The taste of a nation: Training the senses and sensibility of cinema audiences in Imperial Germany

Scott Curtis

I step in; intermission has just begun. An oppressive, damp draft blows against me, even though the door is open. The entire room (500 capacity) is filled to the last seat with children. There is an indescribable din: running, yelling, shrieking, laughing, talking. Boys scuffle. Orange peels and empty bon-bon boxes fly through the air. The ground is studded with candy wrappers. Along the windowsill and radiator young toughs romp around. Girls and boys sit together, densely packed. Fourteen-year-old boys and girls with hot, excited faces tease each other in unchildlike ways. Children of all ages, even two- and three-year-olds, sit there with glistening cheeks. Young women walk among them selling sweets. Many children sneak candy and drink soda [Brause]; young boys smoke furtively.

Then the movie begins.

For the cinema reformers of Imperial Germany, this was a scene from hell. This is what German Kultur had come to, what modernity had wrought: children melting and spoiled like day-old candy on the floor of a movie theatre. Like Professor Rath of Der Blaue Engel (The Blue Angel, 1930), who follows his students into a seedy nightclub and is initially shocked by the sexuality and degeneracy within, this schoolteacher from Bremen walked into a matinée and was horrified by what she saw. Her emphasis on the corporeality of the scene, on the body of the audience, so to speak – fighting, eating, sweating and awaken-

Scott Curtis currently works at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences Center for Motion Picture Study in Beverly Hills, CA. He is a Ph.D. candidate in film studies at the University of Iowa and his dissertation concerns the discourse on cinema in Germany before World War I. Please address correspondence to 6448 1/2 Orange Street, Los Angeles, CA 90048, USA.
ing sexuality — attests to the perception that cinema presented a grave danger to the children’s emotional and moral fitness, and especially their physical health. Given the traditional bourgeois association of sensuality with the lowly ‘masses’, this scene also represented a threat to the well-being of the nation, of the body politic. As I will later demonstrate, ‘children’ and ‘the masses’ were often interchangeable concepts. Indeed, while cinema was often depicted as a gaping Moloch devouring innocent children in some pagan ritual, the children here are far from sacrificial lambs. They present something of a veiled threat to the narrator, as if she had entered a strange, chaotic culture. In the contemporary literature on children and cinema, the anxieties produced by scenes like this one are manifested as twin, contradictory paternal urges: to protect and to control.

‘Young women walk among them selling sweets’. Along with the concern for sensuality (and its tacit partner, capitalism), the numerous references to sweets stand out in this description. Implicit is the assumption that cinema is spoiling the ‘taste’ of the children for financial gain. Reformers complained constantly about the ‘tastelessness’ of both the theatre atmosphere and the films themselves. Figuratively speaking, the concession candy which ate at the children’s teeth was also rotting their aesthetic sensibilities. Konrad Lange, a noted art historian of Imperial Germany and a ferocious cinema reformer, put it more bluntly: ‘If one were to judge the artistic understanding of our good, middle-class citizens, one would have to say that their taste is rotten to the core. They have a morbid taste for the slick, the effeminate, the sentimental, and the sugary. They display a demoralizing aversion to the healthy dark bread of true art’.

Here the relation between taste, class, and the body is made as explicit as possible. Taste, as the simultaneous expression of individual judgement and social distinction, serves as a connection between the private and the public spheres. It is, as Pierre Bourdieu notes, ‘a class culture turned into nature, that is, embodied’. It therefore provides a link between individual consumption and a national agenda. Lange anxiously condemns the feminization of culture accompanying the onslaught of modernity. He was not alone with his fears; most middle-class males of the Western world seemed to share his concerns.

Lange’s solution, like that of many teachers and educators involved in cinema reform, stressed the education of children and adults. The abiding faith in the ability of education to overcome social ills and promote social progress was a fundamental plank in the platform of many fin-de-siècle movements, from the socialists to the progressives. But the tradition of aesthetic education, with its promise to harmonize the senses and sharpen judgement, offered a quintessentially German solution. By pointing the way to a ‘true’ and ‘pure’ aesthetic experience, aesthetic education also pledged to counteract the corrupting influence of the cinema. While many reformers, such as Lange, steadfastly refused to be seduced by cinema’s charms, some flirted with this particular ‘Lola’, courting her in hopes of making her an honest woman by giving her an aesthetic education (or an education in aesthetics). Even while cinema used the reformers for its own ends, it revealed the contradictions of their ideology. Just as Professor Rath’s affair with Lola reveals the indefensibility of his position – a teacher who, ultimately, does not have the best interests of his students at heart – so, too, the reformers’ involvement with cinema shows that there were larger issues at stake than the health of the children.

This essay will explore both the facts and fissures of Germany’s cinema reform movement as it dealt with the relation between cinema, children and the masses, taste and nation, education and the body. After placing cinema reform in the context of other reform movements, this article will outline some of the concrete steps Kinoreformers took to protect child audiences from the hazards of cinema. Censorship, taxes, and child protection laws were accompanied by attempts to create an alternative film system by controlling means of production, distribution, and exhibition. It will also describe reformers’ efforts to persuade production companies and theatre owners to support reform films and exhibition values, which led to the creation of reform theatres and community cinemas. The essay will also discuss the discourse on ‘the child’ and its relation to the concept of ‘the masses’. The urge to protect children from the ‘degeneracy’ of mass entertainments went hand-in-hand with the desire to educate the general public. Both concerns drew life from child and crowd psychology popularized at the turn of the century.
Finally, this article will focus on the work of one reformer, Hermann Häfker, and his attempts to use cinema as an instrument of ideological solidarity. Increasingly worried about the ‘bad taste’ of mass entertainments, Häfker enlisted cinema in a programme of aesthetic education designed to raise the sensibility of the people to a unified, national level. Taking his cue from a long tradition of aesthetic education dating back to Schiller, as well as the art education movement then taking place, Häfker wanted to use cinema to ‘train’ the tastes of the nation. His special exhibition projects best exemplify reformers’ attempts to establish certain rules of spectatorship for their audiences. Furthermore, in trying to influence the way the audience actually viewed the films, the reformers’ programme was, at bottom, one of bodily discipline.

The spirit of reform

In their desire to make a change for the better, the men and women involved in Kino-reform were part of a much larger set of movements sweeping the industrialized world around the turn of the century. As increased industrialization and urbanization brought on one social upheaval after another, ‘reform’ expressed the mood of the times in many ways throughout Europe and the United States. In Britain, constitutional reforms swept through Parliament as various groups demanded suffrage throughout the last third of the century. In the United States, the agrarian Populist movement of the 1890s and the Progressive movement of the 1900s reflected a broad impulse toward criticism and change. Progressivism, in particular, captured the spirit of reform through its outrage over the excesses of capitalism, its faith in progress, and its interventionist policies. During the 1880s, the pressures of industrialization and democracy prompted the French parliament to create the only state-run, compulsory, secular primary school system in the world. The growing confrontations between the forces of labour and capital also prodded republican politicians to campaign for social legislation, such as regulation of working conditions, in order to insure social peace.

Germany, in particular, was deluged by swelling transformations in the public sphere provoked by rapidly changing demographics. The industrial revolution and national unification came relatively late...
to Germany and accelerated very quickly. The resulting discord between the classes and between rural and urban lifestyles seemed especially acute. During the high tide of these changes, which occurred from around 1890 to 1920, the concept of ‘reform’, as an expression of the sense of transition and as a plan for managing it, took on special significance for self-understanding. Germany’s groundbreaking legislation providing for compulsory insurance for workers’ sickness, workplace accidents, and retirement pension became an influential model for Great Britain, the United States and France. These measures, dealing in some form with physical conditions and consequences of the workplace, illustrate the strong connection between class and somatic issues in reform movements during the late nineteenth century. Reform manifested itself in everything from Jugendstil decor to a new, more ‘natural’ style in women’s clothing (Reformkleidung), to nutrition reform (Ernährungsreform). ‘Reform’ implied a battle against tradition, against perceived cultural and social stagnation and as such, it provided a plan for the formation of new, more ‘authentic’ concepts for living. In fact, the connections between the reform movements and the more general tradition of Kulturkritik are very strong; from Rousseau and Pestalozzi in the eighteenth century to Nietzsche and Lagarde in the nineteenth, the critique of society paved the way for a general re-evaluation of values in the twentieth.

Very often, the critique of society focused on the educational system. Education reform was among the first movements to sweep across Germany. The Kaiser himself had set the agenda on a December morning in 1890 while addressing a congress of educators in Berlin; Wilhelm II claimed he grasped ‘the spirit of an expiring century’ with his calls for school reform. In answering the question of how the German schools of the nineteenth century could be reshaped to meet the needs of the twentieth, the Kaiser echoed sentiments that had been expressed throughout Europe during the often rocky transition from the Victorian age to the modern. Specifically, he voiced his fears that the Gymnasium failed to train its students adequately for the requirements of Germany’s rapid industrialization. Secondly, he complained about the ‘excess of mental work’ in the schools, arguing that such ‘overburdening’ was threatening the physical health of Germany’s youth. Lastly, he insisted that German schools devote more time and energy to fostering specifically national values: ‘We must make German the basis of the Gymnasium; we should raise young Germans, not young Greeks and Romans.'

The Kaiser’s concerns about ‘the modern’, ‘the healthy’ and ‘the national’, reflected and reinforced similar fixations of the European elite. Like them, he found the educational system to be both the problem and the solution to the crises. By inadequately preparing the nation’s children for the demands of the future, the system risked irrelevance. Swift reform promised both a brighter future and a greater measure of control over the rapid changes taking place. Among the different examples of education reform were the Landerziehungsheime, which were experimental schools located in the countryside as an explicit rejection of urban culture. Their emphasis on the ‘physical education’ of their students echoed the hopes of the youth movement for a spiritually renewing combination of countryside, fresh air and Volk. Likewise, the Arbeitsschule hoped to renew the creative (and ethical, hence political) spirit through manual labour, such as gardening and handicrafts, such as wood sculpting or leather crafts. The art education movement (Kunsterziehungsbewegung) similarly stressed the creative capacities of children as well, advocating renewal through art and education of the aesthetic sensibility.

Cinema reformers shared the Kaiser’s anxiety about ‘the modern’, ‘the healthy’ and ‘the national’. At the centre of their concerns lay cinema, which they also found to be both scourge and cure. The emblem of modernity, cinema represented a plague, especially toxic to children, and proper education of the public was the only hope to halt the epidemic. At the same time, cinema was the most powerful instrument of mass education, and therefore provided the surest treatment for whatever ills modernity had spread. Before treatment could begin, however, commercial interests had to be persuaded to participate in this remedy. Moreover, cinema needed a stamp of legitimacy in order to have any authority in this rescue mission. Kinoreform was the process by which these goals were attempted, if not completely achieved. It shared roots, objectives and ideology with other reform movements of the day, especially, and not surprisingly, educational reform.
It does seem rather unusual that the head of the German empire, almost by definition the representative of a conservative status quo, would come out so strongly in favour of reform. The mixture of progressive reforms and reactionary politics indicated the ambivalent attitude of the bourgeoisie toward the troubling issues of the day. All reform movements revealed, in one way or another, the fundamental irony of the Kaiser’s position. The calls for clothing reform in Germany exemplified this contradiction. In his 1901 book, The Culture of the Female Body as a Foundation for Women’s Clothing, Paul Schultze-Naumberg made an extensive study of the debilitating physical effects resulting from methods of forcing the female form into an aesthetic ideal. In a graphic and impassioned plea to eliminate the corset, in particular, Schultze-Naumberg demonstrated how its use eventually caused deformation of the muscles, bones and internal organs. He called for a more functional clothing in keeping with ‘a new concept of corporeality’. While consistent with similar efforts by women’s movements to liberate themselves from the pressures of social constraints, Schultze-Naumberg’s ‘new concept’ of more ‘natural’ bodies included only those from healthy German stock. Carl Heinrich Stratz, another strong advocate of clothing reform, took a similar approach in his book Women’s Clothing and its Natural Development, grounding his arguments for the elimination of the corset on the conclusion that it threatened the racial superiority of European women. Schultze-Naumberg and Stratz, whose concerns for the health of women were cloaked in worries about the integrity of the Fatherland, are excellent examples of the fusion of progressive goals of more liberal movements and reactionary, nationalist politics.

Schultze-Naumberg, Stratz and the Kaiser shared with their fellow guardians of culture a general anxiety about the decline in German cultural life. This anxiety found voice in a cluster of complaints, ranging from protests about the lack of creativity in higher education to the decadence of mass entertainments, such as cinema or ‘trashy novels’ (Schundliteratur). In many cases, as Schultze-Naumberg and Stratz illustrate, the preoccupation with ‘degeneracy’ was often connected to an obsession with and fear of female sexuality. As the women’s movement gained momentum, it represented an increasing threat to male domination of the public sphere. Although the motivations of a class of people can be difficult to ascertain, the mandarins’ alarm over a ‘crisis of culture’ is usually attributed to this declining authority. The women’s movement only exemplified a menace that surrounded German intellectuals; actions such as the youth movements threatened to undermine paternal credibility even in the home. Faced with such massive structural changes, the cultural élite embraced reform as a way of coping with, and controlling, the assault of modernity. Education reform, in particular, flourished as only the most visible and dominant in a series of movements to which the bourgeoisie looked with both hope and apprehension.

The cinema reform movement

Cinema reform patterned itself after these movements, both in terms of ideology and practice. Because most of the reformers were teachers and educators, their close ties to the education reform groups of the period remained a formative aspect of their own efforts. Hermann Lemke, a Gymnasium professor from Hagen and one of the founders of KinoReform, was well connected to the Society for the Dissemination of Adult Education (Gesellschaft zur Verbreitung von Volksbildung), the leading educational organization in Germany. Hermann Helfker, the most articulate representative of cinema reform and arguably Germany’s first film theorist, was a journalist and writer who was also close to the leaders of the art education movement. Before he became the chief film censor in Berlin, Karl Brunner was also a Gymnasium professor and one of the most visible participants in the national movement against ‘trashy novels’. Konrad Lange, one of the leading voices of the art education movement, taught art history at the University of Tübingen.

Despite their similar backgrounds, these reformers were not all of one mind. The disparate views and priorities of all involved, as well as the absence of a central organization or platform, make it difficult to even characterize KinoReform as a movement. Scattered around mostly northern and small-town Germany, the representatives worked at the local level, trying to coordinate national efforts through the trade press, such as Der Kinematograph out of Düsseldorf. The birth of trade magazines devoted exclusively to cinema coincides with the birth of the reform movement in 1907; during its earliest years,
Fig. 2. A banner from *Der Kinematograph*, ca. 1913, a trade magazine that helped to coordinate reform efforts.

*Der Kinematograph* acted as a willing partner in *Kinoreform*\(^20\). The range of viewpoints in its pages, and in the other magazines that followed shortly thereafter, testifies to the difficulty the reformers had choosing the most effective course of action.

If they did not agree on methods, they did have a set of common objectives. First and foremost, they felt compelled to protect children from what they perceived to be the dangerous effects of cinema. This was first explicitly stated in 1907, when a teacher’s group in Hamburg, the Society of Friends of the Schools and Instruction for the Fatherland (Gesellschaft der Freunde des vaterländischen Schul- und Erziehungswesens), formed a commission to study the effects of cinema on school children. Its conclusions were predictable: both the films themselves and the theatres produced physical and moral side effects in school-age children. The combination of the ‘flicker effect’ and the lack of adequate ventilation in theatres caused ‘eyestrain, nausea and vomiting’, according to the commission. Emphasizing the connection between the body and ethical judgement, the committee hinted that these physical symptoms were a sign of a deeper moral sickness, manifested in school by ‘apathy for learning, carelessness, and a tendency to daydream’\(^21\). Jurist Albert Hellwig, certainly the most prolific reformer, echoed these concerns in 1914, when he argued that ‘a promotion of a certain superficiality and inattentiveness, as well as a retardation of concentration and aesthetic cultivation’ could be counted among the psychological dangers to young moviegoers\(^22\).

Second, the reformers made it clear from the very beginning that they hoped to use cinema for educational purposes. In this and many other ways, the German reformers were very similar to their American counterparts, who also took it upon themselves to ‘uplift’ both the theatres and the films for the good of the masses\(^23\). The Hamburg commission concluded its study with the recommendation that:

> Technically flawless cinematic presentations with suitable topics could be an outstanding medium for instruction and entertainment. Educators and artists should sit down with prominent members of the [motion picture] industry and come to an understanding. Encouraging the filmmakers to create good productions appropriate for children – to be shown in special children’s shows – would be a step toward better and nobler use of the cinema particularly worth striving for\(^24\).

This call to arms was answered independently by Hermann Lemke in the summer of 1907, when he persuaded a Friedenau cinema theatre owner to open Germany’s first reform theatre. Lemke gave the opening address, making the goals of cinema reform clear to the mostly middle-class audience of teachers, press and community leaders. He charged
that the current state of cinema had caused the aesthetic sensibilities of the people to regress. Calling on the combined power of educators and the press, he maintained that 'when the taste of the people is so backward, it's the duty of the intellectual [geistigen] leaders to influence them and put their aesthetic taste back on the right track'. Cleaning up the cinema theatres was the first order of business in this project. Lemke demanded that:

This reformation should begin by giving the theatres a respectable appearance. Gone is the small, narrow room where everyone is crammed and squeezed together; in its place we find a larger, airier hall, so that the visitor no longer has the impression that he is in a second-rate establishment. Good ventilation has been provided in order to reduce health risks25. Lemke’s concerns demonstrate how closely ‘taste’ and ‘respectability’ were tied to ‘the body’, and especially the body of ‘the masses’. He was preaching to the converted, however. Der Kinematograph later reported, ‘it seems that the middle class is more interested than the working class in the direction the reform theatre is taking. While the seats in the third section show hardly any patrons, the first section (50 cents admission) is mostly sold out’26. Still, Lemke was sufficiently encouraged to organize a ‘Cinema Reform Party’ the following autumn. Represented by teachers, members of the press, theatre owners, and production companies, the society was one of many throughout Germany that hoped to coordinate efforts from these quarters towards their educational goals. Lemke’s society received contributions from such firms as the German branches of Eclipse and Gaumont27. While cleaning up the Kinos, the reformers turned their attention to the films themselves.

Production
Enjoying the easy fraternity with producers during the early years, Kinoreformers hoped to capitalize upon their good relations with the motion picture companies in order to increase the number and availability of reform-type productions. In 1908, Lemke suggested that his reform society act as a ‘Film-Idea-Central’, a clearinghouse of sorts for reform-minded scripts. Members of the society could submit ideas for scenarios and the society would negotiate with the studios on the writers’ behalf. Lemke explained, ‘Because we’re in good standing with the producers, such an exchange would be relatively easy to carry out. We would take on this service free of charge and only require that those who use it be members … Perhaps this way we’ll succeed in bringing the film companies up to date as well as being an influential model for foreign countries’28. Unfortunately, while the members of the movement itself might have held some early enthusiasm for this plan, the film companies themselves apparently did not take to it; the idea never went beyond the initial stages and no further mention is made of the ‘Film-Idea-Central’ in the trade press or reform publications.

The failure of the ‘Film-Idea-Central’ established something of a frustrating pattern for the reformers. Film companies expressed early interest in reform projects, even going so far as to sponsor events, but eventually refused more meaningful and lasting support. The end of 1908 saw the opening of Germany’s first film trade show/exhibition at Berlin’s Zoological Gardens. Jointly sponsored by Lemke’s reform party and the leading film companies at the time, and with the rather obvious motto of ‘The Ennobling of Cinema’ (Veredelung des Kinos), it was nonetheless heavily criticized even by friendly periodicals for its lack of organization29. Exhibitors, manufacturers, and production companies declined the reformers’ help for the next exhibit in 191230. Likewise, when Lemke and Hafker attempted to muster support for their special exhibitions, the film companies were initially supportive, but lost interest fairly quickly. Realizing that domestic companies could not or would not produce sufficient numbers and variety of educational films, Hafker went so far as visiting foreign film companies, such as the Charles Urban Trading Co. in London and Eclipse in Paris, to find suitable nature films for his exhibitions31. Lemke even went to England and wrote film treatments in order to jump-start some sort of interest in his programme32. Very early on, it was quite clear that the production companies were cautious about backing the reformers and their schemes.

This did not mean, however, that the film companies wanted nothing to do with the reform movement. They were certainly willing to use the reform movement for their own ends; despite their difficulties, the reformers were still a legitimating presence - they were, after all, educators, clergy, journalists,
and otherwise pillars of their respective communities. Film companies were eager to cash in on this allegiance. Advertising trumpeted this relationship, even if the reformers had nothing to do with the making of the film. A 1912 PAGU film, Die Irrfahrten des Odysseus (The Wanderings of Odysseus), is labelled a ‘Reformfilm’ and carries this blurb: ‘From a special press screening, which was attended by the most respected Berlin literary figures and art critics, came the unanimous decision: “This film signals the long-awaited reform of cinema”‘.33 Aware of the potential directions cinema could take, the film companies initially went along with the reformers. But as soon as it became apparent that the vast majority of the viewing public was more interested in narrative entertainment, the companies brushed off the reform societies’ efforts to influence the product directly.

The reformers did little to help their cause with the production companies. Their regular denunciations of ‘cinema drama’ (Kinodrama) merely antagonized an industry leaning heavily toward narrative films. This prejudice against narrative films often disguised stronger rhetoric against international domination of the German film market. ‘In the internationalist cinema drama [Kinodrama], the wildest passions of all nations come together for a gruesome rendezvous’, charged one reformer.34 Likewise, their complaints about capitalist interests tainting cinema’s potential were thinly veiled laments about the presence of foreign capital. Some refor-
mers, such as Hafker and Lange, dismissed cinema drama because of aesthetic concerns. It did not offend their sensibilities because of sloppy production qualities, although these did attract attention. Rather, the filmed drama betrayed what they saw to be cinema's primary mission: to record movement and 'real life'. The argument for filmic realism, of course, coincided with their desire to use cinema for educational purposes. As Sabine Hake notes, they did not dismiss the possibility of story elements in their educational films, but the excesses of the 'trashy film' so contradicted their stated ideals that they rallied against film drama altogether, for both political and aesthetic reasons.35

Lemke hoped to reform the cinema through example, stressing cooperation with and from the industry. Others were not so willing to rely on this teamwork. One faction of the reform movement, led by Albert Hellwig and Karl Brunner, saw censorship and regulation as the best way to combat the deluge of Schundfilme. Both Hellwig and Brunner advocated a series of legal restrictions on the cinema, including censorship, entertainment taxes (Lustbarkeitsteuer), poster censorship, safety regulations, and child protection laws (Kinderschutz). Authorities tried to maintain some control over child audiences (and, consequently, theatres) by restricting their visits to specific hours of the day, regulating the length of the matinées, and requiring that children be accompanied by an adult, that police should have unlimited access to the theatre during the matinées, that the day's programme must be given prior approval, or that a 'suitable pause' separate the films.37

Distribution and exhibition
Reformers realized early on the importance of establishing a distribution network for their educational films. For this task, Lemke and his circle enlisted the help of the Gesellschaft zur Verbreitung von Volksbildung (hereafter referred to as the GVV). An umbrella organization for over 8,000 local education groups, clubs, associations, and societies, it was a formidable partner in Kinoreform. Bildungs-Verein, had attended the opening of Lemke's Friedenau reform theatre, he still considered cinema to be of minor significance.38 The GVV resisted involvement with cinema until 1912, when it established a film distribution centre of 180 films in 16 categories, from 'History of the Fatherland' to educational films on biology.39

The reformers found a more willing and beneficial partner in the Lichtbilderei, established in 1909 as a foundation of the Association for Catholic Germany (Volksvereins für das katholische Deutschland). The Lichtbilderei was the largest educational film institute before World War I, with an extensive catalogue of titles. It began as a rental source for magic lantern slides, which could be used for public lectures, but started collecting films as well after 1911. By the end of 1912, it had around 900 titles and was collecting more at about 30 films per week, and by 1913 offered 400 slide series and 1,400 film titles.40 The Lichtbilderei was not limited to providing films for schools, churches and clubs; it also provided programming for many commercial theatres. Approximately 40 weekly theatres and 50 to 60 Sunday Kinos showed Lichtbilderei films regularly.41 The Lichtbilderei was also involved in the distribution of more commercial dramas, actually acquiring 'monopoly' rights over such established hits as Quo Vadis? (Italy, 1913), Giovanna d'Arco (The Maid from Orleans, 1913), and Tirol in Waffen (Tirol in Arms, 1914).42

From 1912 to 1915, the Lichtbilderei was something of an organizational centre for the cinema reform movement. Its stock of films gave life to the community cinemas and private Reformkinos, and its publications – the periodical Bild und Film (Image and Film) and the series of books from the association's Volksvereins publishing company – were the principal forum for the discussion of Kinoreform issues after 1912.

In 1912, the GVV, in association with the Lichtbilderei, established the funds for two educationally oriented Wanderkinos. These travelling cinemas toured from town to town, playing for four to six weeks in each place, in an effort to offset the influence of commercial cinemas and unity aesthetic and educational standards across the nation. Showing between nine and eleven films an evening, accompanied by lectures concerning such topics as 'A Modern Factory', the enterprise was basically
modelled after the GW's successful Wandertheater and public lecture series. Between the fall of 1912 and the outbreak of war, the Wanderkinos offered a total of 1,279 such evenings.

Reformers had most success with their exhibition experiments. In addition to the reform theatres and Wanderkinos already mentioned, numerous communities established their own public cinemas. The first was founded in the town of Eickel at a cost to the community of 14,000 Marks. Others opened soon afterwards, in such towns as Altona, Wiesbaden, Osterfeld, Frankfurt (Oder), Gleiwitz and Stettin. These cinemas became the centre of local reform activity, and provided the precedent for the state-run cinemas of modern Germany, which continue to illustrate the relation between taste and nation. The proclamations of the early kommunale Kinos articulate this relationship and the goals of the reform movement in general:

To oppose, for aesthetic, cultural and patriotic reasons, the trash that is offered as a general rule in the private theatres; to offer instead entertaining films of scientific and educational worth; to exert, in association with institutions with similar principles, a gradual influence on the film market, which is now almost exclusively dependent upon foreign companies; and to therefore keep here the millions that are flowing out of the country. Finally, to place the cinema in service of the youth organizations and schools by providing suitable presentations.

To the modern observer, the cinema reformers of Imperial Germany might seem a bit quixotic. Tilting their lances to such impassive windmills as capitalism and narrative, they only reluctantly and belatedly conceded that they were charging against the wind of public opinion. As the movies became more popular and an evening's entertainment
began to look less and less like a lecture series, instead relying more heavily on ‘Kinodrama’, the reformers began to look more and more irrelevant. Their own ‘Dulcinea’ – the children of the nation – seemed oblivious to their efforts. Even those sympathetic to their cause, like this reviewer of a book on cinema and theatre reform, found the strategy somewhat naive:

[The author] is certainly up to the task in this serious matter. But he will surely understand if skepticism prevails. An ‘ennobling’ of cinema by means of literature is not altogether believable and the completely different natures of the media would appear to doom this project to a bad end. The idea that theatre could be made free [of commercial influence] through the large-scale efforts of community interest groups is simply too pretty a picture for even his friendly brush to paint.

Others were not so kind. One theatre owner from the 1920s remembers them as ‘sanctimonious folks and hypocrites, morality sleuths in male and female guise’. Film histories, until recently, have been equally dismissive. Siegfried Kracauer charges simply that, with their zealous efforts to defend the literary canon of the nation, ‘they yielded to the truly German desire to serve the established powers’. Even if a bit condescending, Kracauer is not far off the mark. While the proclamations of the various Kinoreformers embraced a wide range of opinion, they never strayed far from the status quo. As Sabine Hake notes, ‘in sharp contrast to the intellectuals, the reformers aligned themselves openly with the existing power structure’.

We mustn’t, however, underestimate the reformers’ contribution to German culture. In trying to sway what Kracauer called ‘the salutary indifference of the masses’, the reformers succeeded in dominating the discourse on cinema in the years before World War I. In addition to the permanent impression they left on German film culture, mass communication research owes them an especially heavy debt: their focus on media effects had a lasting influence on the vocabulary and goals of modern mass media studies.

Ultimately, of course, cinema reform was not completely successful. The reformers failed to meet their stated goals and, considering the extreme position of many reformers, this is perhaps all for the best. World War I changed abruptly the nation’s priorities, and even though the calls for reform were heard again through the Weimar years, the urgency of the moment had passed. In 1913, lances heavy with disappointment, the movement clearly appeared to be running out of breath. Sighed Lemke, ‘I had always hoped that someone would take over the chairmanship for me and assist me in further expanding the [Cinema Reform] Society, but no one was found and the result was that the Society remained stuck in its children’s shoes’.

**Child/crowd psychology**

Lemke’s metaphor is apt because it reveals the extent to which the reformers were thinking about the cinema (and themselves) through the metaphor of ‘the child’. Since they were educators and teachers, this is perhaps to be expected. It is noteworthy, however, that they applied this trope to adult audiences. References to their audiences as ‘children’, especially in connection with mention of ‘the masses’, are scattered throughout the discourse. Even a bit condescending, Kracauer is not far off the mark. While the proclamations of the various Kinoreformers embraced a wide range of opinion, they never strayed far from the status quo. As Sabine Hake notes, ‘in sharp contrast to the intellectuals, the reformers aligned themselves openly with the existing power structure’.

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Lemke’s metaphor is apt because it reveals the extent to which the reformers were thinking about the cinema (and themselves) through the metaphor of ‘the child’. Since they were educators and teachers, this is perhaps to be expected. It is noteworthy, however, that they applied this trope to adult audiences. References to their audiences as ‘children’, especially in connection with mention of ‘the masses’, are scattered throughout the discourse. Even a bit condescending, Kracauer is not far off the mark. While the proclamations of the various Kinoreformers embraced a wide range of opinion, they never strayed far from the status quo. As Sabine Hake notes, ‘in sharp contrast to the intellectuals, the reformers aligned themselves openly with the existing power structure’.

We mustn’t, however, underestimate the reformers’ contribution to German culture. In trying to sway what Kracauer called ‘the salutary indifference of the masses’, the reformers succeeded in dominating the discourse on cinema in the years before World War I. In addition to the permanent impression they left on German film culture, mass communication research owes them an especially heavy debt: their focus on media effects had a lasting influence on the vocabulary and goals of modern mass media studies.

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new teaching methods to correspond to the new century, leaving behind the authoritarian methods of the old school and reassessing pedagogy ‘from the child outward’ (vom Kinde aus). If adult society, utilitarianism, and the demands of the ‘real’ world had determined the standards of pedagogy before, now attention turned to the child’s needs and inner nature. Whereas the old pedagogy might have emphasized uniformity, now the child could expect to be treated as ‘the measure of itself’\(^55\). As Key insisted, ‘instruction should only cultivate the child’s own individual nature’, which Key and others assumed to be creative, good and even wise\(^56\).

Freud, however, was less optimistic about the life of the child. His essay on ‘Infantile Sexuality’, published in his 1905 Three Essays on Sexuality, painted a darker picture of childhood as a ‘hothouse of nascent psychopathology’\(^57\). His explanation of the importance of the child’s body – describing the oral, anal and phallic stages – on mental development was ground-breaking. Its lasting contribution is manifold, but most immediately it underlined the influence of childhood development on adult mental life. While there is little indication that Freud’s theories were wholeheartedly accepted by garden-variety reformers, the new child psychology of both Key and Freud does provide a clue to the urgency reformers felt when they argued for aesthetic cultivation and against the influence of sexually charged ‘Kinodramas’.

Despite Freud’s seminal contributions, Darwin’s evolutionary theories of child development still had a strong grip on the public imagination during this period. In particular, Darwin argued that child development recapitulated the mental evolution of the species. Accordingly, the maturing child was expected to exhibit mental characteristics of subhuman species. In The Descent of Man, Darwin observed, ‘We daily see these faculties developing in every infant; and we may trace a perfect gradation from the mind of an utter idiot, lower than that of an animal low in the scale, to the mind of a Newton’\(^58\).

Discussions of crowd psychology latched on to this teleological comparison between children and primitive mentalities. Gustave Le Bon, the most well known popularizer of nineteenth-century crowd psychology, characterized the masses as ‘an enraged child’. Furthermore, according to Le Bon:

It will be remarked that among the special characteristics of crowds there are several – such as impulsiveness, irritability, incapacity to reason, the absence of judgement and of the critical spirit, the exaggeration of the sentiments, and others besides – which are almost always observed in beings belonging to inferior forms of evolution – in women, savages, and children, for instance\(^59\).

Darwin’s evolutionary scheme provided a quasi-scientific basis for comparing crowds to children, but even more significant for this comparison was the concept of ‘suggestibility’. Le Bon devoted a chapter to ‘the suggestibility and credulity of crowds’, arguing that the crowd is ‘perpetually hovering on the borderland of unconsciousness, readily yielding to all suggestions’, a mental state most commonly found in women and children. Most serious psychologists of his time dismissed Le Bon’s rather crude arguments, but the metaphorical connection between children and the masses was still quite powerful for researchers. In fact, one could argue that social psychology has its roots in child study. Alfred Binet, a follower of the famed hypnotist Charcot and one of the founders of experimental social psychology, used the observational opportunities provided by public school classrooms to test his evolving theories of suggestibility. His conclusions about children and suggestibility worked their way into his formative studies of social behaviour, which had a profound impact on the direction of modern social psychology\(^60\).

Reformers borrowed the concept of ‘suggestibility’ as they described the cinema audiences and their scopophilia or Schaulust\(^61\). The Hamburg commission noted this condition in their report, complaining that:

... many cinema presentations morally endanger the children. Let’s take an example: an impressionable young man sees a swindle presented with elegance and brilliant success. Wouldn’t that arouse his imitative instinct? A young girl cannot help but notice how selling her honour could provide a carefree and, in her eyes, honourable life. Later, life’s hardships arrive and she asks herself: ‘why work at a sewing machine for 10 pfennings an hour, why work at a factory for 10 Marks a week’\(^62\).
Why, indeed? These remarks prefigure persistent themes in the discourse on cinema during this period, especially the preoccupation with cinema, suggestibility and crime, not to mention female sexuality. Emilie Altenloh, who wrote one of the first sociological studies of cinema audiences, maintained that, in the absence of a strong family life or education, cinema held a mesmerizing influence on its young patrons. That cinema has won a certain influence over the entire thoughts and lifestyle of the impressionable is beyond doubt', she concluded. 'From the morals of criminals and fearlessness of cowboys they take a conception of life that forces them into trajectories similar to their celebrated heroes'63.

Albert Hellwig also wrote often on the suggestive power of cinema and its dangers for the criminally inclined or morally weak. In one article, he describes a neurasthenic woman and her response to a night at the cinema. In the film, a postal clerk dreams that he is attacked by robbers; ‘there appear a series of threatening faces and ghostlike hands, which reach out to others in their sleep’. This made such an impression on the young lady that she began to see hallucinations of these hands day and night. ‘The apparently intelligent woman was perfectly aware from the beginning that these were merely hallucinations stemming from her own imagination. She was nonetheless quite disturbed because these gigantic hands would appear out of nowhere at different times and under varying circumstances’64.

Hellwig implies that the cause of the woman’s hallucinations is a combination of cinema’s suggestive power and the woman’s pathological condition, neurasthenia, a vague nervous condition in vogue during this time. It left its victims incapable of work and inflicted upon them a dazzling array of symptoms, including headaches, the fear of responsibility, graying hair and insomnia. According to Anson Rabinbach, ‘neurasthenics were identifiable by their impoverished energy and by the excessive intrusion of modern urban society on their physical and mental organization’65. It was a form of mental fatigue that left its victims unable to resist the stimuli of the modern world; it was characterized, in short, as a weakness of the will, as moral exhaustion.

The combination of pathology and morality is significant, because the concept of ‘moral weakness’ metaphorically connects judgement and physical strength. The reformers’ focus on both the unhealthy atmosphere of the nickelodeons and the suggestive power of cinema reveals an underlying concern for both the bodies of the audiences and their moral judgement. This concern manifested itself as a problem of ‘taste’ – taste lies between the realms of sensuality and reason.

As with the question of the nature of the child, reformers were divided over the nature of the masses, especially their judgement. Against those who argued that the masses were not ready for reform, that they were not interested in what interested the educated classes, Hermann Lemke argued, ‘I’ll give credit to the people for not having such bad taste. And even if the people are not yet mature enough for cinema’s reform, one should never be permitted to appeal to their lowest instincts – that would be dangerous to the community and must be fought against’66. Hellwig was less willing to entertain the idea that the masses were inherently good: ‘It is the bad taste of the audience that ultimately makes the trashy film’67. The solution to this problem of taste and, by extension, the crisis of moral judgement, was aesthetic education.

**Taste, nation and aesthetic education**

Since Schiller, aesthetic education has offered a solution to the twin problems of sensuality and suggestibility. That is, Schiller suggested the category of ‘the aesthetic’ as a medium between alienated Nature and Reason. In an alienated world, the aesthetic provided Schiller with hope for reintegration and, thus, social harmony. The aesthetic category acted as a corridor between raw nature and a higher...
morality. 'In a word', Schiller wrote, 'there is no other way of making sensuous man rational except by first making him aesthetic'.

The reformers were very interested in making 'sensuous man rational'. Schiller's importance for the reformist agenda is illustrated by an editorial in the trade periodical, Lichtbild-Bühne. The headline reads, 'The Cultural Work of the Cinema Theater: Thoughts from the Year 1784, by Friedrich von Schiller'. The essay invokes Schiller's 'The Stage Considered as a Moral Institution' to argue that cinema could function in the same manner. The aesthetic, however, is a precondition to the moral, and cinema must first go through that transformation. An illustration from a 1918 reform pamphlet illustrates the axiomatic nature of this relationship between the aesthetic and the moral. The upper-left sphere represents 'immorally affective entertainment' and 'morally irreproachable entertainment', while the upper-right sphere signifies 'art' and 'non-art'. A transubstantiation occurs when the rather plain problems of morality and aesthetics are superimposed to reveal the nature and proportion of 'art', 'trash', and 'kitsch'. This new sphere represents the issue of 'taste'.

Schiller represents the beginning of a long tradition of aesthetic education in Germany, one that eventually became grafted on to questions of nationalism. The most famous, or infamous, example of this development was Julius Langbehn's Rembrandt as Educator, first published anonymously and with enormous success in 1890. Like Schiller and Lagarde before him, Langbehn reacted against the excessive rationalization of the Enlightenment. The preoccupation with systemization, objectivity and book-learning had, in his opinion, brought about 'the decline of the spiritual life of the German people'. Specialization, he complained, precluded exercise of creative power: 'one thirsts for synthesis' in over-educated Germany, he wrote, and so 'one turns to art!' The German people could be rescued from this 'systematic, scholarly, cultured barbarism' by 'going back to their original source of power, their individualism'. Furthermore, if individualism is the root of all art, and he claimed it is, and if education should correspond to the nature of its students, then art education would be the most effective and natural form of instruction. Rembrandt, for Langbehn, was 'the most individual of all German artists'. 'The scholar is characteristically international, the artist national', he said, underlining the difference between science and art, word and image. The goal of art education, as Langbehn saw it, is to effect a spiritual regeneration of the German people by reacquainting them with their own inner nature as it is exemplified by the masterpieces of national art.

Alfred Lichtwark, generally recognized to be the driving force behind the art education movement, followed Langbehn's lead in his address to the 1901 art education conference in Dresden. 'Our
The taste of a nation

education still lacks a firm national foundation', he declared. The basis for a national culture, as with Langbehn, could be found in German art. 'Up to now', Lichtwark said, 'the schools have not considered it their task to acquaint youth not only with the names, but the works of the great artists who express the German character'. And he blamed this lack of attention to 'national art' for the lack of 'formative power' in German culture. Even though Lichtwark later distanced himself from Langbehn's very nationalistic views, he still held that 'the challenge of art education' was inseparable from 'a moral renewal of our life'. This hope was certainly not limited to Lichtwark; most representatives of the art education movement held it as their ultimate goal.

But Konrad Lange was cautious of such sanguine hopes, asking at that same conference if 'with "Kunsterziehung" [art education] we're actually found the magic word to solve all social questions'. If he seemed less concerned about the spiritual state of the people, he was very anxious about the state of German art. He acknowledged that 'we actually have masters of the first order in all the areas of the fine arts, men who are living proof that the creative German spirit is not yet dead', but claimed that this was not enough. In order for this relative good health to survive, it must have good soil in which to grow. 'And this soil can only be the people’s understanding of art', he said. Worried that the elements of the Großstadt could undermine their sense of culture, Lange advocated leading children to art in order to maintain a sense of artistic tradition, to bring 'the artistic education of our youth ... in closer connection to the living, creative art of the present'.

The education of taste was also very important to Lichtwark. To his contemporaries, he was even more well known as the director of the Hamburg Kunsthalle, which came into international prominence during his tenure. There he was instrumental in organizing ground-breaking exhibits of amateur and artistic photography, promoting local artists, and discovering such talents as Philipp Otto Runge.

'We do not want a museum that simply stands and waits', proclaimed Lichtwark upon assuming the directorship of the Hamburg Kunsthalle in 1886. 'Rather, we want an institution that actually works for the aesthetic education of our population'. In that same year he complained that 'our citizens are not yet as cultured as the English'. Lichtwark envisioned his museum as an educational centre for the artistic life of the region. It would be a clearinghouse of taste, where exhibits of art from around the world would help raise the sensibilities of the general public and teach new techniques to local artists. For instance, in his introduction to the first exhibit of amateur photography in 1893, Lichtwark stated that the show's goal was to 'raise the artistic taste of the public and stir interest' in the new art. The development of a national art depended upon the aesthetic education of both the public and the artists – his museum would take up that task.

Lichtwark's influence on actual educational practices came through one of his most popular books, Exercises in the Contemplation of Art Works. The drills consisted of Aristotelian question and answer sessions between teacher and student, demonstrating by example how the child's inherent aesthetic taste could be cultivated and guided to acceptable standards. The student would gaze upon a painting and answer the teacher's questions about its form and content until the work's meaning revealed itself to the child. For this process to be successful, Lichtwark stressed the importance of extended contemplation of single art works in a quiet, conducive environment. Consistent with the 'vom Kinde aus' philosophy mentioned earlier, this method of aesthetic training soon gained wide favour among German educators. Lichtwark's system also confronted the important issue of national taste.

The typical modern German is aesthetically weak. He lacks both a superficial knowledge of culture and an inner connection with visual art. He has no need of aesthetic pleasures, which presume an education of the eye and heart. His eyes see poorly and his soul not at all. For the health of our nation and our heritage, this inadequacy must be redressed.

Lichtwark designed his Exercises to provide a training programme for children and others who were 'aesthetically weak'. By teaching youngsters how to look, gaze and, ultimately, see, Lichtwark was following a set of presumptions common to aesthetic education: train the eye and the heart follows. For the art education reformers of Imperial Germany, then, educating public taste was a pro-
ject in nation-building. Simply, education through art was a way of building a distinctly national art, while education to art was designed to build consensus and therefore national unity, as well as maintain traditional standards and methods of evaluation. These two directions were and are common for all art education programmes from Schiller to Dewey.

Kinoreformers also grasped on to this constellation of taste, nation and education. The taste of the nation was a matter of public concern because it was a symptom of both the state of national art and the political and intellectual strength of the population. For many reformers, the unity of the nation seemed fragile enough to warrant harsh measures against foreign influences on the public's sensibility. For example, Willi Warstat, in his essay 'On the "Taste" of the Peoples', advocated censorship, entertainment taxes on the exhibitors, and tariffs on foreign films to help the fledgling German film industry, but more importantly, to protect the national sense of taste. Of Danish films and filmmakers he wrote: 'They know how to make "moral dramas" of such cunning, both unobjectionable to the censor and attractive to the lower instincts of the masses, that they now present the greatest danger to the education of public taste'. But cinema is salvagable: 'That there are fairly good films now and again prevents one from despairing completely over
the current depths – apparently getting deeper – of the Kino theatres in the matter of taste. Cinema’s worth, actually still developing, depends upon its control by the forces of good taste, not just the taste of the people.80

Hermann Hafker’s ‘model presentations’
For Hermann Hafker, ‘control by the forces of good taste’ meant establishing alternative exhibition venues. After the failure or, at best, limited success of the attempts to create an alternative production and distribution system, the reformers realized that focusing on exhibition held the most promise for fulfillment of their programme. Miriam Hansen has argued that the peculiarities of early cinema exhibition presented the structural possibility of an alternative public sphere. The variety format, the sense of theatrical space, the combination of lectures, live music, sound effects, etc., and the uneven development of modes of production, distribution and exhibition – all contributed to ‘overlapping types of public sphere, of “nonsynchronous” layers of cultural organization’.81 Between the ‘fissures of institutional development’, alternative modes of reception and experience could emerge. The reformers, of course, hoped to ‘synchronize’ these layers, not only by coordinating the modes of production, distribution and exhibition, but also by integrating the various cultural spheres that commercial cinema was already grafting upon itself: literature, science, the tradition of the lecture series, and art.

Hermann Hafker’s ‘model presentations’ (Musstervorstellungen) are the best example of the reformist exhibition programme. Some have called him Germany’s first film theorist – he was certainly one of the very first to write regularly about the cinema.82 He began the century working as a writer, journalist and translator for a number of periodicals, covering a range of topics, from Shakespeare’s sonnets to his own bicycle tour of Finland. He was one of the first writers for Der Kinematograph and a spirited contributor to and editor of Bild und Film, eventually writing three books on film for the Volksvereins publishing company. His Image and Word (Bild und Wort) society film exhibitions were prototypes for many ‘model presentations’ that reformers tried to implement on a regular basis around Germany. His 1913 book, Cinema and Art, is an elaborate justification of the artistic potential of cinema and an extension of his earlier work in the reform journals. In this monograph, he describes his attempts to create aesthetically pleasing and educationally effective cinema programmes. As we have seen, Hafker was not alone in these attempts, but he was unique in providing theoretical justifications of his presentations.

Like Lange and the other reformers, Hafker was concerned with the aesthetic sensibility of the masses and the influence of bad taste. His comments about taste are directed particularly to the contemporary state of film exhibition. Of the nickelodeons of the teens, Hafker noted that ‘the educated circles have been repulsed by the tastelessness of the programmes’.83 Further, ‘it’s not the What of the programme, but the How of the presentation that makes the impression’.84 Of course, he certainly did not withhold complaints about the ‘sensational’ films the producers presented to the audience. But unlike many of his contemporaries, such as Warstat, who felt that censorship was the proper solution, Hafker continued to express his concern for the ‘tasteless’ exhibition. This tastelessness referred, most generally, to the intrusion of modern life’s hectic pace into the auditorium, where spectators were assaulted with a ‘breathless chase of one number after another, accompanied by intertitles, the uninterrupted noise of the projector, the lights, etc’. Hafker demanded an exhibition that avoided the exciting and the extraordinary and instead tried to establish ‘a quiet and natural mood’. He advised exhibitors to programme their films in accordance with classical aesthetic principles, building tension and then release by alternating comedies with dramas and ‘scenes from the life of nature and simple people’. The exhibitor should also refrain from putting all the films on one reel, allowing instead a short pause between them so that ‘the spectator’s eyes would receive their necessary recovery time and the nerves a moment to relax’.85

This last bit of advice points to a range of literature dealing with visual fatigue and the motion pictures. In this discourse, the equation of cinema with modernity becomes most explicit. Hafker expresses the concerns of the day quite well when he complains that ‘image and form, word and sound, colour and line … rain like a hailstorm on the nerves of modern man – especially in, but not limited to, the Großstadt’.86 Cinema came to epitomize this hail-
storm. Some of the first articles written on cinema in Germany were medical papers on the harmful effects of ‘flicker’ cinema’s. Other medical investigations dealt with the threat of eyestrain in the Kinos. Nearly all reformers or opponents of cinema criticized its threat to public health and vision.

This outcry must be seen in the context of the larger preoccupation with fatigue that characterizes discourse coming out of the late nineteenth century. As Anson Rabinbach has shown, the trope of fatigue was more than a scientific mania of the age; it expressed a profound anxiety of decline and social disintegration. In the medical, scientific, and even literary study of fatigue, there is ‘a tendency to equate the psychological with the physical and to locate the body as the site where social deformatons and dislocations can be most easily observed’. In other words, metaphors of health and sickness were used to express national anxiety. Fatigue was more than a physical ailment — it was also perceived as a moral disorder, a sign of weakness and the absence of will. ‘Fatigue’, Rabinbach notes, ‘as the horizon of the body’s forces, was identified with the moral horizon of the species; the moral infirmity of the population was directly proportional to the debilitating effects of fatigue. ... Fatigue represented the membrane between morally sacrosanct labour and the violent, irrational impulses that constantly threatened to disrupt the social order’. Neurasthenia, mentioned before in connection to cinema’s suggestive power, was the most typical metaphor for the delicate condition of the national psyche.

Like that of Walter Benjamin, Hafker’s conception of modernity is neurological, centering on the notion of ‘shocks’. But unlike Benjamin, Hafker seeks a haven to which he can escape the hailstorm of modernity. He just wants to rest for a while, give his nerves time to recuperate. He would like to make cinema such a haven. But cinema will never be this sanctuary, he said in 1908, ‘so long as the corresponding sense of illusion is missing and the correct mood is lacking’. There is so much in the modern world to disturb this mood, but treating film as an art form, especially exhibiting films ‘tastefully’, could slow this flood of ‘the much-too-much’ (der Vielzuvienlen). He planned to do just this with his ‘model presentations’. In 1910 he presented to the ‘Image and Word’ association in Dresden a model programme, which was to be the prototype for other cities. The selection consisted mostly of nature films, but further exhibitions planned to include travelogues, scientific films and actualités. Originally, he intended to continue the exhibitions in coordination with local schools, but the project fizzled due to lack of readily available films for continuous programming.

The 1910 presentation, entitled ‘Spectacles of the Earth’, highlighted Hafker’s preferred form, the nature film: ‘The first part showed high mountains and deserts; the second part concerned ethnological subjects (laplanders, Chinese, Arabs, Indians, cannibals, etc.). The third part dealt with ‘The Thousand Games of Water’ (Victoria Falls, Niagara Falls, storms on the coast, surfs, rapids, geysers, underwater volcanoes from New Zealand). The films were accompanied by lectures, slides, music and nature sound effects, all of which Hafker tried to orchestrate into a Gesamtkunstwerk of Wagnerian proportions.

The presentation began with a lecture of what to expect, what to look for, and ‘in which sense to take it’. It would then alternate films with slides and lectures, carefully presenting each. Hafker provides a detailed – and obviously quite proud – description of the final section of the programme:

Then it became dark once again. You could hear the sound of water, and as the curtain parted, you could see an actual waterfall, etc. At the end of this section there was a beautiful image – one of the rarest and most artistic [Trip on the Avon River in New Zealand]. The spectators didn’t know at first exactly where they were, and as if by magic an invisible, delicate music sounded, completely in rhythm and harmony, as if made for the image (and, of course, suited to it), accompanying it to its end. As the lights shone again on the closing curtain, the loud applause was not only for all that had been seen up to that point, but for the last image and the genuine musical enjoyment that accompanied it. The proscenium seemed a magical sphere, a mysterious land of light, life, and music.

Hafker’s further descriptions show the pains he took to assure a proper environment and mood. He reports having three men work the slides to guaran-
tee precise timing; curtains were hung all around the auditorium to dampen the sound; coloured stage lights shown artistically as the audience seated themselves (59–60).

These preparations certainly have many precedents in traditions of theatrical and orchestral performance, and the format is adapted from the long tradition of lecturing in performance halls. Like other reformers, Häfker insisted that focusing on the viewing environment was the first step toward cinema’s eventual aesthetic respectability. But Häfker set himself apart from his contemporaries with his claim that the entire cinematic apparatus – image, light, music, sound effects, lectures – could be used in combination for the artistic presentation of film, calling this Wagnerian use of cinema ‘Kinematographie’. Häfker’s efforts to guarantee the proper conditions show his concern lay primarily with the spectator’s relation to the film. The conditions of reception were vitally important to his programme and his conception of the function of art. The full effect of the ‘total presentation’ (Gesamtvorführung) – here illustrated by the audience’s reported confusion/illusion that they were in New Zealand – required the spectators’ complete and undistracted attention. It required, in short, their contemplation of the film as they would an art work. He hoped that he could educate audiences to this way of viewing the film.

Häfker took his cue from Lichtwark’s Exercises in the Contemplation of Art Works, which provided the foundation for the training of taste and vision, a way of viewing art that Häfker transferred to film. This way of viewing was certainly not unique, having immediate precedent in the German tradition of art history, which advocated above all an unmediated, contemplative gaze, a ‘silent surrender’ to the art work. His presentations did not simply provide an environment conducive to the passive reception of art; they set out to actually train the audience’s vision. Through the lectures, Häfker guided the audience to what was important and ‘in which sense to take it’ – that sense being, primarily, vision. But he did not want to stop there: ‘In order to draw attention to especially interesting images, perhaps one should occasionally employ little signal lights. They could be coloured incandescent lamps placed around the screen that light up shortly before surprising scenes or scenes that are difficult to see’ (57–58). These visual cues would reinforce his verbal guidance, perhaps eventually creating some sort of physiological response. Apparently, Häfker did not consider that the lights might have been a distraction.

There is also a moral dimension to this way of looking. In Häfker’s discussion of approaches to art, contemplation is exemplary of a certain economy of energy, in that focused attention on the art work is a way of exercising the will against the excessive stimuli of modernity. If neurasthenia was a type of mental fatigue caused by the difficulties of dealing every day with modern life, art provided not only a haven of unity and harmony in a distracted and disorganized world, it also offered an opportunity to train the attention and exercise the taste. Art and the artistic presentation of film were workouts for the mind; museums and film theatres could be mental health clubs.

Vision and taste

Schiller, like most philosophers, was suspicious of the senses, but he was least suspicious of the sense of sight. According to Schiller, knowledge of the physical world passes through the senses, and is therefore contingent on them, but vision provides the opportunity to transcend the physical world and enter the aesthetic on the way to the moral realm. The key to this journey is ‘contemplation’. Schiller declared, ‘As long as man, in that first physical state, is merely a passive recipient of the world of sense ... he is still completely One with that world. ... Only when, at the aesthetic stage, he puts it outside himself, or contemplates it, does his personality differentiate itself from it’. Upon entering the aesthetic, the subject renounces his or her passions and creates the possibility of becoming a moral being. Contemplation is the exercise through which this process begins. The very act of perception, the very apparatus of vision is both inextricably implicated in the sensual world and ironically outside of it. ‘From the moment a man sees an object, he is no longer in a merely physical state’, Schiller noted. That is, while exercise of the other senses testifies to one’s proximity to the natural world, vision offers the opportunity for distance. The aesthetic of contemplation, exemplified by what Benjamin called the ‘aura’ of an art work, is based on distance. The aesthetic of distraction, again illustrated by Benjamin’s discussion of cinema and archi-
tecture’s tactile qualities, is based on proximity. Schiller again: ‘If desire seizes directly upon its object, contemplation removes its object to a distance, and makes it into a true and inalienable possession by putting it beyond the reach of passion.’

Thus the whole concept of subjectivity – becoming a knowing subject by objectifying and therefore ‘possessing’ Nature – is dependent upon the refusal of passion and sensuality. Once ‘outside’ this sphere, the moral becomes possible. For Schiller, the renunciation of Nature is not a goal in itself as much as a necessary step toward the fulfilment of humanity’s moral potential. Like the act of vision, always in the physical world while simultaneously having the potential to transcend it, humanity balances on the fine line between the sensual and the moral. Schiller called this line ‘the aesthetic’.

Taste, like vision, is both embedded in Nature and somehow removed from it. Even more than vision, taste implies participation in the social world. An artwork affects the individual, but the exercise of aesthetic judgement implies universality. When we find ourselves agreeing that something is beautiful or sublime, we are exercising a unique and precious form of intersubjectivity based on our recognition of shared capacities for aesthetic experience. This is what Kant meant when he called taste a ‘sensus communis’ – a communal sense.

The concept of taste provides the ideal illustration of the relation between aesthetics and ideology. While society could impose moral behaviour on its subjects by appealing only to Reason, it is more efficient to employ the emotions in this task. As the medium between Nature and Reason, the aesthetic allows this operation. Schiller explains:

... the ethical State can merely make it (morally)
necessary, by subjecting the individual will to the general; the aesthetic State alone can make it real, because it consummates the will of the whole through the nature of the individual. Though it may be his needs which drive man into society, and reason which implants within him the principles of social behaviour, beauty alone can confer upon him a social character. Taste alone brings harmony into society, because it fosters harmony in the individual.\textsuperscript{103}

Faced with a society that they felt was becoming more alienated and fractured, reformers latched on to the promise of harmony and unity offered by the aesthetic realm. Lichtwark and Hafker focused on vision to affect a renewal in taste. Their exercises in the contemplation of art works were attempts to ward off the distractions of modernity, prophylactics against the ‘much-too-much’. If spectatorship had been characterized as an addiction that lulled audiences into an impressionable somnambulism, Lichtwark, Hafker and other reformers hoped to counteract this state by inscribing cinema into an aesthetic of contemplation and reflection. The audience’s vision required training so that mental and physical fatigue would not set in; it was a way of ‘pumping up’ moral weaklings. While Hafker’s Gesamtkunstwerkeffekt would provide the illusion necessary for the aesthetic experience, it was not intended to lull the audience into distractedness. Rather, it provided access to the ‘sensus communis’ through a disinterested, distanced aesthetic experience. Nature films were both safely asexual and reminders of potential harmony. Yet the use of nature films is ironic; the reformers’ emphasis on vision and distance and disavowal of Kinodrama and ‘sensational films’ amounted to a refusal of sensuality and corporeality — in short, a refusal of Nature. Training audiences to conform to certain rules of spectatorship — an ascetic education of their vision — was part of an ideology that combined educational practices and Kantian aesthetics in order to establish some sense of social order.

This legitimation strategy — anaesthetizing/aestheticizing cinema and its audiences — was a response to modernity’s perceived assault on the body and the body politic, exemplified by cinema’s ‘flicker’. Hafker and others felt that training the aesthetic sensibility could lend off the ‘shocks’ of modern life. The combined concepts of ‘the child’ and ‘taste’ served as a fulcrum for the reformers, allowing them to ‘uplift’ the motion pictures and incorporate cinema into their ideology. As Germany’s Kinoreformers attempted to redeem and legitimate cinema as Art, they recognized within it the potential for recovering a lost utopia of unity and, ultimately, a means for social control.\textsuperscript{*}

Notes

1. ‘Die Bremer Lehrerinnen und die Kinogefahr’, Die Lehrerin 30 (1913): 156, qtd. in Albert Hellwig, Kind und Kino (Langensalza: Hermann Beyer & Sohne, 1914), 71. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. I would like to thank Jennifer Barker and John Belton for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay.


9. On reform in Germany in general, see Handbuch der deutschen Bildungsgeschichte, ed. Christa Berg, (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1991) and Wolfgang Scheibe, Die Reformpädagogische Bewegung, 1900–1932: Eine einführende Darstellung, Ninth ed. (Weinheim and Basel: Beltz, 1984). Some have rightly argued that, despite the implications of the concept of ‘reform’, we should be careful not to view the educational or social theories and praxis that came out of this period as complete breaks with tradition. See Jürgen Oelkers, Reformpädagogik: Eine kritische Dogmengeschichte (Weinheim and Munich: Juventa, 1989).


15. Paul Schultze-Naumberg, Die Kultur des weiblichen Körpers als Grundlage der Frauenkleidung, qtd. in Korpers als Grundlage der Frauenkleidung, qtd. in Kien, Anatomy, 15. Schultze-Naumberg shifted easily from advocating ‘natural clothing’ to supporting art fashioned after natural bodies; during the Third Reich he was an architect of the campaign against ‘degenerate’ art. See Kern, Anatomy, 223–226.


22. Hellwig, Kind und Kino, 22.


25. 'Die Eröffnung des Reform-Kinematographentheaters', Der Kinematograph 32 (7 August 1907). Der Kinematograph was not paginated.

26. 'Ein kurzer Rückblick auf die erste Woche des Reform-Kinematographen-Theaters', Der Kinematograph 33 (14 August 1907).

27. 'Kinematographische Reformvereinigung', Der Kinematograph 43 (23 October 1907).


30. Indeed, by this time the relations between the exhibitors and the reformers and trade journals were downright hostile. See 'Die Kino-Austellung und "Wir"', Erste Internationale Film-Zeitung 6.50 (14 December 1912): 52.

31. Hermann Hafker, 'Eine Reise an die Quellen der Kinematographie', Der Kinematograph 163 (9 February 1910) and 172 (13 April 1910).


33. Der Kinematograph 258 (6 December 1911).

34. Paul Samulheit and Emil Born, Der Kinematograph als Volks- und Jugendbildungsmittel (Berlin, 1914), qtd. in Hake, 36.

35. Hake, 36–38.

36. The legal discourse on cinema in Germany is far too vast to even attempt a survey here. Albert Hellwig’s reviews are the best place to start, however: Rechtsquellen des Öffentlichen Kinematographenrechts [M. Gladbach: Volkvereins, 1913] and Öffentliches Lichtspielrecht [M. Gladbach: Volkvereins, 1921]. See also Gary D. Stark, 'Cinema, Society, and the State', Essays on Culture and Society in Modern Germany, 122–166.

37. Hellwig, Öffentliches Lichtspielrecht, 32–33. Not all regulations applied to the same theaters at the same time, of course.


39. Dräger, 236.


41. Heiner Schmitt, Kirche und Film: Kirchliche Filmarbeit in Deutschland von ihren Anfängen bis 1945 (Boppard: Harald Boldt, 1979), 41.

42. The 'monopoly' system, established in Germany between 1910 and 1911, allowed distributors to acquire sole rights to a film and pass this exclusivity to cinema managers in the form of local exhibition rights. The theatre owner’s local monopoly enabled him to charge more and thus make, for the first time in Germany, a considerable profit. See Corinna Müller, 'The Emergence of the Feature Film in Germany between 1910 and 1911', in Before Caligari: German Cinema, 1895–1920, ed. Paolo Cherchi Usai and Lorenzo Codelli (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 94–113. The best survey of the role of the Lichtbilderei in the reform movement is Diederichs, 84–88.


45. Minutes from the meeting of the community representatives of Eickel, 14 May 1912 [Archive of the City of Wanne-Eickel], qtd. in Schulze, 64.


49. Hake, 28.

50. Helmut Kommer, Früher Film und späte Folgen: Zur Geschichte der Film- und Fernsehenerziehung (Berlin: Basis, 1979).


52. Many scholars have stressed the connection between 'the masses' and 'the feminine' as an indication of the anxieties and spirit of the age. This line of reasoning is indeed extremely significant, but I would like to shed light on a relationship that has not yet been fully explored. On the masses as feminine, see esp. Susanna Barrows, Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in late Nineteenth-Century France (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

53. Lorenz Pieper, 'Kino und Drama', Bild und Film 1.1 (1912): 5.


55. This phrase and 'vom Kinde aus' are attributed to Hamburg pedagogue Johannes Gläser, one of many who popularized and realized Key's suggestions. See Scheibe, 65.

56. Ellen Key, 'Erziehung', in Das Jahrhundert des Kindes (Berlin, 1905) in Flitner and Kudritzki, 52.


64. Albert Hellwig, 'Über die schädliche Suggestivkraft kinematographischer Vorführung', Aerztlische Sachverständigen-Zeitung 20.6 (15 March 1914): 123.


71. Alfred Lichtwark, 'Der Deutsche der Zukunft', in Flitner and Kudritzki, 104. Lichtwark and Langbehn were acquaintances; Lichtwark introduced Langbehn to the work of Rembrandt in 1887.

72. Konrad Lange, 'Das Wesen der künstlerischen Erziehung', in Lorenzen, 22.

73. Lange, deutschen Jugend, 10.


78. Alfred Lichtwark, Übungen in der Betrachtung von Kunstwerken (Dresden: Gerhard Kühlmann, 1900), 17.


82. Helmut H. Diederichs, ‘Natufilm als Gesamtkunstwerk: Hermann Hafker und sein ‘Kinetographie’-Konzept’, *Augenblick* 8 (1990): 37–60. If Hafker is known at all to English-speaking readers, it is through Kracauer’s characterization of him in From Caligari to Hitler as the man who ‘praised war as the salvation from the evils of peace’. Hafker saw World War I mainly as an opportunity for the state to take control of cinema and put his plans into action. While there is no doubt that Hafker was conservative, nationalistic, and blind to the horrors of war, it would be unfair to depict him as a warmonger with the pre-fascist tendencies implied by Kracauer. Hafker earned a ‘heart attack’ in a concentration camp for his resistance to the Nazi government. All biographical information comes from Diederichs’ article and his entry on Hafker in *Cinegraph*, ed. Hans-Michael Bock (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1984). My presentation of Hafker is indebted to these essays and my conversations with Diederichs.


85. Hafker, ‘Dramaturgie’.


88. Rabinbach, 21.

89. Rabinbach, 43.


91. Hafker, ‘Meisterspiele’.


96. I am thinking esp. of Johann Friedrich Hebart’s psychological aesthetics and his influence on Conrad Fiedler’s notion of ‘visibility’ and Robert Vischer’s theory of empathy. See *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873–1893*, ed. Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonomou (Santa Monica, Ca.: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994).

97. Heide Schlüpmann notes that, ironically, narrative structure eventually assumed the task of guiding the spectator through the film. *Unheimlichkeit*, 266.


101. Schiller, 183.
