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A Cultural Approach to American Studies

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. . .meaningful forms, whether they be African passage rites, nineteenth-century novels, revolutionary ideologies, grammatical paradigms, scientific theories, English landscape paintings, or the ways in which moral judgments are phrased, have as good a claim to public existence as horses, stones, and trees, and are therefore as susceptible to objective investigation and systematic analysis as these apparently harder realities.

Everything from modern logic, computer technology, and cybernetics at one extreme to phenomenological criticism, psychohistory, and ordinary language philosophy at the other has conspired to undermine the notion that meaning is so radically "in the head," so deeply subjective, that it is incapable of being firmly grasped, much less analyzed. It may be supremely difficult to deal with such structures of meaning but they are neither a miracle nor a mirage. Indeed, constructing concepts and methods to deal with them and to produce generalizations about them is the primary intellectual task now facing those humanists and social scientists not content merely to exercise habitual skills.

Clifford Geertz, "Introduction" to Myth, Symbol, and Culture[1]

In order to deal directly with a central problem inherent in American Studies I am tempted to start off in the autobiographical mode. So, let me confess that I, having received most of my university education in literary studies, had next to no experience with American Studies – until I got a lectureship some five years ago which specifically involved both American literature and American civilization. Thus the field of civilization, at that time somewhat odiously called "background," was virgin land to me. I consequently dealt with it the same way you deal with troublesome questions of etiquette at formal parties: you look at what the person next to you is doing. So I proceeded teaching background the way it was being done in Norway at the time, namely as a one year's course involving a general introduction to American life, including

the study of its class structure, minorities, regions, political institutions, religion, education, mass media, and so on.

When a course is being taught for the first time, nobody learns as much, of course, as the teacher. This was doubly true of my civilization course, since I felt like an explorer in a strange land or, less romantically, a greenhorn away from home. Nevertheless, engrossed and exhilarated, I roamed from discipline to discipline, from subject to subject: from sociology to political science, from the Other America to the Imperial Presidency, from the Organization Man to sex roles, from the Civil War to Board of Education of Topeka, from Melting Pots to Bay of Pigs, from discussing the number of Americans believing in God to analyzing Ajax-the-white-tornado commercials... the list, in theory if not in practice, becomes inexhaustible. I was actually so preoccupied with trying to keep up with my subjects that I had hardly had time to think about the nature and aim of the course itself, until one of my students at lunch one day suddenly said, "Listen, what are we actually supposed to learn from this course?" I muttered something along the line of "ehhh...importance of being acquainted with different aspects of American life... unhhh..." "But this jumping from one topic to another," he objected, "it is so disconnected and superficial." Later, I heard similar objections from other active students; gradually, I came to feel that their comments were entirely justified. Seen in retrospect, the course seemed like the academic equivalent to an early 1970s movie farce about American tourists in Europe called something like "It's Tuesday, so this must be Belgium;" only here it was a sort of "It's the second week of October, so today must be American eduction, and next week it is religion." Far from becoming a melting pot, the course represented a very mixed salad bowl indeed.

"Background" was actually a precise term for the course; I came to feel that nothing justified the teaching of it in these terms. I do not think this was purely a matter of my professional shortcomings in dealing with these diverse subjects; the most acute problem was how to integrate them. To me, the minimal requirement of a university discipline was that it had certain cognitive objectives of its own; that the study, say, of American civilization, had a theory of how to systematize knowledge and thus attain a methodical understanding of its subject matter, namely American culture as a whole. The switch of terms from "background" to "civilization" or "culture" does not, of course, in itself create any discipline; yet I felt

that the study of civilization, in the general sense of the term, somehow *was* of great importance for the study of English as a foreign language, and that it somehow *deserved* a place on the curriculum.

Struggling with such problems, the foreign student of American civilization is actually better off than the students of other cultures, since Americans have always been quite concerned with trying to characterize their own way of life. Englishmen or Frenchmen, for instance, have not felt the same need to define their "Englishness" or their "Frenchness;" being an American, however, has usually meant being part of a vision, and sharing a world view — it has been a philosophical condition as much as a fact of birth. The American Studies movement from the 1940s to the present day can easily be regarded as part of this tradition of self-definition; and it was a matter of course to me to turn to this movement, especially to its writings on theory and method, with which I had not been familiar before.

The classical manifesto of the emerging American Studies movement, Tremaine McDowell's *American Studies* of 1948, at first seemed like a godsend for my purposes. American Studies was regarded by McDowell as symptomatic of a general movement "away from extreme academic specialization toward a synthesis of knowledge." American Studies, McDowell declared,

> is the intellectual process whereby a student assimilates the complicated and often contradictory details of American civilization which he meets in his courses in social science, history, literature, philosophy, and the fine arts. And it is the intellectual process whereby he fashions out of them a picture of these United States. In so doing, he reduces diversity to some degree of unity.[2]

This seems wonderfully promising, until one discovers that McDowell's Whitmanesque celebration of the totality of American life does not really include any suggestions of how such a synthesis of the different fields can be brought about. Indeed, one of the most striking, and somewhat paradoxical, trends of the 1950s and 60s was that, while American Studies programs spread like bushfire to campuses throughout the United States, the main implication of American Studies discussions of the same period was one of growing misgivings, disillusionment, or forebodings of failure.[3] The criticism of the "traditional" American Studies programs can perhaps be said to have reached a climax in an essay by Jany Mechling, Robert Merideth, and David Wilson in 1973, where they speak of the "Do-It-Yourself-Synthesizer-Kit-Fallacy" of American Studies which

not only encourages students to take whatever they wish from various disciplines. . .but directs them to put it all together — as in the spastic chant: two, four, six, eight — integrate!. . . the task of synthesis, the study of culture, is dumped on the novice student, as if he with his uncorrupted, natural talents were better suited to the hardest imaginable intellectual work than those who ought to know better.[4]

This description fits my reaction to my own civilization course to a tee; obviously, integration becomes no less problematic when various specialists teach the different fields.

However, a growing body of theoretical writings in American Studies during the last two decades has proposed that the anthropological concept of culture may serve as a theoretical and methodological foundation for the study of American life. The first central step in this direction was taken by Richard E. Sykes in an essay entitled "American Studies and the Concept of Culture: A Theory and a Method" (1963). To Sykes, American Studies was primarily "the study of American culture. Culture is the key concept, the unifying concept, the root word which suggests both theory and method."[5] During the last three years, I have come to share Sykes' view that the concept of culture may serve to define American Studies, delineate its central subject matter, and provide it with a theory through which systematic insight and synthetic understanding may be achieved.[6]

There are nearly as many definitions of culture as there are anthropologists. Traditionally it has been defined simply as the "man-made" part of the human environment, or more specifically as *observable* behavior patterns, customs, and artifacts. It has, however, more recently also been defined as the belief and value systems which *govern* behavior; this appears to me to represent the most fruitful conception of culture as applied to the study of American civilization. As a working definition for my discussion of the culture concept in American Studies I therefore propose that *culture* should be seen as *explicit and implicit, mutually confirming and conflicting patterns of collective beliefs and values which guide the behavior of a social group and serve to define the meaning of its existence.*

I would like to elaborate, very briefly, on some of the implications of this definition, namely that 1) Culture is an abstraction, 2) it is collective, 3) it is unconscious as well as conscious, 4) it serves a guiding rather than deterministic function, 5) it is dynamic and 6) it involves both empirical analysis and interpretation.

Culture is an *abstraction* because it refers to the patterns of ideas

and norms which generate behavior, which define people's way of life. It must therefore not be confused with concrete behavior itself. Its abstract status is also connected with the fact that it is *collective.* People's actual behavior is of course a fusion of personal and social elements, but cultural analysis is concerned with identifying the ideas and values which are collectively shared by the people of a social group. This sharing of ideas and values is *as often unconscious as conscious.* Some patterns of normative beliefs are openly expressed and publicly sanctioned, thus explicit; others are unstated or hidden, i.e. implicit, either because they are a matter of habit or because they are repressed.'

I have tried to indicate that culture *serves* a *guiding rather than deterministic function* by emphasizing that it guides behavior. The word "guide" could, however, be exchanged with the term "determine" if the idea of "determination" is defined as suggested by Raymond Williams in his work *Marxism and Literature,* namely as "setting bounds" and "exerting pressures."[8] This describes in my opinion precisely the way in which culture patterns function in social life. It is important to realize that this "exertion of pressures" and "setting of limits" of culture patterns is a highly complex and *dynamic* affair. I have deliberately defined culture as "patterns of beliefs and values," not as "*a* system" of such patterns. Thus I mean to suggest that it is not possible to say that complex industrial cultures, at least, have *one* coherent system of beliefs and values — *one* consistent world view and ethos. Instead, culture can be conceived as comprising a great many patterns, some mutually reinforcing each other, others indeed conflicting with them, and all of them yielding varying pressures on the members of a social group. Thus a culture at any given point in time is a highly complex mosaic of dominant, alternative, and oppositional patterns of beliefs and values which are part of an historical process and thus reflect both continuity and change.

The study of culture is *empirical* in the sense that it requires a careful analysis of a variety of different sources in order to establish the representativeness, the collective status, of certain beliefs and values, of how they form patterns, how these patterns are reflected in different population groups, which patterns are the most dominant, how they reinforce or conflict with each other, and so on. But beliefs and values do not, of course, represent objective facts;[9] thus evaluating their function and importance in the life of a social group is always subject to *interpretation* — from the very stage when

we select specific beliefs as central to the stage when we study the relationship between different patterns. Since culture above all is a matter of people communicating through language, the connotational, metaphoric, and symbolic means of language also play a crucial part. Cultural symbols, for instance — whether a model T Ford or the Mississippi — serve as concrete touchstones for abstract belief patterns by fusing thought and emotion, by being experienced rather than simply rationally appreciated. As communicated through expressive language, whether merely connotational or symbolic, culture is always subject to interpretation. Although their emphasis is collective, culture studies are therefore not fundamentally different from humanist disciplines. As the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz says,

> Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning... Meaning, that elusive and ill-defined pseudoentity we were once more than content to leave philosophers and literary critics to fumble with, has now come back into the heart of our discipline. Even Marxists are quoting Cassirer; even positivists, Kenneth Burke. [10]

These webs of meaning — these patterns of beliefs and values which guide people's behavior — must certainly not be regarded as existing in some separate sphere of ideas, as a sort of history of ideas of common people. There is a genuine danger in letting the study of culture patterns become too abstract, too ideational. Therefore culture patterns must continuously be analyzed in relation to social and economic conditions, of which they are inextricably part. In fact, the culture concept can be closely related to such Marxist concepts as for instance ideology, superstructure, and hegemony. Each of these terms has been defined in several divergent ways, but all of them have also been used so as to refer to the dominant beliefs and values in a society, which serve to legitimize the power of the ruling class. For instance, taking off from Antonio Gramsci's discussion of hegemony as a continual process of class domination and subordination, Raymond Williams characterizes it as

> a lived system of meanings and values — constitutive and constituting — which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes... a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives.[11]

This conception of hegemony comes indeed very close to the definition of culture used in this paper. Of course, the more a student of culture emphasizes the importance of economic factors and class

struggle in the development of culture, the more his culture concept will be related to Marxist concepts like ideology, superstructure, and hegemony. The basic point in this connection, however, is that most students of culture, whether Marxists or non-Marxists, would agree that economic factors play a crucial part in the formation of culture. In most cases, too, they would talk about a very complex interrelationship between economic base and cultural superstructure; it would take a very simplistic student of culture and a very "vulgar" Marxist to talk about a direct, one-to-one relationship between economic conditions and culture patterns. Most students of culture, however, would agree completely with the idea of priority inherent in Marx's statement that "It is not the consciusness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness"[12] especially when "determine," again, is taken to mean "setting bounds" and "exerting pressures.))

I have chosen to emphasize the interplay between society and culture in order to consider the culture concept in relation to another widely used term, namely *myth.* Myth is another of those concepts reflecting widely different meanings and usages; sometimes it refers to sacred fables of supernatural beings, or to archetypical narratives; other times it denotes sets of ideas which are illusory, hence out of touch with reality; and finally, in some works by social scientists, it is used for the beliefs and values through which people of a social group structure their lives. In Robert M. MacIver's *The Web of Government,* for instance, myths are defined as "the value-impregnated beliefs and notions that men hold, that they live by or live for. Every society is held together by. . . a complex of dominating thought-forms that determines and sustains all its activities."[13] This, again, is not essentially unlike the definition of culture patterns presented in this paper.

More importantly, however, the term myth occupies a prominent place in the works of the so-called myth-and-symbol school of American Studies, which include for instance Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950), John William Ward's *Andrew Jackson : Symbolfor an Age* (1953), R.W.B. Lewis's *The American Adam* (1955), and Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964).[14] As used in many of these works, however, myths are not directly defined as culture patterns within a complex social process; instead, they represent a strange amalgation of something both mythological, archetypical, illusory — and social. This may be due to the literary emphasis of most of

these myth-and-symbol works.[15] In one way, of course, the works of the myth-and symbol school can be regarded as a reaction against the ahistorical literary criticism of the 1940s and 50s. Yet, as Winfried Fluck argues in a recent essay on American Studies, it is nevertheless colored by the aesthetics of tlie New Criticism.[16] Both literature and culture seem in several of the myth-and-symbol works reduced to a conflict between dualistic ideas like innocence vs. corruption, embodied in such dualistic metaphors as the pre-lapsarin vs. the fallen Adam, or the garden vs. the machine. What is lost in this kind of analysis is the sense in which culture represents an interplay of quite complex belief patterns which reflect a heterogeneous, diversified social reality. As Thomas A. Kreuger puts it "The histories of the Edenic Mytli exhibit a surprisingly weak feeling for the texture of American life: its differentiations of class, religion, and ethnicity; its distinctive regional variations; its generational divisions; and the basic distinction between the sexes."[17] Although I do not agree with all of Bruce Kuklick's objections to the myth-and-symbol studies in his well-known essay from 1972, I think that he touches upon a central point concerning cultural analysis when he says that "the imputation of collective beliefs is an extraordinarily complex empirical procedure which ought not to be undertaken lightly;" nevertheless American Studies humanists, according to Kuklick, are "persistently eager" to speak of " 'the popular conception of American life,' " " 'the American view of life,' " and the like.[18]

In addition, the theoretical conception of myth in several of these American Studies works is awkward because it seems to make myths into strangely subjective, yet collective, notions floating about in a no-man's land between illusion and reality. In his Preface to the first edition of Virgin Land, Smith speaks of myths as "an intellectual construction," and as "products of the imagination," which "exists on a different plane" from empirical fact.[19] This emphasis on myth as "mental construct," a term also used by Leo Marx in an essay on American Studies,[20] establishes a dualism between myth and reality which makes genuine cultural analysis very difficult. Of course cultural myths may be said to be false in the sense that they do not reflect the "true" state of affairs of "social reality;" this, however, makes them no less part of that reality. In one sense, culture can be said to be precisely the result of the interplay between "historical reality" and the meanings that people impose on it, a point also conceded by Smith in the 1970 preface to *Virgin Land*.[21]

Despite the theoretical shortcomings of these works, their literary and cultural analyses are in many ways very illuminating. Thus my criticism is primarily directed at their sketchy suggestions of theory. They cannot serve as models *either* for a methodical study of American culture *or* for a systematic historical interpretation of American literature (nor were they intended to do that, of course). I believe that the concept of culture patterns as discussed in this essay can serve as the basis for a more systematic approach, especially since it is intimately identified with the social and economic life of a social group. At the end of this discussion of a cultural approach to American Studies I want to point, first, to its fruitfulness for the teaching and study of the discipline of American civilization itself and, second, to its usefulness for the teaching and study of the Anglo-American language and literature.

The greatest advantage of the concept of culture as the belief patterns and value systems of a social group is perhaps to be found in the flexibility of the term "social group" itself. On the one hand, it can refer to the nation as a social group; on the other hand, it can be used for specific groups of people within the nation. In the former case, the study involves the analysis of dominant culture patterns in American society as a whole. Then the concept of culture comes very close to the idea of "national character," which has for instance been defined as "a *group of interrelated motivations, values and feelings prevailing among a people*."[22] Indeed, national character defined as culture patterns can rescue the term from its ill repute as a static or ethnocentric concept; it implies, however, that the character of a modern industrial nation like the United States is not a homogenous phenomenon at all.[23]

It is obvious, however, that the identification with major culture patterns in a given period will vary from social group to social group within a nation according to factors like class, ethnicity, race, region, religion, sex, age, and so on. It is therefore equally important to study the cultures of specific social groups — often referred to as subcultures — like those of a specific region (like the South), a specific ethnic group (like the Mexican Americans), and so on. This concept of culture gives a theoretical focus for describing, on the one hand, the main beliefs and values that are characteristic of American life in general in a given period, and for describing, on the other hand, what is characteristic of lor instance working class life in the same period. The cultural perspective thus organizes the study of what traditionally in civilization teaching has been a hot-

chpotch of historical, sociological, political, and literary observations. In sum, the aim of such a culture study is to give the student an intellectual conception, as complete as possible, of what it means to be an American, or an American woman, or a middle-class American, or an Afro-American, or a Southern American — or, to pick a more narrow example, what it meant to be for instance a Southern black middle-class woman in the 1920s. A statement by Clifford Geertz can serve as a suitable conclusion to this entire discussion of the culture concept: "The whole point of a semiotic approach to culture is...to aid us in gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them."[24]

Indeed, this statement by Geertz contains the central justification for civilization-as-culture studies in English departments at foreign universities since, in order to be able to communicate with other peoples, the learning of grammar and syntax is not enough: quite often an understanding of the cultural context in which language functions is necessary. For instance, a discussion between a Norwegian and an American about social class and the idea of equality may become quite pointless if they are not aware of the different ways in which these concepts are used in everyday speech in the two countries. Not even a lot of sociological information does in itself suffice. It does not significantly contribute to language acquisition to learn to know how many Americans are defined as poor, or what problems blight an American city, or how many Americans believe in God: such information is only a means to an end, namely as part of the analysis of how people experience their own social reality. In short, it is first and foremost an analysis of culture, of people's central beliefs and values, which makes understanding, hence communication, possible.

But culture studies are by no means less important for the study of literature, which forms the last field in the triangle of disciplines in English departments abroad. This, of course, leads us back to the philosophy of American Studies again. To me, the idea of integrating the various subjects of civilization has actually been much more problematic than trying to bring together the study of society and the study of literature. In the 50s and 60s, however, many scholars felt that the American Studies enterprise had stranded precisely on attempting to do the latter. In a well-known essay from 1957 entitled, "Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method?" Henry Nash Smith spoke of "the dualism which separates social

facts from aesthetic values," and claimed that the study of literature and the study of society had so far proved incompatible because the literary critic tends to "cut aesthetic values loose from social fact," and the social scientist "uses techniques of research which makes it difficult or impossible for him to deal with the states of consciousness embodied in serious art."[25] Today, however, more than 20 years after the publication of Smith's essay, I believe that this felt schism between social and literary studies has been considerably bridged. There is a whole body of recent criticism, whether structuralist-semiotic, phenomenological, sociological, or Marxist, which, in its concern with the problems of meaning in art and society, has served to bring these studies closer together. I would like to think that my concept of culture studies also has this function.

Indeed I believe that, in a very special sense, culture is the stuff which literature is made of. Although literature very often gives a significant sense of likeness to "real life," it is not a photographic lifelikeness, of course. A writer's imitation of people's behavior is quite selective and is, I think, first and foremost motivated by what their behavior, their life, signifies to him — that is, a writer is especially concerned with expressing the meaning *behind* behavior at the same time. Thus he selects gestures, habits, ways of speaking and acting that in a quintessential way *define* the characters socially as well as individually. In this way, literature can be said to have a cultural objective. As Richard Hoggart says, good works of imaginative literature give us a sense of "the way life was lived 'in the bone' at the time — that behind people's actions and reactions lay *this* particular sense of a nation's destiny, *these* assumptions about the relations between the sexes, about class and money and duty."[26]

Studies of culture are therefore important because they may often make us aware of (the full context of) thematic implications of literary works which may otherwise pass us by. Of course literary interpretation is always, in one way or another, a matter of recognition and discovery of what is there, in the work itself. Thus the frequent distinction between "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" literary criticism is in my opinion untenable; interpretation is always a result of the complex interaction between text and reader which, among other things, also brings into play the reader's personal experiences or his knowledge of psychology, myth, religion, philosophy, or whatever. Besides familiarity with literary aesthetics, historical socio-cultural insight seems to me to be the most central prerequisite for the study of literature.

The socio-cultural approach to literary interpretation of course involves more than a recognition of the historical "content" of a literary work. A "content sociology" or "culturology," although highly useful, must be used sensitively, since literature is not simply an objective reflection of life; it is also a subjective, creative transformation of human existence. A mistake which is often made in literary criticism, however, is to somehow regard this subjective, transformational character as less social; in my opinion, it should perhaps be regarded as the most *significant* social aspect of imaginative literature.

A brief digression may be important in order to elaborate further on this idea: We should not forget the fact that literature is an active means of communication. As Kenneth Burke suggests in his work The *Philosophy* of Literary Form, literature, indeed any verbal act, should be considered as "symbolic action," as "a strategy for encompassing a situation," and thus as "the answer or rejoinder to assertions current in the situation in which it arose."[27] In short, a literary work represents an active response to the socio-cultural situation at the time it was written. Thus its social significance is not found simply in the way it reflects culture and society, but even more in the strategies it adopts to deal with them. Consequently the form and structure of the work must also be regarded as fundamentally social.

In this context, the study of culture is of central use to the historical interpretation of literature in two major ways, one general and one more specific. At the most general level, culture studies identify and analyze the fundamental beliefs and values which are part of the economic and social life of the nation in a specific period. In hermeneutical terms, such studies help establish the historical "horizon" of the literary work.[28] A social practice and thought, these culture patterns — this ideological horizon — are determinational in the sense of "setting the limits" for, and "exerting the pressures" on, people's lives during that time. These limits must therefore also be limits of the world of the literary work; it cannot describe people qualitatively realizing another way of life without falsifying reality. Therefore the particular aim of the cultural analysis of a literary work is to reveal how the work, thematically and formally, tries to come to terms with these limitations of reality — or tries to transcend them by literary strategies of its own, for instance through implication, symbolism, fantasy, dream, pastoralism, utopianism, etc., thus creating a vision of a world of different values, which should have been.[29]

In a different sense, culture studies can be of use to literary interpretation in terms of their analysis of the main beliefs and values of specific social groups within a nation in a particular period. The function of such a study is to discover and examine the way in which the belief patterns of particular social groups are reflected and/or transformed (not least through selectiveness and emphasis) in a literary work in order to help express the central vision of life in that work. This type of cultural analysis may consequently contribute to a more detailed and thorough identification of the distinctive imaginative features and the particular thematic concerns of a work of literature.

Of course, the very medium of literature — language — is fundamentally cultural. Conversely, as a linguist perhaps would view it, culture exists primarily through language. There is no reason to raise the impossible question about the chicken or the egg here; the central contention of this paper is simply that culture study can and should become a discipline in its own right, that it contributes significantly to the study of both language and literature, and that it therefore may serve as a crucial third partner in the study of English at foreign universities.

NOTES

1 Clifford Geertz, ed., Myth, Symbol, and Culture (New York: Norton, 1971), pp. x-xi.

2 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1948), p. 33.

3 See for instance Robert E. Spiller, "Value and Method in American Studies," The Third Dimension: Studies of Literary *History* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 199–216; Roy Harvey Pearce, "American Studies as a Discipline," Edwin H. Cady, " 'American Studies' in the Doldrums: Or Whistling up a Breeze," and Robert E. Merideth, "Introduction: Theory, Method and American Studies" — all three in Robert E. Merideth, ed., American Studies: Essays on Theory and Method (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1968), pp. 14-25, 33-39, and v-xiv; Henry Nash Smith, "Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method?" in Joseph J. Kwiat and Mary C. Turpie, eds., Studies in American Culture: Dominant Ideas and Images (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1960), pp. 3-15; Henry Wasser, "Principled Opportunism and American Studies" and Marshall W. Fishwick, "American Studies: Bird in Hand?" — both in Marshall W. Fishwick, ed., American Studies in Transition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), pp. 166-180 and 330-341.

4 "American Culture Studies: The Discipline and the Curriculum," American *Quarterly*, *25* (October 1973), 372.

5 American Quarterly, 15 (Summer 1963), 254. See also the essay by Mechling, Merideth, and Wilson, 363-389 (cf. note 4); and Gertrude Jaeger and Philip Selznick, "A Normative Theory of Culture," in Merideth, ed., American Studies, pp. 93-123 (cf. note 3).

6 This paper concerns itself primarily with questions of theory. Any true discipline has in my opinion a theory concerning its character and main concerns. When it comes to questions of method, however, most disciplines reflect a variety of approaches, which indeed may testify to their vitality. Thus my concern is theoretical rather than methodological. I am primarily occupied with trying — in terms of the culture concept — to define the central subject matter of American Studies and thus stake out the direction of the work within this discipline.

7 For a highly interesting treatment of the explicitness and implicitness of culture patterns, see Bernard Bowron, Leo Marx, and Arnold Rose, "Literature and Covert Culture," in Joseph Kwiat and Mary C. Turpie, eds., *Studies in American Culture,* pp. 84-95 (cf. note 3).

8 *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 83-89.

9 Many social scientists and humanists have suggested that not even acts of behavior can be regarded as forming objective facts, since they are only the tips of icebergs sticking up from masses of conflicting ideas and motivations underneath. This means that ideas and values behind behavior become not only a valid but a necessary topic of study. Cf. John Dewey in *Freedom and Culture*: "Any doctrine that eliminates or even obscures the function of choice of values and enlistment of desires and emotions in behalf of those chosen weakens personal responsibility for judgement and for action. It thus helps create the attitudes that welcome and support the totalitarian state." Cited and used as a premise in Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962, originally published 1944), p. lxxi.

10 "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 5, 29.

11 *Marxism and Literature,* p. 110 (cf. note 8).

12 "Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,*" in Lewis S. Feuer, ed., *Marx and Engels, Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1969), p. 84.

13 Quoted in Cecil F. Tate, *The Search for a Method in American Studies* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1973), pp. 19-20.

14 It is perhaps only in retrospect that these works can be grouped together as a "school" in terms of their common concern with images, symbols, and myths in literature and life. It should be pointed out, however, that these works are quite loosely connected with each other and represent very different approaches. When Leo Marx was invited to speak on behalf of this school, he took care to present himself as "a wholly unauthorized spokesman for this wholly unorganized group" ("American Studies — A Defense of an Unscientific Method," *New Literary History,* 1 (1969), 75).

15 A narrative element is also sometimes added to the definition of myth in studies with a literary orientation. Cf. Leo Marx's definition of myth as "a combination of symbols, held together by a narrative, which embodies the virtually all—encompassing conception of reality — the world-view — of a group" ("American Studies — A Defense of an Unscientific Method," 86).

16 "Aesthetic Premises in American Studies," in Robin W. Winks, ed., *Other Voices, Other Views: An International Collection of Essays from the Bicentennial* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978), pp. 21-30.

17 "The Historians and the Edenic Myth: A Critique," *Canadian Review of American Studies,* 4 (Spring 1973), 8.

18 "Myth and Symbol in American Studies," *American Quarterly,* 24 (October 1972), 445.

19 *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), p. xi.

20 "American Studies — A Defense of an Unscientific Method," 86 (cf. note 14).
21 Virgin Land, p. viii.
22 Jules Henry, "A Theory for an Anthropological Analysis of American Culture," Anthropology and American *Life*, eds. Joseph G. Jorgensen and Marcello Truzzi (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 9.
23 For an early and highly suggestive discussion of the relationship between culture and national character, see David M. Potter, "The Behavioral Scientists and National Character," People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1954), pp. 32-72.
24 The Interpretation of Cultures, p. 24 (cf. note 9).
25 In Kwiat and Turpie, eds., Studies in American Culture, pp. 14-15, 10 (cf. note 3).
26 "Literature and Society," Speaking to Each Other, vol. *II* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p. 24.
27 The Philosophy of Literary Form (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1973), pp. 8, 109.
28 Cf. for instance Richard E. Palmer, Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in *Schleiermacher*, *Dilthey*, *Heidegger*, and Gadamer (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1969).
29 For excellent treatments of fiction reflecting the irreconcilable gap between reality and humanist ideals, see for instance Georg Lukács, The Theory of *the* Novel (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971) and Studies in *European* Realism (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964); and Michel Zeraffa, Fictions: The *Novel* and Social Reality (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976).