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On the cover: a word cloud created from the introductory chapters of several 2011 Cooper House theses and a screen shot from a busy graduate student.
This issue of the porchlight features American Studies on the move. Ulli Adelt has reached the midpoint in his research semester in Germany (tough duty). Lilia Soto is anticipating her year as a Ford Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of California, Irvine (congratulations!). Two students are preparing for study abroad in Denmark and Germany. We have summer interns aplenty involved in projects all over the state (including one three-week stint in Grand Teton National Park, to which I say again, “tough duty.”) And one undergraduate is heading off to yoga boot camp in India.

This semester I had the privilege of lecturing and conducting workshops in India, courtesy of the U. S. Embassy in Delhi. I met a wonderful variety of faculty members and students in Delhi, Chennai, Jaipur, and Rajamundry, the latter a new university on the east coast in a city sporting an airport smaller than Laramie’s aptly-named Brees Field. It was exciting to see plans forming, a new program being shaped, even a new campus being excavated. I also visited a place that I had heard of for over thirty years – the legendary American Studies Research Center in Hyderabad. For more than a generation scholars from all over South and East Asia have conducted research in this impressive facility. Later in the Spring I attended the European Association for American Studies conference in Izmir, Turkey. I did get around but I also had another chance to see what “American Studies” means in very different circumstances. What a privilege!

In early May, we’ll graduate the class of 2012. Despite a ceremony that seems to get longer every year it’s a time to be prized – a moment to think about what we do here and to reflect on the accomplishments of our students and faculty. This is the end of my 30th year as program director (more or less) and I’m always amazed and impressed by our American Studies community. A handshake and (for some) a hood don’t do the trick – I wish I had the time to highlight the considerable growth and estimable achievements of each member of our graduating class.

And now we turn to the Fall and a new class of promising students who will, once again, reconfigure what “American Studies” means at Wyoming. Have a good summer.

Dr. Frieda Knobloch and her team of teaching assistants (Zeynep Aydogdu, Shaun Milligan, and Julia Stuble) had the pleasure of working with 50 undergraduates in Introduction to American Studies this spring. The class focused on landscapes and identity formation and used a variety of texts; Nabhan and Trimble’s *The Geography of Childhood* was, by far, the overall favorite. The class was able to work with 2nd and 3rd graders from UW’s Lab School on their favorite outdoor places. Below, photos from the in-class workshop and from the end of semester reunion between “lab schooler” and their “college friend” at Harbon Park.

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Graduate student Norma Haskell, who is the great-great grand niece of Martha Jane Canary (Calamity Jane), brought her performance of her hell-raising relative to the cooper house to discuss her lost love (Wild Bill) and give a bull whip demonstration. Though Calamity had made law enforcement aware of her bull whip show (which sounds like a gunshot), enforcement still responded due to a miscommunication. Bull whips and pre-finals week hype do not mix.
Carly-Ann Anderson’s work "McFadden, Wyoming: A Case Study in Narrating Our Changing Energy Landscapes" uses the Rock Creek Valley as a place to discuss energy issues in the state. McFadden, Wyoming, centered in the Rock Creek Valley, was built in 1917 as a company camp for the Ohio Oil Company, which later became Marathon Oil. The camp was abandoned in the 1980s following Wyoming’s energy bust and was purchased by a local cattle company. Today, wind farms surround the area. Anderson discusses Wyoming’s continuing history as an energy producer and the associated issues, including visual disruption, loss of cultural sites, and the importance of siting and mitigation regulations to the state. Wyoming’s role as an energy producer is placed in the context of the nation’s energy demand, with an emphasis on the importance of educating energy users to the impact their lifestyle has on natural and cultural landscapes.

This thesis examines the work of the first Turkish American writer Selma Ekrem’s autobiography Unveiled in search of answers to the question: “How did Turkish women handle the way they were perceived by Americans at the beginning of the twentieth century, after an era of Orientalist thinking in America?” Based on research on history, literature, and film, my thesis adopts an interdisciplinary approach to examine the representations and positioning of “Turks” in both visual and literary texts produced in the 1920s and 1930s in America. My central concern in this study is to show how American essentialist thinking mapped out and destabilized the boundaries of race and nationality and how such constructions were hampered by the same process of articulation of identity in writing. This study illustrates the hybridity of being modern, Muslim, Turkish, and a woman in America and the effects of the hybridity on the process of constructing identity and developing national consciousness. Drawing upon historiography, narratology, reader-response criticism, feminist theories of autobiography and various literary and cultural theories this thesis examines a Turkish woman’s social imagination and creative modes of representing and thinking about boundaries of race, gender and nationalism in America.

Rie Misaizu’s M.A. research focuses on the history of hole/whole historic landmarks in national parks of the West and applies Clifford Geertz’s theory of thick and thin descriptions to these public spaces. It is the case that the majority of American national parks serve as sacred places for Native American tribes around the area. Histories of these landscapes are often interpreted for the benefit of socially dominant ethnic groups and classes. Marginalized minority groups tend to be misinterpreted by a dominant group, and Native Americans are rarely considered the “insiders” of the National Parks no matter how long they have lived in the area. I focus on Glacier National Park and the dedication of its transmountain road, Going-to-the-Sun Road (GTSR) in 1933. I explore how native white witnesses and native people experienced the dedication of 1933 based on their sociocultural backgrounds. I am interested in the way Native Americans treat national park areas that used to be their ancestral lands, and the worldviews regarding the lands and natural resources. I would like to understand what national parks mean to American culture and its people, and how national parks help construct identity of Americans through their park visits.

Dr. Lilia Soto, an assistant professor of American Studies and Chicano Studies, was recently awarded the Ford Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship for the 2012-2013 academic year. Below Dr. Soto describes the work she will accomplish with this fellowship.

The Postdoctoral Fellowship will take me to the University of California, Irvine where I will be working under the mentorship of Dr. Leo Chavez in the Anthropology Department, on my book manuscript. Tentatively titled, The Fate of Transnational Migration: Muchachas Mexicanas, my book manuscript examines the experiences of Mexican immigrant adolescent girls raised in transnational families both before and after migration. Growing up in this familial arrangement meant that migration entered the lives of these girls and shaped them as they grew up with migration always looming. This project is twofold: First, it examines the girls’ lives before migration where I expose how the intersections of age and gender shape their migrant journey north. I inquire how, from Mexico, they lived their lives on the brink of migration. Second, I situate their stories within the Napa Valley and examine their lives as daughters of the workers whose labor maintains narratives of the Napa Valley. In doing so, I examine how a series of historical events both in Mexico—the long tradition of US bound migration and the economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s—and the Napa Valley—the famous 1976 Paris Judgment Day and the transformation that followed—have affected the lives of the girls who are at the center of the project. I will return to the University of Wyoming for the 2013-2014 academic year and look forward to teaching and starting a new research project.
Established through the generosity of an anonymous donor, the American Studies program is now able to offer two alumni fellowships. Program director Eric Sandeen noted that “we are calling them ‘alumni fellowships’ in recognition of the many alumni who have found their professions in the public sector.” This year’s fellowships honor that public sector work by applying the funds to two internships. The two recipients, Sonjia Weinstein and Carly-Ann Anderson, detail their work below.

During the summer of 2012, Sonjia Weinstein will be working as an intern under the supervision of Nicole Crawford, Curator of Collections at the University of Wyoming Art Museum. The scope of her work will focus on researching the UW collections to find all artwork that was created for the Works Progress Administration during the New Deal. Her findings will be shared with the General Services Administration as part of an nationwide initiative that GSA has undertaken to locate and catalogue WPA art. Sonjia will also continue to transcribe a series of artist interviews as part of an effort to expand the UW Museum’s outreach and educational program.

Sonjia comes to American Studies from a background in art. She earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1988 from Rhode Island School of Design. After graduating, she worked as a graphic designer in communications for corporations and agencies in Switzerland for nine years. Upon coming back to the United States, she moved to the northern Rocky Mountains, drawn by the allure of sunshine, high altitude and snow. As a Graduate Student in American Studies, she is focusing her studies on socially and environmentally responsible built environment.

Carly-Ann Anderson will be working for the Albany County Historic Preservation Board and the West Side League of Neighbors, planning, organizing, and publicizing a series of three workshops called “This Place Matters” in Laramie’s West Side neighborhood. The workshops are a follow up to a historic resources survey conducted by the UW American Studies program in 2011, which determined that the neighborhood is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The workshops are intended to educate and inform residents of Laramie’s West Side about the history of their houses, and how they can be rehabilitated for current use while retaining their historic character. The West Side League of Neighbors, formed as a result of the survey, hopes that this project will help homeowners and residents understand that their neighborhood is a treasure worth preserving.

Carly-Ann is a student of the American Studies and Environment and Natural Resources Programs. She is currently writing her thesis on the changing energy landscape of McFadden, Wyoming, where an abandoned oil company town is now the site of several large wind farm developments. She enjoys studying the history of Wyoming communities and respects the enthusiasm of the West Side League of Neighbors has for their project.

One graduating senior, James Stauffer, is flying from the coop this spring. He recounts his American Studies career for porchlight:

My undergraduate academic career has been an interesting one. I started out my run as botany major, but quickly saw the error of my ways, abandoned the dark side and joined American Studies (or perhaps here joined the dark side). The program has helped me become incredibly reflective when observing our culture, our architecture, and my own life. Though the American Studies curriculum, I have learned the value of tradition, history, and relationships. Strangely enough, as my undergraduate years drew to a close, I found myself aiming my future near the trajectory on which I began. After graduating, I plan on attending a Physician’s Assistant graduate school, and hopefully open a non-profit medical center.

James Stauffer (l) responds to Eric Sandeen’s discussion of his undergraduate career; which has been a truly interdisciplinary mix of the sciences and the arts. Congratulations on your graduation, James!
Professor Ullrich Adelt:

Thanks to the generous support of the University of Wyoming and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), I am currently spending three months “back home” in Germany. Since the entire family is here with me, we are experiencing the reverse culture shock together. It is quite amazing how American we all have become! Maya and Luna are enjoying the absence of rules in the German school they are attending. Ursula is most excited about the high-fat milk products and chocolate. Stella seems to be wondering what we are doing in this strange country, while Noah is the same good-spirited fellow as back home in Wyoming, no matter if he is on the train to Copenhagen, in Dublin’s Botanical Gardens, or on yet another subway in Hamburg.

I’m looking forward to a string of guest lectures at German universities, among them the University of Leipzig, Humboldt University Berlin, and my alma mater, the University of Hamburg. I’m also working on my book manuscript on krautrock, German rock and electronic music from the 1970s, and its connections to Americanization, globalization, and anti-American attitudes. Two articles I have written about this subject are coming out in 2012, and I’m currently trying to figure out how this could become something longer and more substantial. Since I’m discussing issues of national identity and belonging, spending a few months back in Germany with my family sometimes seems like a practical experiment in what I’m writing about as we are navigating questions of what “home” means and how American/European ethnic identities are formed and transformed.

Theory aside, I’m having a wonderful time -- whether I’m going through the endless rows of vinyl records at Bremen’s Klaus Kuhnke Archive or sitting on an Alster boat with my kids, showing them the city in which I spent 30 years of my life and which they are really only seeing for the first time now.

This semester I have had the pleasure of working with Dr. Deb Paulson of the geography department as a teaching assistant for the Campus Sustainability class. The class is offered by the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources. This program emphasizes interdisciplinary and innovative teaching styles, and is quite compatible with the American Studies method, in my opinion.

This course is project based and introduces students to the definition of and problems with sustainability. Using a variety of readings, students are exposed to classic definitions of sustainability as well as critiques of economic systems and introductions to big-picture thinking. Our readings this year covered food systems, social justice, and creating behavioral change. We had several guest speakers, including economists, professors of sustainable business practices, and student leadership advocates. We also were fortunate to take a field trip to Fort Collins to see examples of sustainable growth in the city, sustainable business at the New Belgium Brewery, and local food production at the Harvest Farm.

After developing an understanding of sustainability, students applied themselves to a particular problem on campus. Past class projects have helped to develop the bike library on campus, formed the Campus Sustainability Committee, and founded ACRES student farm. This semester, our campus project was working to replace T-12 light bulbs with more efficient bulbs and determining the best places for occupancy sensors to be installed. The reduction in every use from using efficient fixtures will ultimately help to lower UW’s greenhouse gas emissions, a goal of the campus’ Climate Action Plan.

Two projects focused on gardening in Laramie. One team has produced a brochure with all of Laramie’s local gardening information including where to have soil tested, what to plant at 7200 feet, and where to purchase supplies. The third project is helping a local resident transform her front yard into a community garden. The team had designed irrigation and compost systems as well as a marketing strategy to attract community interest.

Teaching this course has been thoroughly rewarding and I have enjoyed watching our students grapple with issues of sustainability and applying their unique perspective to solving problems in our community. Recently, our class participated in a brainstorming session to collect their feedback regarding what to include in the proposed introductory and senior level sustainability courses offered for UW’s new sustainability major and minor. The students’ feedback was helpful and showed that they had a refined and introspective view of their education. I would encourage anyone interested in sustainability to check out UW’s Haub School of ENR at www.uwyo.edu/enr/!
When I was a child, I never imagined I’d grow up to be sitting at a little table on the second floor of a comfortable, used book store doing psychic readings on Sunday afternoons.

The word psychic is loaded with all sorts of ideas, perceptions and especially images. My appearance as an average (well, perhaps slightly stylish) young woman without a trailing headscarf or rows of glittering beads around my neck comes as a surprise to most of the people who timidly approach asking, “Are you the one who does the…psychic…readings?”

A brief Google of all things “psychic” reveals we are approaching a new age of understanding consciousness and how the energy of our minds operates, while not yet unstuck from the mire of skepticism and disbelief. Before the Wright brothers corrected the erroneous Smeaton coefficient in the mathematical formula that had ruined potential fliers for centuries, many people criticized human flight as unnatural. Now that our skies are laden with jets we take flight for granted, and wouldn’t the Wright brothers be proud? Similarly, organizations like the Noetic Institute, founded by astronaut Edgar Mitchell, are working hard to explore the unknowns of consciousness — the imaginary and fantastic manifestations of energy like telepathy, psychokinesis and precognition that have long fascinated fiction writers — in a scientific manner.

My own path collided with these revelatory ideas in college, when I interviewed a professional psychic for a journalism class profile. We had a long talk about many things and afterward, he invited me to come to his psychic development class. I went and kept going for the next two years and also took workshops on dreaming, visualization and meditation. As I progressed in learning to use my inner mental screen, the same one we use to visualize or daydream, I found I could focus my mind to let in images or feelings, and began to discover how they corresponded with people or events around me.

In November 2011, my first semester as an American studies graduate student, I started doing psychic readings at Night Heron books in Laramie to gain more practice. It has definitely been a learning process, but the most interesting thing for me is how people have responded. Most people who come in for a reading are just as nervous as I am; they think I can know secret things about them or that perhaps I’ll reveal something they aren’t yet ready to hear such as their imminent death. Once I begin talking about their relationship or their work environment, the tension dissipates and we act like old friends. It is intimate in that sense because I can often feel their emotions or the emotions associated with a person or job. Learning to let go of a reading, especially when I have felt strong emotions or information, has been a challenge for me because I learn a lot about a person’s life and then I start to think about how they are doing, or whether they were able to change a pattern.

The questions this sort of work has raised for me as a person, a journalist and a graduate student continue to multiply. Most importantly, I’m interested in how we think and talk about consciousness, the mind, and how we as a society interpret our scientific understanding of the universe. One big lesson for me is that no matter how much I think I know, soon enough another rabbit hole opens up a new world to be explored.

Jessica reads B and Kip.

The Association of Western States Folklorists (AWSF), a loose affiliation of public folklorists working in the region, held their annual meeting in Cheyenne and Laramie on April 15-18. The meeting was hosted by Annie Hatch, Folk Arts Program Director at the Wyoming Arts Council, and Andrea Graham, Folklife Specialist with the UW American Studies Program. Attendees came from Wyoming, Nebraska, Colorado, Utah, Oregon, Washington, New Mexico, Montana, and Idaho, and work for arts councils, state parks, universities, and non-profit organizations. Most of the sessions were held in Cheyenne at the State Museum, and included workshops on radio and video production, and discussions on regional cooperative projects, archived, and strategic planning for the field.

Field trips to learn about local history and culture are always an important part of the meetings. The group spent an afternoon in Cheyenne visiting the new National Guard Readiness Center, where they ate MREs for lunch (the chemical meal-heating system is amazing) and talked with some returned veterans about their stories and experiences, and then toured Warren Air Force Base to see the beautiful historic brick homes and facilities, and went into a deactivated missile silo (where they learned the folk nicknames of different kinds of workers). On the final day of the meeting they came to Laramie for a tour of the Territorial Prison (led by American Studies graduate Misty Stoll), a visit with long-time West Side resident John Chavez, an introduction to downtown Laramie Mainstreet director Trey Sherwood, and a reception at Cooper House with faculty and students. Everyone loved Wyoming, and all are looking forward to next year when the group will be meeting in Laramie.
undergraduate export: Mariah West

It has been a long journey full of paper work and the stress that comes with such paperwork, but I am excited to announce my plans to attend the University of Southern Denmark for an academic year, starting in fall 2012. As a sophomore in the University of Wyoming American Studies Program, I have spent a lot of time thinking about studying abroad, and where I would like to go. Through Dr. Sandeen, I learned about the University of Southern Denmark and it seemed like a perfect fit. As I pursued my study abroad plans further, I realized how right he was!

The University of Southern Denmark currently has a graduate program in American Studies and is beginning an undergraduate program next semester. I am going to Denmark both to participate in this new program and its development as well as to gain a greater perspective of American Studies and my place within the larger program base. They have several new classes at the undergraduate level, including Introduction to American Studies, American Documentary, American Literature before 1922, American History, and American Politics. I plan on participating on some level in all of these classes, as well as a few graduate courses to get some much needed transfer credits for my Core and Theme Studies.

I am also planning on working through internship at one of the several museums in Odense or at the University of Southern Denmark through their new program. There are several different museums in Odense such as the Carl Nielsen Museum (for the great Danish national composer who lived and worked in Odense), The Hans Christian Andersen Museum (for the writer that was born in and wrote all of his famous fairly tales in Odense), The Funen Art Museum, Funen Village (which is an interactive history museum) and the Odense City museum. All of these museums are incredible and I would be so happy to work at any of them!

While I am in Denmark I will be living in student housing, that is not a part of the University of Southern Denmark, but is rather similar to American dormitories, without the cafeteria. I am delighted to be able to spend time with Danish students, rather than spending most of my time with other exchanges. I expect to be living a fairly different life while I am in Denmark, full of stimulating new experiences and great new friends. I cannot wait to be working in a brand new department because I think it can bring me a new understanding of what it means to teach at the university level, as that is what I would love to do with my life and my degree!

I am incredibly thrilled to be traveling abroad for the first time, and exceptionally enthusiastic about all the things I am sure to learn while I am gone from the University of Wyoming. I expect that it will be a dramatic and exhilarating transition, albeit slightly difficult, and I am hoping to find many different perspectives on and experiences with the United States and American Studies.

Q: Why is the cow a sacred animal in India?
A: Because it Om's at the perfect pitch!

Namaste Porchlight readers. This August, I will be venturing to Khajuraho, India, where I will be receiving a yoga certification, so I was asked to write a little ditty on what I'm expecting to gain from the experience and then a follow up piece on what I actually learned (hopefully I'll have some insightful epiphanies to share and entertain you all with once I return in September!)

My expectations for India are relatively straightforward. I'm going simply to practice and explore the playful art of balance. That is, the balance between the mind and body, balance between science and spirituality, and balance between subtle and conceptual worlds.

Over Christmas break of this past year, I had an overwhelming desire to immerse myself in yoga culture. I have been practicing along the Front Range at different studios for the past few years, exploring the Yoga realms of Hatha, Ashtanga, Anusaura, and Kundalini, and dabbling in workshops focused in meditation, sound healing, Reiki, and the chakras. In doing so, I've grown fond of the Yogi's concept, Be Present! This straightforward idea has been anything but simple for me to grasp, but remains the motivation behind “my weirdness” (as my dad likes to call it).

My hope in returning from India is that I'll have a better understanding of my fascination for this journey I've embarked on. I'll be staying at an ashram just outside the ancient city of Khajuraho, Madhya where a teacher will closely supervise myself and 21 students and work with us physically and mentally, acquiring the full experience of Yogic lifestyle. This way I'll soak up and integrate the rich tradition and wisdom of Yoga. On the ranch, I'll live with simple and basic facilities and limited communication with the outer world. I chose to do a month long immersion, with hopes of keeping my mind away from the distractions and attachments of my regular life, therefore allowing me to focus completely on the teachings and self-reflections. I'm stoked about my trip because experience is fundamentally non-conceptual. My friend Shane puts it perfectly. “Experience is the ever-present part of our lives when the raw vitality of existence encounters our internal and external senses. It is also the process of integrating this raw vitality with our collective biases, our identities, and the habitual patterns that form our psychic life.”

I'm excited for the opportunity to learn first hand about such an amazing culture. I want to approach the month of August with minimal expectations and mindfully embrace as much knowledge as I can. I'm going to take the advice offered by Dan Flores in his book, Horizontal Yellow. He says, “Find your own place. Exult in the wonder of the sensual and elemental world around you. Learn its intricacies with passion and with all your senses. Respect the locals and their customs but go native in your own way. Above all, find your own place. It's Henry Thoreau’s maxim, gone western: Creating your own original relationship with the universe is the most important thing of all.” So that's my goal, I'm going to embark on a native quest to India with my Minnetonka's laced tightly and my yoga mat in hand!

undergraduate export: Winsome Williams