

The Eternal, Irresoluble Tensions in American Studies

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***Abstract:** This article discusses two tensions within American Studies, the first between discipline and interdisciplinarity, the second between national and transnational orientations. It argues that these tensions have characterized American Studies since at least the 1950s and that they are still awaiting their resolution. The article also proposes that recent controversies between representatives of the myth-and-symbol school and members of »New« American Studies can be understood in the light of the discipline-interdiscipline tension and that the kind of research that Transnational American Studies advocates has been performed, albeit with a different theoretical inflection, for decades by, primarily, European Americanists.*

***Key words:** American Studies – transnational – interdisciplinarity – emigration – immigration – ethnicity – American influence*

Two interlinked tensions have characterized but also troubled American Studies since the emergence of this field of study some one hundred years ago: on the one hand, the tension between the conviction that the individual discipline is the basis for American Studies vs. the belief that true interdisciplinarity is possible; on the other, the tension between a national focus and an inter/transnational orientation. The present article attempts to address these contending approaches from a historical perspective, also contrasting U.S. American Studies with non-American, particularly European, American Studies.¹

1. The present article is published as one of several that have appeared in the past few years in *American Studies in Scandinavia* analyzing and debating the development of U.S. and European American Studies: Jørn Brøndal and Dag Blanck, "The Concept of Being Scandinavian-American," *ASinS* 34:2 (Autumn 2002); Marc Luccarelli, "Rethinking American Studies for the 21st Century: A Critical Commentary," *ASinS* 36:1 (Spring 2004); Lene Johannessen, "'The Insincere Embrace': Canons and the Market," *ASinS* 36:2 (Autumn 2004);

The first part of my discussion will be devoted to the academic discipline vs. interdisciplinarity, to the tension between specialization and integration, tradition and renewal, or, to use the terms of Sigmund Skard, the grand old man of Nordic American Studies, to the relationship between American Studies and American Studies "Proper." The confrontation between these two ways of dealing with the study of America has existed since the beginning of this field of study, and it is still an unresolved issue. The pivotal texts I will use for this discussion are Skard's "The American Studies Movement," delivered as a lecture at the second Nordic Association for American Studies Conference in 1964 and printed in the proceedings *USA in Focus*, on the one hand, and three articles from the Spring 2005 issue of *American Literary History*, on the other. In analyzing these texts I will put the searchlight on the particular question of discipline and interdisciplinarity.

The second half of the article will focus on an equally troubling tension in American Studies, the one based on geographical criteria, whether American Studies should restrict itself to study the specificity of culture within the borders of the United States or whether it should have a cross-cultural, international, comparative orientation. I will trace how the tradition in Europe as well as the United States of these contending directions, with a special emphasis on Transnational American Studies now launched as a "new" development in U. S. American Studies, goes back to at least the 1950s.

I. American Studies vs. American Studies "Proper"

In his 1964 article, "The American Studies Movement," Sigmund Skard gives an overview of American Studies on both sides of the Atlantic from the eighteenth century up to the 1960s. He draws a picture of the meandering development in American Studies, at times favoring the individual discipline, at other times advocating an approach of integrated, interdis-

Orm Øverland, "Studying Myself in the United States – Studying the United States in Myself," *ASinS* 37:2 (Autumn 2005). Two special issues of *ASinS* on American Studies have also appeared: "Redefining American Studies: Not English Only," ed. Orm Øverland, *ASinS* 32:1 (Spring 2000) and one on Americanization, eds. Erik Åsard and Elisabeth Herion Sarafidis, *ASinS* 35:2 (Autumn 2003).

ciplinary studies. First of all, Skard makes it clear that American studies is a European invention. The first real scholarship on American culture was produced by people like Filippo Mazzei (1788) and de Tocqueville. Up until the end of the nineteenth century these studies were generalizations, syntheses of American civilization as a whole, often seen in comparison with world developments. In the 1860s and 1870s American studies starts to become an academic subject. In the 1870s a chair in the study of America is established in Strasbourg; the first American Institute is set up in Berlin in 1910.

Simultaneously with the academization of the subject in Germany in the late 1800s, a general shift takes place from a synthetic/holistic approach toward an increased emphasis on specialization. Disciplines are defined, departments and institutes are established, separated from each other. As a consequence, a deep suspicion of generalizations becomes common. The German tradition of specialization, of constructing disciplines, spreads to the United States, where each specialty tends to isolate itself from its neighboring disciplines.

But soon enough, in the decades around the turn of the century, a reaction against specialization occurred in Europe. Initiatives to further a more synthetic, integrated American Studies were taken in France and Germany. In France, the subject "Literature et Civilisation Americaines" was established, and in Germany, to protest against the atomistic approach of historians, a synthetic and speculative *Kulturkunde* came into existence. Around 1912, Skard writes, "Karl Lamprecht's interdepartmental Institute of World Civilization proclaimed as part of its program to see America as well as other nations from the aspects of social mass movements and the morphology of cultures" ("The American Studies Movement" 144). Lamprecht's initiative sounds to me like one of the precursors of presentday transnational American Studies.

After WWI, American Studies continued to grow in France and Germany. In 1918 Charles Cestre was appointed by Sorbonne to the first permanent European chair in "American literature and civilization." He insisted on the idea of many-sidedness as distinctive of American Studies. Several other chairs with the same designation appeared, and Collège de France established a full professorship in American Civilization. In Germany in the 1920s *Geistesgeschichte* and comparative research became common in order to study the soul of a nation, and

demands for *Auslandskunde* were raised. In 1921, a program for *Amerikakunde* was formulated, a new, interdisciplinary study of American civilization integrating history, literature, and economics.

However, the resistance to this newfangledness was strong from the established disciplines. In their harsh objections the critics held that “all *Kulturkunde*, whether German or foreign, runs the risk of dilettantism” (146). The advocates of the specialized disciplines were unsuccessful, however, and *Kulturkunde* was appropriated with a twist in 1933 by the Nazi government. In the years to follow, making use of *Auslandskunde*, Hitler could generalize about races and nations, not least the Americans. American Studies, Skard points out, thus became thoroughly discredited. In the Soviet Union a similar manipulation of American Studies took place, in which America was one part of a coherent study of the entire Capitalist world.

If we cross the Atlantic, the same picture of opposition between disciplinary and interdisciplinary American Studies is repeated. In the period after WWI and up to and past WWII, American universities, according to Skard, were characterized by “the traditional emphasis on foreign and past civilizations, particularly British, at the expense of America itself; the academic departmentalism with its formal narrowness; the worship of facts and details; and the fear of large views and value judgments” (147). Gradually a reaction grew; there was a need and urge to emphasize the unity of the nation, to redefine its heritage and give a sense of direction to its culture. There was thus a reform movement for a new synthesis of knowledge. The beginnings were very modest. By the end of the 1920s there were no more than three American Studies programs in the United States. One of the reasons for this slow start was that advocates of American literature were involved in establishing their own subject as a separate discipline. The rest of this story is well-known, how the American Studies Association was started in 1951 and how the myth-and-symbol school grew strong and influential; I will have reason to return to this form of holistic American Studies below.

The catchword of the American Studies of the 1950s was “integration,” designating a fusion of disciplines and a fusion of the various aspects of American society; the goal was to study the United States as a whole, to search for the essential “American” identity. And now we are entering Sigmund Skard’s own time of writing, the late 1950s and early

1960s. Skard draws a picture of internal as well as external criticism and opposition. He points to the cultural conservatism, not least in the English departments, which looked at “the motley, incoherent and ‘pluralistic’ civilization of modern USA with aversion and concern” (151). But he also questions the practical results of the new scholarly field. The overwhelming majority of the 1900 institutions of higher learning in the United States taught American Studies in some discipline or other, but only 120 of them had some form of integrated arrangement for American Studies. Relatively few American universities had established graduate departments in “American Studies proper.” The tension, then, between disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies must have been considerable at the beginning of the 1960s.

A third problem, according to Skard, and which will be further addressed in the second half of my discussion, was the parochialism and narrowness of American Studies in the United States. The lack of comparative studies was striking; the students knew, for instance, nothing of their European roots. Nor were American scholars aware of American Studies research going on outside America. Voices were raised demanding that all American Studies should by definition be comparative. Another fear uttered by critics was that the somewhat limitless scope of American Studies may lead to intellectual looseness or cheap popularity, allowing the students to know less and less about more and more. It is easy to guess where such criticism came from. These critics held that the “crossdepartmental study of widely divergent fields may lead to an amateurish toying with methods and knowledge within disciplines which, each in itself, requires a lifetime of concentrated study” (153). Still other critics, or maybe the same ones, argued that American Studies was merely a façade, that integration existed only on paper, that programs consisted of lectures and courses given by scholars in specialized disciplines. A final reservation was that American civilization is too complex to be synthesized.

Skard’s own remedy to some of these problems was the following: “The undoubted danger of dilettantism involved in such a transgression of boundaries can only be countered by a sharpened critical attitude within each individual field concerned” (159). This sounds somewhat like what a disillusioned Daniel Aaron said to me when I happened to meet him in the late 1980s: “Back to the disciplines.”

Let us now take a giant leap forward – 41 years to be more precise, to the Spring 2005 issue of *American Literary History*. What has happened during those four decades? Skard ended his survey by calling the debate over American Studies a “long and inconclusive bickering” whose “outcome remains ambiguous and is bound to continue to be so” (170). Are we now any closer to a resolution to the tension between discipline and interdisciplinarity? Chameleonlike, the issues have shifted color, but basically, it seems to me they are the same. Before we turn to the three articles in *American Literary History*, a few general words may be needed about American Studies between 1968, which Leo Marx has called the Great Divide, and the present situation, with a particular focus on the opposition between discipline and American Studies “proper.” The questioning of integrated American Studies of the 1940-60s from members of established disciplines has obviously continued also in the period when American studies shifted towards an interrogation of gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity and has become even more heated, it seems to me, in the present-day age when American Studies has moved closer to cultural studies and into transnational and postnational American Studies. But there has also been a tension among those who represent integrated American Studies, between members of the myth-and-symbol school and the two later inflections of American Studies, a confrontation that could very well be analyzed in terms of specialization and integration.

In the Spring 2005 issue of *American Literary History*, Leo Marx, in “On Recovering the ‘Ur’ Theory of American Studies,” divides American Studies into BD and AD – Before the Divide, 1968, and After the Divide – and gives his perspective on the development. He depicts BD American Studies as an “essentially holistic, affirmative, nationalistic project.” Its scholars believed in both the project and in America. But he also acknowledges that American Studies never found an interdisciplinary method, and self-ironically admits that he and his colleagues “managed to ignore, in keeping with the nationalistic, patriarchal, racist, hegemonic master narrative to which they subscribed, the sharp differences of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexual preference that divided Americans into virtually separate groups” (123). In the 1970s, he says, this holistic unifying view was denounced and repudiated, and AD Americanists turned their attention to “concrete particulars, to the precise, close-up, empirical, often quasi-ethnographic study of the beliefs and behavior

of clearly defined, relatively small, even face-to-face local groups with shared identities” (124). He claims that it became far more important to the AD Americanists to study the dividing than the cohering forces at work in America.

It may sound as if Marx is accusing the AD Americanists of having run back to their respective disciplines, back to specialization, abandoning their commitment to interdisciplinary studies. This is obviously not true, nor does Marx level such a critique. The work of the Americanists focusing on gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity was still interdisciplinary but giving attention not to American society as a whole but to distinct smaller aspects of it. Race, gender, etc. are obviously best studied with an interdisciplinary approach. What Marx questions is rather that the AD scholars disregarded the search for a unified “American” specificity.

Without making a distinction between the Americanists of the 1970s and 1980s, on the one hand, and the development in the 1990s in American Studies, on the other – they are all AD americanists to Marx – Marx launches an attack on the latter group, which he defines as “an energetic cohort of vocal, theoretically inclined, ultra-Left Americanists” (130). He strongly opposes the attempts to delete or redefine the “American” in American Studies, and counts Alan Wolfe, after his review in *The New Republic*, as a brother in arms. Marx agrees with Wolfe’s extreme views: “[Wolfe] concludes that many of these scholars, in particular those who write in the unintelligible jargon of critical theory, have ‘developed a hatred for America so visceral that it makes one wonder why they bother studying America at all’” (130).

American Literary History invited two scholars, George Lipsitz and Amy Kaplan, to respond to Marx’s piece, and it becomes clear from these three contributions how ideologically inflamed the issue of American Studies has become. Lipsitz claims in his article “Our America” that Marx’s “‘America’ is an America of white male propertied power, of imperial ambition, of collectivist coercion disguised as the defense of individual freedom ... In the name of unity, our leaders seek unanimity. They seek to foster through fear what they cannot inspire by faith. When they cannot lead us, they lie to us. They insist that the story of America must be a unified narrative told from one point of view. They want a land where we dance to their tune, not our land of a thousand dances” (136).

So, while Marx implies that the New Americanists are unpatriotic America-haters, Lipsitz counters by implying that Marx is George W. Bush's errand-boy. It is time, Lipsitz holds, for American Studies to assume "our moral responsibility to engage with the concerns, injuries, and aspirations of a world wider than any one nation" (139). "Our America," he concludes, "and our American Studies should be one that hears [the cries of the poor and desperate], no matter what theoretical or epistemological form they take" (140).

Amy Kaplan's response is titled "A Call for a Truce," but it turns out, as she starts countering Marx's arguments, that she herself has difficulties accepting a truce – which she finally admits. Kaplan holds that Marx caricatures and demeans the work of the AD scholars. According to Kaplan, Marx laments the loss of the original belief in America and the ur-theory of American Studies, a loss he attributes to "disillusionment ensuing upon the US war in Vietnam, the importation of European theory, a focus on social conflict and divisions, and the fragmentation of scholarship into smaller subdivisions of race, gender, ethnicity, class, and sexuality" (142). Kaplan herself sees the same development entirely differently: "Looking back at the last thirty years of scholarship, I see a breath-taking proliferation of innovative work about the structures and institutions of social oppression; about the vitality of different social groups, individuals and alliances to struggle against and transform those institutions; and about the creativity to invent and express alternative forms of belonging to different local and global communities, of which the nation is only one. Where I find a rich, complex, and multivalent portrait of America emerging from this work, Marx finds a diminishment of the original project" (142-43).

I do not want to disregard the ideological differences of this battle of the Americanists, but it seems to me that one aspect of the debate concerns the age-old tension between discipline and the interdisciplinary. Seemingly, part of the problem is that Marx has, retrospectively and maybe nostalgically, started to regard the holistic American Studies of the 1940s up to the 1960s as a discipline, a discipline which has later, after the Great Divide, been betrayed, fragmented, subdivided by an even more interdisciplinary form of American Studies which has abandoned the study of America as a whole. And his argument with the ultra-Left Americanists of the 1990s may in part stem from his irritation with their foregrounding of "the transnational and *post-disciplinary* critical impulse

in contemporary American Studies,” (my emphasis) as the brochure advertizing the 2005 Summer Institute at Dartmouth phrases it. What “post-disciplinary” means, exactly, is difficult to know, apart from the term expressing a critique of earlier forms of integrated, interdisciplinary American Studies for having been too dependent on individual disciplines. I would not be surprised if Marx would repeat what Aaron said: “Back to the disciplines.” Nor would I be surprised if he regarded the old school of Americanists as doing in-depth research in comparison to the dilettantism of the New Americanists.

To return to the situation in Europe, I also want to return to Sigmund Skard’s picture of American Studies in Europe after WWII. There were attempts after the war, Skard writes, to introduce “integrated” or “cross-departmental” American Studies in Germany. These attempts were complete failures. Interest in American Studies as such was strong, but there was a “stern determination” to establish such studies within the established disciplines. There was, naturally enough, great suspicion of all kinds of area studies, or *Auslandkunde*, because of its previous connection with Nazism. But that was not the only reason. Skard points perceptively to the main reason for the difference between the United States and Europe on this issue – that the national conditions were different. Americans are born into their civilization and language, Europeans are outsiders to that civilization. Skard says: “Outside of the English-speaking nations even an elementary knowledge of this background has to be acquired with sweat and tears, and always imperfectly, within the framework of the established disciplines; there is no ‘integrated’ approach to English intonation” (“The American Studies Movement” 163). As a consequence, in Germany the study of American civilization took place within the existing disciplines, primarily English and History, and, as Skard says, “‘integration’ in the American sense does not enter into the picture at all” (164). Separate courses on American culture were offered together in a study program, but, as Hans Galinsky, one of the important European Americanists of the 1960s, pointed out, “integration between the subjects is hopefully supposed to take place within the mind of the ideal student who attends all these heterogeneous courses” (165).

Concerning the Nordic countries Skard gives the following picture of the 1960s. In Denmark and Iceland American Studies were in their infancy. “In Finland, Norway, and Sweden the subject is now firmly

entrenched in the traditional departments ... but so far, there has been hardly any time to spare for organized integrated work" (166). As an example of Skard's impression, one may mention the fact that in 1962 two positions in American Studies were established at Uppsala university, one in history, one in literature, both financed by ACLS money. As far as I remember, no co-operation existed between the two fields. However, and this is a curious piece of information, in the conference volume from the second NAAS conference in 1964, there is a report from Sweden which says that an "entirely new subject," American Civilization, is being inaugurated at Uppsala university: "The aim is to concentrate on five areas of study: American history, American literature, sociology, art, and geography or music. The plans have been accepted by the university but await final approval from the Chancellor" (Skard, *USA in Focus* 200). However, this new subject never materialized.²

II. Transnational American Studies: Old Wine in New Bottles, or New Wine in Old?

Both Skard's overview and the debate summarized above between Marx and Lipsitz and Kaplan did not only concern the tension between discipline and interdisciplinarity, but, equally so, the tension between the national and transnational orientations within American Studies. Marx clearly feels that the AD scholars have betrayed the nationalistic project, and Lipsitz and Kaplan, equally explicitly, demonstrate their commitment to American Studies that include a "world wider than any one nation" and "global communities, of which the nation is only one." So let me now shift the searchlight and deal more in detail with the history of the tension between the national and the transnational. As I will show, this doubleness has existed from the inception of American Studies; transnational American Studies has been practiced for decades in the United States, but primarily in Europe, albeit in slightly different forms and with a shifting theoretical framework.

2. The minutes from the University Board, the Humanities Faculty Board, and the Language Section Board between 1962 and 1968 contain no reference to such a discipline or area study having been proposed.

In the 1990s, "New" American Studies started deconstructing traditional models of nationalist synthesis; the search for some essential "American" identity has now been abandoned and has been "shown to be as impossible as the old chimera of the 'Great American Novel'" (Giles 525). In his 1998 article "Circling the Spheres: A Dialogue," Laurence Buell lets professor B say: "In the nineties there's been a striking push in African American studies to go beyond stressing the internal teleology ... to develop a comparative approach or scene of negotiation across ethnic or national borders. I'm thinking of Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, Sollors on interracialism, Douglas on Manhattan in the twenties" (471). Professor B here draws attention to a general shift in U.S. American Studies of the 1990s – the development toward what has been termed transnational, trans-Atlantic, hemispheric, pan-American American studies, depending on which geographical constellation one has in mind. Numerous manifestations of this shift may be mentioned. In 1993, Cathy Davidson described how Duke University had started a cross-disciplinary, multinational, multilingual "Seminar on the Americas" program "that has me reading everything from Belizean fiction to political analyses of Cree land and resource rights in Quebec" (134). In 1995, Eric Cheyfitz proposed the creation of "Americas Cultural Studies," a social project combining theory and practice (843). In 1998, Janice Radway discussed the possibility of changing the name of ASA to either the International Association for the Study of the United States or the Inter-American Studies Association, suggestions she herself rejected (18, 20). A few years ago the International Association of American Studies was formed, with the aim of studying the Americas.

Various combinations of Pan-American studies have been suggested: North-American studies, i.e. studies that also include Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean and the near Latin American countries (Pease 7); studies of both the Americas (Radway 20, Porter 504); Pacific Rim Studies and Cross-Atlantic Studies. Concerning the latter, Buell lets professor C express the view that "a modest ... first step that would test Americanists' powers of stretchability would be for U.S. literary studies to make the 'Atlantic culture' move more than it does. Even if it were just a matter of doing a little more by way of Anglo-American comparative work" (478).

While many Americanists have enthusiastically embraced this new development within their field, others, both American and European – like

J. Gerald Kennedy, Heinz Ickstadt, and David Nye – have voiced their concern as to the dangers involved in such transnational studies. Kennedy has pointed out that “transnational studies by Paul Gilroy, Paul Giles, and Kirsten Silva Gruesz have indeed redefined ‘American’ literary studies by problematizing its boundaries. But we neglect national myths and foundational narratives at the risk of exempting nationalism itself from certain forms of interrogation” (2). Ickstadt has warned that such vast and culturally diversified studies run the risk of “promoting academic dilettantism, however well-intended and progressive [they] may be” (14). In his paper, “American Studies in an Age of Globalization,”³ Ickstadt referred to Spivak who sees the danger that studies of such global scope “become so diluted that all linguistic specificity or scholarly depth in the study of culture is [...] ignored” (Ickstadt 15, from Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* [1999] 170). Another danger, apart from neglect of the national perspective and scholarly dilettantism, is the one of imperialism. If U.S. Americanists only look outward from the United States and refuse to see the reciprocal nature of the exchanges involved, such studies may mean appropriation of other cultures and, as Radway puts it, a “troublesome imperialist gesture” (21). Similarly, Gregory Jay has expressed his fear that the introduction of transnational American Studies “could end up repeating the history of colonial imperialism at the level of academic study” (in Porter 499). A fourth limitation is the danger that transnational American Studies may study non-American cultures only as they affect life in the United States. Desmond and Dominguez claim, for instance, that the study of the relationship between Latin America and the United States “is usually limited to analyses of migration of people from Latin America to the United States, the historical contests over the U.S. border, the theorization of cultural borderlands, and the development of a Hispanic population in the United States” (476). Doris Friedensohn expresses similar reservations: “For many United States Americanists, the possibility of doing comparative work is a welcome corrective to our parochialism. However, we rarely have the grounding in a foreign culture which foreign Americanists possess” (79). Leo Marx would surely agree with all these critics in their objections to taking the “American” out of American Studies.

3. Lecture delivered at the EAAS conference in Bourdeaux, March 22-25, 2002.

As an example of transnational American studies, let me quote a somewhat long passage:

Current interpreters repudiate the previous notion of consensus, and stress the discords and perplexities of America's evolution. A growing number of scholars in the United States are attracted by the comparative approach, which seeks to relate American life and thought to that of other nations. In a way, every interpretation of American identity has done this. The novelty is that past interpretations dwelt upon the *difference* of the United States from other nations. The new approach is ready to stress the *similarities* ... Instead of looking for the unique, quintessentially *American* aspect of a particular theme, the new challenge – amazingly obvious once it is stated, and yet amazingly neglected in recent decades – is to see the United States in a wider context, with its own peculiarities ... but also with its persistent involvement in a wider, Euro-American and world realm. (Walker 52)

Judging by the main drift of this quotation – if not its discourse – one might suspect that it was written in the 1990s. However, it was written thirty-five years ago, in 1971, by Marcus Cunliffe, the British scholar, in an article called “American Studies in Europe.” The article appeared in *American Studies Abroad*, edited by Robert H. Walker, a volume that gathered articles previously published in *American Studies International*. Cunliffe's article is one of self-criticism. He comes to the conclusion that in 1971 European Americanists had on the whole not yet “said startlingly fresh things about the United States.” Referring to what Henry Adams wrote to Henry James about their generation being a set of “improvised Europeans,” Cunliffe suggests that European Americanists are “improvised Americans” who have “so successfully acclimated ourselves that we have ceased to possess a distinctive, European viewpoint.” (51) As a remedy to this scholarly provincialism, he points out that European Americanists enjoy special advantages in that they can take a larger, binocular view of the United States. More specifically he suggests the comparative approach referred to above, which for the first time gives European Americanists the prospect of “joining the dialogue on at least equal terms, of presenting revised interpretations, and of examining the United States in a wide perspective.” Down that path lies, according to Cunliffe, “the possibility of a new consciousness” (52).

Walker's volume consists of numerous articles reporting on the status of American Studies in countries around the world. Several of these reports emphasize the existence of or the desire to implement a comparative approach. The report from Argentina, “American Studies in

Argentina” by Rolando Costa Picazo, points out that Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, before he became President of Argentina in 1868, founded a periodical, *Ambas Américas* (Both Americas), whose aim was, as he wrote in the first issue, the following: “For reciprocal convenience, the two Americas must engage in intellectual dialogue and establish means of communication” (Walker 40). In that spirit of reciprocity and comparison, American Studies in Argentina was later founded, according to Picazo. The Argentine Association of American Studies was founded in 1966, stressing the need for a comparative approach, carrying out a program of activities that would “contribute to the scientific study of the United States in Argentina and Argentina in the United States.” The association organized conferences with themes like “Historical and Cultural Processes in the United States and Argentina, 1880-1940,” with workshops like “Land Occupation in Both Countries” and “Humor in American and Argentine Literature.”

In the article on American Studies in Great Britain, J. E. Morpurgo laments that British scholars had written far too many studies on the “use of the semi-colon in the novels of Thomas Wolfe” and not enough pondered a comparative approach. He writes that he is convinced that in the next few years “the prime emphasis of British-based American Studies must be on comparison and the consideration of interaction ... At all levels the future strength of American Studies in Britain is likely to be based,” he asserts, “upon the rich possibilities of American-British Studies. Happily for us the frontier between American Studies and American-British Studies is not clearly drawn” (Walker 57). Peter Buitenhuis, director of the North American Studies Programme at McGill University, Montreal, gives in the same book a survey of American Studies in Canada. The Canadian Association for American Studies came into existence in 1964, and its members soon realized that a “pure” study of the United States was impossible, and, as Buitenhuis writes, “that, of necessity, the comparatist approach was implicit in our activities.” “At one general meeting it was even suggested,” he continues, “that the name of the Association be changed to the Canadian Association for Canadian and American Studies ... The word American is, of course, an umbrella large enough to shelter anything going on within North America – or South for that matter, although questions about the latter have not yet arisen” (Walker 36). The CAAS organized in the latter part of the 1960s confer-

ences and published proceedings with themes like *Canada and the United States in the Great Depression*, *War and Society in North America*, and "Art and Nature in North America." However, in the nationalist Canada of the late 1960s, such a comparative approach was not always applauded; as one critic put it: "attempts to homogenize the two countries ... condescends [sic] to Canadian problems and is blind to Canadian needs" (37).

As a contrast to all the foreign perspectives in the volume, there is one article on "Recent Trends in American Studies in the United States" by David W. Marcell. Here nothing is said of the advantage of comparing United States culture to that of other nations. To illustrate the "recent trends" in U.S. American Studies, Marcell describes courses and programs in the field at various American universities. He offers us as an example a "core course" at the University of Denver on "Individualism in America" which is "designed to examine and evaluate the ways in which Americans have defined themselves as persons and as a people ... Its central theme is individualism and its manifestations as a social value, in social behavior, national myths, and self-identification. During the past year the course focused on the writings of Jefferson, Thoreau, Emerson, Whitman, Lincoln, Andrew Carnegie, William Graham Sumner, and John Dewey" (Walker 27-28). Marcell lists other courses like "American Personality and the Creative Arts" at Wisconsin State which intends to illustrate the "distinctive features of the American personality" through, again, the works of white males like Franklin, Frank Lloyd Wright, Charles Ives, Albert Ryder, Melville, William Whyte, Whitman, Sandburg, and Aaron Copeland. The focus on national specificity here seems total, but, as we know, also in the United States there existed comparatist, international initiatives in American Studies.

I have devoted much time to Walker's *American Studies Abroad* because, to me, it raises the question whether the new developments in U.S. American Studies towards a transnational perspective are so new after all. In his self-criticism, Marcus Cunliffe not only called European Americanists "improvised Americans," he also proclaimed that if they did not assume a comparative approach, they would be "doomed to scholarly provincialism" (Walker 51). Questions we might ask ourselves are: What happened to the desire for and the attempts at transnational American Studies that obviously existed in 1971 in both the United

States and other parts of the world? And, who ended up in scholarly provincialism, the Americans or the non-Americans?

Transnational American Studies thus seems to have a longer history than what is commonly held, going back to at least the 1950s, and there are strong indications that American Studies in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s contemplated moving in the direction of an internationalized perspective, which did not come about. If not the majority, at least a substantial number of non-American, particularly European, Americanists seem to have invested early in comparative, trans-Atlantic studies, more so than their colleagues in the United States. It also seems clear that, when it comes to comparative studies, communication was for a very long time more or less non-existent between Europe and the United States.

One may draw attention to three examples of the early awareness among U.S. Americanists of the need for a comparative method and of the hegemony at the time of national(istic) American Studies. The first example comes from 1948, when Tremaine McDowell in his *American Studies* speaks strongly in favor of comparative courses on the United States and Foreign Civilizations as being the "perhaps most profitable" for American Studies, deploring the lack of such courses in the country. He holds that

we and the world outside rarely meet in the same classroom; America is disastrously isolated from Europe and from Asia by the oceans of departmentalism. No additions to college and university curriculums can contribute more to world understanding and likewise to American Studies than courses which in themselves bridge the Atlantic and the Pacific. (65)

In 1961, at the first conference organized by the Nordic Association for American Studies (founded in 1959), Kenneth B. Murdock, who had spent much time at the universities of Uppsala, Oslo, and Copenhagen, gave a lecture in which he, having stated that he was proud to have been part of establishing an American Studies program at Harvard in 1939, gave voice to a certain anxiety that parallels Skard's fears, discussed above, concerning the growing parochialism and chauvinism of U.S. American Studies:

But I have grave misgivings as to some of the results in some American institutions. In spite of the efforts of the leaders of the American Studies Association, there has been an alarming tendency toward chauvinism, toward a fanatic devotion to every American subject, toward the exaltation of every American book or every American notion as good because American, and a terrifying disposition to act as if to know the work of Jefferson or Hamilton, Emerson or Melville, Hemingway or Faulkner, William James or John Dewey, the painter Cole or the architect Sullivan, were an excuse for forgetting Bacon or Milton, Machiavelli or Voltaire, Coleridge or Goethe, Proust or Baudelaire, Strindberg or Ibsen. Too many scholars have proceeded as if comprehension of American writers and thinkers could be fully realized without sound knowledge of those of Europe or of classical antiquity ... We discourse in scholarly fashion on American romanticism and know little of English, German or French romantics ...; we talk of the "American Way," of "American know-how," as if we could define them, although in most cases we cannot, largely because we have nothing to compare them with, no points of reference with which to measure them, no broad horizon against which to judge their true stature in proper perspective. (Åhnebrink, ed., *Amerika och Norden* 191)

Here one may point not only to the fact that the dominant American Studies at the time, according to Murdock, seems to have been chauvinistic, but also to the fact that, in the listing of only white males, it was thoroughly gender and color blind.

In the volume *American Studies in Transition* from 1964, similar voices are heard. One is that of Lawrence W. Chisolm from Yale, who in his contribution, "Cosmotopian Possibilities," argues that to avoid ethnocentric error American Studies should adopt cross-cultural thinking. We should learn, he holds, "to think habitually in comparative cultural terms," to engage a "systematic study of and experience in several cultures, our own and at least two others." He, interestingly enough, mentions a Swedish example: "The clarity of Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* owed much, clearly, to comparative cultural perspective." He also holds that "a reorientation of American Studies toward comparative cultural history should develop new kinds of questions and some new areas of study as part of a collaborative international enterprise" (Fishwick, ed., 307-11).

What happened to the comparative approach that Cunliffe, Murdock, and others testified existed in the 1960s and early 1970s? There are no ready answers, but it seems to me that Europeans continued being both "improvised Americans" and comparatists, while American Studies in the United States developed away from a transnational perspective – if it ever had one. One explanation for the resistance among U.S. American-

ists to cross-Atlantic studies could be the fact that U.S. American Studies was founded on the premise of the uniqueness of American culture, in opposition to the common view that the United States was a mere extension of Europe (cf May 182-83). In the historiography of American Studies in the United States a picture emerges of the gradual shift occurring around 1970 that I have already referred to above. The historical surveys of this development do not speak of a budding movement toward a comparatist approach, the way Cunliffe does. The shift around 1970 is rather described as one towards the study of ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality – and, to a degree, class – in a national perspective. This reaction against the myth-and-symbol school was undoubtedly a salutary one, but it may have prevented the development of an international perspective. American Studies still remained, basically, a nationalist project. Yetman and Katzman, looking back in 2000, saw the following development: “the shifts in American studies over the last twenty-five years to focus on race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality ... have led away from macro perspectives” (8). However, the dominance of national American Studies was not complete; as Gene Wise pointed to in 1979, during the 1970s the comparatist, cross-cultural approach lived on, even if it was a life in the shadows (205).

Numerous European Americanists, on the other hand, being outsiders, based in their own culture and at a distance from American culture, more naturally assumed a transnational outlook. As David Nye puts it: “Abroad, American Studies scholars inhabit two cultural and linguistic universes, which sometimes intersect, but more often run parallel to or contradict one another.” Nye holds that such scholars experience what he calls “stereo cultural vision” (8). And Dale Carter has pointed to the fact that thirty years ago the University of Warwick, England, established a Joint School of Comparative American Studies (Carter 12). Simultaneously, however, many European contributions were not of a comparatist kind but in the tradition of national U.S. American Studies. The shift taking place in the United States around 1970 also happened in Europe. This “national” work is not what concerns me here, but rather the comparatist studies that were produced from the 1950s and onwards but which were not quite accepted at the time as a form of American Studies. I would like to draw attention to three forms of research that may be defined as transnational and that have been pursued in Europe for

decades before internationalism in the 1990s became such a central concern in U.S. American Studies: Emigration/immigration, ethnic culture, and Americanization/the Image of America abroad. Such studies all involve more than one culture and they all employ a comparatist approach. My focus here will be on Sweden, but obviously the picture is similar concerning relations between the United States and other European, and also non-European, countries.

Emigration/Immigration Research

In his 1999 article "American Civilization as a Discipline?" Murray Murphey draws attention to the frequent lack of a cross-cultural perspective when he says that the study of immigrants should include "the study of the cultures from which they came." "Further," he continues, "we need to know not only about those who came but about those who came and went back, and about those who never came at all. Relations between immigrants here and their relatives in the homeland often continued through two or three generations, and in some cases even longer, with resources flowing in both directions, yet we know relatively little about these extended relationships" (16).

If Murphey had had access to, or made himself familiar with, the extensive research on, for instance, Swedish emigration to the U.S., he would have found it unnecessary to write as he did. Much of the research he is asking for has already been done, even though, obviously, much more could be accomplished. It is true that some of this European research on transnational relations is in Swedish, German, French etc., but certainly not all. And one might even argue that much of this work in other languages than English is worth translating.

The first studies on Scandinavian immigration to the U.S. were produced in the 1930s and 1940s by American historians of Scandinavian descent: George Stephenson, Theodore Blegen, and Marcus Lee Hansen. Not only did they write on Scandinavian immigration, but two of them, Stephenson and Hansen, also wrote general histories on immigration; the latter published in 1940 *The Immigrant in American History*. It is interesting to note that both Stephenson and Blegen were professors of history

at the University of Minnesota; Stephenson gave courses on immigration in the 1930s and Blegen wrote, for instance, *Norwegian Migration: The American Transition* in 1940. As is well known, one of the first American Studies programs was started at the University of Minnesota in the 1940s. Leo Marx, Tremaine McDowell, and others have told the story of the inception and growth of that program. Marx mentions in his 1999 recollection numerous colleagues who contributed to the American Studies program there from the departments of English, Art, Political Science, and from History – David Noble and Clark Chambers – but there is no mention of Stephenson and Blegen. The conclusion is close at hand that immigration history was not considered part of American Studies. Leo Marx has confirmed to me that he knew Blegen and Stephenson at Minnesota and that they were not considered part of American Studies. He said: “They were down the hall. They were in Scandinavian studies.” McDowell, however, gives a slightly different picture of the Minnesota program. In their summer program occasional courses were given on “Influence of Europe on American Culture” and “Anglo-American Cultural Relations to 1860,” and a few afternoon lectures on “The Germans of Minnesota” and “The Orient and America.” At one of the one-week, non-credit American Studies summer institutes, Theodore Blegen gave a lecture on “Immigrant Songs and Ballads” (77-80).

In Sweden, the first studies of emigration history also appeared in the 1930s and 1940s (Westin, Nelson), but it was not until around 1960 that the large-scale research on emigration was established through a major project at Uppsala university, which eventually produced some twenty books and numerous articles on various aspects of the Swedish emigration to the United States and on Swedish-American culture. “Much of the work of the Uppsala project,” Dag Blanck writes in his survey, “Five Decades of Research of Swedish Immigration to North America,” “exhibits a clear demographic and statistical bent.” In addition, Blanck continues, “much of the Uppsala work put an emphasis on the situation in Sweden, and was less concerned with the New World” (188). A few studies, however, dealt with the situation of the Swedish immigrants in the U.S., followed them from the homeland to the new settlements, and, in a study or two, back to Sweden again. Many of these studies were written in English, and others, originally in Swedish, were later described and discussed in Norman and Runblom’s *Transatlantic Connections*

from 1987. Among later important works devoted to the trans-Atlantic relations between Sweden and the United States one may mention two books, written by American scholars and published in Sweden, Robert C. Ostergren's *A Community Transplanted: The Trans-Atlantic Experience of a Swedish Immigrant Settlement in the Upper Middle West, 1835-1915* (1988) and H. Arnold Barton's *A Folk Divided: Homeland Swedes and Swedish Americans, 1840-1940* (1994). So, Murray Murphey could very well have learned more about the issues he thought were missing from the agenda.

Scandinavian emigration historiography was, however, rather provincial, as the American historian Kathleen Conzen has pointed out. It was certainly impressive in scope and width, but it was "a historiography content to talk only to itself and debate only within its own context" (Blanck 192). It is obvious that Swedish historians would have benefited from cooperation with American colleagues in this field, but, even if they had tried to do so, there would probably have been very little interest at that time, in the 1970s, in reciprocal exchanges among American historians or Americanists. In 1977, historians Robert Swierenga and Charlotte Erickson separately pointed out that American immigration scholars would be well advised to read the work of Swedish historians (Blanck 190). The cross-Atlantic exchange in this field had not yet developed, it seems, but comparative research was being done on both sides of the Atlantic.

Ethnicity Studies

The shift in American Studies in the 1970s included the study of ethnicity and ethnic culture in America. However, it seems to me, the interest in ethnic culture was selective: it concerned mostly certain ethnic groups and it never became cross-cultural to any significant extent. The scholarly emphasis was put on the cultures of Asian-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Caribbean-Americans, and a few other groups like Mediterranean-Americans. Few U. S. Americanists, however, did work on the culture of Scandinavian-Americans, Finnish-Americans, German-Americans, etc. More or less, these cultures remained outside U.S. American

Studies. Why did Americanists privilege certain ethnic groups over others? To again use the Swedish example, is the explanation for their marginalization the fact that Swedes immigrated so long ago, that they are white, that they assimilated so well into mainstream Anglo culture? But not even their culture in the past – when they were newly immigrated and unassimilated – has attracted much interest among U.S. Americanists.

There was a shift from the early interest among Swedish emigration historians from quantification and social structure to issues of ethnicity such as assimilation, cultural persistence, organizational and religious life, literary and artistic activities, the role of women, radicalism in the Swedish-American communities. A source of inspiration for this change was the research on ethnicity done in the 1970s and 1980s by American scholars. Swedish studies appeared on how a “Swedish ethnic consciousness was established in that cultural construct that became known as Swedish-America” (Blanck 191). The American work, by Sollors and others, on the invention of ethnicity was also applied to Swedish research in this area.

Numerous important studies appeared by Swedish, and also American, scholars on the social, cultural, and religious life of the Swedish immigrants, on internal migration and social mobility, on their religious commitment, political involvement, and union activities, on language maintenance, on art, music, and literature in the new settlements. Much of this new European and American research counter-balanced Oscar Handlin’s ideas of the immigrants as the “uprooted,” showing how they rather managed to mix the Old and New World cultures, to integrate the old habits into the new surroundings. In addition to Ostergren’s and Barton’s studies mentioned above, John Bodnar’s *The Transplanted* (1985) describes in sharp contrast to Handlin, the immigrants’ experience as one heavily based on maintained links to the Old World (Norman and Runblom 142).

As examples of recent research two books may be mentioned, one Swedish and one Norwegian-American. First, Hans Norman and Harald Runblom’s *Transatlantic Connections*, which succinctly builds on new developments in immigration and ethnicity research concerning the Nordic countries and which, in a historical perspective, compares the situation of Nordic immigrants in Latin America, the United States, and

Canada. In his article Murray Murphey also asked for studies that would compare immigration of one certain ethnic group into the United States with immigration of members of the same group into another country to "make it possible to sort out what is due to the ethnic group and what to the host culture, something that cannot be done by looking only at the U.S. case." (16) Norman and Runblom did just that, among other things, more than a decade before Murphey asked for it.

The other exemplary text is Jon Gjerde's *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West 1830-1917* (1997), which in a highly interesting fashion deals with mainly three themes: community formation, the farming economy and community, and the political and cultural factors and obstacles which faced the immigrants. He discusses what one reviewer called "a *Kulturkampf* between immigrants and Yankees over public schools, temperance, and women's suffrage" (Blanck 2000, 117). Gjerde makes use of the concept of "complementary identities," the possession of which made it possible for the immigrants to "pledge ... allegiance to both American citizenship and ethnic adherence" (Gjerde 8).

In the past two decades, European and American scholars of ethnicity in America have increasingly started to learn from each other. As one Swedish historian puts it: "Bridges have been built between the earlier separated worlds of migration researchers in America and Europe and this has affected the interpretations of immigrant life" (Norman and Runblom 142).

Americanization/The Image of America Abroad

At most American Studies conferences in Europe there have for decades been lectures, panels, and workshops on such themes as Americanization, the American influence, the impact of America on smaller nations, and the Image of America abroad. At the first NAAS conference in 1961, at which Murdock expressed his discontent with some institutions of U. S. American Studies, the theme was "America and the Nordic countries," and the lectures were comparisons between the five Nordic countries and the United States, many of them devoted to the "American Impact on

Scandinavia” and the Image of America in Scandinavia. In the conference, lecture after lecture explored numerous aspects of the relations between the Nordic countries and the United States. They recorded the fact that the European interest in, and fear of, the American impact on Europe had a long history – for instance, that the Dane E. C. van Haven wrote in 1792 a book with the title *What Influence Has the Birth of America Had on the People of Europe?* – and spoke insightfully on such topics as the image of America in Scandinavia, the influence of American literature on the indigenous literatures, the dependence of Scandinavian literary critics on American New Criticism, and the influence of American sociology on the way Scandinavian sociology was formed (Åhnebrink 221-22).

Even though such studies have not been spoken of as examples of transnational American studies, both of these forms of comparative research – the American influence on Europe and the European Image of America – have over the past fifty years produced extensive results. The research on the American influence is now burgeoning, not only in Europe; scholars in the U.S. and elsewhere in the world have also, particularly in the past fifteen years, increasingly given attention to this field of study. Let me just mention four rather recent studies: Rob Kroes’ *If You’ve Seen One, You’ve Seen the Mall* (1996), which deals with Europeans and American mass culture; Richard Kuisel’s *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (1993); and “*Here, There and Everywhere*”: *The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture* (2000), edited by Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May. And finally, Richard Pells’ *NOT LIKE US: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture since World War II* (1997), a broad discussion of economic and social life, of mass culture, of American Studies in Europe, but also the Europeanization of America.⁴

4. Richard Pells’ *NOT LIKE US* contains an excellent bibliography on various aspects of the American influence on Europe. However, its focus is primarily on Great Britain, Germany, France, and Italy, leaving out works on the Nordic countries. Books and anthologies devoted to the American influence on the latter countries include: Lars Åhnebrink, ed., *Amerika och Norden* (1964), which contains several articles on the American impact on the Nordic countries; Rolf Lundén and Erik Åsard, eds., *Networks of Americanization: Aspects of the American Influence in Sweden* (1992); Erik Åsard and Elisabeth Herion Sarafidis, eds., Special Issue on Americanization in *American Studies in Scandinavia* 35:2 (Autumn 2003); Scott E. Erickson, ed., *American Religious Influences in Sweden* (1996); Steinar Bryn, *Norske Amerika-bilete* (1992); Eero Kupařinen and Keijo Virtanen, eds., *The Impact of American Culture* (1982).

Scandinavian scholars have also been active in this field of study. Halvdan Koht wrote, in 1949, *The American Spirit in Europe: A Survey of Transatlantic Influences*, and several books on the American influence in the individual Nordic countries have appeared. In Sweden, the research has changed from one emphasizing the character and scope of the American values and material objects imported, i. e. the specifically *American* contribution to, or intrusion into, e.g., Swedish culture, towards looking at the process of transculturation, at Swedish society as a contact zone, or a borderland, where the encounter between the incoming American culture and the indigenous culture creates a culture of hybridity. One phenomenon that received special attention is the distinction between what has been termed *manifest* and *latent* influence. The enormous influx of films, toys, books, holidays like Halloween and Valentine's Day, sports like American football, etc., is, to all Swedes, obviously of American origin. But most of the influence is rather invisible and enters the culture in the form of the school system, university disciplines, election campaigns, and such phenomena as positive thinking and creative writing courses.

Conclusion

So, what is the situation like today in the Nordic countries and what has happened since the 1960s? It seems to me, and of course I am generalizing, that the picture Skard gives is more or less still true. There is no doubt that American Studies has changed since the 1960s. The shift after Marx's Great Divide has also taken place in Europe and in the Nordic Countries. Looking, for instance, at the programs for EAAS and NAAS conferences over the past two decades, it is obvious that the focus on ethnicity, race, sexuality, gender, and class has also been embraced by European scholars. And new disciplines have been added to the conference programs, like politics and film studies. But, it seems to me, interdisciplinary, integrated American Studies has not been embraced. Scholars from different disciplines come together in conference workshops, we produce scholarly books together, we establish area studies programs at our universities, but these efforts and achievements are *multidisciplinary*

in nature rather than *interdisciplinary*. We are trained in specialized disciplines and come together in projects and programs to make our specialized contributions. I think Paul Lauter's description of American Studies outside the United States is more or less correct. In many places abroad, he writes,

American Studies "belongs" to one or another largely self-contained discipline, like history or English, and these are heavily the fields within which American Studies students actually labor. Thus work in American Studies is less likely to take interdisciplinary form or by itself to challenge existing structures of knowledge. In many areas one remains not an Americanist but a historian or an economist who happens to study the United States. (34)

When it comes to the latest development in American Studies, transnational and postnational American Studies, it seems to me that that particular inflection has had, so far, little impact on actual research or teaching in the Nordic countries. In spite of the fact that both the NAAS conferences in Copenhagen in 2001 and Trondheim in 2003 had the conference themes of "Trading Cultures" and "Transnational Dimensions of Life and Culture in the US," respectively, the resistance to this form of American Studies seems rather extensive, maybe because we feel as Europeans that we for decades, although somewhat differently, have actually practiced comparative, transnational American Studies – such as emigration, ethnicity, American influence research – but primarily because we have a very strong tradition – for better or for worse – of working within established disciplines.

Finally, let me ask the question: Does it really matter whether we pursue truly interdisciplinary work or do our research within the disciplines, whether we are disciplinary, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or post-disciplinary American Studies scholars, whether we are located in American Studies or in American Studies Proper? Skard refers to the Constitution of the Canadian Association for American Studies, adopted in 1964. The association declared that it wished to "include among its members both those who favor the newer interdisciplinary approach and those who see American Studies as a number of separate but related studies within the framework of the traditional disciplines" (170). It seems to me that this is also what the Nordic Association for American Studies has done since 1961 and what it should continue to do.

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