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REFERENCES

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- 1 Having not read the work of Winfried Fluck before, I eagerly took on the tasks of reading and reviewing this edited volume of his work, titled *Romance with America?* As I worked my way through the first part of the book which deals with American Studies and Cultural Studies, and their relation to issues of aesthetics, I was struck by a couple of things. First, I wondered why I had not read any of his work over the years. And then, that led me to a subsequent observation which was more like a question: Had I encountered Fluck in some of my books relating to American Studies, and perhaps simply failed to remember? Thumbing through the indexes of a few books, *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of a Discipline*, edited by Lucy Maddox, John Carlos Rowe's *The New American Studies*, and *American Studies in a Moment of Danger*, by George Lipsitz, I simultaneously felt relief and dejection that the name Fluck had not been present. In the first case, I was utterly relieved that I had not been previously introduced to his writings through references made in the books just mentioned, and therefore, had not overlooked this author. However, relief was replaced by a sense of bewilderment that the writings of Winfried Fluck were not present in a number of key works which deal with American Studies and topics related to American culture. This revelation seemed to confirm something that I had felt plagued the discipline of American Studies for some time, its lack of a truly transnational character and engagement among the

American academic community with non-U.S. scholars of American Studies. While transnationality and other related discourses have been proclaimed within the discipline, its practical application remains at best, limited.

- 2 Having made a somewhat short story long, I now turn to the author and the book in question. Since the early 1970s Winfried Fluck has been making an invaluable contribution to the field of American Studies. His probing analyses of aspects of American literary and cultural history coupled with his theoretical investigations reveal the impressive scholarly canvas Fluck has consistently been preoccupied with. Part of the appeal of *Romance with America* is that it encapsulates Fluck's vast and diverse intellectual interventions in a single volume. The collection of articles is divided into four sections which range from aesthetics in American Studies and early American fiction to American popular culture and literary reception. No review, I believe, can truly capture the disciplinary scope and intellectual boldness present in *Romance with America*. With that in mind I will discuss a number of different points from several essays present in the volume that I, at a personal level, find particularly appealing.
- 3 The initial 'hook', and incidentally the first essay in the collection titled "Aesthetic Premises in American Studies," which caught my attention was Fluck's focused engagement with and criticism of some of the key figures associated with the origins of the discipline of American Studies. In his sights are individuals such as F. O. Matthiessen, Henry Nash Smith, and Leo Marx. Writing back in 1973, Fluck was essentially part of a vanguard of scholars challenging the associated discourses of American exceptionalism, which at that time had been a fixture of the field since its inception in the 1930s up through to the 1960s. His criticism also centered on what he referred to as "the perpetuation of certain aesthetic premises" (16) interlocked with particular hermeneutical approaches embedded in the discipline; for example, there was an almost exclusive focus on a methodology of literary analysis during the early phases of scholarship in American Studies which failed to engage seriously with other domains like popular culture. But even as disciplinary focus became more varied American exceptionalism continued to function as the pivot. Fluck's thinking on this is clear. He argues that while America is not exceptional that does not preclude it from being unique. In another article, "Theories of American Culture," he points out that the development of the United States moved in tandem with "historically unique constellations" (82) different from the experiences of other countries. While some might see this as an easy way out of a very complex issue I believe that Fluck's position is accurate. At the same time, however, I do not think that 'American exceptionalism' can be delegitimized or assigned a nomenclature as merely a cultural-historical phenomenon. Whether fantasy or an ideological construct, it remains very 'real' and relevant in the minds of Americans and U.S. political culture. Along those lines, it still makes a lot of sense for the discipline to address and react to these multifarious discourses of American exceptionalism.
- 4 The matter of exceptionalism is discussed further in another essay in the volume titled "American Studies and the Romance with America through its Ideals." Quite boldly, Fluck summarizes the discipline of American Studies in two sentences. He states: "The field was constituted by a romance with America, with the myths and symbols of American exceptionalism, which were then, in a second stage, submitted to ever more radical forms of disenchantment"(87). Whether through revisionism or deconstruction,

scholars have sought to redefine the direction in which American Studies should be heading usually by critiquing the traditional schools of thought. Transnationalism represents the most recent intervention in the field. This transnational turn is not necessarily 'new' in that Fluck reminds us, in another essay, of Randolph Bourne's study, "Transnational America," which dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century. With a degree of skepticism Fluck makes the following comment about the transnational agenda stating that while it "is presently considered the cutting edge of the field, [it] is merely the latest installment in an attempt to escape from the field's initial romance with America" (87). The theme of a 'romance with America' is intimately linked to the articulation of particular ideals which work towards reinforcing traditional American narratives or serve as fertile ground from which oppositional discourses may emerge. What Fluck draws attention to quite cleverly is that despite the individual scholar's intent in 'redefining,' he or she is in essence reviving the discourse of American exceptionalism. This discursive persistence is apparent elsewhere as Fluck exhibits. In one example he refers to an academic dean of a well-known institution who, in calling for a revival of and return to American ideals that have been hijacked by the neo-conservative agenda, falls victim to a form of idealization of the assumed ideals of America. Again and in a highly perceptive fashion Fluck's response is the following: "Indeed, what if the American story is not one of ideals which were occasionally betrayed, but the story of an unmediated coexistence of utopian promise and profane reality in which American ideals were never what interpreters have made them out to be, namely constitutive of American society" (101).

- 5 Throughout this volume it is more than apparent that Fluck's writings strive to understand the currents and intricacies of American society and popular culture. Personally, I find his essay "The Americanization of Modern Culture: A Cultural History of the Popular Media" to be the most fascinating in the collection. Even though it dates back to 1998 it still possesses a strong contemporary 'feel.' He takes on the issue of the presumed "Americanization" of global culture and attempts to discern the mass-global appeal of American popular culture. After examining the various discourses of the cultural imperialism paradigm, he then considers opposing theoretical arguments. Two points in particular stand out most in this essay. The first considers the appeal and successful diffusion of American popular culture. In short Fluck suggests that American society had a built-in advantage over other countries in that America's multi-ethnic profile and influences, as well as its multicultural composition, was essentially heterogeneous. This ethnic diversity of the American audience "anticipated today's global market in its diversity and multilingual nature" (242). His second point has to do with what he calls cultural dehierarchization. This process is linked to larger social developments such as the arrival of modernity. A key aspect of cultural dehierarchization concerns the issue of access –access to culture. It would seem that this aspect along with others like individualization and "imaginary self-empowerment" can be realized most effectively in America. American popular culture, Fluck points out, is an "unexpected manifestation and consequence of modernity" (263). Perhaps then it is the most complete consequence of modernity, thus explaining its global cultural appeal and attractiveness.
- 6 Much more can be uttered about Romance with America, but it is better left to the reader to encounter first-hand. I have not touched on many other points and discussions present in the volume such as his work on American painting and Edward

Hopper or his work on visual culture and the photography of Edward S. Curtis. My point is that no review can really 'do justice' to the body of scholarship represented in this collection of essays. The richness, clarity, range, and intellectual breadth of Fluck's oeuvre places him at the forefront of scholarship in American literary and cultural history. His dynamic interventions in the field in American Studies are equally impressive and deserve recognition not only in Europe, but elsewhere, particularly on the other side of the Atlantic. As Winfried Fluck notes himself regarding the future of American Studies, he states "perhaps European American Studies will be able to develop a project of which U.S. American Studies does not seem to be capable of at the present time, namely to make the search for a different emplotment of America the new adventure in our field" (102).

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