ Markus Heide, for example, studies the trope of cultural contact in Chicano Literature as a reference to the first colonial encounters. Gómez-Peña speaks of the "rediscovery and recolonization of the Americas / this time, cosponsored by CNN, Televisa & Goya Products" (77).

cultures that have evolved separately but also in relation to the unequal ways in which groups and individuals appropriate, combine, and transform elements from several societies/cultures (García Canclini, *Consumers* 91). The semantics of alluding to (post-)colonial power structures constitute a highly effective rhetorical resource. But this problematic approach relies on a certain anachronistic historical parallelism that explains present-day social exclusion, subalternity and capitalist exploitation as part of a colonial legacy. It might be more appropriate to focus instead on the ways in which these phenomena are inextricably linked to (hemispheric) neoliberal modernization in times of postindustrial production.

A second highly influential narrative trope related to cultural contact but more in tune with postmodern thinking is the post-national paradigm associated with the “run for the border,” as postcolonial cultural criticism has discovered the creative cultural potential of interstitial sites as a potent counter-strategy to essentialist and exceptionalist visions of national discourses of homogeneity. García Canclini’s metaphor of the U.S.-Mexican urban conglomerations in the borderlands as intercultural and aesthetic laboratory of postmodernity in his article “Arte en la frontera México-EEUU” explains the key role the border plays by generating radical changes at the level of symbolic representation of the national. The borderlands, their rites of passage and tales of transgression, constitute a potent foundational myth of transnational or inter-American identities, partly because this myth takes up and subverts the U.S.-American foundational myth of the Frontier. The expansionist logic of the Frontier (à la Frederick Jackson Turner) is inverted by migration from Latin America crossing the border and reoccupying materially and symbolically the territories formerly appropriated by the United States. The clear-cut division between First and Third World, Anglo and Latin America, is questioned by the ever increasing Latino presence in the borderlands (and throughout the United States, cf. Tobar), just as the image of the U.S. democracy and human rights system is questioned by the militarization of the border and the hundreds of migrants who have died trying to cross the border since the beginning of Operation Gatekeeper (cf. Nevins). Latino ethnicity, Mexican food, Spanglish, Catholicism, and Mexican popular art all have become formative elements of a border culture which constitutes a powerful symbol of the postmodern self-conception of a nomadic *conditio humana*.

Gloria Anzaldúa introduced the diglossic compound *Borderlands/La frontera* in her influential manifesto-like work of that title. Among the host of features which have made *Borderlands* a postmodern Chicana classic – the polyvalent symbolism of the borderlands referring to ethnic, cultural, linguistic, class and gender relations, the shifting and multiple identities described, the intertextuality, the transgression of literary genres (cf. Luz Angélica Kirschner’s essay in this collection) – there is one of particular interest in this context: when representing living conditions in the borderlands and appropriating indigenous mythology as a foundational narration of the origin of Chicano culture, Anzaldúa cites a song by Violeta Parra:

Arauco tiene una pena / más negra que su chamal, / ya no son los españoles / los que les hacen llorar, / hoy son los propios chilenos / que les quitan su pan / Levántate, Pailahuan. (qtd. in Anzaldúa 6)

The reference to the Mapuche population of Southern Chile is part of a metonymical move to establish the borderland experience as central to an overall Latina/o identity. This hemispheric dimension of borderland rhetoric can also be found in the work of performance artist and “border brujo” Guillermo Gómez-Peña, who envisions a Chicano cyberpunk utopia called *The New World Border*, where in the near future the Americas will have split into balkanized micro-republics, the border will have disappeared, and the social pyramid in the U.S.A. will have been inverted. *The New World Border*, according to Gómez-Peña, consists of

a great trans- and intercontinental border zone, a place where no center remains. It’s all margins, meaning there are no “others,” or better said, the only true “others” are those who resist fusion, *mestizaje*, and cross-cultural dialogue. (7)

In this carnivalesque reversal of U.S. social order and geopolitical hegemony, the Americas are “Chicanized” completely, leaving no place for monocultural communities and ethnicist ideologies. Although the centrality of WASP-culture succumbs here to hybridity in an act of “border brujería,” one could argue that the trans- and intercontinental expansion of the borderlands constitutes unwillingly a new centrist narration. This interpretation would be in line with Saldívar’s claim in *Border Matters* that the border is a “dangerous zone of crossing with new ‘centralities’ that challenge dominant national centers of identity and culture” (19). This strategic border identity assumed by Chicano identitarian discourse in order to impose a cognitive remapping of the U.S.A. becomes highly problematic when it is used to represent metonymically the whole of the Americas, as Achugar has rightly claimed (cf. Yúdice 451).

These semantic shifts that occur when concepts migrate across cultural and academic borders within the Americas are one of the major challenges of Inter-American Studies, because they make the different positionings within the geopolitics of knowledge evident. Key concepts of Inter-American Studies like “border”/“frontera,” “contact zone”/“zona de contacto,” “hybridity”/“hibridación,” “transculturation”/“transculturación” require careful cultural translation in order to understand the semantic difference and strategic uses in each context and to contribute to reciprocity and mutual understanding.

4. Inter-American Vistas

This volume presents a number of approaches to American topics and their inter-American contexts. The essays are centrally concerned with (cultural) identity – individual, communal, regional, national, transnational, and hemispheric – as it is being depicted, constructed, negotiated, and sometimes instrumentalized. Each essay within itself as well as the collection as a whole seeks to place individual and national issues in a transnational, inter-American framework. Since this volume initiates the book series *Inter-American Perspectives/Perspectivas Interamericanas*, it is our hope as series editors that our efforts will promote inter-American approaches to Western Hemisphere topics. In this volume and in the book series in general we endeavor to infuse both North American Studies and Latin American

Studies with the transnational outlook that Shelley Fisher Fishkin had demanded for (U.S.-)American Studies in her presidential address to the American Studies Association.¹⁴

Without disregarding regional and national specificities, we wish to call attention to their transnational, inter-American implications. Heeding José Martí's warning that "The disdain of the formidable neighbor who does not know her is our America's greatest danger," we seek to highlight commonalities and differences in the Americas (*Selected* 295). This is done here in both English and Spanish, with essays in Spanish being accompanied by an abstract in English and vice versa. In addition to transcending national and linguistic boundaries we also seek to transcend the boundaries of academic disciplines by combining essays from cultural, literary, language, music and media studies with works in gender studies, sociology, anthropology, political science, law, and history. Finally, we also wish to help overcome territorial disputes over Inter-American Studies by including in this volume the work of Latin American, North American, and European scholars alike.

Since identity is at the core of this volume, the opening essay by Sebastian Thies and Olaf Kaltmeier establishes a theoretical framework for "Approaching the Field of Identity Politics" in the integration processes that are currently re-shaping the Americas. Relying on Pierre Bourdieu's field theory and on the recent "complexity turn" in the social sciences, the authors devise a model for analyzing how a wide variety of agents (re-)negotiate and (re-)construct cultural identities in the current transnational integration processes. They illustrate the interrelatedness of identity politics by political and cultural elites, social movements, mass media, political institutions, and agents of everyday life, all of which intervene on local, regional, national, and transnational levels. The model aims to shed some light on the plurality of identitarian positionings and the intersection of identity-related discourses.

The volume's first section, then, deals with "Politics of Divergence and Integration in the Americas" and thus approaches the ways in which identity construction is framed by and related to current political processes. Focusing on Chile and basing his approach on cultural anthropology, José Bengoa examines the consequences that globalized "compulsive modernization" and the "fear syndrome" produced by the

¹⁴ Fishkin said: "As the transnational becomes more central to American studies, we are likely to focus not only on the proverbial immigrant who leaves somewhere called 'home' to make a new home in the United States, but also on the endless process of comings and goings that create familial, cultural, linguistic, and economic ties across national borders. We are likely to focus less on the United States as a static and stable territory and population whose most characteristic traits it was our job to divine, and more on the nation as a participant in a global flow of people, ideas, texts, and products – albeit a participant who often tries to impede those flows. Our continued focus on local spaces will attend to the ways in which these spaces participate in global phenomena – 'internal' and 'external' migrations, the diffusion of cultural forms, the spread of capital and commodities – and all the attendant consequences" (24). However, we seek to avoid the danger – inherent in Fishkin's words – of applying (in an unreflected manner) the methods and approaches of North American Studies to Latin America.

Pinochet regime entail for the construction of collective identity in contemporary Chile. In view of a growing social fragmentation and the privatization of formerly public spaces, Bengoa sees in contemporary Chile numerous forms of cultural resistance to neoliberal globalization and its accompanying individualism. Continuing the focus on post-dictatorial societies, Salvador Millaleo examines the treatment of state crimes in the re-democratization processes in Chile and Argentina. He demonstrates how important the trials against former state officials are in the political processes currently under way in both countries and how they contribute to the formation of a political culture dealing with human rights issues that bears a markedly transnational dimension. Christa Wichterich approaches the issue of gender identity and women's solidarity in the framework of global governance. Describing the development of women's movements in the context of international institutions, she shows how the challenge to the concept of a collective female subject by Third World Women's movements was overcome in the 1980's and 1990's by a successful transnationalization of women's solidarity. At the present time, writes Wichterich, temporary strategic coalitions (including transnational ones) illustrate the diversity of issues and positions with which the women's movements are concerned.

In recent decades, ethnic identities have been recognized as crucial to identity politics in the Americas – both in national and transnational contexts. This topic is addressed in the two contributions by Olaf Kaltmeier and Christian Büschges, which examine the ethnicization of politics in the Americas from two different perspectives. Olaf Kaltmeier's essay discusses the relationship between ethnicization and neoliberal governmentality: ethnic identities nowadays can be viewed both as a site of resistance against neoliberal globalization and as an instrument of new governmental techniques, as Kaltmeier illustrates with examples from Bolivia, Ecuador and Chile. Looking at the Andean region (in particular Ecuador) in comparison with South Asia (in particular Nepal), Christian Büschges then discusses 19th- and 20th-century uses of ethnicity as a political resource from the perspective of transnational historiography. He examines various models of political integration of the ethnically diverse population that have been implemented in the past and he demonstrates the crucial role which ethnicity plays in contemporary political processes. Klaas Dykmann's essay focuses on the role of supranational institutions in the Americas in the creation of a hemispheric political project. Concentrating on the time since the foundation of the Organization of American States in 1948, Dykmann gives a historical overview of how Bolivarism (favoring Latin American unity and distancing Latin America from the United States) has been competing with Pan-Americanism (inter-American partnership, usually dominated by the U.S.).

The book's second section, "The Role of Media and Media Industries in the Formation of Inter-American Identities," takes on the crucial position of media in the processes of (re)shaping collective identities in the Americas. Enrique Sánchez Ruiz gives a critical account of certain tendencies in the social sciences and in cultural studies to adhere to a series of contemporary myths concerning globalization, post-national identities, multiculturalism, mass media, and the role of audiences. He demands an epistemological approach to identities in times of global-

ization that allows us to understand the coexistence of local, regional and transnational identities, constructed by mass media. Libia Villazana's contribution on the cultural politics of Hugo Chávez's government in Venezuela takes up the issue of Bolivarism discussed by Dykmann and demonstrates how Venezuelan culture has become a political resource in the government's politics on film and television production to underline the cultural independence of the nation. Josef Raab is concerned with revisions of identities and their representations. He explores the major works of Chicano filmmaker Gregory Nava, arguing that much of Nava's oeuvre is an expression of the director's desire to reduce the degree of otherness with which Latinas/os are invested in the United States. Nava questions the factors that generally attribute an outsider or subaltern status to Latinas/os. Chris Lippard similarly examines the construction of otherness in film; he focuses on the content and post-production of four Bolivian films of the late 1960s and of the 1970s. These demonstrate, according to Lippard, why Bolivia continues to perceive the U.S. as a country that is materially rich but spiritually poor and emotionally empty – a hetero-perception that gives a sense of place to Bolivians. Sebastian Thies, then, puts the focus back on U.S. film, specifically on *Traffic*, *Crash*, and *Babel* as filmic network narratives on intercultural contact. The contribution focuses on the appropriation of diasporic discourse by the North-American culture industry. In all three works Thies uncovers the crystal frontier as a diasporic master trope and as an innovative but ambivalent aesthetic means in depicting ethnic conflict.

Taking into account the important role of the internet for shaping new communal identities, Heike Mónica Greschke analyzes the construction of "Paraguay-ness" in an internet forum. She observes a high degree of intimacy and trust in a geographically dispersed online community, for whom the electronic forum functions like an alternative public sphere which enables the participants to contest images of their nation produced by others and to discuss the mass media's construction of Paraguay. The volume's section on media culture is concluded by Steven Loza's analysis of the "Cultural, Economic, and Political Implications of the Globalizing Latin Music Industry." Loza first concentrates on the concept of *mestizaje* as it relates to art and to development theory. He then explores the social, political, and industrial dimensions of the Latin American artistic experience; the issue of intercultural conflict as related to economics; and the worldwide, media-driven appeal of Latin American musical culture.

After this focus on media and the media industry the book's third section concentrates on "Literary Negotiations of Identity." Authors from California, Cuba, and Texas are discussed here. Jens Martin Gurr considers the recent work of Luis J. Rodriguez. Gurr shows that market considerations apparently influenced the use of Spanish expressions and of chronology and dating in Rodriguez's fiction: while the story collection *The Republic of East L.A.* (2002), arguably geared towards a Chicana/o audience, frequently relies on "insider knowledge," the historical novel *Music of the Mill* (2005) seeks to appeal to general (U.S. and international) readerships by almost obsessively dating events and translating Spanish expressions. Gabriele Pizarz-Ramírez presents the alternative "American" identities constructed by Juan Felipe Herrera and Rubén Martínez. These two writers attempt to replace

prevailing ideas of North American exceptionalism; transcending national borders, they regard “America” as a continent rather than a nation. While Herrera focuses on neocolonial hierarchies, presenting a bleak vision of the destruction of native cultures, Martínez constructs an almost utopian vision of transnational cultural fusion. Werner Kummer’s contribution about Cabrera Infante’s semi-autobiographical novel *Infante’s Inferno* allows to compare these U.S. Latino views on transnationalization with a perspective informed by a Cuban context. Cabrera Infante portrays the love-life of the male protagonist as a hybrid combination of his experiences with actual Cuban women and his imaginary experiences with film stars in the movies he watches. Kummer argues that Infante’s work shows how the collective games of make-believe created in the studios of Hollywood and other dream factories shape the personal experience of movie audiences on the Caribbean island in a way that turns popular culture in Havana into a transnational hybrid between Hollywood production and Cuban reality. Such transnational considerations, argues José E. Limón, have come to dominate increasingly the study of U.S. literature. Using the work of Texan writer and anthropologist Américo Paredes as a test case, Limón cautions that instead of foregrounding only the global aspects of U.S. American literature we need to engage in “critical regionalism,” which uses two foci: it explores both local specificities and transnational or global parallels.

After the critical engagement with specific cases and issues in an inter-American framework that the three preceding sections have offered, this volume’s concluding section returns to the wider issue of cultural contact that the opening theoretical essay had addressed. “Cultural Diversity, Hybridity, [and] New Identities” are examined from theoretical, gendered, cultural, linguistic, and personal perspectives. Alfonso de Toro analyzes “new hybridizations” and “new identities” that demand a re-thinking of the Americas. He opposes Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s hybrid border-culture concept to Samuel Huntington’s position in *Who Are We?*, while also referring to William Luis’s *Dancing Between Two Cultures*. Then de Toro goes on to propose an epistemological model of hybridity as a *conditio* or *petitio principii* of our global times. Focusing on *mestizaje*, a concern with gender boundaries is at the heart of Luz Angélica Kirschner’s essay on Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Kirschner presents Anzaldúa’s seminal text as a literary exemplification of the model of a “Body without Organs,” which was conceived by Deleuze and Guattari. In its feminist approach, Kirschner writes, *Borderlands/La Frontera* depicts the body (of the mestiza) as neither and both: the private and the public, self and other, natural and cultural, psychical and social, instinctive and learned, genetically and environmentally determined. The “borderland” of which Anzaldúa speaks is therefore not a mere geographical concept but also includes psychic, physical, and linguistic aspects.

Remaining in the U.S.-Mexican borderlands but shifting the focus to Chicanos and the Chicano Movement, Alfred Arteaga explores *Chicanismo* as a “border *zeitgeist*.” He states that the meaning of *Chicanismo* is not just linked to hybridity, *rascuachismo*, and *diafratismo*, but also to space, time, and music. The essay then concentrates on Pachuco Music, a hybrid music with a rumba beat to it and Chicano lyrics, sometimes even rap. Taking up the aspect of language, which Arteaga men-

tions as a marker of identity, Stephan Gramley looks into language contact in the Americas. Focusing on the U.S.A. – but also including Canada and the Caribbean in his discussion – Gramley examines how family, peer group(s), the wider speech community, and public institutions influence an individual’s language use and contribute to the development of language retention, bilingualism (specifically diglossia, language shift with retentions, transitional bilingualism, and symbolic bilingualism), pidginization, and creolization. Language is also discussed as a marker of identity in Josef Raab’s interview with Ilan Stavans. Stavans maintains that despite the multiple roles we all play we have a core Self: although we are parts of many entities, we still know who we are. In this context he speaks of “rotating identities” as characteristic of the contemporary world. He goes on to emphasize the growing political, economic, and social significance of Latinas/os in the United States.

* * *

In exploring American identities the essays in this volume bear in mind the question mark at the end of this book’s main title, *E Pluribus Unum*. With regard to the U.S.A., this volume also heeds Djelal Kadir’s warning against nationalist, reductionist U.S.-American Studies, which, to him, demonstrate “the continuity of America’s ongoing national and nationalist project” (“America” 12). It also seeks to overcome the national focus which characterizes much of Latin American Studies. In its cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural, transnational outlook this volume responds to Kadir’s observation that

America is a bicontinental hemisphere between the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans that extends on a north-south axis from the Arctic to Antarctica. ... [Therefore] [o]ur perspective must be translocal and relational, rather than fixed or naturalized. Our discursive locus must be supple, mobile, transnational, and, as mediate subjects among academic cultures and disciplinary fields, we must be ethical agents of transculturation, especially in times of affective paroxysms, when critical reason may be dimmed and civilized conversation drowned out. (11, 22)

By encouraging a transnational outlook and a border-crossing function for both North American Studies and Latin American Studies and by promoting Inter-American Studies as an academic discipline, we hope to contribute to a better understanding of both the distinctiveness of and the interconnections (as well as the disparities) within the Western Hemisphere.¹⁵

As José Martí wrote in 1891, “Never before have such advanced and consolidated nations been created from such disparate factors in less historical time” than in the Americas (*Selected* 289-90). Disparity and diversity have indeed characterized the Western Hemisphere for millennia and have increased dramatically in the past

¹⁵ Cf. also Emory Elliott’s plea for a transnational orientation of American Studies in his recent presidential address to the American Studies Association, in which he demanded a receptiveness to “outside perspectives and criticism” (18). We consider this statement also as an encouragement to European scholars like ourselves to contribute our “outside perspectives” to the exploration of New World topics.

five centuries. They have brought about national identities in the Americas and they account for the transnational commonalities, connections, and issues that continue to shape the Western Hemisphere.

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