Matthias Oppermann

American Studies in Dialogue

Radical Reconstructions between Curriculum and Cultural Critique

North American Studies

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American Studies in Dialogue

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North American Studies

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Introduction

Teaching seems to be a problem that reinvents itself
in every generation.
Lee Shulman

The past decades have seen various projects to critically re-define and re-position the field of American studies. Anti-racist and anti-sexist critiques have emphasized various dimensions of cultural difference in terms of race, class, ethnicity, or gender, and brought subject matters to the fore that had previously been neglected. The field has turned away from static, unitary and exceptional notions of American culture and shifted its attention towards more dynamic and transnational conceptions of cultures. Having expanded beyond the narrow traditional centrality of a "canon" of privileged objects of study, the number of texts available for study has increased exponentially, and today these "texts" originate in a variety of media. Scholarly publications have moved beyond traditional means of going public, like the critical essay or monograph, to now include works of fiction, art, and mixed media. In short, quantitative and qualitative changes in the range of available sources have coincided with an expansion in the range of interpretive paradigms for textual and cultural analysis.

In the context of American studies programs in U.S. higher education, these critical reconstructions have intersected with renewed concerns about *what* is being taught, and *how*. Anthologies have been rewritten, curricula have been revised, and new pedagogies have been introduced. However, such efforts are primarily understood as a trickle-down effect from research and scholarship to pedagogical practice. Teaching has not only been at the margins of revisionist projects in American studies (as indicated by how little attention the topic receives at professional meetings or in most journals), but it has generally not even enjoyed much status at that (Lauter 1995, 313). While research is perceived as rigorous scholarly work that fuels the development of the field, teaching is often seen merely as the transmission of knowledge. In contrast to research, teaching is not understood as a set of intellectual problems worth much scholarly attention. According to the most recent (2007) American Studies Association survey

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of departments and programs, 81.9 percent of respondents (all program leaders) listed "teaching" as the "least problematic issue" for the future of American studies at their institutions (Bronner 2008, 14). In other words, for the vast majority of American studies program leaders, teaching does not even have the status of a problem. As Randy Bass has noted, the notion of having a "problem" in one's research vs. having a "problem" in one's teaching is indicative of how qualitatively different research and teaching are perceived:

> One telling measure of how differently teaching is regarded from traditional scholarship or research within the academy is what a difference it makes to have a *problem* in one versus the other. In scholarship and research, having a problem is at the heart of the investigative process; it is the compound of the generative questions around which all creative and productive activity revolves. But in one's teaching, a problem is something you don't want to have, and if you have one, you probably want to fix it. Asking a colleague about a *problem* in his or her research is an invitation; asking about a *problem* in one's teaching would probably seem like an accusation. (Bass 1998b, 1; emphasis in original)

It follows that the exploration of challenging research problems thrives through critical exchanges within the academy, while teaching is set up as a strikingly private and almost secretive activity. As a result, teaching and scholarship indicate two separate notions of the academy, two bounded territories that seem largely disconnected: first, research as academic American studies, and second, teaching as the "other" part of American studies in the academy. In essence, this concept of teaching and research in American studies is separatory.

This study calls for a radical reconstruction of American studies in U.S. higher education that is grounded in an understanding of cultural analysis and critique as genuinely dialogic processes of scholarship *and* teaching. Such a call is potentially disruptive to traditional notions of American studies in that it implies a deconstruction of the binary oppositions between teaching and scholarship, between classroom practices and research methodologies, and between subject matter and pedagogical strategies. I argue that if American studies continuously reinvents and reproduces itself in the academy through courses and curricula, then these processes require a critical reconstruction that is radical in the sense that it is based on a fundamental rethinking of the imaginary relationship between research and teaching as separate spheres. My reconstruction of this relationship builds on John Alberti's important observation that the discourse around the

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study of American cultures must always be both pedagogical and theoretical, and that "the radical critique known as multiculturalism must consciously resist the traditional academic split between research and teaching, scholarship and classroom practice, in order to *be* a truly radical critique" (1995, xii; emphasis in original). Recent configurations of American studies as a project of radical multicultural critique seem ideally suited as sites of resistance against this research-teaching dichotomy, and offer interpretative frameworks to reconstruct the repressed relationships between teaching and research that go beyond attempts to simply make one representable through the other. Rather, if American studies is understood in its genuinely transformative and dialogic dimensions, then a critical reconstruction of this field highlights the potential to deconstruct and to rearticulate the categories of research and teaching, and to suggest that these categories are not only hierarchically interconnected, but also radically ambivalent, inherently multiplicitous, and conflictual.

In this study, I use the term "American studies" to refer to a field of research and teaching that is primarily concerned with the interdisciplinary study of American cultures in a transnational context. More specifically, my analysis draws on the redefinitions and repositionings of American studies in the work of the New Americanists and Post-National American Studies (Fishkin 2005; Fishkin et al. 2009; Isensee and Raussert 2008; Lenz 2002; Pease and Wiegman 2002; Pease 2003; 2008a; Rowe 2000b; 2002a). Their emphases on the "multidirectional flows of peoples, ideas, and goods" across borders and on the "multiple intersections and exchanges" between cultures challenge the "'naturalness' of political, geographical, and epistemological boundaries," putting transnational concerns at the center of critical inquiry (Fishkin et al. 2009, 1). Such an emphasis, John Rowe et al. remind us, does not signal the need for a "new critical practice" as such, but rather "builds upon previous work, within and outside American Studies, that is critical of U.S. hegemony and the constructedness of both national myths and national borders" (2000, 3). Accordingly, my study does not indicate a new field of inquiry or another perspective on American studies. Rather, I hope to contribute to efforts for a critical reconfiguration and reconstruction of American studies that Rowe et al. suggest.

The following chapters are divided into three main parts: First, I will identify significant work for the development of American studies in earlier configurations, particularly those contributions to the field that highlight

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the interdependencies between emerging scholarship and pedagogical practice. Second, building on such previous work, I will introduce contemporary scholarly and pedagogical visions of American studies that account for the inherent heterogeneity of American multicultures, and foreground the growing impact of digital media for such projects. Third, I will illustrate how new work on learning and expertise since the mid-1990s can inform an assessment of how traditional or emerging pedagogies intersect with new visions for American studies in the most generative ways. All three of these efforts build coherence around the basic premise that learning and scholarship in the field of American studies do not represent separate spheres, but are intricately intertwined and characterized through mutual interdependencies.

I cannot claim to have addressed all of these issues comprehensively in the following chapters. The institutional configurations of American studies in the United States are very diverse and include a variety of professional organizations, programs, or departments in secondary and higher education, as well as individual practitioners in K–16 educational settings, independent scholars, and those working in the field of public humanities. For the purpose of this study, I will limit my discussion to American studies programs in higher education, and here primarily to colleges and universities in the United States. Such a limited scope will inevitably lack an explicitly international, comparative perspective, and may seem diametrically opposed to repositionings of American studies as a transnational enterprise. I believe strongly in the mutual influences and interactions between American studies programs and practitioners worldwide, and my own work has benefited greatly from the opportunities that transnational collaboration and interdisciplinary border crossings in American studies provide. My research for this project was evenly distributed between locations in the United States and in Germany, and my work in both academic systems has certainly informed my own perspective on the topic. I do not consider my positionality as "American studies abroad" (Horwitz 1993) or the articulation of a "foreign" perspective, but as a contribution to the transnational exchanges between Americanists that characterize the realities of the field in a time when borders between "native" and "foreign" versions of American studies are increasingly difficult to draw (Rowe 2000a, 26). However, this does not imply that American studies is becoming increasingly homogeneous and follows the same institutional patterns across the globe. Thus, while I do not claim that American studies in U.S.

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higher education is a unique (or even "exceptional") phenomenon, I believe that the institutional configurations of the field in U.S. academia are nonetheless different from those of other countries (see also Budianta 1997; Fellner 2008; Fluck, Brandt, and Thaler 2007; Ickstadt 2002; Pultar 1997; Wu 1997). For the purpose of this study, the specific political, economic, cultural, or historic conditions that influence the development of American studies in international institutional landscapes must remain outside the scope of my inquiry. Therefore, I will emphasize and accentuate the transnational character of American studies as a field of inquiry, and simultaneously draw on national, regional, or local configurations and institutionalizations of American studies in specific courses, programs, or departments in the United States. This limitation characterizes particularly my examination of the curricular origins of American studies in U.S. higher education in the first part of this volume.

Histories of Curricular Innovation

Three decades ago Robert Berkhofer claimed that if Americanists read accounts of the beginnings of the American studies movement, they would be "immediately struck by the Americanness of the movement's mythology" (1979, 340). The same year, Gene Wise published his influential essay "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement," which begins with the assessment that, "For a Movement so critical of the culture around it, American studies recapitulates America in revealing ways. Both began as revolts against the established order—for America, the Old World, for American Studies, the traditional disciplines" (Wise 1979b, 293). However, whereas "America" had been influenced by "fables" of its past rather than by its actual past, Wise goes on to note, American studies "has had little sense of its own history at all" since "almost nowhere, until recently, could anything be found in print describing how American Studies began" (294). According to Wise, until the early 1970s "only a handful of essays in the field had been concerned with the past of American Studies," and his initial literature review of twenty-two articles that deal with the history of the field finds only two before 1960: Tremaine McDowell's 1948 volume *American Studies*, and Robert Walker's 1958 survey of college programs (Wise 1979b, 294–95). It seems to me that Wise's account is a first-rate example of how the United States and American studies do indeed recapitulate each other: some nar-

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ratives dominate the discourses of disciplinary or national histories, others are marginalized or excluded and too easily forgotten, and myth and ideology play a large role in the construction of a "usable past" (Wise 1979b, 298; see also McDowell 1948a, 27).

In Wise's case, the dozens of pre-1970s articles that describe the beginnings of American studies as a field of curricular innovation are missing from the "cultural and institutional history" that the title of his essay suggests. Many of these accounts appeared in journals like *American Mercury, American Heritage, College English, The Journal of Higher Education, Educational Review*, and others between the 1920s and the 1960s, yet for Wise a serious critical engagement with the history of the field begins in 1972, predominantly in essays published in the *American Quarterly* (1979b, 294). Thus, Wise's seminal article (probably one of the most frequently cited contributions to the history of the field) staged a reductionist disciplinary narrative that has become a somewhat ritualized rhetorical strategy. In 1999, two decades after the publication of Wise's history of the movement, James Farrell argued that such simplified histories were rhetorical conventions, rather than historical accounts:

> Most essays in *American Quarterly* begin with the history of an inquiry or the history of the field. A convention of academic writing, this literature review both establishes the history of the conversation, and the credentials of the author to participate in this particular conversation. […] In some cases, I would suggest, these histories of American studies have been less historical than rhetorical. (Farrell 1997, 185)

I do not have sufficient evidence to support Farrell's claim that most contributions in *American Quarterly* begin with a literature review, but a brief version of the "early history" of American studies is certainly a recurring topos in many of them. In these accounts, the initial development of American studies in U.S. higher education was driven by individual struggle and natural expansion, by a sense of mission and innocence, of manifest destiny and exceptionalism—especially in comparison to other fields in the academy. These elements contribute to reductionist narratives of field formation that Philip Gleason describes as the "'folk history' of American Studies:"

> What might be called the "folk history" of American Studies runs like this: The movement had its beginnings in the 1920s with scattered efforts among professors of literature and history to develop an integrated approach to the study of the national culture; it took on more formal shape in the 1930s with establishment of

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the first degree programs in American Civilization at Harvard, Yale, and Pennsylvania; and it expanded rapidly in the next decade by a natural process of growth, with the launching of *American Quarterly* (1949) and the founding of the American Studies Association (1951) being the culminating landmarks of its maturation. (Gleason 1984, 343)

More than twenty-five years have passed since Gleason's description, and this "folk history" of American studies has remained suspiciously stable. In the first part of this study, I am particularly interested in a reconstruction of diverging "histories" of American studies that offer an alternative or supplementary account of the development of the field. Too often, the beginnings of American studies as a nationalist research enterprise are repeated almost as a mantra, incompatibilities between differing accounts are disguised or assimilated, and earlier "paradigms" are constructed on the basis of sweeping generalization only to be rejected in the next sentence (see e.g. Bollobás 2002, 565). These assessments focus nearly exclusively on histories of professionalization and published scholarship, but not on pedagogical and curricular developments.

I hope to offer a more differentiated assessment that avoids reductionist rhetorical strategies. While notions of American exceptionalism and the construction of national consensus clearly played a part in the development of the field, an examination of the curricular history of American studies complicates that picture considerably. My purpose here is therefore to illustrate teaching and curricular innovation as elements that have thus far been largely neglected in the "folk history" (Gleason) of the field, and to underline their importance for what Donald Pease calls the "field-Imaginary" of American studies: the "field's fundamental syntax—its tacit assumptions, convictions, primal words, and the charged relations binding them together" (1990, 11). My aim is not to chart a complete or representative history of the field; instead, I will build my narrative around a notion of American studies that is characterized by incompleteness, non-continuousness, and absence of origin or telos.

The first part of this study reconstructs key moments and significant developments of curricular innovation that have influenced the beginnings of American studies in the United States. I stake my claims for this reconstruction on broad surveys and individual case studies from American literature, American Civilization, American studies, and American Culture Studies courses and programs from the early 20th century until the late 1970s. In chapter one my analysis of early American literature courses

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emphasizes that the origins of American studies can be read as an "educational reform" (Mechling, Meredith, and Wilson 1973, 365). Through individual courses, American literature entered U.S. higher education primarily as a teaching, rather than a research endeavor (Grier 1954). Yet scholarship on the emergence of American literature in U.S. academia has thus far focused primarily on developments in published research (Reising 1986; Vanderbilt 1986), or treated teaching simply as a means to ensure future scholarship (Shumway 1994). For example, in his seminal *Creating American Civilization*, David R. Shumway devotes one chapter to "American Literature in the Curriculum" from the 1920s through the early 1960s. Shumway points out that in contrast to academic articles and books (that were hardly noticed by anyone outside the profession), undergraduate teaching disseminated the conception of American literature widely, and must thus be seen as "an important aspect" of the institutionalization of American literature in the academy (1994, 191). Yet he also explains that "a discipline [...] is dedicated to the production of knowledge, so that under the disciplinary model, transmission of knowledge becomes a mere means to further production" (1994, 7). Since Shumway is primarily interested in a genealogy of American literature as an academic discipline, he consequently neglects the "important aspect" (1994, 191) of teaching for the rest of his study, and comes to the conclusion that the emergence of American studies merely "contributed to the course of developments that the field [of American literature] was already bound to take" (1994, 217). With my own study, I hope to complicate this finding, and to offer a different assessment of the relationship between teaching, scholarship, and processes of field formation.

The curricular origins of American studies are often construed as simply the confluence of elements from American literature and American history. However, it is interesting to note that this was not a merger of two equal partners: the subject of American history was already well established by the end of the 1920s, while only four percent of all literature courses in American colleges dealt with American literature (Nuhn 1928, 329). Many scholars who subsequently taught in American Civilization programs were English literature PhDs who had never taken (let alone taught) a course in American literature. The status of American literature as a subordinate category of English literature had profound consequences for notions of scholarly expertise and for the development of certain teaching practices,

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like the critical essay, that continue to be an integral element of American studies pedagogies and scholarship.

Curricular innovations of the field in the 1930s and 1940s were pedagogically progressive and ideologically problematic, and thus resist monocausal assessments. Newly institutionalized American Civilization programs and "regional courses" were dedicated to the study of specific national (or regional) literatures and cultural traditions that neglected the contributions of women, ethnic minorities, or intercultural perspectives beyond the "European" tradition. At the same time, some of these programs and courses consciously moved beyond disciplinary and national borders, and attempted to create a learning situation that highlighted the interdependencies between literature, culture, and politics. The increasing institutionalization of American Civilization and American studies programs during the 1940s and 1950s is equally difficult to categorize. The influx of grant money contributed to the expansion of American studies programs, and the political and cultural climate during World War II and its Cold War aftermath did validate American nationalism and exceptionalism. However, not all American studies faculty subscribed to nationalist tendencies, and not all students were driven into the open arms of these programs by a heightened crisis consciousness or sense of cultural superiority (cf. Turpie 1979; Gleason 1981, Kerber 1989). In chapter 1.2, my analysis of the nascent American Studies Program at the University of Minnesota in the late 1940s and early 1950s suggest that an emphasis on folklore (especially folk music) and comparative approaches were two pedagogical strategies that mobilized international perspectives on American cultures against the threat of national chauvinism and isolationist understandings of American history.

The development of American studies from the early 1950s until the 1970s is connected to the work of scholars associated with the so-called "myth-and-symbol school," a diverse group of scholars who read American literature and cultural artifacts in the context of larger national myths. However, many American studies practitioners held positions as professors of English, and at the time their home departments were reigned by the formalist New Critics. The New Critics' "obsession" with close reading and focus on the text itself was at least in part a reaction against the neglect of textual analysis in English literature courses of the 1930s and 1940s. In the mythologies of field formation, the scholarly and ideological differences between New Critics and Americanists are in hindsight constructed

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as unbridgeable schisms. My case study from the University of Minnesota in chapter 1.3 illustrates how such differences played out in pedagogical practice during the 1950s: students in the American studies program took classes from professors who identified either as New Critics or as "Contextualists" (Americanists). According to Leo Marx, while methodological and ideological differences between the two groups were not resolved, they were problematized with students in the classroom and thus became a productive element of American studies pedagogy at the University of Minnesota (1999, 41). The interdependencies between disciplinary methodological discourses and multidisciplinary pedagogical practice make the example of the American Studies Program at the University of Minnesota a compelling case for the purpose of my inquiry.

"Maturity" and "Midlife Crises"

American studies practitioners of the first and second generation had often insisted that since American studies was introduced to overcome departmental boundaries, the call for American studies departments would be an oxymoron. In the 1960s and 1970s, this resistance to departmentalization seriously hampered curricular reform because American studies programs were often under-resourced and dependent on traditional departments like English or History. In theory, American studies programs built coherence around the culture concept and interdisciplinary methodologies. In practice, even core courses failed to introduce students to culture concepts, and training in American studies was multidisciplinary at best. All programs required their students to select courses from traditional disciplines, and virtually all programs relied heavily on the methodologies of these disciplines. Curricula remained organized around a bipolar literature-history concentration. At the same time, the number of American studies programs doubled during the 1960s, a large number of theoretical essays and edited volumes were published, and funding for faculty development seemed widely available. In chapter two, I position my assessment of American studies in the 1960s and 1970s in this force field between "maturity" and "midlife-crises," between quantitative growth and methodological uncertainties, and illustrate the curricular consequences of these tensions. My comparison of two 1963 visions for American studies curricula (by Hennig Cohen and Richard Sykes, in chapter 2.2) highlights the interdependencies between notions of expertise and curriculum design that

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locate methodologies and learning goals somewhere between anthropology, literary criticism, and a more general humanities skills set.

Both Sykes and Cohen worked with holistic culture concepts that described a unique national culture within distinct spatial and temporal boundaries. During the 1960s, the premises of such homogeneous culture concepts were increasingly challenged. Social movements and identity politics fueled a radical critique of the cultural consensus that had informed earlier versions of American studies. These changes reverberated in curricula and led to a radical reconceptualization of American studies pedagogies as political work. Robert Meredith's notion of the "radical as teacher" (1969, 1) illustrates such a redefinition (chapter 2.3). In his influential article on the history of the movement, Gene Wise nominated Meredith's introductory seminar at Miami University "Culture Therapy 202" as the "representative act" for American studies in the late 1960s, and Robert Spiller's 1954 course "American Civilization 900" at the University of Pennsylvania as the "representative act" for the corporate nature of the American studies movement in the 1950s (Wise 1979b, 312). While Spiller's course articulated the dominant culture of the 1950s, Wise claimed, Meredith's course symbolized a position that Pease and Wiegman call a "negative critical project, one that positioned the American studies scholar antagonistically in relation to the field's self-defining object of study" (Pease and Wiegman 2002, 7–8). It is interesting to note that Wise chose instances of teaching practice, and not research projects, to illustrate the particular "paradigms" that govern American studies in the 1950s and 1960s. However, my reading of these "acts" suggests that the "American Civilization 900" seminar at the University of Pennsylvania has more explanatory value as a case of failed interdisciplinary teaching practice in the 1950s (chapter 2.4), whereas the innovative nature of Robert Meredith's pedagogical radicalism surfaces much more clearly (and less "antagonistically") in his contributions to the American Culture Studies curriculum at the University of California, Davis.

In the spring of 1970, Robert Meredith became the program chair of the nascent American Culture Studies program at Davis. Jay Mechling and David Wilson joined Meredith as faculty in the program within the first year, and all three were actively involved in the design of a new curriculum. I conclude the first part of this study with a comparison of programs at the University of Minnesota and the University of Pennsylvania in 1970, and the University of California, Davis, in 1973. While the curriculum at Min-

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nesota focused primarily on the analysis of art and literature (in the tradition of the so-called "myth-and-symbol school"), the American Studies Department at the University of Pennsylvania was concerned with the assessment of change in socio-cultural systems, and worked with social science methodologies and a distinctly anthropological culture concept. The American Culture Studies program at Davis evolved around "three basic steps of problem solving" and articulated the transformation of social conditions as an explicit learning goal. Here, different pedagogical strategies were employed to model radical cultural critique for students, and the imitation of expert epistemologies by novice learners became a fundamental rationale behind the curriculum design. The American Culture Studies curriculum at Davis constitutes a powerful illustration of the generative interdependencies between teaching and scholarship in American studies, and the description of the program by Mechling, Meredith, and Wilson is a landmark study for the development of pedagogical markers of the field. All three programs (Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and Davis) demonstrate the conceptual diversity of American studies in the late 1960s/early 1970s and call any alleged methodological or pedagogical homogeneity into question.

Trajectories of Transformation

Beginning in the 1960s, political agendas and identity politics of emancipatory social movements and activism increasingly disputed the imaginary "uniformity of values" and cultural consensus of the United States that had characterized the work of many American studies practitioners during the 1950s (see e.g. Huber 1954; Pearce 1957). In the second part of this study, I introduce several trajectories that continue to have a genuinely transformative effect on the field of American studies, and highlight how these trajectories meet and overlap in recent scholarly and pedagogical visions that account for the inherent heterogeneity of American multicultures more adequately. In the 1960s and 1970s, European structuralist and poststructuralist theory "revolutionized" the study of culture (Lipsitz 1990) and informed the debate over the role of culture as an agent of change in the realm of the social (Shank 1997). Poststructuralist theorists sought alliances with "identitarian social movements," and drew attention to the relationship between academic inquiry and social change (Pease 2003). In the 1970s and 1980s in particular, newly institutionalized interdisciplinary programs and sub-fields emerged, among them Women's Studies, Queer

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Studies, Asian American Studies, African American Studies, Chicano and Chicana Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Postcolonial Studies. Their critical positionalities emphasized various dimensions of cultural difference in terms of race, class, ethnicity, or gender, and brought subject matters to the fore that had been central to social movements and activism of the 1960s and 1970s. The interdependencies between various minority discourses, social movements, the success of British Cultural Studies in the United States, and new interdisciplinary programs are difficult to assess, and their relationship to American studies cannot be understood in additive or supplementary terms. However, as I will demonstrate in chapters 3.1 and 3.2, all these fundamentally different yet intersecting and overlapping trajectories have informed American studies research and curricula in at least two major ways: first, with an understanding of American cultures as inherently dynamic, differentiated, multicultural and transnational, and second, with an emphasis on the political nature of teaching and scholarship in higher education.

Since the 1990s, several related projects have redefined the methods and objectives of American studies in ways that address central issues of multiculturalism, globalization, and postnationalism, and responded to the critiques of critical theory, cultural studies, interdisciplinary programs, and minority discourses. In chapters 3.3 and 3.4, I introduce the work of a diverse group of scholars associated with the New American Studies project most broadly construed, among them Donald Pease and Robyn Wiegman, Janice Radway, Günter Lenz, Amy Kaplan, John Carlos Rowe, and Paul Lauter. Despite differences in degree and direction, these scholar stress the ideological implications of literary production, describe experiences of cultural (ex)change under conditions of unequal power relations, emphasize the comparative and dialogic nature of American studies, and foreground the power of postnational narratives to actively change social relations. Günter Lenz has formulated a particularly dialogic, international, and comparativist vision of cultural critique in his project of "American Culture Studies," a critical intervention into the "field-Imaginary" (Pease 1990, 11) of the New Americanist project that locates the interrelationships between minority discourses and American studies in a transcultural, postnational arena (Lenz 1999). Lenz grounds his project in a "radically contextualized and historicized" notion of "border discourses" and "contact zones" (Pratt 1991) as two key discursive formations that address the dynamics of cultural identities through analyses of the multiple inter-

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connections of inter- and transcultural discourses (Lenz 2002, 469). This centrality of border discourses and contact zones for new versions of American studies as radical multicultural critique intersects with fundamental transformations in course and curriculum design, teaching materials, and pedagogies in the field.

Despite visual or performative turns and the emergence of new media, during the 1990s print-texts continued to be central to research and teaching in American studies. The analyses of these texts contributed to an understanding of how social and cultural boundaries were constructed, changed, or dissolved. As a result, the selection of "representative" texts that illustrated cultural struggle and exchange as social situations within specific historical contexts was necessarily a conflictual process. Such conflicts surfaced with the production of literary anthologies that highlighted how arguments about *what* students should read are fundamentally connected to arguments about *how* scholars read. To illustrate my claim, I introduce the work of two scholars who in this period suggested complementary and at times contrasting ways to translate an expanding canon into pedagogical practice: first, Paul Lauter's work on the 1990 edition of the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*, and second, John Carlos Rowe's "Comparative U.S. Cultures Model."

Lauter's seminal work on the *Heath Anthology* followed a comparative approach to literatures and cultures of the United States that emphasized how differences in historical developments have resulted in "differing literary traditions" and characterized the United States as multicultures of difference (1990, 12). Equally committed to multicultural topics, John Carlos Rowe's "Comparative U.S. Cultures Model" highlighted the articulation of integrated, rather than parallel accounts of differing literary traditions (1995; 2000; 2002a; 2002b). According to Rowe, parallel accounts implied a curriculum of representative courses for each "discrete cultural group in the United States" (2002a, 8–9). In contrast, Rowe advocated a curriculum of courses that are based on a canon of social situations, and that illustrate the pedagogical implications of Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the "contact zone" as social spaces of cultural dialogue, conflict, and exchanges (Rowe 2002a, 12; see also Pratt 1991). With an analysis of the 1997 course "The Americas: Identity, Culture, and Power" from the nascent American Cultures Program at the University of Houston, I demonstrate the mutual interdependencies between curricular practice and the reorientations of American studies during the 1990s that Lauter, Lenz, and

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Rowe conceptualized. The design of this introductory course, to anticipate my argument, is postnationalist in scope and yet follows a distinctly regional approach, and underscores the potential of contact zones for the study of cultural confrontations and discursive negotiations in the American studies classroom.

American Studies in the Age of Digital Cultures

Building on Pratt's critique of an often simplistic and monolingual notion of language as a communication device for an imagined national community (1991, 38), Rowe and Lauter have repeatedly argued for expanded conceptions of texuality as the "cultural speech act" for new configurations of American studies (Rowe 2002a, 12; see also Lauter 1999; 2001). As I will demonstrate in the first part of this study, American studies emerged in U.S. higher education when the nation state was considered the pre-eminent social formation, and when print-texts were a dominant form of cultural production. More recently, digital media have played an increasingly crucial role in ongoing processes of globalization and transnational communication. These media force us to consider a broader spectrum of "textuality" as the archival basis for the study of cultures, and a wider range of cultural, social, as well as political alternatives to the nation. However, as John Carlos Rowe has pointed out, "American Studies' traditional emphasis on the significance of non-print media has not included sufficient treatment of telematic, computer, and Internet forms of communication" (2002a, xxiii). For Rowe, writing in 2002, this neglect may have been due to the relative novelty of these media. Today, a decade into the new millennium, the so-called "new media" are no longer new. For chapter four, my dominant concern is to re-visit Rowe's assessment: How have new configurations of American studies addressed, and/or failed to address, the impact of "new" (digital) media? How can American studies develop what Douglas Kellner (2004) has called "multiple literacies" and recognize the fundamental importance of new media environments as spaces of social, cultural, political, and pedagogical negotiations?

My exploration of these questions will highlight several projects that have been particularly instrumental in exploring the potential of new media for curriculum innovation in American studies, and in shaping the role of new media for the international American studies community more generally. Here, I refer specifically to the *American Studies Crossroads Project* and its

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many online projects that foster the transnational dialogue about differences and similarities in scholarship, curricula, and institutional situations between American studies practitioners from various countries. Since 1994, *Crossroads* has sponsored the *American Studies Web*, which started as a collection of resources for the study of American culture and history on CD-ROM. The latest, 2007 version of the *American Studies Web* makes use of various social networking features and to a certain degree exemplifies the fundamental changes that have resulted from recent configurations of new media as sites for transnational communication, collaboration and cultural production. I argue that the implications of these changes for the American studies project of cultural critique are profound, and that they challenge tacit assumptions and dominant narratives associated with that project.

To elaborate this claim, I will illustrate how online videos function as sites for the maintenance, reproduction, and contestation of cultural and political processes in Web 2.0 environments. I want to suggest that one of the reasons new media such as online video are not part of what Donald Pease has called the "field-Imaginary" of American studies (1990, 11) is that these new media pose epistemological challenges to the interpretative frameworks of the field. I understand these challenges primarily to be tensions between traditional, linear narratives of cultural critique and the new media protocols of cultural production that follow the logic of the database. As a field that is primarily print-based, American studies is just beginning to develop a language that can accurately account for cultural objects that privilege constant re-ordering and arbitrariness over sequence and narrative. The increasing presence of new media as an integral part of teaching and scholarship in American studies contests the authority of certain texts and audiences, and it will force us to rephrase and reconsider some of the questions most central to our project. At the same time, it allows us to imagine a "cultural speech act" (Rowe) for new configurations of American studies that enables students and scholars to articulate cultural critique in multiple languages, across borders, and beyond territorial epistemologies.

Expansions of the Field-Imaginary

In the third and final part of this study, I position my inquiry at this moment of transition to new "cultural speech acts" (Rowe) in light of

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digital media. At such a moment of transition it is tempting to fall into the trap of technological determinism. In this explanatory model, the mere introduction and use of new technology cause change. However, at the intersection of research and teaching, the role of technology for recent versions of American studies is more difficult to assess: digital media create possibilities for new ways of doing things while simultaneously absorbing more traditional practices in an uneven movement forward and backward. My primary purpose for the last part of this study is to explore the potential of digital media to foster a radical reconstruction of American studies that highlights the interdependencies between scholarship and classroom practice, but avoids the rhetoric of technological determinism. Thus, before I explore the role of digital media further, it seems productive to take a step back and to clarify the primary purpose of digital media for teaching American studies in higher education. I suggest that all media should be subject to the same benchmark: their effectiveness in producing successful learning that shows an affinity with recent redefinitions of what it means to do American studies. It follows that before questions about the best ways to teach American studies with new media can be explored, it is paramount to first ask what the concept of "learning" in American studies entails. In other words, my take on Shelley Fisher Fishkin's 2004 seminal presidential address to the American Studies Association is, What would education in American studies look like if student learning was at its center, rather than teaching with particular media? (cf. Fishkin 2005, 21). This question, I believe, should precede any assessment of how new media environments can support successful teaching, as well as show an affinity with recent projects of American studies as radical multicultural critique.

In order to address this question, I will adapt Robert Barr and John Tagg's influential notion of the "Learning Paradigm" for my reconstruction of American studies at the intersection of teaching and research. In the mid-1990s, Barr and Tagg described the "Learning Paradigm" as a fundamental shift in U.S. undergraduate education: if the primary purpose of colleges had thus far been to provide classroom instruction, their highest priority should now be to facilitate student learning. Building on Barr and Tagg, my aim for chapter five is to conceptualize student learning as a dominant concern for American studies in U.S. higher education in three ways. First, I will introduce constructivist taxonomies of learning, and indicate their relevance for revised notions of knowledge production in American studies. Here my analyses draw on findings from the 2000 report

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