

Nature Writers and American Landscapes

Special Edition of American Studies in Scandinavia

Note from the Editor

Beginning in the 1920s and continuing through the 1960s, American Studies was centrally concerned with considerations of culture and nature. The pastoral theme of contact with nature in American literature became influential in raising questions about the purpose and scope of technological innovation, the cultural impact of instrumentalist thinking, the consequences of uncontrolled urbanization, the destruction of traditional farming – themes tangentially connected to the rise, of what Lewis Mumford had called back in the 1930s, the “megamachine.” Insofar as American Studies was concerned, emphasis on the pastoral and naturist literature upon which the aforementioned themes were brought to the attention of humanists, receded in the 1970s as other interests pertaining to social pluralism and feminism came to the fore. Then, as American Studies’ leading position as an interdisciplinary field in the American academy was displaced by cultural studies, concerns about nature and culture found other venues. By the mid-1980s studies of the importance of environment and the theme of nature found space in the fields of environmental history, the new cultural geography (including landscape studies), ecocriticism, as well as the history of science and technology and philosophy.

The articles that appear in this issue were first presented as papers at a seminar entitled “This Incomparable Land? Writing and Thinking about Nature in a Comparative Perspective” held at the University of Oslo on September 30, 2006. At the conclusion of that meeting, the participants agreed to form a research group – the Network for Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies or NIES – based at Oslo. We’re certainly not the first European-based Americanists to return to these issues, as evidenced by the publication of the 2000 EAAS conference proceedings in book form in 2003 (“*Nature’s Nation*” *Revisited*). Nor are we united in perspective or approach. What these articles share is an interest in themes of nature and environment in American culture as well as the impact these themes outside of the United States itself as reflected through American cultural influences. Likewise we share a determination to find theoretical approaches that can bring these issues into our own day.