Critical and Comparative Perspectives on American Studies

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Edited by

Ksenija Kondali and Faruk Bajraktarević

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INTRODUCTION: CRITICAL AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON AMERICAN STUDIES

KSENIJA KONDALI
AND FARUK BAJRAKTAREVIĆ

The present volume contains a selection of papers that were read at the American Studies Symposium, an international event held at the University of Sarajevo's Faculty of Philosophy on March 22, 2014. More than forty scholars from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia, and the United States were in attendance. The topic of the conference—*Critical and Comparative Perspectives on American Studies*—invited participants to discuss highly relevant and wide-ranging fields of research, encompassing areas of investigation such as history, literature, linguistics, philosophy, sociology, politics, geography, popular culture, arts, education, and gender. The papers collected in this publication are the product of research interests and approaches that address the convergences and divergences of American Studies today, and, more specifically, how this discipline might be approached. Further, the presentations and discussions also reflect the concerns related to what role and capacity American Studies may have amidst alarming circumstances of environmental, economic, and educational degradation in a world characterized by a transnational flux of people, money, and cultures.

It should be noted that since its inception in the 1930s, the field of American Studies has been continuously examining its own disciplinary concepts, methodological approaches, and geographic assumptions. It has been argued that such questioning of its own identity has made American Studies one of the most rapidly developing disciplines in the world. One of its intrinsic tendencies has been the linking of a broad set of concerns across other fields of study, notably those of cultural studies, ecocriticism, gender and critical race studies, immigration, and issues of (post)colonialism. In recent decades, this discipline has been especially invigorated by focusing greater attention on globalization, internationalization,

transnationalization, and hemispheric studies (such as the most recent archipelagic American Studies). Owing to the diverse research affinities and interests of the scholars, the papers have produced a multifaceted image of the current approaches to American Studies that include those interdisciplinary and applied.

The opening paper by Stipe Grgas (University of Zagreb) poses a provocative and pertinent question: "Is There a Need for Marx in American Studies?" The author, an eminent scholar and leading Americanist in Southeast Europe and beyond, considers the post-socialist world—particularly the former Yugoslavia—as the site where the question in his title is being asked. He argues that the need for Marx in understanding the present conjuncture works against both the ostracism of Marx in the post-socialist world and against his "anomalous" position in American Studies. The first part of his discussion excavates from Marx's writings a number of passages in which Marx argued that the United States was the exemplary site of the rising capitalist order. The author supports these readings with evidence that shows Marx to have been fascinated by the United States. Extrapolating from these insights, the author contends that Marx's analyses and conceptualizations of capital are related to the current mutation of capitalism. In his conclusion Grgas indicates how the reading of the United States within this framework of understanding has implications for the way the practitioner of American Studies positions himself towards the object of his study. With his careful orchestration of citations from Marx as illustrations of the central themes and indeed much of the history of American Studies, this paper represents a challenging perspective that this volume aims to advance, particularly in the context of transnational and international reconsiderations of American Studies.

In the next writing, additional attention is drawn to the position of the discipline with an article by Joseph W.H. Lough, from the University of California, Berkeley, entitled "American Studies in a Social and Historical Context: Rethinking Immanuel Wallerstein's Disciplinary Taxonomy." The author contextualizes the expansion of area studies in the United States after World War II and evokes the more current situation of these studies programs at institutions of higher learning. His discussion builds on the frequent understanding that the increasing condemnation of area studies programs in such institutions is led by retrograde structures that are failing to convince in their attacks against the trends of history and progress. Using the ideas of Immanuel Wallerstein from his *World-Systems Analysis* (2007), principally his taxonomy of modern disciplinarity, the author argues for the centrality of American Studies in the struggle for the life of the mind. Through the confrontation of Wallerstein's vision, the

author encourages our critical assessment of the roles played by economic, social, and political domination in the development of both the Fordist and the post-Fordist universities. Recognizing the role of American Studies in the critical evaluation of changes in the Americas over time, the author's argument affirms the discipline's potential to assist students and scholars within American Studies to understand the world of today and challenge those who consider academic freedom a superfluous extravagance, rather than a necessity.

The discussion in the next section takes up the issue of dislocation and mediating spaces in contemporary, early twenty-first century expression through a feminist matrilineal reading of the novel *The First Rule of Swimming* (2013) written by Courtney Angela Brkic, an American writer of Croatian origin. The author, Tatjana Bijelić (University of Banja Luka), bases her discussion of "Sisters and Solid Foundations: Reinventing Alternative Spaces in Courtney Angela Brkic's *The First Rule of Swimming*" on the ideas of Luce Irigaray, Azade Seyhan, Rosi Braidotti, and other critical sources, including those on East European transnational writers. Situating the novel in this theoretical-critical framework, the author explores the circumstances of patriarchal values, immigration, exile, and transnational nomadism that influence the existential split in the protagonist's mother-line. As one of the few (diasporic) novels written in English by a woman author living in the United States and originating from Southeast Europe, *The First Rule of Swimming* exemplifies, as Bijelić contends in her article, the treatment of mother-daughter and sibling relations within broader transnational contexts. Specifically, the author investigates how Brkic, a first-generation Croatian American, creates her characters from the position of a transnational mediator, and avails of other strategies to address related historical and cultural concerns, rooted in the space covering two or more different geographies. Bijelić's exploration of this novel extends to other questions related to East European and post-Yugoslav diasporic writing, contributing to the discussion of fast-rising transnational trends in literature that have successfully challenged the delineation of English and American literature as separate from the literatures of the rest of the world.

The work of Ksenija Kondali, from the University of Sarajevo, under the title "Fictionalizing Transatlantic Slavery: A Comparative Study" also deals with resistance to national and hegemonic boundaries in literature as it explores the reinscription of transatlantic slavery in selected literary texts by Toni Morrison, Fred D'Aguiar, and Lawrence Hill. As a theoretical framework of this comparative analysis, the author uses Paul Gilroy's conceptions of the "Black Atlantic" and its "re-membering" by

Lars Eckstein, along with other theoretical approaches, to investigate the recuperation of ignored and silenced voices from the Middle Passage and the transatlantic correlation of black identities. These voices are those of the characters in Morrison's *A Mercy* (2008), whose African American contribution to this topic is explored along with the novels *The Longest Memory* (1994) by the British-Guyanese author Fred D'Aguiar, and *The Book of Negroes* (2007) by Lawrence Hill, a Canadian author of US-immigrant background. In this comparative analysis of the selected novels, the author explains that, despite numerous differences, they share common features that help us understand the complex and multifaceted legacy of the slave past. Through the interweaving of race, narrative, resistance, and memory, the novels confirm that the history of colonial rule and the transatlantic slave trade is etched in the collective memory of those whose identity is linked to the Atlantic world. The comparative reading of the fictionalizations of transatlantic slavery contained in this writing calls attention to the relations between Black writing in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, and also contributes to an increasing need for international and comparative perspectives on American Studies.

The next paper's focus shifts to another re-evaluation of the interconnections of race, gender, and ethnicity in a different literary genre with the article "Women in Twentieth-Century American Theater" by Ifeta Čirić-Fazlija, from the University of Sarajevo. The author explores the context of twentieth-century American culture at large, and specifically of the theater through the lens of women playwrights of all races and ethnicities. The range of plays analyzed in this paper spans almost one hundred years of American women's playwriting, starting with Rachel Crothers' *A Man's World* (1910), Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* (1916), and Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* (1928), all manifesting the social and other circumstances of American women in the first decades of the previous century. The discussion then focuses on pre-World War II plays by representatives of early African American and feminist drama—Zora Neale Hurston's *Mule Bone* (1930), Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour* (1934), and Clare Boothe's *The Women* (1936). The author then elucidates the postwar and contemporary American drama characterized by general eclecticism as well as diverse themes and genres, using the examples of Alice Childress's *Trouble in Mind* (1955), Maria Irene Fornes' *Fefu and Her Friends* (1977), and Wendy Wasserstein's *An American Daughter* (1997). Throughout her paper, the author exposes the struggle of female dramatists, particularly the difficulties posed by male-dominated American theater and drama of the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Nadira Aljović, from the University of Zenica, in her paper entitled "Negative Concord and Negative Polarity Items in African American Vernacular English," addresses a widespread language pattern that is still regarded as socially unacceptable by language purists and labeled as "English with mistakes." By examining *n*-words in African American Vernacular English with those in Modern Standard English and Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian, the author compares the performance of negative polarity items in these different languages. This comparative analysis relies on the typology of negative polarity items developed by Ljiljana Progovac (1994), and demonstrates that *n*-words in African American Vernacular English do not pattern with *n*-words in Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian, even though their function as negative polarity items is fulfilled. Drawing on the notion that *n*-words in African American Vernacular English are not pure substitutes for Modern Standard English *any*-words (i.e., its negative polarity items), the author contends that they seem to conform to a type of negative polarity items also evident in Turkish that is licensed by negation and does not abide by strict locality conditions. The chapter also examines other properties of negative concord in African American Vernacular English—negative concord of verbs across clauses and negative inversion—that are not only challenging but also difficult to explain using the approach advanced by Progovac. Presenting interesting comparative findings, the author illuminates a relatively understudied topic in generative and applied linguistics, which, due to their interdisciplinarity of research, greatly interlink with other areas of investigation within the discipline of American Studies.

Real world language issues in the American political, social and cultural milieu are also the focus of the next writing in which "Deixis in Commencement Addresses Delivered at American Universities" is analyzed by Nejla Kalajdžisalihović from the University of Sarajevo. The author examines the speaker's usage of grammar and extralinguistic referents encoding culture(s) and shared microcosms based on five transcripts of commencement addresses. The addresses were delivered at four American universities' graduation ceremonies in the early twenty-first century by speakers of different social and cultural backgrounds. More precisely, five prominent personalities, Michael Dell, Bono Vox, Steve Jobs, Oprah Winfrey, and Drew Houston, gave their respective speeches at Stanford University, the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Pennsylvania, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) from 2003 to 2013. In her analysis, the author takes special interest in the presence of personal, temporal, spatial, and social deixis, and the degree to which deictic words reveal culture-specific referents and shared microcosms

and at the same time change the global social reality. Underscoring the importance of studying social deixis across English-speaking countries, the description strives to determine the correct interpretation of deictic words by audiences that do not necessarily have a common range of deictic devices. The author's analysis provides an interesting comparative view into this important form of human communication that has a long tradition at American universities and exerts considerable influence in the broader community, with the potential to foster a better appreciation of multicultural sensibility.

In the following paper entitled "Imploding the Myth of Progress and Women's Emancipation in *The New World Order* as a Critique of US-led Economic Imperialism" by Lilijana Burcar from the University of Ljubljana, the discussion is directed toward Harold Pinter's short drama piece *The New World Order*. Pinter's play is grounded in the broader socio-economic context alluded to in the title of the play and aims to debunk Western humanitarianism as one of the key strategic tools in the justification of Western military and economic incursions into the countries of the global South. Burcar reminds us that mainstream Western drama has devoted meager attention to the workings and consequences of neo-colonial globalization processes upon women, especially women in the global South. Emphasizing the importance of Pinter's play in exposing neo-imperial policies and the structural violence stemming from them, the paper investigates how the play challenges the rhetoric of Western countries' lead role in bringing economic progress and exporting women's rights. Pinter's strategy is to evoke real-life experiences of women and men under Western-led occupations, be those of a direct or indirect nature, military or other. The analysis in this paper examines how these experiences are grounded in the import and spread of gendered hierarchies inherent to Western capitalist patriarchies. Of particular interest in this analysis is Pinter's language, primarily his dialog, and, as the author illuminates, the complexity in the connections between capitalist patriarchy and Western imperialism in reference to the "woman issue."

Unconventionally titled, the next contribution, "A Pinch of Insight, a Dash of Resolution—the Recipe for Success" by Željka Babić (University of Banja Luka), addresses the issue of teaching history-related courses, including those of US cultural history, and its practices in English departments in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). While the author acknowledges the ongoing longstanding debate about the teaching practices of UK and US history at language departments abroad, she also underscores the need to devote more critical attention to the curricula of English departments at universities in BiH in terms of their structuring and

approach according to the expected results, whether linguistic, literary, or cultural. Taking into consideration critical issues and the challenging circumstances of English Department teachers in general, and specifically at Banja Luka University, the author analyzes the inevitable market orientation and competitiveness in academia nowadays and how the syllabi and curricula are expected to adapt to these conditions. The modernization of American history courses in Banja Luka's English Department serves as an example of the inevitable modification, responding also to the necessity of introducing multiperspectivity and culturally responsive teaching in tertiary education. In the presentation of the results obtained in the curriculum changes within her English Department, the author explains the processes entailed as well as the outcomes, emphasizing the need to respond to the changing context and demanding a more collaborative teaching environment and learner-centered approach. Such innovative strategies are aimed to provide new perspectives on teaching American history and contribute to the broader issue of American Studies methodologies.

The volume's final piece, "I'm a True Ferrari Diva (But I Haven't Always Been This Way): Turbo-Folk and the American Dream of Social Mobility," discusses turbo-folk as a local pop culture phenomenon with strongly evident global influences upon its aesthetics and ideology. Faruk Bajraktarević, from the University of Sarajevo, identifies these influences in a number of turbo-folk narratives of upward social mobility, ranging from music video plots and song lyrics to social media posts, which he discusses as peculiar hybrids of the Balkan/local and American/global ideas of social status and mobility. This paper views the class identities of turbo-folk stars as primarily performed and not necessarily reflecting the "real-life" wealth and social status of the performer. This analysis focuses on two turbo-folk stars, Ceca and Jelena Karleuša, as model class-passers who flaunt, construct, and, most importantly, perform their newly acquired social statuses, often highlighting the difference between their present (higher) social statuses and the original (lower) social statuses they were born into—upholding the meritocratic myth that upward social mobility is possible for everyone if they try hard enough. Turbo-folk is thus viewed not as a completely endemic phenomenon but, in many ways, a local manifestation of fabricating the now globalized American dream of full freedom to make it.

In this volume, the diverse and far-ranging representation of texts is a reflection of an open and critical discussion about American Studies, intending to display the inseparability of different research interests within the discipline. Offering their contributions to an ongoing debate, the

authors reconsider and re-evaluate, often from radically different viewpoints, the capacity of American Studies, as a complex and rapidly evolving discipline, to respond to an ever-broadening range of contemporary issues and challenges. Inevitably, this discussion eschews generalization and encourages interdisciplinarity through critical and comparative engagements in this increasingly inclusive field of scholarship.

IS THERE A NEED FOR MARX IN AMERICAN STUDIES?

STIPE GRGAS

Abstract

This text is part of an argument that I have, on previous occasions, formulated as the paradoxical absence of capitalism in a discipline whose object of study is the paradigmatic capitalist nation. On this occasion, I argue that in large part this stems from what Michael Denning has labeled the "anomalous" position of Marxism in American Studies. I will begin by showing how the United States is inscribed in Marx's work not only in cursory remarks but in two passages that diagnose the American experience in a manner of profound significance to the discipline of American Studies. After addressing the manner in which Marx thought of the United States, I will ask and discuss the following questions: 1) What are the reasons for the aversion to Marx in American Studies and within the broader American cultural field?; 2) What are the implications of reinscribing Marx into both the disciplinary archive and the transdisciplinary attempts to understand the United States?; and 3) How does the reinscription of Marx pose a challenge to our thinking not only of the discipline itself but also the present moment of the United States? In my conclusion, I argue that Marx's thoughts have profound bearing on the present conjecture, but to understand this, one has to rethink certain orthodoxies, particularly the central notion of capital.

Keywords: Marx, American Studies, discipline, the present, capital

1.

I ask the question from a particular place, at a particular point in the historical trajectory of the discipline, and within a global conjecture in which the object of our studies, the United States, continues to play no small role. I ask the question and will attempt an answer cognizant of the

fact that the question originated in Croatia and it is being addressed and the results of dwelling upon it are being delivered before an audience in Bosnia. I indicate this geography to my potential reader, particularly to fellow Americanists in ex-Yugoslavia, because I believe that these localities, used here as synecdoches of the post-socialist world, ought to be given a hearing in the internationalization of American Studies. This latest turn in the discipline has prompted editors of one of the newest anthologies of American Studies to acknowledge the work done by scholars in the field outside of the United States by assigning it a separate section (Radway et al. 2009, 567–604). I start with the following assumption: if Americanists in the post-socialist world want to see their work acknowledged within the latest turn in the discipline, one way they can do so is by retrieving the breadth of research and philosophical tradition that has been ostracized in their new-found statelets. I say this because, although my presentation is primarily motivated by disciplinary concerns, it has been no less prompted by what I see as the debilitating consequences of the ostracism of Marx in one of those statelets.

Let me say at the very start that the question in my title is rhetorical. I will show it to be so by describing how the name in the title, Marx, needs to be incorporated into American Studies at different levels of the discipline. Some of these are shared by all knowledge disciplines, particularly by those that constantly engage the memory of their constitution, while others are specific to American Studies. If American Studies, whether positively defined or defined by default—as postdiscipline, antidiscipline—objectifies, create topics (or objects) for research (see Grgas 2014), and constantly works upon and expands the archive of knowledge about its object of study, I will show how Marx is part of that archive. The recuperation of this Marx is the foremost aim of my presentation. If, again, like other disciplinary pursuits, American Studies maps the temporal trajectory of its object, I will show that Marxist thought provides a fecund explanatory framework. The second step of my argument will sketch a number of stops on this trajectory and show how Marx is relevant to them. Finally, if we agree that one of the specificities of American Studies—its actuality, its overstepping of academic boundaries, its "extracurricular surplus" (Grgas 2014)—derives from its readiness to confront the challenge of exogenous shocks, I argue that Marx has something to say to the latest conjuncture of the object of our study. In this section, I will outline the contours of how I see the present moment of our object of study and show that Marx has something to say about both "cognitive capitalism" and "financialization," to herald the naming of those contours. In conclusion, I will look at the implications these notions

have for the discipline of American Studies as such, and as I see it conceived and practiced in our part of the world.

2.

The most often-cited analysis of Marx's position in American Studies was provided by Michael Denning in his article "'The Special American Conditions': Marxism and American Studies" (1986). Writing within the context of the Cold War, Denning concluded that "the place of Marxism in the study of American culture, in 'American Studies,' seems somewhat anomalous" (1986, 356). Denning's later publication *The Cultural Front* (1997)—an in-depth study of the left-wing Popular Front in the United States—showed what the addressing of that anomaly can achieve. I, here, draw attention to his succinct discussion of the emergence of the field of American Studies in the later publication, his contention that the discipline was conceived as "the quintessential alternative to Marxism itself, which was understood simply as Soviet ideology" (2000, 446) but note his remark on the other less familiar archive of American Studies: "American Studies was also, for many of the young intellectuals it attracted, a 'movement,' the practice of American cultural history as a form of radical cultural critique" (2000, 446).[1] Denning has in mind the cultural history that was pioneered by Popular Front scholars; a mobilization, as he writes, that was intended as oppositional but, "nationalistically appropriated," "became incorporated hegemonically" (2000, 447). I could proceed by showing the relevance of Marx by retrieving this mobilization,[2] what Denning calls "a rich and often forgotten American Marxism" (2000, 424) or by updating the archive since the publication of Denning's study. This is not what I intend to do here.

Rather, my first task will be to go to Marx himself and show how we find in his work knowledge about the object of our discipline. That knowledge is not ancillary; it does not appear only in Marx's letters or his journalism[3] but in his most important work and, I argue, is of foundational significance to American Studies. I begin with a quote from *Capital Volume I*. In a footnote in which he comments on the method that needs to be used when portraying the laws of political economy, Marx writes:

> Nowhere does the fluidity of capital, the versatility of labour and the indifference of the worker to the content of his work appear more vividly than in the United States of North America. In Europe, even in England, capitalist production is affected and distorted by hangovers from feudalism. The fact that baking, shoemaking, etc. are only just being put on a *capitalist* basis in England is entirely due to the circumstance of English

> cherished feudal preconceptions of 'respectability'. It was 'respectable' to sell Negroes into slavery, but it was not respectable to make sausages, boots or bread. Hence all the machinery which conquers the 'unrespectable' branches of industry for capitalism in Europe comes from America. By the same token, nowhere are people so indifferent to the type of work they do as in the United States, nowhere are people so aware that their labour always produces the same product, money, and nowhere do they pass through the most divergent kinds of work with the same nonchalance. (1990, 1014n23)

Later in the same volume, Marx reiterates this point about the nature of labor in the United States: "We can see this *versatility*, this perfect indifference towards the particular content of work and the free transition from one branch of industry to the next, most obviously in North America, where the development of wage-labour has been relatively untrammelled by the vestiges of the guild system etc." (1990, 1034).

The point I want to emphasize in these observations is Marx's recognition that the United States provided conditions that were not ballasted by the past. Undistorted by "hangovers from feudalism" and "untrammelled by the vestiges of the guild system," the United States was the exemplary site for the emergence of a socio-economic order whose contours, logic, and future development he was attempting to fathom. Marx made the same point earlier in *Grundrisse*:

> Not only the category, labour, but labour in reality has here become the means of creating wealth in general, and has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any specific form. Such a state of affairs is at its most developed in the most modern form of existence of bourgeois society—in the United States. Here, then, for the first time, the point of departure of modern economics, namely the abstraction of the category 'labour', 'labour as such', labour pure and simple, becomes true in practice. The simplest abstraction, then, which modern economics places at the head of its discussions, and which expresses an immeasurably ancient relation valid in all forms of society, nevertheless achieves practical truth as an abstraction only as a category of the most modern society. One could say that this indifference towards particular kinds of labour [...] is a historic product in the United States. (1993, 104–05)

Again in *Grundrisse*, commenting on the economist Henry Charles Carey, Marx reiterates the point. I think that the passage deserves to be quoted *in extenso*:

> Carey is the only original economist among the North Americans. This belongs to a country where bourgeois society did not develop on the

> foundation of the feudal system, but developed rather from itself; where this society appears not as the surviving result of a centuries-old movement, but rather as the starting point of a new movement; where the state, in contrast to all earlier national formations, was from the beginning subordinate to bourgeois society, to its production, and never could make any pretense of being an end-in-itself; where, finally, bourgeois society itself, linking up the productive forces of an old world with the enormous natural terrain of a new one, has developed to hitherto unheard-of dimensions and with unheard-of freedom of movement, has far outstripped all previous work in the conquest of the forces of nature, and where, finally, even the antithesis of bourgeois society itself appear only as vanishing moments. That the relations of production within which this enormous new world has developed so quickly, so surprisingly and so happily should be regarded by Carey as the eternal, normal relations of social production and intercourse, that these should seem to him as hampered and damaged by the inherited barriers of the feudal period, in Europe, especially England, which actually represents Europe to him, and that the English economists should appear to him to give a distorted, falsified reflection, generalization of these relations, that they should seem to him to confuse accidental distortions of the latter with their intrinsic character—what could be more natural? American relations against English ones: to this his critique of the English theory of landed property, wages, population, class antitheses, may be reduced. In England, bourgeois society does not exist in pure form, not corresponding to its concept, not adequate to itself. How then could the English economists' concepts of bourgeois society be the true, undimmed expression of a reality, since that reality was unknown to them? In the last analysis, the disturbing effect which traditional influences, influences not arising from the womb of bourgeois society itself, exercise upon its *natural* relations reduces itself, for Carey, to the influence, to the excesses and interferences of the state in bourgeois society. (1993, 884–85)

To summarize: in Marx's view, the polity across the Atlantic had developed "the most modern form" of the emergent society and it was there that "for the first time" economic abstractions had come into being in practice. The dynamic Marx was conceptualizing in Europe had been outsourced[4] to a site that provided laboratory conditions for its "untrammelled" development.

I quote these observations at length because I hold them to be foundational regarding knowledge about the United States. They have to be read and reread. Marx is assigning to the American project an epochal significance, not in the sense of a historical rupture but of embodying the very concept of the new world socio-economic formation. Implications for American self-representations are manifold. I will not pursue them here. I

cite Marx because others have not done so, not even those who work within the Marxist tradition. For example, Michael Aglietta, in his book *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience* (2000), remarks: "The type of juridical subjectivity that reflects the general reification of commodity-producing societies was all the more decisively imposed within the new American nation inasmuch as there were no organic ties to pre-capitalist forms of production" (2000, 72). Aglietta's formulation, "no organic ties," is equivalent to Marx's remarks that the United States was not "hung over" by feudalism or that it was "untrammeled" by past socio-economic relations. However, Aglietta does not reference Marx when he pronounces the above judgment. If Marxists feel they need not attribute the assumptions they work with to Marx, if this is assumed knowledge,[5] I am contending that Marx's observations regarding the United States have to be acknowledged and given due weight, particularly in a discipline where he holds an "anomalous" position. In that sense, I see my reinscription of Marx as an act of intellectual responsibility. Fulfilling it, sifting through his main writings for the American presence, I am reclaiming for American Studies an "unclaimed legacy,"[6] one which, as I will show, has more than a historicist interest.

Merely registering Marx's generalizations concerning American specificity problematizes some of the grounding insights that have been relied upon to build knowledge about the United States. If we duly incorporate them into the horizon of thought and the repertoire of questions we put when engaging the object of our discipline, both the content of American Studies and its research agenda are inflected. Let me illustrate this by calling upon August H. Nimtz, who asks whether it is Marx or Tocqueville who provides us with sustainable readings of the United States. We ought to recall that Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* is frequently referenced in arguments that work with the notion of American exceptionalism. Privileging Marx's arguments, Nimtz writes: "Rather than treating them as 'mores' and customs, as Tocqueville did, slavery and racial oppression were fundamentally grounded in material reality—the exploitation of labor" (2003, ix). I mention this to signal the next step in my argument, where I will show that, in addition to the above-quoted generalizations, Marx in his writings referred to the United States, addressing particularities that are of paramount importance to our disciplinary knowledge.

My reference to Nimtz implies one of these—slavery. In the *Grundrisse*, we find the following:

> *Negro slavery*—a purely industrial slavery—which is, besides, incompatible with the development of bourgeois society and disappears with it,

> *presupposes* wage labour, and if other, free states with wage labour did not exist alongside it, if, instead, the Negro states were isolated, then all social conditions there would immediately turn into pre-civilized forms. (1993, 224)

Here is another quote from *Grundrisse*: "The fact that we now not only call the plantation owners in America capitalists, but that they *are* capitalists, is based on their existence as anomalies within a world market based on free labour" (1993, 513). In *Capital Vol. I,* we find more on the subject:

> Hence the Negro labour in the southern states of the American Union preserved a moderately patriarchal character as long as production was chiefly directed to the satisfaction of immediate local requirements. But in proportion as the export of cotton became of vital interest to those states, the over-working of the Negro, and sometimes the consumption of his life in seven years of labour, became a factor in a calculated and calculating system. It was no longer a question of obtaining from him a certain quantity of useful products, but rather of the production of surplus-value itself. (1990, 345)

Furthermore, Marx was aware of how the existence of slavery was detrimental to the mobilization of the working class:

> In the United States of America, every independent workers' movement was paralysed as long as slavery disfigured a part of the republic. Labour in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin. However, a new life immediately arose from the death of slavery. The first fruit of the American Civil War was the eight hours' agitation, which ran from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California, with the seven-league boots of the locomotive. (1990, 414)

Since the black experience plays such an important part in American Studies, Marx's comments merit a hearing. He saw American slavery as incompatible with the emergence of the new economic order, and is therefore an indispensable source for all interpretations that are not content with moralistic or political explanations of the Civil War and its aftermath.

In an aside in *Grundrisse* on the human relationship to the earth, Marx writes that nomadic tribes "relate to it as their property, although they never stabilize this property" and adds: "This is the case too with the hunting grounds of the wild Indian tribes in America" (1993, 491). Although the allusion to American Indians here might be seen as simply exemplifying how the American indigenous population percolated the

cultural imaginary of 19th-century Europe, I will supplement that passing remark with a passage from *Capital Volume I*:

> The treatment of indigenous population was, of course, at its most frightful in plantation-colonies set up exclusively for the export trade, such as the West Indies, and in rich and well-populated countries such as Mexico and India, that were given over to plunder. But even in the colonies properly so called, the Christian character of primitive accumulation was not belied. In 1703 those sober exponents of Protestantism, the Puritans of New England, by decrees of their assembly set a premium of 40 pounds on every Indian scalp and every captured redskin. (1990, 917)

Marx continues by listing the prices of "a male scalp of 12 years and upwards," of "male prisoners," of "women and children prisoners," of "women and children." After this excruciating price list, Marx indicates the ironic turn history took when the colonialists turned against the mother country:

> Some decades later, the colonial system took its revenge on the descendants of the pious Pilgrim Fathers, who had grown seditious in the meantime. At English instigation, and for English money, they were tomahawked by the redskins. The British Parliament proclaimed bloodhounds and scalping as "means that God and Nature had given into its hand". (1990, 918)

Thinking America, Marx did not let pass slavery and the genocide of the natives, two points that have been high on the agenda of those who have worked to subvert the exceptionalist narratives of the New World. After his description of the wages of genocide, the "pious pilgrim fathers" and their "errand into the wilderness" lose, to put it euphemistically, much of their aura. However, it needs to be emphasized that Marx does not stoop to moralistic banter. This is clear if we keep in mind that Marx's comments on the "treatment of indigenous population" appear in part eight of *Capital Volume I*, entitled "So-Called Primitive Accumulation" (1990, 873–940).

Another founding myth of American Studies, Henry Nash Smith's "virgin land," was also anticipated by Marx. In a footnote in *Capital Volume I*, we read: "We are dealing here with true colonies, i.e. virgin soil colonized by free immigrants. The United States is, economically speaking, still a colony of Europe. Apart from this, old plantations where the abolition of slavery completely revolutionized earlier relationships also belong here" (1990, 931n1). Later in the text, Marx quotes Edward Gibbon Wakefield:

> If all members of the society are supposed to possess equal portions of capital ….no man would have a motive for accumulating more capital than he could use with his own hands. This is to some extent the case in new American settlements, where a passion for owning land prevents the existence of a class of labourers for hire. So long, therefore, as the worker can accumulate for himself—and this he can do so long as he remains in possession of his means of production—capitalist accumulation and the capitalist mode of production are impossible. (1990, 933)

Marx goes on to comment on Wakefield's observation:

> He depicts the mass of the American people as well-to-do, independent, enterprising and comparatively cultured, whereas the English agricultural labourer is a miserable wretch, a pauper ….In what country, except North America and some new colonies, do the wages of free labour employed in agriculture much exceed a bare subsistence for the labourer? (1990, 938)

The availability of land was, of course, not only the precondition for the Jeffersonian visions of freeholders but, as Smith argued, it served as a safety valve which diffused the tensions that inevitably arose in industrial capitalism. But here too Marx was prescient when leveling a critique at Wakefield:

> On the one hand, the enormous and continuous flood of humanity, driven year in, year out, onto the shores of America, leaves behind a stationary sediment in the East of the United States, since the wave of immigration from Europe throws men into the labour-market there more rapidly than the wave of immigration to the West can wash them away. On the other hand, the American Civil War has brought in its train a colossal national debt and, with it, a heavy tax-burden, the creation of a finance aristocracy of the vilest type, and the granting of immense tracts of public land to speculative companies for the exploitation of railways, mines, etc. In short, it has brought a very rapid centralization of capital. The great republic has therefore ceased to be the promised land for emigrating workers. Capitalist production advances there with gigantic strides, even though the lowering of wages and dependence of the wage-labourer has by no means yet proceeded as far as to reach the normal European level. (1990, 940)

Regarding this topic, I add a passing remark Marx made in *Grundrisse* in his discussion of Henry Charles Carey: "In America, as long as the worker there still appropriates a part of his surplus labour for himself, he may accumulate enough to become e.g. a farmer etc. (although that too is already coming to a halt now)" (1993, 579). The bracketed caveat shows that Marx observed how the special conditions in the United States, simply

put, the availability of free land in "the great republic," were disappearing. The "stationary sediment in the East" was no longer being diffused but was growing, aggravated by the outcome of the Civil War, enabling gigantic strides for capitalist production. Returning to the disciplinary framework of American Studies, we can say that Marx here formulates, in embryonic form, the contours of Turner's closing of the frontier thesis and the dynamic Alan Trachtenberg later designated as the "incorporation of America."

These references to America can be supplemented by others. In *Capital Volume I*, Marx quotes Benjamin Franklin, who saw "through the nature of value" (1990, 142n18). In another footnote appended to the notion of "political animal," Marx writes: "The real meaning of Aristotle's definition is that man is by nature a citizen of a town. This is quite as characteristic of classical antiquity as Franklin's definition of man as a tool-making animal is characteristic of Yankeedom" (1990, 444n7). In passing, I mention that Marx uses Mrs. Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1990, 892n30), in an acerbic comment on how the English aristocracy positioned themselves on the slavery issue. One final note: Marx read the American experience not only in its particularity but also saw it as part of a global system. I will provide two illustrations. Amongst the examples Marx gives to depict the "international credit system," we find the following comment: "The same thing is going on today between England and the United States. A great deal of capital, which appears today in the United States without any birth-certificate, was yesterday, in England, the capitalized blood of children" (1990, 920). If this remark beckons us to conceptualize credit in a more sanguinary manner than economists are wont, the following passage from *Capital Volume III* has an unsettling structural relevance to our present-day crisis: "In 1857 the crisis broke out in the United States. This led to a drain of gold from England to America. But as soon as the American bubble burst, the crisis reached England, with a drain of gold from America to England" (1992b, 623). If we want to update Marx's observation, the dates would have to be changed and later mutations of capital/money taken into account, but the positioning of our object of study in world capitalism would remain a universal under which we could subsume its historical trajectory and present state of being. In an interview he gave to the *Socialist Review*, Alex Callinicos argues that Marx's writings transcend his portrait of Victorian industrial capitalism. At one point he remarks:

> There's a fascinating letter that he wrote to Engels in 1858 where he says, 'I'm confident the revolution will happen in Europe, but the problem is that capitalism is storming ahead in America and China. What happens if we

> succeed in Europe but are then flanked by these new capitalisms in the rest of the world?' (Callinicos 2014)

Callinicos goes on to say: "One of the reasons why Marx never finished *Capital* was because he wanted to accumulate enough data to understand what was happening in America" (2014). For American Studies, whether Callinicos's explanation answers why *Capital* was not completed is not of primary importance. What is of paramount importance is that, as I have attempted to show, the United States figures prominently in Marx's attempt to grasp capitalism or, put even more emphatically, that it was the United States that provided the laboratory conditions for its emergence. American Studies needs to acknowledge those passages where Marx does not equivocate on the matter.

3.

If we now turn to the historical trajectory of the American project, we will see that in addition to the above textual evidence, there is another way to argue for Marx's relevance. I begin by mentioning Christopher N. Matthews's book *The Archaeology of American Capitalism* (2010). Namely, if archeology is a discipline that recuperates beginnings, reconstructs origins, it is indicative that Matthews proceeds to delve into the American identity by excavating artifacts and the social relations that are inscribed into them from a past that, to reformulate Marx, is unburdened by the "hangovers" of antiquity or later formations. If we acknowledge the observations I have highlighted from Marx, it cannot be otherwise. From the zero point of its inception, that is, from its genocidal encounter with the indigenous peoples, the American project, to quote from Michael S. Nassaney's preface to Matthews's book, was "geared for the creation of private profit that has been pervasive in structuring consumption patterns and landscapes." Nassaney admonishes:

> Social scientists of various stripes would be remiss if they did not accord this phenomenon serious consideration in examining the constitution of society. Yet, just as capitalism erodes alternative forms of social interaction based in collective traditions of production and exchange, so too does it cover its tracks, making it notoriously difficult to monitor its pernicious social effects. (Matthews 2010, ix)

What Marx was doing was uncovering those tracks, both by thinking of America through his conceptual framework and attending events in the United States. Therefore it comes as no surprise that in 1828, Marx

reminded his readers that "a group of Philadelphia artisans organized the first 'Labor Party' in world history" (Davis 1986, 3). An American Studies that seeks to retrieve its "unclaimed legacy" would have to be cognizant of the fact that for ten years—from 1852 to 1861—Marx served as the London correspondent for one of America's leading newspapers, the New York *Daily Tribune*. Robin Blackburn reminds us of this (2011, 2) before he undertakes to reconstruct "the brief and mediated exchange between Marx and the US president" (2011, 46). The president is Lincoln, and no American Studies that seeks to do justice to the complexity of the Civil War ought to erase that exchange. Blackburn's excavation of this "exchange" is of more than anecdotal relevance. As he states: "I will argue that the Civil War and its sequel had a larger impact on Marx than is often realized—and, likewise, that the ideas of Marx and Engels had a greater impact on the United States, a country famous for its imperviousness to socialism, than is usually allowed" (2011, 4). On the basis of what has been said in the previous section, it was to be expected that Marx, as Blackburn has it, "remained fascinated by events in the US" (2011, 2).

I will add to the evidence of that fascination one final observation that Marx made on developments in the United States not only because of its inherent interest but also because it provides the bridge to the next step of my argument. It appears in a letter Marx wrote to Friedrich Sorge in 1880. The quote appears as an epigraph at the beginning of Edward Soja's chapter on Los Angeles in his book *Postmodern Geographies* (1989).[7] It reads: "I should be very much pleased if you could find me something good (meaty) on economic conditions in California …California is very important for me because nowhere else has the upheaval most shamelessly caused by capitalist centralization taken place with such speed." Soja's perceptive comment on Marx's seemingly offhand remark deserves to be quoted at length:

> Marx's premonitory curiosity about California was piqued by the extraordinary events following the gold discoveries of 1848. Out of practically nowhere, a formidable capitalist presence emerged along the Pacific Ocean rim of the New World, beginning a California tilt to the global space economy of capitalism that would continue for the next century and a half. California gold significantly fuelled the recovery and expansion of industrial capitalism after the age of revolution, helped prime the pump for the territorial consolidation and rapid urban industrialization of the United States, and deposited in the San Francisco Bay region one of the late nineteenth century's most dynamic centres of accumulation. But the process, once begun, did not end there. Relatively unseen in 1880 was the onset of another, more local, tilting that would sustain the Californianization of capitalism through the twentieth century. The rise of

> Southern California, the region centred on the city of Los Angeles, has confirmed the prescient intuition of Marx. Since 1990, there may be no other place where the upheavals associated with capitalist centralization have developed more rapidly or shamelessly. What Northern California was to the last half of the nineteenth century, Southern California has been much more to the twentieth. (1989, 190–91)

If American Studies, during its various stages, has privileged this or that United States region or city as the synecdoche for what was happening in the nation as a whole, Edward Soja, building on Marx's offhand remark, relocates that locale to the Pacific coast. California now emerges as the center of capitalist accumulation. That Marx was prescient enough to recognize this tilt would be reason enough to incorporate him into any theoretical purchase on what Soja has dubbed as "the Californianization of capitalism."[8]

However, to substantiate that claim, we can no longer depend on textual evidence. We need to develop some of Marx's thinking on capital and apply it to the contemporary moment of the object of our study. In this way we will recognize Marx's abiding relevance. We will persuade those who, for instance, insist that Marx did not anticipate the implications of the Californianization of capitalism, that his was no more than a mere intuition, that there is today a need for Marx. In that sense, I find it interesting that the place of the "tilt" reappears in analyses which contend that we are today living in a third capitalism, which on appearance disproves Marx's projections and his analytic. Vann Moulier Boutang calls it cognitive capitalism. Boutang maintains that it was in California that "the new centre of gravity of world economy was located," but then goes on to disparage those who "continued to count the number of containers of goods leaving San Francisco or Shanghai for Santos at the hour of the information influx. This resulted in a trivialization of capitalism's California revolution" (2011, 7). According to Boutang, the mutation of capitalism he diagnoses was not only a geographical tilt but amounted to a new regime of accumulation based on knowledge and innovation. He is geographically specific: "It was in Silicon Valley that the new world economy was being forged, the new historical and contemporary capitalism" (2011, 6). If we are indeed living in a third capitalism, the United States is again at its very center and American Studies needs to acknowledge the mutation and how it implicates our object of inquiry. But we are mistaken if we think that Marx has disappeared in this new mutation of capital. Boutang lends support to this contention. He writes:

> We need to avoid, on the question of cognitive capitalism, vulgar notions of the knowledge-based economy. The new system set in place is not an extension of industrial capitalism into knowledge, viewed as the industrialisation of the tertiary sector while everything else remains unchanged. What is in question is the substance of value, and its shape. The economy is not based on knowledge as such (although society itself is), but on the exploitation of knowledge. (2011, 162)

As can be anticipated, in mapping the contours of what he calls "third capitalism," Boutang takes Marx's legacy into account. Amidst abundant evidence of this is his contention that "cognitive capitalism does not content itself with calling increasingly on living labour rather than on dead labor." Or, even more explicitly, the statement: "the rule of science had been broadly anticipated by Marx in the *Grundrisse* (1857–8)" (2011, 163).[9] Put otherwise, if we accept that we are living in a new kind of capitalism and if we seek to map the object of our study onto this new constellation, Marx is always somewhere in the wings.

However, if we are not persuaded by the argument of cognitive capitalism and if we hold that "the current capitalist-informatic ecumene" (Sloterdijk 2013, 51) has more to do with developments in finance than in knowledge or, put otherwise, that knowledge is nowadays at the command of money,[10] does Marx still have anything to say to us? To re-employ geographic synecdoches, if Wall Street today has eclipsed the centrality of Silicon Valley, does Marx still speak to us? Although Boutang recognizes that today "capitalism has everywhere withdrawn into finance as if into its fortress" (2011, 15), and although we find in *Cognitive Capitalism* an explicit reference to the financialization of our object of study,[11] he offers an idiosyncratic explanation for the ascendency of finance and leaves Marx out of its description.[12] If Boutang persuasively uses Marx to analyze the ever more central role of knowledge and the relation between it and power, he does not register Marx's relevance in understanding the process of financialization. Others do.

Andrea Micocci, for example, contends that "Economics has acquired today a perfect centrality, comparable to that central architectural position that once upon a time seemed to belong to theology" (2009, xi).[13] I add a passage from Micocci's book *The Metaphysics of Capitalism* (2009) that not only engages issues that arise amidst the present crisis but also, in line with my argument, points to Marx's abiding relevance:

> The fact that economics can measure, and act upon, what it deals with is precisely the proof of its epistemic impotence. The question, however, is purely empirical—that is, actual: material and virtual wealth are not the

> same thing. Worse, the latter has power over the former. Both forms of wealth operate at once, with material wealth tied to the limits of its material nature and virtual wealth free to define its own bounds. In fact money is not, in our times of the financialization of economies (see e.g., Glyn 2006; Vasapollo 2007), nor was it ever Adam Smith's money's worth. (2009, 230)

Not only do the last words in that formulation succinctly articulate what I have previously designated as the command of money[14] but the enigma of money leads Micocci back to Marx: "It is, and was, Marx's tool of self-defined multiplicability, whose links to the material items are, if at all present, hazy and formal" (2009, 229–30). Micocci emphatically states that Marx "clearly saw the potentially autonomous power of capital" (2009, 233). A quotation from *Capital Volume II* will corroborate that Marx had envisioned this possibility:

> It appears as the circuit of money capital because industrial capital in its money form, as money capital, forms the starting-point and the point of return of the whole process. The formula itself expresses that the money is not spent here as money, but is only advanced, and is thus simply the money form of capital, money capital. It further expresses the fact that it is the exchange-value, not the use-value, that is the decisive inherent purpose of the movement. It is precisely because the money form of value is its independent and palpable form of appearance that the circulation form 'M…M', which starts and finishes with actual money, expresses money-making, the driving motive of capitalist production, most palpably. The production process appears simply as an unavoidable middle term, a necessary evil for the purpose of money-making. (This explains why all nations characterized by the capitalist mode of production are periodically seized by fits of giddiness in which they try to accomplish the money-making without the mediation of the production process). (1992a, 137)

Although I did not cite this passage in an earlier article, I did offer my thoughts on the process of financialization and will not repeat them here (Grgas 2014b, 231–33). Here I will merely say that without attending to banks and finance, without a history of money and credit, their agents and their institutions, we let the very essence of our object of study pass under the radar of our attention. Without paying attention to these elements of the economy, we are unable to understand the role of the United States in creating the present mutation of capitalism, sustaining it, paying a price, and reaping gains from its maintenance and survival.

The three volumes of Marx's *Capital* in the Penguin edition I have been using have on their covers, in respective order, reproductions of a forge, the Royal Exchange in London, and the Krupp's steam hammer. On

the cover of *Grundrisse* is a bricklayer. I mention this because I think there is a rhetoric at work in the choice of these quaint antiquated reproductions. It is a rhetoric which is complicit with strategies that archive Marx and write him off as irrelevant to the present world. One measure of the soundness of my argument for the need to reinscribe Marx might be the extent to which those reproductions ought to be put into question. One way of doing this would be to question their implied geography, and propose a remapping that would take cognizance of the landscapes of American capitalism. But even this intervention would not contain or comprise the heuristic value of Marx's work. By arguing that Marx enables a purchase on cognitive capitalism and the ascendency of finance, I wanted to show that he still speaks to the conjunctural exigencies of the present, to a present that seems to thwart representation itself.

4.

Marx was no stranger to the American issue. The evidence above substantiates that claim. If American Studies takes that claim seriously, it will not only welcome the evidence I have put on offer but also search for the American presence in Marx's and Engels's other writings and in the archive they have spawned. Presently, I primarily wanted to reclaim a number of Marx's pronouncements on the United States; pronouncements that, as far as I know, have not been directly addressed either in the discipline or outside it. These were supplemented by remarks showing Marx to have been a keen observer of the American scene. I extrapolated from the founding generalizations he made about the American experience to show that his thinking gives us a purchase on later mutations of capital and of its exemplary nation. The evidence I have culled from Marx's writing and the way I have shown his thoughts to be a requisite framework within which to picture the trajectory of the American project ought to suffice to give an affirmative answer to the question that prompted my presentation.

However, as I stated at the beginning of my article, my thoughts were motivated not only by the belief that the retrieval of Marx will enhance our knowledge of the United States but also by an attempt to position the work of American Studies in this part of the world within the international turn the discipline has taken. Of course, when I acknowledge Bosnia as the site where I discuss my issue and Croatia as where it originated, I gesture to identity formations. I mention this because I think identity politics have hugely contributed to Marx's ostracism in both countries. With hindsight, it is obvious that identity politics had to repress the historical dynamic that