

**Lene M. Johannessen, *Horizons of Enchantment: Essays in the American Imaginary* (Dartmouth College Press, 2011)**

In the preface to this book Donald Pease states that Johannessen's approach is one that recognises the Transnational turn in American Studies. He goes on to say 'Re-Mapping the Transnational was founded on the premise that non-U.S. Americanists use models for thinking and writing about American Studies that are different from those deployed by United States scholars' (viii). This turn in approach, is indeed, one of the strengths of this book. It is interesting to read these different understandings of 'America'. Johannessen is a Norwegian academic and begins the book with a story about leaving America and returning to Norway. She notes that one of her American neighbours told her that everyone must go where they can gain advancement. This is the starting point on which Johannessen builds her argument.

The theoretical underpinnings of the book are drawn from Charles Taylor and Cornelius Castoriadis. Johannessen points out that while Jacques Lacan may be the better known theorist in relation to the imaginary in the United States, in Western Europe Taylor and Castoriadis are also well known. She draws on Castoriadis's 'master imaginary' to explore whether multiple social imaginaries merely reflect on the master one or whether it is possible for 'imaginaries' to remain malleable and endlessly accommodating. Charles Taylor's investigation into the 'social imaginary' and its relationship with individualism is also used. She attempts to move away from conventional notions of Manifest Destiny and the chosen people to explore wider concepts of Americanism. Each chapter addresses questions such as 'cultural provenance', 'places of imaginary', individualism for social good, and ideas of enchantment. The chapters are self-contained and are organised around a number of key concerns: progress, individualism, loss, and imagination.

The Imaginary becomes the methodological lens through which all of the concerns within the chapters are explored because as Johannessen reminds her readers 'America named an idea that long preceded an actual coming into being as the nation we know today' (28). The textual choices made for analysis and discussion in each of these chapters may, at first, appear quite odd as the usual 'big' American writers are missing. The book raises many examples that one may not expect to read when reaching for a book on the American imaginary. Chapter One starts with an analysis of Ryan Fleck and Anna Boden's baseball 2008 film *Sugar*. Johannessen says this film represents the joining of the sacred and the secular. The narrative may follow the conventional American Dream plot but she finds it goes further as it explores whether imagination is a mirror on society or a place to construct new dreams or places of enchantment. Chapter Two looks at Drude Krog Janson's 1887 novel *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*. This Chapter investigates why this novel can be seen as an American novel (even though it is written in Norwegian and written for a Norwegian readership). Chapter Three is a comparative analysis between Walt Whitman's 'Songs of Myself' and Rodolfo 'Corky' Gonzales' 'I am Joaquin'. She finds that Gonzales' poem does not arrange itself according to the master imaginary but creates a space for a different history. Chapter Four uses Richard Ford's *The Sportswriter* to explore ideas around suburbia, the

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secular and the sacred and the seamless convergence between the individual and society. Cuba becomes the site for the discussion of the American Imaginary in Chapter Five. This chapter deals with those not given access to the master imaginary or what happens when those who have their imagination framed through the dominant imaginings are taken out of their safety zone and placed into a new 'unknown' imaginary.

The strength of this book is in its approach. It does not ignore traditional American Studies or past reflections but rather side-steps them and comes to them via a different path. Johannessen says her readings 'attempt to calibrate how the imaginary's contours materialize' (19) and, overall, she does this well. This strength can, in some ways, also be seen as a difficulty when reading a book such as this. It is often difficult to 'grasp' the examples and there are moments when the chosen texts struggle to emerge from underneath heavy theoretical concerns. However, this book still remains a valuable addition to transnational studies as it opens up a space for future dialogue on America.

**Lesley Hawkes**