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**The American Impact on Western Europe:  
Americanization and Westernization in Transatlantic Perspective**

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"Americanization", "Americanness" and "Americanisms":  
Time for a Change in Perspective?

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You know the story about Pandora’s box. According to it, Zeus sent us the evils from which humanity has been suffering up until today. Now, in its wisdom the Greek myth does not list each of these evils. This gives me the opportunity to propose my own - admittedly apocryphal - reading. One of these evils, and not the least one, was, I guess, the tendency to generalize. Couldn’t we just sit back comfortably in our *Bauhaus* chair, sip iced coke and have a good old chat about the European roots of the *Leaves of Grass* or about the new German enthusiasm for basketball? But instead we are racking our brains and might even get into an argument about how the hell to actually grasp the nature of transatlantic exchange and interaction: Americanization, Westernization or yet another “-ization“.

I am not going to challenge the occidental tradition of thought here; we live from it and with its help we want to get an entitlement for a pension. And even if one was to put these most precious goods at stake, the attempt to lock the evil back into the box comes a few thousand years too late. This skeptical note is simply my way of introducing myself as someone doing historical research inspired by cultural anthropology. And representing this species, I feel obliged to show our club’s badge, that is, the shuddering about macro-theories, the commitment to the specific, the interest in the multiple meanings expressed by the practices of ordinary historical actors.

About the state of the discussion

I confess my reservations about the term “Americanization“. In colloquial German it circulates as part of an ethnicizing, homogenizing discourse which is reason enough for it being no good for academic purposes. Therefore my perspective on the use of this term in the historiography of transatlantic relations might be somewhat biased. Fortunately, I have the impression that “Americanization“ does not play a central role in recent scientific literature. In these studies it is not used as an analytical, theory- informed concept claiming explanatory value; rather it figures as a signpost which serves a quick understanding about a subject area, about a set of questions regarding American-European relations.

However, it seems that – in the context of debates about the linguistic or culturalist turn in historical science – certain shared assumptions about the set of questions to be considered here have gained acceptance. Only two decades ago such views could rarely be heard, in any case not in the following combination.<sup>1</sup>

Firstly, nobody talks seriously about one-way communication and manipulation anymore; we are dealing with complex relations of exchange and with interactions in which all participants pursue their interests. This is based on the assumption that such flows of influence, such processes of adoption and adaptation are something “normal” in the field of cultural contact and that whatever is “one’s own” does not exist without engaging with an “other.”

Secondly, growing interest is turning to the subjective, ideational mediations of these processes of exchange and interaction. There is much talk about mutual images and their perception. Different formulations vary the point that “America” provided material with which Europeans substantiated their ideas about modernization.

Thirdly, adopting both material goods and strategies is understood as changing them; by fitting them into European societies, US exports took on new functions and changed meanings.

And fourthly, it seems to me that these conceptual changes have not resulted in giving up a critical perspective. Whoever talks about transatlantic or global exchange and interaction only rarely ignores completely that this involved asymmetrical connections, that power relations and hegemonic influences were always at stake here.

In my view, these shared assumptions in the understanding of our topic offer fairly useful and flexible analytical tools which are worth following up in further work and debate. An important new impulse has come from research on transatlantic relations from the angle of the history of ideas; this research has been guided by the concept of “Westernization”. In my reading of these studies, they propose a kind of division of labor according to different subject areas. The authors suppose that there are three distinctive fields, each shaped by specific structures and specific actors: a) state relations in foreign affairs and alliance politics; b) the transnational exchange and influence of value systems and models of society, as formulated by political ideologies, in religion and academia – this is regarded as the actual field of “Westernization”; c) the culture of everyday life and consumption as well as organization models for work and the economy – the field of “Americanization.” „Westernization“ here figures as a “level of mediation” between the other two fields of action.<sup>2</sup>

I want to make just two remarks about this from a conceptual angle. Firstly, the above distinction of fields appears only appropriate for the twentieth century. State organized relations in preceding periods cannot be grasped with categories such as “foreign affairs”, or even “alliance politics,” but with those of colonization and the strive for independence. As is known, the USA entered the stage of world politics only toward the end of the nineteenth century. Transatlantic relations go back much further though, and the presence of Europeans in Northern America gave these relations a particular everyday dimension.<sup>3</sup>

But, secondly, this raises some pressing questions about the closing century too. The ways in which agency is mediated ideationally are obviously extremely complex; they comprise much more than what the recent approach to the history of ideas has summed up under the heading of “Westernization.”<sup>4</sup> A few studies

which address the German-American relations from this point of view have been published meanwhile.<sup>5</sup> I see their particular accomplishment in that they have provided empirically detailed accounts of how value systems and models of society were restructured among important groups of the postwar élites in Federal Germany in the context of their political, journalistic, academic, and entrepreneurial praxis. The impact this has had on the field of foreign affairs and alliance politics is self-evident.

It is quite doubtful, however, whether the same can be said about the relationship of "Westernization" to everyday life, popular culture, patterns of consumption and the value orientations and interpretations of society implied. Proponents of the Westernization thesis argue that "within politics, culture and science the structures and meanings of social everyday life and political processes were created, respectively [...] popularized and propagated."<sup>6</sup> But what impact did political and scientific ideas have beyond the élites and educated classes? How did they influence the Westernization of average citizens? The concept of mediation, as it has been used in studies of the history of ideas, seems to me problematic here. Everyday consciousness about the social order, about "America" and the possible suitability of "American" models for the constituent Federal Republic drew, up until the 1960s, largely upon other sources. At the time images of the young, free and comfortable "American way of life" were disseminated by popular culture and Cold War propaganda; without doubt, they proved to be very influential. But just as prominent were stereotypical interpretations of "America", all of which had been formulated by the mid-nineteenth century and have remained widespread ever since. The romantic topos that no nightingales sang in America came up during the 1820s at the very latest, and it was immediately picked up.<sup>7</sup> This symbolic statement of anti-modern, anti-capitalist reservations may have had no lesser an influence on the thoughts, feelings, and practices of twentieth century Germans than had the appropriation of pragmatism by the élites.

Arguments about terminology ("Westernization" versus "Americanization") as well as abstractly competing models and concepts (everyday knowledge versus systems of ideas) may help us to make progress with our methodological reflections. But, in my view, the real challenge for the historian is to work out substantively and in detail the interconnection and mutual conditioning, the intermingling and juxtaposition of the different factors entering into the praxis of historical actors. Depending on how one defines the circle of agents, quite divergent research perspectives emerge though. In what follows I want to outline an approach that is interested in the everyday practices of ordinary people who did not belong to the élites or to the "educated." In doing so I use the term "Americanization" with a lower profile, that is, not as an explanatory model that refers to a particular theory, but as an aid utilized tool for a provisional understanding.

#### "Americanization" as appropriation

Generally speaking I am going to pursue an ethnographic approach. It is based on the assumption that we shall understand human practices only when we

seek to grasp the meanings which these practices have held for the agents. This requires reconstructing the horizons of meaning and the symbolic structures within which it appeared useful and appropriate for particular groups to take up practices and goods which we categorize - from a historical bird's-eye-view - as "Americanization."

The "use" aspired to by the historical actors may be considered in two respects: the material and the symbolic. Everyday practices are always doubly determined. They form part of the repertoire for dealing with life, and they serve the symbolic positioning in social space. Individual and collective agents ascribe meaning to actions and goods – in interaction with the meanings ascribed to these actions and goods by other groups of society which are relevant to these agents. This means, for example, that in order to understand particular practices of "Americanization", I need to examine the meanings given to them by cultural anti-Americanism.

Practices and goods thus turn into a web of symbols; on the stages of everyday interactions these are then utilized for productions which carry equivocal and enigmatic messages indeed. If someone wants to decode the messages communicated through particular activities, then the framework within which the actors placed their actions must be reconstructed – the broader social context as well as meaningfully arranged particular interactions.

From this angle the political and economic, the social and material facts of the transatlantic exchange and interaction after 1945 cannot be treated as causes for "Americanization"; they were its – indispensable - preconditions. What needs explaining then are the ways in which agents appropriated these facts; only thus did conditions, possibilities, and offers become actual practices. From the view of historical ethnography "Americanization" is understood as appropriation, and appropriation includes selection. The supply-side-paradigm in research on "Americanization", indeed in research on cultural globalization in general, ignores amongst other things one fact. The majority of the offers which were presented with great economic and media power were not taken up. The postwar years can definitely be portrayed as an endless series of failures in attempting to make dances, clothing fashions, sports, films and goods for consumption coming over from the USA palatable to the Germans.

From this argument follows that we have to differentiate groups that appropriated different offers in different ways, ascribing different meanings to them; or they appropriated the same offers in different contexts and with accordingly divergent messages. A middle-class high school student listening in secret to *Jailhouse Rock* on the radio at home was something completely different to working-class youths wearing blue jeans and leather jackets, hair styled with an Elvis-quiff, gathering at a fun fair in front of rides from which the same song boomed.

#### A topsy-turvy world

In what follows I want to say a bit more about the just mentioned youths, the so-called "Halbstarken." They formed a sub-cultural group of working-class

adolescents who got much public attention as the folk-devil of the middle class during the second half of the 1950s,<sup>8</sup> a kind of distant relative of the English Teddy Boys.<sup>9</sup> On this basis I want to develop some more general reflections about the examination of “Americanization.”

My interest in the Halbstarken was aroused not least by the fact that they stood for a kind of topsy-turvy world in matters of “Americanization.” The political and spiritual élites as well as representatives of the educated classes who pursued political and intellectual support for the USA in many areas, were warning and objecting when “cultural Americanization” was at stake; the spearhead of the latter were these provocatively behaving working-class youths. Commercial popular culture, demands for consumption, casualness as an ideal for behavior – this met the fiercest, sometimes hysterical resistance of the “educated.” And vice versa, young working-class people, who are usually not at all identified with a cultural avant-garde role and active readiness for innovation, here became (successful!) protagonists of a development which brought West Germany closer to the American way of life and entertainment. I have called this “Grassroots Americanization”.<sup>10</sup>

We also encounter a topsy-turvy world when we look more closely at what contemporaries meant by “American” and “Americanized”. An example. In November 1958 the youth magazine BRAVO carried the resplendent headline: “Elvis Presley turns into a German.” A photograph served as proof: Presley doing the military salute wearing the US Army’s walking-out uniform with straight tie and peaked cap. The caption read: “Does Elvis turn into a German? The smart [„zackig“] salute proves it: He is one already now.”<sup>11</sup> The faithful readers of the magazine were probably quite thrown by this news. They had learned to equate “America” with a casual and civil attitude – a positive counter image to their parent generation’s ideal of the smart [„zackig“], soldier boy.<sup>12</sup> Now they suddenly must have felt like being the last Americans – their idol had been disciplined into a German. “Americanization” – what does it mean here?

No doubt the Elvis boom in Germany was based on the marketing power of big record and film companies backed by the State Department. US press agencies and their Federal German subsidiaries were participating; foreign political interests and activities on the part of the US Information Agency were involved.<sup>13</sup> Yet this icon obviously facilitated entirely opposing readings. Presley, the smart soldier as a German: “Americanization”? In any case, for the Halbstarken, who wanted to provoke their surrounding with a pointedly “Americanized” appearance, this new image of the rock star hardly offered any further points of identification.

Why of all things did the Halbstarken draw on “Americanness” to develop their challenging style? First it has to be said that this characterization was ascribed to them from the outside. After the first appearance of young men on heavy motorbikes who were provoking upright citizens in 1955 in Berlin, the press was quick to claim: The bikers’ gang from the Marlon Brando film “The Wild One” was being imitated here.<sup>14</sup> Now the love for heavy motorbikes and leather jackets had already been flourishing in Germany since the interwar period.<sup>15</sup> By no means was it genuinely American during the 1950s; but large parts of the public had adopted patterns of interpretation which linked youthful provocation and

delinquency with cultural Americanization, with comics, detective novels, Westerns, "Negro music" [sic] and indeed films such as "Rebels Without A Cause" or "The Blackboard Jungle". In a spiral of attributions and self-stylization the Halbstarken became the epitome of the "Americanized youth".

#### A German "sign wars"

Now this, of course, is the easier part of the explanation. In the following section, I want to show how "Americanness" served as material in a German "sign wars". As an example, I shall be looking at various "American" music styles which different groups of youths chose as expressive symbols.<sup>16</sup> The key question is, which benefits, which material and symbolic use values did German actors expect from these music imports? Traditional jazz and bebop, boogie, rock'n'roll and mainstream pop music got transposed into an entirely different cultural sphere; they were fit into a net of traditions, patterns of perception and evaluation, signs and references for systems of distinction. In this new context they acquired meaning as an element of "German culture." More precisely: depending on the expressive features associated with different American music styles, various groups fitted them into different contexts and picked out their own particular messages from them. What emerged was a complex system of relations consisting of references and attributions, images of the self and the "other." I can only reconstruct what rock'n'roll meant in 1957, when I know what admirers of Beethoven and jazz enthusiasts said about it and how rock'n'roll fans thought about admirers of Beethoven and jazz enthusiasts. "Americanness" and the "Americanized" were only produced as cultural facts in discourses and semiotic controversies on German ground.

With various imports, Germans adhering to different, socio-culturally distinctive styles dissociated themselves from each other. Struggling for recognition and distinction all of them tried to take advantage of the image of "Americanness" as modern and superior. Each group strove for a hegemony in taste. Yet what they actually selected and how they practiced and presented it, was determined by the respective cultural heritage, by the habitus of these different agents. Clifford Geertz has suggested from the ethnologist's point of view that the actions of people have a dimension of self-representation and that in some way the persons acting seem to be aware of this.<sup>17</sup> Hans Medick calls this an element of self-interpretation and "self-exaggeration".<sup>18</sup> In my opinion, this idea provides a clue to understanding the juvenile styles<sup>19</sup> of the 1950s. The ways in which they expressed differences through American material can be seen as a self-exaggeration of features of their parent cultures.

Crucial for the creation and perception of styles were, for example, different understandings and practices of physicality. Rock'n'roll as private fun only came second for the Halbstarken – decisive for the public display of oneself was the dancing to these rhythms. In doing so they marked the opposite pole to the self-acclaimed élite of jazz fans, which despised dancing to their music as vulgar.

The contours of arguments can only be outlined roughly here. First of all two different front lines are to be distinguished. One of them refers to the generation gap. Young people of the 1950s stood up against their parents and against the

authorities who had burdened them with a stifling moral and material heritage: the present world of ruins, responsibility for the world war and for the, although only vaguely sensed, crimes of National Socialism.

Turning to American popular music was a symbolic protest against the adults from all social classes. Most grown-ups responded in a fascinatingly stereotypical way with slogans like “Negro music” [sic], “anti-culture”, “Yankee howling” and other, similarly imaginative, comments. From the point of view of the adolescents this was a dead cert, a virtually Pavlovian reflex. On this cultural border line most young people stood together, and the common ideal of “casualness” expressed this physically.

On the other front line, the choice of a collective music style served the expressive demarcation of one’s position in relation to other groups of youths. Without doubt, fancying rock’n’roll or Dixieland was widespread in urban milieus and not at all confined to specific classes. Insights into the role these Americanisms played in the culture as a whole, however, are offered to us by contemporary group styles which fused a wide range of traits into a coherent form of expression. These styles can be situated within the social structure; they indicate how young people utilized “Americanization” to reevaluate and modernize the tastes and attitudes to life of the milieu they were coming from.

Contemporary concern about the “Americanization” in popular culture and lifestyles was extremely hysterical in nature. Right at the center of this perception was the challenge of the Halbstarcken. Why did they choose rock’n’roll from the American fund and why did this make them the folk-devil of the middle classes? Why not country & western, rumba or the perfect schmaltz products of Bing Crosby, Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra & Co? I can only give a very short answer here - so short that one might call it impertinent: Rock’n’roll as a collective style was “homologous” to the habitus of young German working-class men.<sup>20</sup> With loud rock music, wild dancing, blue jeans and cowboy boots, an Elvis-quiff and the cult around “heavy machines” the Halbstarcken who went to elementary school [„Volksschule“] set themselves off against the rest of the world, especially against those who were of the same age and continued their schooling. What working-class youths chose from the fund of “American” goods, attitudes and behaviors and how they presented this, all merged into the project of demonstratively and pointedly challenging bourgeois norms about decency, culture and taste.

During the second half of the 1950s – to put it somewhat nostalgically, though perhaps not that inappropriately – a symbolic class struggle took place. At its center stood the issue of the social recognition of common people’s ideas about happiness, aesthetic standards and having fun.<sup>21</sup> In this context it was obvious not to pick from the range of American music those slick idols who fitted the white middle-class norm such as Perry Como or Doris Day. Bill Haley and Elvis Presley represented a kind of transnational affinity in popular taste and promised to serve the desire for provoking bourgeois standards of culture. It was “the music of vulgar American democracy”<sup>22</sup> which working-class youths appropriated: rock’n’roll.



This sound was already preceded by the aura of "jungle music", the destruction of culture, tastelessness, sexual provocation, and unrestraint. And after the first riots about rock music films, which were virtually written about by preliminary press reports, a West German pattern of perceiving rock'n'roll<sup>23</sup> was established. American rock'n'roll and its singers personified the very negation of all that Germans who were concerned about education treasured as art. Supposedly this was the triumphing of "inner hypocrisy" and "noisy nastiness", whereas "the genuine cultural values and treasures of our people are being frowned upon and forgotten, denied and blasphemed in the heart of the masses."<sup>24</sup>

### Competing through Americanisms

With the expressive use of their bodies, the Halbstarcken marked their distance from young people of other social origins. An autobiographical text, which pushes the proletarian though, names the opponents and their— all "American"! — musical signs: "Rock'n'roll, that was our music. Not that Dixieland wanking to which mummy's college boys in confirmation suit were hopping along with their sweethearts at Sunday afternoon tea dancing parties, and also not that naff, bloodless cool jazz crap with which the existentialists jerked themselves off in their cellar by the main bus station. We were only hot on rock'n'roll, just brutal, dead hard, boiling hot, sweating, pounding rock'n'roll."<sup>25</sup>

Wherever young people from the educated middle classes and the upper class searched for a musical collective style, they chose jazz from the American products on offer. Jazz stood for a whole bunch of values: freedom from conventions, tolerance and cosmopolitanism, coolness, civility, opposition to all that seemed conformist, rusty, uniformist.

In West Germany at the time, "jazz" comprised quite a broad range of styles: Louis Armstrong's visits to the world of pop music, the show performances of Lionel Hampton's formation, adaptations of swing and big band music by German entertainment orchestras, the revival of the traditional New Orleans style coming over from Britain, variations of bebop mainly imported from Paris and cool jazz with artists such as Dizzie Gillespie, Charly Parker, Miles Davis or the Modern Jazz Quartet. Notwithstanding plenty of diversities, the social character of jazz culture was clearly delineated. Its supporters were mostly young middle- and upper-class men, and it tended toward an élitist self-conception. In public, reputed jazz fans were extremely concerned not to be lumped together with "pop music enthusiasts, swing blokes, boogie-woogie dancers, rock'n'roll hoppers and primitive rowdies."<sup>26</sup>

Yet a border that could barely be crossed separated two jazz scenes from each other. Lovers of mainstream jazz, from swing to Dixieland, with a "medium taste" (Bourdieu), tended to come from the lower and intermediate segment of the middle classes and aimed to get secondary schools ["Realschule, Mittelschule"] certificates. The adherents to bebop, cool and modern jazz came mainly from the intellectual and élitist milieu of oppositional grammar school ["Gymnasium"] pupils and university students. Here one felt close to French existentialism and there were close connections to the subculture of the "exis."<sup>27</sup>

To judge from the currently very dissatisfactory state of research, the actual musical leitmotif of the “exi” style came from cool jazz such as by Miles Davis or the Modern Jazz Quartet. This, originally „American“, strand of music was then transfigured by fans and intellectual defendants into an art music in the tradition of Bach.<sup>28</sup> By thus elevating cool jazz into autonomous serious music, it could be used for distinction from youth styles gathering around other musical languages.

This entailed a strange, but quite logical redefinition of the national classification of particular directions of contemporary jazz styles. Most “exis” came from the milieu of the educated middle classes. Here, traditional patterns of cultural anti-Americanism continued to be influential during the late 1950s. Among these groups, Westernization took the form of a rapprochement to the “great democratic, cultured nations in Europe“, to England and especially France. Against this background the “exis” identified traditional New Orleans jazz just as rock’n’roll with the stigma of being "American". By contrast cool jazz as well as avant-garde strands of bebop or free jazz served equally as signs for "Frenchness", which is to say for a culturally distinguished youth style. A contemporary witness, attending grammar school at the time, remembers: "I got into (...) modern jazz early on, because I had aversions against America."<sup>29</sup>

Here it is again, the topsy-turvy world. A strand of music which according to general knowledge had been imported from the USA turned into a sign for demarcating francophile protests. An élitist group instrumentalized jazz music by American<sup>30</sup> artists in order to label other youth styles as lacking culture and being vulgarly American.

### Traditions and power struggles

We probably have to accept that “American” was a highly blurred category characterized by no clear origins at all. Collective agents created, by identifying and opposing, extremely varied images of “Americanness”. They did so in order to convey - within the web of relations to other groups and their images of "America" - particular symbolic messages. This involved Germanizing the “American” (modern jazz musicians as Johann Sebastian Bach’s great-grandchildren) and Americanizing the “German” (the dream about “heavy machines” as the imitation of a Hollywood picture). We can read these mutual constructions and projections as a symbolic representation of the complicated, multiply determined, ambiguous web made up of material demands, hegemonic conflicts and struggles for recognition in the young Federal Republic. But this reading ignores the essentially historical dimension of the postwar "sign wars"; it would definitely underestimate the "longue durée“ of the images of "America“. The controversial meanings and interpretations of the 1950s and 1960s seemed so obvious and convincing to the contemporaries, because they were in keeping with elementary patterns of German images of "America" - images which had been internalized and practiced for generations. As Marx put it: “The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare down on the minds of the living.”<sup>31</sup>

I want to mention only one aspect of this German cultural heritage: the opposition between „popular“ and élite representations of "America". Amongst those sections of the populace which had sent out millions of emigrants throughout the nineteenth century, the image of "America" as the "utopia of the common man"<sup>32</sup> had stayed alive. This "popular America" was, to speak with Hannah Arendt's words, a "nightmare to the wealthy bourgeoisie, the aristocracy and a certain type of intellectual, who perceived equality as a threat to culture rather than a promise of freedom."<sup>33</sup> This conflict recurred after 1945 in the controversy about the "American way of life" and popular American culture. Amongst the workers, and with real enthusiasm amongst working-class youths, propagandist promises and fascinating representations of affluence from the commercial arts were taken up willingly, even greedily. These images helped to legitimize what their parents and grandparents had already aspired to: prosperity and an easier everyday life, great entertainment and the recognition of popular taste. The postwar constellation made it possible to state these demands in a "politically correct" way – because now they were "American". In the eyes of the middle classes this expressed the very "western materialism" which their intellectual mentors had fought for generations as the most dangerous threat to German culture.

Now one might be tempted to characterize the revival of this conflict, again with Marx, as a farce.<sup>34</sup> The German "ideas of 1914", which were conceived as a program for the historical revision of the "western" ideas of 1789, are tied up with the tragedy of the Great War. The confrontation between "German culture" and "western civilization" was repeated after 1945 in arguments about "Elvis the Pelvis" and an undefined refreshment drink. But this comparison would miss the significance these arguments about the legitimacy of popular culture had in Germany. From about 1900 well into the 1960s, debates on the value of commercial popular arts and entertainment had raised key questions about the social distribution of power. The middle-class critique of "trash" [„Schund“] and "cheap amusement" always implicitly questioned the legitimate entitlement of the "uneducated" lower classes to become the sovereign of mass democracy.<sup>35</sup> And the works by Pierre Bourdieu and his school of thought have helped us to recognize the power to socially subordinate or empower with the symbolic instruments of distinction.

In a sense, here lies the basic answer to the question why the Halbstarken working-class youths so readily, in parts eagerly, "Americanized themselves." This was one of the "tactics" employed by those with little power in engaging with the powerful, as de Certeau has argued.<sup>36</sup> Cleverly, the Halbstarken used the fact that the reference to "America" brought all those into trouble who wanted to stabilize their position by supporting US foreign policy, but who did not think at all about giving up just an inch of their cultural domination and economic privileging as a welcoming gift for the new democracy.

This answer does, however, presuppose the political and economic constellation of the postwar years. Americanizing oneself was not a purely willful act. It was the utilization of an objectively given constellation, and in this respect it depended on the dynamics of Cold War politics and the world economy. Within this very context, however, I consider it necessary to examine the praxis of

appropriation by West European agents. If we do accept that something as vague as the "image of America" among different groups is not a private matter, but a mental factor which influences political action, then we are obliged to examine what is specific and requires explanation about "Americanization".

From this perspective the "Americanization" of the first two postwar decades already proves to be a case of cultural globalization. At the time "Americanness" was established in Western Europe in qualitatively new ways as a primary reference system. "America" provided physical, ideational and symbolic materials, arguments, and examples which were being utilized (and increasingly had to be utilized) in the old world in order to articulate and strengthen different interests. "Using a shared reference system does not mean that we all turn out the same; rather we present our differences in increasingly similar ways. Global culture constitutes a system of categories within which we have to define cultural differences in order to understand each other and to gain mutual recognition."<sup>37</sup> At least this is the tendency that emerged in the appropriations, constructions and instrumentalizations of "Americanness" after 1945.

#### Americanisms, systematized

Interpreting "Americanization" as a web of appropriations reduces the term ultimately to a formal cover. What comes to the fore is the task to bring some order into the network of creative adaptations and instrumentalizations. The common denominator might be put as follows: Groups and individuals create various images of "Americanness" and they try to realize some features of it within their own country and their own life. In the German debate such behavior has often been called "Americanism", mostly with an explicitly derogatory connotation.<sup>38</sup> According to the arguments outlined above one ought to speak of different, even opposing Americanisms.

Considering the past two hundred years of German preoccupation with "America" I would like to make a first proposal for a typology which distinguishes five variants.

*Technocratic Americanism* is interested in everything that promises greater power and success. It turns to "America" expecting to find methods which can help to achieve one's own aims more effectively and more smoothly – in the economy, in politics, in advertising and political propaganda, etc. Often the intention is stressed that taking on "American" recipes should remain confined to utilizing them as a means to achieve "German" ends; the "Americanization of culture" is to be explicitly avoided. From the Wilhelminian era up until the Cold War, the bearers of this technocratic Americanism primarily belonged to the economic and political élites in Germany.

*Republican Americanism* identifies with democratic principles and regulations which it considers realized, or at least conceptualized in an exemplary way, in the USA and which it seeks to implant in Germany. To this type belonged, for instance, the nineteenth century bourgeois revolutionaries who perceived the US constitution as an ideal. Representatives of republican Americanism were also

those postwar élite groups and opinion leaders who took up and identified with the American offer for reorientation. In the 1960s, this attitude could result in siding with the protest against the US war in Vietnam.

As a subgroup of Republican Americanism one could add the construction of an *Egalitarian Americanism*. This type was somewhat closer to everyday life and had a stronger orientation towards the promise for equality. Its image of America highlights, for example, informal and communitarian patterns of interacting among people who are positioned differently in the social hierarchy. *Egalitarian Americanism* also stresses the supposed high prestige of popular culture in relation to culture with a capital C and contrasts this with respective German deficits.

*Hedonist Americanism* defines the "American Way of Life" in terms of conveniences, an easier life, and splendid pleasures. The readiness or even strive of West Germans to fit into the Pax Americana after 1945 fed mainly on such expectations. The Halbstarken expressively voiced these demands; regarding their actual realization – from the car to the house in Florida – members of the middle and upper classes were mostly ahead of them.

Finally, *distinctive Americanism* uses certain goods and practices, which have an air of "Americanness" around them, in order to gain an advantage in struggles for recognition. Thus blue jeans, which the *Egalitarian Americanism* of the 1950s was interpreting as working trousers, had previously served the upper class as proof of a cosmopolitan casualness.<sup>39</sup>

Mind you, a similar motivation cannot be denied the avant-garde of proletarian wearers of blue jeans too. Separating these five Americanisms therefore is purely analytical in nature; in practice different groups of actors fused them in specific historical situations into changing combinations.

I started off with classical mythology, so I will finish with mythology - though with what has been called "lower mythology". In this realm we meet Father Christmas and the Easter bunny, elves, giants and ghosts. Lately, a quite familiar ghost was reported to have shown up in my country. "Yet again a ghost haunts Germany. This time it wears a red and white striped top-hat with a blue brim and hides its face behind a non-burstable bubble gum. The ghost is called: Americanization."<sup>40</sup> As a cultural anthropologist I have learned that ghosts ought to be taken seriously. But one does not have to believe in them.

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Translation by Birgit Reinel.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Rob Kroes, Americanisation: What are we talking about? In: Rob Kroes et al. (eds.), Cultural Transmissions and Receptions: American Mass Culture in Europe. Amsterdam: VU University Press 1993, p. 302-318; Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, Dimensionen von Amerikanisierung in der deutschen Gesellschaft. In: Archiv für Sozialgeschichte 35, 1995, p. 1-34; Rainer Pommerin (ed), The American Impact on Postwar Germany. Providence: Berghahn 1995; Alf Lüdtke et al. (eds.), Amerikanisierung. Traum und Alptraum im Deutschland des 20. Jahrhunderts. Stuttgart: Steiner 1996; Pierre Guerlain, The Ironies and Dilemmas of America's Cultural Dominance: A Transcultural Approach. In: American Studies International 35, 1997, no. 2, p. 30-51; Kaspar Maase, „Amerikanisierung der

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Gesellschaft“: Nationalisierende Deutung von Globalisierungsprozessen? In: Konrad Jarausch, Hannes Siegrist (eds.), *Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung in Deutschland 1945-1970*. Frankfurt/M.: Campus 1997, p. 219-241.

- <sup>2</sup> Dietrich Beyrau et al., Vorwort der Herausgeber. In: Michael Hochgeschwender, *Freiheit in der Offensive? Der Kongreß für kulturelle Freiheit und die Deutschen*. München: Oldenbourg 1998, p. 9-13; cf. also Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, *Westernisierung und Amerikanisierung. Politische Ideen, Kulturtransfer und die Transformation der westdeutschen Gesellschaft 1945-1970*. Mskrpt. Tübingen 1998.
- <sup>3</sup> Cf. Claudia Schnurmann: *Europa trifft Amerika. Atlantische Wirtschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit 1492-1783*. Frankfurt/M.: S. Fischer 1998.
- <sup>4</sup> A good overview is given by Peter Schöttler, *Mentalitäten, Ideologien, Diskurse. Zur sozialgeschichtlichen Thematisierung der „dritten Ebene“*. In: Alf Lüdtke (ed.), *Alltagsgeschichte. Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen*. Frankfurt/M.: Campus 1989, p. 85-136.
- <sup>5</sup> Hochgeschwender, *Freiheit*; Thomas Sauer, *Westorientierung im deutschen Protestantismus? Vorstellungen und Tätigkeit des Kronberger Kreises*. München: Oldenbourg 1998; Gudrun Kruij, *Das „Welt“-„Bild“ des Axel Springer Verlags. Journalismus zwischen westlichen Werten und deutschen Denktraditionen*. München: Oldenbourg 1999.
- <sup>6</sup> Beyrau et al., Vorwort, p. 13.
- <sup>7</sup> Well-known is Lenau's formula about the poetic curse weighing down on the "country without nightingales"; but before him, as early as 1822, Ludwig Gall reported on his stay in America: "... no nightingale flutes in these beautiful forests, no lark swirls its thanks up into the sky; only dismal croaks meet the ear from time to time; the birds, just like the people in this country can only please as long as one does not know any more about them than their feathers." (Ludwig Gall, *Meine Auswanderung nach den Vereinigten-Staaten in Nordamerika im Frühjahr 1819 und meine Rückkehr nach der Heimat im Winter 1820*, II. Teil, Trier 1822, S. 411. Quotation from Peter J. Brenner, *Reisen in die Neue Welt. Die Erfahrung Nordamerikas in deutschen Reise- und Auswandererberichten des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Tübingen: Niemeyer 1991, p. 326.). GDR propaganda also fell back on romantic Anti-Americanism; cf. Rolf Weber (ed.), *Land ohne Nachtigall. Deutsche Emigranten in Amerika 1777-1886*. Berlin: Der Morgen 1981; Lenau *ibid.*, p. 82.
- <sup>8</sup> Curt Bondy et al., *Jugendliche stören die Ordnung. Bericht und Stellungnahme zu den Halbstarkenkrawallen*. München: Juventa 1957; Günther Kaiser, *Randalierende Jugend. Eine soziologische und kriminologische Studie über die sogenannten "Halbstarken"*. Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer 1959; Detlev Peukert, *Die 'Halbstarken'. Protestverhalten von Arbeiterjugendlichen zwischen Wilhelminischem Kaiserreich und Ära Adenauer*. In: *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik* 30, 1984, p. 533-48; Kaspar Maase, 'Halbstarke' and Hegemony: Meanings of American Mass Culture in the Federal Republic of Germany During the 1950s. In: Kroes et al., *Transmissions*, op. cit., p. 152-170; Id., *Rhythmus hinter Gittern - Die Halbstarken und die innere Modernisierung der Arbeiterkultur in den fünfziger Jahren*. In: Andreas Kuntz (ed.), *Arbeiterkulturen*. Düsseldorf: Thomas 1993, p. 171-204; Thomas Grotum, *Die Halbstarken. Zur Geschichte einer Jugendkultur der 50er Jahre*. Frankfurt/M.: Campus, 1994.
- One can find a lot of contemporary material in Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Die Protest-Chronik 1949-1959. Eine illustrierte Geschichte von Bewegung, Widerstand und Utopie*, 4 vols. Hamburg: Rogner & Bernhard, 1996; cf. the headword „Halbstarke“, *ibid.*, vol 4, p. 2661.
- <sup>9</sup> Cf. Tony Jefferson, *Cultural Responses of the Teds*. In: Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson (eds.), *Resistance Through Rituals*. London: Hutchinson 1976, p. 81-86. Such rebelling youths appeared simultaneously in many European countries in which the extent of US influence differed extremely. But everywhere they got outstanding media attention. In my view, this also indicates that the explanation in terms of "Americanization", which was already preferred by contemporaries, falls short.
- <sup>10</sup> Kaspar Maase, *BRAVO Amerika. Erkundungen zur Jugendkultur der Bundesrepublik in den 50er Jahren*. Hamburg: Junius 1992; Id., *Amerikanisierung von unten. Demonstrative*

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Vulgarität und kulturelle Hegemonie in der Bundesrepublik der 50er Jahre. In: Lüdtko et al., *Amerikanisierung*, op. cit., p. 291-313.

- <sup>11</sup> BRAVO 44/1958, S. 39.
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. Kaspar Maase, *Entblößte Brust und schwingende Hüfte. Momentaufnahmen von der Jugend der fünfziger Jahre*. In: Thomas Kühne (ed.), *Männergeschichte - Geschlechtergeschichte*. Frankfurt/M.: Campus 1996, p. 193-217.
- <sup>13</sup> Cf. for examples in Austria Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1994.
- <sup>14</sup> Bondy et al., op. cit., p. 9, 81.
- <sup>15</sup> Cf. Nicola Lepp, *Ledermythen. Materialien zu einer Ikonographie der schwarzen Lederjacke*. In: *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 96, 1993, p. 471-495.
- <sup>16</sup> More evidence of what follows is in Kaspar Maase, *Von Rock'n'Rollern, Jazzbanditen und „coolen“ Exis. Populärmusikimporte als Amerikanisierung?* In: Annette Kreuziger-Herr, Manfred Strack (eds.), *Aus der Neuen Welt. Streifzüge durch die amerikanische Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Hamburg: Lit 1997, p. 265-281.
- <sup>17</sup> Clifford Geertz, 'From the Native's Point of View': On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding. In: Janet L. Dolgin et al. (eds.), *Symbolic Anthropology: A Reader in the Study of Symbols and Meanings*. New York: Columbia UP 1977, p. 483.
- <sup>18</sup> Hans Medick, 'Missionare im Ruderboot'? Ethnologische Erkenntnisweisen als Herausforderung an die Sozialgeschichte. In: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 10, 1984, p. 295-319, quot. 306 f.
- <sup>19</sup> I am using the term "style" as it has been developed in Cultural Studies. It denotes the process by which clothes, goods, bodies, etc. are coherently transformed into signs. For exemplary studies, see Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen 1979, p. 7-120; Paul Willis, *Profane Culture*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1978.
- <sup>20</sup> For the concept of „homology“ and its application to young workers' subcultures, see Willis, *Profane*, op. cit.
- <sup>21</sup> Cf. Kaspar Maase, *Establishing Cultural Democracy: Youth, „Americanization“, and the Irresistible Rise of Popular Culture*. In: Hanna Schissler (ed.), *Revisiting the „Miracle“ Years: West German Society from 1949 to 1968. A Cultural History*, Princeton: Princeton UP 1999 (in print).
- <sup>22</sup> Robert Pattison, *The Triumph of Vulgarity: Rock Music in the Mirror of Romanticism*. New York: Oxford UP 1987, p. 55.
- <sup>23</sup> In fact it was an All-German pattern. Emotions and arguments in socialist East Germany differed only little – a further indication that corresponding patterns of interpretation regarding „Americanness“ formed part of a common mental heritage, the accumulation of which had begun well before 1933. Cf. Uta G. Poiger, *Rebels With a Cause? American Popular culture, the 1956 youth riots, and new conceptions of masculinity in East and West Germany*, in Pommerin, *Impact*, op. cit., p. 93-124; Id., *Rock'n'Roll, Kalter Krieg und deutsche Identität*, in: Jaraus/Siegrist, *Amerikanisierung*, op. cit., p. 275-289.
- <sup>24</sup> Friedel Schröder, *Gefahr und Not der Halbstarke*. In: *Deutsche Allgemeine Lehrerzeitung* 8, 1956, p. 326-28, quot. 327.
- <sup>25</sup> Chris Hyde, *Rock'n'Roll Tripper*. Rheinberg: Zero 1983, p. 9 f.
- <sup>26</sup> Cf. "Es ist nicht alles Jazz". In: *Weserkurier*, April 14 1957, and a debate among the writers of „Letters to the Editor“ in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, April 7 to April 30, 1952.
- <sup>27</sup> Cf. Heinz-Hermann Krüger, "Exis, habe ich keine gesehen" - Auf der Suche nach einer jugendlichen Gegenkultur in den 50er Jahren. In: Id. (Ed.), "Die Elvis-Tolle, die hatte ich mir unauffällig wachsen lassen". *Lebensgeschichte und jugendliche Alltagskultur in den 50er Jahren*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich 1985, p. 129-151; Id., *Viel Lärm ums Nichts*.

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- Jugendliche Existenzialisten in den 50er Jahren. In: Willi Bucher, Klaus Pohl (eds.): Schock und Schöpfung. Jugendästhetik im 20. Jahrhundert. Darmstadt: Luchterhand 1986, p. 263-68.
- <sup>28</sup> Ulrich Kurth, Als der Jazz "cool" wurde. In: Hanns-Werner Heister, Dietrich Stern (eds.), Musik der 50er Jahre. Berlin: Argument 1980, p. 110-122.
- <sup>29</sup> Quotation from Maase, BRAVO, op. cit., p. 185.
- <sup>30</sup> American at least in terms of their citizenship.
- <sup>31</sup> Karl Marx: Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte. In: Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: Werke, vol. 8, Berlin: Dietz 1960, p. 115.
- <sup>32</sup> Marcus Lee Hansen, The Atlantic Migration 1607-1860. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP 1951, p. 146.
- <sup>33</sup> Hannah Arendt, Europa und Amerika (written 1954). In: Id., Zur Zeit. Politische Essays. Berlin: Rotbuch 1986, p. 71-93, quot. p. 79.
- <sup>34</sup> Marx, Brumaire, op. cit.
- <sup>35</sup> Kaspar Maase: Grenzenloses Vergnügen. Der Aufstieg der Massenkultur 1850-1970. Frankfurt/M.: S. Fischer 1997.
- <sup>36</sup> Michel de Certeau, Die Kunst des Handelns. Berlin: Merve 1988.
- <sup>37</sup> Joana Breidenbach, Ina Zukrigl: Tanz der Kulturen: Kulturelle Identität in einer globalisierten Welt. München: Kunstmann 1998, p. 209.
- <sup>38</sup> Otto Basler, Amerikanismus. Geschichte des Schlagwortes. In: Deutsche Rundschau vol. 224, 1930, p. 142-146.
- <sup>39</sup> Wolf-Dieter Koenenkamp, Jeans - Mode und Mythen. In: Jeans. Beiträge zur Mode und Jugendkultur. Tübingen: TVV 1985, p. 99-179, here p. 126 f.
- <sup>40</sup> fau: Uncle Gerhard. In: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, March 10 1998, no. 58, p. 41.