

Chapter 1

THE NEW GERMAN TELEVISION AND THE NEWER GERMAN FILM

A History of Industry Disruption and Synergy

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In 1961, Joe Hembus published his in/famous report, *Der deutsche Film kann gar nicht besser sein* (German film cannot be better).¹ That report's acerbic assessment of the conditions of film production at the time responded to the real film market collapse in the 1960s. Yet we know that this collapse gave incentive to transform the German film industry. Out of crisis the much-celebrated New German Cinema arose. Since Hembus's report, critics, and historians of German cinema, have continued to chart out an industry caught in repeated cycles of crisis and success, collapse and expansion.

Part of the reason for the cycles of crises film historians identify is the repeated disruptions brought about by new technologies. In the 1960s, audiences stayed home in front of the new television rather than going to the cinema. Subsequent disruptions from newer technology like home video, Video on Demand (VoD), all the way to contemporary streaming platforms initiated new waves of market crises. Of course, the most recent crisis brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic was not technology based. Nevertheless, the resulting collapse in theatrical distribution propelled new technology, and compelled new market structures.

Yet if one looks beyond feature-length film and cinema exhibition, it might be possible to develop a narrative of more consistent transformation in which disruption is a norm and change has a continual impact on established players in the audiovisual sector. Indeed, a focus

on cinema that considers primarily the image on the big screen will fail to comprehend the full complexity of that image. It is not cinema *contra* television but rather cinema *and* television. Indeed, Karl Prümm remarked that film history cannot be written as a particularized story of a single medium.² Cinema is a complex medial dynamic that requires attention to both the image moving on the screen and the apparatus that brings it there. Looking at the current conditions of production, we can tell a large and complex story with technological changes transforming viewer possibilities and spectator expectations, with the big screen and the small screens evermore closely connected.

In this chapter, to attend to this complexity, I want first to focus on the immediate market conditions upended by the pandemic, an era that has fostered a new form of quality production for viewing at home and on other mobile devices. I will then turn to a historical analysis, considering the synergistic relation between the New German Cinema and what we can call New German Television. I will address the disruption of that synergy resulting from the advent of private television in Germany, which resulted in what is often described as the cinema of consensus, and I will ask if we can speak of a TV of consensus as well. While these media developments are often discussed as a German national phenomenon, I will underscore the broader European contexts of these transformations. And finally, I will return to the new age of quality production, and consider the relation to streaming and new forms of screens (especially the proliferation of smartphones, which has added to the mix). Cinema exhibition as well as broadcasters seek new roles in this new environment in which feature films, longform narrative series, short series, and minimal length moving images circulate alongside each other, and content is available on a rapidly expanding set of platforms including cinemas, Public Service Broadcasters (PSB) media libraries, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, YouTube, Disney+, Star, HBO, and Tiktok.

The Present Is Crisis, the Future Is Content

The cycle of crisis and expansion is not simply a phenomenon of German cinema. A recent instantiation came in 2020 at the Göteborg Film Festival when media analyst Johanna Koljonen expressed her delight at the always lively annual Nostradamus Report. For the first time in the seven-year history of the report, she was able to offer a positive vision for the European film industry. The previous seven years had been

filled with dire assessments based on the disruption that streaming services had caused. The reason she gave for a positive assessment in 2020 was new forms of storytelling:

The next three to five years will be a time of creativity and chaos, with many artistic highs and unprecedented amounts of money invested in scripted content. This is when the changes we have predicted over the years are becoming everyday—new release patterns normalized, the digital transformation of TV completed, content crossing cultural and linguistic borders freely, and categories like film, serial drama, and online video both increasingly overlapping and separately leaning into their own unique strengths. A competitive and rapidly shifting marketplace will be dominated by the largest media companies the world has ever seen. But the technology is also pushing power back toward the talent, and offering new ways for smaller, nimbler participants in the audiovisual space to connect with audiences.³

She presented this information with considerable energy, even glee, and it brought a great deal of hope to the representatives of the European audiovisual sector. Of course, even as she delivered this positive prognosis, the news was reporting on a rapidly spreading virus and addressing fears of a global pandemic. When she repeated the presentation at the Berlin Film Festival two weeks later, it was the last major gathering of the film industry before Europe went into lockdown and the cinema screens went blank. The German Filmförderungsanstalt (Federal Film Board, FFA) quickly studied the crisis of traditional cinema exhibition, and pointed to collateral collapse in distribution and taxes used to subsidize the production side of the media industry.⁴ Over the coming years, the pandemic would pose many challenges to the industry, and to many it was a reminder that Nostradamus is the seer of catastrophe.

Yet in the middle of intensifying lockdowns across Germany, most of Europe, and the globe in general, the FFA also undertook a quick study of the streaming market, and found dramatic growth in this sector of the media industry.⁵ As indicators of those positive changes, we can note that the third season of *Babylon Berlin* (2017–), Germany and Europe's largest and most successful series to date, aired on ARD, Germany's primary public service broadcaster. The premiere took place alongside releases on Netflix in the United States and in thirty-five further countries. As Jill Smith and Hester Baer noted, the series offered quality TV made in Germany to a broad audience.⁶ Almost simultaneously, ARD underwent a different transformation when it premiered the series *All You Need*. This queer dramedy went straight to the online

Mediathek (media library) without a broadcast premiere—a first in the history of the broadcaster.

It is clear in these assessments that industry considerations are not solely focused on film projects destined for theatrical release. The FFA report actually repeated many of the points of the Nostradamus Report, identifying a “war for talent” and a scramble for content as part of the new market structures. It praised global success in German storytelling, acknowledged the devastating effects that lockdown had had on traditional cinematic exhibition, but positively assessed the expansion of the home market, pointing to shifts in streaming delivery strategies. The pandemic did not put developments on hold; rather it largely accelerated the processes Koljonen had identified. A narrow cineastic focus obscures the full complexity of the audiovisual sector. I would highlight here certain connected elements in this medial dynamic: representational strategy, technologically compelled shifts in the mode of production, and socially organized means of reception. And such industry considerations invite attention to more than narrative feature-length film.

Quality TV/Quality Film

Clearly market disruption poses a financial threat to parts of the industry; for theatrical exhibition *and* terrestrial broadcast, Video on Demand streamed to the small screen via media libraries bypasses precisely terrestrial broadcast and the cinema screen, thus undermining the solvency of cinemas and the stability of television stations.⁷ On the other hand, many media analysts understand these series appearing on the small screen as also setting new standards for the big screen. Quality TV, of the type Smith and Baer discuss, has an impact on the expectations of cinema audiences. Many scholars have long argued that “quality TV” builds up an audience with more elaborate expectations and expanded interests.⁸ They acquire viewing expectations not generally served by standard television offerings or the blockbuster-oriented multiplexes. And in an environment where 50 percent of the German arthouse cinema’s audience is aged over fifty, there is an urgent need for exhibition to inspire new younger audiences.⁹ Scripted content develops synergy in the entire audiovisual sector and reaches new and younger audiences. These developments to which we must attend are occurring throughout the audiovisual sector, not just in a narrow German industry, and they impact exhibition not only in (arthouse) cinemas but on all the screens we use to watch moving images. In *Quality*

Hollywood, Geoff King has undertaken an extensive analysis of quality production in global Hollywood.¹⁰ Like King, we may want to explore quality film and TV as terms that offer alternatives to discussions of arthouse cinema, which focus on cinema exhibition; this chapter, along with other works in this volume, can be understood as developing the discussion for the German and European audiovisual industry.

We can use the discussion of quality TV to inspire a consideration of quality film. Discussions of arthouse cinema in recent years seem to have been motivated by a concerned focus on theatrically released films, threatened by popular media and forms.¹¹ However, now that Netflix and AppleTV have produced Oscar contenders, a designation like quality film that interacts with quality TV may prove more productive than retaining a focus on one form of screen culture. If there is skepticism about the claims that quality TV alters viewer expectations, there are real statistics to show a “material” connection between quality TV and quality film. The European Audiovisual Observatory’s *Yearbook 2020/2021* provided data that underscore the horizontal connection across a broader apparatus of media production, distribution, exhibition, and reception. Their analysis supports the existence of an interconnection rather than explicit competition between big and small screens.¹² The yearbook noted that 89 percent of streaming releases had had a theatrical release before or alongside their release as Video on Demand; VoD has actually benefited smaller arthouse film productions, bringing them more viewers and more revenue, and investment in film and high-end series are synergistic. Production in longform series has expanded the overall investment in audiovisual production, thus making feature film production more dynamic as well. In addition to benefiting exhibition, filmmakers, and producers, the yearbook also noted that VoD releases benefit distributors working in smaller markets and in smaller countries, thereby bringing European film into broader circulation. And it ultimately underscored the necessity of the development of VoD, showing all of European film production in third place for global circulation, and noting that US productions still dominate the European audiovisual market by 73 percent. Supporting the predictions of the Nostradamus Report, this study likewise suggests that the future might not be an either cinema or cellphone, a big screen film release or small screen series market; rather the storytelling strategies and demographic appealing to audiences on multiple screens will define moving image production in the coming decade.

For German film studies, television has played a marginal role in scholarship, but at the moment there are many reasons to take up

an analysis of quality TV and its relation to quality film. Television, streaming services, and the success of longform storytelling are having a fundamental impact on the overall German audiovisual sector. Alongside *Babylon Berlin*, we can note *Dark* (2017–20), *4 Blocks* (2017–19), *Deutschland 83/85/89* (2015–20), *Biohackers* (2020–), *Unorthodox* (2020), *Charité* (2017–), and *How to Sell Drugs Fast (online)* (2019–21) as only some of the prominent recent series with high production values. In their content these projects offer film scholars plenty for critical theoretical analysis.¹³ Furthermore, as part of a growing slate of projects that enjoy great successes on German and international television and streaming platforms, it is also important to consider them as currently driving industry and audience development. These shifts in production are not localized to a few prestige projects like *Babylon Berlin*.¹⁴ At the 2019 Berlin Film Festival, to acknowledge the importance of series productions, a new Drama Series Days was organized. It was further upgraded in 2020 to the status of a Berlinale Series Market to organize the sales and distribution of German and international series. A new section at the Berlinale's European Film Market is such a rare occurrence that it should be understood as a sign of a tectonic shift in the industry.

Serials and Features and Exhibition: A History of Synergy

For film scholars, attending to the new series may make them question whether they are tangential to feature films. Such a question invites historical comparative research. Series, longform visual storytelling as a synergistic factor on the film market, is not a new dynamic. If we expand our historical framework, we can even recognize a long tradition, emerging out of serialized silent films. Serialized films were part of the cinema's move to predominance in the offerings of free-time entertainment. As long feature films began to emerge, shorter serials became part of the regular offerings alongside newsreel and other shorts to create a screening mix of entertainment and information that could fill an evening. Films like the six-part *Homunculus* (1916), *Die Herrin der Welt* (The Mistress of the World, 1919), *Das Geheimnis der sechs Spielkarten* (The Secret of the Six Cards, 1920–21), *Der Mann ohne Namen* (Thief of Millions, 1921), *Das indische Grabmal* (The Indian Tomb, 1921), and *Die Abenteurerin von Monte Carlo* (The Adventuress of Monte Carlo, 1921) among others track out the expanding appeal to middle-class audi-

ences, the building boom of cinemas and the film palaces of the 1920s, and an expansion of market through new storytelling forms. These films also remind us of German film's competition in the world media market. They indicate a model of filmmaking inspired by Hollywood's serials but stamped with a particular UFA studios pomp pursued in its monumental epic film strategy during the Weimar Republic.¹⁵ Rumder Canjel's comparative work on silent film series distribution highlights for us that the UFA's "scripted content" of the 1920s offered its own quality film from Germany to broad audiences in a highly competitive market.¹⁶

Fifty years later, serialized storytelling reappeared, merging the quest for quality film with quality television. The made-for-television series of the 1970s and 1980s include works that are understood as milestones of the New German Cinema like *Heimat* and all its subsequent sequels and prequels (1981–2013), *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980), and the blockbuster hit *Das Boot* (1981). These projects—and likewise mammoth film projects like Syberberg's *Hitler, ein Film aus Deutschland* (Hitler: A Film from Germany, 1977) and *Parsifal* (1981), which screened on Germany's ARD in 1980 and 1984—were part of a larger set of series, made-for-TV films and spectacle films. However, this is only the most obvious of examples. Indeed, German television in both the Federal Republic and the GDR provided an important catalyst as a venue of production, exhibition, and reception.

The New German Cinema and the New German Television

The authorial New German Cinema has long been a centerpiece to German film studies, but New German Cinema is unthinkable without a New German Television. In the major works on New German Cinema, the Oberhausen Manifesto of 1962 plays a crucial part in its origin story.¹⁷ The Oberhausen revolt followed Hembus's assessment: declining box office, a descent into low-budget genre films, an old guard of filmmakers reluctant to support new talent, competition from Hollywood *and* competition with the television's small screen required a reset of the film industry. The Oberhausen group of young film radicals pronounced the death of "papa's cinema" and announced the birth of a new film. However, the status of television in both the decline of the old and the emergence of the new cinema must be underscored. What exactly its role was has been a topic of contentious research over the de-

cares.¹⁸ However, in his classic study of New German Cinema, Thomas Elsaesser described the conditions as “a rich film country and a poor cinema country” precisely because of the key role that television had in fostering new productions and new film strategies.¹⁹

Television undeniably played the role of disruptor in the postwar audiovisual industry. In 1952, television broadcast began in both the Federal Republic and the GDR. At that time, only three hundred households in the Federal Republic had a television set, however ownership quickly became a sign of success in the *Wirtschaftswunder*. After the years of war and privation, the television became central to the new consumerism of the era; by 1957 one million televisions had been sold, rising to over 3.5 million by 1962. In the GDR, under radically different conditions of production, similar dynamics between television and film developed. Television also acquired the status of a prestige object. In spite of the initial television model, the Leningrad, selling at a price that placed it well inside the luxury class of goods, by 1958 three hundred thousand televisions had been registered in the GDR. Heather Gumbert notes, though, that many of those sets came from the West or were even Nazi-era productions.²⁰ In the GDR the real growth in consumer goods began after the building of the Wall in 1961; nevertheless, television had already become a centerpiece of the newly furnished living room in the Federal Republic and the GDR. Likewise, in both countries, the small screen had a disruptive impact on the big screen. In this discussion of television, it is important to recall that West German television broadcast covered most of the GDR; reciprocal plans on the part of the GDR to broadcast into the Federal Republic were not as well realized, but certainly in Berlin and border regions it was possible to receive East German television signals.²¹ The impact of television on social and cultural life was deep in both Germanies, but it was in the Federal Republic where television had a significant impact on the shape of the commercial film industry.

As already noted, the standard narrative of film history, and West German film history in particular, sees the television as having a negative impact on the industry because of its impact on cinema audiences. In the East a similar drastic decline in cinema attendance began with the ascent of the television.²² We can, however, note that from the early days of broadcast, television called for quality film. The first made for television movie in the Federal Republic was the 1957 staging of Dürrenmatt’s *Der Richter und sein Henker* (The Judge and His Hangman).²³ The Dürrenmatt adaptation was followed quickly by further projects, filmed on celluloid. These included *Am grünen Strand der Spree* (On the

Green Banks of the Spree, 1960), in which for the first time a made-for-television film took up the Holocaust. This portmanteau film's first episode portrays a soldier recalling his part in the mass execution of Polish Jews.²⁴ Typically the story of New German Cinema describes a lag between the pronouncements of the Oberhausen Manifesto and the first breakthrough films by young German filmmakers in 1966.²⁵ The reason cited is often lacking infrastructure. However, if we expand our perspective beyond cinema, we can recognize that television became a producer and exhibitor of critical and experimental film before other institutions.

Starting in 1961 regional broadcasters NDR and WDR established divisions for film production. Hicketier and Hoff report that on a Tuesday evening in 1964 audiences had the opportunity to watch on ARD a German made politically critical film about World War Two followed by *Hiroshima mon amour* (*Hiroshima my Love*, 1959).²⁶ By 1965 the various broadcasters had brought in new program managers like Günter Rorbach, Peter Lilienthal, Hubert von Bechtolsheim, and Gerhard Prager. Placed in charge of the various stations' film divisions, they all sought to innovate film production precisely through the possibilities offered by television. Rorbach in particular aspired to a socially critical film that appealed to viewers where they live and work. With this support, directors like Christian Ziewer and Klaus Wiese established the Berliner Schule des Arbeiterfilms (Berlin School of Working-Class Film). Their work led the way in television films oriented toward the working class; but such work extended well beyond Berlin.

Broadcasters regularly offered film programming addressing social problems and marginalized groups. Hicketier recalls that Rorbach's dictum "*Fernsehfilm ist Film*" (Made-for-TV films are films!) led to a direct support for celluloid. And in the situation where the Oberhausen signatories had indicted a lack of film training and access to high quality equipment for the next generation, television offered inexperienced *auteurs* an opportunity to work with an established camera team.²⁷ Thus, rather than understanding it as strictly antagonistic, we can consider the relation between film and television as increasingly synergistic.

A New Legal Framework, an Uneasy Synergy

Having already become a vehicle for film exhibition, in 1967 broadcasters were ready to deepen their engagement when the West German

parliament passed legislation to bolster the film industry, the *Filmförderungsgesetz* (German Film Law, FFG).²⁸ This legislation not only established new regulations for the industry, it established the FFA to oversee conditions and distribute subsidies. A central portion of the FFA's mandate was explicitly to build harmony and synergy between broadcast and film. In 1973, following an existing model of drawing revenue from cinema exhibition through a tax on ticket sales, a revision to the FFG established a film levy (*Filmabgabe*) for broadcasters, the so-called Film-Fernseh-Abkommen (Film and Television Agreement). The nature of the agreement changed in subsequent iterations, but the *Filmabgabe* continues to the present as a mainstay of film production. Hence *Babylon Berlin*, for instance, follows from a long series of co-productions between German television and Tykwer's production company X Filme. A frequent central aspect of the FFA has been that in exchange for supporting a film's financing, stations obtain screening rights to the film.²⁹ *Babylon Berlin* and the other contemporary series expand this dynamic into streaming services. There are tensions of course between the small and big screens, but as a result the law regulated an uneasy synergy into existence.

In the 1960s and 1970s, as now, cinema owners in particular decried the competition with the small screen. Cinema audiences did continue to decline and theater owners identified a negative attitude toward cinemas: why pay for the film in an uncomfortable cinema when it could be watched in the comfort of home on TV? On the other hand, television stations consistently need material to fill airtime, and in the 1960s and 1970s broadcasters developed high-quality programming that aligned with their mandate. For broadcasters, support for film production in line with the subsidy system of the FFG actually proved more cost-effective than in-house productions.³⁰ In that first decade the majority of German feature films viewed were already on television and not in cinemas.³¹

In the Film and Television Agreement, the premiere of those films funded by broadcasters nevertheless went first to theatrical release, giving cinemas an opportunity to profit from the production of a better quality German film. However, cinema programmers actually turned their back on German films. Even though they denounced the conditions, German cinemas did not serve as primary venues for German films: they actually oriented themselves toward Hollywood to maximize their profitability. In many ways German cinemas undermined the commercial film in Germany by reserving slots for theatrical releases of West German socially critical films to off-time slots, early or

late in the day, thus only a truly dedicated German cinephile audience could easily experience a German film on the big screen. The big screen exhibition can be understood as eroding the New German Cinema.

The synergistic relation between broadcast and film established at that time continues up to the new millennium as discussed in the opening of this chapter. It has come to include video, private television, and eventually streaming. Yet the contemporary situation of streaming services inverted this dynamic. Led by Netflix, new platforms established competition for content with the established broadcasters, leading to a decline in audience for the established television, a point to which we will return.

Quality Films, Radical Production

Television, in many ways the agent of the conditions attacked by the Oberhausen Manifesto, became a motor driving the New German Cinema. Already in 1963, three days after the establishment of the Second German Television (ZDF) in the Federal Republic, the station began broadcasting *Das kleine Fernsehspiel* (The Little Television Play). In the wake of the FFA, the format of the *Fernsehspiel* changed, moving to a 10 p.m. slot and becoming a venue that directly generated breakthrough film projects like Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Händler der vier Jahreszeiten* (The Merchant of Four Seasons, 1971).³² It is here we can really see the importance of the New German Television. A partial list of filmmakers whose work was funded by the *Fernsehspiel* already reads like a who's who of the New German Cinema: Alexander Kluge, Peter Lilienthal, Herbert Achternbusch, George Moorse, Helmut Costard, and Werner Schroeter, among others. It proved instrumental in creating a vibrant environment for women filmmakers: Helke Sander, Jutta Brückner, Uschi Reich, Monika Funke-Stern, Elfi Mikesch, Chantal Akerman, and Ulrike Ottinger, among others, produced through television some of the most cutting-edge projects of feminist filmmaking.³³

Up to the mid-1970s at least, television stations often acted as vehicles for radical social critiques. In addition to workers' films, we can note screenings of social problem films, youth milieu films, feminist films, and so on. Famous in this context is Rosa von Praunheim's film *Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation in der er lebt* (It Is Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But the Society in Which He Lives, 1971).³⁴ Produced with Günter Rohrbach's WDR, the station sought to address the liberalization of the anti-homosexual Paragraph

175 and a new ability to represent the community. As typical then of the FFA, the film had its cinema debut at the Berlin Film Festival in July 1971, and its television premiere in January 1972. The broadcast into living rooms lent the film an impact it would never have had with only a cinema release. Controversy erupted. The Bavarian regional station, Bayerischer Rundfunk (Bavarian Broadcasting) refused to broadcast it, and the viewers in the rest of Germany witnessed a film whose images to this day stand out in the history of the moving image. A radical per-siflage of the homosexual milieu, the film sparked such an outcry that it is often identified as the incitement for the modern Gay Liberation Movement in Germany.

East–West Developments

While the focus here is on the New German Cinema, the state studios in the East, the DEFA, paralleled developments in the West; DEFA devoted up to 50 percent of studio capacity to television production.³⁵ DEFA feature and documentary films became a regular part of the small screen, with dedicated series like the *Schauspielerreihe* on Wednesday evenings.³⁶ Many classics of DEFA film found reception in the Federal Republic via these broadcasts. Provocatively we could suggest that in these first decades of broadcast what I am identifying as the New German Television actually contributed to a redefinition of the spectator in the West in a way that was more in line with the East. The postwar West German commercial film industry that had treated spectators as audiences gave way with the FFG and FFA to a state-organized subsidy system, in which spectators were understood as citizens. Critical of the GDR, nevertheless, Egon Monk, the director of the film division of the NDR, was a student of Brecht and he advocated an alternative to commercial film.

The control over content in the West was of course not the same as that in the East; the auteurist mode of production of New German Cinema was at core almost an antithesis to the collective decision-making process in the East. Nevertheless in the second half of the 1970s both states clamped down on their critical artists. In the GDR the expatriation of Wolf Biermann in 1976 was the most prominent of a series of repressions and censorship.³⁷ In the Federal Republic, the response to the terrorism of the decade led to the state clamping down on radical work for both big and small screens. For filmmakers the *Radikalenerlass* (radical decree) of 1972 impacted production largely by shifting fund-

ing to support for the “safety” of literary adaptations.³⁸ The impact was more direct on the careers of people working in public television, where a series of purges took place, and by 1979 the signatories to the Hamburger Erklärung (Hamburg Declaration of German Filmmakers) were making attacks on television, just as the Oberhausen signatories had done on the film industry.³⁹

The End of New German Television: The Emergence of Private Television

In 1982 the era of Helmut Kohl and the CDU-led federal government began. That same year Rainer Werner Fassbinder died. These two events are frequently cited as marking a caesura in film history, the end of New German Cinema. It can also be understood in many ways as the end of New German Television. In 1983, Kohl’s new minister of the interior, Friedrich Zimmermann, initiated a thorough reform of the funding structures of the New German Cinema and established a principle of audience appeal and profitability, and in 1983 the new postmaster general Christian Schwarz-Schilling supported initiatives to provide private cable and pay-TV services to test areas in Germany. The introduction of private television was followed two years later by the expansion of broadcast hours to a 24-hour cycle. These changes amounted to a similar and thorough reformation of broadcast in Germany.

In the 1970s, before Kohl’s election, conservative politicians had already sought to respond to the radical programming on German television by seeking a way to defund public television, or by injecting a conservative patriotic even nationalist agenda into film and television production. The *Radikalenerlass* allowed them to advance this agenda. But as of 1984 the era of critical film and television media gave way to a market-based, profit-oriented audiovisual sector. From critical-educational to a popular, “least common denominator” orientation, the mode and content of production rapidly changed, especially within private television projects. In effect, the 1980s in the West saw an inversion of the developments of the 1960s and 1970s. Broadcast now came to align with a model of “viewer as consumer,” and it fostered a new popular cinema that stood in contrast to the critical mode of the previous two decades.⁴⁰

The primary agent and beneficiary of the market transformation was a small cross-border broadcaster, Radio Télévision Luxembourg (RTL). An outgrowth of the German language broadcast of Radio Lux-

embourg, RTL private television began broadcasting via cable in Germany in 1984.⁴¹ RTL spread rapidly beyond the limited connectivity of the cable network through advances in satellite technology, generating programming on a new platform that would eventually be renamed as Sat.1. RTL and Sat.1 became the cornerstone of private broadcasting in Germany, expanding television broadcast hours exponentially, and creating a hunger for new and popular forms of programming.

The privatization of television, the expansion of cable, and the start of satellite brought about a dynamic expansion of broadcast airspace and airtime. A race for content began, not unlike the contemporary condition caused by the endless expansion of offerings on streaming platforms. The race for content in the late 1980s and early 1990s immediately created a trade imbalance with Hollywood; broadcasters scrambling to fill the airtime relied on cheap productions from the United States.⁴² It was not that the Germans loved David Hasselhof but that shows like *Knight Rider* and *The Golden Girls* were available on the cheap, and helped fill airtime. In the newly united Germany, it was for similar reasons a moment when the history of 1950s Heimat films and popular genre productions were rediscovered. They offered inexpensive material to fill broadcast space. Television fostered a renaissance of sorts of West German *Wirtschaftswunder* film. In its popularity it even inspired a series of remakes like *Die drei Mädels von der Tankstelle* (The Three Gals from the Filling Station, 1996) that sought to transfer the appeal of the genres from the older to the new generations. A new orientation toward popular and genre production emerged both on TV and in film. As New German Television had determined New German Cinema, the new conditions likewise determined the cinema of the 1990s.

Television of Consensus?

Famously, Eric Rentschler described this moment as a “cinema of consensus.”⁴³ It is likewise possible to discuss a corresponding television of consensus. Public broadcasters, which had been historically charged with a task to educate and inform a democratic electorate, began a struggle to keep audience attention in the face of private television’s entertainment offerings. RTL’s first own in-house production was the “pie in the face” show *Alles Nichts Oder?!* (Everything Nothing Or?!) in which well-known guests competed with the hosts in frivolous competitions, and the loser got pies in the face tossed by audience members. Through this kind of spectacle the RTL Group grew, and it was domi-

nating the broadcast market by 1996. Public stations, operating on government-allocated budgets controlled by politicians unappreciative of critical investigative reporting, found themselves under-resourced in the free market, and seeking new ways to carry out their mandate.

In the designation cinema of consensus, we observe a critical rejection of the production of the period, which I would suggest frequently rests on a misrecognition of the general crisis in production. It was not just the political shift but significant market shifts as well that led to the end of the subsidy structures that made New German Cinema possible. Moreover, this is not just a West German story. Throughout Western Europe the expansion of home video in the 1980s created a new form of disruption for film *and* television. It initiated a new era of audience options and consumer control that extends to the present day, with consumers having ever-increasing options across various streaming platforms and internet venues. Furthermore the expansion of small screen viewing options undermined further the stability of West German film exhibition. The audience numbers for theatrical release dropped further in the second half of the 1980s, and continued to drop in the 1990s.

National Disruptions, Transnational Solutions

But the story is transnational in that the decline in Germany was also a decline across Europe, West *and* East. And responses as well as solutions began to develop at a European level.⁴⁴ The 1989 Television without Frontiers Directive (TWFD), which grew out of the European Community and was one of the first successful policy initiatives of the European Union, transformed the conditions of broadcasting across Europe and ruptured once and for all the relative autonomy of state broadcasters and the historic national model that had dominated broadcast since the post-World War One era.⁴⁵ The PSBs of European Union member states had to share the airwaves with private broadcasters. The collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the rapid political and economic liberalization expanded the market for private television further. RTL pursued its model in other national markets, and out of the Luxembourg-Germany cross-border origins would grow the world's largest media conglomerate, headquartered in Germany. The development of RTL and private TV in Germany is intimately connected to the development of a new form of cultural policy making at the European level, and the emergence of a European audiovisual sector.

The 1990s thus is a period not only of post-Socialist transformation in the East, but also of European unification across the continent; and in this period the audiovisual sector underwent thoroughgoing transformations. It was not just in Kohl's Germany that the media took on new roles. Famously in the wake of the TWFD the real-estate developer and private television broadcaster Silvio Berlusconi could consolidate a media empire through the breakup of the monopoly of Italy's state television RAI. Expanding his market across Italy and into France, Germany, and Spain allowed him to secure a political future for himself, dominating European politics for decades. For its part, the small private broadcaster RTL could become one of the grand winners of this transformation, with control of sixty-eight television and thirty-one radio stations across Europe, including Russia, and other non-EU countries.

Although it became one of the world's largest media companies, what is confusing here is that the broadcast model of RTL appears national and even local. In this model each country has its own station with a certain autonomy, but as a conglomerate they follow a similar format. RTL Hungary and RTL Germany may differ significantly in terms of time of offerings, however they are subsidiaries of the same conglomerate with the same market orientation, intellectual niveau, and entertainment aspects, and they rely on the same formats. Such production appears national and yet has a Europeanized model uniting it. The decisions and content appear tailored to the local, but on comparison evidence a homologous quality such that we can say that there might not be one European audience that watches the same show, but European audiences are watching the same type of show. It is telling that for the German market RTL-plus and Sat.1, with all the possibilities of a radical break with existing models, nevertheless kept their programming in line with the fundamental forms of linear broadcast; to this day the news show *RTL aktuell* broadcasts every evening at 6:45 p.m., marking a shift in program strategies from daytime toward an evening audience—a shift no longer necessary in today's "everything on-demand at any time" streaming structures.

New Industry Models and Quality Production Redux

As in the 1960s, broadcasters continued to synergize a new post-Wall media industry into life. But perhaps the big winners were the established studios. Bavaria Studios and Studio Babelsberg rose out of these

transitions to become centers of a diffuse but lively commercial media production industry with both television and film production at their heart. This transition to a new production strategy was not easy for the studios but they proved able to become service providers for a broader spectrum of media production for the entire audiovisual sector.

A narrow national focus that denounces a cinema of consensus can lead us to ignore the creation of a viable industry. Along with my work on the transnational aesthetic and the Europeanization of cinema, a number of colleagues have sought to balance the critique of neoliberalism in this process.⁴⁶ Hester Baer has recently added to our understanding of these processes, tracing out the developments through the 1980s in both the Federal Republic and the GDR as the audiovisual sectors came to align.⁴⁷ The rapid expansion of productive capacities and the market orientation were interconnected with the formation of big indie companies like Vivendi Universal, Fremantle, match factory, Grenada, and X Filme, which shifted the dominance of Hollywood over the European audiovisual sector.

One of the outcomes was to generate the initial formats of reality TV that have come to dominate broadcast until today. Since the first broadcast of *Big Brother* (1999 Netherlands, 2000 Germany), German and European television has been dominated by the reality TV format, with private television in particular filling expanded broadcast slots in a liberalized media market.⁴⁸ The United States and other major media markets followed suit, producing European media formats.

Critics looking for critical scripted storytelling have thus hailed the emergence of the new series as signs of a return of “quality television” programming, viewing it as a positive shift in strategy.⁴⁹ But we have to understand these developments as a part of the full complexity of the audiovisual industry in the new millennium. Those same indie companies and private television broadcasters also shifted production to serial formats, like *Gute Zeiten, schlechte Zeiten* (Good Times, Bad Times), which premiered on RTL in 1992 and became the longest running and most successful of its genre. *Gute Zeiten, schlechte Zeiten* has been the primary vehicle for representations of youth, milieu, sexuality, and social problems to an audience of a critical age. It has done so in ways that prompted Kohl’s Friedrich Zimmermann to attack the New German Cinema a decade earlier. Tom Tykwer and his production company X Filme arose in these conditions, and without this economic and generic foundation there would be no basis for the production of the celebrated scripted content of today.

Newer German (Streaming) Cinema

The audiovisual sector has been one of constant transformation it would seem; the tectonic shifts in the last decades have, however, been so significant as to require a revision to the legal code governing the market. The new *Medienstaatsvertrag* (State Media Treaty, MStV), passed in 2019, affords a legal basis to the expanded audiovisual infrastructure. Replacing the *Rundfunkstaatsvertrag* (State Broadcasting Treaty, RStV) that had been in effect for over three decades, the MStV regulates all media, incorporating the impact on terrestrial linear broadcast that the digital transformation has brought about. The MStV includes forms from streaming to social media, as well as blogs and even voice assistants like Amazon's Alexa. The MStV's reach indicates something of the deep transformation and almost constant disruption of these last decades.

As the name of the older treaty suggests, it had previously largely regulated a broadcast world dominated by radio and television. In 1987, the RStV organized a system of linear broadcast, in which cable and satellite were only starting to compete for the console television's terrestrial antenna reception. Video home systems had become popular during the 1980s, making it possible to play back broadcasts later, but audiences largely participated in a broadcast world regulated by certain structures and rituals bound to the standardization of broadcast times. The evening news in the GDR, *Aktuelle Kamera*, was broadcast at 7:30 p.m. and in the West *Tagesschau* at 8 p.m. Before and after the news, stations planned time slots for revue and game shows, sitcoms, and political interviews. Since the 1970s the West and East German audiences have both enjoyed competing crime dramas—*Tatort* in the West and *Polizeiruf 110* in the East. Only two years later, in 1989, Tim Berners-Lee would establish the basis for the World Wide Web at CERN in Geneva, but for the RStV the developments of Web 2.0 and its impact on the broadcast world remained hidden. Digital, streaming, Video on Demand, YouTube, and social media all had to wait until the future for their opportunity to disrupt the broadcast system and compel the new regulation of the MStV.

Of course in its early years, the World Wide Web did not seem to be any direct form of disruption or competition to existing big screen, small screen relations. That was a relation defined largely by taxes on ticket sales and levies on household screens. Even when Netflix entered the Video on Demand market, it at first seemed a minor player. However, as we have discussed here, streaming services like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video instigated a fundamental transformation of the market,

rupturing terrestrial broadcast models that had dominated decades of programming strategies in public and private broadcasters, as well as theatrical exhibition, compelling a multi-screen viewer experience.

Just as the emergence of broadcast television was denounced in the 1970s as disrupting the established industry, a wave of critical voices decrying the death of TV and cinema has arisen. And yet, something new has emerged instead. If the 1980s and the first decade of the new millennium were denounced as a cinema of consensus, those critical voices that expressed a nostalgia for the “political work” of state-subsidized production in the 1970s now run a risk of becoming simply reactionary when rejecting the outpouring of new modes of longform storytelling and shortform image making.

A New Generation of Disrupters

This “disruption” of media in Germany has opened up space for a younger generation breaking through into what was a closed market. It is reminiscent of the dynamic initiated by the rebels in Oberhausen whose 1962 manifesto set off the transformations of the celebrated New German Cinema. Now the new generation has venues that bypass the established public private companies. A new niche market orientation toward specific audiences and data driven production on a small scale ruptures the control of executive producers in favor of creatives: the race for content.

To be sure, Netflix, Amazon, Apple TV, Google, and YouTube all operate in an economic model that extracts value and reduces payout, but the conditions of vertical integration that maintain that economic model are fragmenting quickly. Synergistically, Netflix sales can raise the audience for national broadcasters: BBC’s *Peaky Blinders*, ZDF’s *Babylon Berlin* or Antenne 3’s *Money Heist* would have been impossible as mass critical and audience successes without the permeability to Netflix. We have entered into new models where once obsolete technology giants like Telekom develop originals for national broadcast while also then offering Amazon Prime Video as a platform to its subscribers.

The Public Broadcasters and Their Media Libraries

Jonas Schlatterbeck is responsible for the *Mediathek* of the ARD. The Mediathek, as already noted, is the online VoD library of the broadcast-

ers, and it serves as the center of the ARD's streaming services, the site where the public broadcaster offers streaming material to compete with Netflix, as it were. It is here that the ARD undertook the experiment with *All You Need*, discussed earlier in this chapter, as the first direct to media library production. In a recent interview with media journalist Alexander Soyez, Schlatterbeck described how the media library had experienced unprecedented demand during the lockdown phases of the pandemic.⁵⁰ The growth can be understood as an acceleration of the trend away from linear broadcast models that had dominated radio and television almost from their starts, toward VoD and other types of nonlinear steaming services. In the interview, Schlatterbeck provided a vision of the public broadcaster of the future. Importantly he did not suggest that the media library would be a replacement for linear broadcast; the majority of the television audience does still sit down in front of the television to watch the news programs, crime dramas, and so on at set times. For instance, on Sundays the 8:00 p.m. news followed by *Tatort* at 8:15 p.m. offers a ritual viewing experience so strong in Germany that the time slot for the popular television crime story has generated public viewings in bars, cafes, and other such places. Schlatterbeck rather treats his part of the offerings of the ARD as a mechanism for gaining new post-linear television audiences. For instance, Schlatterbeck identified *All You Need*, the dramedy focused on the interwoven stories of two gay friends in Berlin, as breaking new ground for the public broadcasters. A long way from the controversy of *Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers*, it addressed a specific market demographic without an assumption that it would broadcast into all German living rooms. Produced to stream directly in the media library, it had no terrestrial broadcast, in effect paralleling some of the developments in which Amazon and Netflix have produced feature films direct for streaming, bypassing the cinema release.

For Schlatterbeck, however, the offerings in the media library should hence distinguish themselves from the offerings of the market leaders of the streaming services like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+. Schlatterbeck described *All You Need* as representing the goal to develop content paired to the goals of the media library. He understands the direction of the ARD as having to run parallel to the developments on Netflix and other large streaming services; yet in spite of them having set a new standard for streaming, the goal should not be to offer the same content. The "user experience" should be replicated, allowing for an ease of use and a capturing of interest that leads to continued viewing, or binge viewing. However, the content should not

simply imitate the offerings on Netflix—imitations will always appear as imitations. Schlatterbeck describes the public broadcasters as having a different role, to “educate, inform, and also entertain.” Documentary production on the public broadcasters is much stronger than the offerings on Netflix, representing precisely their commitment to educate.⁵¹

Exclusive productions versus original programming, once a tool of a quasi-distinction between cinema and broadcast, now become a market restrictive technique. “German” content then, like *Babylon Berlin*, *Ku’damm, Freud*, or *Dark*, becomes a marketing tool with content developed by media boards in a new agreement with the media libraries of the networks and the streaming platforms like Netflix. In such deals, when the exclusive rights are over, the production can go from the media library to other platforms. And in terms of production financing, Netflix is now a major “studio” at a time when other European-based streaming platforms act as distributors. These distributors focus on customer curation, while Telekom and its Magenta service morphs into an aggregator of content, offering the customer what they want—and the customer sometimes wants to be an informed citizen, and sometimes a couch potato.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to develop a model of analysis that is not based on cycles of crisis; ongoing sector transformation brings forth both disruption and harmonization. Technical innovation corresponds to changing audience expectations. New means of communication generate new ways to tell new stories. Although I have not undertaken specific image analysis, I have sought to relate the content of production to the technological, economic, and political apparatus out of which those images arise.

From the market predictions discussed at the opening of this chapter to the run through a much longer history of shifts and transformations, we can distill a few recurring themes. First, for critics and scholars of German film and television, the current moment invites us to consider how television and film production are, and have been, interconnected in Germany and throughout Europe. Television production organized on the basis of national and regional broadcasting stations may appear limited to national and local audiences, but stepping back to consider the horizontal and vertical structure of the audiovisual sector allows us to recognize the broadcast network as part of European and global

media markets. Second, technological innovations, like streaming, do disrupt aspects of the industry, in this case cinema exhibition *and* broadcast; however, an overview of the longer history of film and media production reveals that the constant dynamic of disruption/innovation is part of another: convergence/market expansion. And lastly, the interests of cinema spectators are not served by only one form of production (i.e., arthouse feature films); rather a breadth of audiovisual production builds audiences for moving image projects we can describe as quality TV and film.

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Notes

1. Hembus, *Der deutsche Film kann gar nicht besser sein*; Fischer and Hembus, *Der neue deutsche Film*; Rentschler, *West German Film in the Course of Time*; Elsaesser, *New German Cinema*; Pflaum and Prinzler, *Film in Der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*; Hake, *German National Cinema*; Jacobsen, Kaes, and Prinzler, *Geschichte des deutschen Films*; Grob, Prinzler, and Rentschler, *Neuer deutscher Film*.
2. Prümm, "Film und Fernsehen," 545.
3. Koljonen, "Nostradamus Report," 7.
4. "Finanzielle Auswirkungen von Covid-19 Auf Kinobetreiber."
5. Goldhammer et al., "Gutachten zu den Auswirkungen."
6. Smith and Baer, "*Babylon Berlin*."
7. Council of Europe, *European Audiovisual Observatory*; Fontaine, Blázquez, and Cappello, "Key Trends."
8. Feuer, Kerr, and Vahimagi, *Mtm Quality Television*; McCabe and Akass, *Quality TV*; Nesselhauf and Schleich, *Das andere Fernsehen?!*
9. "Programmkinos in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland."
10. King, *Quality Hollywood*; King, *Indiewood, USA*.
11. Galt and Schoonover, *Global Art Cinema*; Fisher and Prager, *Collapse of the Conventional*.
12. Fontaine, Blázquez, and Cappello, "Key Trends."
13. Nesselhauf and Schleich, *Das andere Fernsehen?!*
14. Fuechtner and Lerner, "*Babylon Berlin*"; Krauß, "When German Series Go Global."

15. Kreimeier, *The UFA Story*; Rogowski, *The Many Faces*.
16. Canjels, *Distributing Silent Film Serials*.
17. Hembus, *Der deutsche Film kann gar nicht besser sein*; Fischer and Hembus, *Der neue deutsche Film*; Lewandowski, *Die Oberhausener*; Franklin, *New German Cinema*; Rentschler, *West German Filmmakers on Film*; Prinzler and Rentschler, *Augenzeugen*; Elsaesser, *New German Cinema*; Pflaum and Prinzler, *Film in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*; Knight, *Women and the New German Cinema*; Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat*; Davidson, *Deterritorializing the New German Cinema*; Gemünden, *Framed Visions*; Rentschler, "From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus"; Hake, *German National Cinema*; Jacobsen, Kaes, and Prinzler, *Geschichte des deutschen Films*; Flinn, *The New German Cinema*; Knight, *New German Cinema*; McCormick and Guenther-Pal, *German Essays on Film*; Eue and Gass, *Provokation Der Wirklichkeit*; Grob, Prinzler, and Rentschler, *Neuer deutscher Film*.
18. Faupel, *Medien im Wettstreit*; Hillrichs and Ungureit, *Filmkultur, Filmverbrauch*; Blaney, *Symbiosis or Confrontation?*
19. Elsaesser, *New German Cinema*, 31.
20. Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism*, 27.
21. Dittmar, *Feindliches Fernsehen*; Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism*.
22. Schenk, *Eine kleine Geschichte der DEFA*.
23. Hickethier and Hoff, *Geschichte des deutschen Fernsehens*, 153.
24. *Ibid.*, 157.
25. Typically cited are the premieres of *Abschied von Gestern* [Yesterday Girl] (1966), *Schonzeit für Füchse* [No Shooting Time for Foxes] (1966), *Es [It]* (1966), *Der junge Törless* [Young Törless] (1966).
26. Hickethier and Hoff, *Geschichte des deutschen Fernsehens*, 219.
27. *Ibid.*, 248.
28. For the latest version, see <https://www.ffa.de/index.php?id=1>.
29. The most recent version of the agreement can be found at <https://www.ffa.de/ffg-regelsammlung.html>.
30. Karstens and Schütte, *Firma Fernsehen*; Hickethier and Hoff, *Geschichte des deutschen Fernsehens*.
31. Forster and Knieper, "50 Years of Television Broadcasting."
32. Schreitmüller and Stein, *Freispiele*.
33. Hickethier and Hoff, *Geschichte des deutschen Fernsehens*, 348; Knight, *Women and the New German Cinema*.
34. Heinemann, "Schwierigkeiten mit einem Tabu"; Halle, "Rainer, Rosa, and Werner"; Halle, "From Perverse to Queer"; Halle, "Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers."
35. Schenk, *Eine kleine Geschichte der DEFA*; Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism*.
36. Hickethier and Hoff, *Geschichte des deutschen Fernsehens*.
37. Pleitgen and Biermann, *Die Ausbürgerung*; Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition*.
38. Feldmann et al., *Wer ist denn hier der Verfassungsfeind!*; Jacobsen, Kaes, and Prinzler, *Geschichte des deutschen Films*, 262; Elsaesser, *New German Cinema*; Rentschler, *West German Film in the Course of Time*.
39. Prinzler and Rentschler, *Augenzeugen*; Rentschler, *West German Filmmakers on Film*.
40. Halle and McCarthy, *Light Motives*.
41. Devlin, "Commercial Onslaught"; Emery, "Radio Luxembourg."
42. Halle, *German Film after Germany*.
43. Rentschler, "From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus."
44. Halle, *The Europeanization of Cinema*; Halle, *German Film after Germany*.

45. Coleman, "Contending with 'Unity in Diversity'"; Halle, *German Film after Germany*; Nenova, "The New Audiovisual Media Services Directive"; Krebber, *Europeanisation of Regulatory Television Policy*; Dupagne, "EC Policymaking"; European Commission, *Television Broadcasting Activities*.
46. Halle, *German Film after Germany*; Halle, *The Europeanization of Cinema*.
47. Baer, *German Cinema in the Age of Neoliberalism*.
48. Halle, *German Film after Germany*.
49. Krauß, "Im Angesicht der 'Qualitätsserie'"; Klug, *Scripted Reality*; Nesselhauf and Schleich, *Das andere Fernsehen?!*
50. Soyez, "Wie sieht die Mediathek der Zukunft aus, Herr Schlatterbeck?"
51. *Ibid.*

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