Alan Shima and Hans Lofgren (eds), *American Studies in the Nordic Countries*. Uppsala Nordic American Studies Reports No. 14 (Uppsala: The Swedish Institute for North American Studies, 1998), 101 pp., ISBN 91-506-1279-4; SEK 120.

Thanks to the initiative of the organizers of the 1997 NAAS conference in Gothenburg, two panels, one with doctoral students the other with professors, provided an opportunity to assess the development, present status, and challenges of American Studies in the Nordic countries. The resulting little book edited by Alan Shima and Hans Lofgren is a valuable contribution to our ongoing reflections on the nature of our scholarly and pedagogical work.

As might be expected, the two panels were different in their approaches to the question about the methodological and institutional implications of current developments in American Studies (7). While the professorial panel give surveys of past developments and present status, stressing institutional aspects, the doctoral students are more inclined to discuss challenges, consider new departures, and stress theoretical aspects. This is as it should be.

Finland has the most interesting news to report on the institutional level. Markku Henriksson and Mikko Toivonen have decided on a sensible division of labor that makes the Finnish contributions more of a piece than those from the other countries. Henriksson has a broad historical sweep, beginning with the work of Pehr Kalm in the 1740s but quickly moving up to the more recent past. Among the Finnish achievements are the annually alternating North American Studies conferences since 1985 in Tampere and Helsinki. Thanks to the generosity of the McDonnell-Douglas Aerospace Corporation, Finland now has its first chair in 'multidisciplinary American Studies, with teaching especially in American society, history, and culture.' (Congratulations, Markku!)

Another exciting development is that North American Studies is one of the four-year national doctoral programs funded by the Ministry of Education and the Finnish Academy. Toivonen gives an instructive account of this program, located in Tampere and starting out with seven graduate students with scholarships in 1995. The program is not only interdisciplinary; it is also inter-university with several additional 'associate' participants who have various funding from their universities. That the program runs counter to institutional departmental organization, however, is a complicating factor. There is some understatement in Toivonen's remark that '[c]rossing over to other disciplines is not encouraged in the Finnish universities' (29). I will return to some of his reflections below. Before we leave Finland, however, it must be noted that while the situation holds promise, it is also precarious. The doctoral program has not received funding for a new four-year period and much will depend on current efforts to get funding from other sources. The candidates will have to have their degrees from traditional departments since Finnish law, as Henriksson has informed me, 'does not recognize a degree in North American Studies.'

While buoyancy characterizes the attitude of the Finns, Rolf Lundén seems more resigned in his account of what he calls 'The Uphill Journey.' The public resistance to institutionalized American Studies may have been greater in Sweden than in the other Nordic countries. While a positive attitude to the United States became part of official Finland's Cold War balancing act, and while the Norwegian government took the initiative to establish chairs in both Russian and American literatures after the Second World War, the Swedish government at first refused to appoint a new professor to the only Swedish chair in American literature (in Uppsala) after Lars Ohnebrink died in 1966. When it was eventually decided to fill the chair in 1968, it was necessary to have Olov Fryckstedt return home from a German university. Lundén's survey of the present situation is largely focused on the Uppsala Department of English, but he also describes the two undergraduate programs in American Studies organized by the Swedish Institute for North American Studies at Uppsala and the Center for North American Studies at Lund.

Lundén is concerned that NAAS may pride itself with labels such as multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary but that it in practice is an association of literary scholars with a

sprinkling of historians. He welcomes the 'fairly recent influx of political scientists into NAAS [as] a healthy trend,' and wonders whether we should not try to attract more representatives from a variety of disciplines. But he is also concerned that 'such proliferation [may] threaten the cohesion of our association' (36).

Dale Carter's Danish story is more optimistic in tone. After giving much the same description of a discipline-based academic structure, he adds that it has not been his experience 'that current departmental structures make cross-disciplinary work impossible. My own department gives me and my American Studies colleagues full freedom to teach inter- and multi-disciplinary courses, as well as courses that you would not expect to find in English Departments, such as U.S. foreign relations or politics and the media' (65-66). One reason for Dale Carter's more up-beat approach to his subject may be that Denmark has indeed become a powerhouse for American Studies in Scandinavia. I would date the ascendancy of Denmark to the appointment of David Nye as professor of American history in Odense in 1992. While keeping up a stream of books of remarkable merit he has become the natural center of an active team of colleagues. He was responsible for the creation of the American Studies Center at Odense in 1992. Aarhus got its center in 1996. For a long period the historian Niels Thorsen at the English Department in Copenhagen was the main editor of *American Studies in Scandinavia* while now the editorship has passed on to David Nye and Carl Pedersen in Odense. As a previous editor of the journal I feel entitled to observe that there has been an improvement in energy and quality under Danish management.

Per Winther has a somewhat different approach than his colleagues, focusing on the teaching of the 'civilization' component in the Departments of English. He gives a survey of differences between the two main approaches to the subject with Oslo and Trondheim representing a social studies/history approach and Tromsø and Bergen along with several colleges representing a text-based cultural studies approach. The only book-length attempt to develop a theoretical basis for culture studies in English Departments in Scandinavia is Frederick Brøgger's (Tromsø) *Culture, Language, Text: Culture Studies within the Study of English as a Foreign Language* (1992), and he argues for the study of texts (widely defined) at the center of American Studies. Ole Moen (Oslo), the most explicit critic of this view, argues for a social science and history approach. The main problem may be that both insist that their scholarly approaches and teaching methods should be normative. Surely the very idea of American Studies invites a liberal and inclusive attitude to approaches, methods, and research materials. Quality of research, of writing, and of results. not ideological or methodological purity should be our criteria for judging each others' work. *Forlig eder!*

The most interesting contributions, however, are by the doctoral students Berndt Clavier (Lund), Henrik Bødker (Odense), and Lene Johannessen (Bergen). In his account of the Finnish Graduate School, Mikko Toivonen points to problems facing doctoral students in small departments in sparsely populated countries, isolated from peers as well as experienced scholars by long distances. This theme is also taken up by Lene Johannessen who claims that 'professional isolation is perhaps one of the strongest characteristics of the graduate student's academic existence.' Contributing to this professional isolation are the minority position of American Studies in the English Departments that host them and the

'rigid disciplinary boundaries which prevent us from collaborating with colleagues in other yet related fields' (99). Her call for 'the creation of a forum for Nordic doctoral students' (101) should be heeded.

Berndt Clavier points to the possibility of 'cross-disciplinary rather than inter-disciplinary' (52) programs by opening up the spaces between departments rather than by creating new ones. This echoes the views of Carter who observes that Danish institutions 'offer at least the building blocks of American Studies, even if not always the cement' (59). Clavier has found the makings of good cement at UCSC, in particular in the encouragement given there for the creation of 'research clusters.' A main difficulty facing innovation at Scandinavian (Clavier writes Swedish) universities is that interdisciplinarity 'always takes the shape of institutionalization and disciplinarity' (54). 'Instead of maintaining our boundaries at all cost we should try to find ways of including the negotiable edges of our disciplines into the solid cores' (52), he writes, and concludes, 'we could perhaps start to build programs, courses and research clusters, between rather than in specific departments' (55).

Perhaps the most controversial contribution is Henrik Bødker's 'The Re-Inscription of Distance: Doing Non-American American Studies in a Diminishing World.' Taking his cue from Sigmund Skard, he sees 'the elimination of certain productive and vital distances' as a major problem in that 'it almost seems as if a great part of contemporary European American Studies were practiced from positions wholly within the United States' (71). He takes issue with both the topics of study and the implied audience of much of the American Studies conducted in our continent and asks whether our 'explicit perspective' should not be through our 'own culture and its history' and our work thus be more 'comparative' (75).

> American Studies in the U.S. is … largely a reaction against the study of America through European methods and materials; what one might tentatively call for at this stage of American Studies in Europe is thus an 'inverse' re-invigoration of American Studies in Europe in the sense that what should be de-emphasized are the materials through which America studies itself while perhaps retaining some of the methods. (77)

Bødker's view may be timely. It certainly is based on reflection. And yet it speaks of the distance in time back to the young Øverland who reacted to what he regarded as the parochial and isolated nature of so much of what went for American Studies in Europe as he was starting out in what to him seems yesterday.

On the one hand much of academic American Studies in Europe is still conducted in the many vernacular languages, which means both that this work does not enter an international scholarly discourse and, consequently, that it has no real peer review. On the other, however, there is the danger that what we do may easily be derivative and must certainly suffer from our distance from American source materials and our second-hand American experience. Our outside perspective may be our most important asset in American Studies. Perhaps we should heed Bødker's mene tekel, increase our awareness of this outside perspective, and make use of its creative potentials rather than be virtual Americans.

A word in closing. Three of the four doctoral students refer to a recent year of study at

an American graduate school sponsored by the Fulbright Program. Surely this program deserves a few words of praise and gratitude from us all as it celebrates its fiftieth anniversary.

Orm Øverland University of Bergen