

Prismatics, Multivalence, and Other Riffs on
the Millennial Moment
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WE MEET AT AN INTRIGUINGLY APPROPRIATE TIME TO BE EXAMINING THE PAST, present, and future of a protean field of study in a dramatically changing world, for we meet near the liminal middle of a liminal year, suspended between our own *fin de siècle* and the opening of a brave new millennium. Having survived the apocalyptic prognostications of the late, unlamented Y2K moment, and not yet overwhelmed by the predictable onslaught of launch-pad punditry, we lift off into the magical year 2001, the real beginning of the new millennium.

Though many of us may be savoring the respite, I wish to disturb the delicious calm between these two storms of millennial self-consciousness. I want to suggest that this turn of the century, this unique millennial moment, may have special uses for our work in ASA in spite of—and more precisely because of—the already shopworn, clichéd, and seemingly pedestrian-by-nature quality of almost anything that can be and has been said about this passage.¹

The turn of a century is an arbitrary point, not a line or a space. Though we tend to extend such a point backward and forward to approximate a *fin de siècle* or a “bridge to the future” era, it is hard to get around the artificiality of the central conceit that one specific point in time has any more inherent meaning than any other. But perhaps the

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superficial nature of the century turn presents its most useful quality as a tool of analysis. This is because such a vacuous conception does so much to subvert narrative, grand or otherwise—no particular story, theme, or frame is necessarily privileged, at least initially, because inquiry starts, rather, with a point that can be imagined as a lens through which the entire spectrum of historical change must necessarily pass. A myriad of dimensions, from politics to technology or real estate or artistic expression or domestic roles, ethnic identity, and social space—all are in motion on distinct trajectories with distinct determinants and rates of change; all necessarily crowd through the lens of any particular moment.²

My angle of approach, then, is to see the turn-of-the-century moment as a kind of prism, the opposite of today's laser. Instead of focusing diversity into the laser's concentrated and powerful stream, the prism deconstructs a beam into its constituent spectrum, allowing us to inquire into the composition, distribution, and relationships of its various components. This is the imaginatively liberating "prism" of the past, rather than the imaginatively controlled and controlling "prison" of the historical narrative. Sensing the limitless complexity of history in this way may prove useful as we confront the future before us—whether in general or for American studies as a field, a future at once deeply contingent and even over-determined, yet also wholly and resolutely unpredictable.

I have been much involved with these notions in my own work of late, in projects considering, from the vantage of our millennial moment, a world's fair at the dawn of the last century. I will draw on this tonight, in the first half of this talk, to propel broader reflections, in the second half, on the work before us in American studies.

The Fair was the Pan-American Exposition of 1901, held in my own city of Buffalo, New York (Fig. 1). Worlds' fairs in general have been multidimensional prisms more than singular narratives, and this particular prism within the turn-of-the-century prism embodied, quite transparently, all that was in motion in American culture and society at the dawn of the twentieth century, and all that was contested and complex in the project of resituating the U.S. in relation to the hemisphere and the world.³ As such, it speaks very directly to our meeting's theme, "American studies in the World, and the World in American studies," and to our presence in the very real world city of Detroit, whose provocative complexity we have sought to mobilize as a resource.



Fig. 1. Crossing the Triumphal Bridge at the entrance to the Pan-American Exposition, 1901. Photograph by C.D. Arnold, courtesy of the Charles Raud Penney Collection and Research Facility.

Let me begin with four structures that give “the Pan-Am” legibility as a text. For oral shorthand, think of these as “the name,” “the frame,” “the game,” and “the shame.”⁴ First, “the name”: the Pan-Am emerged out of the 1890s expansion of American trade and business, and the growing interest in the dominant U.S. role in a western hemisphere, which it took no great prescience to see as emerging from the final collapse of Spain’s once vast empire. In the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, the Expo took on a necessarily broader geo-political and cultural gravity in no way reducible to its parochial local and prosaically economic business roots.⁵

If Pan-Am was the name, electricity was the frame—from the dazzling dramatic four-hundred-foot electric tower, chief icon of the Exposition, to the bulbs that profiled each building, dim glowing to bright as sunset deepened into evening (Fig. 2). Alternating current’s newly developed ability to move power over long distances made Buffalo, twenty miles from the source at Niagara Falls, a perfect spot for electricity’s dramatic annunciation as the transformative force of the twentieth century.⁶



Fig. 2. The Pan-Am Exposition electrified. Photograph by C.D. Arnold, courtesy of the Charles Raud Penney Collection and Research Facility.

Name and frame came together powerfully in the exposition's intricate architecture: The central buildings (actually shells with surfaces sculpted in the equivalent of *papier maché*) were in an ornate Spanish Renaissance style, the most prominent feature of which was the overwhelming use of color, with rich pastel and earth tone hues everywhere. Notwithstanding the curious contradiction of a tribute to Spanish culture symbolizing liberation from Spanish hegemony, the scheme served its purpose, presenting an intentional contrast to the "White City" classicism of 1893 and positing a hemispheric reorientation rich in unleashed energy, raw power, and even sensuality—all under the controlling romantic vision of a unified, cooperative, U.S.-dominated hemisphere.⁷

Explicit in this palette and landscape were litanies of progress, hierarchy, and evolution; endlessly didactic statuary and a progression of color from the "primitive" dark to the "civilized" pale announced the triumph of a new civilization led by America's democracy. This celebration of "color" only to imply its subordination to the power of whiteness suggests the most blatant contradictions. But these are prismatically repositioned when we realize how uncertain it is that the

throng of visitors—more than eight million—paid much attention to messages so elaborately encoded, or even noticed them at all in their transport over the emotional power of the sights, lights, and colors.⁸

As this suggests, thematization could be insufficient for controlling and shaping representations, engagements, and popular receptions, a point especially striking when we shift from the “name” and the “frame” to the fair as “game,” or entertainment—specifically, the dazzling Midway, a more integral dimension of the exposition than at Chicago in 1893 and the point of entry and focus for most visitors.

It is tempting but misleading to see a simple and stark polarity between the formal industrial exhibits and the commercial entertainment zone of the exposition. Much of the Midway at Buffalo was more didactic than playful—offering historical and ethnographic concessions redolent with the period’s ideology and assumptions, “object lessons” for popular education. The mobilization of pseudo-scientific racism and instrumental ethnography made these lessons explicit—as in the Midway’s popular “Darkest Africa” attraction, for example, or the “Old Plantation,” with “genuine Negroes” enacting the nostalgia of the slave south so crucial to *fin-de-siècle* racial retrenchment and brutally imposed white supremacy (Fig. 3). In the Indian Congress, the imprisoned Geronimo was on display while Thomas Edison’s movie cameras captured daily Wild West “sham battles”. There was the Filipino Village, showcasing America’s newest neo-colonial quasi-subjects; when Aguinaldo was captured in 1901, it was immediately proposed that he be added to the show in Buffalo. From today’s vantage, certainly in a local community hungry to celebrate past glories, such images inspire embarrassment and even—my fourth signifier—an immobilizing shame, in the face of contradictions painful to confront.⁹

Such emotions were, in fact, present at the time, though far more palpable in connection with the tragic denouement of this World’s Fair, the shooting of President McKinley by Leon Czolgosz at a reception in the Fair’s Temple of Music, an event that still reverberates locally because of stories attributing McKinley’s unexpected death eight days later to botched emergency surgery by an ob-gyn who had operated in many bellies, but none quite like William McKinley’s. That the malpractice charge turns out to be untrue—McKinley’s wounds would have been fatal even with the best trauma interventions of that day—has not diminished its signifying power, even now.¹⁰ Similarly indelible is the ideologically useful image of Leon Czolgosz as a Polish



"HE WAS EVIDENTLY LOOKING UP HIS ANCESTORS."

Fig. 3. Illustration taken from Thomas Fleming, *Around the "Pan" with Uncle Hank: His trip through the Pan-American Exposition.* NY: The Nutshell Publishing Co., 1901.

immigrant anarchist. This immediately took on, and retains today, a "Voltaire's Holy Roman Empire" quality—for Czolgosz was known even then to be not definitively and fully Polish, not at all an immigrant, and in no serious sense an anarchist.¹¹ Such stories suggest the even broader resonance of Pan-Am as a complex, prismatic moment. The curiosity about electricity, technology, and invention at this precise moment, for instance, was enormous (it was linked to Czolgosz, of

course, through his quickly subsequent execution at Auburn prison, an event memorialized in a bizarre Edison film re-enacting the electrocution—among the world’s first narrative movies and certainly its first snuff film.)¹²

But there was more to the technological impact than that, in ways that quite outran the Exposition’s narrower ideological script. Individual exhibits connected to this curiosity—such as the pay-for-view infant incubator Midway concession (complete with live premies)—attracted sustained attention, directly connecting to multiple discourses about women and children, cities and slums, social work, public health, immigrant labor, technology, science, and so on.

The implicit “live links” in the thematic presentations, that is, (to appropriate today’s web term, not that inappropriately) could and probably did regularly subvert the narrower scripts themselves, making the experience of the exposition unpredictably open-ended and interactive, whatever the intent of its planners. This is true even in the most problematic areas. Buffalo’s African American community protested the Old Plantation’s representations and worked hard to bring to Buffalo elements of W. E. B. Du Bois’s famous 1900 Paris exhibit on Negro life and contributions. The Indian Congress concession was also, in fact, a tribal congress to which a wide spectrum of indigenous leaders brought their own serious purpose in their dealings with each other and amplification of their own messages through the circuitry of a world’s fair. The “natives” on display in the African village were professionals careful about how they presented African crafts, traditions, and arts; many had traveled more extensively and were more internationally sophisticated than those gazing at them in their enclosure. And among the surviving artifacts of the village are carved tusks on which these artisans inscribed their impressions of the Victorian crowds coming to see them—“returning the gaze” in the most literal sense.¹³

As these examples suggest, there is value in seeing the Exposition as a more complicated and contested field of interaction—beyond a text to be read, beyond expression or reflection—through which a great deal may be learned about the forces at work at the turn of the century, and how they were understood and engaged. But what are its uses beyond that—what can it tell us more dialogically, about our own relationship to our own turn of the century? How can unpacking the dense interactions of history inform a prismatic approach to our own no-less complex and contradictory circumstances?

My involvement in the Pan-Am, in fact, has its roots in these last questions—as a public historian concerned with history’s capacity to shape our interrogation of the present and imagination of the future. Over the past few years, I have been excavating a kind of imaginative Pan-Am-anian Canal that might help Buffalo connect past and present to a future less constrained by the crushing burden of deindustrialization and decline. This work has taken two forms that I can sketch briefly; both can help turn our discussion to a prismatic, millennial-moment take on American studies.

In the broad form, my colleagues and I have been intrigued with Pan-Am as the frame for a centennial that might broaden historic commemoration into a pro-active platform for framing parallel, linked, and resonant issues for the turn of the twenty-first century. We have, to this end, offered a kind of simple model of the “energy field” of the world’s fair, every historical aspect of which can be referenced and explored in activities focused on the present and future. In this conception, the world’s fairs of that era can be imagined as a diamond with four points: 1) the explicit historical and thematic focus and content; 2) trade and business promotion; 3) a unique blend of public entertainment, education, carnival, and festival; and 4) a public platform for academic, cultural, artistic, scientific, and public policy activities, here termed—with apologies for the civic shorthand—“high end” (Fig. 4). If all four dimensions are not present, you don’t have the complex energy field of the world’s fair, which was defined not so much by any of these points as by the charged space they—and the tensions they constructed—define. If, in contemporary space and terms, all four dimensions of activities can be linked and made similarly resonant, some of that recalled historical energy might be available for charging civic reimagination and even contestation in the present.

In this spirit, we have been seeking to mobilize an ambitious web of self-standing activities, a diamond in which centennial historical evocations; business and economic development and debates, such as NAFTA and the WTO; academic congresses, scientific, artistic, and public policy programs; neighborhood and community mobilizations, festivals, and sports and entertainments—can be woven into Pan-Am 2001, a programmatic exposition without walls embodied in people, places, and activities across Buffalo, western New York, and southern Ontario. Some of this will indeed be visible in Buffalo in 2001, though limited resources and the difficulties inherent in looking beyond the

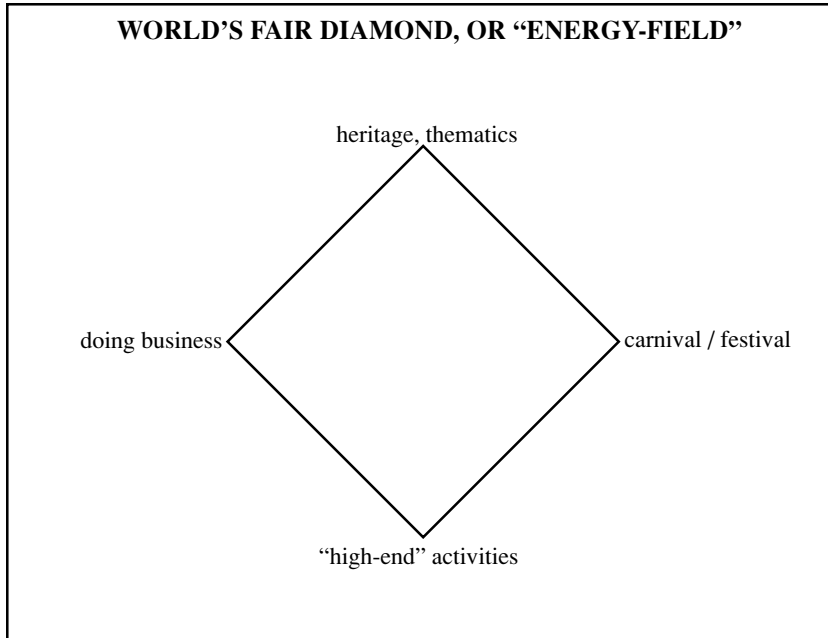


Fig. 4. World's Fair diamond.

constraints of a very difficult present will mean there is more going on at each of the points and not as much as I had hoped in the more generative space in between.¹⁴

I am more actively involved in a more particular project focused on that space—a collaboration among university, historical society, our public television station WNED-TV, and Azar & More, Inc., a private media firm. Together, we are producing an unusual television documentary that tells the Pan-Am story from the vantage of a community interrogating the present. To this end, the film confronts three documentary challenges: the first challenge is spatial frame and context—how to tell a story both local and international. The Pan-Am is in one sense Buffalo's fair, but it is more significant as a moment in popular culture, national and international politics and power, science and technology, and social relations—not a local story at all.

The second challenge is more temporal and imaginative: how, if we are to bring this history to the present, to evoke the kaleidoscopic energy of a fair that was so exciting then but seems so dated and prosaic

today? How can we represent the experience fairgoers had gazing at dazzling symbols like the Electric Tower or the Infant Incubators—when these very images today, in romantic paintings, grainy old photographs or primitive early movies, seem so quaintly old-fashioned?

The third challenge links past and present through dilemmas of perspective and attitude: How can we convey a story that is in some ways inspiring and celebratory, while also facing up to its deeply disturbing qualities? And, how can we explore all that without inviting the opposite tendency—smugly condemning the politics, racism, prejudices, and stereotypes of the past, as if we did not face our own contradictions and challenges in dealing with each other as Americans and with the other peoples and societies of our changing world?

To get out from under the controlling narrative voice that flattens so many historical documentaries, our approach makes use of technology that challenges imagination now as dramatically as electricity did in 1901, by a three-dimensional computer model of Pan-Am, based on the historical documentation: thousands of black and white photographs, oil paintings and watercolors, and the Edison films. This modeling project is reconstructing the exposition's buildings and grounds in 3-D digital form through which viewers can move spatially through the fair, and back and forth between past, present, and exotic future—mirroring the experience and wonder of the world's fair environment.¹⁵

To set these structures in dramatic and expository motion, we will follow “story-seekers,” contemporary individuals who serve as proxies for the modern audience. One seeker may be a descendant of a major Pan-Am organizer who returns to Buffalo to explore his family's role in a peak moment of community history. A second is likely to be an inner city schoolteacher, for whom the dubious legacy of Pan-Am in terms of racial stereotypes and the arrogance of elite spokesmen for progress represent obstacles to celebration, especially as set against the challenges facing her students in a very different city, community, and nation today. Through such story-seeking and the story-telling it propels, and through the dialogue of past and present that the combination of computer model and historical documents makes possible, we hope to collapse, for the purpose of contemporary dialogue and engagement, the distance between the 1901 experience and our own collective walk along the future's edge in 2001.

Let me now turn from this context, grounded in work in my local community, to the broader American studies community I am so honored to serve as president. For me, the connections are in fact anything but abstract. My Pan-Am interest began, in fact, with an effort to bring the ASA 2001 convention to Buffalo in order to kick start a centennial propelled by the questions and concerns American studies can crystallize. And that linkage traces, in part, to my encounter with a remarkable project on the Pan-Am Expo developed at the University of Wyoming, of all places, by Eric Sandeen and Bill Bryant, in which American studies students—far in advance of the software and web technology now available for such work—created a hypertext exposition for studying turn-of-the-century American culture, for which the Buffalo fair provided an organizing metaphor and foundation.¹⁶

And finally, as we have followed this impulse several compacted technological generations later, crucial seed support came from entities—NEH and the Imagining America, Scholars and Artists in Public life project based here in Michigan—committed to linking the academy and the real world as a crucial civic priority. It is no coincidence that these same organizations, quite independently, stepped forward to support and advance the quite resonant theme of our Detroit ASA meeting, as you will see at tomorrow's late afternoon plenary session featuring Bill Ferris, and the "community commons" reception and Jawolle Zollar performance and poetry reading at the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Museum of African American History. There is thus, for me, enormous personal, intellectual, and political resonance between my own work and the work we have undertaken in this convention. In this spirit, let me now bring the perspectives and imaginative tools I have been discussing to bear on our own very first prismatic turn-of-the-century moment in American studies.

I do this because I have some concern that the tradition of self-reflection in American studies tempts us to conceptualize and represent our work in ways that drift towards simplified narratives belying the insights of the scholarship actually comprising the field. We ask where the field of American studies has been, assess where it is, and debate where it should, or should not, be going. For all our sophistication in a scholarship that has so productively explored, for example, the multiple meanings of border, the selective and situational plasticity of hybridized identities, and the complex dialectics of hegemony and agency in public and private spheres, our reflexivity seems too often to invite

narratives presuming a sequence of stakes and milestones along a very particular road, a zero-sum either-or binary road going, say, from social history to cultural studies, from exceptionalism to balkanization, from national to transnational.

I want to urge us to suspend this reductive directionality in order to appreciate a more diverse and diffuse weave of tendencies at the core of American studies scholarship, at this moment and in fact at almost *all* moments. In describing our field through a kind of prismatic spectography, I will be identifying a complex of dynamics at work, dimensions discrete individually but constellated in constantly evolving ways over time. After marking these out briefly—they are individually familiar to everyone here—I will offer a few suggestions as to how these constellations might speak to an American studies conceptualized and organized on a basis appropriate to a new millennium.

Consider American studies as a field mapped over time on four related but distinct axes—each differentiated, but even more complex in relation to the others. The first is the most basic: the interdisciplinarity at the heart of any definition of American studies from its inception. It has always been easier to invoke than to mobilize and organize this effectively; it has resisted conceptualization as well. The unstable relationship between the interdisciplinary, the multidisciplinary, and the trans- or post-disciplinary aspects of American studies scholarship (and academic organization, not incidentally) has been repeatedly noted; meanwhile, the vectors of creativity in diverse disciplinary fields—from cultural studies to material culture to folklore to performance to public history and media—have defined, in their interaction in American studies, much of the trajectory of the field—not only now, but over its entire history.¹⁷

A second axis close to the heart of the current moment is the contested discourse of nation—national identity and exceptionalism whether cultural, institutional, political, or characterological; comparative and trans-nationalisms; hemispheric connections, and global enmeshment. Here too, note how consistently over time American studies has involved efforts to locate, interrogate, and transcend the problematic of nation, in a process by no means uni-vocal or uncontested, as in American society and culture itself. Appreciating the provenance, weight, and multiple sources of this interrogation will be an important resource for an American studies movement—in the U.S. and internationally—deliberating how best to respond, intellectually and organizationally, to the very different international order that is emerging.¹⁸

The third axis is the transformative exploration of multiculturalism, ethnicity, race, class, and gender that has been recasting for several decades now the most basic outlines of American history and culture as a contested, interactive field of forces. It almost goes without saying, but not quite, that this has not simply altered our understanding of things “within” American culture and society, but has been leveraging our capacity to re-imagine the connections of the U.S. and its peoples to everything and everyone else in the world: what our threatened right wing likes to picture as a fragmenting balkanization is just the opposite, recasting American exceptionalism as the true fragmenter, and resituating the dimensions of American experience in a far richer and integral explanatory web of regional, global, and trans-historical understandings.¹⁹

The fourth and final axis is a trans-methodological orientation to engagement, praxis, activism, ethnography, and embodiment as a propelling dimension of American studies scholarship over the years. If we appreciate that ethnography and documentary and ethnomusicology and performance all share something important with a politically engaged activist American studies practice and pedagogy, even though neither the politics of the former nor the intellectual or analytic content of the latter can in any way be assumed, and if we understand that all of this work may, conversely, share very little with intellectual production that stands at an imperious remove from any sustained, organic connection to the people and experience theorized so broadly, however resonant the political vision or the postures of engagement —then we understand what I am getting at here as a persistent, defining dimension of American studies.²⁰

Now each of the four I have mentioned is almost self-evident as an organizing axis over the years. What is much less evident is one’s relation to the other and the ongoing implication of each in the other. It is a measure of the teleological pull of disciplinary narrative that these tend to collapse and flatten into a kind of casual linear meta-history of the field. Thus, we understand a national project informed by a limited literary-historical interdisciplinarity then transformed by the radicalism, activism, and social-historical ascent of the 1960s, flowering into a more richly multidisciplinary multiculturalism that begs a range of theoretical and political questions to which, by the late 1990s, cultural studies and trans-national reconceptualizations provide new answers, leading directly to—to Detroit, perhaps, or at least to the battle of Seattle.²¹

I don't find this kind of narrative very helpful, or even descriptive. It is more accurate and useful, I think, to see these as ongoing, contemporaneous dimensions of American studies scholarship, all always there. I prefer the dynamic image of the cat's cradle web, a space created and defined by the tension lines cross-connecting the points surrounding it.

In a simplified two-dimensional representation, of course, this is—tada!—the diamond with which I represented the prismatic Pan-Am as both history and contemporary engagement (Fig. 5). Perhaps this model has resonance for American studies—the points marking a space through quadrilateral tension, with American studies being the space in-between, the space defined by the complex resultant of this diamond of forces, not by the nominal character of the particular points themselves.²²

I'd like to enter that interior space now, and visit a few suggestive points of cross-connection. In this, I'll be making a more directive argument about the shape of that quadrilateral field at the current moment, and the shape I think it needs to assume. In particular, I'll be arguing the crucial importance of the fourth axis I noted, the dimension of fieldwork, praxis, engagement, performance, and activism, of learning from and in the real world—a diverse dimension in which, to resuscitate and re-direct one of Marx's best observations, the point is to understand the world *and* to change it—and to see the way these are necessarily interdependent. This is what we meant to suggest in our conference theme, which not only invokes the transnational grounding of American studies but also brings the real world into the work of American studies and vice versa, the aim being a scholarship of American life that can matter—a scholarship with the intellectual capacity to both *describe* and *engage* the world more usefully.

For this perspective, I'll be shifting from what I have learned from the Pan-Am to what I have learned through long-term work at the juncture of oral history, documentary, narrative, and social-historical urban engagement; in so doing, I'll also be shifting to the second major riff in my title, which for reasons presently made clear, I insist on pronouncing “mul-ti-valence.” Let me frame this by first extending somewhat anecdotally the point of my prismatic model—that rather than substituting one emphasis for others, we need to appreciate their implication in each other as a basis for adjusting the proportions and directionality of this implication. I start, appropriately enough, with my very small part in the fiftieth anniversary celebration of *American*

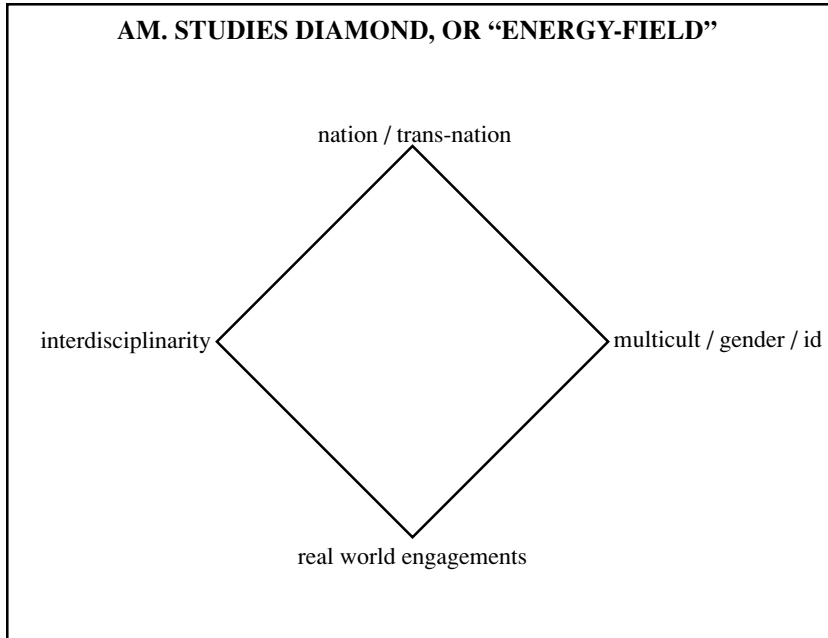


Fig. 5. American studies diamond.

Quarterly—*Locating American Studies: The Evolution of a Discipline*, edited by *AQ*'s Lucy Maddox—a remarkable collection of seventeen classic essays from *AQ* reprinted with retrospective comments.²³ My assignment was to comment on one of my graduate school favorites, Warren Susman's "History and the American Intellectual"—later positioned as the lead essay in Susman's great legacy compendium, *Culture as History* (1984).²⁴

There seemed few initial reasons for not regarding the article as an American studies chestnut, not the least because of the intellectual terrain that Susman explores—with modern search engines, a student today would be led directly to the article through a "hit" parade comprised of Anne Hutchinson, Roger Williams, Cotton Mather, Emerson, Thoreau, Bancroft, Prescott, Parkman, Turner, Beard, Becker, Henry and Brooks Adams, Eliot, Pound, Crane, William Carlos Williams, Toynbee, Niebuhr, Morison, (Samuel Eliot, not Toni), Schlesinger Jr., and Nevins. Similarly dated is the sweeping anthropological typology of "status societies" and "contract societies" in which Susman

locates contrasting orientations to change that he calls the “mythic and utopian” as opposed to the “historical and ideological.”

But the subtle argument connecting the anthropology to the chestnuts is incredibly resonant today. Myth, Susman tells us, is utopian in function in that it explains the present and imagines a future without seeing any process connecting the two. But history involves rationalizing the social order in terms of the processes that produce it and that project it towards the future. The function of history, in contrast to myth, Susman calls ideological in the sense that it imagines a connection between past, present, and future, and makes understanding the past a means for effecting change.

This leads to the second part of Susman’s title, “The Uses of a Usable Past,”—how history, conceived as something usable, is actually engaged and mobilized, by whom, and to what ends. And, it is this that generates the essay’s power today, for it speaks directly to hyperbolic debates about the relation of historical (and American studies) scholarship to broader representations of history in American culture and contentious claims on historical memory itself. These are debates that have grown more shrill, stale, and predictably one-dimensional with each new attack on a museum, each new textbook controversy, each jeremiad about political correctness, multiculturalism, or the easy-target excesses of narrow specialization and obscure theorizing in academic practice, including our own. But more deeply, these all concern uses and usability, among diverse users, of American history and American studies. They are struggles in the public and civic realm that validate Susman’s observation that “there is a special meeting ground between history and myth that frequently provides a key to the central tensions within a culture.”

Susman helps us see these conflicts as something other than Manichean struggles between intellectual integrity and what are imagined to be its anti-historical opposites. And he challenges us today by embracing tensions and contradictions, by reminding us of the inevitable implication of these tendencies to myth and history, utopianism and ideology, in the very nature of perceiving history in the present and in imagining the possibilities of change. He imagines a continuum on which to think about the past is to think about the present and future, and vice versa. And he places scholars where they belong—as part of a meaning-making continuum linking intellectuals and ordinary citizens in the struggle to make sense of their lives, communities, and the world

around them. The choice is not whether to do this, but rather how, and to what ends.

Susman closed his essay with a stark challenge: American intellectuals can retreat farther from engaging intimidating changes, as he feels they had in the mid-nineteenth century. Or, perhaps, he suggested “there will yet be a reawakening, as there was in the 1890s, to the other real need and function of history in our kind of society. Perhaps there will even be another kind of social order.” And perhaps, I would add, we can be bolder today in moving beyond the diffident passive tense of these prescriptions—something easier if American studies is placed and pursued in the charged center of the diamond of all the forces I have described—exactly where Susman’s argument is in fact located, notwithstanding the tonalities of its chestnutian examples.

If this offers one perspective on how more traditional American studies scholarship has been and remains energizing through its connections to other points of the diamond, I encountered another at a recent conference in Bergamo, Italy, entitled “Different Equalities—Rights, Subjects, and Social Complexity: A Reflection Starting From the United States.” It was organized by *Acoma: a Journal of Northamerican Studies*, itself a product of a remarkable Italian collective of scholars, artists, and activists. Everything about this suggests the re-positioning of American studies in an open-ended, sophisticated international discourse—the conference title’s yoking of political philosophy, cultural theory, and social description, its open-ended and provocative “starting from the United States,” and the journal’s own pueblo name taken from the first city in a broader America figured by “northamerican” studies.²⁵

The conference thus stood at an intersection at once transnationally contemporary and quintessentially American (and American studies)—especially in how its title evokes the paradoxical tension between equality and difference, which is to say freedom, in the constituting of American culture and society—which goes back to Tocqueville and beyond, yet echoes powerfully in a contemporary moment characterized by dramatically widened structural inequality in American life and consequently enormous cognitive dissonance between social values and stubborn social facts. Of particular note in the Acoma conference statement was the observation that where equality was once asserted and embraced through the denial or suppression of difference, contemporary politics feature sustained efforts to mobilize differences as the

defining base of a more meaningful social equality—thus introducing remarkable cultural complexity into a discourse already complicated enough by the contradictions of postmodern political economy.

The burden of this effort has been imposing, and the tensions at its heart have tended regularly, across the political spectrum, to collapse into unhelpful extremes, as illustrated, for example, by the temptations of multicultural essentialism, on the one hand, and on the other an increasingly cranky Left critique seeing cultural particularity as an impediment to a politics of equality. The conference struggled mightily to avoid resolving into one or the other position, postures that achieve intellectual comfort at the considerable cost of becoming unable to describe the real world.

Indeed, the conference discussions sounded a note encountered with increasing frequency in modern discourse, the call to resist false binaries, to embrace what Rosie Braidoti called “the simultaneity of opposites” as essential if we are even to describe, much less understand, fluidities of identity at once existential and strategic, or figurations of citizenship and agency in volatile, globalizing political space. Escape from the prison of either/or, in this view, stands as a requirement of contemporary change.²⁶

It is also, of course, a requirement for truly describing, understanding, and critically engaging the cultural history that has brought us to today. This is a point understood even back when people wrote in simple sentences, as is demonstrated, again, by that other century’s Mr. T—our first exemplar of the notion that standing outside the U.S. is a resource, not a handicap in American studies.²⁷

But the links between either/or thinking and insufficiencies of social description remain powerful and proved so at that very conference. Take, for instance, the seemingly irresolvable furor over multiculturalism and its discontents, and especially the charge from right and left, that the focus on diversity invites—or even constitutes—a corrosive, balkanizing essentialism, as if assertions of difference were necessarily claims of an encompassing, defining, difference in fundamental identity.²⁸ I have watched the bubbling over of the overheated multicultural pot with a sense of curiosity and dismay, since the controversy on all sides seems to me so detached from the actual core scholarship that fuels it. The problem, I think, is the “ism” of multiculturalism, which implies an “it,” an exclusive defining orientation that one either embraces or rejects. And yet, in the serious intellectual practice at the

core of the best American studies scholarship, I detect very little “ism” at all. Polemics and postures aside, I see a scholarship that over quite a long while now has in anything-but-uniform ways been trying to describe the real world of an American culture and history that conventional categories and foci have not permitted us to see.

And I think the same has been true of the rapid internationalizing of this approach. The essential engine has been a reaching more for descriptive than analytic power, much less for a coherent ideological position. I suspect this impulse has become controversial in recent years less because of the sweeping claims and positions attributed to it (usually mistakenly) than because its descriptive capacity has been converging with the increasingly manifest implications of recent social change that need to be made visible, whether these be the accumulations of internal demographic change in the U.S. or the globalization of capital and labor that have had such inescapable social consequences in, for only one example, European nations that no longer even pretend to describe themselves in other than complex, multicultural, and increasingly—in this sense—Americanized terms.²⁹

It has, of course, been convenient for those threatened by this pincer-like convergence between scholarly capacity and manifest social realities to see it in other terms, and by this I don’t simply mean the assault from the right, a too-easy target, after all. In some deeper senses that go to the heart of the practice of American studies today, the tension between theory and practice, between analysis and experience, is one that we need to embrace and engage, not resolve—and to ground in the soil of our own real-world lives.

This is not easy, as was demonstrated by the response at the Acoma conference to a paper by Janet Zandy, one of the key figures in an important new working-class studies caucus within our ASA community. Zandy focused on the painful illegibility of class in the discourse of contemporary cultural identity and the consequences of its inaccessibility as a legitimate ground for the assertion of difference.³⁰ But her request that a progressive-left academic conference confront the problematic, contradictory invisibility of the working class in our own subjectively experienced academic lives and structures seemed to make the tension between values and social facts too uncomfortable to confront. Her challenge was received as a romantic prescription leading to further “balkanization” rather than as a call to accept class as a component of social experience and description that needed to be

“brought home” and engaged reflexively, especially considering how class has been experienced within teaching, within the academy, and within scholarship itself as a persistent and painful marginalization—including, I might add, in the tonalities of intellectual privilege at our own ASA meetings in recent years.

To me, these reflections connect the frame I have been discussing and trying to broaden here, to intriguingly parallel efforts encountered over many years in my work in oral history, and in our American studies program at Buffalo—efforts in which the problem of transcending unhelpful either/ors has been presented in the often prosaic problematics of an oral history interview or the bureaucratically problematic line between academic programs and social involvement, in arguments about why American studies academic credit might attach to drumming and dancing in social space, in the even broader tension, in scholarship itself, between research and activism. This is a realm in which discourse has meant sustained conversation among people, in which narratives are stories sought and told, in which interviews are dialogical in ways it does not require (though it certainly benefits from) Bakhtin to imagine, in which “the subject” is a human being one talks to, in which bodies dance and party and mediate actual voices, in which the public sphere is a space for prosaically concrete practice and involvement.³¹ To explore all this, as a final way to explore what it might mean to bring the real world into American studies and American studies into the real world, I am brought, finally, to . . . multivalence.

Let me frame my remarks by speaking as an historian who has been working with the meaning and uses of oral history in documenting the recent structural economic changes unhelpfully termed “de-industrialization.” One approach to oral history has always resisted any notion of special claims and qualities for the evidence it produces: I once called this the “more history” approach, as if the point were to shine a flashlight into an otherwise dark corner of the basement or attic, and retrieve data—with the privilege of analysis and interpretation reserved for the retrieving, synthesizing scholar. A contrasting approach inverts this emphasis, seeing the “voice of the people” as self-explanatory and self-empowering, embodied in oral history as an “anti-history” that subverts or at least circumvents the interpretive power of historians and what they are presumed to represent.

Much of the energy in oral history as a field has come from the effort to work between the rock and the hard place that these poles repre-

sent—to see oral history as evidence in a broad sense going beyond data, and to read interviews as interpretive dialogues, however implicit, in which we can hear, learn from, and engage actively the ever-present narrative perspective of the interviewee, in a process that returns us to a more basic meaning of their “subjectivity,” a term which until recently had only a pejorative meaning for many historians.³² But it has remained hard to represent this complexity—what Jacquelyn Hall has called the “interpretive authority of ordinary people” has often been obscured on the one hand by the seamless historical narrative “illustrated” by vivid oral history excerpts, or on the other by unmediated oral history documents presented as if meaning and implications were self-evident, which tends rarely to be the case.³³

Recent trends in scholarship have made this old dilemma worse. A new generation of cultural studies and social history has centered on the complex social construction of identities, on the culturally embodied intersections of race, class, and gender, on the complexity of social memory, and on understanding the profound tensions between hegemony and agency. And yet we have paid a heavy price—in the form of scholarly discourse so relentlessly theorized as to lose touch with the people and the narrative realities it deals with, much less with any readership beyond those already invested in highly restrictive vocabularies and questions—for these insights. Recent op-ed polemics—PC and otherwise—aside, there is an emerging consensus that for all its accomplishments, too much contemporary scholarship, ours included in American studies, risks what could be called a “discursive disconnect” from the very people, issues, and interests it presumes to intersect. More prosaically, we risk a terminal case of “paralysis from the analysis.”³⁴

There is a striking irony in this for those of us who have been involved in oral history and documentary work, since the very issues contemporary scholarship has spotlighted with great intellectual huffing and puffing are issues presented, in oral history, in the form of lived experience and living conversation, where they must be dealt with in highly concrete decisions about the conduct, editing, presentation, and interpretation of interview narratives. Here, the abstractions of theory cannot so easily get away from the stubborn corporeality and materiality of real people and real lives, and it is harder to reduce narrative to simply another form of raw data for interpretation. Once this is appreciated, I think, it becomes easier to appreciate the capacity of narratives and testimonies to inform, challenge, complicate, and shape

our own categories and questions—especially if we are willing to share with interview subjects the authority of interpretation, to read narratives as offering an interpretive dialogue implicit in the relationships producing ethnographic or documentary evidence in the first place, and often explicit, if we stop to listen, in the texts generated in the process.³⁵

In collecting and editing a book of narratives based on life-history interviews with Buffalo, New York steelworkers in the aftermath of the evaporation of a once-mighty steel industry, I was struck repeatedly by how regularly and easily interview subjects moved around the convenient categories presented to them—frequently of an either/or nature—when asked to describe industrial work, family, and community before, during, and after job loss. They both liked their jobs and hated them. They identified with the union and/or the company yet felt betrayed by either or both. They saw themselves as victims of the plant closings yet refused to act or feel victimized. They were deeply nostalgic and yet fully engaged with moving on. They resisted the very notion that their lives were defined by their work situation, past or present, offering instead a more seamless web in which worlds of family, neighborhood, and community were woven together with work and workplace in their own identities.³⁶

This is what I have come to call “multivalence”—a locution, and pronunciation, meant to echo but contrast with “ambivalence.” Ambivalence stands at a moral distance and inevitably suggests uncertain feelings or a confusion of values. But multivalence evokes the very different quality that we often hear in narratives: multi-valents, many values, the holding of different values at the same time without implying confusion, contradiction, or even paradox. Multivalence implies a way of being in the world—one that may be particularly characteristic of the experience of “others,” challenging and complicating a dominant culture’s categories and asking us to think about things in very different ways. As in the provocative quote from Linda Lord, a displaced poultry worker in rural Maine, that folklorist Alicia Rouverol and photographer Cedric Chatterley chose for the title of their wonderful recent book, *“I was Content and Not Content”: The Story of Linda Lord and the Closing of Penobscot Poultry*.³⁷

For me, this work has come to stand for a broader point about intellectual authority and dialogue, and about learning from the world we engage. To draw out the point, I hope it’s not too indulgent to offer a personal story from a world that may seem even farther a field—if

Anton Chekhov and his *fin-de-siècle* Russian aristocrats seem to stand a long way from both a Belfast, Maine chicken factory and from the Detroit Renaissance Center on the eve of the millennial moment. A number of years ago, my then Buffalo American studies colleague Dick Blau dragooned me into a community theater production of *The Three Sisters*. I played Kulygin, schoolteacher and cuckolded husband of Masha, the most tempestuous of the sisters. I needed a lot of coaching, particularly in delivering one crucial line: In the face of every humiliation and disappointment that is his lot, Kulygin repeats, “I am content, I am content, I am content.” The trick was to say these words in a way that was not pathetic, that made clear how determined the man was to keep on going on, to avoid the self-pity immobilizing the other characters in the play.

This all came back to me when I encountered Alicia Rouverol and Linda Lord. Consider that beyond poor Kulygin, *The Three Sisters* involves a family of *fin-de-siècle* aristocrats in the twilight years of a Russian nobility soon to be swept away by modernization and revolution—by the then-looming twentieth century. They are stranded in the provinces: “Moscow, Moscow, Moscow,” the sisters sigh in their different ways. They, their lovers, and their friends spend most of four long acts complaining about boredom and bemoaning their fate.

Linda Lord throws all this into sharp perspective. Here are Chekhov’s aristocrats who for all their wealth and privilege insist, “we are not content.” Here is Kulygin, the middle-class professional who insists, “I am content”—when he so obviously, painfully, is not. And here is Linda Lord, a working-class woman from Belfast, Maine who when asked whether she liked her poultry job says, well, “I was content and not content”—and goes on to offer her story in her own voice. We need to notice that Linda Lord’s comment was not a free-floating “expression” of her existential take on her job so much as it was a dialogic parry, a deflection of an either/or question whose assumptions she did not wish to legitimize through responding. In her multivalence, she suggests how deeply functional is the capacity to hold and to deploy strategically seemingly contradictory values, each of which can be true and real in different ways, and all of which in sum represent the terrain of complex experience.

For another example, consider the story (or rather stories, since she actually told it twice) in my steelworker project that Doris McKinney tells, a story about almost losing her steel mill job. Ms. McKinney tells

us first that she had been a single mother on welfare when given an opportunity to work at Republic Steel. Towards the end of her probation, the foreman told her that she wasn't cutting it, that she would be fired if she didn't do better with the heavy burning torch. She describes what happened then:

And you say, going from two—let's see, I think how much I was making, maybe three hundred a week, and the thought of going back to the welfare and making three hundred a month—the whole weekend I cried and I cried. When I walked in there Monday, I could pick the torch up and walk with it and anything else. Because it was psychological, you know. I knew that I did not want to go back to living like I was. And if there was any ounce of strength within me, and if other women could do it, I can't see why I couldn't, and so I did.³⁸

But later, in a long interview, she re-tells the story. She describes how welfare had enabled her to complete a community-college certification as an occupational therapist's assistant, but that on graduation she could not afford to take a low-paying job in that field and only reluctantly took the job at Republic instead:

It was a step forward because it was a good, high-paying job; it was a step backward because it was not the kind of job I wanted to do. So it was very depressing for me. . . . [But] we had been deprived a long time, and the money outweighed the experience. And who was to say that the other job was going to work out? So, once I took the job at Republic, you know your whole mentality has to change in order to keep a job, you can't continue to see yourself doing something else, just doing this temporarily. No—you got to be all or nothing. I thought you could keep up with reading, and keep up with your AJOTs, *Journal of Occupational Therapy*, you know. But you can't keep up unless you're actively participating in it. So then you finally make up your mind, you say, "Well, as long as I'm going to be at the job I'm going to do my damndest to keep it, and get some of the things I want, and if the time comes, then so be it, I'll go from there."³⁹

It took me a while to realize that these two stories were the same story—that the welfare mother terrified of returning to poverty and the college-trained para-professional who conquers her disappointment about being in a manual-labor job, are the same woman, facing the same moment of truth. It's a good example, I think, of multivalence in action, of identity so complex and nuanced as to be apprehensible only through the unfolding layers of expression in a complex narrative.

What do such stories suggest for American studies, for the prismatic, quadrilateral map I have offered, for the project of bringing the world into the work of American studies and vice versa, in the complex of ways intended by Sharon O'Brien, Neil Foley, and Brenda Dixon Gottschild when they framed the theme for this convention? Although intellectuals often presume we are unfolding and unpacking the meaning of experience through broader conceptualizations and theoretical frames, a strong case can be made that the process is the reverse: our generalizations and abstractions flatten the particularities of experience in ways that prevent us from apprehending precisely what people are expressing, and trying to tell us.

To me, the lesson lies in the importance of genuine dialogue, engagement and exchange—actualized in all directions. I have no illusions about this being a shortcut to some sort of pristine consciousness, of agency somehow outside the orbit of the same powerful cultural and political structuring forces that have produced the very paradigms we seek somehow to get out from under. At the same time, there is encouraging ground for this belief in the power of real world engagement and dialogic—seen, for instance, in the destabilizing surprises that history can throw in the path of what can seem the most fixed intellectual assumptions.

Consider the quite incredible improvisations surrounding the WTO meetings in Seattle a year ago—which amounted to the enactment in public space of a remarkable, transnational, truly inclusive and cross-class American studies teach-in on the very issues so prominently featured in our conference program. Could it be a coincidence that these events occurred only a year after a controversial ASA conference in that very same city raising what turn out to be some of the same issues? (We are, surely, the only group of people in the world tempted to associate the “Battle in Seattle” with the aftermath of an ASA Presidential Address.⁴⁰) No, we must confess—such spontaneous ground-level mobilizations (as opposed to theorized prescriptions) were as unanticipated by most of our scholarship as was the evaporation of Soviet communism by any conclave of international affairs experts as late as 1988.

So where did they come from? Such surprises suggest that there is always, in the experience of people, however mediated and however much internalizing of the dominant culture, an experiential basis and capacity for alternative constructions. We might see this, to torture

another riff, as a kind of DNA—the generative basics of insight and understanding embedded in the cells of life experience and inherently capable of activation and replication, even if this does not occur spontaneously or easily. Theory itself, in this view, remains a necessary, crucial part of dialogue—since it is only through generalization and abstraction that a concept defined by one experience or situation can be transported meaningfully into another; throwing in theory is something like throwing in the clutch, helping us all to shift gears and move smoothly and meaningfully through a sequence of contexts.

But most people drive automatic transmissions these days, which is to say that both the metaphor and the working of these connective/transmissive relationships are too easily mystified in practice. Here, as elsewhere, it seems to me that for an American studies wishing to both understand and change the world the answer lies in a deeper and more sustained dialogue, of talking and really listening across diverse realms of experience, informed by a belief in the possibility that experience as well as expertise—the two words have the same root, I like to observe—each provide tools for the creation of a new discourse of possibilities.⁴¹ For beyond narrative as illustration, and narrative as appreciation, and even narrative as instruction, it is narrative as dialogue—which however implicitly is embedded in all narrative—that may be most worth our attention.

And these notions point, once again, to the usefulness of recognizing how important engagement, and mutual interrogation have always been to the force field of cultural and intellectual practice in American studies. These help nourish the energizing tension and provocative instability of “both/and” responses to “either/or” questions, responses American studies at its best has always embraced.⁴² Multivalent intellectual issues and embodied institutional postures, that is, have characterized our organization and work for some time now in one form or another, at every level from scholarship to pedagogy to community engagement to international involvement and activities—and are needed now more than ever.

This has been instructive and defining for me—to close where I began—in my own program in Buffalo, which began decades ago, with Larry Chisolm’s prescient vision, joined by Charlie Keil, Bob Dentan, Liz Kennedy, Dick Blau, and others, of an American studies re-situated in a global perspective and grounded in the centrality of cross-cultural fieldwork, of activist scholarship, of music, dance, and literally em-

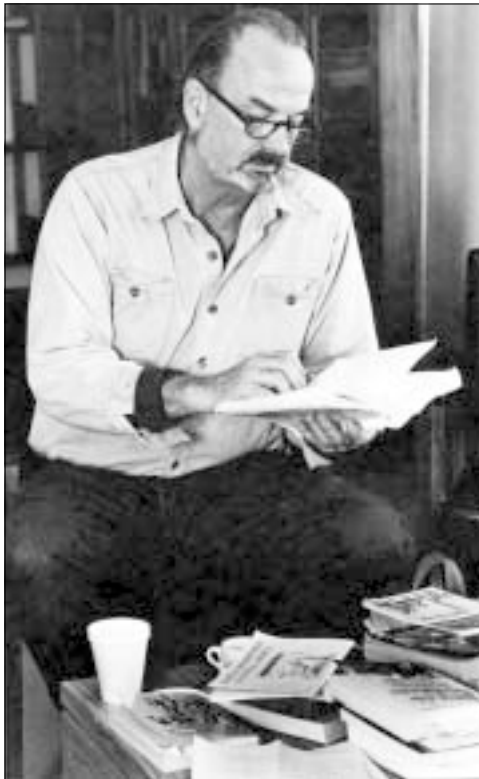
bodied praxis. And it is no coincidence at all that this orientation became the generative ground for a multicultural constellation of programs focused outside the academy and never seen as inconsistent with this broader, inclusive vision—Native American studies developed by Barry White, John Mohawk, and Oren Lyons; Women’s studies as built by Liz Kennedy, Lillian Robinson, Ellen Dubois, and more recently Masani Alexis DeVeaux; a cosmopolitan Puerto Rican studies led by Francisco Pabon and Alfredo Matilla; and an African American studies program propelled, at the start, by Jim Miller, who has gone on to be so important in this work in ASA.

The many-dimensioned multivalence of this approach was never really appreciated by our university, or perhaps it was apprehended too clearly—in any event, a once-substantial department has now been restructured and absorbed within a broader, vaguely constituted umbrella “Center for the Americas.” This makes perfect and even admirable intellectual sense, on many grounds, even if it has been more problematically imagined from above as a way to retain the prestige of cutting edge scholarship without the pesky intrusion of the actual people, issues, problems, agendas, and agency to whom our space has been open, and by whom it has been shaped. This is a complex, painful transition, but the new Center, initially shaped by the Americanist literary critic Mark Shechner and about to be led by the remarkable combination of John Mohawk and Dennis Tedlock, may yet surprise administrators bent on deconstructing precisely the kind of energizing constellations I have been invoking tonight. They may yet be surprised by the durability of dialogue and engagement, and their indispensability to currently cosmopolitan constructions. This will depend, I expect, on whether the kind of generative tensions suggested by my models tonight can, on the programmatic level, be sustained, nourished, respected, and embodied in engaged community—both within and leading beyond the program and the university.⁴³

This the broader politics of the academy renders quite uncertain. As it is here, in Detroit and in ASA, which is why we have sought—in constructing the conference program, in the community based pre-convention collaboratives, and in the plenary, “community commons” and performance tomorrow evening—to emphasize the centrality of engagement beyond the Renaissance Center, and beyond the circle of our own academic discourse. Seen in the prismatic array or in the quadrilateral of forces I have described (physics in the hands of an

historian, I have surely demonstrated, being no more constraining than history in the hands of a physicist), I see the current moment as one of extraordinary dimensionality, not usefully reduced to any particular intellectual posture or organizational model and requiring connections and resources beyond our intellectual work as such. For only in the most demandingly inclusive interrogation of our mutually implicated world will we be able to mobilize the power of a fully deployed diversity—as we move, together, through this necessarily dialogic, infinitely prismatic, and relentlessly multivalent millennial moment.

In Memory of Lawrence Chisolm



Larry Chisolm, the founder of the American Studies program at SUNY Buffalo, died of cancer in April 1998. The program and his inspiring vision are discussed towards the end of my address. For a fuller appreciation of Larry's unique presence and significance in the field, see Charlie Keil, "Obituary: Lawrence Washington Chisolm," *American Studies Association Newsletter* (Mar. 1999).

NOTES

I deeply appreciate the many discussions with friends, colleagues, and students, especially at SUNY Buffalo, who have for so long shaped my understanding of the issues discussed in this address. For particularly helpful feedback as the address took shape, I want to thank Charlie and Angie Keil, Dick Blau, Erik Seeman, Debra More, David More, and Mark Shechner. My greatest concrete debt is to the two graduate students who assisted me on this project and became trusted and highly valued colleagues in the process: Judith Weiland, who has worked with me on various dimensions of the Pan-Am Exposition project and research, discussed in the address, and who masterminded the multimedia presentation that broke some new presentational ground in Detroit, and Christine Zinni, whose extraordinarily thorough research in the related literatures referenced in my notes has been of inestimable value to me and, I know, to her own rapidly crystallizing emergence as a scholar, filmmaker, and theorist.

1. Among the more thoughtful and concise commentaries on this moment, see Peter N. Stearns, *Millennium III, Century XXI: A Retrospective on the Future* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996).

2. There has been considerable recent interest in synchronicity lately, much of it coming in works examining diverse developments compacted within a single year. These, however, generally rely on claims for the special significance of the chosen focus. See, for instance, Scott Heller, "What a Difference a Year Makes," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 5 Jan. 2001; and Louis P. Masur, *1831: Year of Eclipse* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2001). In contrast, my interest here is in the value of an arbitrary point, as such, for exploring the insights of synchronicity.

3. Though there has long been widespread interest in world's fairs from many vantages, their core historiography, and the best starting point, centers on the work of Robert W. Rydell. See Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984); as well as the more recent synthesis and overview, Robert W. Rydell, John E. Findling II, and Kimberley D. Pele, *Fair America: World's Fairs in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000). Rydell also gathered a very useful collection of work by a diverse group of scholars in Robert W. Rydell and Nancy Gwinn, eds., *Fair Representations: World's Fairs and the Modern World* (Amsterdam: VU Univ. Press, 1994). James Gilbert, *Perfect Cities: Chicago's Utopias of 1893* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991) is among the best of the monographic studies, and the one most useful for broader readings of fairs against the context of American culture and urban society.

4. Beyond the substantial coverage of this fair in the various works by Rydell, there are a number of useful works focused exclusively on the Pan-Am. For a sophisticated overview in a popular audience format, see Thomas E. Leary and Elizabeth C. Sholes, eds., *Buffalo's Pan-American Exposition* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia, 1998). This volume is comprised of a marvelous collection of illustrations accompanied by a narrative in the form of extensive caption commentaries. There is also an excellent overview in the opening chapter of Mark Goldman's spirited history of Buffalo, which presents the Pan-Am as both a story and a metaphor for the city's nineteenth-century rise and twentieth-century struggles. Mark Goldman, *High Hopes: The Rise and Decline of Buffalo, New York* (Albany, N.Y.: State Univ. of New York Press, 1983). The most important of the new works occasioned by the fair's centennial is Kerry S.

Grant, *The Rainbow City—Celebrating Light, Color, and Architecture at the Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo 1901* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Canisius College Press, 2001), a lavishly illustrated “coffee table” book with a comprehensive scholarly commentary. The book illustrates, as well, the serious uses of this much-patronized form, given the visual significance of the fair and a rich documentary record that has, among other things, never been presented in the color renditions crucial for understanding the Pan-Am’s particular impact and meaning. The fictional treatment in Lauren Belfer, *City of Light* (New York: Dial Press, 1999), sets the Pan-Am against an evocative portrait of turn-of-the-century Buffalo; the national and international best-seller success of this historical novel has been both gratifying and suprising to Buffalonians steeled to expect media and popular condescension. A vast array of Pan-Am and related historical websites are most conveniently accessed through the portal site for the overall Pan-Am Centennial, <http://www.panam2001.org>.

5. This is the central focus of Rydell’s landmark work, *All the World’s a Fair*, as captured in its subtitle, *Visions of Empire*. For broader reflections on this dimension, see especially Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1993). Much of the broader literature on nationalism and post-coloniality, of course, speaks to the problematics of empire inevitably encoded in these fairs: see Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991); Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998); and Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000). See also the broader critique of assumptions and traditions in western culture in John C. Mohawk, *Utopian Legacies: A History of Conquest and Oppression in the Western World* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Clear Light Publishing, 2000). For reflections on some of these same issues as engaged in more contemporary circumstances and terms, see Daniel Mato, “On the Making of Transnational Identities in the Age of Globalization: The U.S. Latina/o ‘Latin’ American Case,” *Cultural Studies* 12 (1998); and Nikhil Pal Singh, “Culture/Wars: Recoding Empire in an Age of Democracy,” *American Quarterly* 50 (Sept. 1998).

6. Electricity was nothing new at the fairs, but this scale and quality of illumination was quite unique, and widely commented upon. See David E. Nye, “Electrifying the Expositions: 1880–1939” in Rydell and Gwinn, eds., *Fair Representations*; as well as David E. Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990).

7. As noted above, this central theme lends particular importance to both the illustrations and commentary presented in Grant, *The Rainbow City*.

8. Discussion of the ambiguities encountered when moving from fairs as text to fairs as experience and contestable space is one of the most notable differences between Rydell’s earlier synthesis and his new popular history of U.S. fairs, Rydell, et al. eds., *Fair America*.

9. See especially Burton Benedict, “Rituals of Representation: Ethnic Stereotypes and Colonized Peoples at World’s Fairs,” in Rydell and Gwinn, eds., *Fair Representations*; and the broader explorations in Micaela diLeonardo, *Exotics at Home: Anthropologies, Others, American Modernity* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998). Also relevant is Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1998). These last two works are discussed in an insightful recent review essay, Steven Hoelscher, “America the Exotic,” *American Quarterly* 52 (Mar. 2000). For similar issues engaged usefully in a different medium and context, see Ward Churchill, *Fantasies of the Master Race*:

Literature, Cinema, and the Colonization of American Indians (San Francisco, Calif.: City Lights, 1998). There is a quite apposite discussion of the evolving representations of the Buffalo Bill show in this era in Jonathan D. Martin, "'The Grandest and Most Cosmopolitan Object Teacher': *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* and the Politics of American Identity, 1883–1899," *Radical History Review* (fall 1996). Among other things, Martin traces the show's shifting content, focus, and denomination from the American Wild West to a presciently multi-, trans-, and post-national International Exposition of Rough Riders. It is likely that this is one of the origins of the term soon linked, indelibly, to Theodore Roosevelt and San Juan Hill, an interesting example of life appropriating art and an interpenetration of theatrical and historical representation fully reflected in and projected from the Pan-Am exposition just a few years later.

10. Myths die hard, even one that is usually deployed as an implicit explanation or even excuse for broader civic decline and failure. Yet the inevitably mortal nature of the wounds at that point in medical time and their quite certain treatability today is the clear conclusion of a definitive forthcoming work by an eminent surgeon who has closely explored the forensic record and evidence in the context of trauma treatment assumptions and understandings in 1901. See Jack C. Fisher, "Stolen Glory: The McKinley Assassination" (forthcoming), which sets the medical analysis within an overview narrative of the entire assassination story.

11. The whole story is examined from the vantage of Buffalo's Polish-American community in an important dissertation: William Falkowski, "Accommodation and Conflict: Patterns of Polish Immigrant Adaptation to Industrial Capitalism and American Political Pluralism in Buffalo, New York, 1873–1901" (Ph.D. diss., SUNY, Buffalo, 1990).

12. This film, the overall Edison company filming at Pan-Am, and the broader meanings of early film are explored in a fascinating recent article, Jonathan Auerbach, "McKinley at Home: How Early American Cinema Made News," *American Quarterly* 51 (Dec. 1999).

13. Stories about resistance to the Pan-Am's racism and the "Old Plantation" concession and the efforts around the Du Bois exhibit have been items of local folklore for some time; in a more general sense this theme is a prominent feature in the fictional rendition in Belfer, *City of Light*. See as well Leary and Sholes, *Buffalo's Pan-American Exposition*. Only recently, however, has solid evidence been discovered documenting the development—this is being publicly presented for the first time in an exhibit at the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library as part of the Pan-Am 2001 centennial, and information about it will be reachable at <http://www.panam2001.org>. The Buffalo Museum of Science, in the meantime, is at work on an ambitious international traveling exhibition planned for 2003, setting the Pan-Am's African artifacts against the complex history of representations of African culture.

14. The emerging shape of this centennial can best be explored via its portal website, <http://www.panam2001.org>.

15. This project is conveniently presented in Patrick Klink, "Imagining the Pan-Am Exposition," *UB Today* (winter 2000), a SUNY-Buffalo alumni magazine article accessible at http://www.buffalo.edu/UBT/UBT-archives/13_ubtw00/features/feature1.html. This project received crucial seed support in a national competition seeking examples of creative university/community partnerships organized by Imagining America: Scholars and Artists in Public Life. For an introduction to this innovative initiative, see <http://www.ia.umich.edu/>. This Imagining America public scholarship grant was awarded by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, which has itself been at the forefront of a range of initiatives focused on the importance of real world engagements for the future of higher education, and graduate education in

particular. For an introduction, see <http://www.woodrow.org>. The National Endowment for the Humanities awarded a Consultation Grant to WNED-TV for the development of the documentary's themes and of course has recognized the resonant focus of the Detroit ASA meeting through the participation of Chairman Bill Ferris in our keynote plenary session.

16. See Bill Bryant, "Webs of Significance: Approaching American Studies through Hyperspace," *Odense American Studies International Series [Denmark]* (Apr. 1996), a fascinating discussion which, among other things, reflects on how the world's fairs can be imagined as a kind of anticipatory website equivalent—non-linear constellations through which visitors "surfed" in ways and with consequences beyond the reach of scripted narrative messages and pathways. In this sense, Bryant argues, they prove especially appropriate historical subjects for hypertextual exploration today.

17. This is very clear, for instance, in many of the classic essays and contemporary commentaries on them gathered in *AQ's* fiftieth anniversary tribute, Lucy Maddox, ed., *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of a Discipline* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1999). See it, for example, for Bruce Kuklick, "Myth and Symbol in American Studies," *American Quarterly* 24 (Oct. 1972); Gene Wise, "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement," *American Quarterly* 31 (Bibliography 1979); and Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr. "A New Context for American Studies?," *American Quarterly* 41 (Dec. 1989). Also useful in this regard is Joseph J. Kwiatt and Mary C. Turpie, *American Studies, Past, Present, and Future* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1960); and Philip Fisher, ed., *The New American Studies: Essays from Representations* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1991). It proves very instructive to reread a range of older and more recent formulations by the light of contemporary discourse: see, for example, John Higham, "American Intellectual History: A Critical Appraisal," *American Quarterly* 13 (summer 1961); George W. Pierson, "The M-Factor in American History," *American Quarterly* 14 (summer 1962); Richard E. Sykes, "American Studies and the Concept of Culture: A Theory and Method," *American Quarterly* 15 (summer 1963); John William Ward, "Directions in American Intellectual History," *American Quarterly* 18 (summer 1966); Gene Wise, ed., "The American Studies Movement: A Thirty-Year Retrospective (Special Issue)," *American Quarterly* 31 (Bibliography 1979), which includes Jay Mechling, ed., "Some Voices in and around American Studies," *American Quarterly* 31 (Bibliography 1979); Richard Dorson, "The American Studies Type," *American Quarterly* 31 (Bibliography 1979); Doris Friedensohn, "The Mid-Life Crisis of American Studies," *American Quarterly* 31 (Bibliography 1979); William H. Goetzmann, "A View of American Studies," *American Quarterly* 31 (Bibliography 1979); and Joel M. Jones, "American Studies: The Myth of Methodology," *American Quarterly* 31 (Bibliography 1979); Gregory M. Pfitzer, "Resurrecting the Fathers: The Revisionist Movement in American Studies Historiography," *American Quarterly* 43 (Sept. 1991); and Brian Attebery, "American Studies: A Not So Unscientific Method," *American Quarterly* 48 (June 1996); and Michael C. Coleman et al., "Forum on Robert F. Berkhofer Jr.'s *Beyond the Great Story*," *American Quarterly* 50 (June 1998); as well as reflections such as Michael Denning, "'The Special American Conditions': Marxism and American Studies," *American Quarterly* 38 (Bibliography 1986); and Donald Weber, "From Limen to Border: A Meditation on the Legacy of Victor Turner for American Cultural Studies," *American Quarterly* 47 (Sept. 1995). Linda K. Kerber, "Diversity and the Transformation of American Studies," *American Quarterly* 41 (Sept. 1989), frames the historiography of the field very helpfully. But to appreciate some of the challenges confronting a dialogic appreciation of the resonance of old and new scholarship, see Steven Watts, "The Idiocy of

American Studies: Poststructuralism, Language, and Politics in the Age of Self-Fulfillment," *American Quarterly* 43 (Dec. 1991); and Barry Shank, "A Reply to Steven Watts' 'Idiocy'," *American Quarterly* 44 (Sept. 1992).

18. Among the most helpful of the many efforts to assess the broad meanings and deep roots of international and transnational reframing of American Studies, are Jane C. Desmond and Virginia R. Dominguez, "Resituating American Studies in a Critical Internationalism," *American Quarterly* 48 (Sept. 1996); Gunter H. Lenz, "Toward a Dialogic of International American Culture Studies: Transnationality, Border Discourses, and Public Culture(s)," *Amerikastudien/ American Studies* 44 (1999); Paul Giles, "Reconstructing American Studies: Transnational Paradoxes, Comparative Perspectives," *Journal of American Studies* 28 (1994); see also Donald E. Pease, ed., *New Americanists 2: National Identities and Postnational Narratives/ Boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture, Volume 19/1, Spring, 1992 Special Issue*, vol. 19/1 (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1992); and Frederick Buell, "Nationalist Postnationalism: Globalist Discourse in Contemporary American Culture," *American Quarterly* 50 (Sept. 1998). Rereading some of the older interrogations of nation against the context of many more recent discourses, especially in border studies, suggests the kind of resonant curiosities and convergences I have in mind, however different the discursive frames and vocabularies. See, for instance Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., "The Americanness of American Studies," *American Quarterly* 31 (Bibliography 1979), and "A New Context for American Studies?" *American Quarterly* 41 (Dec. 1989); Leo Marx, "Thoughts on the Origin and Character of the American Studies Movement," *American Quarterly* 31 (Bibliography 1979). Exploring such concerns, and an expansive context for appreciating them, has been close to the heart of several recent ASA Presidential Addresses, most notably Patricia Nelson Limerick, "Insiders and Outsiders: The Borders of the USA and the Limits of the ASA," *American Quarterly* 49 (Sept. 1997); Janice Radway, "What's in a Name?" *American Quarterly* 51 (Mar. 1999); and Mary Kelley, "Taking Stands: American Studies at Century's Turn," *American Quarterly* 52 (Mar. 2000). It is not only American studies that has necessarily had to grapple with the problematic of nation in recent years; an equally sustained reconceptualization has been a central concern of for American historians as well. See David Thelen, "Special Issue: The Nation and Beyond—Transnational Perspectives on United States History," *Journal of American History* 86 (Dec. 1999); Thomas Bender, "La Pietra Report—Project on Internationalizing the Study of American History, a Report to the Profession" (Organization of American Historians, 2000) and Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, forthcoming). On the challenge of border conceptualizations, see José David Saldívar, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1997), and *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1991); as well as two review essays that explored these works for a broader American studies readership: Carl Gutierrez-Jones, "Caliban's America," *American Quarterly* 45 (Mar. 1993); and Andrea Tinnemeyer, "Why Border Matters to American Studies," *American Quarterly* 51 (June 1999). See also a useful review essay, James Sandos, "From 'Boltonlands' to 'Weberlands': The Borderlands Enter American History," *American Quarterly* 46 (Dec. 1994).

19. Let me focus, in a note that could otherwise run on for pages, on some sources that explore the interface between this broad movement and American studies as a field. A good starting point, again noting how *AQ* has served as a site for such intersections, is John Higham, "Multiculturalism and Universalism: A History and Critique," *American Quarterly* 45 (June 1993); and a forum discussing it: Gerald Early

et al., "Forum on John Higham, 'Multiculturalism and Universalism,'" *American Quarterly* 45 (June 1993). See also Donald E. Pease, "New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon," *Boundary 2* 17 (1990); Werner Sollors, "Of Mules and Mares in a Land of Difference; or, Quadrupeds All?," *American Quarterly* 42 (June 1990); Christopher Newfield and Avery F. Gordon, eds., *Mapping Multiculturalism* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1996); Saldivar, *Border Matters*; Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Interrogating 'Whiteness,' Complicating 'Blackness': Remapping American Culture," *American Quarterly* 47 (Sept. 1995); Catrin Gersdorf, "American Studies East and West: A Multicultural Project?" in *Multiculturalism in Transit*, ed. Klaus J. Milich and Jeffrey M. Peck (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998); Gary Okihito, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle, Wash.: Univ. of Washington Press, 1994); and a useful review essay, K. Scott Wong, "Rethinking the Center from the Margins," *American Quarterly* 49 (June 1997). Among recent ASA presidential addresses reflecting on these dimensions, see especially Mary Helen Washington, "Disturbing the Peace: What Happens to American Studies If You Put African American Studies at the Center?" *American Quarterly* 50 (Mar. 1998); and also Alice Kessler-Harris, "Cultural Locations: Positioning American Studies in the Great Debate," *American Quarterly* 44 (Sept. 1992); Limerick, "Insiders and Outsiders"; Radway, "What's in a Name?"; and Kelley, "Taking Stands." Newfield and Gordon, eds., *Mapping Multiculturalism* is among the most provocative and useful collections of essays on these developments and their broader transformative and imaginative implications.

20. See Washington, "Disturbing the Peace"; Vicki L. Ruiz, "'It's the People Who Drive the Book': A View from the West," *American Quarterly* 45 (June 1993); and Betsy Erkkila, "Ethnicity, Literary Theory, and the Grounds of Resistance," *American Quarterly* 47 (Dec. 1995), an essay that points to the continuing need for a practice-grounded field of American studies in digesting and refocusing the influence of contemporary cultural studies. Such concerns have been central—implicitly or explicitly—to a number of the powerful presidential addresses that made preparing my own contribution so humbling an experience; see, for example, Allen F. Davis, "The Politics of American Studies," *American Quarterly* 42 (Sept. 1990); Paul Lauter, "Versions of Nashville, Visions of American Studies," *American Quarterly* 47 (June 1995); Elaine Tyler May, "The Radical Roots of American Studies: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 9 Nov. 1995," *American Quarterly* 48 (June 1996); and Kelley, "Taking Stands." For representative examples of the diverse dimensions of engagement I am referencing here, see Regna Darnell, "Theorizing American Anthropology: Continuities from the B.A.E. To the Boasians" in *Theorizing the Americanist Tradition*, ed. Lisa Philips Valentine and Regna Darnell (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1999); Richard Handler, "Boasian Anthropology and the Critique of American Culture," *American Quarterly* 42 (June 1990); Richard Bauman and Joel Scherzer, eds., *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974); Richard Bauman, ed., *Verbal Art as Performance* (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House Publishers, 1977); and Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs, "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990); James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988), and "On Ethnographic Authority," *Representations* 1 (1983); Dennis Tedlock, *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture* (Urbana, Ill.: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1995); Paula Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary* (London: Verso, 1994); Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (New York: Praeger/

Greenwood, 1996); Charles Keil and Steven Feld, *Music Grooves* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994); Charles Keil and J.A. Progler, eds., "Special Issue: Participatory Discrepancies," *Ethnomusicology* 39 (winter 1995); and Keil's current project, MUSE, Inc. (Musicians United for Superior Education), which develops models for making drumming and dancing a transformative agent in primary schools: <http://www.musekids.org>.

21. This note affords me an opportunity to redress an evident misperception reported by some in the audience in Detroit. In this and the comments that follow, I really meant to reference (and did, more explicitly, in the longer version painfully compressed for delivery) the heated controversy that erupted around Janice Radway's presidential address—not the address itself. A great deal of commentary, much of it in e-mail exchanges among those who had not, at that point, heard or read Radway's address, seemed propelled by Manichean fears about the linear directionality of American studies and the dominant cultural studies destination some held Radway to be embracing. But many, especially when the text became available, did not at all hear or read the address in this way. Indeed, I find Radway's assessment of the multiple possibilities in the field, her appreciation of their deep roots throughout its history, and her sense of the importance of mobilizing the tensions among them, to be quite consistent with every dimension of the frame I am offering here, and much worth the closest, continuing reflection. See Radway, "What's in a Name?"

22. My image has considerable resonance with theorizations of the public sphere, civic space, and contested/contestable terrain. See, for instance, the wide-ranging set of essays in Craig Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992); and Joan B. Landes, ed., *Feminism—the Public and the Private* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998); as well as Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1997). For the broader critique of Eurocentric presumptions in this discourse, see Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*; and Enrique Dussell, "Eurocentrism and Modernity" in J. Beverley Oviedo and M. Aronna, eds., *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1995).

23. Maddox, ed., *Locating American Studies*.

24. Warren I. Susman, "History and the American Intellectual: Uses of a Usable Past," *American Quarterly* 16 (summer 1964), and *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); and Michael Frisch, "Commentary on Warren I. Susman, 'History and the American Intellectual: Uses of a Usable Past' (1964)" in Maddox, ed., *Locating American Studies*.

25. See the complete proceedings, including papers and commentaries, in Italian but with quite helpful English summaries, in "Different Equalities—Rights, Subjects, and Social Complexity: A Reflection Starting from the United States," *Acoma: Rivista Internazionale di Studi NordAmericani* [Firenze, Italy: Giunti Gruppo Editoriale] 13 (spring 1998).

26. The challenge of resisting binaries has become an increasingly dominant theme in feminist criticism, border theory and postcoloniality, and in the broader literature of the public sphere and civic space, all realms in which constrictive categories need to be challenged, subverted, and reconstructed. See, variously, Joan B. Landes, "The Public and the Private Sphere: A Feminist Reconsideration" in Landes, ed., *Feminism—the Public and the Private*; Angharad N. Valdiva, "Feminist Media Studies in a Global Setting: Beyond Binary Contradictions and into Multicultural Spectrums" in *Feminism, Multiculturalism, and the Media: Global Diversities*, ed. Angharad N. Valdiva (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1995); Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands—La Frontera*:

The New Mestiza (San Francisco, Calif.: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxist Interpretations of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1997); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1987); Partha Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993); and Wahneema Lubiano, "Like Being Mugged by a Metaphor: Multiculturalism and State Narratives" in Newfield and Gordon, eds., *Mapping Multiculturalism*; as well as Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994); and Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*.

27. In addition to works cited in note 19, the bidirectionality of an inter- and transnationally resituated American studies is addressed, explicitly and implicitly, from a variety of vantages in Lenz, "Toward a Dialogic"; Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*; Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, trans. Michael D. Barber (New York: Continuum, 1995); Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J.M. Dash (Charlottesville, Va.: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1989); and C.M. Eze, ed., *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell 1997); as well as Roger Rouse, "Thinking through Transnationalism: Notes on the Cultural Politics of Class Relations in the Contemporary United States," *Public Culture* 7 (1995); Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*; Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990), and *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994). See also Benjamin Lee, "Critical Internationalism," *Public Culture* 7 (1995); and Singh, "Culture/Wars." For an intriguing reflection on the reconstruction of eastern European identities in this context, see Leszek Koczanowicz and Dorota Kolodziejczyk, "Nation, Identity, Transition: In What Sense Do We Live in the World of the 'Post'?" in Justyna Miklasewska, ed., *Democracy in Central Europe, 1989–1999: Comparative and Historical Perspectives* (Krakow: Meritum/Jagellonian Univ. Printing House, 2000); and Michael M. J. Fischer, "Working through the Other: The Jewish, Spanish, Turkish, Iranian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and German Unconscious of Polish Culture, or, One Hand Clapping: Dialogue, Silences, and the Mourning of Polish Romanticism" in *Perilous States: Conversations on Culture, Politics, and Nation*, ed. George E. Marcus (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), an extensive interview discussion with Koczanowicz.

28. The familiar shelf of culture war polemics has looked different since it was extended to the left. The most widely discussed of the volumes sitting there is Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America Is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996). See interesting commentaries on the evolving discourses of multiculturalism and identity in Newfield and Gordon, eds., *Mapping Multiculturalism*, esp. Lubiano, "Like Being Mugged by a Metaphor: Multiculturalism and State Narratives"; and Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 1989).

29. This powerful convergence is evident, for instance, in the first results of the 2000 census, detailing demographic changes so extensive as to inevitably impact the mainstream discourse surrounding diversity, race, and multiculturalism. Similarly, the clearly non-transient "Seattle effect" has created a quickly changing context, politically and intellectually, for reflections on globalization. But the implications of such developments, especially politically, are by no means self-evident, as witness the ongoing discussion of the need for "strategic essentialism" in the face of manifest hybridizations of every sort. See, for example, Saldivar, *Border Matters*; Frederic Jamson and Masao Miyoshi, eds., *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1998); and Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments*.

30. For a broad appreciation of Zandy's perspective, and the works and writers that have informed it, see Janet Zandy, ed., *Calling Home: Working-Class Women's Writings: An Anthology* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), *Liberating Memory: Our Work and Our Working-Class Consciousness* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1995), and *Writing Work: Writers on Working-Class Writing* (Huron, Ohio: Bottom Dog Press, 1999).

31. I mean no disrespect for philosophers from whom I have learned an immense amount and have drawn insights that actually help permit experience, in its own terms, to become instructive. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin, Tex.: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981); and a range of very germane commentaries permitting extrapolation beyond the immediate context of his work: Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984); Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, eds., *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1989); and Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (London: Routledge, 1990). Similarly, see Craig Calhoun, "Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere," in Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*; and Seyla Benhabib, "Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jürgen Habermas" in Landes, ed., *Feminism—the Public and the Private*. For the importance of a non-western base for knowledge production grounded in experience and social movements, see Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*; Anibal Quijano, "Modernity, Identity, and Utopia in Latin America" in Aronna and Oviedo, eds., *Postmodernism Debate in Latin America*; and Fernando Coronil, "Introduction: Transculturation and the Politics of Theory: Countering the Center" in Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1995). For relevant theorization of the theory-praxis connection itself, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977). See also Lisa Philips Valentine and Regna Darnell, eds., *Theorizing the Americanist Tradition* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1999). A quite different but not unrelated interrogation from within my own field of history comes from Peter Karsten and John Modell, *Theory, Method, and Practice in Social and Cultural History* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1992).

32. See Ronald Grele, *Envelopes of Sound* (Chicago: Precedent, 1975); Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988); Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison, Wisc.: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1997), and *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1991); Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, eds., *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge, 1991); and Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1990). Works such as these are an oral history source of and tributary to the burgeoning river of literature about memory, narrative, history, and culture. See, for diverse examples in that broader stream especially relevant to American studies, David Glassberg, "Public History and the Study of Memory," *The Public Historian* 18 (spring 1996); and Genevieve Fabre and Robert O'Meally, eds., *History and Memory in African-American Culture* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994).

33. See Jacquelyn Dowd Hall et al., *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2000), xx. This is a re-issue of the original 1987 publication with a new, very thoughtful retrospective reflection by the authors. Some of my commentary here originated in a foreword I wrote for this edition, xi–xv.

34. See the fierce attack in Bryan D. Palmer, *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1990); and critiques in Robert McChesney, "Is There Any Hope for Cultural Studies?" *Monthly Review* 47 (Mar. 1996); and David Morley, "So-Called Cultural Studies: Dead Ends and Reinvented Wheels," *Cultural Studies* 12 (Oct. 1998). More extensive, and perhaps more useful, is the generous critique from the left in David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990). See also Stanley Aronowitz, *Roll Over Beethoven: The Returning of Cultural Strife* (Hanover, N.H.: Univ. of New Hampshire Press, 1993). For an especially helpful collection of essays from several vantages, see Ted Striphas, "Special Issue: The Institutionalization of Cultural Studies," *Cultural Studies* 12 (Oct. 1998). Also useful are Nan Enstad, "Fashioning Political Identities: Cultural Studies and the Historical Construction of Political Subjects," *American Quarterly* 50 (Dec. 1998); Lawrence Grossberg, *Bringing It All Back Home: Essays on Cultural Studies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1997); and Chicago Cultural Studies Group, "Critical Multiculturalism," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1992); as well as Alan O'Shea, "A Special Relationship? Cultural Studies, Academia, and Pedagogy," *Cultural Studies* 12 (1998).

35. Oral history here converges with important developments in contemporary reflexive and dialogical cultural anthropology. See Clifford Geertz, *On Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1985), and *The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1987); Dennis Tedlock, "The Analogical Tradition and the Emergence of a Dialogical Anthropology," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 35 (1979), and "Poetry and Ethnography: A Dialogical Approach," *Anthropology and Humanism* 24 (1999); Barbara Tedlock, "From Participant Observation to the Observation of Participation: The Emergence of Narrative Ethnography," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 47 (1991); and D. Tedlock, *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture*. See also Sherry Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26 (1984); Regna Darnell, "Ethnographic Genre and Poetic Voice" in *Anthropological Poetics*, ed. Ivan Brady (Savage, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1991), and "Theorizing American Anthropology"; as well as Roy Wagner, "Poetics and the Recentring of Anthropology" in Brady, ed., *Anthropological Poetics*. A marvelous monograph applying such sensibilities to the complexity of enacted identities in urban America is Ralph Cintron, *Angels' Town: Chero Ways, Gang Life, and Rhetorics of the Everyday* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997). For quite resonant approaches to an ethnographic, vernacular appreciation of the construction of American history, see Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York City: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998).

36. Michael Frisch and Milton Rogovin, *Portraits in Steel* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993). Some resonant documentary studies of responses to de-industrialization, though differing in the use of photographs, interviews and narrative texts, include Judith Modell and Charlee Brodsky, *A Town Without Steel: Envisioning Homestead* (Pittsburgh, Penn.: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1998); Bill Bamberger and Cathy N. Davidson, *Closing: The Life and Death of an American Factory* (New York: The Center for Documentary Studies in assoc. with W.W. Norton & Company, 1998); and Thomas Dublin, *When the Mines Closed: Stories of Struggles in Hard Times* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1998).

37. Cedric N. Chatterley, Alicia J. Rouverol, with Stephen A. Cole, "*I Was Content and Not Content*": *The Story of Linda Lord and the Closing of Penobscot Poultry* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 2000). My comments here are developed more extensively in the foreword I wrote for this volume, ix–xii.

38. Frisch and Rogovin, *Portraits in Steel*, 186–87.

39. *Ibid.*, 190–91.

40. See the caveat in note 22, above. My point is only partly tongue in cheek: as I read it, the resonance between Jan Radway's perspective on directions in American studies scholarship and the way the unfolding WTO debates have begun to re-center American politics in a global frame is quite striking. See Radway, "What's in a Name?"; See also George Lipsitz, "Sent for You Yesterday, Here You Come Today: American Studies Scholarship and the New Social Movements," *Cultural Critique* 40 (1998).

41. See Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (summer 1991), which takes this observation in a somewhat different direction, exploring experience as a competing claim to authority on issues of identity. My interest, in contrast, is in the possibility of ongoing dialogue from these diverse bases. Such a possibility was the propelling curiosity behind a recent conference, organized by Frank W. Munger and the Baldy Center on Law and Policy at SUNY Buffalo, on the contribution of narrative and ethnographic perspectives to contemporary discourses about low-wage labor in the global economy. The conference papers and commentaries are soon to be published: Frank W. Munger, ed., *Laboring Below the Line: The New Ethnography of Poverty, Low-Wage Work, and Survival in the Global Economy* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, forthcoming). My remarks here are developed further in one of the volume's "intervention" commentaries, "Taking Dialogue Seriously."

42. I am indebted to Charlie Keil for these marvelous lines from Blake, suggesting how long and deeply rooted the struggle has been: "Now I a fourfold vision see/ And a fourfold vision is given to me/ 'Tis fourfold in my supreme delight/ and threefold in soft Beulah's night/ and twofold always. May God us keep/ From single vision & Newton's sleep." See Charles Keil, Angeliki Keil, and Dick Blau, "Polka Theory: Perspectives on the Will to Party" (paper presented at the American Studies Association Annual Meeting, Detroit, Michigan, October 2000). The paper's title hints at the revisionist linking of Nietzsche and Blake, speaking of transcending dichotomies. See also Charles Keil, Angeliki V. Keil, and Dick Blau, *Polka Happiness*, (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1992).

43. Let me cite, again, the essay that has done so much to help me locate this experience in a broader frame that helps explain the importance of our model, and its vulnerability: Erkkila, "Ethnicity, Literary Theory, and the Grounds of Resistance." See also Kerber, "Diversity and the Transformation of American Studies"; and Washington, "Disturbing the Peace" for relevant discussions of American studies programs at precisely such intersections.