

The Popular and the Past: Nineteenth-Century Cultures

BritCult Conference at Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg
19 – 21 November 2015

Cultural studies is no longer exclusively contemporary. It also encompasses the 'historical' and increasingly provides diachronic accounts of culture. The aim of this conference is to explore the historicity of one of cultural studies' core concerns, popular culture. In the early nineteenth century, a quasi-mythical (rural) 'folk culture' had just been invented; by the end of the century, a new (urban) mass culture, bound up in questions of technological, industrial, and social change, had become the main focus of attention. Not only did the very meaning of 'culture' change in the nineteenth century – the term began to be theorised, set up as a critical concept, and it became the object of controversial debates. Something very similar happened to the term 'popular'. 'The popular' is still under de/construction today (S. Hall), and it is adapted, appropriated and negotiated in the fields of Neo-Romanticism, Neo-Regency and Neo-Victorianism.

After the general keynote address held by Prof. Isobel Armstrong (University of London), the conference will explore the history of 'the popular' in three sections.

The first, "Historical and Cultural Practices", opened by Prof. Emma Griffin (University of East Anglia), is dedicated to a historical study of 'culture in practice'. It looks at changes in lifestyles, patterns of behaviour and all types of social interaction in everyday life – including labour and occupations, leisure activities and amusements. Because of the far-reaching effects of urbanisation and industrialisation on living conditions and daily routines, we will also discuss historical interpretations of economic growth and technological change and have a look at cultural practices concomitant with, amongst others, the division of labour, the class system and gender hierarchies, consumerism and mass culture.

A second section, headlined by Prof. John Plunkett (University of Exeter), invites discussions of "Mediality" in the widest possible sense. We hope that a renewed focus on mediality will also highlight the heterogeneity of popular cultures. Nineteenth-century popular cultures are caught up in a proliferation of new media that change and develop throughout the nineteenth century and rapidly extend their range, both spatially and socially. Mediality may also comprise the whole cultural field in which media emerge, the social conditions in which they operate, the ideological uses they are subjected to. Questions here include the cultural prestige of media, the new social and cultural uses they are put to, and the forms of consumption and cultural agency that this entails. Finally, nineteenth-century mediality, just as popular culture, has itself been the object of other cultural representations. They occur in a wide range of different media and continue throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

A final section, opened by Prof. Nicholas Daly (University College Dublin), explores "Textual Paradigms" that were either popular themselves (such as penny dreadfuls or sensation fiction)



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or that provided generic and discursive frameworks for negotiations of 'the popular', including popularisations of knowledge in Pennycyclopaedias or monographs specially directed at a broader target audience. Nineteenth-century popular cultures were marketed and maintained (as well as contested) in journalism or advertising, in literature or drama, in scientific and religious discourses and in a large variety of textual paradigms. In their turn, these textual paradigms spark contemporary de/popularisations of texts and genres.

Proposals for 20-minute papers in English should not exceed 300 words and should be accompanied by a short biographic blurb. Please address your abstracts to Prof. Dr. Doris Feldmann and Barbara Gabel-Cunningham, Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (doris.feldmann@fau.de; barbara.gabel-cunningham@fau.de).

Deadline: 30 May 2015

Organizers:

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