

Markku Henriksson, *Kotka ja vaahteranlehti: Johdatus Pohjois-Amerikan tutkimukseen (The Eagle and the Maple Leaf: An Introduction to North American Studies)*. Yliopistopaino, Helsinki, 1994. 150pp.

Mick Gidley, ed. *Modern American Culture: An Introduction*. Longman, London, 1993. 407pp.

Since the 1940s and 1950s there has been continuing discourse about whether American Studies can develop a methodology. Many American scholars have debated this, most often in articles in the *American Quarterly*. From Henry Nash Smith and Roy Harvey Pearce in the 1950s to Bruce Kuklick, Robert Sklar, and Gene Wise in the 1970s, and Robert Berkhofer and Steven Watts at the turn of the 1990s, scholars have asked the same question, whether

American Studies has a methodology (later scholars also started to ask if there is a theory) and, if it does what kind of methodology is it. The answers to these questions have not been always very clear. It took until 1992 before a list of different theories and methods in American Studies was made.

T. V. Reed from Washington State University introduced in *American Studies International* nine theoretical constructions which had their own methodologies, or approaches to what is called American Studies: Genealogy of American Studies; Myth and symbol; Interpretative social science, structuralism, and semiotics; Neo-Marxian; Post-Structuralist theories; Theorizing difference and commonality; Historical theory and method; Literary theory; and British cultural studies. He argues rightly that his "categories are necessarily partly arbitrary and over-lapping," but this is a good start for more detailed description of and methods that are useful in American Studies.¹

Another interesting question is whether American Studies can develop an introductory survey or a text book that could teach basic elements of American cultures, as well as methods and theories to the beginners. Some works of this nature have been done already. If we leave the early pioneers like Vernon Louis Parrington and Stanley T. Williams / Ralph Henry Gabriel out, the first one was Tremaine McDowell's *American Studies* in 1948. Since McDowell's text, most survey books have been written and edited by several scholars, people like Ray B. Browne, Robert Merideth, and Luther S. Luedtke.

In the 1980s two introductory books were published, one by Americans and one by British, with different focus on American culture and American Studies. The American version, edited by Luther S. Luedtke, *Making America: The Society and Culture of the United States*, focuses on American Society, culture, and character in a broad sense. In four parts it describes how the nation was built, what kind of expressions exist in American culture, what the society is like and what kind of values it has, and what its ideologies and thoughts are. *Making America* has excellent writers, most of them highly respected scholars from some of the most prestigious universities in the United States. The significant problem with this book, however, is the thin description of how to study American Studies from interdisciplinary perspective. There is no real discussion on methodology. In his introductory essay Luedtke only

¹ For more details see T. V. Reed, "Theory and Method in American Studies: An Annotated Bibliography," *American Studies International*, October 1992, (Vol. 30, No. 2), pp. 4-34.

mentions social and behavioral sciences methods, together with historical and literary methods, as the best way to study American "character."²

The British book, *Introduction to American Studies*, edited by Malcolm Bradbury and Howard Temperley, is closer to cultural history than to American Studies. It is divided into 13 chapters that run chronologically from the establishment of the British colonies to the 1980s, and these essays concentrate on the culture from historical perspective. Only the introduction has a couple of paragraphs about the methodology of American Studies as an interdisciplinary field.³

Markku Henriksson's book *Kotka ja vaahteranlehti*, also tries to explain and give an understanding to the reader what American culture (and Canada's as well) is, and what is Americanism, and this is also the best part of the book. Henriksson is less clear on what American Studies is all about in the 1990s. *Kotka ja vaahteranlehti* is the first introductory book on American Studies in Finnish language. Henriksson interestingly explores North American cultures that are divided into several geographical districts. He gives several examples on how to divide North America into different cultural and political areas. The first is what he calls "governmental-political" division which is merely a collection of facts drawn from encyclopedias. The second division of North America is more intriguing. Henriksson explains Joel Garreau's nine cultural nations of North America which are based on Garreau's own and dozens of ordinary citizen's personal experiences on their regions, and on regional differences on economy and geography. But these nine nations are not enough for Henriksson, since he as a scholar of Native American history also includes as his third division the tenth nation, which is naturally Native Americans. As his fourth example Henriksson discusses Raymond Gastil's Euro-American cultural division, which can also be found in Luedtke's *Making America*, and which divides United States into thirteen cultural areas.

Henriksson's chapter on "Americanism as Culture" is particularly good. First he examines individual Americans, which is nothing new, using same old thinkers from Crèvecoeur and Tocqueville to Henry Nash Smith and David Potter. Then he tries to find different ways to analyze America and American history. Using William Woodward's article "America as a Culture" from *Journal of American Culture* (Spring, 1988) as his main source, Henriksson

² See Luther S. Luedtke, "The Search for American Character" in *Making America: The Society and Culture of the United States* (Washington, D.C. United States Information Agency, 1987), pp. 7-34.

³ Howard Temperley and Malcolm Bradbury, "Introduction" in *Introduction to American Studies*. (London: Longman, 1981), pp. 17-28.

gives four ways to synthesize American history, which have all played their parts in American historiography from the 1960s to the 1980s. These are the republican synthesis, organizational synthesis, ethnocultural synthesis, and world history synthesis. All of these try to explain what American culture is and how it developed into what it is.

To understand who and what Americans are, and how Americans have shaped their history, and vice versa, Henriksson brings another of Woodward's theoretical division into play. Woodward puts his four syntheses together with different kinds of individualisms that scholars have found in the United States, and from this he has found four different kinds of traditions that have shaped Americans and their culture. These four traditions are the Western tradition (which comes from ancient Greece and Rome), the tradition of the New World (as opposed to the Old World, Europe), the Modern tradition (United States as a home of a continuous modernization process), and the pluralistic tradition (different ethnic identities in the United States). According to Woodward and Henriksson, all these traditions combined will help to explain the "American identity."

Problematic with Henriksson's book is its limited approach to theories and methodology. Significantly, there is no attempt to display different theories and methods that have been used in American Studies from the 1950s to the 1990s, with the only exception being the 1950s intellectual history synthesis school (Smith, Potter, Trachtenberg). Henriksson rightly points out that there has been discourse about whether American Studies has uniform methodology or not, and that very often methods come out of practice, but his examples are drawn from the study of symbols and myths, which have not been studied very seriously in the United States since the 1960s.

The same problem can be seen in Henriksson's chapter on the history of the American Studies. His historiography starts with Crèvecoeur and Tocqueville, continues with Mumford and Parrington, but ends with the founding of the *American Quarterly* in 1949, just before American Studies really started to institutionalize as a discipline. What has happened after that the reader will not learn here. There are no details of the radical changes that the 1960s brought into the discipline, and how new methods and theories were integrated into American Studies from social sciences and other cultural studies such as ethnic studies. Also Henriksson's comment that American Studies is elitist scholarship, concentrating on "manly, elitist, and universally popular themes," is quite wrong at the time this book was published. That was the case in the 1950s and early 1960s, but not anymore. (One reason for this strange argument can be

found in Henriksson's source, which is from 1974.) Had Henriksson read Gene Wise's "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies"⁴ and T. V. Reed's "Theory and Method in American Studies" his coverage of the history of American Studies would have been much broader.

Mick Gidley's edition *Modern American Culture: An Introduction* is a quite good survey book for the American Studies discipline, because of its interdisciplinary approach, which makes it better than the other three books previously discussed, although Luedtke's *Making America* is quite similar in some aspects. *Modern American Culture* is divided into two sections—the first one concentrating on historical, economic, political, and geographical elements of culture, and the second on expressive, or artistic elements of culture—which helps the reader to outline and analyze the term culture, what it includes, and how the term is understood by contemporary scholars.

The first four articles concentrate on explaining the American exceptionalism, American religious and democratic nature, as well as American transcendentalism and pragmatism. These quite conventional themes are discussed in historical perspective, and they do not give much insightful or new information (most of this material can be found also in Luedtke and Bradbury-/Temperley). But for a beginner in American Studies these articles serve as a stepping stone into American cultural history. Also rewarding in these four articles, as in all other articles too, is that they have a further readings list.

Modern American Culture shares with Henriksson's and Luedtke's books the idea of cultural regionalism. Christine Bold's article has a historical approach to regionalism, and she makes comparisons between Howard Odum's 1930s cultural division into six culturally distinctive areas to Raymond Gastil's 1970s division into 13 culturally distinctive areas. What is surprising is that she turns towards Odum's instead of Gastil in her article because it has "firmly lodged in the popular mind." Maybe this is the case with the popular mind, but in reality Gastil, and also Garreau, are closer to the real cultural division in United States that do exist nowadays.

Two articles in *Modern American Culture* are particularly fresh. George Lipsitz's sociohistorical article on white supremacy, racism, and prejudice and how "the others" have fought to create their own identities and culture from the 17th century to the Reagan era is excellent introduction to the contradictory ethnic history of the United States. Berndt Ostendorf's and Stephen Palmié's article on old and new immigration is valuable because of its empha-

4 Gene Wise, "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies," *American Quarterly*, 1979, Vol. 31, pp. 293-337.

sis on recent immigration from Mexico. To give a broad picture of the American culture, Gidley has also included articles on business and consumer culture, urbanization and architecture, and the media. All American Studies scholars know how important these themes are for understanding the American culture. But missing from the book is a discussion on gender, which is a serious weakness, considering how large women's studies and feminist theories are at the moment in American Studies.

The second part of the book deals with expressive forms of the American culture—music, performance and visual arts, fiction and poetry. This makes the book intriguingly interdisciplinary, but it would have been good idea to have included articles on film and television as well, since most scholars consider them, together with popular music, 'the most' American forms of expressive art. The last chapter deals with American cultural criticism. Richard H. King's article is both rewarding and troublesome. His main concentration is in the cultural criticism of the 19th century and early 20th century, and more recent times since the 1960s. King mentions people like Crèvecoeur, Tocqueville, Emerson, Van Wyck Brooks, and Lewis Mumford, and even Max Weber and Gunnar Myrdal, but leaves out Vernon Louis Parrington and the 1950s intellectual history synthesis school. King's approach into American cultural criticism that divides Northern and Southern writers and intellectuals into two different categories is fresh. His approach into the changes that the 1960s brought into American cultural criticism is somewhat provocative, and also different from that of his colleagues in United States.

Gidley's book could have done better in its discussion of methodological approach to study American culture. In most articles the reader must find methodological aspects only from the approach that the writer has chosen for her/his article. Short, but detailed descriptions of both theories and methods of different sub-fields of American Studies, would have been added a needed theoretical and methodological depth. Gidley's book has, on the other hand, succeeded well in giving an introductory view of American culture. Students, and also scholars from other disciplines with an interest in United States, will find this book useful. It is a first step into American culture from which one can pursue her/his own field of interest and then go deeper into the discipline (by using, for example, books from further reading lists). Gidley's book can also be effectively used as a textbook in introductory classes in American Studies when the teacher wants to emphasize the field's interdisciplinary nature.