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Sabrina P. Ramet, Gordana P. Crnkovic, eds. *Kazaaam! Splat! Ploof! The American Impact on European Popular Culture since 1945.* Lanham and New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003. viii + 264 pp. $89.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7425-0000-6; $36.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7425-0001-3.

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The Fear and Love of American Culture: The Sequel

Much of the discourse surrounding the travels of "American" objects and ideas around the world has been and still is conditioned by a conceptual framework that is itself the result of the Cold War. One of the main problems with this framework is geographical: too often intellectuals have (implicitly or explicitly) connected cultural products in a direct and unambiguous way with spatial locations. Although this interpretation has surely undergone dramatic changes since 1989–one need only to observe the enormous increase in articles and books that deal with "transnationalism," "hybridity," and "the global in the local"–it is striking that many of the original premises, which have structured the discourse of Americanization from its beginning, remain largely intact. This is not in itself a negative (non-)development, but it does mean that the discourse of Americanization forces upon the objects it studies a certain order that needs to be explicated.

Unfortunately, this problematic is only made clear by a small number of the contributions to this edited book. The most positive example is the afterword by Uta G. Poiger. Well-known among scholars for her work on American culture and questions of gender in post-1945 Germany, in less than ten pages she briefly summarizes the important themes as discussed in the preceding chapters.[1] More importantly, however, she points to a number of issues that deserve more attention if the research on Americanization is to be of academic and analytical use in the near future. In doing so, her afterword can be read as a critique of some of the premises adopted by other authors in the same book. Let me therefore read the book backwards, as it were, and start with a discussion of this critique before "returning" to the preceding chapters.

As I see it, two aspects are of particular importance. First, Poiger makes very clear that culture should always "be understood as a productive force, as an always present yet always changing series of sites in the formation of international relations.... culture needs to be seen as a constitutive element in the formation of identities and in the shaping of interactions between foreign countries; cultural products transform relations of power within as well as between nations. What constitutes culture is constantly negotiated, and these nego-

tiations, which happen often in the context of uneven power relations, need to be traced" (p. 237). Of course, the discourse of Americanization has always given attention to uneven power relations between nations–usually discussed under the heading of American imperialism–but it has tended to gloss over the fact that people are not only connected with "American culture," but are also and always actors in a range of networks taking place on a number of intertwined scales (local, regional, national, global). Usually, these networks are highly structured and hierarchical themselves. In such a situation, the embrace of "American culture" could very well be an attempt to find a way out of the constraining and oppressive networks "at home." In a sense, both the advocates and critics of American culture are therefore right: it seems likely that American culture often does undermine the power of states and their elites to act (the same argument is nowadays being repeated under the heading of globalization), but it also offers possibilities of change for those formerly excluded from the official decision-making mechanisms.[2]

The second point follows from the first and remains more or less implicit in Poiger's argument but is nevertheless of central importance to historians. If one accepts that culture is produced, then history is the first victim. It is insufficient and problematic to discuss Americanization as the arrival of American products and ideas on a previously "clean" territory and culture with a distinct history, since this national history is itself produced by specific actors in a specific time and place. This is not to say that a national tradition is non-existent, but rather to point out that not all actors are necessarily interested in perpetuating or even remembering this tradition. Therefore, it might be more useful to interpret history upside down: history is made in the present, and it is in the present that the lines are drawn, both in time as well as in space.[3]

Having clarified the conceptual difficulties in thinking and writing about the "American Impact on European Popular Culture since 1945," it is now possible to discuss the separate chapters. The book consists of fifteen chapters and an afterword. Three chapters, however, were originally published in the *Journal of Popular Culture*: Laura E. Cooper and B. Lee Cooper's article on "Popular Music Interchanges between the United States and Britain" in 1993; Beverly James's article on "Hungarian Assessments of American Popular Culture" in 1995; and Sabrina P. Ramet's article on "UFOs over Russia and Eastern Europe" in 1998. Ramet's well-known article on rock music in Yugoslavia, which was originally published in 1988, is also included. Both her articles appear here in a revised and updated form.

Instead of discussing each chapter separately, I want to focus on a number of overarching themes. Since it is always easier to point to the deficiencies of academic work, let us start with these. As I see it, much of the Americanization discourse is based on a fear of loss: the fear of losing the well-known and well-ordered. Marianne Debouzy–in her article on the French debate about EuroDisney–clearly represents this position. After a factual and relatively impassionate description of the negotiations between the French government and the Disney Company, the surrounding intellectual debate and the conflicts between Disney and its workers, in her conclusion she suddenly turns sentimental. She acknowledges that "we should resist any simplistic vision of Americanization" (p. 31) and is clearly aware of the attraction American culture holds for young people, which has led to a situation where "the attitude of French intellectuals toward American mass culture is quite out of step with that of young people" (p. 32). Despite this caution, however, she concludes by writing that precisely this culture "tends to weaken, homogenize, and even eradicate original cultures, impoverishing the cultural heritage of nations" (p. 33). Most of the clichÃ©s of Americanization return here in one sentence.

It is even more problematic, however, that this interpretation is highly elitist, nationalist and exclusionary. The assumption of an original culture and, above all, the connection of this original culture to the heritage of a nation leaves no space whatsoever for those groups and individuals that have always been integrated into this nation in highly conflicted and partial ways. The millions of immigrants living in France are only the most obvious example. Although I am always in favor of developing a position of resistance against hegemonic discourses, the solution cannot be to fall back on one national culture as a last harbinger of hope. This is an important point, since this kind of reflexive behavior keeps returning in the writings of many intellectuals (and not just European ones).[4]

Fear of loss can also be seen as a lack of stable coordinates–a lack of a definitive sense of place. However, where many intellectuals may have developed an anti-American stance in order to cope with this lack, others might paradoxically embrace American culture in order to develop *their* place. This is addressed by a number of authors in the book. Rodney Stark provides an interesting discussion of religion, an often-neglected aspect

of Americanization, in his article "American Missionaries to 'Darkest' Europe." He gives an overview of their religious activities and, through his refreshingly direct style of writing, offers us a clue to why people might adopt American culture. For example, asking the question why the Mormons did so well in Britain, he simply answers: "These were very stressful times there. The enclosure movement had driven millions from rural areas to lead lives of desperate poverty and misery in the polluted industrial cities" (p. 114). Although his own discussion is clearly biased toward a celebration of free-market religiosity, his point is well taken when he concludes that "it is a sense of belonging that the American missionaries are trying to bring about in Europe by creating energetic little groups prepared to challenge the lazy socialized Churches" (pp. 121-122). Such a benign view of American culture as creating security and stability for alienated individuals is miles apart from the interpretation that sees the United States as the main motor behind a culture of speed, dynamism and fragmentation.

Sabrina P. Ramet, in her article on "UFOs over Russia and Eastern Europe," offers another perspective on American culture as offering a sense of place. According to Ramet, not only did the sightings of UFOs increase dramatically after 1989, the descriptions of these sightings in local media were increasingly shaped by American cinematic and television culture. As she writes: "the proliferation of the UFO subculture in Central and Eastern Europe is a classic example of the evolution of what was originally an American subculture into a (sometimes commercially driven) global subculture. And in the course of this evolution, reports which deviate from the established cultural norms (such as the reports at Voronezh that the soccer-loving aliens were three to four meters tall with three eyes) are marginalized, while those which reinforce the dominant cultural paradigm are mainstreamed" (p. 212). According to this interpretation, people around the world connect with a subcultural paradigm that originated in the United States. This is certainly true and it makes once again very clear how the global is intricately connected with the local: "place," in this sense, can no longer be located in simple geographical terms, but instead informs the contents of global techno-social networks that are in need of continuous affirmation. At the same time, in such a situation, it is by no means clear that "American culture" is still produced in the United States by American citizens.[5]

This brings us back to the question of American influence. What is American influence? The articles in the book deal with a wide variety of topics, ranging from literature to music, film, brand names, UFOs and picture books. Two contributions even discuss the situation of European artists in the United States: Gordana P. Crnkovic's article on the Yugoslavian writer Dubravka Ugre?ic; and Beth Holmgren's article on Russian writers of American children's books. After reading all this, one is left with the feeling that everything is American nowadays. Or, formulated differently: everything can be interpreted through the lens of American influence. Take, for example, the article "Shake, Rattle and Self-Management: Rock Music and Politics in Socialist Yugoslavia, and After" by Sabrina P. Ramet. The original version of this article was published in 1988 in a book on East European politics and societies, and a second version was published in 1994 in a book on rock music and politics in Eastern Europe and Russia. The article itself discusses the influences on Yugoslavian rock music (the Beatles, the Stones, the Kinks, U2, Bruce Springsteen and so on), but is above all a descriptive account of the dealings of Yugoslavian rock bands with the state. Although a very interesting article, is it useful to discuss these negotiations as part of Americanization? It seems to me that in this case the question of "America" for these bands and their audience is hardly relevant; they used their music to address a completely different range of issues–the nationalist rhetoric of Milo?evic, for example.

Two points are of central importance here. The first is that every analysis (of Americanization) needs to distinguish between the production and reception of cultural products. Besides Uta G. Poiger in her article on "American Popular Culture in a Divided Germany," this is most explicitly addressed by Herbert J. Eagle. In his article, he discusses the "Appropriation of the American Gangster Film" through an analysis of two films: the Polish *Dogs* (1992) and the Russian *Brother* (1997). He very clearly shows how the filmic vocabulary of classic Hollywood gangster films has been used to address and reflect on specific problems in Poland and Russia in ways that are not necessarily congruent with those intended by the original producers of this vocabulary. As Eagle puts it very well: "In the final analysis, there is usually considerable disagreement as to the 'essential' meaning of popular genres. They typically contain contradictory and paradoxical elements. In this sense, they are not like messages but are more like specialized languages, well adapted for the examination of particular subjects. In the gangster genre that subject is capitalism and patriarchy" (p. 129).

A second point is that the identification of certain commodities as "part of American culture" is itself a rela-

tional process. It depends on the situation you are in, the people you are with and the audience you address. To give an example: I can very well drink Coca-Cola without interpreting the drink as symbolizing "Mythic America" or believing the commercial rhetoric of Coca-Cola as defenders of a peaceful world, as Steinar Bryn seems to believe in his article on "The Coca-Cola Co. and the Olympic Movement." It might very well be possible, however, that in another context the drink does directly refer to the United States, but this can have a positive as well as a negative connotation. The current commercial success of the French-based Mekka Cola, for example, is certainly also the result of its strategic use of an anti-American rhetoric. Seen from this perspective, it does not make much sense to directly link words like "America," "American influence" and "American imperialism" to the geographical entity of the United States. Instead, it might be more useful to interpret them as semiotic elements of signification, which are part of larger relational networks and are put to use in these networks in order to stabilize or to effect change.

Notes

[1]. See in particular her book *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

[2]. For theoretical inspiration, historians might want to look at research that deals with developments outside of Europe. Arjun Appadurai has most famously theorized this problematic as a "new role for the imagination" in day-to-day life. See his *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). The work of Rob Nixon, to take only one more specific example, has described this dialectic of liberation and constraint in the context of South Africa. See his *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

[3]. Postcolonial theory might be of particular relevance in this context. The concept of Third Space, as developed by Homi Bhabha, might be able to grasp "Americanization" in a more sophisticated and complex way. See his *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994). For a recent work that tries to think through postcolonial theory in the context of Germany, see Hito Steyerl and EncarnaciÃ³n GutiÃ©rrez RodrÃguez, *Spricht die Subalterne deutsch? Migration und postkoloniale Kritik* (MÃ¼nster: Unrast, 2003).

[4]. In this book, the article on "The Impact of the American Myth in Postwar Italian Literature" by Giulia Guarnieri provides another example. Although she offers a relatively balanced discussion of the ways two Italian writers–Umberto Eco and Italo Calvino–deal with the American Myth in their own work, she tends to fall back on a view that sees the nation as the ground from which to interpret everything else. When writing about popular art, for example, she notes: "Popular art can be perceived as a representation of reality which could be historical, social, sexual, ecological, idealistic, political, economical, and so on. Popular art is the icon of a nation's truth and it is the metaphor of a country's sense of its essence" (p. 106).

[5]. The article by Beth Holmgren on "ÃmigrÃ©-zation: Russian Artists and American Children's Picture Books" offers one example: here American culture is produced by Russian artists living on the territory of the United States and selling their work to American companies.

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