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Historicising the Popular: A Survey

'Historicising the Popular' – the title of our panel on this year's *Anglistentag* seems innocuous, but in fact, as I was reminded once more only after I had accepted the flattering invitation to present this keynote lecture, it contains not only one challenge but two. First, and fairly obviously: when you set out to historicise something, you should know what it is that you intend to historicise. This is, in our case, not as straightforward as it seems. To this day, for example, the *Oxford English Dictionary* has no entry on 'popular' as a noun in the sense that the title of our panel seems to be taking for granted. What you find instead are only three obsolete, rare and archaic meanings and one accepted meaning which is definitely not what we have in mind:

1. A member of the public; one of the common people. Usu. in pl. Obs.

2. With the or another determiner. Ordinary people as a class; the populace. Now rare and arch.

3. Short for 'popular concert'. […] Now rare.

4. Short for 'popular newspaper' […]. Usu. in pl.

This suggests that the usage of 'popular' as a noun in our title is in fact an academic usage derived from what is, in real life, an adjective, and that behind this there is what the *OED* lists under 'Special Uses 2', i.e. the compound 'popular culture', designating "the cultural traditions of the ordinary people of a particular community". The term 'popular culture', however, emerged only in the second half of the 19th century, and one would have to look to earlier usages of the adjective 'popular' in order to uncover its full connotational range.

Generally speaking, the adjective 'popular' carries connotations of something being "current among the general public; generally accepted, commonly known" (1; 1425, 1589) as well as of something "relating to, deriving from, or consisting of ordinary people or the people as a whole; generated by the general public" (3a; 1533). More specifically, as early as 1573 the designation 'popular' marked "cultural activities or products […] [i]ntended for or suited to the understanding or taste of ordinary people, esp. as opposed to specialists in a field", and, with particular reference to literature, a kind of writing "intended for and directed at a general readership" (4a). By the early 17th century, this evolved into the more general meaning of 'popular' with reference to something "[l]iked or admired by many people" (7a; 1608), and as of 1730, 'popular' was used to identify "forms of art, music, or culture with general appeal [and] intended primarily to entertain, please or amuse" (7b). On a more materialistic note, the early 19th century then saw the addition of something 'popular' as being "[a]dapted to the means of ordinary people; low or moderate in price" (4b; 1830). All these understandings of 'popular' contribute to later 'popular culture' packages, and this glance at the history of the term 'popular' both as an adjective and as a noun suggests that the object

of our historicising intentions consists of a range of attitudes, practices and artefacts (or "cultural activities and products", as the *OED* has it) pertaining to or originating from the general public, the people as a whole, or merely ordinary people. Quantitatively it clearly has a bias towards the many, while qualitatively it is marked by unspecified characteristics which facilitate accessibility, pleasure, and amusement, or, in short: entertainment. Historically, the documentation provided by the *OED* suggests an overall shift towards the 'ordinary', while the ambiguity between the purely quantitative 'many' on the one hand and the qualitative specification of 'ordinary' in terms of social class, intellectual prowess etc. on the other is never fully resolved.

And this is in fact one of the core problems in a project of 'Historicising the Popular': Any history of popular culture will heavily depend on the attitudes and conceptualisations underpinning the identification of 'popular' segments in the realm of culture at large, and this identification will inevitably establish oppositions between the 'popular' and something else – and these oppositions are first and foremost in the eye of the beholder. It seems necessary, therefore, to carefully distinguish between popular culture 'as it happened and happens' on the one hand and the discourse on popular culture on the other (cf. Shiach 1989). And while it seems safe to assume that there have always been cultural practices shared by the many, the people or even some more specified groups of 'ordinary' people as opposed to socially and/or functionally distinguished and privileged groups, the beginnings of a discursive engagement with 'popular culture' as a special realm can be clearly placed in the 18th century. It is, thus, a specifically modern phenomenon and will have to be addressed on these grounds.

This, at last, brings me to the second challenge: While there has been, since the 1960s, an undeniably rich and diversified engagement with popular culture in academia, and popular culture has become a fully legitimate core ingredient in all cultural studies syllabi in the process, attempts at systematic theorising are far and in between, particularly with regard to long-term historical perspectives and macro-structures of culture and society. With the notable exception of Raymond Williams, much of the work in the field has been focused on contemporary concerns while neglecting the diachronic dimension, and given the immense challenge of contextualising popular culture practices and artefacts this is, to a point, understandable. Sometimes it seems, however, that a bit more distance could have afforded a broader view, and the remainder of my lecture will try to sketch such vistas. Somewhat contrary to my title, this will be less of a research survey and more of an attempt at providing some systematic contours for our project of 'Historicising the Popular'.

I will begin by having a look at the, to my knowledge, most sustained and far-reaching attempt at presenting a history of popular culture 'as it happened', Norman F. Cantor's and Michael S. Werthman's pre-cultural studies anthology of writings on popular culture by historians, sociologists and literary critics. This huge volume announces its aim unequivocally in its title: it purports to present no less than *The History of Popular Culture* from antiquity to the present of the year 1968 (and an interesting present it was in terms of popular culture!). I will then proceed to have a look at the other side of the coin, i.e. popular culture as it was 'discoursed' about from the 18th century onwards. My focus here will be on John Storey's provocative 2003 book entitled *Inventing*

Popular Culture, in which he claims that "popular culture is a category invented by intellectuals" and that while "[p]opular culture may be found in earlier historical periods, [...] the *concept* only emerges in the late 18th century in intellectual accounts of 'folk' culture" (xi, my emphasis). In combining these two dimensions, my lecture will try to establish a systematic framework for addressing popular culture as a modern phenomenon in its distinct 'modernness'. This framework and the brief case study of folk/rock guitarist Richard Thompson's interesting *1000 Years of Popular Music* project at the end can then serve as points of reference for discussion in the panel on 'Historicising the Popular', in which all contributions are clearly concerned with modern or even 'post-modern' varieties of popular culture.

1. The History of Popular Culture

So what was the case? What went on in terms of popular culture, historically speaking? Cantor's and Werthman's volume, while necessarily somewhat heterogeneous, is nevertheless held together by a coherent vision of what it addresses, outlined in a succinct introduction by the editors and historically fleshed out in opening statements to each of the seven historical sections which follow ("The Classical World, to A.D. 450", "The Medieval World, 450 to 1350", "The Early Modern Era, 1350 to 1700", "Enlightenment and Revolution, 1700 to 1815", "The Forming of an Industrial Society, 1815 to 1914", "The Modern World, 1914 to 1955", and finally, "The Contemporary World, 1955 to the Present [1968]"). Loosely defining culture as "all [man] knows, all he possesses, and all he does" including "laws and religious beliefs, [...] art and morals, [...] customs and ideas", Cantor and Werthman acknowledge the historical mutability of the "dimensions and forms these various elements take [in determining] the nature and quality of a culture" as well as the differentiation of "every culture [...] into various subcultures" (xxxv). However, they see the "fundamental distinction between work and play: between what is done of necessity and what is done by choice" as "cutting across [these] cultural and subcultural boundaries" (ibid.) and come up with the following working definition of popular culture:

> Popular culture may be seen as all those things man does and all those artefacts he creates for their own sake, all that diverts his mind and body from the sad business of life. Popular culture is really what people do when they are not working; it is man in pursuit of pleasure, excitement, beauty and fulfilment. (xxxvi)

While it is clear that one would phrase this slightly differently these days, and while it is also clear that the clear divide between a working life and a private life might be an anachronistic modern projection, Cantor and Werthman are clearly on to something with regard to the history of the term popular sketched out earlier: Pursuits of popular culture seem to be somewhat removed from more immediate necessities of survival and social strictures, but nevertheless, in their pervasiveness, they can claim larger cultural significance or even centrality. While there is, according to Cantor and Werthman and *pace* Gramsci, "[n]o general rule indicating that culture moves from the rich and powerful classes downward", and even "the tastes and standards of the very lowest elements of society can find their way eventually into the customs and manners of the very highest status groups" (xxxvi-xxxvii), a quantitative *and* qualitative argument for

the increasing significance of the popular in modern culture emerges: Quantitatively, "[i]t is obvious [...] that as technology has increased the potential of communication, the expansion and enrichment of popular culture has been facilitated":

> This means that in the modern era the forms of popular culture have multiplied enormously, and at the same time the possibility for people of divergent backgrounds to share the same cultural experience has become a reality. (xxxvii)

Qualitatively, Cantor and Werthman suggest, this technological potential has fully absorbed and even amplified what they present as a kind of anthropological constant of human potentiality. Conceptualising popular culture largely in terms of "the organized, structured, and institutionalized activities of play" in which "man learns and practices social interaction in a manner least threatening to his position and well-being", they suggest an affinity between fundamental human dispositions and modern culture, especially in terms of the divide between the public and the private sphere:

> There is freedom and spontaneity in play not permitted man in his workaday existence. Involvement in and enjoyment of popular culture permit the participant freedom to be himself. [...] The quality of volition therefore informs the whole history of popular culture [which] measures human potentiality [...] by demonstrating what [man] can do when left to his own devices, free to follow the inclinations of his mind and spirit. (xxxvii-xxxviii)

Again, it is highly questionable whether the a- or trans-historical aspiration of this fairly modern understanding of human potentiality is actually applicable to earlier historical eras whose "cultural components" should be, according to the historicising impulse of the volume, in all instances clearly distinguishable from all other eras (cf. xxxvi). However, as opposed to this common denominator, the following differentiating features can be gleaned from the historical sections of the book:

For the classical world, Cantor and Werthman point out that "the limitations in technology and the urgency of the fight for subsistence did not mean [that] life [...] was devoid of popular amusement and private relaxation" (1). However, the distance of such practices from the necessities of survival was not really marked. Instead, all kinds of necessary practices were "carried on with the embellishments of ceremony which made their performance occasions for the diversion of the participants and spectators alike" (ibid.). Medieval popular culture was then dominated by the three "pervasive social realities" of "religion, hierarchy, and combat" after the breakdown of classical civilisation (91). And while "[m]uch of the popular culture of the [early modern] period represents survivals of the medieval era" (187), there were the seeds of the new with regard to the new era's increasing dynamics: "[T]he religious zeal and penchant for violence which had marked the medieval epoch reappears in the early modern era, supported and amplified by improved military technology and made more threatening by the existence of two opposing and highly influential ideologies", i.e. the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation (ibid.). The period is marked by the increasing involvement in public life of social groups beyond the nobility and the clergy due to the improved communication technology of printing. This, in turn, instigated processes of diversification and professionalisation which were, paradoxically and simultaneously, broadening and marginalising popular culture.

From this point onwards, all the dynamics of modernisation, such as social differentiation, individualisation, rationalisation, domestication, acceleration and globalisation begin to increasingly impinge upon the experience and the understanding of popular culture, which to this day seems to be one of the last vestiges of (re-) integration to some while to others it is the most overt symptom of all that is wrong with modernity (on theories of modernisation and the counter-impulses of integration cf. Degele/Dries 2005). Similarly, the era of "Enlightenment and Revolution" is marked by the discrepancy between aspirations at realising "the potentialities of human betterment" as set out in "philosophy, letters and political theory" on the one hand and the wretched living conditions of the many and the popular obsession with "violence, crudity and passion" on the other (291), while the steady rise of literacy provided an opening for an "expansion of the audiences for beauty and excitement" (292), that is to say, for both education and edification *and* potentially mind-numbing spectacle.

Given the premises of Cantor's and Werthman's approach to popular culture, the impact of "the intellectual revolution in human sensibility which replaced Enlightenment attitudes with Romanticism" (293) cannot be overestimated, because it prepares the ground for "the virtual transformation of popular life" that took place between 1815 and 1914 in which "[t]ime, freedom and energy [...] were available for more people in greater portions than ever before" (397) and thus provided new openings for popular culture. As "the desire for fun and amusement [became] an arm of industrialization and specialization itself" popular culture began to emancipate itself from both Enlightenment and Romantic affiliations in the formation of what has come to be known as the "entertainment industry" (398).

Somewhat paradoxically but very much in line with the double-edged character of much of what went before, the 20th century oscillates between success stories of achievement, emancipation, liberation and progress on the one hand and the catastrophes of two world wars and political extremism of the most atrocious kind on the other. In terms of popular culture the 20th century saw the advent of "truly mass, democratized recreation" and the availability of "personal and immediate experience" through the media "for the vast majority of people" (530). The present of 1968 seemed to indicate unprecedented levels of "new affluence and leisure" (669), while television brought "diversion and culture into every home" (ibid.). After World War Two, Cantor and Werthman point out, the realm of popular culture was subject to an outright multidimensional revolution in the fields of communication, living standard, leisure, sexuality and education (cf. 670). And while they have their eyes firmly set on the "'turned-on' way of life" of the late 1960s – they claim that "[i]n the Western world, many people have acquired an almost uncontrollable desire for total experience" (ibid.) – it would seem that after the "widespread use of hallucinogenic drugs" which concludes Cantor's and Werthman's volume as the latest "important element of popular culture" (671) the last forty years or so have not proven them wrong but rather shifted the emphasis from drugs to a new totality of mediatisation.

2. Construing the Popular

As opposed to Cantor and Werthman's inclusive approach, more recent academic work on popular culture has tended to consider it a purely modern phenomenon both in quantitative and qualitative terms. An early, i.e. 1975 survey course at the University of Sussex, for example, established the following historical frame:

> First the emergence of a separate popular culture in the period c. 1500-1700, second, the hardening of that culture into distinct, although regional cultures of the poor from approximately 1700 to 1850, and third the creation of a national popular culture beginning as early as 1800 but not coming into its full force until after 1914. (Easton et al. 1988, 27)

According to this view, neither the classical world nor the middle ages had a clearly demarcated *separate* popular culture – or perhaps they had, but nobody cared to notice and conceptualise it. Even in the modern age, the distinctiveness of the sphere was slow in establishing itself – or perhaps one should more accurately say: in being established in the discourse on popular culture from the 18th century onwards. Peter Burke marks just this decisive shift when, at the end of his pioneering study of *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (1978), he observes a fundamental "change in the attitudes of educated men" around 1800:

> In 1500, they despised the common people, but shared their culture. By 1800 their descendants had ceased to participate spontaneously in popular culture, but they were in the process of rediscovering it as something 'exotic' and therefore interesting. They were even beginning to admire 'the people', from whom this alien culture had sprung. (286)

Under this new regime, conceptualisations of popular culture comprised a whole array of narrower designations such as 'folk', 'working-class', or 'mass culture', but to this day it seems that 'popular' is the most inclusive and neutral of these (cf. Storey 1993, 1-19; on the problems of both the terms 'popular' and 'culture' cf. Harris 1995). Nevertheless, the whole debate has from its beginning been framed by evaluative stances which have spilled over into the formulation of theories of popular culture in the 20th century (for a survey cf. Strinati 1995).

Here, a negative assessment prevails even in the Marxist tradition (cf. Storey 1993, 97-124 and Strinati 1995, 51-85 and 129-176), which inspired many early conceptualisations of popular culture and should, in principle, validate working-class culture: popular culture under capitalism is, however, as 'mass culture', a prime example of alienation, and its positive counterpart is, frequently and strangely enough, an idealised and un-hegemonic high culture which nevertheless bears a close resemblance to bourgeois ideals of autonomous art in the context of a prevailing Romantic ideology (see, for example, Jerome McGann's comments on Althusser in McGann 1983, 12f. and 155ff.). Against this ideal, popular culture appears as a purely affirmative force which has to be resented by Marxists and cultural conservatives alike, if for different reasons, and mutually implicating each other. Against these closed ranks, a more positive assessment has emerged only fairly recently. John Fiske and Stuart Hall in particular have repeatedly pointed out that popular culture's relative independence from the mechanisms of canonisation and social distinction characteristic of high culture opens up a fairly unregulated field of reception which may well serve emancipative purposes beyond perpetual affirmation (cf. Fiske 1989 and 1995). Along these lines, a more 'lib-

eral-pluralistic, rather than marxisant' attitude towards popular culture has slowly established itself. This new attitude acknowledges that the crucial "changes between 1750 and 1900 were largely made by the people, their appetites, demands and aspirations, to which commercial forces were ready to accede" against a background of increasing "spending power, urbanisation and new forms of communication" (Golby/Purdue 1999, 5/7). Perhaps the 'liberal-pluralistic' optimism of this position needs to be toned down a bit these days in that the "choices made by the people themselves" (ibid., 8) were obviously influenced by the emerging entertainment industry. But in spite of this commercialisation, part of popular culture, and especially the reception side, remained 'of the people' rather than purely 'for the people' (cf. ibid., 7). What is more, the shift from print (cf. Vincent 1989, Barry 1995, Reay 1998) through the mass media (cf. Lury 1992) towards the new media with their interactive interfaces resulting in an increasingly inclusive popular convergence culture (cf. Jenkins 2006) has certainly further readjusted the balance between cultural agency and consumerism.

This overall shift becomes hesitatingly clear in John Storey's polemical intervention entitled *Inventing Popular Culture* which was published in 2003. Storey clearly continues along earlier lines of thinking that acknowledge that popular culture has always had a problem of being dominated by more powerful realms of culture with their respective discourses, be they economical, political or aesthetic. What he adds to the fray, here, is the central tenet of a thorough intellectual appropriation of popular culture. Theoretically, Storey links popular culture to an inclusive Cultural Studies' understanding of culture as an "active process" that "does not lie dormant in things", an understanding of culture as "the practice of making and communicating meanings" (ix-x). With this, he has moved from "the world" as it "exists in all its enabling and constraining materiality" to "practices of *representation*" (x, my emphasis) which "invite us to take up 'subject positions' from which meanings can be made and actions carried out" (xi). In this respect the intellectual appropriations he traces are clearly of the utmost importance for the project of analysing the relations between culture and power at the heart of Storey's explicitly Gramscian version of cultural studies (cf. xi). Nevertheless, the trajectory he describes in his sequence of chapters indicates an increase of leeway, as it were, in the interpellation of subjects in hegemonic structures, even if he chooses not to travel on some of the paths he indicates.
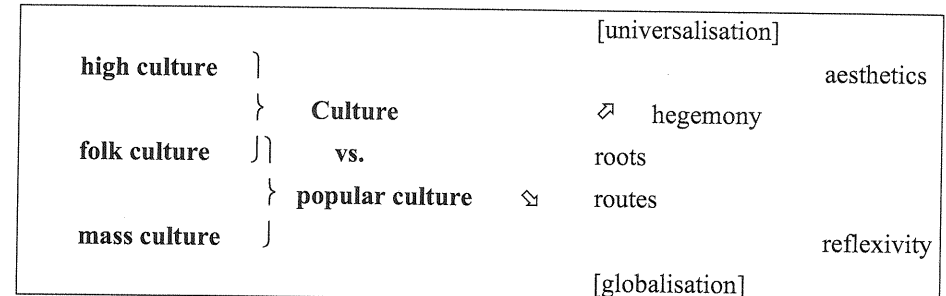
The first three chapters of Storey's book establish its main co-ordinates. From its inception as a suitable and necessary topic of discourse in the 18th century, Storey writes, popular culture was torn between its positive Romantic validation as a repository of unity and authenticity in the face of modernity's fragmentation, specialisation and alienation on the one hand and its complicity with just these processes on the other. To this day, the first position tends to sail under the flag of 'folk culture' (1-15), and even if it is largely "a romantic fantasy, constructed through denial and distortion" (13) its influence on cultural practices has been enormous in its new validation of a national past, its emphasis on a sense of community in the face of increasing urbanisation, anonymity and alienation, and its favouring of authenticity, sincerity, directness and naturalness as regulative ideals of cultural performance and mediation. The second position tends to disparage its objects under the banner of 'mass culture' (16-31), and here Sto-

rey traces a mixed bag of unlikely allies from Matthew Arnold, the Leavisites, T.S. Eliot and Ortega y Gasset on the right to Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse on the left. What they all share is a view of popular culture as the 'other' of high culture or 'true' culture. This 'other' was basically necessary for 'high culture' to define and construct itself as the only Culture [with a capital C] in the 19th century (32-47), a feat of ideological invisibilisation and naturalisation if ever there was one, given modernism's insistence of formal defamiliarisation and the fact that even some adherents of the Marxist counter-narrative of modernity subscribed to its universal aspirations – and a feat well worthy of critique in terms of hegemony as put forward in Storey's fourth chapter.

However, Storey's following chapters remain firmly stuck in the groove of hegemonial critique in spite of the fact that they are clearly hinting at changing socio-cultural conditions. For one, the distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture as established in the course of the 19th century and still valid way into the 20th, seems to have given way to a new, more inclusive sensibility (Susan Sontag), and even while neo-Marxist critics like Fredric Jameson insist that postmodernist culture as late capitalist culture "is no longer ideological, disguising the economic activities of capitalist society", but rather "an economic activity" in itself (65), this does neither necessarily indicate a fundamental difference from culture's modern(ist) past nor that the ideological *Verblendungszusammenhang* has became even more intractable than in its earlier incarnations. In fact, the acceleration and simultaneity of postmodernist eclecticism and pluralism fosters a degree of reflexivity which allows for new subject positions under the rubric of what Storey, following others, calls "Postmodern Hyperconsciousness" (70), subject positions which acknowledge the reception component of production in terms of intertextuality and pastiche while reception in the more commonly accepted sense assumes new powers as a form of meaning production in itself. As Storey points out, even if "[p]ostmodern culture is saturated by media […] this does not mean that we must despair in the face of Jameson's postmodern imposed 'structure'; rather we should think in terms of both 'agency' and 'structure'" (72). Similarly, the new sensibility of postmodernism has finally at least partially replaced older Romantic notions of cultural and personal identities in terms of 'roots' (origins) with the much more contingent notion of 'routes' (roads), and the performance of identities has become less normatively framed and more highly individualised (78-91) – or has it? At this point, we are back with one of modernity's foundational paradoxes: the one thing modern cultural actors share is their individuality, so when this finally becomes the predominant form of performing personal identities, is this conformism?

At any rate, an important ingredient of these performances under modern or even postmodern condition seem to be aesthetic choices against a background of what the philosopher Wolfgang Welsch has called the 'aestheticisation of everyday life' (cf. Welsch 1997, 2-6) and what Cantor and Werthman called 'volition'. As opposed to Storey's polemics against applying the terms art and/or aesthetics to popular culture phenomena, whether along the lines of Noel Carroll's *Philosophy of Mass Art* (1998) or along the lines of Richard Shusterman's *Pragmatic Aesthetics* (1992), a historicised notion of aesthetics (as opposed to the "Aesthetic Essentialism" identified as a bogeyman by

Storey, cf. 104) seems to be essential to any understanding of popular culture. The following scheme gathers the keywords from Storey's account into a 'map' which could guide this attempt at historicisation:

			[universalisation]	
high culture	⎱			aesthetics
	⎰	**Culture**	↗ hegemony	
folk culture	⎰⎱	**vs.**	roots	
	⎱	**popular culture**	↘ routes	
mass culture	⎰			reflexivity
			[globalisation]	

The opening triad in this scheme coincides with Simon Frith's combination of Howard S. Becker's concept of "art worlds" as institutional and discursive processes in which art objects are constructed as 'works' (cf. Becker 1982) with Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "cultural capital" (cf. Bourdieu 1984). Focusing on music, Frith transforms this into an interactive triangle of negotiations between an art music world, a folk music world, and a commercial music world (cf. Frith 1996, 35-42), reappearing here as the equally interactive realms of high culture, folk culture, and mass culture, respectively. What is striking, however, is that only folk culture seems to have a chance of qualifying simultaneously as being part of capital-C Culture *and* the positive side of popular culture. This is, in fact and historically locatable, the outcome of the new footing on which culture, art and literature were set in the context of Romanticism. In functional terms, Romanticism can be described as a core project of cultural modernisation aimed at 'domesticating' subjective experience, the emergent central 'actor' of modern cultural practices. Somehow, the particularity of actually existing subjective experience, i.e., in modern terms: individuality, had to be made amenable to the generalising and universalising impulses of cultural processes inherited from the Western tradition at large and most prominently formulated in neo-classicist programmes of art and literature in the 18th century. In this respect, Romanticism established a double strategy: On the one hand, Romanticism strove to embed subjectivity in larger, near-universal entities such as 'nature', 'the people' or 'the nation', largely conceived of in terms of 'roots' and origins, and thus somewhat uneasily hovering between essentialising and historicising impulses. It is in this context that Romanticism invented and constructed 'folk culture' and thus identified aspects of 'popular culture' as worthy of inclusion in capital-C Culture in an unprecedented act of democratisation. On the other hand, and somewhat at odds with the first impulse, Romanticism established a new understanding of art as subjective expression and imaginative pursuit which ultimately resulted in a move away from the time-honoured principle of normative aesthetics framed by tradition and established a dynamic field predicated on originality and formal innovation in its place. Here, subjectivity was ultimately fused with reflexivity in identifying and realising all possible 'routes' of the human imagination, externalising interiority in all available forms and media in the process and increasingly acknowledging the formative influence of textuality and mediality. As there is an in-built movement towards diffi-

culty and complexity in this dimension, 'high culture' turns out to be the dominant affiliation in these processes, as becomes obvious in the elitism and exclusiveness of aestheticism and modernism from the second half of the 19th century onwards. From a fairly early on, these 'high culture' aspirations and affiliations of Romanticism and the very specific semantics of its 'folk culture' component have established an extremely hostile rejection of everything that is perceived to be 'mass culture' – the new normative aesthetics insists on a grounding in subjectivity which is perceived to be absent in the products of the entertainment industry, even if, as becomes increasingly obvious today, it is the global reach of the entertainment industry which finally establishes some 'real' totality (as opposed to the virtual totalities of aesthetic universalisation in terms of 'work', 'nature', 'nation' etc.). All in all, then, Romanticism established a double-edged normative aesthetics which oscillates uneasily between (1) universalisation and contingency, (2) between a longing for aesthetic transcendence and a reflexive acknowledgement of the subjective and medial foundations of all aesthetic experience, and (3) between hegemonial ideologies of 'high' or 'true' art and culture and democratic impulses of availability and accessibility. The core elements of this normative aesthetics are subjectivity and experience, but the actual trajectories of the cultural negotiaton of these factors are manifold and complex. While they can be traced with some accuracy in the increasingly specialised spheres of modern art and literature which are centred around emphatic notions of the 'work of art' – and even the linear development from Romanticism through Modernism to Postmodernism seems to be restricted to the production aesthetics of the works in question while the reception of these very same works seems to be stuck to some extent in the Romantic grooves of identification, authorial intention, personality etc. – things are more complex in the heterogeneous field of popular culture with its overlap into mass culture (for the systems-theoretical background to much of the preceding argument cf. Reinfandt 2003 and Huck/Zorn 2007). Let us consider this with the help of an example.

3.   1000 Years of Popular Music

In 1999, as part of the millennium craze of those days, *Playboy Magazine* contacted a number of eminent musicians in the fields of rock and pop music and asked for their choice of the ten greatest songs of the Millennium. While many submitted their lists and some presumably did not, the folk/rock guitar virtuoso and singer/songwriter Richard Thompson hesitated. As he puts it in his liner notes for the DVD/CD-set which ultimately resulted from this: "Ha! I thought, hypocrites, they don't mean millennium, they mean 20 years – I'll call their bluff and do a real thousand-year selection [...] starting in about 1068, and winding slowly up to 2001" (Thompson 2006). So he submitted a very special list – which *Playboy* duly failed to print. But with this list, the seeds were sown for a highly original musical project trying to revive the popular music of a thousand years, highlighting the differences as well as the continuities:

> The premise is that Popular Music comes in many forms, through many ages, and as older forms get superceded, sometimes the baby is thrown out with the bathwater – great ideas, tunes, rhythms, styles, get left in the dust of history, so let's have a look at what's back there and see if it still does the trick. (ibid.)

A version of that original list was then put into practice, as it were, for a programme called *1000 Years of Popular Music*, performed, with variations, repeatedly through the early years of the new millennium, and one of those nights was captured on a handsomely produced DVD/double CD set recorded at Bimbo's 365 Club in San Francisco in 2005 and published in 2006. The setlist for the night, performed by Richard Thompson, guitar and vocals, Judith Owen, vocals and keyboards, and Debra Dobkin, percussion and vocals, starts slightly late with "Summer Is Icumen In", datable to c. 1260 but presumably around much earlier. It moves on to a 15th century ballad about Henry V. 16th century selections include a secular song from Italy and a three-part madrigal by Thomas Morley, the 17th century is represented by a 'Cruel Mother' ballad from the North of England and a bleak haunting carol about death looming eventually for everybody. The 18th century is, if you like, evoked by two early 19th century pieces, a sea shanty born out of a US cavalry song and a highly political miner's song about strikebreakers in the North East of England. Only in the later 19th century do we finally get an inkling of the emerging institutions of the entertainment industry with their socially differentiated target groups as represented by a song from Gilbert and Sullivan's light opera *The Mikado* from 1885 and – "meanwhile, across the street", as Thompson puts it in his announcement between the two songs – a British Music Hall piece from the turn of the century. The 20th century selections are then, to say the least, eclectic, thus indicating the boost and diversification popular music received through the availability of recording and distribution technology. Genres touched upon are the more commercial varieties of jazz, the Great American Song Book, rhythm and blues/rock 'n' roll, country, 1960s to 1980s pop and, rounding things off, Britney Spears's "Oops! ... I Did It Again" from the year 2000, 'revealing its own navel', as the liner notes have it. And while there are a number of worthy encores ranging from the 1950s classic "Cry Me A River" to a then brand new track entitled "1985" by a now largely forgotten band called 'Bowling for Soup', and finally on to an interactive music hall traditional from the 1830s, "Oops!", the culmination point of the official programme, shall be the focus of my remaining comments about popular culture (Thompson 2006, DVD 1:25:05-1:29:12).

How does an item like this fit on to our map of popular culture contexts? What 'routes' does it take in its various incarnations? At first glance, and very obviously, "Oops! ... I Did It Again" is as 'mass culture' as it gets. Composed by the Swedish pop songwriters and producers Karl Sandberg (alias Max Martin) and Remi Yacoub for a performer cast for the business at a very early age, the song itself is a typical commodity in a completely commercial context. Thus, in its production as well as its performance, it is light years away from any 'folk culture' credibility – and it worked: there can be no doubt about the purely quantitative popularity of the song, and much of its appeal lies in its catchy and crafty (Swedish/ABBA?) melody (cf. "I'm sent from abo-o-o-ove" and the rhythmical insistence of "I'm not that innocent"). The lyrics, however, draw niftily on some typically Romantic features such as the generic or generalised subject position of the young lover in one-sided dialogue with a beloved, the seemingly casual speech nevertheless held together by some witty near-rhymes such as again/friends, crush/serious, and this/exist, and finally the insistence on the problematic nature of subjective experience in general. Taken together with the traditional repetitive song

structure of verses and choruses/refrains one could speak of a commodification of 'folk culture' models which might be re-appropriated on two levels. First, acts of reception might actually choose to disregard the slick commercial production of the song and focus on short circuiting the lyrics with the performer persona *and* the experience of the listener in a Romantic reading of Britney Spears as the prototype of a new kind of sexually experienced innocence – with all her problems of more recent vintage thrown in as evidence that it is a hard life, indeed. Secondly, the song may be 'covered' in other genre contexts. Most popular among these are, if one believes YouTube, a version by the Finnish black metal band 'Children of Bodom' and a version by neo-swing crooner Max Raabe which has been appropriated for the trailer of a computer game, a transposition apparently inspired by the line 'Got lost in the game' in the chorus of the song. While these versions would merit closer inspection on their own, let me return to Richard Thompson's (which can also be found on YouTube). Here, the whole song is immediately shifted towards 'folk culture'. Even if you do not know anything at all about Richard Thompson's impressive credentials in the British *Story of Folk into Rock* (cf. Dallas et al. 1975) both as a solo artist and as a member of 'Fairport Convention' in the 1960s and 70s, the focus on the sparse instrumentation of acoustic guitar, vocals and percussion in what is clearly a live concert situation without any post-production (but relying heavily on an electronic sound system) indicates a different register of what Christopher Smart has usefully called 'musicking', i.e. the complex and interrelated cultural practises of taking part "*in any capacity in a musical performance*" (Smart 1998, 9, original emphasis). What is more, the performance of the song is clearly focused on playing and singing (instead of dancing and singing) and part of a larger interactive context ranging from directly addressing the specific concert situation and theme in the oblique introductory comments to letting the audience sing the refrain towards the end and rounding things off with an allusion to Britney's final gesture in the official video. Thompson's introduction is in fact a masterpiece of distancing and appropriation:

> Amazingly enough, we have reached the year 2000 and it's time to lay down our weary tune. This is a song by what might be considered a rather crass … erm … pop artist. Just my kind of person. It's a kind of classic pop song, and if we just take it out of the original hands and give it a slightly different interpretation, perhaps we can reveal it [sic] some splendour (if it has any). Strangely enough, its chord sequence is reminiscent of about the centuries [sic] and just towards the end we're gonna play it in the style of the sixteenth century just to show that it comes round again. (Thompson 2006, DVD 1:25:05-1:25:56)

Clearly, Thompson considers himself to be in a different register or even league from Britney Spears, and the 'folk' markers are dominant in this respect, from the reference to the traditional song title "Lay Down My Weary Tune" (modified to include the audience) to the insistence on continuity and tradition rather than newness and originality. And yet, he has to reluctantly admit that the song, as a pop song, is a 'classic' with its own "splendour" which can be appropriated according to the standards of the folk music world. In spite of all differences, there is, it seems, continuity, and this is in fact the continuity of popular culture which spans folk and mass culture. What is more, Thompson's focus on the musical materials as highlighted in the "tunes, rhythms, styles" to be snatched from oblivion mentioned in the text accompanying the album,

and his strong insistence in the liner notes to each song on the relevance of written sources for his earlier material, such as manuscripts from the British Library, 19th and early 20th century ballad and song collections and even sheet music (actually held by Thompson for all three singers to draw upon during the *a capella* performance of Morley's "O Sleep Fond Fancy"), provides the occasion with a 'high culture' serenity unthinkable on a Britney Spears concert – an impression, incidentally, which is corroborated on the DVD by the comfortably seated, rather middle-aged audience in a rather lush nightclub-like atmosphere and by the book-like production of the set both in terms of its format and of its continuity-emphasising illustrations. So, to return to my opening challenges: It is actually very difficult to come up with a hard-and-fast identification of defining features of the popular beyond rather vague quantitative assumptions combined with notions of the 'ordinary' as opposed to 'eminent'. Even the focus on entertainment and accessibility does not fully hold in view of so many highly specialised popular sub-cultures. What can be done instead is the demarcation of the field in which practices and representations can be positioned in a given historical period. For modern culture after the 18th century the triad of 'high culture', 'folk culture' and 'mass culture' provides some suitably differentiated co-ordinates for all kinds of cultural practices predicated on performance and/or representation. These are all, in their reception, at least to a certain extent dominated by what might be called 'aesthetic volition'. Thus, the triad can only provide historically shifting markers which are subject to larger discourses such as the double-coding of modern culture between Enlightenment and Romanticism with their respective semantics. To actually identify the popular in this shifting historicised field one would then have to be very attentive to the close conjunction between media history and cultural practices of performance and representation – and this conjunction is also what justifies the assumption that the popular should be treated as a genuinely modern phenomenon. It is all fleeting and contingent, and thus thoroughly modern, but traces remain in all kinds of media – and these are all there is for the project of historicising the popular with its unavoidable intellectual bias.

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INGO BERENSMEYER (GIESSEN) AND MARTIN SPIES (GIESSEN)

The Tudors in the Victorian Popular Imagination: Ainsworth's *Tower*, Brough's *Field*

Victorian popular culture offers a rich and diverse area of study in which there is still a lot to explore. In the German academic tradition of *kritische Theorie*, but also in the austere sort of English 'practical criticism' preached by the likes of the Leavises, these popular phenomena would have been condemned from the high ground of morally serious and formally complex 'high art'; as part of the culture industry, their potential for telling us about what 'average Victorians' (if they ever existed) thought and felt, what they enjoyed or disliked, would have been ignored in favour of those texts or works that display 'preadaptive advances' of High Modernism. Fortunately, a good dose of British cultural studies has put these Adornoid or Leavisite misgivings to sleep, at least for the time being, even in Germany. The time now seems ripe for the study of middlebrow, middle- and working-class (or generally popular) cultural phenomena from an ideologically more neutral vantage point.

For this purpose, we are going to focus on one particular strain in the Victorian popular imagination: its repeated reference to, or preoccupation with, English history and historical figures from the Tudor period. While certain elements of Tudor history – especially the figure of Henry VIII – have remained popular since the age of Shakespeare, it is arguably Victorian popular culture, in tandem with 19th-century antiquarianism, that has created a powerful iconography of the English Renaissance, based on Tudor portraiture, documentary evidence and material relics. Its 'look', its visual splendour, sensationalist pathos and nationalistic spirit of celebration, arguably still haunt 21st-century envisagings of the Tudor past in its emphasis on spectacle and melodrama, from *The Tudors* to *Elizabeth – The Golden Age*.

It has to be noted that this paper can only present a very small selection from what seems to be a vast amount of material; there is certainly a lot left to discover. Furthermore, there is no overarching, monolithic 'master narrative' to the Victorians' preoccupation with the Tudors. Instead, the impression that results from our material is of an ongoing, dynamic dialogue in which a present is trying to make sense of itself by recourse to a motivated selection from the past; in other words, it allows us to observe cultural memory, and the first glimpses of a future heritage industry, in the making: the creation of a 'usable past' by combining material and documentary remains with imaginative narrative structures. But it also allows us to observe the (almost instantaneous) self-parody and caricature of historicist pretensions, especially in popular entertainment such as music-hall and burlesque. This is why we focus on a historical novel from 1840 on the one hand and a burlesque from 1868 on the other hand.