



R a d b o u d U n i v e r s i t y
D u i s b u r g - E s s e n
S p r i n g A c a d e m y

Grounding Transnational American Studies in European-American Contexts

**Master programs in American Studies at
Radboud University Nijmegen and the University of Duisburg-Essen**



Welcome to RUDESA!

The American Studies Department in Nijmegen and the University of Duisburg Essen are launching a new international project within their Master's programs: RUDESA. The Radboud University & University of Duisburg-Essen Spring Academy represents a joint initiative to engage in transnational American studies, exchange ideas, research agendas, and establish new academic contacts.

The RUDESA Spring Academy takes place in the middle of March.

You will be co-taught by scholars from both sides of the border in Nijmegen and Essen to explore innovative theories of "Grounding Transnational American Studies." Students engage in a novel form of curriculum composed of an appealing combination of lectures, workshops, team-based discussions, and field visits. You will be discussing theories of transnational studies, engage in excursions to iconic sites of memory and museums to trace contact zones of European-American encounters.

The RUDESA spring academy introduces students from Radboud and Duisburg-Essen to cutting-edge theories of transnational American Studies. You will be able to establish an international network of fellow students and scholars to forge a future career in the field. In addition, the Spring Academy adds a strong international component to your education in American Studies.





RUDESA Teaching Staff

Nijmegen:

Prof. Frank Mehring	http://www.ru.nl/nas/who-what-where/staff/prof-dr-mehring/
Prof. Hans Bak	http://www.ru.nl/engels/waar/medewerkers/prof-dr-hans-bak/
Dr. Mathilde Roza	http://www.ru.nl/nas/who-what-where/staff/roza
Dr. Markha Valenta	http://www.ru.nl/nas/who-what-where/staff/dr-markha-valenta/
Dr. Jorrit van den Berk	http://www.ru.nl/nas/who-what-where/staff/dr-jorrit-van-den/
Dr. Laszlo Muntean	http://www.ru.nl/nas/who-what-where/staff/dr-muntean/
Dr. Luna Najera	http://www.ru.nl/nas/who-what-where/staff/dr-najera/

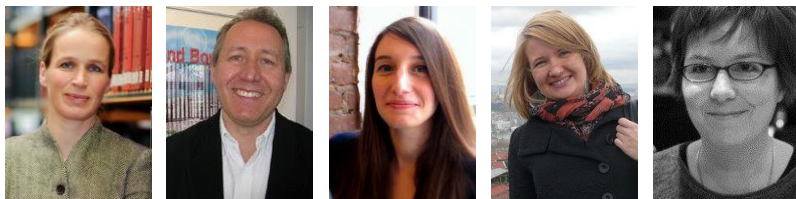
Coordinator: Anja Adriaans <http://www.ru.nl/col/eu-network/events-projects/anja-adriaans/>



Website: <http://www.ru.nl/nas/>

Duisburg-Essen:

Prof. Barbara Buchenau	https://www.uni-due.de/amerikanistik/buchenau
Prof. Josef Raab	https://www.uni-due.de/amerikanistik/raab.shtml
Elena Furlanetto	https://www.uni-due.de/amerikanistik/furlanetto_elena
Dr. Julia Satter	http://englisch.tu-dortmund.de/cms/de/100_IAA/140_Personen/
Dr. Julia Leyda	http://www.mendeley.com/profiles/julia-leyda/



Website: <https://www.uni-due.de/amerikanistik/>

Mission Statement: [brief]

GROUNDING TRANSNATIONAL AMERICAN STUDIES

When approaching transnational American Studies in European-American contexts we need to ground our work in a threefold manner: First regarding the premises, second, regarding the theoretical frameworks, and third regarding geographic dispositions and opportunities for research, case studies, and valorization.

First, we consider it crucial to acknowledge the underlying premises, which inform the theories and methodologies of Transnational American Studies in European-American contexts.

Second, we need to ground our critical thinking in innovative theoretical frameworks, which allow us to understand scholarly work within the United States while becoming aware of opportunities in modifications or novel approaches from the European perspective.

Third, we understand grounding as a geographical practice, as a comparative approach, which renders American Studies particularly relevant in the vicinity of the very universities where we are studying, working, teaching.

Our goal in the Dutch-German Spring Academy is a threefold grounding of Transnational American Studies as a form of *engaged comparative teaching, research, and valorization* with an emphasis on multi-national perspectives in interactive classrooms.

Mission Statement: [comprehensive]

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First, we consider it crucial to acknowledge the underlying premises, which inform the theories and methodologies of Transnational American Studies in European-American contexts. Only if we bring to the forefront the unconscious, often implicit narratives and values which guide our choices regarding objects, theories, and methodologies, can we initiate a process of strengthening the outside perspective on American culture, politics, and the economy. In what ways do we organize narratives about developments in American culture and academia? The five romances with “America” which American studies theoretician Winfried Fluck traces are helpful. He distinguishes between the romance with the American founding myths (such as the

success story, the frontier myth or the melting pot), the romance with popular culture (or the so-called “outlaw-and-defiance romance”), the romance with Southern culture, the romance with American modernism and postmodernism, and the romance with the popular myth of a democratic culture (2009, 89-90). One might add three more romances such as the romance with the west, the romance with American technology, and the romance with Anti-Americanism (a romance *ex negativo*).

Second, we need to ground our critical thinking in innovative theoretical frameworks, which allow us to understand scholarly work within the United States while becoming aware of opportunities, which lie in modifications or novel approaches from the European perspective. The challenge is to turn the alleged disadvantage of being so far removed from “the homeland” into an asset. The distance from the physical space of the United States and its border regions allows – this is my hope and conviction - for a nuanced perspective on the US as a global agenda setting country whose effects are often different from the processes which inform the frameworks of encoding, to use an expression by Stuart Hall. The European perspective can contribute to challenging what Amy Kaplan called “the tenacious grasp of American exceptionalism.” Understanding, mapping, and analyzing the cultural sources of American power and its effects means that European scholars and students can embark on transnational American Studies with confidence and without a felt need of self-provincialization. The Dartmouth series *Re-Mapping the Transnational* edited by Don Pease is but one example which places special importance on transnational and European perspectives on the US. This encouraging development needs continued debate to allow students to formulate a persuasive answer why they chose – of all places – to study American Studies in Nijmegen/The Netherlands, Duisburg-Essen/Germany or Warsaw/Poland, to name but a few places of lively American Studies programs in Europe.

Third, we understand grounding as a geographical practice, as a comparative approach, which renders American Studies particularly relevant in the vicinity of the very universities where we are studying, working, teaching. Paul Lauter recently argued in his September 2014 keynote speech at the Salzburg Seminar: “You cannot do American Studies today and confine yourself to events that have occurred, or writers who have composed, within the boundaries of the now-50 states that constitute the US of A.”¹ Speaking from the perspective of American literature, he argued that complicated work is ahead, such as “finding the manifold ways by which an international text milieu [i.e. a space in which creative writers and teachers function today] affects what is written and how it is read.” For American Studies, text milieus might be extended into “cultural milieus” in which text is understood as discourse in the Foucauldian sense. Whatever kind of sources, media texts, spaces, and developments we analyze, whether as American scholars and students or European scholars and students working in the field of

¹ <http://www.salzburgglobal.org/news-media/article/paul-lauter-you-cannot-do-american-studies-today-and-confine-to-the-boundaries-of-the-now-50-st.html#.VFm7Hef7p7E>

American studies, we produce answers and results that are always “acts of cultural self-description.”² Ideally, this involves work in regional archives, reaches out to public institutions related to American politics, economy, or culture, as well as sites of memory. Again, the culturally diverse European network of universities offers a particularly promising basis to ground Transnational American Studies by offering multi-national perspectives. We will focus on triangular perspectives on war, liberation, diversification and urbanization, sites of memory, borders regions, cultural imaginaries, religious confrontations and memorial mania from World War II to today. How can students and scholars from the Netherlands, Germany, and the US trace American legacies in a transnational and comparative fashion? Case studies involve sites of memory related to World War II, the Holocaust, the music of oppression and liberation, cultural politics such as the Fulbright program and Marshall Plan at work in Nijmegen and Essen, sports, transcultural imaginaries, Islamophobia in the wake of 9/11 as well as urban transformations.. A combination of classroom lectures and debates with excursions offers a promising experiment of grounding by comparing triangular approaches and results, for example via online learning platforms. In addition, students equipped with digital communication devices and powerful shareware tools are invited to combine theoretical analysis with the very means they use to retrieve information, namely documentary films, photo essays, or the programming of new smartphone apps to present their research and their own archives, be it oral history, visual archives created with smartphones or discovering archives in the digital and analogue realm.

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² We borrow this expression from Frank Kelleter’s response to William Uricchio’s outlook on the American Studies-Media Studies relationship at the FU Berlin conference on *American Studies Today* in 2011, published 2014.