

undergoing. I found in the course of previous research trips that these intellectual exchange processes are best studied through the personal manuscripts of the individuals concerned. Consequently, this trip to the United States took me to the personal papers of four leading American liberals: Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., John Kenneth Galbraith, Hubert Humphrey, and Daniel P. Moynihan.

My arrival in Boston in early October coincided with an academic conference at Harvard University on the “Global 1970s,” which I was able to attend as an observer. Against the background of the current international situation, many of the conference discussions revolved around the links and parallels between the present economic crisis and the events and problems of the 1970s. What went wrong in those pivotal years, and how can our understanding of that decade inform our views of the present? These questions not only made for lively discussion among the illustrious group of presenters, but had direct relevance to my own work. The 1970s, after all, mark the end of the historical period I am researching.

In the days following the conference, I began reviewing the papers of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and John Kenneth Galbraith at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston. Both men are known as leading public intellectuals and advisers to Democratic presidential candidates and presidents from Adlai Stevenson to Lyndon Johnson. Beyond their engagement in US politics, however, Schlesinger and Galbraith maintained a network of contacts to Western European socialist and social democratic leaders. Even though both of them considered the United States their primary theater of action, they were global-minded thinkers who engaged with the political causes of center-left reformers around the world, in particular in Europe.

Since the personal papers available at the Kennedy Library cover Schlesinger’s life and work only until 1965, I also reviewed his journals at the New York Public Library in Manhattan. The carefully kept diary - extending across the half century from the 1950s to the early 2000s in the course of roughly five thousand pages - allows for detailed insights into the personal relationships and social constellations among the American East Coast establishment and, more importantly for my research, Schlesinger’s close friendships with Europeans.

From New York I continued to the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul, where the papers of Hubert Humphrey are located. The Twin Cities provided me with an unexpected immersion into Humphrey’s life, politics, and legacy: I arrived at the Hubert Humphrey terminal of the Minneapolis airport, changed buses at

the Hubert Humphrey Metrodome (a downtown stadium) and stayed with hosts who had attended the Hubert Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. To boot, one of the Minnesotans I befriended had been a longtime assistant to Amy Klobuchar, Humphrey’s most recent successor in office as US Senator for Minnesota. With regard to my research, I was happy to find that Humphrey had kept a careful record of his informal discussions with European friends. His notes on meetings with figures such as Willy Brandt and Harold Wilson (the towering figure of the British Labour Party in the 1960s and 1970s) will be invaluable for my dissertation.

The last destination of my research trip was Washington, DC, where I stayed with American friends for Thanksgiving. On the days before and after the holiday, I consulted the papers of Daniel P. Moynihan at the Library of Congress Manuscripts Division. Moynihan, who moved in some of the same circles as Schlesinger and Galbraith, was conversant with contemporary European social democratic thought and maintained close transatlantic friendships that began with his year abroad at the London School of Economics in the 1950s. His records shed light on the relationship between center-left politician-intellectuals from the Old and New World at the twilight of American liberalism – that is, the tumultuous years of the late Johnson presidency and Nixon’s first term. On a lighter note, I also received a behind-the-scenes tour of Capitol Hill during my stay in Washington, including an exploration of the culinary delights to be had at the House of Representatives cafeteria.

I am deeply thankful to the EAAS for having made this research journey possible. The Association’s support was essential especially with regard to the trips to St. Paul and Washington, DC, which I would probably not have undertaken otherwise. These two trips yielded some of the most surprising and valuable results of my research in the US. The Transatlantic Grant allowed me to follow my research interests freely and without undue concern for financial constraints. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the EAAS and all its members for helping me in this way.

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Research Project: “Spaces of Seclusion, Spaces of Freedom in the City in Contemporary American Literature”

Institutions: Gent University, GUST Library; the Library of the English Department, Gent University

The 2008 Intra European Grant that EAAS had the generosity to offer me proved of invaluable help to the progress of my PhD thesis.

During my October-November stay with Gent University, Belgium, I was granted unrestricted access to the library of Gent Urban Studies Team (GUST), an entire library dedicated exclusively to the domain of urban studies in America. I also had the chance to meet in person and discuss with some of the professors who are GUST members and specialists in my field of doctoral research, namely the city in contemporary American literature.

I carried out research mostly with the very pleasant library of GUST and also with the Library of the English Department as well as with a number of other libraries at Gent University. As a result, I managed to study about sixty essential books and articles dealing with my topic, especially contemporary novels and theoretical books which I had been unable to reach in my own country. I should also not forget to mention the elegant bike that Gent Urban Studies Team were so kind to rent for me and that I fully enjoyed riding for a whole month.

Novels such as Siri Hustvedt's *The Blindfold*, Jonathan Lethem's *Motherless Brooklyn*, Toni Morrison's *Jazz* or E. L. Doctorow's *Lives of the Poets* account for a variety of marginal voices and their different perceptions of the city. They helped me deepen and nuance my perspective on how literature tries to understand and assimilate the often amorphous American urban space. I had a view of the city as a fortress and a suffocating presence, but due to discussions with the GUST researchers and the books they recommended me I realized that such a space is also one that helps unleash individuals' inventiveness and freedom, often through the creation of small communities that reinstitute difference at the very heart of big cities.

In what concerns the theoretical part of my dissertation, after reading especially Edward Soja's *Imagining Cities* and *Postmetropolis* where he accounts for the constantly restructuring, incessantly growing urban spaces of today that defy comprehension, I decided to detail my analysis of the way in which literature attempts to capture a city that is in fact fragmentary and absent. In doing so, I was asking myself if contemporary literature is capable of doing what Soja in *Imagining Cities* suggests we should all do, namely '... radically rethink and perhaps deeply restructure ... our inherited forms of urban analysis to meet the practical, political and theoretical challenges presented by the post-metropolis' (56). The conclusion that I have reached is that literature has radically refashioned realism into an even darker, more poignant and impersonal

style to match the incoherent hyper-reality of the city as well as its loss of identity (as in B. E. Ellis' *American Psycho*, for example); simultaneously, the same realism is capable to dissolve reality, rendering the city's endless play of surfaces, the simulacrum it has come to represent (as in Paul Auster's *City of Glass*). But even if American cities changed radically in their transition to postmodernity (as accounted for also by Fredric Jameson), literature has more often readapted certain traditional literary forms (the detective novel for example, or the nineteenth-century type of realism) in order to make such changes palatable to the public and draw our attention to them.

A novel like Toni Morrison's *Jazz* helped me expand a chapter in my dissertation that is dedicated to inner spaces in the city and their relationship to everydayness. It was mostly after reading *Jazz* that I fully realized the intricacy and denseness of destinies that can be compressed between a flat's four walls and the extent of drama that is confined to the small, anonymous, domestic spaces in the city.

I must admit that without the access to information made possible through the grant and without the invaluable help that I received from the GUST professors, I would not have been able to discover essential primary as well as secondary sources that perfectly fit the scope of my dissertation; generally speaking, I would not have been able to make significant and substantial progress in my thesis.

I can only express again my gratitude for receiving the EAAS grant through the level of excellence that I hope my thesis will achieve in the end.

EAAS ON THE WEB

The EAAS Website provides information about the European Association for American Studies – The Articles, Officers and Board, Constituent Members. Information on American Studies and related fields in Europe can be found under different entries in the navigation menu: upcoming conferences and the activities of member organizations under Conferences and Events and the ASE Newsletter. A new category, EAAS Archive & History has recently been added. This section includes lists of EAAS conferences since 1957 and of the officers since 1954. The link to European Journals is another feature which is hoped to be both valuable and practical for widening the peripheries of intellectual exchange among European Americanists.



The EAAS Mailing List is our free EAAS-L distribution list that disseminates to its subscribers, information pertaining to American Studies in Europe. Thus, it provides a venue for member associations as well as individual subscribers to post and, at the same time, to have access to information that might be useful to Americanists in Europe, such as research news, teaching projects, information about new internet resources, announcements of conferences, grants, fellowships, job opportunities, calls for submissions for Books and Journals and inquiries concerning American Studies in Europe in general. Members are encouraged to subscribe – if they are not already subscribers – to the EAAS Mailing List to follow up with recent academic activities conducted in Europe and thus contribute to maintain a dynamic interaction among the European Americanists. Members who wish to announce new publications are requested to include in their posting: Full bibliographical information (author/editor, title, place, publisher, and year of publication), ISBN number, retail price (and possibly discounts for EAAS members) and a 100-word abstract.

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All members take an interdisciplinary approach to American Studies; are independent organizations with some of their own sources of funding, not exclusively linked to a university; have some research facilities; and are committed to a role of public service to the community at large. ASN works in close association with the EAAS. Its goals are those of promoting the study of the United States by close cooperation of the different institutions interested in this area of study. The ASN exists to provide mutual support for all the centers involved, help channel the flow of information on resources among the members and the community, establish joint projects that will increase cooperation and productivity and thus integrate the European studies of America. The ASN is willing to act as an advisory group to encourage the development of American Studies, particularly in Eastern and Central Europe.

One of the key activities of the ASN is the networking of resources and information such as the availability of visiting scholars for lecturing at the different institutions. Through different means of communication, the

ASN hopes to make available to members the library resources of each center and establish an interlibrary loan facility. Another goal is that of promoting the exchange of scholars and students of the different centers. One of the specific ASN projects is the establishment of the American Studies Network Book Prize, a prize of €1,000 for a remarkable book published in English by a European scholar on any aspect of American Studies. The jury for that biennial prize, presented at the EAAS conferences, is comprised of representatives from the EAAS and the ASN. The deadline for submitting books for this prize is announced in the EAAS newsletter in the year preceding the EAAS conference.

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Editorial Notes

Deadlines:

- September 1, 2009 Deadline for the submission of updated member lists and Board members of National Associations with e-mail addresses to the Secretary General of EAAS. Please note, however, that new Board members should be reported right after their election since the website is updated continuously and the officers must know who is representing whom.
- October 15, 2009 Deadline for submission of relevant information for the fall 2009 *ASE Newsletter* to the Editor-in-chief. Make sure to add “ASE-EAAS” (without quotes) to the subject line of your e-mail(s).

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