# German Visual Culture: From National to European Style

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Considerations of nationalism, national culture, and national style tend to conform to the national imaginary itself, however, to study nationalism, its emergence, and supersession, we must not allow the parameters of any particular nation-state to define our perspective. The national imaginary invites us to see nation-states as discreet entities in order to foster a national sense of uniqueness in the world. By contrast, contemporary discussions of transnationalism, which often seek to identify a post-national condition, frequently efface the long history of internationalism. Unfortunately, scholars often neglect internationalism, once the dominant mode of thinking outside or beyond the nation-state. Yet internationalism, like transnationalism, never was the opposite of nationalism.

Transnationalism emerges in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a dynamic of new forms of globalized capital, which weakened the nation-state form, made borders porous to goods and services and people. Transnationalism also arose out of imaginative communities, some of which preceded the national imagined community, others and localized identities to express competing claims to governmental legitimacy. Transnationalism may not have secured globally the post-national condition or the cosmopolitan alternative to the nation-state, but at least in the EU we can recognize one on-going global experiment to find an alternative to autonomous national governance that equals the parameters established by the challenges of globalized economic exchanges.

At this point we can present some clear hypotheses to be explored in this paper: the imagining of the national community is always undertaken in an inter-national imagining of other communities. The structure of the nation is predicated on a structural repetition of all nation-states. Transnationalism, by contrast to internationalism, designates a contemporary possibility of socio-political organization that restructures national legitimacy and thereby opens the potential of multiple imaginative communities and multiple loyalties. If internationalism was predicated on the discreteness of national borders,

the complex connectivity of transnationalism both contains and exceeds the borders of the nation.

To consider these propositions, I want to trace out a history from the emergence of what we can call the national style to its transformation by the emergence of a transnational style. I will focus on German visual culture, ostensibly film, however this discussion will start before the projected image and consider its emergence in precisely the larger visual field. The history begins with 1) the emergence of national style in the era of empires. It moves on to 2) the formation of cinema as inter-national commodity style, considering then 3) the development of sound as market fetter. It will turn to 4) the emergence of a European mode of production or what we can describe as culture industry 2.0.

## The emergence of national style in the era of empires

Reviewing the emergence of the national ideal with all its peculiar particularism that allows nations to claim a unique and special status, we can recognize that the communal cultural imagining at its heart arises nevertheless in a field of universalism and international comparativity. We can trace how in the 19th century historicism came to dominate various aspects of visual cultural production, designating an international engagement with universal history. Historicism defined an approach to modeling the greatness of the past in the present, an approach that was open to anyone or any nation (Maurer; Grewe; Hvattum; Kreuzmayr and Boeckl). It influenced architecture from Berlin to Barcelona, New York to Tokyo, aspired to a syncretic union of various heights of human expression. Drawing on a full history of decorative elements, it served the representational needs of both bourgeois and state aspirations. And it verified that the local participated in the spirit of a global international modernity.

Even with the foundation of the Second Reich and all its bombastic nationalist pathos, the imperial nation began with an artistic and architectural field dominated by the universalism of Historicism (Döhmer; Hamann and Hermand). It is not until almost two decades later that we can point to the emergence of a national style. A key year is 1889 during which a number of important and transformative events were underway in the German Reich. In that year the competitions for the Kaiser Wilhelm *Nationaldenkmal* and the *Kaiser Wilhelm Denkmal* in Westfalen began—this search was highly representative of the search for a new style to represent the new nation. Bruno Schmitz won both competitions, beginning a career that would be understood as giving shape and form to the national spirit of the new Kaiserreich. His subsequent commissions include among others the *Kyffhäuserdenkmal* (1892) in Thüringen, *das deutsche Eck* (1897) in Koblenz, the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* (1898–1913) bei Leipzig, and the *Bismarckturm* in Unna (1899). Schmitz

turned precisely from the stylistic pluralism that dominated the eclectic architecture and the references to antiquity that dominated historicism. He sought to draw on ethnically and historically specific local sources, what he understood as Germanic influences. Schmitz's völkisch national style eschewed the colonnades of Neoclassicism and relied instead on simplified rustic blocks and Romanesque arches decorated with historical scenes that began with the Germanic tribes. Here a concentration developed on materials drawn from local stone, and his monuments and his works were placed frequently in natural landscapes, often as sites for hiking tours. Schmitz's monuments acted in effect as secular pilgrimage sites for the nation, part of what George Mosse famously described as the nationalization of the masses. Clearly in the quest for a national style, Schmitz's work is not simply a question of architecture; it represents a public transformation, the creation of new public spaces where the nation, the people, the Volk, could experience itself in its collectivity. Such a project required not just monuments but marching spaces, boulevards, and facades, parade grounds and monumental paintings. And in his monuments Schmitz promoted not only national myths and local materials but also this new sense of national experience for the public; Schmitz's designs for the Porta Westfalica cleverly included even a kiosk for the sale of national commemorative items.

Schmitz was not alone; rather the transformation to a national style transpired in the arts generally. In 1889, the same year that Schmitz submitted his designs, many artists and craftsmen went to Paris to attend the Exposition Universelle, a comparative forum for artists, industrialists, and entrepreneurs from all over Europe (Busch and Futter). While the reports of that exposition are filled with praise for the machine and German industry, critics had no praise for the quality or form of the German products on display. For many attendees it was an indictment on the world stage of the state of the arts in the young German nation. It was clear to them that Germany's rapid industrialization, its rise to world power, had not corresponded to an elevation to status as key figure in world culture. In this comparative setting, it was clear to participants that the French and English excelled at producing distinctive goods, whereas the German aspirations were aesthetically thoughtless, uninteresting in form.

Returning from Paris, cultural critics and artists rebelled against the rigid commitment of the academy and its state sponsors to the historicist style. The quest for a new national style that could compete equally with the other Europeans began unleashing a wave of secessions from the state controlled academies and onto a liberalized search for the new art that could infuse the new German industry (Makela; Shedel). As a leader in these developments, Alexander Koch began a publishing career with the goal of overcoming Historicism, culminating in the journal *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* (1898), which for the next three decades proved to be the most influential German-

language art and design journal. In the first issue of *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, Koch warned that German art is dependent on England, America, and France, whose products are flooding the German market. More significant for Koch is that the successes of those countries threatens "das Idiom einer heimischen, individuell deutschen Kunstsprache" (m). He calls for a solidarity of all arts and artists, crafts and craftsmen, an *ineinander-aufgehen* (m). Koch compares his journal to those of France and England, *The Studio* or *Art et Décoration*, and he sees its task as forming a "real German language" of art and form that reaches through to craft and design—as they had done for France and England (n).

The formation of the Munich Secession in 1892 was followed rapidly by similar breaks with the state academies in Vienna and Berlin, resulting in groups that advocated the freedom of the arts. This break thus opened up the possibilities of new styles, fostering movements embodying Koch's call for "einer mitten im Leben stehenden, vom Volke getragenen, gesunden deutschen Kunst" (o). Quickly the quest for national style affected not only developments in the high arts, but also in the applied and industrial arts. The new national style accomplished a broad consuming community, and this national consuming community exceeds Benedict Anderson's imagined community of print culture. From its emergence, this national market of consumers united people in a familiarity of commodities, standardized consumption practices, shared styles, and common fashions.

We can thus summarize. 1) In this historic moment we witness the unleashing of a new cultural regime bound to the project of nation-building. This regime would last for a century. 2) This regime of national cultural style is evidenced by an imperative to design external and internal life, not just public but also private spheres were to be given artistic form, material and mental life were to be reshaped according to a national form. 3) If the preceding era of academic art and Historicism offered developing communities universal representational forms to indicate their participation in the general processes of modernization, the new national style offered particular forms that could circulate and compete in the international markets of modernity. That does not mean that national style ceases to be part of a general structure. The national cultural regime as comparative and inter-national is an interdependency (Wechselwirkung) of the universal and the particular. 4) The national regime, thus, appears as local yet is a comparative one. In as much as it makes a claim to represent the essence and interests of, e.g., a German Volk, this regime is a comparative national project compelled by the conditions and potentials of industrialization. It may claim to represent the inner essence of the nation, but it aims to keep up with an inter-national trade in style. It is a national mode of production, which, while it claims to serve the particular and local, develops out of an aspiration to outcompete on the international market. 5) This new national cultural regime is a visual one. Print culture

gives way to an expanded terrain of image and form. Form here, as evidenced for instance in Koch's text, acts as a term that unleashes the hold of the gilded frame on the image and opens up a new organization of the world, designed according to visual pleasures. 6) In the conditions of industrialization, it pushes for a liberalization of cultural production. State-based cultural politics, the academy of arts system, becomes reactionary vis-à-vis cultural economics. If previously the academy acted as extension of the state controlled artistic activity, the Secessionist movements promoted an arts and crafts model that brought cultural production into the terrain of free market and industry. It is here that we can identify the emergence of the culture industry 1.0. And 7), this cultural regime remains the dominant paradigm for measuring national culture.

## The Formation of Cinema as Inter-national Commodity Style

In 1895 Max and Emil Skladanowsky premiered their *Bioscop* as a technique for projecting the illusion of "living images" to a mass audience (Castan; Elsaesser and Wedel). Their famous screening at Berlin's *Wintergarten* occurred just two months before the Lumière Brothers premiered their *Cinématographe*, while across the Atlantic Edison premiered his projecting *Kinetoscope* a few months later in 1896. It exists as the newest of many transformations in the visual field: architecture, monumental space, design and the applied arts, lithography, photography, illustrated press, advertising, and so on. However, unlike the other established branches of the culture industry, cinema in its earliest decades does not participate easily in the national regime; it is not understood as a national product. Tom Gunning noted "cinema crossed borders easily in its first decades [following] global pathways opened up by worldwide capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism" (Gunning 11).

Where national style produced a unity of the nation through the familiarity of commodities, standardized consumption, shared styles, and common fashions, cinema in its earliest decades disrupted familiarity and unity. Spectators did not consume nationally, and even when filmmakers attended particularly to national motifs and interests, their work did not produce an easy community of national spectators. The first historical newsreels and the use of cinema for what could be described as political propagandistic purposes can be traced back to the images of Kaiser Wilhelm II (Loiperdinger). In the literature he even earned the nickname "Media Kaiser." Yet these images had multiple valences. As Richard Abel has highlighted, film programs evidenced a heterogeneity that would bewilder easy (national) identification: the Kaiser is likely to have appeared in a program alongside other world leaders, followed by a scene of a kangaroo, or a street in Delhi. In contrast to the goals of national style, which sought to construct a space and market of consump-

tion by Germans for Germans, spectators did not view cinema as Germans watching German images for Germans. Nowhere was such spectating possible. Early cinema brought the distant close and it imbued the proximate and quotidian with a potential to become exotic and to entertain.

It is first in the context of WWI when cinema globally comes to align with national interests as it is mobilized to serve war interests. Cinema on all fronts served as patriotic entertainment for the mobilized masses. And it was the *end* of WWI, with the break-up of the Hapsburg, Ottoman, and Prussian Empires, that new conditions increasingly aligned cinema to national polities and markets. Most intensely perhaps, we can describe a region that runs down from the Baltics to the Turkish Republic, in which entertainment and the apparatus of culture, once part of imperial flows, are exposed to similar structures of nationalization, industrialization, and standardization. Cinema from Poland to Turkey became more intensely a vehicle for nation-building. After 1918 we can talk about German, Polish, Turkish, Hungarian, Czech, and Slovak cinemas in a form we could not discuss previously. Nevertheless cinema still evidenced an ability to cross borders.

After the great bloodletting of World War One, in 1921 the first "export" from Germany to the US was Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari (Wiene, 1920). The film with its uncanny horrors and its sets painted in expressionist style was an event, and the screenings in New York were controversial. Its success lay in its ability to convey an experience of a new and particular distinctive style understood as national style. Weimar Expressionist films were not German because they were done in the German language; silent film was free of linguistic barriers. Rather, and here think back to what we discovered in the national style generally, Expressionist films constituted a commodity marketed internationally on the basis of the uniqueness of its style, the look of the films understood as a German look. Yet it is not simply that Wiene and Murnau and the other Expressionists aspired to national style in order to compete with Hollywood, rather it is in the opposition of styles that Hollywood style too takes on its contours. Indeed, it is a general period in which national style comes to define cinema: consider that this is the period of the Soviet Avant-garde, French poetic realism, the Pure Film Movement in Japan, etc.

Long before Deleuze based his Cinema books on this observation, Sieg-fried Kracauer, in his seminal study *From Caligari to Hitler*, read *Caligari* as a national allegory. For Kracauer, "It was only after the first World War that the German cinema really came into being" (15). And *Caligari* played a central role. It was not just style, at that moment mass audiences began to consume cinema as national consuming publics and cinema, as large-scale industrial collective undertaking spoke more clearly to the "collective character" of its time (Kracauer 5). Much has been written about Deleuze's *and* Kracauer's analysis. Much has been written about the limitations of their

approach, yet I would underscore that in reading the film precisely as national film, this analysis aligned itself with the project of national style and set the parameters for organizing film studies since. Echoing Koch's introduction to *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* from a half century earlier, Kracauer noted that "The film of a nation reflects its mentality in a more direct way than other artistic media," citing the collective quality of its production and its appeal to a mass national audience (5). Films "provide clues to hidden mental processes" (7). Kracauer's analysis of Weimar cinema and *Caligari* in particular has been roundly criticized; however, the principles he put forward defining national film set a foundation to national film analysis that has lasted to the present.

### National Sound as Market Fetter

With the advent of sound things changed yet again. The advent of sound placed a limitation on the ability of film to move. It created a fetter, attaching film first to a linguistic market. Bound to language in new ways, once global suppliers of moving images MGM, Pathé, or UFA suddenly confront producing films oriented first to an English, French, German, or Turkish-speaking audience. Studios thus develop various strategies of responding to this fetter on market circulation brought about by the new technology. Best known of the methods of course is the use of subtitles, a basic extension of the intertitle of silent film into the frame of the moving image. In this way visual language became subordinated to the spoken word.

Along with subtitles, however, we can recall a rather forgotten strategy from the period, the Multiple Language Version Films (MLVF). The heyday of the MLVF was in the years between 1929 and 1935, with some 500 films being made for the European market alone. The project of Film Europa began to break apart in the face of aggressive German *völkisch* politics. The MLVF project comes ostensibly to an end not because of the failure of the strategy but because of the stricter fettering of film to the national market in the 1930s and with the effects of WWII.

## A European Mode of Production: Culture Industry 2.0

In the 1990s a new European level focus on culture, especially on the audiovisual market, addressed a particularly urgent crisis. Spectatorship for national productions dropped to all time lows throughout Eastern *and* Western Europe. Film and television industries in East and West were in a state of crisis. The national mode of film production in particular crumbled away, studios and theaters closed, and spectators turned largely to Hollywood productions. The exponential increase in broadcast hours afforded by the liberalization of the European television industries immediately created a deficit, because there

was not enough material to fill the new space and instead airtime was filled with reruns of American series like *Golden Girls* (Cooke).

Thus the EU level focus on the audio-visual industry was a motivated economic focus, attempting to gain control over a common European audio-visual sector. The goal was to make it more profitable for European investment and more competitive against especially Hollywood productions. The EU level organization of a new regime of production is reminiscent of the transition in the 19th century: the European regime ruptured state control over the media on the national level; it replaced the high cultural orientation of the existing subsidy systems with an emphasis on popular culture, mass appeal, and profitability; and it sought on a transnational level to create a common European culture industry, understood as a positive term.

This broad initiative quickly experienced important limits in its goal to constitute a European audience. In contrast to the US and Canadian market, the citizen-spectators of the EU, are parceled out in smaller markets circumscribed by linguistic and cultural diversity, conditions that pose a significant challenge to the production of a common audio-visual market; the citizens of the EU simply do not share a common imagination of European community. Moreover, by the end of the 20th century, the digital revolution had brought significant shifts in the technologies of production that were at the heart of the new mode of production. The new technologies of the 21st century introduced a state of rapid and permanent revolution into the audiovisual industry. The small start up proved capable of destabilizing the vertically oriented media giants.

To respond to these challenges, the European Commission has developed with great energy a new master plan for cultural union. In 2007 the EU adopted the European Agenda for Culture, and starting in 2008 the European Commission developed a focus on the *cultural and creative industries* (CCIs). Creative economy, creative labor, creative industries are terms widely used positively since the 1990s, which appeal to politicians and labor leaders considering how to remake their urban environments devastated by the outsourcing and off-shore production of the globalized work environment. The Creative and Culture Industry model has appealed to policy makers of the EU as the basis for the broad new orientation. And in general this contemporary shift produces what we can describe as Culture Industry 2.0

The most important development out of the Agenda for Culture is the establishment of the Creative Europe Programme (CEP) in 2013, effective as of January 2014, which unites the resources devoted to audio-visual production in the MEDIA Programme with the resources devoted to funding for the arts and heritage preservation, the CULTURE programme. The new CEP has a total budget of 1.46 billion, which represents a 9% increase in funding combined. The "MEDIA strand" experienced a 28.6% increase in overall budget as it rose to 990 million (KEA European Affairs 9). The new program

promises to employ 300,000 artists, publish 5,500 books, distribute 1,000 films, benefit 2,500 cinemas where 50% of the films screened are European, and as a new development it will offer 750 million in bank loans for cultural and creative businesses. In responding to the question, why Creative Europe, the promotional information for the program suggests that "Europe needs to invest more in its cultural and creative sector because it significantly contributes to economic growth, employment, innovation and social cohesion." Androulla Vassiliou, the Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, the guiding force behind the CEP, explained directly, "The cultural and creative sectors offer great potential to boost jobs and growth in Europe. EU funding also helps thousands of artists and cultural professionals to reach new audiences. Without this support, it would be difficult or impossible for them to break into new markets" ("Creative Europe" 2).

The MEDIA strand increases support for the general shift to digital technologies, such as assistance to refurbish cinemas with expensive necessary new digital projection equipment. It will oversee the creation and regulation of online platforms like Netflix for the delivery of streaming video and the facilitation for home viewing of content providers. Indeed, it is charged with a new emphasis on the full extent of the audio-visual market, especially new support for moving-image games and gaming technology.

In earlier interventions in the audio-visual sector, the emphasis had been on the production of images and building the basics of a synergistic European audiovisual industry. Significantly, then, it stands out that the CEP has turned the focus on the question of profitability. The discussion of audiences in the CEP is less concerned with the development of a common European spectatorship and approaches audience as largely a question of customers or consumers. The CEP structure approaches culture generally as a consumable product or marketable experience. In the CEP, cinemas, for instance, are being developed not as screening but event spaces. The audience plugs into, downloads a product, or goes to a place that offers an experience outside of the quotidian.

To conclude I want to return us to the opening summary of the national regime and offer a parallel summary of the European transnational regime.

1) In this historic moment we witness the unleashing of a new cultural regime freed from the project of nation-building. Europeanization, as a transnational project, does not replace the nation state. The organization of the EU does not develop as a supranational entity transforming Europe into a United States of Europe based on the principles of Jeffersonian democracy. The European regime does not do away with national style, rather it incorporates it precisely as style, now as a marketing strategy for European and global culture markets.

2) In the European cultural regime the imperative to design external *and* internal life, public and private spheres ceases. This retreat means for Germany specifically that a transformation occurs from *Volk* to *Bevölkerung*, and

this transformation from people to population is repeated across the Europe without borders. Instead of a redesign of public spheres and lifewords, the market orientation that dominates the current conception of the regime proves distant from political interests, promotes a democracy deficit, and treats the public sphere as a public market. 3) While in the European regime the conditions and potentials of industrialization, that is to say technological transformation continue to generate new cultural forms, commodity culture of course dissociates largely from a national market. What remains of a national style is a question of commodity design, Alessi versus WMF, Scandinavian versus British mid-century modern. In this regime, cinema/the audiovisual "sector" of the market is crucial. The propensity of cinema to cross borders and accomplish complex connectivity is actualized in the European regime. Cinematic co-productions are up; for over a decade the majority of German films are produced as co-productions, and in vast parts of the globe from Algeria to Benin, Tajikistan to Uruguay national film industries rely on coproduction relations with the EU to keep their industries alive. If the older regime was comparative, the European regime is integrative. 4) To be sure the new European cultural regime remains a visual one. But cultural politics liberalizes reorienting cultural production toward profitability, bolstering what in European policy language is creative and culture industries. For cinema this culture industry 2.0 is integrated with Hollywood as a global practice. Simultaneously, however, through its retention of national style and its reliance on co-production strategies, the European cultural regime develops globally not a counter-cinema but a counter-practice to Hollywood. 5) While in the national regime the state came to subsidize culture to promote its own interests and remove it from the market, here the EU develops cultural policy and support systems designed to make culture profitable. In post-industrial conditions, the value of culture increases in as much as it is able to act as market.

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