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Reprise Editor's Note

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# Reprise Editor's Note

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NINA MORGAN

The interdisciplinarity underlying Transnational American Studies is part and parcel of the larger commitment of scholars invested in this area of study to open the borders of our interpretive projects. This issue's Reprise section offers three very interesting examples of these efforts: Nassim W. Balestrini's essay introducing the relationship between Transnational American Studies and adaptation studies; Susanne Leikam's lengthy chapter on the 1906 earthquake of San Francisco, excerpted from her study on the European and American conventions in disaster discourse; and Magdalena J. Zaborowska's article, originally published in *Architectural Theory Review*, brings together Walter Benjamin's and James Baldwin's Paris in order to demonstrate the structures of racism and homophobia in modern Western history.

Nassim W. Balestrini's chapter in her edited collection from 2011 entitled *Adaptation and American Studies: Perspectives on Research and Teaching* broaches the question of Transnational American Studies' relationship to other forms of inquiry, suggesting that "the (inter)disciplinarity debate and the ongoing attempts at defining a transnational American studies can . . . benefit from new developments in adaptation research." Balestrini's introductory essay offers readers a series of relevant questions while providing a historical view of both fields and how they intersect, touching on the work of prominent specialists in Transnational American Studies (Shelley Fisher Fishkin, Günter Lenz, Emory Elliott, for example), as well as on the important theoretical developments in adaptation studies with special reference to Linda Hutcheon. Balestrini makes the convincing argument that both fields encounter very particular theoretical strains in relationship to certain concepts and values—the question of origins and originality, the problem of exceptionalism, "intricate interdependencies" (Janice Radway), "intercultural connections" (Winfried Fluck), and so forth. The essay concludes with an extended discussion of director Will Gluck and writer Bert V. Royal's 2010 film *Easy A* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. This piece was selected for its discussion of and insight regarding the important reciprocities between Transnational American Studies and adaptation studies. Special thanks to Universitätsverlag Winter for permission to republish this excerpt.

Capturing an image of San Francisco historically and at the moment of its transformation, Susanne Leikam's "The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire" demonstrates how the "ruinscape" of San Francisco became the "most photographed event around the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century," while the hundreds of thousands of homeless became "refugees." In this greatly detailed study of San Francisco, Leikam examines how the representation of the city and the analysis of its future were framed by a range of factors, from a sudden proliferation of sensationalist books and photo booklets, to the results of the Japanese team of seismology experts who were invited to the city to evaluate its future stability but were met with racial discrimination and violence, to the reframing of the disaster-ruined city as a Pompeii, comparable to the ruins and rise of other great cities around the world. The notion that the prominence of the disaster was in part due to the distribution of postcard images of the event—the first such event to be disseminated visually through the mail in this way, though, as Leikam notes, the postcard was formally invented in Austria in 1869—is indicative of Leikam's study of the mobility of visual culture and its role in memorializing the disaster while concurrently redefining the city itself. The experience of the disruption of space and social life that had an impact on "belonging" also contributed to a sense of reimagining the city's survival and hope, allegorizing, if not blatantly idealizing, San Francisco: "Drawing on the acclaimed ruins of ancient Greece and Rome, the photographers around [Louis J.] Stellman found what Van Wyck Brooks called a 'usable past' in framing San Francisco's destruction." Leikam's monograph, *Framing Spaces in Motion: Tracing Visualizations of Earthquakes into Twentieth-Century San Francisco* (2015), from which this chapter is excerpted, brings inter pictorial analysis, together with disaster discourses, into a transnational focus when comparing "European conventions" to American representations of natural disaster. This chapter was selected in part due to its useful historical and insightful interdisciplinary analysis of San Francisco and in recognition of the fact that "fault lines" also cross borders. *JTAS* would like to thank Universitätsverlag Winter for permission to republish this selection.

Originally published in 2005 in a volume of *Architectural Theory Review* edited by Gevork Hartoonian, Magdalena J. Zaborowska's "From Baldwin's Paris to Benjamin's: The Architectonics of Race and Sexuality in *Giovanni's Room*" builds a space within which to examine how the insider structures of power—race, sexuality, nationality, class—function architecturally not only to enclose social space but to fence off intellect and imagination, history and identity: "In the reading of Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* and Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* that follows, I show that the production of knowledge about architectonic underpinnings of race and sexuality can and should be conducted across genres and disciplines. In particular, architecture and literature—prominently intertwined in Benjamin's theoretical work and seductively fictionalized in Baldwin's novel—can help us to desegregate and decolonize our thinking." Reading both texts together as they represent the interiors of Paris, Zaborowska's essay pursues Baldwin's philosophy on American racism as inseparable

from his complex understanding of sexuality, in part as a way of demonstrating the spaces in which certain identities are assumed to dwell; thus Zaborowska complicates the manner in which Baldwin's character "escapes" American society, finding a qualified "covered passage" in the interiors of Parisian life. This Transnational American Studies piece not only addresses literature and architecture, race and sexuality, but also examines how the history and life of the seemingly foreign city isn't too far removed from the problems at home: racism and homophobia are transnational structures that characterize the West.