

Editor's Note

In front of you, dear reader, you have an issue of *American Studies in Scandinavia*, volume 43, number 2, consisting of six articles and four reviews. There is no deliberate theme which combines the texts other than "American Studies," and the texts are the result of individual proposals and the peer-review process. The combination of texts therefore becomes quite arbitrary, but certainly the individual texts put together make up a portrayal and an appraisal of the ongoing investigation named American Studies.

This field is multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary. Thus, in crisscrossing the academy it identifies and opens up disciplinary borders, and it adds to the resonation between, in this case, history, cultural studies, literary studies, film studies, ethnomusicology, political science, in the attempt to explore issues constituting American Studies. Here, the vehicle for this pursuit is the present journal. Texts provide inroads and approaches to American Studies out of investigations pointing in diverse directions. Even so, they make up a whole which is the present issue, and therefore not only the individual investigations but also the junctures, the order of presentation, the interstices between the texts and their juxtaposition open the field of American Studies and add new meanings in a continuous process of drawing and redrawing.

This is a process which covers space and time. Space as territorial area and spheres of influence: from northern Africa to the heart of the country; from the World War II battle fields to the Danish nature centers; from the wasteland of trash to the focal points of the United States, Europe and China. Space in a more comprehensive sense refers to the national, hemispheric and global inferences of American Studies. Time implies both historical time and time of publication. Historically, the present texts boldly span the myths of Native American and Viking bygones, the narratives of eighteenth-century captivity, early twentieth-century film history, the aftermath of World War II, the dismal presence of the subversion of nature

and its dystopian prospects, future scenarios for political influence, thus including a dim, distant past, a number of historical vantage points, and stretching forward to a future of fear and hope. Time may also refer to time of publication. As a witness the present issue of *American Studies in Scandinavia* provides an insight into what questions were considered relevant for American Studies at the beginning of the 21st century.

In addition, the present explorations add to something that may be more difficult to grasp, namely American Studies as a metonym for universal, global concerns: What is captivity? What makes film the medium for melodrama? How can one war help to overcome another? What is the attraction of performance? What are the implications of the disposal of waste? What are the imbrications of national and international politics?

Thus the present delineation of American Studies, the present juxtaposition of texts, is metonymic. Let me explain: In his text "Borders, Bodies, and Writing: American Barbary Coast Captivity Narratives, 1816-1819," Stephen F. Wolfe departs from the transatlantic Barbary Coast captivity narratives and an analysis of skin and body to find that in these tales, which constitute a transatlantic conversation subverting generic conventions, skin is a border, and the body provides a "series of metaphorical/allegorical equivalences with the body politic, the nation state, or the enslaved body" (xx). These accounts of terror and desire enacted on the body take place within a historical period of dramatic social, political, and cultural change. However, by delimiting the analysis in time and place and specific genre Wolfe's analysis at the same time extends the relevance of its own object of captivity study.

On the other hand, Bert Cardullo's reflection of the relationship between melodrama and film out of the example of Griffith's film *Way Down East*, or rather, the advantages of film as a medium for the enactment of melodrama, not only explores the aesthetic aspects of the transfer of drama to film, but also contextualizes this in the cinematography of D. W. Griffith's oeuvre. His text, "Theatrical Melodrama, Dramatic Film, and the Rise of American Cinema: The Case of Griffith's *Way Down East*" therefore situates such reflection of generic transfer in American film history, and at the same it analyzes the human endeavors—hardships, defeats, and victories—of the protagonists in this particular melodrama, thus universalizing the conflicts and pointing forward to subsequent elaborations of melodrama in film.

In her reading of film as the pervasive genre, Anne Mørk considers World War II in film history and finds a revival of this topic in the 1990s. She

identifies the mythology of World War II as it is expressed in the miniseries *Band of Brothers*, and she finds that the revival here serves two purposes: it heals the wounds after Vietnam and it reminds the American people of the glory and triumph of World War II. Her suggestive title, "Will This Picture Help Win the War?: *Band of Brothers* and the Mythology of World War II" indicates, as she concludes, that the revival, the way it is performed in *Band of Brothers*, may have helped the United States to win its other wars, be they military or cultural, thus underlining the importance of media—film and TV—for ideology and attitude.

Tara Browner identifies pow-wow as "an event where American Indians of all nations come to celebrate their culture through the medium of music and dance" (83). What are the implications if this event is enacted on sites unrelated to the origin of pow-wow performance, as in her case sites in Denmark and Germany? As a participating ethnomusicologist, this is what Tara Browner considers in her text "Tradition, Appropriation, and Mimesis: American Indian Style Pow-Wow Singing and Dancing in Denmark." It is the observation from her interviews with participants that in this transatlantic transfer, authenticity and the mimetic are negotiated with European cultural concepts both in a Danish adherence to stylistic authenticity and a German deviation from such concern, which reflects the influence from cultural traditions and from the sites on which the pow-wows are enacted.

"Everything's connected" is the phrase that Erik Kielland-Lund finds is "the most importantly pervasive mantra" in Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (104)—and not only relevant in that context I would add as the editor of *American Studies in Scandinavia*. In his text, "The Subversion of Nature in Don DeLillo's *Underworld*," Erik Kielland-Lund departs from the phrase to consider the interactions of consumption and waste and the military-industrial complex. He reads the "underworld" as a state where waste and trash dominate a growing nature, a high price to be paid for subverting the natural order. Out of this analysis, he posits *Underworld* in the context of Nature Writing and links the novel to *The Great Gatsby* as a wasteland of refuse in which we manage our garbage. This definitely makes a universal application of the context of American Studies.

What is the future of the United States as a superpower? Erik Åsard discusses the question in the final text of this issue of *American Studies in Scandinavia*, "The End of the American Era: Challenges to U.S. Supremacy in the 21st Century." It is his thesis that the United States will continue to be the world's leading global actor but from the position of a fragile su-

perpower. He bases his prediction on a number of considerations: the external relations—what he calls the European challenge and the Chinese challenge—but more important, he estimates, will be the domestic problems which the U.S. faces, namely the budget deficit and the trade deficit. “The acute danger,” Erik Åsard puts it, “comes from within, not from abroad” (133), thus placing the U.S. on the national/international scales, in an arena of global economy and power-play.

Thus, the texts identify and extend the land of American Studies, and in their resonance and conversation they include American Studies in the land of global concerns. To conclude the territorial metaphoric and relate it to the title of this journal: what is Scandinavian here? Well, most of the texts originate in Scandinavia—Norway, Denmark, and Sweden; one of the topics is firmly based in Scandinavia; but above all, the journal title, *American Studies in Scandinavia*, in its *pars pro toto*, underlines the international dimensions of the field. That is as it should be.

Reviews in this issue take us from the paradoxes of American Literary History to the literatures of Los Angeles, from Native American Identity to the Edgar Allan Poe Bicentennial.

Welcome to partake in the reading of the present texts! A look ahead tells us that the forthcoming special issue will apply the spatial dimension in a more definite direction: “Nordic Spaces in North America.”

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