

Amerikafantasier
Kön, medier och visualitet i svenska reseskildringar från USA 1945-63

Imaginary America
Gender, Media and Visuality in Swedish Post-War Travelogues

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the construction of an imaginary America in Swedish travel writing from 1945 to 1963. By placing focus on the intersecting dimensions of gender, media, and visibility, the aim is to analyze Swedish notions of the US that surface both in the written word as well as in the illustrative material, by contextualizing these imaginings within the expanding media culture of the time. Visuality is recognized as a meaning-making process and a vital aspect of travel culture; apart from ways of seeing, a range of pictorial expressions as well as visual metaphors are explored. What is argued is that the publications fostered a perspectival pluralism that bears witness to a mobile and ambivalent stance towards this emerging superpower and its modern mass culture.

While the first chapter introduces the theoretical framework of this study as drawing on the fields of visual culture-, gender and media studies, the second chapter seeks to map out the historical as well as generic aspects of travel literature in relation to imaginings of America. Next to situating the travel books within a cultural history of media, the study addresses the interface of traveling and mediation. Travel writing is, moreover, conceived as *scripting*. The third chapter examines the viewing positions adopted by the Swedish travelers by focusing on how the arrival scene in New York and hence their first encounter with the US was depicted. What is stressed is that the presence of America within the Swedish mediascape heavily shaped the travelers' expectations as well as perceptions, creating a *mediatized gaze*, which often turned their journeys into a 'cinematic' experience. Six stereotypical viewing positions are further discerned among which the travelers oscillated: the Tourist, the Natural Scientist, the Colonialist (expressive of a *medial attitude* toward the nation) and further the Anti-Hero, the Detective, and the Flâneur (expressive of criticism, reflexivity and ambivalence).

The fourth chapter deals with the travelers' discussions of American media and mass culture. What was voiced was often a highly ambivalent position. On the one hand, travel writers exposed a positive and enthusiastic response to American mass culture as being young and playful - 'just for fun'. On the other hand, (visual) media forms such as cinema, television, comic strips and illustrated magazines were deemed as highly problematic and America, implicitly a 'feminine' culture, was regarded as lacking history and maturity.

The fifth chapter approaches the representation of the American inhabitants. While whiteness was secured as the norm (through the American as bread-winner and the American woman who comprised a range of ideals about femininity), travelers nevertheless also paid attention to the hybridity of the American population. Afro-Americans and native Americans were approached as the *other* and were attributed along the lines of contrast. In addition, Americans were captured as creatures of transition and transgression. They challenged in provocative manner, norms about binary oppositions between masculine and feminine, high and low, ultra-modern and primitive, civilized and wild.

In the final chapter, the study concludes that *ambivalence* was the key notion that Swedish travelers of the Post-war era came to develop towards America, a matter which foremost needs to be related to the realm of mediatization. Because of the mediated relationship to the country, America offered a high potential for self-reflexivity and the nation became a complex and moving projection screen for Swedish fears and fantasies. In all its materiality, America was also potentially a figment of the imagination.

Key words: America in the Swedish imagination, travel writing, media history, mass culture debate, post-war era, representation, textual interpretation, urban theory, visual culture studies, feminist media theory.

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