

Launch of Inventing Europe

Technology and the Making of Europe, 1850 to the Present

European Science Foundation EUROCORES Programme

and

Third Plenary Conference of the Tensions of Europe Network

Objectives

The conference *Appropriating American, Making Europe* will explore the making of European identity in a global world through an explicit transatlantic lens. In the making of twentieth-century Europe, the United States has loomed large as an object of derision or emulation. The threat of the 'Americanization' of Europe (mass production, standardization, 'scientific management', commercialism, and consumerism) has horrified commentators. When it comes to technology, the United States has both figured as the ultimate competitor to beat or the guiding light to be emulated. If during the interwar period the United States figured as Europe's 'Other,' during the post-war period the United States has been at times instrumental for Europe's integration and other times wary of its economic rise.

Current historiography has converged to the point where Americanists, economic historians, and cultural studies scholars agree that the encounter between the United States and Europe was neither wholesale acceptance nor outright resistance, but one of a complex set of appropriation strategies. Scholars cast European actors as players who actively and selectively appropriate American models to fit domestic European practices (Kuisel 1993; Pells 1997; Bjarnar and Kipping 1998; Zeitlin and Herrigel 2000). At the same time the direct influence of the United States in the shaping of Europe's science, technology, and culture should not be underestimated if we want to have a proper understanding of the making of Europe during the so-called 'American century' (Endy 2004; De Grazia 2005; Van Elteren 2006, Krige 2006).

Discussions about the technical transfer of American models to other national settings show that there is not a single model, that 'America' has acquired different meanings, and that an appeal to 'America' may be in fact mobilized for different ends. Our challenge is to study how on the one side the US government, business, civil society organizations, and cultural tastemakers have sought to shape Europe's future; and how on the other side Europeans have sought to resist, appropriate, and rework the models offered.

The conference invites participants to reflect on the ways US social actors and institutions first sought to impose their practices on European partners, but may have become 'Europeanized' in the process; how European partners have sought to resist, negotiate, appropriate, and rework American models to serve their local needs. In particular, as historians of technology we ask how representations of America both in positive and negative senses became part of the cultural scripts embedded in technological design; how users and consumers resist, appropriate, and rework

American models or collaborate with their American counterparts trying to tweak U.S. corporations; or to what extent European social actors raised the spectre of “America” to serve their own needs.

The conference brings together a number of case study projects within Inventing Europe to address these questions. These debates will contribute to the understanding of technology’s role in the making of the discursive and material space of Europe. These discussions are also expected to contribute to the study of Americanization in the post-war era. For this purpose, we are also inviting a number of specialists Americanists as keynote speakers and commentators to foster cross-disciplinary encounters.

Format

The conference consists of:

- Plenary meetings, during which the invited key note speakers will present and discuss the relevant theoretical insights on the issues of Americanization and Appropriation. Communication- and film theoreticians specialized in the visual circulation of American images abroad will present selected film clips to highlight the visual dimensions of the themes under discussion.
- One panel discussion on “Appropriating America: A Personal View of Scholarly Practice”, where outstanding Dutch scholars from different academic backgrounds will present their own academic experience with cross-Atlantic exchanges.
- One plenary session will be devoted to “Sound and Vision”, an expert analysis of images, films and sounds by which key players presented themselves and were perceived by others.
- Parallel paper sessions where the participants will foster the exchange of ideas and insights, mutual cooperation, stimulation and theoretical fertilization, across the borders of the different projects.

References

Bjarnar, Over; Matthias Kipping (1998), *The Americanisation of European Business: The Marshall Plan and the Transfer of US Management Models* (London: Routledge).

Elteren, Mel van (2006), *Americanism and Americanization: A critical history of domestic and global influence* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland).

Endy, Christopher (2004), *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press).

De Grazia, Victoria (2005), *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance Through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

Krige, John (2006), *American Hegemony and the Postwar Reconstruction of Science in Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press).

Kuisel, Richard (1993), *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

Pells, Richard (1997), *Not Like Us. How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American*

Culture Since World War II (New York: Basic Books).

Zeitlin, Jonathan; Herrigel, Gary (2000), *Americanization and Its Limits: Reworking US Technology and Management in Post-War Europe and Japan* (New York: Oxford University Press).