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LISBON AS A SITE OF CROSS-CULTURAL DIALOGUE

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of IASA's 3rd World Congress

From the start, the rationale of IASA has been to broaden the scope of American Studies and place it in active interagency with the world at large, beyond spatially defined boundaries and the comfort of culturally-closed systems. This project has symbolically been sustained by the organization of conferences in various parts of the world, bringing together scholars from many different fields and uniting them by their intent to revise prevalent approaches to American Studies and to privilege cross-cultural dialogue. For the 2007 World Conference, Lisbon has been selected as the preferred venue for pursuing this ongoing dialogue. In this short statement, we want to illustrate the appropriateness of the Portuguese capital for the cultural politics of IASA. In many ways, the city of Lisbon embodies the three-fold theme around which the debates during our third IASA meeting will gravitate: Trans/Nation, Trans/Ocean, Trans/Lation.

The Portuguese *caravelas* that five centuries ago spearheaded into uncharted oceans in search of new sea routes and what were perceived as new worlds, encountering in the process other peoples and other mores, often departed from Lisbon's harbor. The ensuing interactions and their lasting effects show how much of cultural otherness has been appropriated or accommodated by all sides involved in this cultural interchange and the extent of the **Trans/Oceanic** ventures that, in the words of the epic poet Camões, 'gave new worlds to the world' of that time.

Lisbon has always been a **Trans/National** meeting ground. The old Moorish or medieval quarters, the districts of Alfama, Castelo, and Madragoa coexist with the modern Pombaline downtown or postmodern uptown. Architecturally, the old Roman-style *Aqueduto das Águas Livres* stands within view of the postmodern *Amoreiras* buildings, while the Portuguese-Gothic *Jeronimos* monastery lies next to the very recent Cultural Center of Belém. In painting, the millenary Portuguese art of tiles, in itself the product of so many cultural encounters and cross-pollination, has been metamorphosed by the art of Vieira da Silva who, in turn, was influenced by the modernist revolution in the visual arts. As regards the written word, one example is probably enough and better known world-wide: Fernando Pessoa, the Portuguese modernist poet would be very likely misread if one fails to consider how South African Apartheid politics played into the very nature of his heteronymic otherness.

As in the past, contemporary Portuguese life as experienced in Lisbon and elsewhere in the country is very much the arena for the interplay of heterogeneous cul-

tural forces which vie with the more standard products that result from a process that we often reductively label globalization. A site of change and cultural interfacing, Lisbon is thus, in our view, an ideal symbolic location for IASA's pursuit of localizability—finally the third component of the theme—as a dialogical mode of **Trans/Lation** between different realities situated at interface location.

It is now opportune to consider how American Studies translates in Portugal as a sort of wrap-up for the choice of location for the 2007 IASA World Conference, and of the Faculty of Letters, University of Lisbon, as the local host. In the aftermath of the changes brought about by the Bologna Process, the American Studies program at Lisbon has undergone a radical transformation within the English Department where, heretofore, it had been located at the borderlands, at least at the undergraduate level, and remained generally restricted to the study of literature and culture. Before two years, a Portuguese student wishing to specialize in the study of the USA had to wait for the MA or a PhD to be able to study American society independently. And then s/he was still mostly confronted with either a literary or a cultural orientation. Nowadays the courses offered by the English Department branch out in three different directions: English Studies, North-American Studies, and Anglo-American Studies (a combination of the above areas in equal proportions allowing for different emphases according to students' preferences). The three courses are offered at all university levels, ranging from undergraduate to post-doctoral degrees. More specifically in the case of American Studies, a broad approach to this field includes the study of literature, culture (including popular culture), music, film, visual arts, history, philosophy, social studies, political theory, and cultural geography. Even if mostly USA-oriented, the program opens up to Canadian Studies and connects, in interdisciplinary dynamics, to other courses inside or outside the Faculty of Letters. American cultures, canonical or peripheral, are no longer enclosed in the exacting spatial boundaries of the USA but are evaluated in intra- and intercultural perspectives that bring these studies into the larger focus of the cultural diversity that characterizes the world in this age of globalized perceptions and realities.

The pursuit of diversity has engaged Portuguese scholars, not only in American Studies, but in the several Departments and Programs of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon in a longstanding dialogue with colleagues from all over the world. Their presence has been felt both in their participation at innumerable international conferences, colloquia, seminars, etc., and in the number of international events which they have promoted, organized and hosted over the past decades. IASA's 2007 World Conference will afford another excellent opportunity to test whether Lisbon, the sought-after city for many who have taken to the road in quest of unfathomable futures for many centuries, is still at the crossroads of knowledge in this era of renewed trans/oceanic, trans/national, and trans/lational intercultural relationships.