

Cultural Industries and Cultural Politics: Britain 1750–2000

Veranstalter: Arbeitskreis Deutsche England-Forschung (ADEF), Christiane Eisenberg (Berlin) and Andreas Gestrich (London)

Datum, Ort: 02.05.2008–04.05.2008, Mülheim/Ruhr

Bericht von: Stephan Schwanke, Humboldt Universität

This year's conference of the Arbeitskreis Deutsche England-Forschung (ADEF), organised by Christiane Eisenberg (Berlin) and Andreas Gestrich (London), was held at the „Wolfsburg“ in Mülheim/Ruhr on 2–4 May 2008. The first of a series of two, with a follow-up conference planned for November 2009 in London, the conference focused on the tension between „cultural industries“ and „cultural politics“ in Britain from about 1750 onwards. In Britain, the „cultural industries“ worked in close co-operation with the press and the advertising and consumer-goods industries, while alternative suppliers such as the Court, the Church, the nobility and urban authorities, the potential organisers of public cultural policies, had only an indirect influence.

The conference focused especially on the fields of music and sport as examples. As Christiane Eisenberg pointed out in her introduction, this approach to the complex and somewhat unusual topic was a result of the difficulties of dealing with „culture as such“, since the meaning of the term „culture“ varies between European countries, with the differences between „culture“/„cultural industries“ and the German terms „Kultur“/„Kulturindustrie“ being an obvious example. The first conference was therefore mostly concerned with the situation in Britain and tried to identify problem complexes, periodisations, and actors' opportunities for action by looking at specific examples. The resulting issues of broader comparisons and theoretical approaches were deliberately ignored for the time being, especially since the state of research outside Britain would have made it difficult for all speakers to make comparisons.

The conference was opened by the doyen of

the modern history of sports, WRAY VAMPLEW, whose keynote lecture on „Economic Approaches to Sport and Cultural History“ provided a general overview of the way in which economic theories and methods can be applied to sport and cultural history, and the role of economics for sport as a cultural product. Vamplew touched on some of the particular characteristics of culture that an economic description of sport needs to consider, and focused on the economic aspects of sport as a cultural product. Using Allen Guttman's and Stefan Szymanski's theories on modernisation and associativity respectively further to illuminate the relationship between cultural and economic aspects in sport, Vamplew stressed that while it is possible to explain sport as such in entirely economic terms, the main goal should be to treat culture as a joint output of economic and cultural factors and to emphasize interconnectivity, a notion that was also repeatedly confirmed by subsequent presentations.

The first panel of the conference, „Eighteenth Century: The Rise of Commercial Culture“, consisted of two presentations: RUTI UNGAR's „The Commercialisation of Honour: Boxing in Eighteenth-Century England“ and TIMOTHY BLANNING's „The Business of Music and the Status of the Musician in Eighteenth-Century Britain“. The two presentations complemented each other extremely well and provided a detailed picture of the overall development of the „cultural industries“ during this period.

Timothy Blanning, although careful to point out that the term „cultural industry“ might not be wholly appropriate and cautioning against a straightforward „Whig History“ interpretation, described eighteenth-century London as a city that had undergone a massive expansion both financially and in terms of population growth. This had led to a steadily increasing demand for entertainment and a laissez-faire attitude in and towards the commercial sector. At the same time, the city was still characterised by the traditional political and social structures. As Blanning made clear, London was essentially a city of two halves: a „Residenzstadt“ and a rapidly developing merchant centre, linked by money, but otherwise separated by a clear East/West divide.

Against this background, Blanning outlined the development of the music industry as an industry undergoing increasing commercialisation, benefiting in turn various parts of the existing cultural industries (publishers, journalists, instrument manufacturers, pleasure gardens, etc.) and leading to an increase in interdependence and interconnection between them. Commercialism also functioned as the primary driving force in the upper market, where the target audience consisted entirely of the nobility and gentry, who were the potential organisers of public cultural policies, but preferred private concerts themselves and saw no need for wider-reaching initiatives. Using Georg Friedrich Handel as an example, Blanning subsequently examined the impact of these features on the art of music and the artist. Pointing out that while the commercialisation of culture offered many benefits to the artist, enabled musical expansion and also influenced the art itself (for example, the available orchestras and the taste of the audience both influenced the compositional process), Blanning also cautioned that a purely or mostly economic perspective would nevertheless offer an unduly simplified explanation and ignore several aspects such as the importance of political events, religion, or the political structure as responsible for the lack of infrastructure.

Ruti Ungar's examination of the sport of boxing in the eighteenth century likewise managed to detail the success of a particular cultural industry and delineated several parallels with developments in the sphere of music described by Timothy Blanning. Boxing had been a popular activity in England since the beginning of the seventeenth century, but became even more popular and very fashionable in the second half of the eighteenth. Although the sport existed in a legal grey area, it nevertheless managed to transcend class barriers and appealed to a wide section of the population, which in turn helped to further commercialise the events and prevent the authorities from taking action against the organisers. This allowed for a development very similar to that in the music industry in terms of the level of interaction with the cultural industries (publishers, publicans, fight organisers, betting, the selling of assorted mer-

chandise such as mugs or porcelain figurines, etc.) and the opportunities afforded to the boxers to turn their success as sportsmen into commercial success.

Using the Jewish boxer Daniel Mendoza as an example, Ungar's overview of the commercial possibilities boxing held for successful stars of the sport invited comparisons with Handel's success as described by Blanning, and touched upon some of the limitations inherent in boxing as a chance for social betterment. Most boxers came from a working-class background and usually did not earn enough money to turn their sporting success into a subsequent career; some even died at a relatively young age because of the health risks inherent to the sport. Even the chances boxing offered to minority groups were something of a mixed blessing, since the inclusion of Jewish or black boxers only made the fights more interesting by emphasizing the differences between individual boxers and appealing to nationalistic, religious, or racial sentiments among the audience. Cultural factors also played an important part in the development of the sport, with central values such as honour, courage, and fair play being either retained or derived from the long-established cultures of boxing and street fighting. However, this did not impose limits on the commercialisation process, but actually worked in its favour and was used as an additional selling point by various agents.

Moving on to the nineteenth century, PETER BAILEY opened the second panel on „The Operation of Business in a Modern Class Society“ with his presentation on the „British Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure Revisited“. Focusing on vaudeville and the „popular end of legitimate theatre“, Bailey described the history of the British music halls as comparable to the overall development of British capitalism and increasing industrialisation. Compared to the eighteenth century, music halls and theatres existed in a far more commercial climate in which several of the previously identified trends and characteristics had undergone a commercial widening and deepening. This in turn encouraged further growth and added another layer of complexity to the relationships both within the cultural industries and between the cultural

industries and cultural politics.

According to Bailey the result was a general movement towards more „business-like“ concepts, strategies and structures, which foreshadowed many of the features of the music-hall business in the twentieth century. „Fun“ was the central keyword underlying these developments, and the need to provide the most and best fun affected both the final product and its production. On the production side, the efforts of music hall proprietors led to an increased professionalism and embrace of new opportunities, ranging from technology (film, electric lights) and finance (foreign capital, mostly from the US) to the actual production process itself. This increasingly relied on organised and specialised labour, although some of the traditional ties and values, such as feelings of clannishness or family ties still remained. „Fun maximisation“ also gave rise to the idea of „entertainment packages“, which were offered in association with other parts of the leisure industries, such as restaurants or hotels. This steady increase in interconnection between the various industries also extended to the actual product and established a link with the sphere of sport: the broadcasting of sports results during shows or the appearance of „streaking“ revue girls during soccer matches were used as welcome „fun enhancers“.

In the twentieth century the music halls and theatres continued to be an overall success story and the entertainment sector became an accepted and recognised part of the economy. But as Bailey showed in his paper, the relationship with the state remained ambivalent. A general movement towards free trade and commercialised forms of leisure still prevailed. However, a *laissez-faire* climate clearly no longer existed and regulations and licensing were often a hindrance, although the overall relationship was too complex to describe it as overwhelmingly positive or negative.

KLAUS NATHAUS gave the second paper covering the period from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. He was the only speaker who dared to present an international comparative perspective in his analysis of „Sport Clubs in a Commercial Society – with a Comparative View of the German Case“. Nathaus argued that the commonly held

perceptions of commercialisation as a negative factor and voluntary associations as a positive factor for the overall development of sport are not necessarily accurate, and he referred to the cases of Germany and Britain as examples.

Starting with the British case, Nathaus described eighteenth-century British sport as a highly commercialised activity, including its organisation. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the middle classes started to object to this commercialised nature with all its undesirable side effects and tried to turn sport into a form of „rational recreation“ contributing to health, moral improvement, and better social relations. This amounted essentially to an effort to teach and control the working classes, but ultimately failed because of increasing commercialisation and demand for commercial leisure. Sport not only had to compete with other forms of entertainment that were often more attractive than the offerings of the voluntary sports associations, but also became increasingly interesting as a potential marketing and advertising tool for gaining access to the mass market. While this frustrated the efforts of middle-class reformers, it also helped to facilitate the self-organisation of people who treated sport as an end in itself and thus diminished the negative experience of social control and exclusion.

In Germany, similar attempts to use sport as an instrument of social control were far more successful because of the tight regulation of the commercial entertainment sector and an already more restrictive social and political climate. Working-class associations could be blocked or banned and the lack of alternative sources of funding meant that clubs had to depend on the goodwill of individual patrons. This development further strengthened the influence of the elites and carried over into the associations which, rather than restricting themselves to the task of organising and controlling the games, also functioned as political bodies and managed to absorb all influences from the market. Voluntary associations therefore served primarily as instruments of social control and were not entirely voluntary to begin with, as no alternative options were available for people who wanted to engage in sport as an end in itself.

Corresponding to the other panels, the third one on the „Twentieth Century: Modernisation and Expansion of Business“ was intended to have two speakers. But DAVE LAINING was unable to attend the conference and his presentation on „The American (Dis-)connection: British Popular Music after 1950“ had to be cancelled. This left DILWYN PORTER as the sole speaker. Discussing the relationship between „Sport, Business and the Media in Twentieth-Century Britain“, he started by examining the long-standing links between sport and business, but focused for the most part on the role of the media. He distinguished between two forms, newspapers and television, which has arguably had a far larger impact over recent decades. Television broadcasting has not only changed the perception of the established forms of sport, but has also led to the development of new forms of „media sport“, where the media itself is responsible for changes in the form. This transformation started in the 1960s, when sport underwent an institutional reform and the previously still valued amateur ideals were discarded as outdated values. Underlying this transformation were two factors: increased sponsorship through business and rapidly developing „media sport“. Both were supported by the general growth in sports consumerism and facilitated by increasingly critical and „anti-establishment“ views within society that also pushed for institutional reform. Subsequently, the commercial climate changed and the role of the media became progressively more important, eventually also increasing the level of interdependence and interconnectedness between the sectors of sport, media, and business.

As Porter made clear, sponsorship became one of the most important sources of revenue, which in turn also affected the nature of the sporting organisations. Since media coverage played an important role in determining the chances and amount of sponsorship and also influenced the overall popularity of individual sports and sport in general, this led to a further loss of autonomy, resulting in a transformation of sport as a product and an expansion of its links to other parts of the cultural industries. Although sometimes positive, for example, in the case of sporting ve-

nues being used for concerts or in the trend towards „package offers“ that integrate sport with other services, this development also poses a risk for the future success of sport as an entertainment product, according to Porter, since competition from other forms of entertainment now also extends to representation in the media. However, he also pointed out that some special cases still exist in which the cultural or national importance of sport can serve as a „protector“ against market forces, as in the case of cricket. A „sense of bereavement“ and some resistance can also be detected among the population. It might also be necessary to draw a distinction between the situation in England and that in other parts of Britain.

The final presentation of the conference was FRANZ BRÜGGEMEIER's examination of „The Creative Industries Concept and Cultural Politics in Contemporary Britain – (from) a Historian's Perspective“. He provided an analysis of how from the mid-1990s onwards the idea of „cultural industries“ was linked to „cool Britannia“ and the early years of the Blair government. Essentially an economic concept and referring to a cluster of interlocking industry sectors, the political concept of „creative industries“ was in this context driven primarily by the idea of making culture more „productive“. Brüggemeier used the definition of the concept given by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in his presentation, which recognises a total of eleven industrial sectors as part of the „creative industries“ and defines the term as „those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property“. Although Brüggemeier admitted that this definition is not without its problems, he also pointed out that some statistical data supports the „creative industries“ model. „Creative industries“ have experienced steady growth over the last thirty years, account for roughly 5 to 7 per cent of the UK's GDP and employ roughly the same percentage of the total workforce (and up to 30 per cent if a wider definition such as „creative class“ is used).

According to Brüggemeier the idea of crea-

tivity also possesses a social and cultural dimension. Since creative and innovative people are an essential resource for businesses, companies might be willing to follow potential employees instead of the more established model of mobility that requires the workforce to follow potential employers. The state can thus steer economic development by attracting the „creative class“ to selected regions, which usually entails the creation of a tolerant, open and multicultural climate. This climate is in turn fostered by the arrival of the „creative class“ and the growth process eventually gains a dynamic of its own, making further political involvement unnecessary. Brüggemeier noted that it might be tempting to regard this as the logical reaction to the experience of commercialisation and cultural politics in the past and, ultimately, a merging of cultural industries and cultural politics. However, the fairly recent introduction of the concept and the still ongoing and rather controversial discussions surrounding some of the central ideas and definitions make any kind of accurate assessment impossible. A definite evaluation would clearly be premature.

The „Concluding Remarks“ of the conference were provided by ANDREAS GESTRICH. He noted that clear parallels in the development of the cultural industries in the spheres of music and sport had been successfully established throughout the periods covered by the conference and appreciated that the identification of these periods contributed to a general overview. On the other hand, Gestrich regretted that the differences between the two examples of sport and music had not been carved out systematically because the wide scope of the conference often did not allow for more intensive examination. However, according to Gestrich, one of the key factors of the cultural industries history that could be identified during the conference was the crucial importance of the media as an intersecting agent between the various sectors of the cultural industries. Cultural politics on the other hand fell somewhat short and for the most part featured only as an interference in the market, which led to a comparatively strong focus on the economic sphere. With respect to the multidimensional nature of the „cultural industries“ model Gestrich asked whether

this was a somewhat deceptive result or an accurate reflection of the specifically British features of the topic. One main task of the 2009 follow-up conference, therefore, is further to explore the cultural industries in Britain and to expose the findings to international comparisons.

Conference overview:

Friday, May 2, 2008

Christiane Eisenberg (Berlin): Welcome and introduction: „The Cultural Industries: Structure and Aims of the Conference“

Wray Vamplew (Stirling): Keynote lecture on „Economic approaches to Sport and Cultural History“.

Saturday, May 3, 2008

First panel: „18th Century: The Rise of Commercial Culture“ (Chair: Andreas Gestrich, London)

Timothy Blanning (Cambridge): „The Business of Music and the Status of the Musician in 18th-Century Britain“

Ruti Ungar (Berlin/London): „The Commercialisation of Honour: Boxing in 18th-Century England“.

Second panel: „19th Century: Operation of Business in a Modern Class Society“ (Chair: Andreas Fahrmeir, Frankfurt/M.)

Peter Bailey (Indianapolis): „British Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure Revisited“

Klaus Nathaus (Berlin): „Sport Clubs in a Commercial Society – with a Comparative View of the German Case“.

Third panel: „20th Century: Modernisation and Expansion of Business“ (Chair: Christiane Eisenberg, Berlin)

Dave Laing (London): „The American (Dis-) Connection: British Popular Music after 1950“ (cancelled)

Dilwyn Porter (Leicester): „Sport, Business and the Media in 20th-Century Britain“.

Fourth panel: „Early 21st Century: The Cultural Industries as a Political Issue“ (Chair: André Kaiser, Cologne)

Franz Brüggemeier (Freiburg): „The Creative Industries Concept and Cultural Politics in Contemporary Britain – a Historian’s perspective“.

Tagungsbericht *Cultural Industries and
Cultural Politics: Britain 1750–2000.*
02.05.2008–04.05.2008, Mülheim/Ruhr,
in: H-Soz-Kult 27.06.2008.