"PARADIGM DRAMAS" IN AMERICAN STUDIES: A CULTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT

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[American Studies] has thus emerged not as a discipline, but as an arena for disciplinary encounter and staging ground for fresh topical pursuits. It embraces America in a Whitmanish hug, excluding nothing and always beginning.

Stanley Bailis, "The Socal Sciences in American Studies: An Integrative Conception," *AQ* (August, 1974)

If you want to understand what a science is, you should look in the first instance not at its theories or its findings, and certainly not at what its apologists say about it; you should look at what the practitioners of it do.

Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*

If we have a "method," it is the approach to ideas and consequences in the round—a total approach something like the "total theatre" of Bertolt Brecht. From the communication point of view, American Studies wants more than most disciplines to include its audiences.

Jay Gurian, "American Studies and the Creative Present," *Midcontinent American Studies Journal* (Spring 1969)

FOR A MOVEMENT SO CRITICAL OF THE CULTURE AROUND IT, AMERICAN Studies recapitulates America in revealing ways. Both began as revolts against the established order—for America, the Old World, for American

Studies, the traditional disciplines. In contesting the old, both have articulated visions of a new and better order; and the insecurity of identifying with an *ought* rather than an *is* has compelled each to continue asking, "Who are we?" and "Where are we heading?" In seeking answers to these questions, neither has been particularly informed by history. Or rather, America has been informed more by fables of its past than by intimate communion with its actual past, and until lately American Studies has had little sense of its own history at all.

Almost nowhere, until recently, could anything be found in print describing how American Studies began, or seeking to explain either the evolution of consciousness and institutions within the movement, or the impact on American Studies of cultural forces outside. Like Americans, Americanists have been too busy building to pause and reflect much on their own roots. Of late, however, this trend shows signs of reversing—in the culture at large and in the movement too. Within the past decade, several articles have been published on the history of American Studies, plus one book already in print, and at least two others in the works.[1]

The present essay is part of this recent trend. It is also an effort to place that trend in a context. In the essay, I suggest that for perspective on our present situation and for guidance on our future direction in the movement, we should journey back over the history of American Studies during the course of the twentieth century. I also suggest that we try to understand our own movement as we would any other experience in America—that is, critically, in cultural and institutional context. As culture critics of American Studies, we should ask, *"What imperatives are there in the larger American culture and social structure, and in the culture and social*

[1] Until the early 1970s, only a handful of essays in the field had been concerned with the past of American Studies. Among these were Tremaine McDowell's *American Studies* (Minnesota, 1948), 26ff.; Robert Spiller's retrospective, "American Studies, Past, Present, and Future," in Joseph Kwiat and Mary Turpie, eds., *Studies in American Culture: Dominant Ideas and Images* (Minnesota, 1960), 207–20; Leo Marx's "American Studies: Defense of an Unscientific Method," *New Literary History,* (Fall 1969), 75–90; and Robert Sklar's two critiques, "American Studies and the Realities of America," *AQ,* 22 (Summer 1970), 597–605; and "Cultural History and American Studies: Past, Present, and Future," *American Studies: An International Newsletter,* 11 (Autumn 1971), 3–9.

Since 1972, however, several articles have critically reviewed traditions of American Studies. This trend was launched with Bruce Kuklick's influential piece, "Myth and Symbol in American Studies," *AQ*, 24, (Fall 1972), 435–50. Other works in this vein include Robert Berkhofer, "Clio and the Culture Concept: Some Impressions of a Changing Relationship in American Historiography," *Social Science Quarterly,* 53 (Sept. 1972), 297–320; Jay Mechling, Robert Merideth, and David Wilson, "American Culture Studies: The Discipline and the Curriculum," *AQ*, 25 (Oct. 1973), 363–89; Robert Spiller, "Unity and Diversity in the Study of American Culture: The American Studies Association in Perspective," *AQ,* 25 (Dec. 1973), 611–18; Gordon Kelly, "Literature and the Historian," *AQ,* 26 (May 1974), 141–59; Robert Sklar, "The Problem of an American Studies 'Philosophy': A Bibliography

structure of academe, which have made possible the quest for an integrating 'American Studies'?" and *"How have these imperatives changed over time?"* Finally, I suggest that we view these changes through a sequence of representative acts—what I call "paradigm dramas"—which crystallize possibilities for integrated American Studies in each stage of the movement's history.

Conventionally, when handling ideas in historical context, scholars have employed a "climate of opinion" mode of explanation. In this mode, ideas are handled as surface "reflections" of underlying social forces. The social reality is seen as basic, and is thought to determine the ideas. Thus it is said that American scholarship of the 1950s was determined by consensual forces in the culture then, new left scholarship reflected the more radical climate of the 1960s, and so on.[2]

"Climate-of-opinion" history is convenient to write, since one need only catch the general tendencies of an age, then explain any particular idea simply by plugging it into the general category. There is no need here to discuss the many shortcomings in this mode of explanation.[3] For present purposes, it is enough to say that climate-of-opinion history falls short on at least two counts. First, such explanations tend to be flat and one-

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of New Directions," *AQ*, 27 (Summer 1975), 245–62; David Marcell, "Recent Trends in American Studies in the United States," in Robert Walker, ed., *American Studies Abroad* (Greenwood, 1975), 25–33; Richard Dorson, *The Birth of American Studies* (Inaugural Address at Founding of American Studies Center at Warsaw University, Poland, October 5, 1976); Marcell, "Characteristically American: Another Perspective on American Studies," *Centennial Review*, 21 (Fall 1977), 388–400; and Luther Luedtke, "Not so Common Ground: Controversies in Contemporary American Studies," in Luedtke, ed., *The Study of American Culture: Contemporary Conflicts* (Everett Edwards, 1977), 323–67.

To date, the only book-length analysis of past American Studies scholarship is Cecil Tate's *The Search for a Method in American Studies* (Minnesota, 1973). Pershing Vartanian is currently working on a comprehensive history, based on extensive research in archives of the movement, and connecting academic American Studies to forces in the larger culture and in American higher education. Vartanian's history is to be titled *American Studies: Patterns in Academic Contra Culture*. Richard Johnson is also working on an oral history of figures in the history of the movement to be titled *American Studies: Images and Self-Images*.

For historical accounts of academic programs in American Studies, see the 1970 summer supplement of *AQ*. Especially useful are the program descriptions of Yale, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania, by Sydney Ahlstrom, Mary Turpie, and Murray Murphey, respectively. For an earlier account, see Robert Walker's comprehensive *American Studies in the United States: A Survey of College Programs* (Louisiana State, 1958).

[2] For a clear statement of this mode of explanation, see Robert Skotheim, ed., *The Historian and the Climate of Opinion* (Addison-Wesley, 1969), 1–5.

[3] I have criticized the climate-of-opinion approach to ideas, and offered a "situation-strategy" alternative, in chapter 5 of *American Historical Explanations: A Strategy for Grounded Inquiry* (Dorsey, 1973), 113–57. That alternative is adapted from the "dramatistic" approach of Kenneth Burke. For critiques of climate-of-opinion type analyses in American Studies scholarship, see Kuklick, Berkhofer, Kelly, and Tate.

dimensional. They recognize only a one-way route between the general culture and particular ideas, particular institutions, particular persons; the general climate acts, particulars simply *re*-act. This, to my mind, is too deterministic. Second, climate-of-opinion history is too monolithic. It assumes a holistic culture more thoroughly integrated, and more rigidly hierarchical, than experience of our own fragmented culture suggests to us today.

In this essay, I propose a different mode of explanation. Where the climate-of-opinion metaphor is borrowed from observation of weather, my working metaphor is drawn from the theater. It views historical ideas not as "enveloped" by their surrounding climates, but rather as a sequence of dramatic acts—acts which play on wider cultural scenes, or historical stages. The drama metaphor suggests a dynamic image of ideas, in contrast to the passive "reflector" role they play in climate-of-opinion explanations. It also gives to ideas a *trans*-actional quality. This is so because an act in the theater is always in interplay with the scene around it; an actor does not simply pass on his or her lines *to* an audience, but actor and audience (at least in a play which works) are in continual dialogue, messages traveling back and forth between one role and the other.[4]

Two additional preliminary points. In this brief retrospective, I have chosen four different acts to represent the movement for American Studies during the twentieth century. By "representative" I do not mean like a congressman or a senator—representing in the sense of holding to the middle and averaging out all extremes. By representative act, I mean something which dramatizes inherent *possibilities* in a cultural situation—an act which spotlights changing boundaries of what is possible for a person or a group at a particular time and in a particular place and in a particular milieu. Again, emphasis is on the drama of trans-actional interplay in doing cultural history; it is not on charting a succession of more or less static "climates" of intellectual opinion.

[4] If later in this essay I lean toward the social scientific side of culture studies, my basic metaphor—of culture as drama—is drawn from the humanities, and not by accident. I believe drama metaphors offer enormous potential for future work in American Studies, and are especially useful in bridging the long-lamented gap between humanistic and social scientific approaches to culture. For more on this, see Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* (Louisiana State, 1941; rpt. Vintage, 1957); Peter Berger, "Sociological Perspective—Society as Drama," in *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective* (Anchor, 1963), 122–50; and Hugh Dalziel Duncan, *Symbols in Society* (Oxford, 1968). For applications of a drama perspective to American cultural materials, see Kai Erikson's brilliant treatment of the Anne Hutchinson case in *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (Wiley, 1966), 71–107.

Finally, by "paradigm act," or "paradigm drama, I employ a term heard often in scholarly circles today, too often I suspect. A careful reader once distinguished no fewer than 21 separate meanings of the word "paradigm" in Thomas Kuhn's influential study, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.[5] The commonest use, at least in historical scholarship, is paradigm as a consistent pattern of beliefs held by a person, a group, or a culture. Thus we hear of the "Progressive" paradigm, or the "Einsteinian" paradigm, or the "Capitalist" paradigm.

Thomas Kuhn did of course write of paradigm in this fashion. But he also used the term in another way more relevant to this essay. In *The Structure,* Kuhn handles paradigms not only as patterns of belief but also as the characteristic acts which function to dramatize those beliefs. Hence he writes of paradigms as "exemplars"—actual examples, say, of the Newtonian style of thinking, or the Einsteinian. For Kuhn, then, a paradigm is not just the content of a thought pattern, but, more fundamentally, *an actual instance of that pattern of thinking in action*.[6]

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The initial stage of American Studies' history begins before the academic movement as such. It comes to consciousness during the Progressive era early in the twentieth century. We can find there seeds of ideas which later—during the 1930s and 40s—were to supply intellectual energy for articulating the movement itself.

[5] Margaret Masterman, "The Nature of a Paradigm," in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge, 1970), 59–89. For Kuhn's own work, see *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, 1962). For applications of Kuhn in American historical studies, see David Hollinger, "T. S. Kuhn's Theory of Science and Its Implications for History," *American Historical Review,* 78 (Apr. 1973), 370–93.

[6] For further on the idea of paradigm as "exemplar," in this case applied to Franz Boas and his influence upon the discipline of anthropology, see Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Paradigmatic Processes in Culture Change," *American Anthropologist,* 74 (June 1972), 467–69. Wallace writes, apropos of the use of "paradigm" I am adopting here,

> In the history of American anthropology . . . one can find a convenient illustration in the origin of the "fieldwork" paradigm. Whether accurately or not, one thinks of Franz Boas stepping off the boat in an Eskimo village [on Baffin Island, in 1883] with his suitcase in hand, preparing for a long stay in residence. This image *is* the paradigm: the subsequent development of field techniques, standards of ethnographic description, ethnological theory, and training requirements for the Ph.D. stem from, and are implied by, the symbol of Boas as lone fieldworker taking up prolonged residence in a small community. This symbol is opposed in a revolutionary way to a nineteenth century tradition of library scholarship and of uncritical use of the comparative method to derive models of cultural evolution. (469)

The term "paradigmatic drama" first appeared in American Studies scholarship, to my knowledge, in 1973, in Mechling, Merideth, and Wilson, 367.

Morton White has caught this stage's representative act in his phrase "the revolt against formalism."[7] From our perspective in American Studies, the figure who most fully embodies that act is Vernon Louis Parrington. No other, I believe, so clearly deserves the title "Intellectual Founder of American Studies."[8] In his work, Parrington was to construct an immensely *usable* past. Parrington's work was usable not just in the obvious sense of making the past relevant to urgencies of the present. It was usable also in offering a way to create order and direction from masses of disparate materials on the whole history of American experience. In this sense, he demonstrated in his scholarship how an integrating "American Studies" might be done.

Intellectually, Parrington's single most dramatic act was the 1927 publication of *Main Currents in American Thought*. With that act, the integrating study of American culture was to enter a new era. But the single act of *Main Currents* cannot be understood apart from what preceded it in Parrington's biography. Hence the representative act—or paradigm drama—I have selected for focus here is Parrington's entire life leading up to that event. More than any other Americanist, Vernon Louis Parrington gave life to Emerson's vision of "The American Scholar," a passionate mind encountering a dynamic world, sans the mediating forms of convention.

The general lines of Parrington's biography are well known. He was born in Aurora, Illinois in 1871; his family moved to a farm near Americus, Kansas, a small village outside Emporia, when he was six.[9] As

[7] *Social Thought in America: The Revolt against Formalism* (Beacon, 1949).

[8] There are others who could legitimately be called "Intellectual Founder of American Studies." Some, for example, might trace the germinating idea for the movement as far back as the second volume of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1840). Others might pick it up in more recent pre-American Studies works—e.g., Moses Coit Tyler's *A History of American Literature, 1607–1865* (1878), or Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893), or Van Wyck Brook's *America's Coming of Age* (1915), or Lewis Mumford's *The Golden Day* (1925), or Norman Foerster's anthology, *The Reinterpretation of American Literature* (1928). Yet others might contend that the idea for the movement actually followed the movement itself, and that it was not until, say, F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* (1941), or, later, Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950) that American Studies was to achieve intellectual coherence. (A few perverse souls insist the movement never has got its act together; I'll bypass that position for now.)

Still, I stake my claim here on Parrington and *Main Currents*, and urge others to advance their counterclaims. The same holds true for my choices of the other three "paradigm dramas." I do not assume they are the only important symbolic acts in the movement's history, only that they seem most important in the context of this essay. Again, I hope others may propose other significant "moments" in the cultural history of Amercian Studies, so we can generate more public dialogue about our movement and its past.

[9] For details of Parrington's life, I have drawn from the vivid portrait in Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (Knopf, 1968), 349–434. See also Ralph Gabriel's illuminating sketch of Parrington's life in Marcus Cunliffe and Robin Winks, eds., *Pastmasters: Some Essays on American Historians* (Harper and Row, 1969), 142–66.

he later explained, he grew up a frustrated young aesthete amid the drab midwestern prairie, finally escaping east to take an undergraduate degree at Harvard. In Cambridge, Vernon Louis Parrington was the archetypal young man from the provinces: exhilarated by the freer intellectual atmosphere of the East, yet naive and hence vulnerable there to its cosmopolitanism and its social elitism.

Graduating from Harvard in 1893, Parrington returned to his prairie homeland, to teach at the College of Emporia for a princely $500 a year. Four years later—his salary having grown to but $700—he left Emporia for a better position as Instructor in English and Modern Language at the University of Oklahoma (Parrington not only served as a classroom teacher there, but preceded Bud Wilkinson by several decades as the Sooners' head football coach). In 1907, young Parrington suffered a setback; he was caught up in a faculty scandal at Oklahoma and was summarily fired. He had become identified with a cabal of young, Eastern-educated Turks who counseled subversive activities like smoking, drinking, and playing cards, and an outraged state governor, urged on by Southern Methodists, cleaned out the lot of them.

So at age 36 Vernon Louis Parrington was out of a job, with only a B.A. in hand. And here we may witness one of the more poignant acts of his life. He set down then to write the secretary of the graduate school at Harvard, requesting admission to study for a Ph.D. in English literature. But Harvard, concerned to uphold standards, rejected Parrington as too old to begin a graduate career. This decision deeply wounded him at the time, hardening him in what was to become a life-long antipathy against the East and its academic establishment.

For the American Studies story, however, Parrington's Harvard rebuff was in time to prove fortunate. For within a year, he would set his life on a course which culminated some two decades later in scholarly fame—if not quite in Parrington's own lifetime, then soon thereafter. In 1908 he accepted an offer as Professor of Literature at the University of Washington, and he soon struck up a productive companionship there with the Progressive intellectual J. Allen Smith. Inside five years he would begin work on his summa, *Main Currents in American Thought.*

Still, Vernon Parrington's career would suffer added disappointments, even if in retrospect his life would seem to have taken on pattern and direction. In Seattle, Parrington was of course freed from football coaching duties and from the prudery of Oklahoma Methodists, and he was also to flourish under the intellectual stimulus of Smith. Still, he was not to find a ready audience for his work. Publisher after publisher rejected early drafts of *Main Currents;* after almost a decade of labor, he finally despaired of the project, in fact stopping work on it. Fortunately in 1922 a draft of the first volume was seen by Van Wyck Brooks, then an editor for

Harcourt, Brace; Brooks recommended publication. Five more years were to pass, however, before *Main Currents* was finally published in 1927. In all, this was some 14 lonely years since Parrington had begun the project; by 1927, this author of his first scholarly book was a ripe 56. Doubtless in our own day, some conscientious tenure committee, committed to high standards of academic excellence, would long since have wiped him out of the profession as "lacking in scholarly promise."

Parrington is a representative figure for this pre-institutional stage of American Studies because he did it almost all *alone*. In an era when the academic disciplines of literature, economics, history, sociology, and political science all were seeking professional respectability by institutionalizing their scholarship—establishing regulations for sound academic training, creating journals of publication to give their work visibility but also to police their disciplinary borders, forming professional associations which would move the enterprise of scholarship into predictable, regulated forms of fraternal interchange, establishing reward and punishment structures to assure conformity with their norms—during all this time Vernon Louis Parrington was basically going it alone in his American intellectual journey.[10] He received no graduate training to focus and channel his interests; save for J. Allen Smith and a few others he had no sustaining companionship with fellow scholars of like interest; he never had a Guggenheim or NEH or ACLS grant; he lacked the camaraderie of professional association meetings; and he never had a Fulbright for travel or teaching abroad. Today, we would think *Main Currents in American Thought* a deprived work; it lacked all the institutional supports now felt necessary to the enterprise of scholarship. It was simply an act of human intellect reduced to the barest essentials—*a single mind grappling with materials of American experience, and driven by concentrated fury to create order from them.* And that, I would say, is *the* elemental "paradigm drama" of American Studies—elemental not only in being first, but also in embodying a characteristic urge of persons drawn to the movement from Parrington's day on to ours.

From 1927, with the publication of *Main Currents,* up through 1965, with Alan Trachtenberg's *Brooklyn Bridge,* the work of American Studies was made possible by a consensus among scholars, a loosely structured

[10] For a brilliant cultural and social structural analysis of this trend toward "modernization" in the academic professions, see Thomas Haskell's *The Emergence of Professional Social Science: The American Social Science Association and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Illinois, 1977).

"paradigm" of sorts, on what American experience is like, and by procedural agreement on how to study it. Vernon Louis Parrington did not wholly create that paradigm. But his work is its most comprehensive expression. Later in the essay, I shall comment on this paradigm's intellectual make-up. For now, suffice it to say that those who came after *Main Currents in American Thought* had Parrington as an exemplar to move off from. They could accept his example, or they could reject it, or they could try to revise it. But whatever, the paradigm drama of *Main Currents* was there, a visible symbol, as it were, for those who followed to respond to.

Initial responses in the late 1920s and early '30s mark the halting beginnings of institutionalization in the movement. We do not yet see identification with the name "American Studies," nor all the institutional supports of the 1940s and '50s. But we do catch glimpses of dissatisfaction with old academic formalisms, and early efforts to structure new ways to study and teach about American experience. This stage of the movement is dramatized in the second of my sequence of paradigm dramas, Perry Miller's "jungle epiphany" in the heart of the Belgian Congo.

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It is not widely known that this most intimidating of Harvard intellects was in fact a college drop-out. Bored and restless with what passed for the life of the mind at the University of Chicago in the early 1920s, Miller quit school to tour the country with a drama troupe. After a year, he quit that too to pick up on an oil tanker which eventually took him to Africa. Years later, he was to describe what happened to him then in the Congo; his preface to the 1956 publication of *Errand into the Wilderness* contains the following story:

Drawing on his background in theater, Miller began, "[I have included essays here] that seem to add up to a rank of spotlights on the massive narrative of the movement of European culture into the vacant wilderness of America." He continued,

> To the elucidation of this story I, in common with several historians of my generation, have devoted my life. . . . These papers, along with three or four books, are all I have yet been able to realize of a determination conceived three decades ago at Matadi on the banks of the Congo. I came there seeking "adventure," jealous of older contemporaries to whom that boon had been offered by the First World War. (Nobody had the prescience to teach me patience, to assure me that I too should have my War.) The adventures that Africa afforded

were tawdry enough, but it became the setting for a sudden epiphany (if the word be not too strong) of the pressing necessity for expounding my America to the 20th century.

With characteristic mock humility, Miller proceeded to a striking comparison:

> To bring into conjunction a minute event in the history of historiography with a great one; it was given to Edward Gibbon to sit disconsolate amid the ruins of the Capitol at Rome, and to have thrust upon him the "laborious work" of *The Decline and Fall* while listening to barefooted friars chanting responses in the former temple of Jupiter. It was given to me, equally disconsolate on the edge of a jungle of central Africa, to have thrust upon me the mission of expounding what I took to be the innermost propulsion of the United States, while supervising, in that barbaric tropic, the unloading of drums of case oil flowing out of the inexhaustible wilderness of America.

Miller then described how this "jungle epiphany" was to seize his imagination, setting him on a quest to consume a lifetime:

> However it came about, the vision demanded of me that I begin at the beginning, not at the beginning of a fall (wherein Gibbon had an artistic advantage, which he improved to the utmost), but at the beginning of a beginning. Once I was back in the security of a graduate school, it seemed obvious that I had to commence with the Puritan migration. (I recognize, and herein pay my tribute to, the priority of Virginia; but what I wanted was a coherence with which I could coherently begin.) One or two of my instructors warned me against throwing my career away; that field, they said, was exhausted, all the wheat had long since been winnowed, there was nothing but chaff remaining. I might have abandoned the mission, persuaded that my voices had misled me, had not Percy Holmes Boynton sustained me. He did this, I now suspect, not so much because he believed that in this area more was needed from scholarship, but simply because he held that a boy should be allowed to do what the boy genuinely, even if misguidedly, is convinced should be done.[11]

There are several things to note in this remarkable confession. First, and most notable, Miller carries here the same compulsion found in Parrington—the urge to impose form upon experience, to seize upon the American past and insist that it answer questions he is driven to ask of it. This is not the conventional academic's desire simply to make a "contribution to scholarly knowledge"; it is something deeper, more passionately existential, than that. It is the human drive—a drive occa-

[11] *Errand into the Wilderness* (Harper and Row, 1956; rpt. 1964), vii–ix.

sionally bordering on rage in a Miller or a Parrington—to *explain* things, to make one's own experience, and the world around that experience, comprehensible. Hence Miller's search for "a coherence with which I could coherently begin." That search would drive him back to the articulate origins of American experience, and would fixate him there for most of the 35-odd years remaining in his life.[12]

Intellectually, then, Miller's paradigm drama resembles Parrington's—the obsession to give order, *explanation,* to America's experience, and the will to break through scholarly conventions blocking that quest. But Perry Miller was born in 1905, a full generation after Parrington, and therein lies a world of difference in scholarly situation. For once Miller mounted his fury in the mid-1920s, he would then—unlike Parrington—be encouraged to return to "the security of a graduate school." Where Parrington's intellectual work was characteristically frustrated by an unresponsive world, Miller was continually nurtured by the most respected institutions of academe.

His graduate mentor at the University of Chicago, Percy Holmes Boynton, left the young Miller free to pursue his obsession with early America. Boynton, it seems, was not concerned that his student carve out an academic territory, and in time make his "contribution" to scholarly knowledge. Rather, he urged Miller to follow his own intellectual passions—his "voices," as it were. Boynton and Chicago were so flexible, indeed, that they encouraged Miller to take the bulk of his graduate courses at Harvard, where the freshest work on early America was then being done. The young graduate student was also left free to roam between the academic disciplines of history and literature, since of the two most notable colonial scholars then at Harvard, one, Samuel Eliot Morison, was a historian, and the other, Kenneth Murdock, was in literature. When Miller himself was later appointed to the Harvard faculty, his position would be in the literature department, though the bulk of his published scholarship was in history.

Where Parrington had been refused entry to Harvard, Miller was given a coveted professorship there, and soon would become one of its most distinguished scholars. It is an added insult to the Harvard-rebuffed Parrington that Miller's first scholarly article—written for Morison's graduate seminar there and published in the *New England Quarterly* when Miller was a callow 26—was an assault upon the recently-deceased Parrington and his interpretation of Thomas Hooker.[13]

[12] For details of Miller's life, I have drawn upon Robert Middlekauff's biographical portrait in Cunliffe and Winks, *Pastmasters,* 167–90; and upon the dedicatory essays published in the *Harvard Review* a year after Miller's death (Spring 1964). To date, no full-length biography of Miller exists, but Stanford Searle is currently working on one.

[13] "Thomas Hooker and the Democracy of Connecticut," *New England Quarterly,* 4 (Fall 1931), 663–712.

Still, it indicates something of Parrington's influence only a few years after his death that Perry Miller was obliged to attack him in order to clear ground for his own work. And when we look at broader institutional developments of the 1930s, we see that those early efforts at interdisciplinary American Studies at Harvard, and at other Eastern universities like Yale and Princeton and Pennsylvania, were energized and given direction by Parrington's monumental accomplishment in *Main Currents*. In his lifetime, then, Parrington would be refused entry to the Eastern scholarly establishment; yet after death he would in effect gain entry there by having constructed the ideas and, more fundamentally, the methods of inquiry, which many establishment scholars would go on to study themselves.

In several Eastern universities during the thirties, we can see mounting restlessness with conventional disciplinary boundaries. What gave form to this restlessness was a quest for "The American Mind" (or, in Parrington's term, for the "main currents in American thought"). No one else experienced the drama just like a Parrington or a Miller; but others could share their vision of a distinctive American culture, and could register discontent with how the conventional disciplines had obscured that vision.[14]

Discontent ran especially strong in departments of literature. For some decades prior to the thirties, momentum had been building to free the study of American literature from its role as an appendage to Anglo-Saxon literature,[15] and instead to study it "on native grounds," as it were.[16] With the renaissance in American writing during the teens and twenties, and the malaise of English and European culture following World War I, this

[14] Witness for example Robert Spiller:

> I am not sure just how clear the founding fathers were in their formulation of this question or in their answers to it, but I can assure you that we tackled the problem as though we knew what we were about. We said by our actions if not by our words: There is now in existence a well-formed total and autonomous American culture and it is our business to find out just what it is, how it came into being, how it functions, and how it should be studied, researched and taught.
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> (Spiller, "Unity and Diversity," 612)

[15] Immediately before the founding of American Studies, classes on American literature comprised but one of every eleven undergraduate courses taught in English departments in the United States. At the graduate level, the proportion was even smaller, one in 13. Ferner Nuhn, "Teaching American Literature in American Colleges," *American Mercury*, 13 (Mar. 1928), 228–31. And as recently as 1948, Howard Mumford Jones could write, "Of the sixty-odd presidents of [the Modern Language Association], none has been distinguished for work in the American field." *The Theory of American Literature* (Cornell, 1948; rpt. 1956) 160–61.

[16] The phrase is Alfred Kazin's. See his *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature* (Harcourt, Brace, 1942). See also, for phases of this movement toward the independent study of American literature, Jones, *Theory*, 139–43, 160–87; Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920's* (Viking, 1934; rev. 1951); Spiller, "Value and Method" and "Unity and Diversity"; and Richard Ruland, *The Rediscovery of American Literature: Premises of Critical Taste, 1900–1940* (Harvard, 1967).

movement was to gain even more momentum. It finally broke through—in a few Eastern institutions—in the late twenties and early thirties, with an added push from the Parrington exemplar in *Main Currents*.

In 1929, for example, the journal *American Literature* was founded, and that same year (the year of Parrington's death) the Modern Language Association was to sponsor its first convention session ever on American literature. Two years later, Stanley T. Williams of Yale—who at the time held one of the first chairs of American literature in the country, and who in 1926 had authored a book on *The American Spirit in Letters*—inaugurated a course on "American Thought and Civilization." Williams taught the course jointly with Ralph Henry Gabriel of Yale's history department. If the Williams-Gabriel class was not actually the first American Studies offering anywhere in the United States, it claims to be one of the first.[17] In another two years, Yale moved yet further in this interdisciplinary venture by establishing a new department of History, the Arts, and Letters; and by awarding its first Ph.D. in the American branch of this department—to A. Whitney Griswold, for a dissertation on "The American Cult of Success." Griswold's has been claimed as the first American Studies, or American Studies-like, Ph.D. ever granted.[18] Four years later, in 1937, Williams and Gabriel capped their cooperative teaching venture in "American Thought and Civilization" by editing a book for the course—significantly titled *The American Mind*. A series of documents expressive of different areas of American thought, interspersed with commentary by the editors, *The American Mind* was soon adopted in American Studies-like offerings throughout the country.

Such offerings were introduced in several American universities during the 1930s, especially in the East. In 1936 George Washington University began a program in American Studies, and the same year Harvard opened its interdisciplinary graduate program in the History of American Civilization (guided, incidentally, by the young Perry Miller and F. O. Matthiessen, among others). One year later, Pennsylvania launched its program in American Civilization, chaired dually by Roy Franklin Nichols from history and Sculley Bradley from literature. In 1938 Western Reserve started its American Studies program, headed by Lyon Richardson from the literature department. And in 1940 Harvard was to award its first Ph.D. in the History of American Civilization—to one Henry Nash Smith, for a dissertation on "American Emotional and Imaginative Attitudes Toward the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains, 1803–1850."

[17] For more on the Williams-Gabriel class, see Gabriel, "Ideas in History," *History of Education Journal*, 11 (Summer 1951), 97–106.

[18] For Yale's claim to several "firsts" in the history of American Studies, see Sydney Ahlstrom, "Studying America and American Studies at Yale," *AQ*, 22 (Summer 1970), 503–17.

In the early 1940s, several other universities began programs in American Studies—among them Princeton, Minnesota, New York University, Texas, Brown, and Maryland. By 1947, more than 60 institutions were offering undergraduate majors in the field, with 15 going further to offer the M.A. or Ph.D.

These activities were energized and given form by a loosely organized consensus among scholars—a substantive consensus on the nature of American experience, and a methodological consensus on ways to study that experience. This might be called "the Parrington paradigm," or, more descriptively, "the intellectual history synthesis." As I have suggested, Parrington's example was widely followed in early American Studies courses and programs.[19]

Dominating Americanist scholarship of the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, the intellectual history synthesis was made up of several basic assumptions. Clustering together to form a kind of paradigm, these assumptions guided scholarship in the field and helped set boundaries within which students of American Studies were trained for well over a generation. In effect, they functioned to make the American past intellectually "usable" for those in the movement.

Reduced to essentials, these assumptions are as follows:

a) There is an "American Mind." That mind is more or less homogeneous. Though it may prove to be complex and constructed of many different layers, it is in fact a single entity.

b) What distinguishes the American Mind is its location in the "New" World. Because of this, Americans are characteristically hopeful, innocent, individualistic, pragmatic, idealistic. Theirs is uniquely a world of boundless opportunity. Europeans, in contrast, are characteristically tragic in temper, because hemmed in by all the boundaries and limitations and corruptions of the "Old" World.

c) The American Mind can theoretically be found in anyone American. But it comes to most coherent expression in the country's leading thinkers—Williams, Edwards, Franklin, Cooper, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Twain, Dewey, Niebuhr, et al. Hence early American Studies programs offered courses on the "Great Books"—often required—which introduced students to the field through the culture's most elevated minds.

[19] For Parrington's impact on the founding of American Studies, see Spiller, "Value and Method," 2–3; and Jones, *Theory*, 139–43. Howard Mumford Jones writes of Parrington:

> Who can forget the tingling sense of discovery with which we first read these lucid pages, followed this confident marshaling of masses of stubborn material into position, until book, chapter, and section became as orderly as a regiment on parade! Readers in 1927 felt the same quality of excitement, I imagine, as Jeffrey experienced when in 1825 young Macaulay sent his dazzling essay on Milton to the *Edinburgh Review*. (pp. 141–142)

d) The American Mind is an enduring form in our intellectual history. Its distinctive themes—Puritanism, Individualism, Progress, Pragmatism, Transcendentalism, Liberalism—run through virtually the whole of America's past.

e) Though the study of "popular" minds—e.g., Davy Crockett, Daniel Webster, Buffalo Bill—might be academically legitimate, America is revealed most profoundly in its "high" culture. Therefore, great American literature, and the ideas therein, should hold a kind of "privileged position" in American Studies scholarship and teaching.[20]

All these assumptions were instrumental to the basic aim of scholars within the paradigm—to probe for *the fundamental meaning of America*. This search for quintessential meaning was made possible by the holistic faith of those within the paradigm. "Thought" in America is an integrated whole, they insisted; hence interdisciplinary American Studies would bring together what the conventional academic disciplines had previously split apart.[21]

Not everyone in the consensus held all these assumptions all the time, of course; total conformity is not required for a communal paradigm to function. But enough people held to enough assumptions enough of the time so that no fundamental strain was put upon its basic structure from the paradigm's first comprehensive articulation in 1927 up through the middle of the 1960s. We can find the paradigm in full form in Parrington's *Main Currents* (1927–30), in Perry Miller's *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts* (1933) and *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (1939), in F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* (1941), and in Ralph Barton Perry's *Puritanism and Democracy* (1944). And we can find strong currents of the paradigm running through H. N. Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950), Miller's *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (1953), David Potter's *People of Plenty* (1954), Richard Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform* (1955), Louis Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955), R. W. B. Lewis' *The American Adam* (1955), John William Ward's *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (1955), Marvin Meyers' *The Jacksonian Persuasion* (1957), Charles Sanford's *The Quest for Paradise* (1961), Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), on up, finally, to Alan Trachtenberg's *Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol* (1965).

These were the shaping books—the "exemplars," as it were—which set the fundamental aims of inquiry within the intellectual history paradigm, defining its outer boundaries. Because those boundaries were

[20] The term "privileged position" is Murray Murphey's. See his criticism of that position in "American Civilization at Pennsylvania," *AQ*, 22 (Summer 1970), 495–96.

[21] For an extended analysis of how this holistic "American Mind" syndrome has functioned within America Studies scholarship, see Tate, *Method*. See especially Tate's chapter "The Achievements and Limitations of Organic Holism," 105–26.

seldom crossed during the first three and a half decades of American Studies' history, activity and growth could flourish undisturbed inside the movement. We have already looked at this activity during the 1930s and 40s—the era of early growth and experimentation in the movement. Now let us turn to the years from 1950 to the mid-60s—an era of rapid expansion, corporate organization, and productive scholarship in the field.

* * *

In retrospect, the decade and a half following 1950—between *Virgin Land* at one end and *Brooklyn Bridge* at the other—has come to look like the "Golden Years" of the movement. For some time now, we have witnessed a fifties revival in the larger culture—many feeling nostalgic for an age when life seemed simpler, and Americans appeared more confident and less divided against themselves. So too for American Studies.

The retrospective simplicity is of course delusive, as the confidence at the time was deceptive. In the academic movement as in the culture at large, Americans in the fifties seemed bent on enacting David Potter's observation that "Our practice . . . has been to overleap problems—to bypass them—rather than to solve them."[22]

I have chosen as my representative act here a different sort of drama from Parrington's and Miller's. It is a seminar focused on American cultural values in the twentieth century, held at the University of Pennsylvania in 1954, and chaired jointly by Robert Spiller of the literature department and Thomas Cochran from history.

This act of the 1950s is distinguished by its *corporate* nature. It signals a basic change in the movement—where the locus of activity and power points from individuals toward groups, from offering single courses toward the establishment of programs, from articulating personal visions toward making collective contributions to scholarly knowledge. Where the earlier acts of Parrington and Miller took place outside as well as inside the academy, Penn's American Civilization 900 happened wholly inside academe.

What made the joint seminar possible was a massive foundation grant. Pennsylvania's program in American Civilization had already received two Rockefeller grants, in 1949 and 1954. This time it was to land a five-year, $150,000 grant from Carnegie Corporation, and one of its first acts was to set up the seminar.

It was a notable organizational undertaking. Money was spent not only to free Spiller and Cochran from other duties, but also to support the participation of distinguished outsiders in the seminar—among others, the

[22] *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago Phoenix, 1954), 122.

novelist James T. Farrell, the Columbia sociologist Robert Merton, and the obligatory European scholar, this time brought in from the University of Kiel, one Hellmut Bock. With all these notables and all this money, naturally the seminar failed in its express purpose—I cite here Spiller's own confession on the matter.[23] It had too much organized activity and too much diffused prestige ever to focus down on its basic task—bringing together perspectives from history, literature, and social science to explain values in twentieth-century America.

A cultural drama should be judged not only for its manifest purpose, but for its latent functions too. The Penn seminar manifestly failed in bringing together the disparate disciplines of inquiry. But it succeeded all too well in its projective latent function for the movement: it symbolized an age in which America's bounty was made available to academic American Studies. Like David Potter's Americans of that day, American Studies too functioned as a "people of plenty."

Pennsylvania, as I have noted, was awarded three foundation grants from 1949 through 1954. In the late 1940s, Minnesota also got fellowship support from the Carnegie Corporation. And in 1950, Yale was to receive a substantial endowment from the wealthy benefactor William Robertson Coe, and that same year announced a $4.75 million drive to expand its American Studies enterprise.[24]

This theme of expansion, often backed by foundation largesse, can be found in the national movement as well. In 1949 the *American Quarterly* was established, followed two years later by the national American Studies Association. At the time, Robert Spiller persuaded the Carnegie Corporation to fund the ASA with an executive secretary, an office at Penn, and funds for regional development of the Association. Spiller's influence extended beyond academe into governmental circles too, and he was instrumental in securing for Americanists the new Fulbright fellowships for teaching and research abroad.[25]

[23] Spiller, "Value and Method," 6–9. See also Murphey, "Pennsylvania," 495–96.

[24] Among others who received foundation moneys to establish, maintain, or expand their American Studies activities during the fifties were Bennington (Carnegie Corporation, 1950), Barnard (Carnegie Corporation, 1952), and Stetson (Charles E. Merrill Foundation, 1955). Charles Bassett notes that as of 1958, 20 percent of American Studies programs had received funding from outside their own institutions. By 1973, that figure had shrunk to just 5 percent. "Undergraduate and Graduate Programs in the United States: A Survey," *AQ*, 27 (Aug. 1975), 311.

[25] If Parrington ranks as the major intellectual founder of American Studies, then Robert Spiller must surely be its major institutional founder. For evidence of this, see the summer of 1967 *AQ* essays by Russel Nye, Anthony Garvan, and Louis Rubin honoring Spiller on the occasion of his retirement from Pennsylvania.

Nye wrote, for example:

> In the late forties and early fifties, when American Studies needed somewhere to gather and its great centrifugal energies needed to be focused inward, Robert Spiller provided plan, precept and example

A similar pattern of corporate support can be found in the productive scholarship of this era. Where Parrington had worked 14 lonely years on *Main Currents* with virtually no help from outside, scholars in this period received substantial aid from their own institutions and from their benefactors in the society at large. Smith's *Virgin Land,* for example, was sponsored by grants from the Huntington Library, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the University of Minnesota Graduate Research Fund. For *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age,* John William Ward got grant support from the American Council of Learned Societies and from the Princeton University Research Fund. For *The Jacksonian Persuasion,* Marvin Meyers received a year free from academic duties to write at the Stanford Center for the Study of the Behavioral Sciences. For *The Machine in the Garden,* Leo Marx was awarded a Guggenheim Foundation grant. And Alan Trachtenberg's *Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol* was supported by a grant from the American Council of Learned Societies.

Perhaps because people in American Studies often fancy themselves "American Adams" (and now "Eves"), perhaps because, characteristically, corporate ventures are not always seen as "corporate" by the select few on the inside, post-World War II Americanists still tended to see themselves in the image of a Parrington—that is, lone intellectual adventurers fired by a personal vision of the culture, and driven to put scholarly form on that vision. This vision is not wholly false. *Virgin Land* and *The American Adam* and *The Jacksonian Persuasion* and *The Machine in the Garden* are all passionately intense, personal books; they are not intended as simply objective "contributions" to corporate knowledge. Yet the social and economic structure of American scholarship had been fundamentally transformed since the days of Parrington, and those who still envisioned themselves isolated "American Adams" by the 1950s and 60s were largely deceived.

Leo Marx gave voice to this unwitting deception a few years back, in addressing a conference on interdisciplinary studies in Detroit. Marx opened his address with the ritual obeisance to American Studies' open and experimental character—an obligatory gesture, it seems, whenever one speaks with colleagues of the field. No one can say exactly *what* American Studies is, he insisted, because scholars in the field are free to follow their own personal visions. Then Marx went on to apologize for presuming to serve as official spokesman for what he called a "wholly

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. . . . His knowledge of the intricate and murky mazes of Washington and New York bureaucracy has benefited ASA many times; it is said, peprhaps facetiously, that he knows more buttons to push in more bureaus than any other man in academic life.

("Robert Spiller and the ASA," *AQ*, 19 [Summer 1967], 291–92.)

For an additional perspective on the early years of the ASA, see Carl Bode's essay in this volume.

unorganized" group of American Studies scholars—including Henry Nash Smith, Daniel Aaron, Allen Guttmann, John William Ward, Charles Sanford, R. W. B. Lewis, Alan Trachtenberg, and himself.[26]

"Wholly unorganized," indeed! Few political conspiracies have ever been so tightly interwoven as this one. It was no mere accident of talent that they all tended to write of America in similar ways. Beyond the corporate bonds of financial and institutional support just noted, witness the interpersonal academic ties: Smith and Marx were once colleagues on the American Studies faculty at Minnesota, where Ward, Trachtenberg, and Guttmann were graduate students. Smith, Aaron, Sanford, Lewis, and Marx all studied at Harvard within a few years of each other, and all were deeply influenced there, personally or indirectly, by Perry Miller and F. O. Matthiessen. At the time of Marx's address, he, Ward, and Guttmann were colleagues in American Studies at Amherst.

By taking only three institutions, then, Minnesota, Harvard, and Amherst, we can trace out professional and personal connections influencing the work of almost every notable symbol-myth-image scholar writing in those years. If their books were to achieve an intellectual depth which has not been seen since in American Studies, that is because they functioned amid a scholarly fraternity where basic assumptions about the culture and ways of studying it were shared and reinforced, and where powerful institutions of American society nurtured their work.[27]

By the middle of the 1960s, all that began to change. The intellectual history synthesis which had served American Studies so well for so long was shattered; and academies across the country were threatened by forces which charged them with being bastions of reaction, not a haven for free, inquiring minds. Similarly, many saw American Studies not as a vanguard movement on the frontiers of scholarship—the movement's prior

[26] Marx, "American Studies," 75, n. 1.

[27] A glance at book acknowledgments further reveals the corporate nature of these undertakings. In *The Machine in the Garden,* Marx cites the influence of his teachers Miller and Matthiessen, and notes that Smith and Ward read the manuscript. In the 1950 edition of *Virgin Land,* Smith cites Marx and in his 1970 reissue of the book pays respect to Trachtenberg's critique of the earlier edition. In *Men of Good Hope,* Aaron cites Matthiessen and Lewis, and in *Writers on the Left* notes that Smith read portions of the manuscript. In *The Conservative Tradition in America,* Guttmann cites Marx and Ward. In *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age,* Ward notes that Marx read the manuscript, and cites Smith as his teacher and *Virgin Land* as a model for his own work. In *The Quest for Paradise,* Sanford compares and contrasts his work with Smith's and Lewis'. In *The American Adam,* Lewis notes that Aaron read the manuscript, and acknowledges the influence of Matthiessen both as teacher and as author of *American Renaissance.* And in *Brooklyn Bridge,* Trachtenberg cites Marx as one of his two most influential mentors. In addition, *The Machine in the Garden, Men of Good Hope, The Conservative Tradition in America, Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age,* and *Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol* were all published by Oxford University Press.

image of itself—but as an overly timid and elitist white Protestant male enterprise which tended to reinforce the dominant culture rather than critically analyzing it. Borrowing from William O'Neill, I have called this the "coming apart" stage of American Studies.[28]

* * *

My choice of representative act for this stage of the movement is "Culture Therapy 202"—Robert Merideth's introductory seminar held at Miami University late in the 1960s.

Merideth had taken his graduate studies at Minnesota during the late 1950s and early '60s, under the influence there of the symbol-myth-image school. Like many of his generation, he would be jolted off that course, however, by events of the sixties—the political assassinations, the university confrontations, urban riots, escalation of the war in Vietnam, rise of the counterculture. "Culture Therapy 202" was Merideth's effort, late in the decade, to articulate a response to those events. He has described that response in a pamphlet written for the New University Conference, and published in 1969. It is entitled "Subverting Culture: The Radical as Teacher."

Merideth's act of the 1960s contrasts sharply with the three we have seen before. The acts of Parrington and Miller were dramatic personal gestures, made by individuals critical of particular institutions and values in the larger culture; but neither went on to reject the whole structure of American experience. And the Spiller-Cochran act was firmly nestled inside the culture's supporting institutions; its express purpose was to articulate that culture, not basically to criticize it.

But Robert Merideth was not satisfied merely to discover what American culture *is*. What the culture is is obvious, he felt; it is all around people, threatening to envelop them, and bent on corrupting their naturally humane impulses. Hence the teacher in American Studies must assume an adversary role against the culture. He must try to save himself from the culture's poison tentacles, and in the classroom he is obligated to help save others too, or help them save themselves. His only humane option, under the circumstances, is to serve as a cultural radical.

"The primary purpose of the radical as teacher," Merideth insisted, "is to subvert a corrupt culture as it is internalized in his students."[29] Culture *study*—academic analysis of what America is—should be subordinated to

[28] *Coming Apart: An Informal History of America in the 1960's* (Quadrangle, 1971).
[29] *Subverting Culture: The Radical as Teacher* (New University Conference, 1969), 1.

culture *therapy*—the larger-than-academic, radically human act of healing wounds caused by the culture's corrupting influence. Hence Robert Merideth in the late 1960s would direct people in the movement away from publishing scholarship, a distinguishing trait of American Studies the decade before, to become more involved in radical action—radical teaching, community organizing, consciousness-raising.

If the movement as a whole did not follow Merideth's lead here, a visible minority did turn in that direction, with impact well beyond their numbers. In 1972 and 1973, members of the Association's Radical Caucus (which Merideth helped found) sponsored week-long summer institutes, and these were to bear fruit at the fourth national ASA convention held in San Francisco in 1973.[30] The convention format there was restructured to include some two dozen informal workshop sessions—half the ASA's total program. Instead of a passive audience hearing a panel of formally prepared research papers, some dozen or so persons in each workshop were actively to discuss issues like: structuralism and American Studies, the uses of autobiography, the challenge to prison authority, American Studies and the community college, American Studies in the high school, Appalachia and culture studies.

These workshops expressed concern for areas of cultural experience made visible in the 1960s, areas which academic American Studies was urged to respond to. So, late in the decade, the movement would widen its boundaries to include black studies, popular culture studies, folklore studies, women's studies, ecology studies, film studies, material culture studies, ethnic studies, education studies, youth studies, Third World studies, and Native American studies, among others.[31]

[30] It is symbolic of this late sixties–early seventies stage of the movement that leadership for the Radical Caucus, and especially for the summer institutes, came mainly from two graduate students, Nancy Banister and Robert Scarola. The movement had come some distance from the mid-fifties Penn seminar when, as Robert Spiller had put it, "The laboratory work was done mainly by the graduate students; the direction and discussion came rather more from the senior participants." Spiller, "Value and Method," 7.

[31] See Robert Sklar, "Realities," for how this changing consciousness in the wider culture was to affect American Studies. For similar indications, see Jay Gurian, "American Studies and the Creative Present," *Midcontinent American Studies Journal,* 10 (Spring 1969), 76–84; Michael Rockland, "The Concord Complex: Some Remarks on the American Geographical Imagination," *Connections II* (Summer 1976), 28–31; my "American Civ. at Raymond: The 'Cluster' Academy as Radical Alternative," *AQ,* 22 (Summer 1970), 464–88; Doris Friedensohn, *American Studies 242: Education and Social Change* (Kirkland College Press, 1972); issues of the Radical Caucus' journals, *Connections* (1970-73) and *Connections II* (1973-); *Red Buffalo: A Radical Journal of American Studies* (University of Buffalo, 1971-); *New America: A Review* (University of New Mexico, 1974-); and *American Examiner: A Forum of Ideas* (Michigan State University, 1972-).

All these newly-academized experiences imposed massive strain on the old intellectual history synthesis. After the middle of the sixties, it was hard to assume without question that America is an integrated whole; division and conflict, not consensus, seemed to characterize the culture. It was also difficult to assume the privileged position of elite ideas as a window into the culture. Hard facts—emotionally searing events like assassinations and riots, gigantic institutions which could wreak havoc on people's lives—these held power, it appeared, to create or destroy an insubstantial idea in a flash. Students of America thus turned away from airy myths and symbols to look at earthier matters, at material artifacts like houses or bridges or buildings, at functioning social structures like the family or the city or the town or school or corporation or labor union or prison, at measurable human behavior and at people's lifestyles. These, it was felt, would penetrate to the "real" America which functions below the rationalized ideas.[32]

Hence we have seen, since the mid-sixties, a proliferation of subcultural studies focusing on one or another aspect of American life. But we have very little of wide influence in the movement attempting, like the old symbol-myth-image works, to integrate the whole culture. Intellectually, American Studies has never recovered from the earthquake-like jolts of the sixties, and the consciousness those events forced upon the culture.

* * *

Viewed from one perspective, American Studies has been in decline ever since. With the demise of the Parrington paradigm, the movement has lacked a larger cultural synthesis, an image of a "usable" American past to lend it purpose and direction. Where the old synthesis got intellectual mileage from setting America off against Europe—New World against Old—now we tend to see both America and Europe on one side of a cultural and economic chasm, with the poorer, often newer, nations of

[32] An especially virulent form of this critique was voiced in 1968 by Christopher Lasch:

> The defection of intellectuals from their true calling—critical thought—goes a long way toward explaining not only the poverty of political discussion but the intellectual bankruptcy of so much recent historical scholarship. The infatuation with consensus; the vogue of a disembodied "history of ideas" divorced from considerations of class or other determinants of social organization; the obsession with "American studies" which perpetuates a nationalistic myth of American uniqueness—these things reflect the degree to which historians have become apologists, in effect, for American national power in the holy war against communism.

"The Cultural Cold War: A Short History of the Congress for Cultural Freedom," in Barton Bernstein, ed., *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History* (Random House, 1968; rpt. Vintage Books, 1969), 323.

the world on the other. Seen from this vantage point, America does not look as new and innocent, as idealistic, as pragmatic as it once did. Thus American Studies is deprived of its previous fascination with watching a freshly-born culture as, Adam-like, it goes about creating and naming and using new things in the world.[33]

Pursuing further this declension theme, we can say that, unquestionably, American Studies is no longer working on the frontiers of scholarship. During the fifties and early sixties, symbol-myth-image scholarship came uniquely out of an American Studies perspective, and it influenced scholars in traditional disciplines too, particularly in intellectual history and in literary history. Very little of that is happening with American Studies now.

In scholarship, we have become something of a "parasite" field—living off the creations of others but not creating much on our own, nor contributing much to any field outside ourselves. We do this in two different ways. In some cases, we draw from new work in the traditional disciplines—from the discipline of history, for example, we draw from family studies, demography, community studies, and, more generally, from social history; from literature, we draw from autobiography and structuralism; from anthropology, we draw also from structuralism, cognitive anthropology, techniques of field work, and remnants of culture-personality analysis. In other cases, American Studies has drawn from, or rather given a home to, studies which have their real base of vitality in the culture at large. This is particularly true with women's studies, perhaps the most vital and interesting new field in the movement today.[34] But it also true with black studies, Hispanic studies, American Indian studies, ecology studies, and so on.[35] The one field which we might claim

[33] It is no accident that the two most notable works published in the symbol-myth-image era had "Adam" and "Virgin" in their titles, nor that much American Studies scholarship of the fifties and early sixties was focused on the early nineteenth century—when the country seemed freshest and newest, and was most concerned with creating for itself a unique cultural identity.

[34] See especially Betty Chmaj's stimulating *Image, Myth, and Beyond: American Women and American Studies* (KNOW, 1972). See also Joanna Zangrando, "Women's Studies in the United States: Approaching Reality," *American Studies International,* 14 (Autumn 1975), 15–36; Annette Baxter, "Women's Studies and American Studies: The Uses of the Interdisciplinary," *AQ,* 26 (Oct. 1974), 433–39; and the new journals *SIGNS* and *Feminist Studies.*

[35] For a comprehensive bibliographical essay connecting these new fields of cultural inquiry to academic American Studies, see Sklar, "American Studies 'Philosophy.'" For the relation of black studies to American Studies, see the essays on Afro-American theatre, art, and fiction in the 1978 *AQ* Bibliography issue.

as an American Studies creation—popular culture—has broken away to form a separate movement of its own.[36]

Further, intellectual ties between American Studies and the traditional disciplines have loosened substantially of late. American literature has long since secured a territory in English departments, and has little need of American Studies now to legitimize it. The most creative work in the discipline of history is now in social, not intellectual history, a field which does not draw upon American Studies for energy and direction.[37] And since the social sciences went behaviorist some years back, they have stopped looking at American Studies (or any other humanistic enterprise for that matter) as having anything worthwhile to offer their scholarship.

American Studies has also lost some of its initiative to explain contemporary America. In fact, that initiative may be lost from academe itself (if academe ever had it). The richest works giving us intellectual bearing on our experience today are being written by journalists—e.g., David Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest* or Frances FitzGerald's *Fire in the Lake*—or by rogue academicians turned journalists—e.g., Tom Wolfe's *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* or Garry Wills' *Nixon Agonistes*—or by culture

[36] The relationship between the popular culture movement and the American Studies movement deserves more space than I can give it here. In some ways, the two movements have been coterminous. Popular culture notables like Carl Bode, Russel Nye, and John Cawelti are notables in American Studies too—the former two having held the presidency of both national associations. Further, several American Studies classics—for example, Smith's *Virgin Land* and Ward's *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age*—are richly informed by perspectives from popular culture.

Recently, however, some strain has developed between the two movements; and if many still identify with both, some have been obliged, or obliged themselves, to opt for one movement over the other. Culturally, the split developed in response to the decade of the sixties, with its anti-elitist sentiments and its affection for products of the populace. Institutionally, this split has been centered at Bowling Green State University where, under the vigorous leadership of Ray Browne, popular culture studies have become one of the more energetic forces in American academic life over the last several years. This split was dramatized in 1978, when Browne challenged the ASA and the *AQ* by founding a competing American Culture Association, with a competing journal—the *Journal of American Culture*. For more on this, see Bruce Lohof, "Popular Culture: The *Journal* and the State of the Study," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 6 (Winter 1972), 453–62; and Michael Marsden, "American Culture Studies: A Discipline in Search of Itself," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 9 (Fall 1975), 461–70.

[37] This has meant that programs founded on the old intellectual history synthesis, and functioning basically through the integration of history and literature, suffered severe setbacks after the middle 1960s. That is acutely the case with Harvard's program in the History of American Civilization, and also to a lesser extent Minnesota's. These had been the country's outstanding graduate programs during American Studies symbol-myth-image era of the 1940s and 50s. Harvard's program now survives as a shell of its former self. Minnesota's also was in the doldrums for a time; in recent years, however, the program shows signs of considerable revitalization. For more on Harvard's decline, see Dorson, *Birth*, 29–30. For the earlier years of ascendancy, see John Lydenberg, ed., *Political Activism and the Academic Conscience: The Harvard Experience, 1936–1941* (Hobart and William Smith, 1977).

critics who may or may not be academicians but clearly do not identify themselves that way—e.g., Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics,* Philip Slater's *The Pursuit of Loneliness* and *Earthwalk,* Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock,* Barry Commoner's *The Closing Circle,* Robert Heilbroner's *The Human Prospect.* In addition, we often see searching critical analysis of the culture coming from an *All in the Family,* a *Maude,* a *Lou Grant Show,* a *Selling of the Pentagon,* an *Echoes of the Guns of Autumn,* a *Scared Straight!,* a *Roots,* a *Godfather* (I and II), a *Ms. Magazine,* a *Rolling Stone* magazine, a *60 Minutes,* a *Michael Jackson Show* (KABC Talk Radio, Los Angeles). None of the cultural criticism coming today from film, television, radio, music, magazines, or newspapers owes anything at all to academic American Studies. If we borrow mightily from them in our courses and our scholarship on the contemporary, they have little reason to look at us in turn. In this sense too, we are relegated to a parasite role.

All this has happened during the last decade and a half in and around American Studies, and it makes for a depressing story. Yet it is not the whole story of our recent past, not even perhaps half of it. Indeed, a case can be made that measuring the movement through indices of growth and energy and activity, American Studies has never been stronger and healthier. That is why I am unable to choose a single symbolic act to represent this most recent stage of the movement; our direction is so clearly paradoxical that no one can say just where we are now, let alone prophesy where we may be headed.

For example, despite massive cutbacks in academe during this depression decade, the movement has continued to grow in numbers. And despite the vulnerability of interdisciplinary ventures to institutional belt-tightening, American Studies appears not to have suffered unduly. Indeed, new programs, and in several cases independent departments, have been launched throughout the seventies, and the job prospects for teachers of American Studies, though bleak, seem better than for those in traditional disciplines like literature or history.[38]

[38] Of 1700 four-year academic institutions in the United States by 1973, one in seven offered an American Studies degree. This was up dramatically from 1958, when the figure was but one in 20. From 1958 to 1970, American Studies undergraduate and graduate programs doubled in number; from 1970 to 1975, they almost doubled again. Doctoral programs in the field tripled from 1958 to 1973, and no institution granting a Ph.D. in 1958 had dropped it 15 years later. As of 1973, there were 32 independent departments of American Studies in the country, almost 13% of the total programs. That was up substantially from 1958, when independent departments comprised only 5 percent of the total. And recently, when local administrations sought to curtail American Studies enterprises at Washington State University and Case Western Reserve, student and faculty initiative, plus strong support from the national ASA Council, was able to save the programs. Data on American Studies activity is taken from Bassett, "Programs," and Marcell "Characteristically American" and "Recent Trends."

Activity on the national scale even more clearly indicates the movement's good health. The national American Studies Association was founded in 1951, just one year after the first major symbol-myth-image work, *Virgin Land*. Yet during all the symbol-myth-image years, in the "Golden Era" when scholarship in American Studies flourished and massive foundation moneys poured into the movement, never was enough interest generated to hold a national convention of the Association. It was not until 1967, two years after the last of the great symbol-myth-image works, that the first nationwide convention of the ASA was held, in Kansas City. Momentum has picked up since; every two years from 1967 to the present, the national ASA has mounted successful and well-attended conventions—1969 in Toledo, 1971 in Washington, D. C., 1973 in San Francisco, 1975 in San Antonio, 1977 in Boston, 1979 in Minneapolis.

In 1971 the ASA secured funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities to establish the National American Studies Faculty. Under the energetic and talented leadership of John Hague, the NASF has been a powerful catalyst in the years since. It has sponsored interchange between American Studies and the community colleges, American Studies and the high schools, museum work and American Studies, the American Studies summer institutes, and many like ventures. Further, the NASF has served as a clearinghouse for the movement, providing information on course syllabi and field bibliographies from and to American Studies programs across the country.[39]

Institutionally, if the old symbol-myth-image programs like Harvard and Minnesota have lost much of their coherence and have waned in influence, other programs have advanced to take their place. Penn and Yale are now the most respected graduate enterprises in the country—Yale because it is Yale, Penn because it has a clear sense of what it is about and for some two decades has sought to recruit faculty consistent

[39] David Marcell has written of the National American Studies Faculty:

> Since its inception in 1971 about two-thirds of the membership of the A.S.A. . . . have become NASF volunteers. Under John Hague's extraordinary leadership, some three to four hundred of these volunteers have provided assistance of one sort or another to over three hundred educational institutions across the country. And all this has been accomplished on a budget averaging a little more than fifty thousand dollars a year.
>
> ("Necessary Angels," *Connections II* [Autumn 1975], 105)

Needless to say, such an association—based on dedicated volunteers and lacking a cumbersome bureaucratic apparatus—proved alien to the categories of government funding, so in 1975 the NASF lost its grant support from NEH. Since then it temporarily received support from the Carnegie Corporation, and now receives no outside funding at all. See also, for the NASF, Robert Walker, "The National American Studies Faculty: An Outline for Assessment," *American Studies Newsletter* (Stetson, 1976), 4–6.

with that vision.[40] Other programs have become more visible in recent years in institutions like Buffalo, Kansas, Texas, Washington State, New Mexico, Boston, Maryland, Bowling Green, George Washington, Iowa, Hawaii, Emory, Case Western Reserve, the Universities of California at Davis and Irvine, and in the California State Universities at San Francisco, San Diego, Sacramento, Los Angeles, and Fullerton. All this indicates a shift away from northeastern dominance in American Studies to a geographical distribution all across the country.

I have already noted that American Studies today lacks a single synthesis with the influence, say, of the old symbol-myth-image explanation. It also lacks any clear consensus on a "usable" American past. Hence intellectually the last decade has brought disintegration in the movement. But if in one sense dis-integration means decline, in another sense it may mean simply diversification. We have moved beyond the block assumption that there is a single holistic "American Culture," expressed in "The American Mind," to a more discriminating consciousness that contemporary cultures function on several different levels, and in several different ways. We are less inclined now to take readings from a single vantage point on *The* American Experience; instead, we look upon America from a variety of different, often competing, perspectives—popular culture, black culture, the culture of women, youth culture, the culture of the aged, Hispanic-American culture, American Indian culture, material culture, the culture of poverty, folk culture, the culture of regionalism, the culture of academe, the culture of literature, the culture of professionalism, and so on.

* * *

Further, the concept of culture itself, and its usage in American Studies, have come under critical review during the 1970s. Here the department of American Civilization at Pennsylvania has led the way. Indeed, the recent conflict in the movement between new and old conceptions of culture reflects, among other things, the rise to institutional power of Pennsylvania and the consequent decline of Harvard and Minnesota. Penn faculty and Penn graduates have urged the field toward a more social scientific sense of culture and culture studies. And their critiques of past humanistic positions have taken aim at Henry Nash Smith and Leo Marx, both trained as graduate students in Harvard's American Civilization program, and both for a time faculty colleagues in American Studies at Minnesota.

[40] For a description of the program at Pennsylvania, see Murphey, "Pennsylvania." Penn's program is influential also because it has editorial and financial control over the *AQ*; Penn, not the ASA, owns the *AQ*. In addition, many of the *Quarterly's* most notable articles of late have been written by Penn faculty or Penn graduates.

It is never easy to locate the precise beginnings of such trends. But an important early voice in the debate was Bruce Kuklick's 1972 *American Quarterly* essay—"Myth and Symbol in American Studies."[41] In this essay, Kuklick was to take on the symbol-myth-image school of explanation, particularly its habit of reading the whole culture from inside literary texts. He felt that symbol-myth-image scholars were prone to generalize through grand intellectual abstractions—"the anonymous popular mind," "the widespread desire of Americans," "the imagination of the people," "the American view of life"—but only rarely did they offer empirical grounding for their generalizations.[42]

As a student of philosophy, Bruce Kuklick laid bare the unexamined assumptions of symbol-myth-image scholars, charging that their methods of explanation broke apart under a critical eye. But, as Kuklick acknowledged, his procedure was essentially negative; he dis-assembled humanistic symbol-myth-image assumptions, but he advanced no alternative assumptions—humanistic or otherwise—to take their place.

It remained for Kuklick's colleague then at Penn, Gordon Kelly, to offer scholars in the field a new, more social scientifically oriented pattern of explanations. In a landmark essay published in the May 1974 *American Quarterly,* Kelly set American culture studies in substantially new directions. He advanced a theoretical model for the new culture studies, drawn from Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality,* and from work of the anthropologist Cliffort Geertz. And he applied that model to a case example—American children's literature of the late nineteenth century. Kelly's 1974 essay may in time prove as

[41] In fact, the characteristically Pennsylvania approach to culture studies was being worked out, mostly by Anthony Garvan and Murray Murphey, as early as the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s. It appeared in print in the spring of 1967. In a neglected classic of the field, Murphey proposed that American Studies align itself more with social scientific than humanistic forms of explanation, emphasizing that "the focus [of the discipline of American Civilization] is upon the *system,* not upon the unique event." "American Civilization as a Discipline," *Emory University Quarterly* (March 1967), 48.

This emphasis forecast a powerful thrust of American culture studies in the seventies, due in no small part to Murphey himself. Through his strategic location at Penn (where colleagues in the departments of anthropology, sociology, history, and elsewhere have shared and reinforced the sense of culture studies he has been trying to establish), through the analytic brilliance of his published scholarship, through his impact in the classroom and in structuring Penn's program, and through his power over *AQ* and ASA activities as former editor of *AQ* and presently as Chairman of its Editorial Board, Murray Murphey has been perhaps the single most influential figure in American Studies during the last decade and a half. More than any other program, Penn's Department of American Civilization has come close to establishing a Kuhnian "paradigm community," or what Nicholas Mullins calls a "theory group," for contemporary American culture studies. See Kuhn, *Structure,* and Mullins, *Theories and Theory Groups in Contemporary American Sociology* (Harper and Row, 1973).

[42] Kuklick, "Myth and Symbol." 445.

influential for new American culture studies as Henry Nash Smith's classic essay of 1957, "Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method?" was for an earlier American Studies.

As his point of departure, Kelly took the most notable brief for the older humanistic position, Leo Marx's 1969 article, "American Studies—A Defense of an Unscientific Method." Marx had argued there for the unique role of imaginative literature as a key to the culture. Though other modes of inquiry—namely, social scientific methods of content analysis—might itemize the surface "public opinion" of an age, only humanistic insights, Marx felt, could penetrate to the more privileged regions of human experience, wherein lies "culture."[43]

Marx had thus defined literature and culture in transcendental language; he wrote of "the concept of literary power," "the inherent capacity of a work to generate the emotional and intellectual response of its readers," "the intrinsic power of *Moby-Dick* as a work of literature"; and he spoke of great literature as "a semi-autonomous feature of the culture."[44] Gordon Kelly, in contrast, assumed a rigorously functionalist position. He was concerned with the social "creation and function of literary texts"; and his characteristic terms contrast sharply with Marx's: the "social distribution of knowledge," "the process of 'literary socialization,'" "strategies of reassurance and persuasion," "social functions of literature," "paradigms," "principle of social order."[45]

Marx had started with particular works of great literature and then moved to the general culture. Kelly, on the other hand, started with the general culture. Or rather, he began with the social situation out of which both literature and culture are constructed. "We would do well to begin with a concept of context," he wrote, "that directs attention to the rules and definitions which order and govern the creation and consumption of literature than to begin with an ethnocentric commitment to a particular type of literary product."[46]

Kelly insisted that imaginative literature, great or not, be treated as any other human product—as a particular construction of reality coming from a particular context, created and consumed by particular types of people in response to particular experiences in their world. In contrast to Marx's sense of literature as *transcending* everyday reality, Kelly declared that literature must be deeply *grounded in* social reality before it can be understood culturally.

[43] Marx, "American Studies," 81.
[44] Ibid., 80, 89, 85.
[45] Kelly, "Literature and the Historian," 152, 144, 149, 154–55, 146, 156.
[46] Ibid., 147.

Gordon Kelly's most basic contribution to a new form of culture studies is thus his *institutional* sense, his insistence that social structures mediate between the particular work of literature and the wider culture. Such an institutional sense had been missing from previous symbol-myth-image explanations. Marx, for example, had tended to assume that the solitary individual creates and confronts the great works of literature (i.e., "culture") directly, without the mediation of other social forms. But Kelly interposed a rich array of social structures between the literature and the culture—the institutional surroundings of the author, of the publishing industry, of literary critics and changing standards for criticism, of the literary audience and its differentiated social composition, and so forth. Through this array, Gordon Kelly offered contemporary American culture studies a fresh set of questions, and a fresh body of materials, for scholarly inquiry.

Coming also from the University of Pennsylvania (though hardly restricted to that institution) is what has been variously called "the new ethnography," "ethnosemantics," "ethnoscience," or "cognitive anthropology." Its impact on American Studies in the seventies has been substantial, particularly its social scientific approach to culture. Its disciplinary base lies in anthropology, though it has roots in sociology too.

Well before the 1970s of course, American Studies had been receptive to anthropological and sociological perspectives. A substantial part of David Potter's 1954 *People of Plenty,* for example, had discussed how ideas from anthropology, sociology, and psychology might aid in understanding historic American character.[47] And in a prophetic essay of 1963, Richard Sykes had urged American Studies away from humanistic preoccupations, suggesting instead a more anthropological sense of the field.[48] Even Leo Marx—chief spokesman for the humanistic mode—had been involved in an interdisciplinary faculty research seminar at Minnesota in the mid-fifties; the resulting publication—"Literature and Covert Culture" (1957)—is steeped in ideas from social science.[49]

Still, until the last decade Americanists tended to view social scientists with some humanistic disdain, so actual borrowing from their work was slight. In perhaps the most influential essay ever published in the field, Henry Nash Smith charged in 1957 that a "mutilated image of man and culture" dominates the social sciences. Twelve years later, Leo Marx called for "commerce" between humanists and social scientists; but he then accused social science of being shallow and mechanical in its ap-

[47] Potter, *Plenty,* vii-xxi, 32–72, 189–208.

[48] Richard Sykes, "American Studies and the Concept of Culture," *AQ,* 15 (Summer, 1963), 253–70.

[49] Bernard Bowron, Leo Marx, and Arnold Rose, "Literature and Covert Culture," *AQ,* 9 (Winter, 1957), 377–86.

proach to culture—in contrast to the richer, more penetrating insights of the humanities.[50] Finally, as Robert Berkhofer has indicated in his 1972 article, "Clio and the Culture Concept," when Americanists did borrow from the social sciences, they took a functionalist conception of culture as holistic and as value-directed, and this conception was to run head-on into the onslaught of the 1960s.[51]

The "new ethnography" of the seventies, however, employs a less value-directed sense of the culture; and, coming as it does from observation of non-print societies, it has no special commitment to culture as written literature. It takes cultural respondents pretty much where it finds them, assuming that everyone is in effect a culture carrier. This is in contrast to the humanistic mode, which operates as if particular culture bearers—namely, great artists and thinkers—have unique access to the culture's deepest meanings, an access not available to ordinary persons.

The new ethnography was first addressed to the wider American Studies community in 1972, through John Caughey's *American Quarterly* article, "Simulating the Past: A Method for Using Ethnosemantics in Historical Research."[52] Five years later, Jay Mechling urged colleagues in the field to identify with this anthropological method: "The goal of doing American Studies is to unmask the deep-structure rules which Americans use to give meaning to their environment and which they use to generate appropriate or acceptable behavior within that environment."[53]

Though no individual wholly represents this movement within anthropology, doubtless the most influential single figure is Anthony F. C. Wallace. Wallace's influence comes both from his location at Penn, and from his ground-breaking essay of 1962, "Culture and Cognition" (later republished in his equally ground-breaking book, *Culture and Personality*).[54] Another figure of note in the new ethnography is James Spradley of Macalester College, whose works have been widely used in American Studies during the seventies.[55]

[50] Smith, "Can 'American Studies?'" 206; Marx, "American Studies," 75ff.

[51] Berkhofer, "Clio."

[52] Caughey, "Simulating the Past: A Method for Using Ethnosemantics in Historical Research," *AQ*, 24 (Dec. 1972), 626–42.

[53] Mechling, "In Search of an American Ethnophysics," in Luedtke, 245.

[54] "Culture and Cognition," *Science*, 135 (1962), 351–57, and *Culture and Personality* (Random House, 1961; rev. 1970).

[55] James Spradley and David McCurdy, *The Cultural Experience: Ethnography in a Complex Society* (Science Research Associates, 1972); Spradley, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk: An Ethnography of Urban Nomads* (Little, Brown, 1970); and Spradley and Brenda Mann, *The Cocktail Waitress: Woman's Work in a Man's World* (Wiley, 1972). For a fascinating portrait of Spradley and McCurdy's teaching methods at Macalester, see Evan Jenkins, "The New Ethnography: Language as Key to Culture," *Change*, 10 (Jan. 1978), 16–19.

For uses of the new ethnography in recent American Studies scholarship, see Caughey, "Ethnosemantics," and "Artificial Social Relations in Modern America," *AQ*, 30 (Spring

In the Fall 1977 *American Quarterly,* Richard Beeman of Penn's history department took the new ethnographers to task—not by rejecting anthropology as such, but by drawing upon different traditions in the field. Beeman felt the cognitive anthropologists' habit of componential analysis—that is, of itemizing a culture's codes—leads to explanations which are too static; he also charged that the categories of cognitive anthropologists are hard to get unlocked from the particular culture under study, and do not readily lend themselves to cross-cultural generalization. He proposed instead the more dynamic concepts of scene and ritual from the anthropologists Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner, and the folk-urban continuum of Robert Redfield. These, he maintained, would lead to richer, and bolder, kinds of cultural explanations.[56]

Yet another social science perspective, this time entering from sociology, has influenced American culture studies of late. In this case, a single book is chiefly responsible for its impact: Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's little volume, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966).[57] There are parallels between Berger and Luckmann and the new ethnography. Both approach cultures cognitively, seeking to lay bare their underlying codes. Both look for these codes in the everyday reality of ordinary people, and both assume that every person is a culture bearer.

Berger and Luckmann, however, are concerned not only with what a culture's codes are, but, more fundamentally, with how they get constructed. Hence their book's main thrust is institutional; they seek to discover how, in the processes of everyday living, people go about building and maintaining their social universes.

This perspective has shown enormous heuristic potential for American Studies. As a teaching strategy, it addresses students not as blank tablets but as already laden with the culture; and it encourages them not simply to "learn about" their culture, but to envision their own social surround as one pattern of alternatives among a wide spectrum of human possibilities.

1978), 70–89; Mechling, "Ethnophysics"; Berkhofer, "Clio," 311ff; Richard Horwitz, "Architecture and Culture: The Meaning of the Lowell Boarding House," *AQ,* 25 (Mar. 1973), 64–82, and *Anthropology Toward History: Culture and Work in a 19th-Century Maine Town* (Wesleyan, 1978). Wallace, Caughey, Mechling, Horwitz and Beeman (see footnote following) have all been Penn faculty, or Penn graduates, or both.

[56] Beeman, "The New Social History and the Search for 'Community' in Colonial America," *AQ,* 29 (Fall 1977), 428–43. For a stimulating application of Victor Turner's ideas to American culture studies, see Roland Delattre's "The Rituals of Humanity and the Rhythms of Reality" (paper delivered at the Oct. 1977 ASA convention in Boston). For a similarly provocative application of Clifford Geertz to American culture studies, see Karen Lystra's "'Thick Description': Literature as Cultural Artifact" (paper delivered at the Dec. 1977 MLA convention in Chicago); and "Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*" (paper delivered at Sept. 1979 ASA convention in Minneapolis).

[57] Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Doubleday, 1966).

It also encourages them to discover what particular kinds of historical choices led Americans to construct their particular social realities in their particular ways.[58] Such a strategy has served to make cultural realities more accessible to students in the field.[59]

We have already seen some of the impact of Berger and Luckmann on recent scholarly strategies in American Studies. Their perspective was instrumental in shaping Gordon Kelly's 1974 article, "Literature and the Historian." Kelly was empowered there to pose questions which earlier had seemed unproblematic to a Leo Marx and to other symbol-myth-image scholars—Who defines what is "great" in the literature of a culture, and through what social roles? Through what institutional structures do these definitions get passed on and reinforced? What is the social composition of various literary audiences?[60] And *The Social Construction of Reality,* plus selected other Berger works, helped shape Jay Mechling's important recent statement on regionalism, "mediating structures," and American culture studies, published in the Winter 1979 issue of *Prospects.*[61]

* * *

Yet another quality of recent American Studies is a "reflexive" temper in scholarship and teaching. This temper expresses a *stock-taking consciousness* in the movement.

Obviously, that consciousness is neither unique to American Studies, nor is it limited to the past decade. Reflexiveness, rather, is widespread in

[58] For a provocative explanation of how *The Social Construction of Reality* is used in the classroom, and how pedagogical difficulties in its use may be overcome, see Jay Mechling and Merline Williams, "Teaching Up," *Chesapeake American Studies Quarterly,* 5 (Jan. 1975), 1–5.

[59] The Berger and Luckmann volume, along with the new ethnography and with broader cultural events of the last decade and a half, may have helped stimulate interest in field work and oral history in American Studies. For indications of this interest, see Howard Gillette and Jannelle Findley, "Teaching the 1930s: A Cultural Approach," *Chesapeake American Studies Quarterly,* 4 (Apr. 1974), 1–7; Richard Horwitz, "American Communities: The Coralville Strip" (course syllabus, University of Iowa, Spring 1978); Sharon Rubin, "Work in American Culture" (course syllabus, University of Maryland, Fall 1979); Ronald Grele, "A Surmisable Variety: Interdisciplinarity and Oral Testimony," *AQ,* 27 (Aug. 1975), 275–95; Jay Mechling, "If They Can Build a Square Tomato: Notes Toward a Holistic Approach to Regional Studies," *Prospects,* 4 (Burt Franklin, Winter, 1979), 59–78.

[60] Other imaginative uses of Berger and Luckmann can be found in Lonna Malmsheimer's brilliant analysis of New England funeral sermons, "Genre, Audience, and Significance: Social Contextualism and the Literature-History Dilemma" (paper presented at joint meeting of ASA Eastern chapters and British Association for American Studies, Phila., April 3, 1976); and Kay Mussell, "*The Social Construction of Reality* and American Studies: Notes Toward a Method" (unpublished paper). My own impression is that to date the Berger and Luckmann book has had even greater impact on American Studies' "oral" tradition than on its published scholarship. That is, the basic idea—of reality as socially constructed—seems to have wide currency in American Studies classrooms today, and in many other informal and unrecorded situations where ideas get communicated.

[61] Mechling, "Square Tomato."

contemporary scholarship. Doubtless, it signals a historical stage in the evolution of modern academic disciplines; after an era of heady expansionism in the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth century, a more self-critical mood now has set in among some scholars.[62]

In some ways, American Studies has always imbibed this spirit of reflexiveness. The movement got its start in the 1930s and 40s by countering the territorial imperative of conventional disciplines; and, as I noted earlier, from the beginning the identity quest of American Studies has impelled people to continue asking, "Who are we?" and "Where are we heading?"

Yet until recently Americanists seldom reflected long on their own operating assumptions; rather, their self-consciousness was expressed on the run, so to speak. In a 1970 reissue of *Virgin Land,* for example, Henry Nash Smith confessed that he had used his ordering terms "myth" and "symbol" in a naive and contradictory fashion twenty years before.[63] And an extensive methodological introduction to John William Ward's *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* had been cut out when Oxford published the dissertation as a book in 1955.[64] Further, the American Studies movement was into its fifth decade before it produced the first booklength critique of its own ideas—Cecil Tate's penetrating analysis, *The Search for a Method in American Studies* (1973).[65]

But during the last decade, a reflexive temper has become central to American culture studies teaching and scholarship. In some ways, this trend runs parallel to the other contemporary influences we have just seen—the impact of anthropological and sociological perspectives, and the institutional role of Pennsylvania. But in other ways reflexiveness is not so much the quality of a particular method or a particular place, but rather of a particular social generation in the movement. We can see this in the most articulate voice of the reflexive temper, Jay Mechling of the University of California at Davis.

[62] In the discipline of sociology, that mood can be found in C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (Grove, 1959), and, more recently, in Alvin Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (Avon, 1970); in anthropology, in Dell Hymes, ed., *Reinventing Anthropology* (Vintage, 1972); in literature, in Richard Ohmann, *English in America: A Radical View of the Profession* (Oxford, 1976); and in history, in Bernstein, *New Past,* and Martin Duberman, *The Uncompleted Past* (Random House, 1969). I have written at more length on this "reflexive" movement, setting it against a century of territorial expansion in modern scholarship, in "Some Elementary Axioms for an American Culture Studies," *Prospects,* 4 (Burt Franklin, 1979), 517–47.

[63] Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Harvard, 1950; 2d ed. rev., 1970), vii–x.

[64] Ward's reflections were published 15 years later as "Looking Backward: *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age,*" in Lewis Perry Curtis, ed., *The Historian's Workshop* (Knopf, 1970).

[65] Tate, *Method.*

It was Mechling who first wrote of "social generations" in American Studies history. In an essay published in 1977, he noted that the movement is now into its third generation of practitioners.[66] Where earlier generations had tended to align with one or another of the established disciplines—normally literature or history—many in the contemporary generation have spent their entire academic lives in American Studies, and have a distinctive intellectual and personal commitment to it.[67] Earlier, a Henry Nash Smith or a Roy Harvey Pearce might in passing lament that American Studies had not yet developed its own method, then go off to spend the rest of their careers in departments of English.[68] But many of Mechling's contemporaries either lack that option, or have chosen not to pursue it. They *live* in American Studies, hence are self-critical of it in a way prior Americanists were not.

Further, the third generation was socialized during the turbulent sixties, and imbibed a more thoroughgoing critique of the academy than previous Americanists. Mechling himself did his undergraduate and graduate work in American Studies during the sixties at Stetson and Penn, respectively. His subsequent scholarship expresses the seventies trends already noted—the new ethnography, the impact of Berger and Luckmann, the influence of Penn. But Mechling's distinctive impact comes not just from his published scholarship—brilliant and influential as it is—but also from his involvement in the program at the University of California at Davis, and from his pivotal role as Chairperson of the ASA's Standing Committee on Bibliographical Needs and Policies (now the Bibliography Subcommittee).

In 1969 the program in American Studies at Davis was established; in 1970 Robert Merideth was brought in from Miami University to chair the new program; in 1971 Jay Mechling arrived in California fresh from graduate study at Penn; and soon thereafter David Wilson moved over full-time from the English Department to American Studies at Davis. These three set out to structure a new kind of program in the field. In the fall of 1973, the *American Quarterly* published the results of their deliberations—"American Culture Studies: The Discipline and the Curriculum." The Davis essay won the *American Quarterly* Award as the finest article published in the journal that year.

[66] Mechling, "Ethnophysics," 242–45.

[67] It might be noted, however, that the tendency of younger scholars to identify with a distinct discipline of American Studies, and of more established scholars to take the "confederationist" approach, is not just a product of the last decade. Robert Walker noted a similar division more than two decades ago, in the Conference on Undergraduate Courses and Programs in American Studies, held at Washington, D. C. in the spring of 1957. See Walker, *American Studies in the United States,* 158.

[68] Smith, "Can 'American Studies?'"; Pearce, "American Studies as a Discipline," *College English,* 18 (Jan. 1957), 179–86.

In the years following, the Davis statement has become perhaps the most influential article in the movement since Henry Nash Smith's famous essay of 1957. Its influence differs from Smith's, however. Smith represented American Studies much as it actually existed in the 1940s and 1950s. He registered some dissatisfaction with existing approaches to American materials; but in the absence of clear scholarly consensus on an alternative, he counseled Americanists to remain with the conventional disciplines. His essay thus reinforced the "confederationist" approach; American Studies was to live in the interstices between traditional departments, not a thing unto itself but an occasional release from the regular conventions. For years, Smith's essay went almost unchallenged in the movement. Its wide acceptance, I suspect, is due to its counsel of caution; it did not basically disturb the existing order in academe.[69]

The Davis essay, on the other hand, *did* disturb the existing order. It set out to provoke, and occasionally to irritate. It opened, "There is a vast slough of genial ignorance about American Studies"; and it proceeded to condemn "tinkering," "Uncle Tomism," the "Do-it-Yourself-Synthesizer-Kit-Fallacy," the "Body-of-Knowledge Fallacy," and other assorted sins of past Americanists.[70]

The Davis essay has been influential not because it legitimized Americanists to do as they were, but because it has provoked them to question themselves. The essay made many angry, but few have been able to ignore it. Many ended up heeding the Davis counsel, not because they liked the essay, but because it raised issues which they could not avoid.

The Davis group, for example, rejected equating "American Studies" simply with "studies American"; the *mode of approach,* they contended, not the body of materials, should distinguish the field. As a consequence, they have stimulated several in the field to quit calling themselves "Americanists"; perhaps more than any other single influence, the Davis essay has established identification with "American *Culture* Studies" in the movement.

Mechling, Merideth, and Wilson have also offered the most searching critique in print of how American Studies programs have functioned (and misfunctioned) inside the academy. Because of the Davis essay, and because of other forces besetting the American academy during the sixties and seventies, many became less sanguine about the conventional de-

[69] One indication of such caution is the fact that the ASA waited 19 years before electing one of its own Ph.D.'s as president. In 1970–71, Robert Walker was the first American Studies doctorate to become ASA president. In the years since, the Association has elected no one but American Studies Ph.D.'s—Daniel Aaron in 1972-73, William Goetzmann in 1974-75, Leo Marx in 1976-77, and Wilcomb Washburn in 1978-79.

[70] Mechling, et al., "American Culture Studies" 363, 365, 366, 372–73.

partments than was Henry Nash Smith in the fifties. Hence the seventies has seen the creation of autonomous American Studies programs or departments on several campuses. In the forties and fifties, many Americanists seemed content to have their home base in history or in literature, and to offer a course now and then in something called "American Studies." In the seventies, however, advocates of the new culture studies have continued to draw from the traditional departments, but they have also sought a permanent home for American Studies in their institutions, in many cases successfully.[71]

Jay Mechling was one of three behind the Davis essay. He has also served the movement in his role as Chairperson of the ASA Standing Committee on Bibliographical Needs and Policies. Since 1974, that Committee has been responsible for the annual bibliographical issues of the *American Quarterly*.

More than any other single forum, the bibliographical issues have stimulated critical self-consciousness in the movement; they have also given substance and direction to that self-consciousness. In its first five issues, the Bibliography Committee has published essays on the philosophy of American Studies; various approaches to culture studies (e.g., social science approaches, quantitative approaches, film studies, American Indian studies, above-ground archaeology, folklore, women's studies, autobiography, still photography, structuralism, drama, Afro-American Studies); institutional arrangements vis-a-vis American Studies (e.g., museums, the Shawnee Indian Mission, Douglass College at Rutgers University, the 1975-76 National Humanities Institute at Yale, American

[71] In the mid-fifties, the chairman of Harvard's graduate program in American Civilization could write,

> We believe that the conventional departments can do most of the things that are needed in American scholarship and that our function is simply to take care of those few students who have the ability and the interest to tackle subjects which for one reason or another cannot easily be covered in one of the regular departmental programs.
>
> (quoted in Robert Walker, *American Studies in the United States*, 44)

As recently as 1958, more than half the graduate programs in the field offered not a single course in American Studies per se! Fifteen years later, that had been reduced to a quarter—still a surprising number, but a substantial change from earlier (Bassett, "Programs," 328). Despite cutbacks during the depressed seventies, the trend in American Studies has been to establish independent programs or departments, or at least independent tenured positions in the field. Where only a handful of programs had independent status or even independent academic appointments during the forties and fifties, a large number—e.g., George Washington, Skidmore, Buffalo, Kansas, Hawaii, Heidelberg, New Mexico, Dickinson, Case Western Reserve, Bowling Green, Maryland, California State at Fullerton, Univ. of California at Davis—had such status by the seventies. And programs of long standing like Iowa and Minnesota for the first time established independent, tenured positions in the field.

For an excellent structural analysis of independent versus interdependent modes of organization in American Studies, see Pershing Vartanian, "The Voluntary American Studies Program: Strategies for Development," *AQ*, 30 (Bibliography, 1978), 410–22.

Studies and the community college, the "voluntary American Studies program"); and the Bassett Report of 1975 on the state of the national movement.[72]

The Bibliography Committee has also promoted widespread discussion about the movement and its direction, implicitly through its commissioned articles, explicitly through its open forums at recent national conventions of the ASA. This dialogue temper contrasts radically with that of the regular *AQ* establishment—which neither solicits discussion from the Association membership about its modus operandi, nor sanctions forums for dialogue within the journal.[73]

Other scholarly forums have both contributed to the reflexive temper of the seventies and offered a focus for American culture studies lacking in earlier decades. Foremost among these is the journal *Prospects*—founded in 1975 and edited by Jack Salzman of Hofstra University. As an annual, it has published only four issues to date; but it is already challenging the *American Quarterly* as the finest scholarly journal in the field. It has published not only some of the classic names in and around the field—Henry Nash Smith, Alan Trachtenberg, Daniel Aaron, Sacvan Bercovitch, Chester Eisinger, Ray Browne, Allen Guttmann, Russel Nye, Alan Gowans, John Cawelti, Cushing Strout, Robert Berkhofer, Joseph Kwiat. It has also published a remarkable number of scholars whose work points toward the future of the field—among them David Stannard, Peter Marzio, William Stott, Horace Newcomb, Henry Glassie, Gerda Lerner, Robert Corrigan, Roger Abrahams, Albert Stone, Betty Chmaj, Edward Orser, Jay Mechling, Karal Ann Marling, Lawrence Mintz, Joy Kasson, Peter Shaw, Thomas Inge, Fred Matthews.

Also of note are the special theme and period issues of the *American Quarterly;* in these issues may be found some of the richest concentrations of scholarship in the history of the movement. Five such issues have been published to date—on "Death in America" (December 1974, edited by David Stannard); "Victorian Culture in America" (December 1975, edited by Daniel Walker Howe); "An American Enlightenment" (Summer 1976, edited by Joseph Ellis); "Reassessing Twentieth Century Documents" (Winter 1977); and "Women and Religion" (Winter 1978,

[72] For specific references, see the 1974 through 1978 Bibliography Issues of the *Quarterly*.

[73] The reflexive temper of the Bibliography Committee may be an expression of its social makeup. It has been composed mostly of people from Mechling's "third generation," and/or those who identify basically with American Studies rather than one of the traditional disciplines. This again contrasts with the regular *AQ* establishment; its editor holds his academic appointment at Penn in the History Department, not American Civilization, and the *AQ* Editorial Board is composed almost exclusively of scholars with appointments in the traditional departments, not in American Studies.

edited by Janet Wilson James).[74] Though not specifically "reflexive," the special issues provide a point of focus for interdisciplinary scholarship, and they include some of the best examples in print of new culture studies.[75]

Other forums which have either given focus or reflexiveness to the movement of late include: the National American Studies Faculty, founded in 1971; the Radical Caucus summer institutes of 1972 and 1973; the University of Southern California American Studies Institute of 1973, eventuating in Luther Luedtke's excellent 1977 anthology, *The Study of American Culture: Contemporary Conflicts;* the ASA convention workshops begun at San Francisco in 1973 and held at every national convention since; the 1975 national ASA convention in San Antonio on "Recharting the Mainstream," the 1977 ASA convention in Boston on "Theory and Practice in Cultural Studies," and the 1979 ASA convention in Minneapolis; the radical journals *Connections* (1970-73) and *Connections II* (1973-); the Yale Humanities Institute of 1975-76[76]; recent theoretical issues of the *Journal of Popular Culture*[77]; the recently-founded *Journal of American Culture;* and the bibliographical essays published in each issue of *American Studies International.*

* * *

Thus far, we have looked at three recent characteristics of American culture studies—the concern for anthropological definitions of culture, the emphasis on social structures undergirding intellectual and artistic

[74] The first two special issues and a volume of collected *AQ* essays have been published as books by the University of Pennsylvania Press. See David Stannard, ed., *Death in America* (Pennsylvania, 1975); Daniel Walker Howe, ed., *Victorian America* (Pennsylvania, 1976); and Leila Zenderland, ed., *Recycling the Past: Popular Uses of American History* (Pennsylvania, 1978).

[75] Perhaps the finest article in this group is Daniel Walker Howe's "American Victorianism as a Culture," *AQ*, 27 (Dec. 1975), 507–32. In its sense of culture not as vaporous ideas but as institutionally grounded in a "communications system"; in its trans-national approach to Victorianism; in its pluralistic sense of the culture as rooted in the varied experience of different social classes, ethnic groups, and geographical regions; and in its imaginative blending of humanistic with social scientific perspectives on the past, the Howe essay is a model new culture study of the seventies.

[76] See Michael Cowan, "The National Humanities Institute: The First Year," *AQ*, 28 (Bibliography 1976), 578–86.

[77] Countering an earlier tendency to be militantly un-theoretical, the *JPC* of late has published some excellent special supplements on theoretical and methodological matters. See especially the fall 1975 issue on "Theories and Methodologies in Popular Culture" (edited by Ray Browne, Sam Grogg, and Larry Landrum); the summer 1977 issue on "History and Popular Culture" (edited by Susan Tamke and William Cohn); and the fall 1977 issue on "Sociology and Popular Culture" (edited by Gary Alan Fine).

expression, the "reflexive" temper.[78] There are of course other characteristics. Fortunately, Robert Sklar's splendid review of the field published in this journal four years ago ("The Problem of an American Studies 'Philosophy': A Bibliography of New Directions"), plus the comprehensive review articles in recent Bibliography Issues of the *American Quarterly* and in *American Studies International* free the present essay from any obligation to coverage.

A brief survey turns up at least four additional characteristics—a pluralistic rather than a holistic approach to American culture; an accompanying rediscovery of the particular; an emphasis on proportion rather than essence in cultural experience; and a cross-cultural, comparative dimension to American studies.[79]

The first trend is the most obvious and widespread. *A pluralistic approach* is what most distinguishes recent American culture studies from earlier Americanist scholarship. This trend has been widely noted elsewhere, and needn't be further documented here. It comes to focus in the "new social history" of the last decade and a half; it is expressed in ethnic studies, black studies, women's studies, popular culture studies, folklore studies, family studies, and the like.

A parallel trend, actually a sub-trend of the pluralistic approach, is *a rediscovery of the particular in American culture*. This emphasis includes

[78] In focusing here on what is "new" in American culture studies, I should not wish to ignore what has survived largely intact from earlier years. Many of the articles published in the three major journals of the field—the *American Quarterly, American Studies,* and *Prospects*—remain untouched by new methodological forms of the last decade. This is particularly the case with *American Studies,* the official publication of the Midcontinent American Studies Association. The journal maintains a breezy informality in editorial tone, a refreshing contrast to the more sober norm in scholarly journals. And its issues of the last decades have responded to changing events, and changing perceptions in the culture (see for example its Bicentennial issue on "Change in America," Fall 1976). But the journal remains largely innocent of recent social science perspectives and of the "reflexive" temper in contemporary scholarship (see for example its editorial statement in the Spring 1974 issue, 103–04).

[79] Actually, there is yet a fifth characteristic, though it cannot be given a single label. If social science perspectives have been on the frontier of contemporary American culture studies, they have neither taken over nor are they alone. Older humanistic modes of inquiry still supply a great deal of the sensitivity and energy displayed in American culture studies today. They also provide a brake against the temptation of social science approaches to become overly quantitative or categorical. A healthy future for American Studies lies not in the domination of one or another approach, but in an open dialogue, indeed an open tension, between them. Especially promising humanistic perspectives have been developed of late around autobiography and structuralism. See Albert Stone, "Autobiography and American Culture," *American Studies: An International Newsletter,* 11 (Winter 1972), 22–36; Robert Sayre, "The Proper Study—Autobiographies in American Studies," *AQ,* 29 (Bibliography 1977), 241–62; and John Blassingame, "Black Autobiographies as History and Literature," *Black Scholar,* 5 (Dec. 1973–Jan. 1974), 2–9. For the latter, see Tate, *Method,* 133ff; and the articles on structuralism by John Blair and David Pace in *AQ,* 30 (Bibliography 1978), 261–97.

all the particular sub-cultures noted in the last trend, plus the particularity of things—material artifacts, the physical environment of towns and cities, geographical regions.[80] In recent years, much culture studies inquiry has stuck close to the immediate, tangible environment of people; this contrasts with many earlier studies, which tended to emphasize broad floating currents of thought in America transcending particular environments.

Another parallel trend is *the emphasis on proportion rather than on essence in cultural experience*. We have already discussed efforts of earlier symbol-myth-image scholars to locate *the* quintessential "American Mind" or "American Character," and to define the culture through its great "isms"—Puritanism, Rationalism, Transcendentalism, Liberalism, Individualism, and so on. Recent inquiries have not wholly abandoned those concerns, but they do try to particularize them. Hence they raise questions of proportion, querying, in effect, "How much in American cultural experience is shared by how many?"

Such questions are at heart quantitative, and for years were resisted by the humanist strain in American Studies thinking. In their famous essays of 1957 and 1969, for example, Henry Nash Smith and Leo Marx had caricatured social science "content analysis" and "public opinion" studies as superficial and mechanical; such approaches touched only the surface of the culture, they felt, and were no match for the depth probes of the humanities. Even in the 1970s, with greater receptivity to social science, quantification has played but a minor role within American Studies scholarship. Of the influential graduate programs in the field, only Pennsylvania's emphasizes training in quantitative techniques, and only a trickle of works by American Studies-trained scholars has relied heavily on quantification.[81]

[80] On material culture and material artifacts, see Paul Wilderson, "Archaeology and the American Historian: An Interdisciplinary Challenge," *AQ*, 27 (May 1975), 115–32; James Kavanaugh, "The Artifact in American Culture: The Development of an Undergraduate Program in American Studies," in Ian Quimby, ed., *Material Culture and the Study of American Life* (Norton, 1978), 64–75; Linna Funk Place et al., "The Object as Subject: The Role of Museums and Material Culture Collections in American Studies," *AQ*, 26 (Aug. 1974), 281–91; John Cotter, "Above Ground Archaeology," *AQ*, 26 (Aug. 1974), 266–80; Wilcomb Washburn, "American Studies at the Smithsonian," *AQ*, 22 (Summer 1970), 560–70; E. McClung Fleming, "Accent on Artist and Artisan: The Winterthur Program in Early American Culture," *AQ*, 22 (Summer 1970), 571–96; and Henry Glassie, "Meaningful Things and Appropriate Myths: The Artifact's Place in American Studies," *Prospects*, 3 (Burt Franklin, 1977), 1–49.

[81] See for example Richard Merritt, "The Emergence of American Nationalism: A Quantitative Approach," *AQ*, 17 (Summer 1965), 319–35; Robert Zemsky, *Merchants, Farmers, and River Gods: An Essay on Eighteenth Century American Politics* (Gambit, 1971); Melvyn Hammarberg, "Designing a Sample from Incomplete Historical Lists," *AQ*, 23 (Oct. 1971), 542–62; and Hammarberg, *The Indiana Voter: The Historical Dynamics of Party Allegiance During the 1870s* (Chicago, 1977).

In some ways, this under-emphasis may be healthy, as a counter to the decided over-emphasis on quantification in the social sciences, and, more recently, in the discipline of history. American historians got badly burned in the *Time on the Cross* affair of 1974; since then, the counting fad has waned, and a balance of sorts has been struck in the discipline between quantitative and non-quantitative approaches.[82]

Still, some cultural insights yield themselves up only through quantification, and others are made more refined by a detailed sense of proportion. As Richard Jensen wrote in this journal five years ago,

> By measuring error rather than merely acknowledging its existence and by specifying variables and causal linkages previously covertly assumed, quantifiers have significantly raised the sensibilities of scholars regarding the reliability and validity of historical documents and the complexities of actual events. By showing how sparse records dealing with thousands of individuals can be handled, the quantifier has opened the study of the inarticulate to scholars who once could deal only with verbose or introspective elites.[83]

Finally, several recent inquiries in the field have employed *a comparative, cross-cultural approach.* Again, such an approach is not unique to the last decade. The classic works of Parrington, Miller, Matthiessen, Marx, and Sanford et al. sought out the European backgrounds of American ideas, hence were in part cross-cultural. Still, they usually emphasized how Old World ideas took on a different coloration when transported to the New World. This was due to their sense of "American exceptionalism"—Americans had built a new culture in a new land, they believed; the task of American Studies was to explain how that had happened.

But recent experience has occasioned a different sense of the culture. Contrasted only with the "Old World" of Europe, America may seem unique; but compared with the new, post-World War II nations of Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Latin America, America looks more like Europe and less like a "new" kind of world. Thus the polarity of New World versus Old has collapsed of late, and America is placed in a category with other modern industrialized cultures.

The concept of "modernization," originally developed in social science but increasingly applied by historians to the American past, has contrib-

[82] For an account of the *Time on the Cross* controversy, see Thomas Haskell, "The True and Tragical History of 'Time on the Cross,'" *The New York Review of Books* (Oct. 2, 1975), 33–39.

[83] Jensen, "Quantitative American Studies: The State of the Art," *AQ*, 26 (Aug. 1974), 226.

uted a useful tool to cross-cultural understanding.[84] Other cross-cultural perspectives can be found in recent studies of slavery; in family studies; in the December 1975 special issue of the *American Quarterly,* on "Victorian Culture in America"; and in recent social histories of colonial New England. These latter studies speak less of the culturally unique qualities of "Puritanism" in the New World, and instead look for continuities in agrarian lifestyle from Old World to New.

* * *

When we look back over new culture studies of the 1970s, it is evident that, like American Studies in earlier decades, they too have been shaped by forces in the wider society. In one sense, escalation of the trend toward specialization—in academe as well as in the culture at large—has made the synthesizing approach of American Studies seem more problematic of late. The forces of specialization have put interdisciplinary studies on the defensive, and have made them appear dispensable to some academies obliged to cut back on "luxuries" in their curriculum.

But at a deeper level, recent events give an even stronger imperative to integrating culture studies. Pressures of rapid change have put enormous stress on social institutions and cultural values, laying bare their inner workings. What was once buried and taken for granted in America is now made visible for inspection, and for criticism. Those pressures have made everyone—scholar and non-scholar alike—conscious of the massive power of culture and social structure to shape people's experience. Without some such cultural consciousness, American Studies would not be possible; with it, the movement gains energy to do its essential work.

Also, recent events have dramatized inherent interconnections among experiences in contemporary culture. Doctors trained in medicine alone, for example, are powerless to understand problems of health in the inner city, the malpractice crisis, issues of birth control and of abortion, and all the other matters of modern health reaching beyond the confines of pure medical training.

Recent experience should have taught Americans that few critical problems in a culture ever get understood, let alone resolved, by attacking the problem alone. Contemporary cultural problems require understanding in their full interconnecting context. The "light at the end of the tunnel"

[84] For a useful review of the concept of modernization, see S. N. Eisenstadt, "Studies of Modernization and Sociological Theory," *History and Theory,* 13 (1974), 225–52. For applications of the modernization concept to America's past, see Richard Brown, "Modernization and the Modern Personality in Early America, 1600–1865: A Sketch of a Synthesis," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* 2 (Winter 1971), 201–28, and *Modernization: The Transformation of American Life, 1600–1865* (Hill and Wang, 1976).

metaphor erred for Vietnam not simply in its results—it proved wrong to the facts—but in its basic assumption that a "tunnel" metaphor was appropriate in the first place. A "web" metaphor would have been better. For it would have shown what was in fact the case, that America's fault in the war was not at heart technical, but cultural.

A tunnel metaphor occasions "producing" minds—minds concerned, in the time-honored tradition of American pragmatism, to get things done in the quickest and most efficient manner possible. But a web metaphor requires a different quality of mind, a "connecting" mind which can probe beyond the immediacy of the situation to search for everything which rays out beyond it. Such a connecting imagination is precisely what integrating culture studies, at their best, are structured to encourage.[85]

Finally, the quest for subcultural "roots" of the last few years has resensitized Americans to the inescapable power of the past—has emphasized that a people which presumes to outrun its history never does so in fact. Such a consciousness obliges people to get in contact with their past if they would build upon it. This message has evidently got through to Americans of late. There are indications that it may be getting through to American Studies too. Several in the movement seem more inclined now to take soundings on their own past as a means of identifying what American Studies is, and envisioning where it may be heading.

* * *

Hence, as we journey back over the intellectual and institutional history of American Studies, we have, I believe, encountered an ambiguous legacy. On the plus side, we find a series of creative "revolts against formalism"; we find intellectual work in American Studies offering release from the territorial imperative of conventional disciplines; we find the movement offering a place for fresh kinds of studies in the 1960s and 70s which had few other entries into academe; we find a generation of superb scholarship in the symbol-myth-image school and the promise of perhaps another generation in the "new culture studies" of the last decade; we find if not an entire movement then at least several of its programs dedicated to countering the worst sins of today's multiversity. And—I don't know how to say this without sounding sentimental—we find national conventions in American Studies which are simply more decent and more humane affairs than, say, the MLA or the AHA.

On the negative side, we in the movement have been much too ready, especially in past decades, to make peace with the dominant structures of

[85] In a companion piece to the present essay, I have written at more length on this "connecting mind" imperative for culture studies. See "Elementary Axioms."

the academy; we have too frequently allowed our ritual rhetoric of newness to substitute for actually thinking or doing our work creatively; we have often let intellectual flabbiness get by as "openness" or "innovation." And, most basically, we have been too faint of heart in our commitment to a distinctive American Studies venture, and all too often have retreated to our disciplinary havens when matters threaten to get precarious in the field.

Be that as it may, I believe that over the years American Studies has made itself distinctive as a movement which encourages people to be people—students as well as faculty. Given the institutional malaise of the academy, of the scholarly professions, and of the larger society these days, we might dream of, but we can hardly in fact hope for, more.[86]*

[86] For an evocative statement of this "small is beautiful" sense of American Studies, of how the movement seeks to embody Gemeinschaft-like qualities in a largely Gesellschaft academic social order, see Jay Mechling's essay, "If They Can Build a Square Tomato: Notes Toward a Holistic Approach to Regional Studies."

Although "modernizing" pressures, the numbers mania, and the accountability ethic have all reinforced the larger, more traditional units of the academy, it may be the smallness of American Studies which gives structure to its essential qualities, and enables it to carry out its educational mission. To my knowledge, only a single American Studies program in the country has more than 10 faculty members—the University of Hawaii's. My historian colleague Harry Stout of the University of Connecticut has suggested that because of its characteristically small units and informal academic settings, American Studies may be distinguished historically more by its "oral" than its "written" tradition. If Stout is correct, then the oral histories of key figures in the movement currently being undertaken by Richard Johnson and Linda Keller Brown could be of crucial importance.

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