Polish Association for American Studies Annual Conference

American Studies Center, University of Warsaw,

27-29 October 2016

***Transnational American Studies:***

***Histories, Methodologies, Perspectives***

**Plenary speakers:**

Rob Kroes, Utrecht University, Netherlands

James Kyung-Jin Lee, University of California, Irvine

Agnieszka Soltysik-Monnet, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Marta Figlerowicz, Yale University

**Debate on American Studies in Poland**

Ewa Łuczak, University of Warsaw;

Tadeusz Rachwał, University of Social Sciences and Humanities (SWPS);

Marek Wilczyński, Gdańsk University

**CALL FOR PAPERS**

**Can American studies benefit from expanding beyond its current intellectual framing by adopting a consciously transnational approach and a more determined interdisciplinary approach? What would such an evolution imply in various locations and cultural/intellectual/political contexts? How would it affect current hierarchies of knowledge production and distribution? Our aim is to provoke critical reflection on what it is we Americanists do and to expand the field of inquiry through methodological innovation.**

Vernon Louis Parrington wrote in *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927) that he has “chosen to follow the broad path of our political, economic, and social development, rather than the narrower belletristic” – thereby he prospectively defined American studies as **interdisciplinary.** The field has since fared particularly well at the **crossroads of literature and history**, as evidenced in the work of the next generation of scholars, including the literary scholar F.O. Matthiessen and the historian Perry Miller, and in the myth and symbol school, whose founders include Henry Nash Smith and Leo Marx. **Revisionary positions** adopted by Lionel Trilling, Annette Kolodny and others critiquing American studies for neglecting minority perspectives and for reiterating the notion of American exceptionalism did not significantly alter this methodological frame. Feminism, ethnic and sexuality studies, and critical race theory have transformed the field’s hermeneutical perspectives since the 70s, while the end of the cold war helped crystallize a **critique of American exceptionalism in the 90s and beyond**. A recent development, perhaps even a paradigm change, is the influence of affect studies on explorations of American culture, as exemplified by the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Lauren Berlant.

All these developments notwithstanding, the field’s most rudimentary discursive procedures have retained many characteristics of a historicizing narrative and of literary readings. American studies is no longer devoted exclusively to literature and to political and social history, as emphasis has shifted to popular culture, including film, television and the new media. Yet, the field essentially remains a form of cultural studies, while social sciences, political science and economics, philosophy and art history are represented to a modest extent. This is especially clear in the **construction of many American studies curricula** and is reflected by institutional settings.

Linked to questions of methodology are recent calls for a **transnational turn in American studies**, theorized in recent decades by such scholars as (among others) Donald Pease, Amy Kaplan, Alice Kessler Harris, Rob Kroes, Heinz Ickstadt and Winfried Fluck. This approach means placing the US squarely in the global context rather than beginning with the premise of its special role. In fact, one of its main projects has been to challenge “the tenacious grasp of American exceptionalism,” as Kaplan put it. Such calls appear to require a **comparative perspective,** including, though not limited to, the European. The approach may thus invite a discussion of American influences on European unification, or lead to placing the current immigrant crisis against the backdrop of American history, political system, and the way the US has integrated some of its constituent minorities. Conversely, the US is to be regarded not as unique but as occupying a determined place in the global economy and in the international system.

We are also keen to explore how writers, scholars, artists, filmmakers and others outside and within the United States have tackled received ideas about America, questioned its idealism and its founding mythology, or otherwise engaged with its self-image. **Critical readings of America by outsiders** represent a long-standing tradition that includes Alexis de Tocqueville and a multitude of others, Henryk Sienkiewicz and Bernard-Henri Lévy among them. Also worth considering are writings by American expatriates, such as Henry James, Gertrude Stein, Henry Miller and James Baldwin, and by Americans whose perspective was influenced by their travels abroad, such as Herman Melville and Mark Twain. **Indigenous dissenters** have offered and inspired a range of critical insights that may lend themselves to comparative readings and to being discussed from the perspective of a transnational American studies.

**Conference organizers invite proposals for individual papers and panels exploring how Americanists in Poland and elsewhere understand their field and how they wish to change it and to challenge some of its entrenched premises.**

**Suggested topics and themes:**

* transnationalization of American studies;
* examinations of the interdisciplinarity of American studies, or lack thereof, including the place of sociology and political science within the field.
* impact of recent theoretical perspectives: affect studies, object theory, posthumanism, etc.;
* historical perspectives on the evolution of American studies as a field
* key works and key theoretical controversies in the development of American studies;
* Americanization and globalization: cultural, economic and political perspectives;
* American studies and the discourses of anti-Americanism, US imperialism, and neoliberalism;
* critics of American exceptionalism and their impact on American studies;
* European enthusiasts and detractors of the USA; American expats looking back at the USA;
* the role of race, gender and class in American studies;
* intersectional perspectives in American studies;
* American studies and postcolonial studies;
* religion studies and American studies;
* comparative perspectives on American and European societies, politics and cultures;
* institutional and methodological aspects of American studies in specific locations;
* American studies and the crisis of the humanities;
* the role of political contexts in shaping American studies;
* American studies during and after the Cold War;
* American studies’ responses to 9/11;
* American studies and US diplomacy.
* Please send paper abstracts (250 words) and panel proposals to:

**paas2016warsaw@gmail.com** by **JUNE 10, 2016.**

* The conference will include a parallel session or sessions for PAAS members, including doctoral candidates, to present work in progress that may be unrelated to the conference topic.
* Notification of acceptance will be sent by **June 20, 2015**.
* Conference fee – PLN 500 (USD 130; EUR 115), PLN 450 for doctoral students
* Deadline for registration and payment of the conference fee: **September 9, 2016**.

Conference venue: University of Warsaw main campus and American Studies Center.

Conference organizers:

Dr. habil. Agnieszka Graff Dr. Karolina Krasuska

Dr. habil. Tomasz Basiuk Ms. Ludmiła Janion