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CONFERENCE REPORTS

The Cultural Industries in the Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Britain and Germany Compared, conference organized by the Großbritannien-Zentrum, Humboldt University Berlin and the German Historical Institute London, and held at the GHIL, 19–21 Nov. 2009.

‘Cultural industries’ are commercial, in other words, profit-making enterprises run by professionals in the sphere of culture. Although they already played an important part in shaping public life in Britain in the eighteenth century, they did not make a breakthrough in Germany until the early nineteenth century. The Arbeitskreis Deutsche Englandforschung held a first conference on the history of the cultural industries in England in 2008. This follow-up conference, convened by Christiane Eisenberg (Großbritannien-Zentrum, Humboldt University Berlin) and Andreas Gestrich (GHIL), shifted the focus to the German perspective and tried to draw comparisons. In the forefront were questions of general social and cultural history and media history; methodological approaches to the subject were also to be explored.

The opening paper, ‘Media and Mass Culture in Britain and Germany’, given by Corey Ross (Birmingham), already offered a multifaceted insight into the complexity of the topic. Ross first looked at common features (urbanization, challenge to old hierarchies posed by new markets, and so on) and differences (interplay with political developments at national and global level) in the development of cultural industries in the two countries. Using the examples of cinema, press, and radio, Ross then raised the question of whether the cultural industries in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century had a greater integrative effect than in Germany. His answer was ‘yes’ in the case of the cinema, based on attendance statistics, and ‘no’ for the press, with reference to political polarization. For the radio Ross diagnosed in both countries a marked resistance to commercialization of programming, which led in both cases to a rather didactic talking-down to the audience. The breakthrough of radio as an enter-

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tainment medium could, he said, be dated to the 1930s in both Britain and Germany, although in Germany the conditions of National Socialism led to quite specific emphases being placed.

Several of the research issues raised by Ross were dealt with in greater detail in the following sessions of the conference. The first session, '1870–1914: Britain, the Pioneer – Germany, the Latecomer?', focused on theatre and film. Anselm Heinrich (Glasgow) in his paper, 'Dream Palaces: Regional Theatres in Britain and Germany', compared developments in northern England and the Ruhr area. First he looked at common features in the world of the theatre. Around the turn of the century regional theatres in both England and Germany were largely privately financed; contrary to common belief, in Germany, too, theatres did not start to be funded from the public purse until after the First World War. For this reason in the period under examination the theatre in both countries was highly profit-oriented. This was the criterion by which directors and managers were measured. With their emphasis on comedies and operettas the English theatres were more geared towards popular taste. In Germany, on the other hand, plays were fairly clearly directed towards the educational ideals of the bourgeois elite, especially since many of them had supported the theatres with donations. A second paper on the subject of the theatre in which Tobias Becker (Berlin) compared developments in London and Berlin between 1880 and 1930, confirmed Heinrich's diagnosis. Becker further remarked upon the drive towards commercialization unleashed around the middle of the nineteenth century by the removal of royal patronage (in England) and the introduction of *Gewerbefreiheit* (in Germany). By the turn of the century, he said, the theatres in both countries were completely dependent on market forces and general economic developments, which in the early twentieth century led to requests for subsidies, not least in London. In addition Becker was able to show that there was a lively German–British exchange as regards programme structuring; this he saw as evidence of an increasing internationalization of the theatre business around the turn of the century.

For early film Martin Loiperdinger and Jon Burrows confirmed this image of parallel developments in the two countries, a finding which in this case can also be explained by the fact that film technology had become more universal. The two speakers illustrated this connection using the example of the transition from feature films to

epics, the tendency bound up with this for exclusive contracts with actors, and, specifically, the rise of the Danish actress Asta Nielsen to international film-star status. The essential difference between Germany and Britain was, in their view, that Nielsen achieved her breakthrough in Germany with the film *Abgründe*, but in Britain, somewhat later, with *Fools of Society* which, because of its somewhat 'liberal' presentation, provoked calls for censorship. According to Loiperdinger and Burrows, developments in the two countries' film industries did not diverge until the outbreak of the First World War. The decrease in German (and American) film exports to Britain that now set in encroached on cinema-owners' profits, but gave rise to the hope amongst British film producers of being able to 'counteract a future monopolization of the film market by raising the standard', as they put it at the time. In the subsequent discussion not least this aspect caused the relativization of the common view that the roaring Twenties saw a first flourishing of commercial mass culture and that the turn of the century was to some extent just a 'warming-up' period, to be examined using other examples, and to be established explicitly as a first finding of the conference.

In the second session, 'The Inter-War Period: Commerce and Culture in Conflict?', the speakers showed how this largely unified picture in the two countries did, in fact, vary and in the process brought certain surprising examples to light. In his paper, 'Europe Versus Hollywood in the Inter-War Years: A Study of Failure', Gerben Bakker (LSE) looked at the reasons for America's growing dominance of the film industry from about 1910. He saw one of the main reasons as the fragmentation of the European markets and, connected with this, the inability to use economies of scale, the Americans' greater capital availability, and their consequent ability to invest in talkies. Although the protectionist policy of the European states had initially been able to obviate the negative consequences for the international markets, the public preferred the imports because of the new stars and the fact that the American companies blocked the best performance times. Thus the new significance of language in the international film business further eroded the ability of the European film industries to compete. In Britain there were no such language problems.

What language was to film, copyright was to the picture agencies – this was what Rita Gudermann (Berlin) argued in her paper on

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picture agencies in Britain and Germany. Here, she said, it was a question of successfully marketing content that was protected by copyright. The success of the picture agencies depended on being able to sell image rights to as many media as possible. Using the two Leipzig publishing houses of Weber and Spamer and their trade relations with Britain as examples, she demonstrated that Britain's different copyright regulations made life difficult for the Leipzig picture agencies. As a result, they were only able to deal on the German market.

A third factor that contributed to national differentiation in the cultural industries was revealed in the presentation by Susann Lewerenz (Berlin) on 'Germanizing the Arts? Circus, Vaudeville, and Funfair Entertainment in Nazi Germany'. She certainly recognized a peculiar national development in the Nazis' *Gleichschaltung* of the cultural sector. But contrary to generally held opinion, she was able to show that the regime's restrictive measures did not initially have much impact on the sphere she was looking at because the employment of foreign artistes, even those of a 'foreign race', was forbidden only gradually. It was by no means only for propaganda reasons, she said, that the ban was watered down. Other factors were the traveling-circus tradition of ethnographic performances and the self-perception of the Third Reich as a 'white colonial power'. It was not until the outbreak of war that the Nazi regime adopted a more restrictive attitude, but it still remained flexible, especially in the case of Asiatic, particularly Japanese, artistes.

The force of these differentiating factors—different copyright laws, the multitude of languages in Europe, and the cultural impulses from America—was taken up again in the following session, 'After 1945: Unlimited Growth of the Cultural Industries?', but this time from a different perspective. The speakers, all experts in the history of the music business, were not only concerned with giving well-informed statements on developments within their sphere of contemporary history. They also discussed the specific economy of the cultural industries for which different criteria have to be considered from those usually applied.

In his paper, 'The British Popular Music Business 1950-75', Richard Coopey (LSE) discussed the significance of large and smaller independent enterprises in the British music scene, with reference also to its creativity, but did not make general statements about the

optimal size of an enterprise. In this branch of the cultural industries, Coopey said, such assertions were virtually impossible. In Britain numerous changes had taken place in the sphere of creative management and staging during the period in question, and a number of small firms, some of them extremely innovative, had even supported an anti-commercial direction. Nonetheless, at the end of the period the big labels (EMI, Decca) still dominated the British music industry because they had managed to adapt the profitable innovations of the alternative scene and make them part of their marketing strategy. Other factors had to be included if the business success of this branch were to be explained.

Similar thoughts were expressed, this time in relation to copyright, by the economic historian Christian Handke (Rotterdam) in his paper, 'Another Round? Cyclicity in the Record Industry and its Implications for the Debate on Copyright', in which he dealt with the negative consequences for the music industry of the Internet (downloads, Napster). Handke raised the question of whether copyright really did have the effect, always stressed in public, of maintaining the industry's innovative power, or whether it merely protected the owners of the legal titles from competition—a thesis which he impressively confirmed on the basis of material concerning the development of the recording industry. In this connection he appealed for future studies to look in more detail at the unintended consequences of copyright for the cultural industries. Handke also reminded the audience that the relationship between boom and crisis in the music industry could only be described in terms of the usual categories of growth, innovation, and competition to a limited degree because a symbolic product was being produced. More was needed than purely economic approaches, and he therefore appealed for cooperation with historians.

The same appeal for interdisciplinary cooperation, though this time from the perspective of the social historian, was expressed by Klaus Nathaus (Bielefeld) in his comparative paper, 'Why was there a "Rock Revolution" in Britain?'. Here he analysed the weak American influence on the German music market in the 1960s and 1970s. The reason, he said, was that new editions of successful English-language titles could easily be produced with a German text. It was quite different in Britain where American bands were top of the charts. There the music industry felt compelled to develop creative

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solutions in order to survive. It developed marketing strategies for new talents, and so in Britain a reorientation came about, known as the Rock Revolution. The new specifically British rock and pop music could be produced relatively cheaply, so that the British music industry could also extend to the American market, thereby experiencing a lasting boom. Nathaus's strategic argument turned out to be irritating for some of the participants, since up to then social and cultural history had focused on studies on the structure of demand (key-words: baby-boomer and *Zeitgeist*), to which his approach did not seem directly to connect. On the other hand, it was understandable that those who looked at the supply strategies of the music industry – Nathaus included among these strategies music reviews sponsored by the industry – had to reorientate themselves and also take account of the industry's specific 'cultural economics'.

The final session also stressed the individuality of the cultural industries and their tendency to develop their own dynamics. This session transferred the field of enquiry from Germany and Britain to Australia, in other words, to a country in which the cultural industries, for lack of any competing cultural traditions, had already become the dominant culture soon after settlement of the continent and today are particularly influential for the way of life. In some respects Australia therefore offered laboratory conditions for analysing the function and development of the cultural industries. Sinje Steinmann (Berlin) underlined this peculiarity of the Australian example in her paper, 'A Little-Known Heyday of Cultural Business: Operatic Entrepreneurship at the Antipodes', in which she described British cultural transfer to Australia in the sphere of opera. She was able to show that until the Second World War constant attempts were made to copy the British style, but that in Australia the cultural industries, because of their lack of professionalism and the delay with which innovations reached the colony, never reached the same level. As a result, in Australia more than in Britain commercial success rather than further development of cultural forms was the focus right from the start. As Steinmann recalled, an opera house of architectural significance was built in Sydney as early as 1903, but a specifically Australian opera tradition did not develop.

In his paper, 'Surf Culture as a Way of Life', Stephan Schwanke (Berlin) linked up chronologically with Steinmann, and then went on to concentrate on the most recent developments since the mid-1980s.

In this advanced stage in the history of the Australian cultural industries it was, he said, certainly no longer a case of imitating the British; in fact, the Australians wanted to be distinct protagonists of a specifically Australian leisure culture, and to build a national identity on the basis of commercial culture. According to Schwanke this movement was promoted mainly by those born between 1945 and 1960, the baby-boomers, and this social basis was the main reason why the attempt to functionalize the universally loved 'surf culture' for the processes of building a national identity could be considered to have failed. For the baby-boomer Australians, he said, were a self-orientated 'Generation Me'. They had no specific values or ideals; their surf culture represented nothing more than the desire for hedonistic self-gratification, striving for perpetual leisure. This view of Australia also irritated some of the participants since it frustrated the aims of social and cultural history, namely to look for interpretations and 'sense'. Yet the subsequent concluding discussion showed that young historians in particular were quite prepared to take on the challenge of the topic 'cultural industries' connected with this, as regards methodology as well.

The conference ended with a discussion of source problems and some brainstorming about appropriate approaches for future research. The conference was generously supported by the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung. Publication of the contributions to this and the earlier conference is planned in the series of the Arbeitskreis Deutsche England-Forschung.

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