

The Americanization of German Culture? The Strange, Paradoxical Ways of Modernity

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How “American” is German popular culture? How serious is the threat of Americanization? Until recently, the answer seemed to be quite clear. Following in the footsteps of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s chapter on the culture industry in their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, several generations of German cultural critics have harshly criticized the growing influence of American mass culture in Germany. This development, they argue, will lead to increased cultural homogenization and the dominance of an escapist entertainment culture that erases the true task of culture, namely, to function as a counterforce to the alienating forces of modernity.¹ With the student movement of the 1960s this critique gained an additional political dimension. Americanization was now seen as the epitome of cultural imperialism, because the growing role American mass culture played in Germany was attributed not to the attraction of the product itself but to the worldwide market dominance of American companies that pushed competitors and artistically more ambitious alternatives out of the market.²

This was the time in which the television series *Dallas* gained central importance in German cultural criticism because its worldwide dissemination seemed to confirm the enormous power that the leading content providers for television entertainment, at the time the three major American networks, could wield. The German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) provided considerable financial support for a research project on the harmful impact of *Dallas* on German society that claimed that it was now high time to put the criticism of Americanization on a systematic, scientifically rigorous basis in

order to convince German society that the menace was real and the danger of the Americanization of German society imminent.³ Ironically, however, this attempt to objectify cultural criticism was the beginning of the end of the Americanization thesis in its simple, literal-minded form. For as various studies of the impact of *Dallas*—for example, by Ian Ang; by Elihu Katz and Tamar Liebes in Israel; and by Ellen Seiter and colleagues in their project sponsored by the German Research Foundation⁴—all demonstrated with surprising unanimity, the cultural imperialism thesis was based on a surprisingly naive theory of effect and completely disregarded the possibility that different audiences can make different uses of one and the same program.⁵ With these results, studies of the impact of *Dallas* and other television programs confirmed a basic insight of reception aesthetics: in order to give a fictional text meaning, the reader or spectator has to draw on his or her own associations, emotions, and bodily sensations as an analogue and in the process creates a new object.⁶

This transfer process lies at the center of our encounters with fictional material. It explains the interest we have in fictions, for otherwise it would make little sense that we expose ourselves again and again to stories that we know very well are invented. But although reception aesthetics in its classical form restricts its description of the transfer process that takes place in the act of reception to high literature, one may very well argue that it is also at work in popular culture⁷ and, contrary to arguments by Wolfgang Iser and others, in film and other forms of visual representation.⁸ For the reception of American popular culture in Germany, this means that material that in one context may have no other function than that of mere escapism can have quite different functions in other contexts, as Kaspar Maase has demonstrated in his study *BRAVO Amerika*.⁹ In contrast to the then standard view of the topic, Maase shows the extent to which American popular culture played a liberating function for Germany's postwar generation by undermining key elements of the authoritarian personality structure, for example, by replacing the still lingering ideal of the military man with rock 'n' roll heroes like Elvis Presley, by glorifying youthful rebellion through film stars like James Dean or Marlon Brando, and by opening up new spaces for self-fashioning and self-expression without a loss in respectability through the playful exhibitionism of female actors like Marilyn Monroe.¹⁰ The result of Maase's study and others since can be summarized by arguing that, in the context of postwar Germany, American popular culture played an impor-

tant—and, I think, largely positive—role in the Westernization of German society.

Maase's study poses a significant departure from Horkheimer and Adorno's position, especially in its view of modernity. Classical Weberian theories of modernity saw modernity as characterized by a steady increase of bureaucratization, rationalization and standardization and placed their hopes on culture as a counterrealm. The major thrust of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* consists of the claim that instrumental reason and its relentless drive for rationalization have by now also affected and deformed the realm of culture.¹¹ Although there remains a remnant of ambivalence, Maase's description has an altogether different thrust and deserves to be quoted at length:

One of the results of the influx of attitudes that can be found in American popular and everyday culture into German society was that young people in the Federal Republic of Germany developed civil habits (*habitus*). "Civil" here refers to three aspects. The first reference is to commercial attitudes that were still labeled "materialistic" at the time. The idols of pop culture knew how to take advantage of the market. They made no bones about the fact that they wanted to make money instead of preaching any type of message. This undermined a long-cherished German tradition of appealing to idealistic principles for the justification of one's own behavior and, consequently, of thinking in either-or, friend-foe dichotomies. This change of attitude paved the way for a more flexible approach to dealing with conflicts of interest and an increased willingness to compromise. The second reference is to a growing informality in social interaction that, in turn, diminished the symbolical distance between groups that were traditionally in unequal positions of power: women and men, young and old. It is therefore not far-fetched to claim that this growing informality contributed to the democratization of German society. Finally, the new civil habit also affected traditional gender concepts: it strengthened a new view of masculinity in which the ideal of military discipline was replaced by a more relaxed conception that can even accommodate feminine aspects.¹²

The recognition that cultural material is never simply absorbed as a model of behavior but is reappropriated in different contexts for different needs and purposes is, I think, the bottom-line consensus at

tural centers that could shape cultural development on the basis of aesthetic or educational criteria of an elite.²¹ Within this dehierarchized, socially, regionally, and ethnically diversified context, two factors made American popular culture unique, gave it a head start internationally, and explain its amazing worldwide popularity. Both factors are tied to the multiethnic composition of American society. First, American popular culture profited from a variety of multiethnic influences. This is most obvious in the realm of popular music, where the result was a hybrid mix of European and African traditions that was highly original and clearly something no other country had to offer at the time. Second, because of the multiethnic composition of its audiences, American popular culture encountered a market that resembles today's global market in its diversity and multilingual nature, so that a need emerged early on to find a common language that would be able to overcome the heterogeneity of the audiences.²²

The response of American popular culture to this challenge—and, by implication, to the issues of access and accessibility—was reduction. The novel, which is the first example of modern popular culture in the Western world, is already a reduction of the epic; the dime novel, in turn, is a reduction of the novel in terms of narrative and characterization. Each of these reductions increases cultural accessibility, and because this accessibility means increased sales and cheaper production, social access is also increased. However, in order to read a dime novel, one still has to be able to read English. In terms of accessibility, writing, no matter how reduced it is in its requirements for cultural literacy, has obvious limits. Images and music, on the other hand, have obvious advantages. And while even the image still requires a certain literacy in the sense of being able to master a visual code, music can reduce such potential barriers of accessibility even further. Thus, film, television, and, above all, popular music have been the driving forces in the Americanization of modern culture.

Traditionally, it is exactly this phenomenon of reduction that has been the target of cultural critics, because it is seen as the result of a race for the bottom line in taste. But when silent movie directors such as D. W. Griffith and Erich von Stroheim tried to develop a filmic language that would be superior to theatrical melodrama in terms of accessibility and effect, they did not do this in search of the lowest common denominator in taste. They pursued their goals because they realized that the reduction in communication made possible by the image opened up entirely new possibilities of expression. The reduction I am talking about here is, in other words, primarily a result of a transfor-

mation of cultural expression by technological developments such as printing, film, electrified music, and so on—developments that facilitate accessibility but, at the same time, also create new possibilities of expression and aesthetic experience.²³

In my opinion, there is an unmistakable direction in which this development has gone, redefining, in the process, criteria of cultural literacy. Cultural access and accessibility are constantly widened for the individual. At the same time, the individual's wishes for imaginary self-empowerment have been served more and more effectively—up to a point, for example, where the representation of violence has been taken almost completely out of moral or social contexts and is now presented largely for its own sake, that is, for the thrill it gives Hollywood's main target group: young (or not so young) males. This is an important point, because it captures the major paradox produced by the development I have sketched: contrary to the conventional wisdom of a standardized mass production, American popular culture has been driven by a promise of providing ever more effective ways for imaginary self-empowerment and self-fashioning.²⁴ In this sense, it has contributed to an accelerating process of individualization in society.

This individualization provides a third reason for the worldwide success of American popular culture: its deeply ingrained strand of antiauthoritarianism, ranging from stances of mere informality to absorbing stories of youthful rebellion and embracing provocative, shrill, even deliberately vulgar and trashy forms of expression that take pleasure in violating socially established norms of taste. Fittingly, Maase characterizes these heightened forms of self-expression as "sensuous-expressive, shrill, unrepentant and overpowering in their rhetorical means; socially they are close to the taste and behavior of the lower classes and marginalized cultures."²⁵ American popular culture is anti-authoritarian not only in its withdrawal from moral and social contexts but also, and even more so, in its willful disregard of established hierarchies of culture. However, as many cultural critics have pointed out, individualization is a double-edged sword: it is both liberating and potentially antisocial. It increases the social and cultural space of the individual but often at the cost of undermining social values and the possibility of social cooperation.

If popular culture is driven by increasing possibilities for imaginary self-empowerment and cultural self-fashioning, then Americanization, understood as growing, worldwide dissemination of a certain type of culture, means that a process that, for a number of reasons, is most advanced in the United States is taking hold in other parts of the world

which the Americanization debate has arrived.¹³ In his excellent discussion of theories of cultural imperialism, John Tomlinson summarizes the debate: “The general message of empirical studies—informal ones like Ang’s and more large-scale formal projects like Katz’s and Liebes’s—is that audiences are more active and critical, their responses more complex and reflective, and their cultural values more resistant to manipulation and ‘invasion’ than many critical media theorists have assumed.”¹⁴ The cultural imperialism thesis has thus been replaced by models of negotiation, hybridization, and creolization,¹⁵ and if one returns with that perspective to our starting question—How “American” is German popular culture?—then the somewhat unexpected answer must be that it is actually far less so than the question seems to imply. German popular culture today is a very mixed bag. While Hollywood dominates the German film market, by a staggering 80 percent, the role of American series on television has decreased considerably (in view of the *Dallas* hysteria, one might even say dramatically). There are comparatively few American series to be seen, most of them are relegated to the late hours, and few capture any attention. Moreover, driven by the insatiable need for programs that six major and several minor television networks have, German production companies of television series have not succumbed to American market power but have blossomed lately and are actively pursuing foreign markets themselves, especially in Middle and Eastern Europe.

In music, Turkish-German rap groups have become the German epitome of the idea of cultural hybridization.¹⁶ There are several successful versions of German rock music, and there is an influential appropriation of Detroit techno music (patterned, in turn, to a large extent on the experimental electronic music of the German group Kraftwerk) that has made Berlin a center of techno music, made famous by, among other things, the annual Love Parade. Finally, two examples highlight the possibility of successful self-assertion against the seemingly overwhelming market power of American multinational companies: (1) the German video clip channel Viva, which puts heavy emphasis on German popular music and uses German for all of its announcements, has passed MTV as the leading video channel in Germany and has forced MTV to offer nationally and regionally varied versions of its program—a reorientation that has in the meantime become an international policy of the company; (2) to counter the plans of Viacom-owned Nickelodeon to establish a children’s channel program financed by advertising only, the two major German public television networks have created a children’s channel of their own

that has not only successfully held its ground against American competition but driven profit-conscious Nickelodeon out of the German market.

How “American” is German popular culture then? In the cultural imperialism thesis, German popular culture seems to be in danger of being swallowed up wholesale, while in the reappropriation and hybridization paradigm, the issue seems to dwindle down to selective use.¹⁷ Does this mean that we can close the book on the issue? It all depends on what we actually mean by “American.” If “American” refers to national ownership, then Americanization, perhaps with the exception of the film industry, does appear to be no longer a pressing issue.¹⁸ But if “American” is meant to refer to a certain type of culture, developed and made popular in the United States, then the issue becomes more complicated. For it may be true that, at least as far as market shares in the television and music industry are concerned, the influence of American companies has not become overpowering. But the programs produced even by those German companies that have successfully managed to assert themselves against the American competition—the new production companies for television series, the television station Viva, or even the Turkish-German rap groups—continue to pattern their products after American models. A Frankfurt School-inspired cultural critic might argue, therefore, that German society no longer needs to import American mass culture because it is now “advanced” enough to have an American-style culture industry of its own.

However, what is the explanatory power of such a view of American popular culture with its association of a standardized form of escapism? Is American popular culture just mass-produced trash?¹⁹ If not, what explains its stunning worldwide resonance? It is here that the Americanist can perhaps be of help, for one cannot study American society without coming to terms with the crucial role that popular cultural forms play in American culture.²⁰

The significance of the phenomenon of popular culture for cultural history lies in its response to the problems of cultural access and accessibility (in the sense of cultural literacy). Traditionally, access to cultural life in Western societies depended on social standing, economic means (books before the nineteenth century were expensive), and a fairly high degree of cultural literacy. Basically, the term “popular culture” refers to cultural forms that undermine or abolish these conditions of access. In this sense, American society was especially effective for a number of reasons, among them the lack of strong national cul-

as well. This process is usually driven by the demands of a younger generation that is in flight from a tradition it considers restrictive.²⁶ What many cultural critics—including Americans who are embarrassed to have American society associated primarily with consumer culture and fast-food icons—often do not understand is that even the most conventional and most maligned symbols of American consumer culture, such as Coca-Cola or McDonald's, bear a connotation of informality that can be experienced as liberating by young people in most parts of the world.²⁷ Americanization in this sense is an effect of modernization—not in the sense of sociological and economic modernization theory but in the sense of modernity's promise of self-development.²⁸ The problem, however, is that Americanization is an unforeseen, almost embarrassing result of modernity's promise for self-development, for in place of self-cultivation and increasing self-awareness we get unrepentant forms of imaginary self-empowerment and self-fashioning. What we have to realize and acknowledge in dealing with American popular culture is that, contrary to its image as a mindless, standardized mass product, it is not the deplorable counterpoint to this modern culture of self-development but rather an unexpected manifestation and consequence of it.

The United States is a society dominated by business interests, and it would be naive indeed to forget that business tries its best to take commercial advantage of the individual's seemingly insatiable hunger for imaginary self-empowerment. But although these commercial interests should be acknowledged, they do not get to the core of problem. Clearly, the same hunger manifests itself in societies that are quite different in political and economic structure. Nevertheless, each of these societies has to come to a decision about what institutional structures it wants to maintain for cultural production and expression. Or, to come back to our starting question, Germany may not be as American in terms of cultural homogenization and market monopolies as many critics fear, but it is certainly far advanced in patterning itself after models coming from the United States. In view of my explanation of the emergence and function of American popular culture, this development must be seen as an inevitable consequence of the Westernization of German society (which, one may claim, has saved German society from itself). One may look at American culture ambivalently, but one cannot have only half of it. The Americanization of modern culture comes along with other aspects of modernity.

Maase's *BRAVO Amerika* must by now be one of the most quoted books on the topic of Americanization in Germany—deservedly so, I

think, because Maase was the first to tell differently a story that had been watered down to a mere formula. Mary Nolan, on the other hand, in a comment on the concepts of Americanization and Westernization, rightly insists that we need to extend the analysis of Americanization to the contemporary period. The extent to which the 1950s still dominate debates about the Americanization in Germany is striking indeed.²⁹ One obvious reason is that the period marks the beginning of full-scale Americanization.³⁰ But another reason may be that, as part of the cold war period, the 1950s still hold the promise of a dramatic narrative along classical generic lines: There is the drama of victory and defeat, there is the cold war, and there is the question of how to treat the defeated. There are victors who have political interests, and there are those who do not realize that entertainment can be politics too. Critics do not quite agree on the result of this plot constellation, but the narrative provides a welcome opportunity to tell the story again and to tell it differently each time: either as a tale of victimization by American cold war policies; as an upbeat story of Westernization, that is, liberation from the authoritarianism of German society; or as a story of subcultural resignification of culturally dominant forms and hence of successful resistance to cultural hegemony.

These narratives, in turn, are useful because they still provide a basis for large-scale generalizations. Whether the issue is discussed explicitly or not, each of these narratives of Americanization illustrates an underlying view of American society and its relation to the rest of the world. Hence, interpreters draw different conclusions from their descriptions of Americanization in the 1950s, documented in exemplary fashion in the papers from the conference "The American Impact on Western Europe."³¹ They see Americanization as a means of cultural dehierarchization (Maase's grass roots Americanism);³² as an instance of—not entirely successful—hegemonial policies;³³ as—overdue—Westernization;³⁴ or, more recently, as a kind of pseudo-democratization that masks the fact that the American liberal system is fundamentally constituted by racism and sexism and does not hesitate to export this legacy in a seemingly democratic or liberal form.³⁵ In each case, a different view of American politics and society determines what course the narrative of Americanization will take. Strangely, however, these underlying views have not yet become a topic of debate. Could it be that there is a persistent interest in the continued focus on the 1950s because certain generalizations about America are still possible?

In effect, however, the narrative of Americanization has by now become considerably more muddled. This holds true for both of the

main features of the conventional narrative of Americanization: the question of national ownership and the question of whether American popular culture is really a debased form of mass culture. In a time when corporations such as Sony, Murdoch, Vivendi, and Bertelsmann own large pieces of the American entertainment pie, Americanization can no longer be assessed primarily in terms of national ownership. At the same time, American popular culture has become part of a dehierarchized postmodern field of hybrid cultural forms in which "high" and "low" are no longer helpful markers of aesthetic distinction and in which models of imposition or unilateral cultural transfer have to be replaced by myriad constellations of negotiation, appropriation, and transformation. Can we rest easy then and regard the challenge of Americanization as an inevitable result of modernity and its growing plurality of cultural and life-style choices? Or are there new issues that should move to the fore of the Americanization debate? If we no longer want to remain on the relatively superficial and, in itself, often contradictory level of the cultural imperialism paradigm without, on the other hand, discarding the question of cultural politics altogether, then we have to include two aspects into our discussion that can help to bring the discussion up to current states of complexity. One of these aspects is the problem of the organization of culture, the other a differentiation about what we are actually talking about when we use the term "Americanization" and refer to the United States in the process.

Let me begin with the latter aspect. One of the main difficulties in discussions of Americanization is that, as a rule, two different Americas are conflated in the debate. One is the territory we call the United States, which has a distinctive economic and social structure; the other is an imaginary, deterritorialized space that is filled with a selection of objects of choice, evoking strong fascination or disgust. This America is an America of the mind, whose protean, chameleon-like shape constantly changes according to different collective and individual needs. When we pick out cultural features such as jazz or rap music, to name just two out of a sheer endless reservoir of interesting cultural forms, we create our own deterritorialized, imaginary America of the mind. Consequently, "Americanization" can have at least two meanings that should be kept apart. Americanization through an imaginary America of jazz, rock 'n' roll, or rap promises reinvigoration, if not regeneration, of one's own culture without, on the other hand, having to import those social conditions that played a significant role in creating these cultural forms. Those happy apologists for American popular culture

who celebrate only its vitality and antiauthoritarian thrust are, in fact, oblivious to those economic and social contexts. They want rock 'n' roll, not a widely unregulated free enterprise system or urban slums.

The question that the Americanization debate has to face is how the two Americas are related. In the beginning, in the period of the mass culture debate and cultural imperialism paradigm, the implication was that American popular culture would be the bait to make the world ready for American capitalism. The infatuation with an imaginary America would pave the way for the transformation of German society on the American model. The reappropriation and hybridization model of reception that has taken the place of the cultural imperialism paradigm claims that this is an unwarranted causal connection. Fascination with the American America does not necessarily lead to fascination with the American economic and social system. It may, in effect, have no other consequences than leading to a better cultural mix at home and hence to a different, less suffocating form of modernity. On the other hand, where concerns about Americanization have not abated, the basic fear still is that the imaginary America of popular culture may function as a kind of Trojan horse, that it may be the entry gate for establishing American conditions in German society. There is indeed one aspect of cultural life for which this may be true—which brings me to a second important point of differentiation in the Americanization debate.

"Americanization" is a term that refers to the relations between nations. It evokes questions of national self-definition and, by implication, self-determination. When the term is used critically, it suggests that one's culture is no longer one's own but decisively influenced, perhaps even controlled, by someone else. The term draws its polemical force from the fear that one may be in danger of losing control over one's own culture.³⁶ However, in the age of globalization, such thinking seems to have become increasingly obsolete. For one thing, it clings to an outdated notion of national self-control or even nationhood, in this case of a Germanness that is in danger of being diluted or polluted. Moreover, it appears hopelessly outdated at a time when national ownership of media or other cultural resources can no longer be neatly distinguished. (There is concern in the United States, for example, about the dominance of American quality publishers by German companies.) In view of the fact that national boundaries can and should no longer be neatly maintained, my argument so far has been to take the melodrama out of the Americanization debate by identifying the emer-

gence and worldwide triumph of American popular culture as the enactment of a cultural logic of modernity, although an unexpected, largely unacknowledged, and perhaps not altogether welcome part.

In a certain sense, modernization cannot be avoided. As Tomlinson puts it in his critique of the cultural imperialism paradigm, we are condemned to modernity.³⁷ The increasing demands for individual freedom and self-realization that are part of modernity's promise of self-development cannot be ignored or suppressed by prohibitions, unless one lives in a fundamentalist culture. However, there are more and less radical manifestations of this phenomenon, and in this respect historical and social developments can be influenced and shaped. There are, after all, multiple modernities, each with its own specific sources and configurations of the basic process of modernization. For reasons given in this essay, we may not even want to fight against the Americanization of German culture. And since German popular culture is, despite the current increasing number of instances of successful self-assertion against the dominance of American companies, after all patterned after American models, it would be especially absurd to argue for non-American purity in this case. The questions that remain are how much we want of this type of culture and whether the increasing Americanization of German culture should also lead to an American-style organization of culture.

If we look at the issue of Americanization from this point of view, the major challenge of Americanization consists neither of the question of national ownership, which has become muddled in an age of economic globalization, nor of the question of content, since, as we have seen, one and the same cultural text or object can have entirely different functions in different contexts of use. The major issue at stake in the relationship of, and comparison between, American and German culture today is the question of how, or on what principles, culture should be organized and financed. In the United States, the organizing principle is mainly commercial. Except for the National Endowment for the Arts, the state does not consider itself responsible for culture, so therefore cultural production has to find financial support somewhere else. Spending taxpayers' money on opera, musical performances, theater productions, or public television—that is, cultural forms that cannot fully support themselves financially—is rejected. In consequence, a rich culture of philanthropy and sponsorship has developed in the United States.

In Germany, on the other hand, there still exists a public consensus that such cultural forms should be supported by direct or indirect

forms of taxation, although there is an unmistakable tendency to take a page from the American book and to encourage the active search for sponsorship. Therefore, the real issue in the challenge of Americanization today is, I believe, no longer whether we get the wrong kind of culture but rather whether we are drifting toward an American model of organizing and financing culture. It is one thing to welcome the various forms of American popular culture as additions to cultural variety but quite another to organize a whole culture primarily on commercial principles. Or, to put it differently, it is one thing to welcome somebody as a guest in the house but another to make sure the guest does not take over the whole house!

NOTES

1. The term "modernity" is used here in the broad sense of *Neuzeit*, that is, the beginning of the modern period around 1600. It is set in motion, at different times in different places, by the drive of the individual to escape the seemingly god-given social and cultural hierarchies of feudal and aristocratic societies. One consequence is a growing differentiation of social and cultural spheres and, as a result, an increasing pluralization of values and life-styles. The process by which secular values of Western societies such as the doctrine of individual rights, religious freedom, liberal democracy, or civil society become the inspiration for value change is called Westernization; the process by which specific elements are adapted from American society and culture is called Americanization. Culturally, Germany was part of modernity long before the twentieth century, but it was only after 1945 that values of the Western liberal tradition gained a growing influence, strongly aided by the process of Americanization. For an interesting, though eventually inconclusive, debate on whether Westernization or Americanization is the most fitting term to describe Germany's postwar development, see the papers from the 1999 conference "The American Impact on Western Europe: Americanization and Westernization in Transatlantic Perspective" (Raimund Lammersdorf, ed., *GHI Conference Papers on the Web: The American Impact on Western Europe: Americanization and Westernization in Transatlantic Perspective*, <<http://www.ghi-dc.org/conpotweb/westernpapers/index.html>>). In contrast to the conference participants, I do not think that the issue is one of an "either-or" choice, since the terms "modernity," "modernization," "Westernization," and "Americanization" describe different aspects of cultural developments in Western societies and have a different explanatory range. The link between modernity and Americanization is also emphasized in Mary Nolan's *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) and in the introduction to *Transactions, Transgressions, Transformations: American Culture in Western Europe and Japan*, ed. Heide Fehrenbach and Uta G. Poiger (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000) (see especially the section "American Culture,

Nation-States, Modernity," xviii–xxiv). However, in both cases the term "modernity" is restricted to the twentieth century.

2. One of the most recent and most emphatic of these cultural critiques of Americanization is Benjamin Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism Are Reshaping the World* (New York: Ballantine, 1995). For earlier versions of the cultural imperialism thesis, see, for example, Herbert Schiller, *Mass Communications and American Empire*, 2d ed. (Boulder: Westview, 1992), and Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* (New York: International General, 1996).

3. In its more pointed versions, the cultural imperialism thesis always carried the implication of an act of colonization, as expressed, for example, in words like "Coca-colonization" or the "McDonaldization" of the world. Occasionally, the claim was extended to that of a colonization of the mind. German filmmaker Wim Wenders even claimed that Hollywood had successfully colonized the European subconscious.

4. See Ian Ang, *Watching Dallas* (London: Methuen, 1985); Elihu Katz and Tamar Liebes, "Mutual Aid in the Decoding of *Dallas*: Preliminary Notes from a Cross-Cultural Study," in *Television in Transition*, ed. Philip Drummond and Richard Paterson (London: BFI, 1986), 187–98; Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner, and Eva-Maria Warth, eds., *Remote Control: Television, Audiences, and Cultural Power* (London: Routledge, 1989); and Hans Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner, and Eva-Maria Warth, eds., *Never-Ending Stories: American Soap Operas and the Cultural Production of Meaning* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1994). A particularly telling example of the very different ways in which one and the same program is seen in different national and cultural contexts is provided by the American television series *Holocaust*, which found quite different receptions in Germany and the United States, despite the fact that in both contexts the basic attitude toward the program was predominantly positive. Cf. Bruce A. Murray, "NBC's Docudrama, *Holocaust*, and Concepts of National Socialism in the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany," in *The Americanization of the Global Village: Essays in Comparative Popular Culture*, ed. Roger Rollin (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989), 87–106.

5. Even for sympathetic commentators, the cultural imperialism thesis has some serious shortcomings. John Thompson, for example, draws attention to Katz's and Liebes's study of the very different ways in which the American television series *Dallas* was viewed by various ethnic groups in Israel and arrives at the following conclusion: "Studies such as this have shown convincingly that the reception and appropriation of media products are complex social processes in which individuals—interacting with others as well as with the characters portrayed in the programs they receive—actively make sense of messages, adopt various attitudes towards them and use them in differing ways in the course of their day-to-day lives. It is simply not possible to infer the varied features of reception processes from the characteristics of media messages considered by themselves, or from the commercial constraints operating on the producers of TV programs. . . . This line of criticism presses to the heart of the cultural imperialism thesis. It shows that this thesis is unsatisfactory not only because it is outdated and empirically doubtful,

but also because it is based on a conception of cultural phenomena which is fundamentally flawed. It fails to take account of the fact that the reception and appropriation of cultural phenomena are fundamentally hermeneutical processes in which individuals draw on the material and symbolic resources available to them, as well as on the interpretative assistance offered by those with whom they interact in their day-to-day lives, in order to make sense of the messages they receive and to find some way of relating to them." *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1995), 172.

6. In popular culture studies, it has been John Fiske, above all, who has stressed the considerable freedom of appropriation on the side of the recipient. See, for example, his essays "Popular Culture," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 321–35, and "Moments of Television: Neither the Text nor the Audience," in *Remote Control*, ed. Seiter et al., 56–78, as well as his book *Power Plays, Power Works* (London: Verso, 1993). A helpful summary of research on spectator activity in watching television is provided by David Morley in "Television: Not So Much a Visual Medium, More a Visible Object," in *Visual Culture*, ed. Chris Jenks (London: Routledge, 1995), 170–89.

7. Terminology is already telling in this debate. With the advent of a more differentiated and potentially positive view, the term "mass culture" was usually replaced by "popular culture," which has become the standard term by now. I will therefore stick to the term "popular culture."

8. For a discussion of this issue, see Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 137–38, and my counterargument in "Aesthetic Experience of the Image," in *Iconographies of Power: The Politics and Poetics of Visual Representation*, ed. Ulla Haselstein, Berndt Ostendorf, and Hans Peter Schneck (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 2003), 11–41.

9. Kaspar Maase, *BRAVO Amerika* (Hamburg: Junius, 1992). *BRAVO* was the name of the most popular German teenage magazine in the 1950s; it was the main interpreter of American films and popular music for many of the German baby-boomer generation and therefore also had a strong influence on the perception of American society and culture in that generation.

10. Cf. Heide Fehrenbach's characterization of the impact of the rebel-hero on American popular culture: "Through casual clothes and youthful self-assurance, Brando and other American male stars represented a romantic, rebellious macho—a brand of antiheroic individuality and self-expression attractive for its generational- and class-specific packaging. Set against the cultural stereotype of the socially formal, physically stiff, 'soldierly' German male of the Nazi period and the softer, more humble postwar version projected in *Heimatfilme*, it spoke to them of adventure and sexual expression, freedom from restriction and want." *Cinema in Democratizing Germany: Reconstructing National Identity after Hitler* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 167. An analysis of German reactions to Elvis Presley is provided in Uta G. Poiger's *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), chap. 5.

11. Adorno's essay on jazz, "Perennial Fashion—Jazz," in his *Prisms* (London: Spearman, 1967), 119–32, provides one of the most interesting documents of the encounter between the European philosophical tradition and American popular culture.

12. Maase, *BRAVO Amerika*, 14–15; my translation.

13. For studies of Americanization not only in Germany but in the larger European context, see, for example, Rob Kroes, Robert W. Rydell, and Doeko Bosscher, eds. *Cultural Transmissions and Receptions: American Mass Culture in Europe* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1993); Rob Kroes, *If You've Seen One, You've Seen the Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); George McKay, ed., *Yankee Go Home (& Take Me with You): Americanization and Popular Culture* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1997); Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonisation und Kalter Krieg: Die Kulturmission der USA in Österreich nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Vienna: VG, 1991); Ralph Willett, *The Americanization of Germany, 1945–1949* (London: Routledge, 1989).

14. John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 49–50. For a more recent assessment of the Americanization debate from a similar perspective, see Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E. Baker, "Modernization's Challenge to Traditional Values: Who's Afraid of Ronald McDonald," *Futurist* 35 (2001): 16–21. The authors argue: "The impression that we are moving toward a uniform 'McWorld' is partly an illusion. The seemingly identical McDonald's restaurants that have spread throughout the world actually have different social meanings and fulfill different social functions in different cultural zones" (18). "Economic development tends to push societies in a common direction, but rather than converging they seem to move along paths shaped by their cultural heritages. Therefore we doubt that the forces of modernization will produce a homogenized world culture in the foreseeable future" (20).

15. Cf., for example, Joana Breidenbach and Ina Zukrigl, *Tanz der Kulturen: Kulturelle Identität in einer globalisierten Welt* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2000), and Ulf Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992). In his essay "Networks of Americanization," Hannerz has found a helpful formulation for applying this "tool-kit" view of culture to the question of Americanization: "As an alternative to the phrase 'the American influence on Sweden,' we could speak of 'American culture as a resource for Swedes,' and then find that it consists of a great many parts, of different appeal to different people." In *Networks of Americanization: Aspects of the American Influence in Sweden*, ed. Rolf Lunden (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1992), 15.

16. One should also add that there exists a fairly lively subgenre of Turkish-German film productions that deal with issues of cultural contact between German society and its large Turkish minority, initially often in melodramatic fashion but more recently also with ironic distance. The essay collection by Ruth Mayer and Mark Terkessidis, *Globalkolorit: Multikulturalismus und Populärkultur* (St. Andrä-

Wörtern: Hannibal, 1998), contains a number of interesting discussions of the state of Turkish-German popular culture.

17. In this view, one may say, "American" becomes something like a brand name for cultural material that specializes in certain generic features and thrills. In "Is Hollywood America? The Trans-Nationalization of the American Film Industry," Frederick Wasser gives an interesting example of this kind of "staged Americanism": "In my conversations with American film executives, it was obvious that they perceive the world wide market as desiring a certain image of America to be featured in the movies. Each executive may have different and changing notions of the desired image—one season it may be hedonist consumers on the open road with fast cars—the next season it may be the American ethic of an individual hero struggling against all corrupt collectives. The point is not whether international viewers are actually seduced by such images but that film producers set for themselves the task of portraying an 'America' that is a dreamscape for 'universal' desires rather than a historic reality." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12 (1995): 423–37, here 435.

18. The German film industry, which was clinically dead in the 1970s (the period, interestingly, of the greatest international success of German auteur filmmakers such as Wenders, Herzog, and Fassbinder), recovered somewhat in the 1990s and has established a steady output, but its market share remains regrettably low.

19. In his study of American cultural policies after World War II, Volker Berghahn provides a useful reminder that this aversion against American popular culture was a widespread attitude not just of European elites but also of elites in the United States, to whom the worldwide identification of American culture with American popular culture was (and often still is) a source of embarrassment: "In the eyes of many European intellectuals on the right and the left, but also among the educated middle classes, the United States did not really have a culture at all. It seemed more like the end of civilization. What was coming out of America had no sense of quality. It was judged to be vulgar mass culture of the worst kind that could not possibly be compared with the high-cultural achievements of the Europeans." "Philanthropy and Diplomacy in the 'American Century,'" in *The Ambiguous Legacy: U.S. Foreign Relations in the 'American Century'*, ed. Michael Hogan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 396; see also Berghahn's comprehensive study *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe: Shepard Stone between Philanthropy, Academy, and Diplomacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). As Berghahn argues, American cultural policies after World War II set out to prove, in Germany mainly through the institution of the Amerikahäuser, that the United States did indeed have remarkable cultural achievements on their own. Today, in view of the worldwide triumph of popular culture, American cultural policies seem to have developed new priorities. Except for the occasional support of ethnic writers in order to bolster the image of a multicultural America, there is no longer any American effort to "sell" American high culture abroad. Instead, the main line at present is to work against international criticism of Americanization. The battleground of the future, however, will be

somewhere else. It is announced by the title of Tyler Cowen's recent book *In Praise of Commercial Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998). Cowen argues, "I seek to redress the current intellectual and popular balance and to encourage a more favorable attitude towards the commercialization of culture that we associate with modernity" (1).

20. I have addressed this issue in other contexts and publications, to which I have to refer those readers who may be dissatisfied or not convinced by the current condensed version of an originally much more detailed historical account. In view of the available space, I have to summarize an extended argument in the shortest possible fashion here. Cf. my essays "Emergence or Collapse of Cultural Hierarchy? American Popular Culture Seen from Abroad," in *Popular Culture in the United States*, ed. Peter Freese and Michael Porsche (Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 1994), 49–74; "'Amerikanisierung' der Kultur. Zur Geschichte der amerikanischen Populärkultur," in *Die Amerikanisierung des Medienalltags*, ed. Harald Wenzel (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 1998), 13–52; and "Amerikanisierung und Modernisierung," *Transit* 17 (1999): 55–71.

21. In his study *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), Lawrence Levine has traced the emergence of the idea of highbrow culture in America. However, it is significant that his narrative stops before the arrival of American modernism with its dehierarchized, often vernacular, and racially hybrid forms. In the way it is described by Levine, highbrow control over American culture is a phenomenon of the Victorian period.

22. One of the answers at the time of increased immigration around 1900 was the development of a nonverbal culture of performance that draws its attraction from the presentation of spectacular skills, appearances, or acts "for their own sake," that is, without implying any deeper meaning. Important aspects of this development around the turn of the century are described by John Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Lewis Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Robert Snyder, *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon, 1993); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Lauren Rabinowitz, *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies, and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), and various essays in the book *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). In order to describe the special contribution of the silent film to the new culture of performance and exhibition, Tom Gunning has introduced the useful term "cinema of attractions." The concept draws attention to the fact that, in their initial stage, silent movies gave

priority to the extraordinary spectacle or the spectacular technological effect over narrative continuity and plausibility. "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde," in *Early Cinema: Space-Frame-Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: BFI, 1990), 56–62.

23. This holds true even for the dime novel, which gained influence in American culture after new printing techniques made it possible to sell a novel for a dime and thus to open up a market for young adolescent readers who for a number of reasons, would not touch the longer and more expensive type of historical novel that dominated the market up to then. The dominant dime novel genre, the Western novel, was, in fact, only a reduction of the type of historical novel made popular by James Fenimore Cooper.

24. The term "self-empowerment" is employed here in a much larger sense than meaning an identification with a better version of oneself. Because of the processes of reduction to easily accessible visual and aural forms and the textual fragmentation of cultural objects into short segments, single images, or musical moods, the individual encounters ever more improved conditions for satisfying imaginary longings, emotional needs, and bodily impulses. A superb illustration is provided by Gerhard Bliersbach in *So Grün War die Heide: Der Deutsche Nachkriegsfilm in neuer Sicht* (Weinheim: Beltz, 1985): "Ich liebte am amerikanischen Kino die Reifungsprozesse im Zeitraffer-Tempo mit glücklichem Ausgang; es hatte die Geschwindigkeit meiner Tagträume. Wie kein anderes Kino hat Hollywood die Strapazen der Reifung, die Ängste und Konflikte, die Phantasien und Wünsche auf die Leinwand gebracht" (23). [What I loved about American film was to be able to mature to a fast-paced tempo and a happy-ending; it had the speed of my daydreams. Like no other cinema, Hollywood captured the strains of adolescence—the anxieties and conflicts, the fantasies and desires (trans. Heide Fehrenbach)].

25. Maase, *BRAVO Amerika*, 28; my translation.

26. The habitual criticism of the destruction of native cultural traditions through American culture never considers the possibility that, as a form of cultural self-definition, these traditions may be very limited and may be experienced even as suffocating by the individual, because, in reflecting a strict social hierarchy, they only provide one possible role and source of self-esteem. Usually, the demise of these preindividualistic traditions is bemoaned by those Western individuals on the outside who would like to escape the leveling effects of democracy by having a whole array of cultural choices spread out before their eyes. On this point, see the acute observation by Tomlinson: "The critique of homogenization may turn out to be a peculiarly Western-centered concern if what is argued is that cultures must retain their separate identities simply to make the world a more diverse and interesting place." *Cultural Imperialism*, 135.

27. The crucial role youth has played in the worldwide reception of American popular culture is emphasized by David Ellwood in "Anti-Americanism in Western Europe: A Comparative Perspective," in *Occasional Paper No. 3. European Studies Seminar Series* (Bologna: Johns Hopkins University Bologna Center, 1999), 25–33. Ellwood provides a quote by Alexander Cockburn that gives a nutshell summary of the attraction that the informality of American popular culture had in an English context: "American culture was liberating, whether in the form

of blues, jazz, rock or prose. Here was escape from airless provincialism, BBC good taste and the mandates of the class system" (28). See also Volker Berghahn in his introduction to the German Historical Institute conference "The American Impact on Western Europe": "On the German side the 'Americanizers,' it seems, were very much young people who responded positively, indeed enthusiastically, to what arrived from across the Atlantic. The resistance to these imports came from an older generation who rejected rock and jazz, James Dean and Coca-Cola as products of an *Unkultur*." "Conceptualizing the American Impact on Germany: West German Society and the Problem of Americanization," 7.

28. For brilliant analyses of cultural modernity as a culture of restless individualism, driven by a promise of self-development, see Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernism* (London: Verso, 1983), and Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism*, chap. 5.

29. A study of the influence of American culture in the 1960s is provided by Gerd Gemünden, *Framed Visions: Popular Culture, Americanization, and the Contemporary German and Austrian Imagination* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), but Gemünden focuses on responses to American culture in German-speaking literature and film, that is, on cultural production and not on consumption.

30. The other often discussed period is the 1920s, but, as Nolan points out in her essay "America in the German Imagination," Americanization, although a matter of concern, was not yet a social reality: "But the American model of modernity—prosperous, functional, materialistic, and bereft of tradition, domestic comfort, and *Kultur*—did not become the German reality in the 1920s. Americanization was contained both by Germans' poverty and limited consumption and by German capital's reluctance to embark on a full Fordist restructuring of the economy. . . . After 1945 . . . Germans no longer invented America from afar or on the basis of limited firsthand experience; America came to Germany." In *Transactions, Transgressions, Transformations*, ed. Fehrenbach and Poiger, 17–18. In contrast to earlier periods, anti-Americanism "coexisted with a pervasive Americanization of German life" (21). As Gemünden puts it: "What is new here is that an entire generation—roughly those born after 1938— was brought up with American popular culture from its members' earliest childhood on." *Framed Visions*, 23.

31. <<http://www.ghi-dc.org/conpotweb/westernpapers/index.html>>.

32. Kaspar Maase, "'Americanization', 'Americanness', and 'Americanisms': Time for a Change in Perspective?"

33. Volker Berghahn, "Conceptualizing the American Impact on Germany: West German Society and the Problem of Americanization."

34. Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, "Transatlantic Exchange and Interaction—The Concept of Westernization."

35. Mary Nolan, "Americanization or Westernization?": "As many historians and political theorists have argued, liberal values were raced and gendered, and liberal universalism and tolerance masked the exclusion of women, non-Whites and colonial subjects from full participation in projects of democratization, modernization, and Westernization" (8). What is introduced as anti-elitist culture is, it seems, an excuse for the perpetuation of a sexist and racist culture.

36. For the crucial role of invasion metaphors in discussions of Americanization, see my essay "*Close Encounters of the Third Kind: American Popular Culture and European Intellectuals.*" *Annals of Scholarship* 12 (1998): 235–51.

37. "Cultures are 'condemned' to modernity not simply by the 'structural' process of economic development, but by the human process of self-development." Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism*, 141.

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