MOBILIZING LIGHT AND SHADOW:
POPULAR NATIONALISM, POLITICAL CULTURE, AND THE
EARLY GERMAN CINEMA, 1895-1918

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
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Department of History
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Abstract

This dissertation explores representations of the German nation as projected onto German cinema screens in the years between the invention of film in 1895 and the end of the Kaiserreich in 1918. This was a period of intense growth for the German film industry. From a novelty feature in travelling exhibitions at the end of the nineteenth century, film was a part of the everyday lives of millions of Germans by the First World War. Unified only in 1871, Germany was a young state and attempts to define, popularize, and harness its national image formed a central and contested aspect of German political culture. This dissertation argues that the conflicting cinematic representations of the German nation in this period should be understood within the larger context of Wilhelmine political history and that invocations of the nation were instrumental in the development of the German cinema.

Kaiser Wilhelm II, political pressure groups on the radical right, foreign and domestic film producers, and, ultimately, military and civilian authorities of the German state all promoted cinematic visions of the nation that were overlapping, complementary, and conflicting. Kaiser Wilhelm II was Germany’s first film celebrity and personified onscreen a nation of monarchists and military might, yet his media-constructed political authority was overshadowed by his film stardom. Around 1900, imperialist political associations such as the Navy League and the Colonial Society began to use film to construct an image of the nation as an assertive power,
transforming their political agendas into cinematic attractions. In the decade preceding the First World War, critics and reformers became increasingly concerned with the effects of film on the German audience. Part of the response to this criticism—and to Germany’s weak position in the international film market place—was the production of films depicting the heroes and events of the national past. Following the outbreak of war in 1914, cinema connected audiences to the war experience and promoted an image of the nation at war. Between 1916 and the end of the war, the state-driven consolidation of the industry and a wave of propaganda films aimed at the domestic audience brought together the nation as it was conceived by the state with the nation as projected in the cinema.
Acknowledgements

Writing this dissertation has been a long process, and as with many such projects, it has accumulated its share of debts. This dissertation would not have seen completion without an engaged and supportive committee. I wish to thank my supervisor, Jennifer Jenkins, for her patience, her insight, and her ability to see connections in places I had not thought to look. My other committee members, Jim Retallack and Rob King, were generous with both their time and their considerable expertise. My thinking has benefitted from their thoughtful commentary. Johannes von Moltke was an ideal external appraiser. His questions, criticisms, and observations will prove invaluable as the project moves forward in the future. I would also like to thank my internal externals, Charlie Keil and Angelica Fenner, for giving their time and their critical perspectives. Many of the ideas that appear in this dissertation were workshopped at various meetings of the German Studies Association, the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, the Canadian Historical Association, and the Film Studies Association of Canada, and I would like to extend thanks to those attendees for their comments.

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Introduction

Germany is a war made, -a war making state. She believes the sword the only satisfactory arbiter of international questions, - Blood the only food for a growing state. With Germany in the ascendency, war will remain the world’s chief business. The longer she is permitted to retain her “might” idea, the more ruthless her methods, the wider her conquests. The next war will come right on to our own shores unless – we crush the War idea – we crush Germany.¹

According to the American Committee on Public Information, Germans were violent, blood-thirsty and bent on world conquest—the national embodiment of the war idea. The verse above appeared on a poster produced by the CPI, the America wartime propaganda office, after the United States’ entry into the war in 1917 and it was accompanied by a cartoon of a brutish giant of a German soldier stomping down the New York skyline. In its message of German eternal belligerence and in its illustration of a monstrous German foe, the poster was consistent with much of the war propaganda produced by Germany’s enemies between 1914 and 1918.

When Erich Ludendorff wrote to the war ministry in the summer of 1917, he perhaps had something like this CPI propaganda in mind. “The war has demonstrated the formidable power of the image and the film as mediums for information and influence,” he wrote, continuing, “unfortunately our enemies have so thoroughly used their

advantage in this area that serious damage has resulted for us.” With the war about to enter its fourth year, with little progress being made on the western front, with supplies and spirits running thin at home, and with foreign relations increasingly cold, the general and his military command were eager to explore any option available to them. Visual culture, he deduced, was an area of weakness, a weapon in the arsenal of total war that Germany had failed to exploit to its fullest potential. Ludendorff’s epiphany, his realization that the cinema, as a powerful visual medium, had the ability to influence the hearts and minds of the mass public, was a pivotal moment in the history of German cinema. It represented a leap forward in the state’s thinking about politics and film-going. It prompted the creation of the *Universum Film AG* (Ufa), the studio that shaped film production in the golden era of Weimar cinema and, under Joseph Goebbels and the Third Reich, became a potent vehicle of propaganda for another regime preoccupied with “information and influence.”

Ludendorff goes on in the letter to substantiate his vision of cinema’s corrective path. If Germany was to expect a favorable outcome in the war, he argued, then it was absolutely necessary that film “operates with the greatest vigor wherever German

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2 Ludendorff to the War Ministry, 4 July 1917, BA R 901 71974, 23. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
influence was still possible.” For Ludendorff, the importance of film propaganda was in the impact it could have on audiences abroad. What he, and other German observers, saw themselves competing with was an impressive bombardment of cinematic images produced by the film industries of their enemies, notably Britain, France, and the United States. Allied propaganda produced visions of brave and self-sacrificing British, French, and American soldiers. More pointedly, it contrasted these with caricatures of Germans bent on world conquest and oppression, as in the CPI poster noted above. Murderous and barbaric, these bestial Huns held little or no respect for civilian welfare or the governing principles of the international order. These were powerful images. It stands to reason then, that if the Germans were going to win the propaganda offensive as a decisive movement in their military campaign, they needed to counteract this visualization. What was required, and what hitherto had been lacking in Ludendorff’s eyes, was a positive cinematic image of the German nation. A German-made cinematic “Germany” was needed to counteract the one fostered by the enemies of the Kaisereich.

But such a movie-made Germany already existed. Its projection over the two decades prior to 1917 is the subject of this dissertation. From the first images of Kaiser Wilhelm II, or of the German battle fleet projected in a fairground tent at the turn of the century, through to the didactic stories of a German home front fully committed to supporting its troops in the field shown in elaborate movie palaces in 1918, the German

5 Letter to War Ministry, 4 July 1917, BA R 901 71974, 23.
nation was constructed, cultivated, and contested on the screen. In the chapters that follow, the path and variety of this development is explored in detail. What emerges is both the history of the cinema’s national engagement during the Wilhelmine era, as well as a sense of the space the cinema occupied in Wilhelmine political culture.

Broadly, this dissertation is about the representation of the German nation in the German cinema. But what is a nation? For Ernst Renan and other nineteenth-century nationalists the nation meant:

A heroic past, great men, glory (by which I understand genuine glory), this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea. To have common glories in the past to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more – these are the essential conditions for being a people.\(^7\)

To be sure, this dissertation will discuss films about “heroic pasts” and “great deeds,” but these are elements of a (specific) symbolic vocabulary that can define (one particular conception of) a nation, and not its essential components. Whereas nineteenth-century nationalists believed nations to be concrete and essentialist entities, our contemporary conception is based on an understanding of nationalism that is historically specific.

According to Benedict Anderson’s influential definition, a nation is an “imagined community.”\(^8\) Central to understanding particular nationalisms is understanding the ways in which they are imagined. “Communities are to be distinguished,” Anderson writes, “not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”\(^9\) The German nation, in this sense, was imagined in a particular style. It was a socially constructed and, as such, ultimately malleable concept.

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\(^7\) Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?” reprinted in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 19.


\(^9\) Ibid., 6.
There are important provisos that need to be mentioned. First, it is worth noting that Germans in the Kaiserreich believed that there was something real that they called the German nation and that there was a German national identity. That many of them disagreed on what exactly it was that defined the nation does not negate the fact that they believed it to be real and felt a deep attachment to it. Two other points stem from important insights from Geoff Eley and Mark Hewitson. Eley comments that although nations are constructed and therefore malleable creations, they are not blank canvases. As he writes, “we need to temper the idea of nationalism’s changeability and unfinishedness, by keeping in mind the instituted and material finiteness of the resources available for nationalist action.”

The German nation needed to be imagined not out of an infinite range of possibilities, but out of material present at hand. Hewitson has emphasized the extent to which the final years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth were a period of great debate about the essence and meaning of the German nation. In this moment, he writes, “politics became, amongst other things, a controversial but open debate about representing the nation.”

The meaning of the German nation in this period was built upon pre-existing traditions and symbols and contested on a number of fronts. A legacy of popular nationalism that had been invoked and celebrated throughout the nineteenth century was confronted by an official nationalism—put forward largely by the state and monarchy—

11 Mark Hewitson, “Nation and Nationalismus: Representation and National Identity in Imperial Germany,” in Representing the German Nation: History and Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany, ed. Mary Fulbrook and Martin Swales (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 47.
that attempted, in George Mosse’s phrase, to “annex the nationalist dynamic and tame it.”\textsuperscript{12} Unified only in 1871, Germany was a new nation and, as Roger Chickering has put it, its “official nationalism had shallow roots.” One of the tasks of the state “was to create the symbols, traditions, and values to buttress a national self-consciousness focused on the Reich.”\textsuperscript{13} But the state was not alone in attempting to define the values, goals, and symbols of the nation.\textsuperscript{14} In the decades around the turn of the twentieth century, other groups, such as socialists and radical nationalists, challenged the government’s monopoly on setting national aspirations. While a socialist vision of the national community does not factor into this study, those proposed by the radical right receive particular attention. Later, during the First World War, the burdens of that conflict prompted many Germans to rethink how they understood the national community and their place in it. This was the backdrop against which the representations of the nation in the cinema were projected.

This dissertation explores the ends—cultural, commercial, and political—to which these contested cinematic representations were put. Specifically this dissertation

\textsuperscript{12} George Mosse, \textit{The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich} (New York: Meridian, 1975), 18.
\textsuperscript{13} Roger Chickering, \textit{We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886-1914} (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), 26.
\textsuperscript{14} The concept of nationalism used in this dissertation is of the nation as a historically specific and malleable entity. In this sense, I am drawing on works on “invented traditions” and “imagined communities.” See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. \textit{The Invention of Tradition} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}. For a detailed overview of how the German nation was conceived over the centuries preceding the period covered in this dissertation, see Hans Pohlsander, \textit{National Monuments and Nationalism in 19th Century Germany} (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008), 23-101. For further instructive reflections on the form and meanings of nation making in Germany, see Helmut Walser Smith, \textit{The Continuities of German History: Nation, Religion, and Race Across the Long Nineteenth Century} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 39-73, Mark Hewitson, “\textit{Nation and Nationalism},” 19-62.
has three interrelated objectives. First, it attempts to chart the changing image of the
German nation as it appeared in the cinema. A study of the cinematic representation of
Germany contributes to our understanding of popular German nationalism. Historians
have rightfully seen nationalism as one of the defining questions of German history in the
nineteenth and twentieth centuries—perhaps the defining question.\(^\text{15}\) For Imperial
Germany in particular, nationalism has been the lens through which the political history
of the Reich has been viewed. Nationalism explains the factors that contributed to the
state’s founding in the 1860s and 1870s.\(^\text{16}\) It underscores many of the political policies of
Chancellor Otto von Bismarck and his successors—such as the campaigns against the
Catholic minorities in Germany in the *Kulturkampf* of the 1870s and the push for colonial
expansion abroad after 1884,\(^\text{17}\) and nationalism explains the aggressive foreign policies
that pulled (or pushed) Germany towards war in 1914.\(^\text{18}\) Many explorations of

\(^{15}\) For overviews the main currents in German history in the nineteenth and twentieth
centuries, see David Blackbourn, *History of Germany, 1790-1918: The Long Nineteenth
Divided Nation* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), Konrad Jarausch and Michael

\(^{16}\) See Abigail Green, *Fatherlands: State-Building and Nationhood in Nineteenth Century
Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Mark Hewitson, *Nationalism
in Germany, 1848-1866: Revolutionary Nation* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

\(^{17}\) On the former, see Helmut Walser Smith, *German Nationalism and Religious Conflict:
Rebecca Ayako Benette, *Fighting for the Soul of Germany: The Catholic Struggle for
Inclusion after Unification* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2012), on the latter, see
Lora Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884-1945* (Durham: Duke University
Press, 2001), Arne Perras, *Carl Peters and German Imperialism, 1856-1918* (New York:
Clarendon, 2004), as well as essays in the edited collections, Volker Langbehn, ed.
*German Colonialism, Visual Culture and Modern Memory* (New York: Routledge,
2010), Michael Perraudin and Jürgen Zimmerer, *German Colonialism and National

\(^{18}\) For among the most well-known, see Geoff Eley, *Reshaping the German Right:
Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck* (New Haven: Yale University
nationalism have a tendency to focus on nationalism as an instrument of manipulation and an inspiration for radical worldviews or, as Mark Hewitson has expressed it, as a “pathology.” While nationalism cannot be separated from its most aggressive manifestations, it is a narrowing classification. It overlooks the numerous ways that most Germans engaged with nationalism in their everyday lives—what Michael Billig has called “banal nationalism.” These everyday experiences, these manifestations of popular nationalism, tell us much about how Germans related to their new nation state and the myriad ways that the nation was represented to them. While historians such as George Mosse and Hans Pohlsander have explored the popular nationalism of commemoration, and others have examined the place of music, the space taken up by the early cinema in popular German nationalism is understudied.

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20 Michael Billig, Banal Nationalism (London: Sage, 1995). Billig differentiates between “hot” and “banal” nationalisms. Hot nationalism refers to radical and aggressive manifestations of nationalism. Instances of hot nationalism, as Billig notes, are typically what stand out to historians and other observers. Much more pervasive are instances of what Billig sees as banal nationalism, the manifestations of the nation in the commonplace and the everyday. These “ideological habits” serve to “enable the established nations of the west to be reproduced” ensuring that “Daily, the nation is indicated or ‘flagged,’ in the lives of its citizenry.” See Billig, Banal Nationalism, 6. See also Lauren Berlant’s discussion of the American author Nathaniel Hawthorne and the “National Symbolic” in literature. Lauren Berlant, The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). 21 Mosse, The Nationalization of the Masses, Pohlsander, National Monuments and Nationalism in 19th Century Germany. On music, see the relevant works in Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, ed. Music and German National Identity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), Nikolaus Bacht, ed. Music, Theatre, and Politics in Germany: 1848 to the Third Reich (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006). See also, Matthew Jefferies, Imperial Culture in Germany, 1871-1918 (Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). While examinations of cinema in studies of popular nationalism have been rare, the differently oriented category of national cinema remains a leading framework within
Second, this dissertation seeks to write the history of the German cinema into the history of German political culture in the Wilhelmine period. The period under study here has been described as an era of mass politics. Unification had brought with it universal manhood suffrage. Advances in mass media, particularly the print media, allowed for the considerable expansion of the public sphere. Whether through voting, associational life, or military service, Germany’s political culture was participatory. Political culture was influenced by attitudes adopted and initiatives undertaken by the public and by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, much of that same public went regularly to the cinema. From its humble beginnings in fairgrounds and music halls, film quickly

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emerged as a major mass medium attended by millions of Germans daily. This dissertation explores the points of intersection between these two developments. Many of the contested political issues of the day—the role of the monarch, the aspirations of Weltpolitik, and the justification for the sacrifice of wartime—were represented in the theatres of the nation.

An examination of the cinema as an aspect of German political culture contributes to a growing literature on the place of popular media within Wilhelmine politics. Long overlooked in favor of other, more “serious” subjects of inquiry, popular media can, as recent scholarship has demonstrated, offer valuable insight into how political agendas and national policies could be transformed into appealing entertainments and purchasable commodities. 23 David Ciarlo and Jeff Bowersox have shown the ways that colonial policies played out in popular culture, and Jan Rüger has shown how naval politics were communicated to the German public through group events and mass spectacle. 24 This dissertation takes a somewhat different approach, examining how one medium presented several political issues. The ubiquity of the cinema in the daily lives of many Germans across lines of class, gender, and region, made it an intriguing medium for bringing the

23 In addition to politics of the media—how the state attempted to legislate and regulate the various forms of culture and communication. See Corey Ross, Media and the Making of Modern Germany: Mass Communications, Society, and Politics from the Empire to the Third Reich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). On literature in particular, see Gary Stark, Banned in Berlin: Literary Censorship in Imperial Germany, 1871-1918 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).

affairs of state to the population, even if such films made up only a small fraction of the total films exhibited.

Third, this dissertation seeks to highlight the significance of national engagement in the development of the German cinema. In its ascension the German film industry faced two notable sets of obstacles. The first were the foreign producers who dominated domestic—and global—film exhibition before the First World War. The myriad French, Scandinavian, and American films available in Germany made for daunting competition. The second was a perception of the cultural inferiority of the cinema in the eyes of “respectable” society. Due in part to what they saw as its rural and proletarian exhibitionary origins, as well as the sometimes salacious and sensationalistic nature of its product, many in German society were uncomfortable with this new medium. To cultivate an audience the film industry had to establish its own respectability. A closer association with the symbols, values, and heroes of the nation was a key component in meeting these challenges. The further significance of this development was that it was the film industry, and not the imperial state, that did the most in promoting German nationalism in film.

Questions of nationalism and national identity have figured prominently in German film history, but have hitherto been seen as less significant for histories of the early cinema. Film historians have described many of the canonical works of the Weimar cinema in terms of an effort to foster a self-consciously German cinema as nationally

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25 For a general overview of the cinema in Wilhelmine Germany, see Hake, *German National Cinema*, 8-26.
distinct from its international (typically American) rivals.²⁶ Film in the Third Reich, in contrast, is seen as one aspect of an effort to foster a particular national community.²⁷ Likewise, many studies of the postwar cinemas of the German Democratic Republic, the Federal Republic of Germany, and post-unification highlight efforts to define through film a national identity that takes into consideration the difficult legacies of the national past.²⁸ This dissertation argues that the nation was no less significant for the development of cinema in the years before 1918. In so doing it also contributes to the body of work done over the last few decades on the history of the early German cinema.

The increased focus on early cinema in Germany is concomitant with a similar rise in the popularity of early cinema in other national contexts. Since the late 1970s a growing number of film scholars have turned their attention to the period before 1915.²⁹

²⁷ See many of sources on Nazi cinema referenced in footnote 4 above.
²⁹ In particular see the pioneering work film historians associated with the group Domitor, www.domitor.org. Film festivals, most notably the annual “Le Giornate del Cinema Muto,” held in Pordenone, Italy have been integral to this revival.
Their work, along with that of film archivists, has resulted in the preservation, restoration and exhibition of many long-forgotten early works. In the German context, much of this growing scholarship comes from a film studies perspective. As a result, the areas of interest to – and therefore the questions raised by – many of these scholars have tended toward the genesis of the cinematic apparatus and the formal development of film art.\textsuperscript{30} Heide Schlüpmann, Corinna Müller, Anton Kaes, Joseph Garncarz, and Martin Loiperdinger have been pivotal in reconstructing the emergence of the film industry as well as the formation of a film-going public.\textsuperscript{31} Other scholars have studied these processes in localized settings.\textsuperscript{32} Another key theme, one drawn from the spirit of re-discovery that characterizes much of the early work done in this field, has been studies of many of the forgotten pioneers—the inventors, businessmen, filmmakers, and movie-

\textsuperscript{30} Elsaesser’s \textit{Kino der Kaiserzeit}, for example, is divided into sections on genre, stars and film form.


stars who built the early industry.\textsuperscript{33} This dissertation adds to this scholarship and suggests that the nation presents an equally valuable rubric for understanding the early history of German film.

The remainder of this introduction aims to provide the relevant context for the study undertaken here. What follows is an overview of early film history in Germany. Finally, this introduction concludes with a detailed chapter breakdown.

The Early German Cinema

The history of the cinema in Imperial Germany can be roughly divided into five periods.\textsuperscript{34} A brief first period covers the few years after the first exhibition of moving

\textsuperscript{33} The director Franz Hofer, Germany’s first film star Asta Neilsen, and the inventor and producer Oskar Messter have been uniquely celebrated. See the essays in Elsaesser, \textit{A Second Life}.

\textsuperscript{34} The periodization presented here draws upon, but also contrasts with, those provided by a number of film historians. Corinna Müller argues for a “Kurzfilmzeit” before 1907, and the standardization of the “lange Spielfilm” after 1912, with a period of overlaps and transition between 1907 and 1912. See Corinna Müller, \textit{Frühe deutsche Kinematographie: formale, wirtschaftliche Entwicklungen, 1907-1912} (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1994). Müller’s framing is largely consistent with how many historians of the early cinema see the international film industry developing, although they tend to define periods along the lines of film form and audience expectation, seeing a period of “cinema of attractions” before 1906-1907, and a “cinema of narrative integration” established after 1908. For a full discussion, see Ben Brewster, “Periodization of Early Cinema,” in \textit{American Cinema’s Transitional Era: Audience, Institutions, Practices}, ed. Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp (Berkeley: University of California Press 2004), 66-75. Sabine Hake divides the Wilhelmine cinema into three phases, in step with developments in the industry: “the early years of emergence and experimentation (1895-1906), a phase of expansion and consolidation (1906-1910), and the process of standardization that gave rise to the longer feature film.” Hake, \textit{German National Cinema}, 12. Thomas Elsaesser suggests that there are two key periods. In 1902-1906, the industry took shape around “fixed-site” cinemas, film programs, and the practice of exchanging films rather than outright purchase. In 1907-1913, purposefully built theatres replaced storefront fixed-site venues and the films themselves became longer. See Thomas Elsaesser, “Early German
pictures to a public audience in 1895. In this period of film before the film industry, exhibition was largely the domain of photographic inventors and entrepreneurs, who were generally more interested in selling equipment than making films. The proprietor behind the first exhibition in Germany in the winter of 1895 was Ottomar Anschütz, who called his invention the Tachyscope. His father was a photographer. The father of Max and Emil Skladanowsky, whose Bioscop premiered in Berlin in November 1895, was a projectionist and glazier. Oskar Messter’s father made optical equipment. Messter can be seen as a transitional figure. He began by making cameras in 1896 but founded his own film company and evolved into one of the most influential figures in the German film industry before 1920.

Along with Messter’s, a number of other film studios were founded in Germany in the years immediately bracketing the turn of the century. This, the beginning of the second period, was also the moment when international film companies began to make


36 Heide Schlüpmann, The Uncanny Gaze: the Drama of Early German Cinema, trans. Inga Pollmann (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 1. The Tachyscope and Bioscop were two variants of early film technology. Both were considered inferior to the machine premiered by the Lumière brothers in Paris in December 1895, the cinematograph, which emerged as the dominant film technology.

inroads into Germany. French firms such as Pathé, Gaumont and Éclair established German branches in these years, and the Danish Nordisk company also expanded into this marketplace. Of the German companies, Deutsche Bioskop was founded in 1897, Deutsche Mutoskop und Biograph, a subsidiary of the American Biograph Company, was established in 1898, and Internationale Kinematographen und Lichteffekt and Duskes both began operations in 1905. Paul Davidson purchased his first theater in 1906 and founded his film company Projektions-AG Union (PAGU) in 1909.\(^\text{38}\)

During these years, there were two primary forms of film exhibition: in variety theaters or in Wanderkinos. The films presented were short and were typically actualities, ranging from views of well-known personalities and world events to local street scenes, filmed versions of music hall and fairground performers, and brief fictional plays or other staged scenes.\(^\text{39}\) In variety theatres, short film presentations were part of larger revues of dancers, singers, acrobats, and other performers. Wanderkinos, on the other hand and as the name suggests, were travelling cinemas. Itinerant showmen moved from location to location, often, but not exclusively, accompanying traveling fairs. The mobile nature of the Wanderkinos widened the potential audience of the cinema, extending beyond the urban centers likely to house variety theatres. Film historian Joseph Garncarz has argued that the Wanderkinos were the primary medium through which most Germans first encountered the cinema and more importantly, were the exemplary form of cinema


\(^{39}\) For a compilation of the types of films that would have been presented in fairgrounds and variety theatres, see Crazy Cinématographe. Europäisches Jahrmarktkino 1896-1916, DVD, edited by Cinémathèque de la Ville de Luxembourg, Medienwissenschaft der Universität Trier (Edition Filmmuseum, 2007).
exhibition before 1907. For Garncarz, the Wanderkinos had a wider audience, in terms of both numbers and demographic range (urban and rural Germans), and were, unlike the variety theatres, first and foremost vehicles for film exhibition, and not purveyors of a multitude of diverse entertainments, of which film was only one. Garncarz estimates that at the peak of the Wanderkinos’ popularity, the travelling shows could reach a potential audience of more than a million spectators a week, while variety theatres projected to a mere 70,000. Further, 80% of variety theatres were situated in urban locales while the Wanderkinos reached small towns and rural communities without theatres and where the permanent cinemas themselves were late in becoming established.

The third period, the years between 1906 and 1910 were a period of transition. While the films remained short in length, narrative structures became much more pronounced. At the same time, permanent movie theatres became the standard form of exhibition. Primarily in urban areas, storefronts were converted into Ladenkinos, small theatres that offered cheap admission and a set program of films. These permanent theatres grew quickly. In Berlin in 1905 there were only five permanent theatres; by 1907 there were 132. Taking the country as a whole, in 1905 there were fewer than fifty theatres nationwide, but by 1912, there were more than 3000. This trend in Germany had parallels internationally, as a “permanent theatre boom” seems to have taken place in

41 Ibid., 147-148.
42 That the shift happens at around the moment that permanent theatres began to grow in large numbers is for some historians, not a coincidence. Competition between the theatres in a quickly saturated marketplace, and the growing spread of a few dominant film producers—the French firm Pathé chief among them—have been offered as possible explanations.
44 Ibid., 153.
the United States, France, and other leading film markets at around 1905-1906. Eventually, the growth of these permanent theatres pushed the Wanderkinos out of their market dominance, relegating them primarily to rural exhibition circuits. After 1910, the numbers of operating Wanderkinos fell off precipitously.

A fourth identifiable period falls between this standardization of the cinema around 1910 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. This period witnessed the ascension of both permanent movie theatres and feature-length narrative films. These were not merely coincidental developments. Travelling exhibitors were (naturally) itinerant and as such they faced little competitive pressure in the marketplace. Permanent theatres, on the other hand, needed to ensure that audiences returned on a regular basis. Film quality mattered. Another obstacle to the establishment of feature film exhibition was the fact that the early film industry was an open market – exhibitors were allowed to purchase or rent films from producers and distributors freely. Expensive, longer films might prove popular, but there was no guarantee of their profitability if several competing theatres might be showing the same film. The Monopolfilm system, the practice of exclusive bookings for films (akin to theatre performers) began around 1910 and ensured cooperating exhibitors a monopoly on the exhibition of certain films, typically longer, more expensive, and often –in order to meet these first two criteria – foreign.

The fifth period in the development of the Wilhelmine cinema begins with the onset of the First World War. While previous periods can be designated as distinct due to

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45 Ibid., 150.
46 Ibid., 153.
47 See Ben Brewster, “Periodization of Early Cinema,” 66-68, and Corinna Müller, Frühe Deutsche Kinematographie, 126-157. One of the first major Monopolfilm releases in Germany was the American film of the 1910 Jack Johnson – Jim Jeffries title fight.
period-specific modes of exhibition, film form, or business practice, the changes across the industry between the summer of 1914 and the spring of 1915 was about the content of the industry and its products. Foreign producers dominated exhibition in prewar Germany and the majority of films imported came from France, Italy, and the United States – countries who would become Germany’s enemies during the war. Trade embargos against enemy states, the challenges of transnational film distribution during hostilities, and a raised national consciousness during wartime all contributed to the expansion of the film industry. Without foreign competition, German companies expanded rapidly to fill the marketplace. While some foreign films, particularly Scandinavian films, continued to be imported, this was the first period in German cinema history where German producers dominated.48

Chapter Breakdown

This dissertation is a study of interactions. It is an examination of how government officials, politicians, the police, the military, agitating nationalists, anxious reformers, and Kaiser Wilhelm II himself related to the film industry and to the cinematic medium. It is an examination of how film producers, theatre owners, distributors, and commentators presented their craft in service to, variously, the state, the nation, and the

48 Hake, German National Cinema, 24-25. For this period, see also Hans Barkhausen, Filmpropaganda für Deutschland im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg (Hildesheim: New York, 1982), and Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus, Vom Augusterlebnis zur Ufa-Gründung: der Deutsche Film im 1. Weltkrieg (Berlin: Avinus, 2004).
national community.\textsuperscript{49} It is also a study of competition. It addresses commercial competition between producers, and touches on geo-political competition between states. Primarily, however, this dissertation is about competing representations of the nation as they appeared in the cinema.

The main source base used to chart these interactions is the film trade press, and in particular the two leading journals \textit{Der Kinematograph} and \textit{Lichtbild Bühne}.\textsuperscript{50} Other press sources, such as film journals and the publications of the Navy League and the Colonial Society are also drawn from. From the period when the government began taking an active interest in the cinema during the First World War, government documents have been consulted as well. This dissertation is also a study of films. It offers a reading of representations of the nation as they were presented in film. Where possible, existent films are analyzed. However, the majority of the films from this period have not survived, and inferences are drawn from press reports, synopses, reviews, and published advertisements. It is a secondary goal of this dissertation to resuscitate as many of these vanished texts as possible.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. These chapters are, for the most part, chronologically sequential. They focus on particular moments in the history of German cinema’s engagement with nationalism between 1895 and 1918. The first

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\textsuperscript{49} The state, the nation, and the national community were, at times, overlapping jurisdictions.\\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Der Kinematograph} was based in Düsseldorf and began publishing in 1907 (emerging out of the circus and music hall performers journal \textit{Der Artist}). Billing itself as the publication for “all the projection arts,” it had a typical print run of 5000 – 7000 copies and aimed for a wide readership of technicians, investors, exhibitors, and even the general public. \textit{Lichtbild Bühne} began publishing in 1908 and had a typical print run of 2500 copies. For a brief overview of these and other early film trade journals, see Sabine Hake, \textit{The Cinema’s Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany, 1907-1933} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 3-26.
\end{flushright}
chapter, the only one that covers the entire time period under study, examines the relationship of Kaiser Wilhelm II to the cinema. In Wilhelm’s official nationalism, he saw himself as the personification of the German nation. He also embraced the cinema, frequently allowing himself to be filmed and often screening films himself. He quickly emerged as Germany’s first film star, and as the head of state he lent film a high degree of respectability. His authority as monarch was tied to his image as a charismatic ruler, and his personal traits could be strengthened or compromised by his film persona. Ultimately, Wilhelm’s retreat from both the public eye and official governance during the First World War reduced his status as a charismatic leader.

The second chapter explores the place of film within associational political culture during film’s formative years. Although cinema was not widely used within electoral politics, it did find an application in extra-parliamentary politics. For radical nationalist groups such as the Navy League and the Colonial Society, the visual attractions of the cinema provided an ideal means through which they could communicate their national aspirations to a wide audience. The short films produced by these groups informed audiences but also brought to them visual spectacles of radical nationalism.

The third chapter argues that the period between the consolidation of the film industry around 1910 and the outbreak of the war witnessed the beginnings of what can be termed a nationalistic film culture and a national audience. This was a moment of rapid expansion for the German film industry. Spectatorship increased markedly and so did German film production. Building from the concerns of the earlier film reformers and attendant to these industry developments, was a debate about the impact and influence of the cinema on not just a film-going audience per se, but on a German film audience in
particular. Concurrently, film producers began making films that dealt directly with what were perceived to be the great heroes and the pivotal moments of German history. Largely set in the nineteenth century, these films codified a cinematic symbolic vocabulary for German nationalism.

The fourth chapter addresses the reaction of the film industry to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. In the anxiety and enthusiasm of August and September, film exhibitors positioned their theatres as sites of national belonging, promoting special war programs with patriotic themes to capitalize on the emotions of the moment. As mobilization transitioned to hostilities, the key issue for the cinema was its ability to allow Germans to see the war experience, or a visual facsimile of it, for themselves. Access to the front for camera operators and the creation of German war newsreels represent one side of this issue. Debates about censorship policy in wartime represent the other. Finally, hostilities against enemy nations, many of whom had been leading film importers, brought to the surface a desire to facilitate a German film industry free of foreign influences, which were thought to be potentially harmful.

The fifth chapter examines the role of the cinema in the second half of the war, as the burdens of total war weighed heavily on the German population and as the Oberste Heeresleitung (OHL), the Supreme Army Command, grew increasingly concerned about morale at home and the image of the nation abroad. From 1916 on there was a discernable push, first from German business leaders, then the military, and finally Ludendorff himself, to create film propaganda that could compete for hearts and minds on the battlefield of popular culture. Films produced in support of the government’s war loan drives, offer a particularly revelatory case study of wartime propaganda. An
examination of these films demonstrates how, in their efforts to justify financial support for the war, film propaganda contributed to redefining the German nation along the lines of a popular German national community.
Chapter One
Schattenkaiser:
The Rise and Fall of the Wilhelmine Cinema, 1895–1918

Wilhelm II came to the throne determined to fill out the imperial dimension of his office. He travelled constantly among the German states; he glorified his grandfather as the warrior-saint who had built a new dwelling for the German people, and he instigated new public holidays and memorial observances to shroud, as it were, the constitutional and cultural nakedness of the throne in the mantle of a ‘national’ history. He projected himself to the German public as the personification of the ‘imperial idea.’ ¹

This is how Christopher Clark describes the motivation behind much of the ostentation and ornamentation of the public persona of Kaiser Wilhelm II. The spectacle and ceremony that surrounded Wilhelm was part of an effort to foster an image of the monarchy that the German public would see as the embodiment of the German nation. For a monarch whose aspirations outpaced the defined limits of his authority, the need for symbolic power was great. For a leader operating within an age of mass politics and in a milieu of emerging popular media, the opportunity to assume such a role was very real. In addition to his memorials and holidays, beyond his public appearances, Wilhelm crafted—or at least attempted to craft—his persona through the mass media of print, and as this chapter will elaborate upon, film. As Martin Kohlrausch has expressed it, “The extraordinary political significance ascribed to the emperor in Germany thus cannot be understood without taking into consideration the media revolution.” ² This chapter explores the idea of Wilhelm as a film monarch, charting his changing image on screen,

his pivotal role in the development of the medium, and, ultimately, his rise and fall as the first representation of a national idea in German film.

Kaiser Wilhelm II’s career as a film subject began the same year that the cinema did, in 1895. In June, Wilhelm attended the opening and dedication of the Kaiser Wilhelm Canal – a glorification of his grandfather. Also in attendance was the British film pioneer Birt Acres, who recorded the proceedings and released the footage as *The Opening of the Kiel Canal*. Another film, *Kaiser Wilhelm Reviewing his Troops*, was made at around the same time. The films were first presented in personal-viewing kinetoscopes operated in Germany by Stollwerck G.m.b.H, primarily a chocolate manufacturer. It is quite possible, then, that for a number of Germans their first experience with moving pictures—although of the kinetoscope rather than the kinematograph—was also a first encounter with the cinematic image of their monarch.

Wilhelm maintained a prominent role in film throughout the remaining twenty-three years of his reign. For much of that period he was German cinema’s most well known personality, a popular subject, and an invaluable advocate.

On screen, Wilhelm II promoted an official image of a national community centered on the Hohenzollern dynasty and imperial military strength. In his films, he was the German emperor surrounded by his loyal subjects and the attentive warlord at parades and maneuvers. But to German audiences he was also the private figure, the hunter and traveler, the husband and father. By the outbreak of the First World War, the cinematic

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Wilhelm II became less the personification of a nationalist ambition and more so a picture personality with a national appeal. That appeal, like the political fortunes of Wilhelm II himself, did not outlast the war years.

This chapter charts the history of Wilhelm II as a film subject. The sections below proceed chronologically in presenting the different facets of the Kaiser’s image in the cinema. The first section examines the place of Wilhelm and his films within the national political culture of the empire. It draws chiefly from two bodies of work. First, it follows literature assessing the authority of the monarch vis-à-vis the power structure of the state. Second, it draws upon a more recent historiography that examines the political valiancy of the Kaiser as a media-made monarch. The cinema fit into this modern dynamic as one aspect of a wider mass media effort to create the Kaiser’s image. For the film industry, Wilhelm’s film celebrity served to promote the cinema, a process elaborated upon in the second section. Early film producers, exhibitors, and commentators used Wilhelm as a featured attraction in soliciting paying audiences and as evidence of their industry’s cultural respectability. Both were significant challenges in cinema’s first two decades. The third section explores how Wilhelm’s aspirations to authority and film stardom coalesced in 1913. The film industry and the monarch both celebrated Wilhelm’s first twenty-five years on the imperial throne with an intense period of promotion. Specifically, in commemorating the Kaiser through special retrospective films and print publications, the film industry contributed to Wilhelm’s efforts to mythologize his person in German history. As Wilhelm II, film star, the Kaiser was also held up as a pivotal figure in German film history. Finally, the fourth section examines how the image of the Kaiser, so carefully presented in 1913, changed over the course of the First World War.
Wilhelm presented himself at the beginning of the war as a symbol of national patriotic unity, but he ended it in abdication and exile. In film his celebrity also declined, as others usurped his central role as the cinematic personification of the German national community; the most prominent usurper was Paul von Hindenburg.

The Kaiser had a long history as a national symbol. In his own time, he saw himself as the personification of Germany and to many contemporaries, and subsequent historians, he was “the whole spiritual personality of the nation.” The trend was certainly promoted in the negative in wartime propaganda and popularized by commentators after the war who saw in Wilhelm the worst essence of German militarism. Whereas these attitudes associated the Kaiser with the aggressive martial chauvinism on which they could lay blame for the horrors of the First World War, more sympathetic historians have seen the Kaiser as the representative of the tensions and trials of German modernity.

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7 See for example, Wolfgang König, Wilhelm II. und die Moderne: der Kaiser und die technische-industrielle Welt (Padeborn: Schöningh, 2007).
was a hereditary ruler operating within a political culture shaped by active, agitational political societies and a highly-mobilized social democratic movement. He was tradition annexing space in modernity. Matthew Jefferies, summarizing the position taken by scholars such as Thomas Kohut and others, explains that Wilhelm “became widely recognized as the symbol and mouthpiece of the Kaiserreich precisely because he shared its tension and contradictions.”

What this chapter seeks to do is to examine the cinematic Wilhelm as the monarch believed himself to be seen, as the national “imperial idea.”

Media and Monarchy in Imperial Germany

The monarchs of Germany were prominent fixtures in the public life and political cultures of the empire. The old royal families persisted after the unification of Germany in 1871 and retained a level of prominence within their separate states, even if they were secondary to Kaiser Wilhelm II in the larger nation. In an authoritarian monarchical system, Kaiser Wilhelm was at the center of political life. As such, Wilhelm II remains one of the most written-about and oft-debated figures in modern German history. His personality has been dissected by historians influenced by a range of approaches, from top-down great-man adherents to bottom-up social and cultural historians to (inside-out) proponents of psychohistory. His impact on German politics, economics, and society

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9 The definitive work on Kaiser Wilhelm II remains that of John C.G Röhl. For the key works in English translation, see *The Kaiser and His Court: Wilhelm II and the Government of Germany*, trans. Terence F. Cole (Cambridge: Cambridge University
after his ascension to the imperial throne in 1888 continues to be contested. Questions about the strength of his rule and his centrality to the domestic and foreign policies of the state persist. Irrespective of these debates, he was in his time, unquestionably, “the single most powerful person in the Empire.” In cinema history Wilhelm, arguably, should be placed alongside pioneers such as the Skladanowskys and Oskar Messter, as the most influential figures in the development of early German film.

Wilhelm was not only the most powerful, but also the most famous person in the Empire. It was largely as a result of his personal image that he came to play such a decisive role in the development of the film industry. The Kaiser was a media figure. He was a fixture in the press, believing print newspapers to be his connection to his subjects and the basis of their access to him. His belief in the value of the press and in his


For recent work on this debate see Alexander König, Wie mächtig war der Kaiser? Kaiser Wilhelm II. zwischen Königsmechanismus und Polykratie von 1908 bis 1914 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2009) and Wolfgang Mommsen, War der Kaiser an allem schuld (Munich: Propyläen Verlag, 2002).

Jefferies, Contesting the German Empire, 88.

On the media-personality of the Kaiser, see the chapter in Clark, Kaiser Wilhelm II, 218-255. See also Martin Kohlrausch, Der Monarch im Skandal: Die Logik der Massenmedien und die Transformation der wilhelmischen Monarchie (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2005). On media culture in Germany more broadly, see Frank Bösch, Öffentliche Geheimnisse: Skandale, Politik, und Medien in Deutschland und Grossbritannien 1880-1914 (Munich: Oldenburg Verlag, 2009).
own mastery of the medium often resulted in problematic ends, as in the *Daily Telegraph* affair of 1908. Wilhelm also followed the press, which he believed connected him to the issues and attitudes of the German people. Film did not offer the same connection to the German public; only the most general elements of the speeches he was fond of giving could be represented in film. The great advantage of the cinema was that it presented a (moving) picture of the monarch without the potentially controversial content often associated with his public appearances. Film could not efface Wilhelm’s contentious persona nor grant him the scope of public influence and popular adulation he desired. But the Kaiser embraced the new medium nonetheless.

When Wilhelm came to the throne in 1888, the established precedent for the exercising of political authority was the relationship between Chancellor Otto von Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm I. Under Wilhelm II’s grandfather, Bismarck held immense personal power. He was in a position of power, but more so, his power was tied to his person. Bismarck held the offices in government necessary for his influence. He traded heavily on his reputation as founder of the Reich and savvy diplomat, and his monarch granted him a wide range. As Christopher Clark has expressed it:

> The roots of Bismarck’s dominance lay partly in the potent combination of Prussian and Reich offices under his control. As Reich chancellor, he exercised direct authority over the imperial state secretaries; as Prussian minister president, he controlled the debates of the Prussian ministry; as Prussian foreign minister, he was responsible for casting Prussia’s seventeen votes in the Federal Council […] Equally important were his status as the architect of the wars of unification, his reputation as a foreign minister of unparalleled skill and judgment, his unrivalled

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13 Controversy erupted nationally and internationally following comments about England, Germany, and the Boer War made by Wilhelm II to a British reporter in October 1908. For a recent, detailed account of the Kaiser and the Daily Telegraph Affair, see Röhl, *Kaiser Wilhelm II: Into the Abyss of War and Exile*, 662-696. See also Kohlrausch, *Der Monarch im Skandal*, 243-263.

ability to second-guess and intimidate domestic opponents, his astuteness in exploiting public opinion, and his deftness in dealing with his royal master.  

Bismarck’s power was the product of this self-spun web, and Wilhelm I’s willingness for Bismarck to manage affairs as he did meant that the power of the monarch was less actualized that it might have been.

The powers of the monarch in the German state were considerable, but not absolute. In theory, the constitution made many concessions to federalism. In practice, the Kaiser could dismiss and appoint both federal officials and military personnel, and as King of Prussia, he ruled over the dominant German state. Prussian influence within Germany was decisive. These powers made the Kaiser the most influential figure in the politics of the empire. While Wilhelm I may have permitted Bismarck to exercise the bulk of his influence, Wilhelm II provides a much more active example of the possibilities and the limitations on the power of the monarch. Wilhelm insisted on a personal monarchy in which he played an active role. As Clark has put it, Wilhelm was not content to serve merely as “the seat of authority on which power depended,” but rather asserted the throne as “a political power in its own right.”

For much of the twentieth century, historians were reluctant to take seriously the role played by Wilhelm II. They saw him as a weak ruler, a “shadow Kaiser,” who was restricted by established constitutional roles and by his own weaknesses to a place of secondary importance, or, as Hans-Ulrich Wehler expressed it, “a weak figure atop a clay pedestal.” This view has been largely refuted in the last few decades by the

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15 Ibid., 41-42.
16 Ibid., 65.
17 See the discussion in Jefferies, Contesting the German Empire, 85. Wehler quoted here as well.
groundbreaking studies by John Röhl, and the work of Christopher Clark.\textsuperscript{18} For Röhl and those who have followed his assertions, Wilhelm’s impotence was an ahistorical misreading. In such a view the assumed limitations of Wilhelm’s authority were apparent only in relation to more absolute models, and were not representative of the contemporary views held by those familiar with the inner workings of the Kaiserrreich. As Röhl has summarized, “the debate on the role of Kaiser Wilhelm II in the decision-making powers of the Wilhelmine Kaiserrreich has got stuck on the issue of the applicability of the contemporary polemical catchphrase ‘personal rule.’”\textsuperscript{19} Wilhelm did not dictate the foreign or domestic policies of the state. This, however, does not mean that he was not influential in shaping them. The policies that developed frequently did so in line with his thinking.

For Röhl, there are a number of factors that should not be overlooked in discussions of the range of Wilhelm’s political authority. Most significantly, he stresses that although the Kaiser may not have determined every decision or been actively involved in the day-to-day running of the imperial bureaucracy, his influence was nevertheless felt. Wilhelm had, in Röhl’s phrase, “institutionalized personal rule,” meaning that his power of appointments placed much of the machinations of administrative authority in the hands of those he believed represented his own interests. Moreover, knowing that he took an active role prompted officials to abandon projects and initiatives that they felt Wilhelm would reject. At the same time, his favor was, for many,

\textsuperscript{18} See note 9 above.
a privileged end, the pursuit of which resulted in officials making choices they thought would solicit a positive response.20

The extent of the Kaiser’s powers was by no means constant. His interest, and by extension his involvement, in political initiatives was, as Röhl points out, neither uniform nor consistent. He was more engaged on some issues, such as the Naval Laws, than on others. There were also moments over the long course of his reign when his political influence was weakened. The aftermaths of the Eulenburg (1907–1908) and Daily Telegraph (1908) affairs for example, resulted in a less influential role. As will be elaborated upon below, during the First World War Wilhelm withdrew himself from an active role in both military planning and in shaping the domestic response to total war.

Moreover, Wilhelm’s personality and opinion was famously inconsistent. Skilled officials or members of his court could, to use Clark’s phase, succeed in “managing the Kaiser,” directing his opinions to meet their ends.21

Wilhelm’s power extended only as far as he chose to exercise it, and/or to the extent that those around him could “manage” his directives. Historians such as Martin Kohlrausch have argued that it was also influenced by public opinion and that those attitudes were shaped by mass media.22 According to Kohlrausch, the decades bracketing the turn of the twentieth century witnessed the development of a new form of political authority, one based in the personal charisma of leadership and in the successful articulation of that charisma to the public. New, modern modes of communication allowed the Kaiser—and other leaders—direct access to the public and resulted in the

20 Röhl, The Kaiser and his Court, 116-117.
21 Clark, Wilhelm II, 171.
22 See Kohlrausch, Der Monarch im Skandal.
personalization of politics. In this mediated environment Wilhelm II became a “brand name product,” and the success of his politics was tied to the support for his brand.  

Wilhelm’s authority as monarch was closely tied to his image as a charismatic ruler. As Clark affirms in the context of Wilhelm II’s speeches, “The aim was to ‘charismatise’ the monarchy and invoke the kind of transcendent, sovereign vantage point from which Wilhelm aspired to reign over his people.” Kohlrausch elaborates on a similar point:

Wilhelm II’s style of rule – his speeches, his travels, and his symbolic emphasis on the divine right of kings – functioned as a practical measure meant to meet the demands placed upon him to act as ‘Caesar’ and ‘Integrator.’ Wilhelm’s attempts to subordinate all aspects of politics and society to his influence (his ‘personal regime’), to present himself as the focal point of the nation’s life, and especially the eschatological rhetoric of the imperial speeches – the famous herrliche Zeiten (glorious times) the Kaiser promised to bring about – can all be seen as features of charismatic rule.

This effort to charismatise Kaiser Wilhelm II was undertaken in the early cinema as well. Dominik Petzold has demonstrated in empirical detail the extent to which Wilhelm used film to enhance his authority.

Referring to the Kaiser’s engagement

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26 Clark, Kaiser Wilhelm II, 165. Max Weber wrote that charisma was “a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities.” Quoted in Edward Berenson and Eva Giloi, “Introduction,” in Constructing Charisma, eds. Edward Berenson and Eva Giloi, 3.
with the cinema as a means of “staging authority” (Herrschaftsinszenierung), Petzold echoes the assessments of Kohlrausch and Clark regarding Wilhelm’s ambitions towards a media-monarchy. He argues that Wilhelm was aware of the potential value of film in advocating both specific political objectives (such as the Navy Laws) and for the promotion of his rule. Moreover, he notes that this awareness of film’s utility extended to the Kaiser’s court and was most pronounced in the close cooperation between Wilhelm and filmmakers for the French Pathé Frères company from 1912 until 1914. In film, as in print, Wilhelm II saw himself as a media-monarch. However, his success in crafting a positive public persona is at best arguable. Wilhelm’s primary means of communicating with his public was through his speeches and through the press. Live speeches, press reports, and moving pictures are very different avenues of mass communication. Despite the fact that Wilhelm was famous for his public addresses—or perhaps as a negative result of it—these were often the most controversial aspects of his rule. Rarely significantly prepared in advance, often suffering from moments of ill-advised inspiration, Wilhelm’s speeches were received by contemporary observers as vibrant performances. The content however, was often problematic, as it represented his personal feelings in the moment and did not always correspond with official positions, or even, at times, his own. Clark has underlined this point, writing that, “it would not be an exaggeration to say that far more damage was done to the emperor’s reputation […] by

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29 Petzold, *Der Kaiser und das Kino*, 274-279. This period of cooperation allowed for the heavy inclusion of scenes of the Kaiser in Pathé’s newsreels.
what he said than by what he did or caused to be done.”  

Press reports, on the other hand lacked the compelling personal dimension of his speeches, but the message could, in theory, be more carefully tailored.

The extent to which the public viewed the Kaiser with adulation fluctuated over time and remains a point of contention among historians. While there appears ample evidence of cheering crowds and popular films, there is also an abundance of damning contemporary condemnations and, as noted, a succession of public personal scandals. Röhl has called Wilhelm’s wide popularity “one of the most persistent legends of recent German history.”

According to Röhl, the monarch’s popularity was waning by the early twentieth century and the idea that the spectacle and bravado of the Kaiser glossed over his autocratic administration, personal belligerence, and embarrassing gossip, “imputes to the German people a degree of political naivety that they did not possess.” There were Germans who adored their ruler, those who loathed him, and those who felt they could do

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30 Clark, Kaiser Wilhelm II, 222. To cite two of the most well-known examples: speaking to recruits in Potsdam in November 1890, Wilhelm reflected on the political situation of the present and explained to his audience that they “belonged to him now, and would have to be prepared to fire on their fathers and brothers if he ordered them to do so.” Similarly, in his “Hun Speech” to troops departing for the Boxer expedition in July 1900, he urged the German soldiers to show no mercy and to take no prisoners in China so that “Just as the Huns one thousand years ago […] made a name for themselves in which their greatness still resounds, so let the name Germany be known in China in such a way that a Chinese will never again dare even to look askance at a German.” Both quoted in Clark, Kaiser Wilhelm II, 223, 234. See also the discussions on the Potsdam speech in Röhl, Kaiser Wilhelm II: A Concise Life (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 59-60, and on the “Hun” speech in Röhl, Kaiser Wilhelm II: Into the Abyss of War and Exile, 76-78.

31 Although this was often futile, as the efforts to disseminate the official versions of the Hun speech demonstrate.

32 Röhl, Kaiser Wilhelm II: Into the Abyss of War and Exile, 127.

33 Ibid., 127-128.
a better job if only they had come into the position. Ultimately, any lack of popular adoration would only heighten the need for positive media images and only added import to his cinematic representations.

Charismatic rule is bounded by the extent to which the ruler remains charismatic. Charisma requires validation. As Edward Berenson and Eva Giloi have expressed it, summarizing Max Weber, to maintain charisma an individual must “pass tests, endure trials, or show success.” Controversy, if seen as failure, detracts from charisma, as does inaction. Both plagued Wilhelm at different times during his reign. Isabel Hull has suggested that the reliance on public performance was itself damaging to Wilhelm’s reputation in the long term. Hull writes that “the Monarchy attempted to do with ceremony what it should have done with politics, namely, integrate large sections of the population comfortably into a stable but changing order.” Although public performance was central to cultivating a charismatic persona, relying on pageantry while neglecting policy left Germans, as will be shown, with a celebrity as a head of state, but perhaps not with a charismatic sovereign.

Kaiser Wilhelm II, A Friend of the Cinema

The cinema promoted, literally, the image of the monarch. Silent film removed the speaking from Wilhelm’s speeches, and in so doing reduced the dynamic to the man

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34 On the last point, see most famously, Heinrich Claß, Wenn ich der Kaiser wär: Politische Wahrheiten und Notwendigkeiten (Leipzig: Dieterich, 1912). Published under the pseudonym of Daniel Frymann.
36 Hull, The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II, 44.
and to the event. There is no question that Wilhelm II enjoyed being filmed. He does seem to have been less concerned with the form that these films took. Wilhelm was interested in being a media figure, but he was not self-aware of the mediated message he presented. The seeming lack of attention to film form is in contrast to the direct effort he put into speeches and in his use of printed media. Whether for better or worse (often, for worse), Wilhelm II’s forays into these forms of communication were more detailed and planned. While Wilhelm II may not have understood the power of cinema to present specific messages and to advocate for particular issues, film was nevertheless crucial in fostering the image of his personal rule and it contributed to his personal charisma. The power of the cinema, at least in relation to the public image of the Kaiser and the monarchy, resulted from film’s ability to promote his image, and in particular his personal image. That personal image was also the first popular representation of the nation in the German cinema.

More than 200 films featuring Wilhelm II were exhibited in Germany before the First World War. These were actualities, the brief non-fiction films included in many early film programs. Precursors to the later newsreels, many actualities depicted contemporary events and reported on well-known individuals. In Germany, Kaiser Wilhelm was the most popular actuality subject. The vast majority of films featuring the Kaiser depicted his public appearances. Parades, the unveiling of monuments, and other public addresses were frequent subjects. Military parades and maneuvers, including those of the navy were particularly prominent. Wilhelm was referred to as the “Reisekaiser” for

37 Those made during the war will be discussed in the relevant section below. The list of films featuring Wilhelm is based on searches of the German Early Cinema Database for Kaiser Wilhelm II. http://www.earlycinema.uni-koeln.de
the amount of travel he undertook, and it is no surprise that nearly half of the films featuring him place him in locations throughout his Reich, and abroad. His visits abroad typically resulted in several different short films, as can be seen with his trips to the Middle East in 1898 and to Great Britain in 1907.  

What did these films mean for his political authority? An analysis of the film titles, limited though it must be, can offer a few speculative conclusions. The limitations are significant: titles can offer only an approximation of content and do not clarify the abundance or scarcity of each film; some films may have been widely distributed in many prints, others only in a few. Nevertheless, even speculative conclusions have some value. The first conclusion suggests that films frequently presented Wilhelm in association with the German military. Roughly a fifth of film titles make some reference to military parades, maneuvers or ships. Naval building was one of the key projects Wilhelm promoted, and he took his constitutional role as warlord seriously. These relationships were reinforced on screen. Second, films presented Wilhelm as a figure of global significance. As noted, he travelled abroad significantly – nearly one in four films were filmed abroad – and he was often filmed with other heads of state and foreign dignitaries. If the German nation had a symbol in the world, it was Wilhelm. Third, films of his frequent domestic travel reinforced his position as German emperor. While a study of distribution patterns would be necessary to demonstrate this suggestion, the fact

38 Years given are for release dates of the films. Wilhelm’s 1898 visit to the Middle East resulted in approximately 11 films, although similarity in their titles suggests some of these may be duplicates. On this trip, see also the discussion in Petzold, Der Kaiser und das Kino, 236-239.

39 While the number of foreign shot films was no doubt the result of the aforementioned business practice, this does not diminish the number of titles available to the German audience.
that nearly one in two films that do not depict foreign travel make clear reference to German places in their titles suggests Wilhelm’s association with the breadth of the Reich.

Kaiser Wilhelm was vitally important for the development of the German film industry. An additional conclusion that can be drawn from the available list of Kaiser films is that of the known production companies, it appears that more than two out every three films depicting the Kaiser were made by a German company. Although this list includes small and little known companies, like Buderus and Hugo Droes, the majority of films were produced by Messter, *Deutsche Mutoscop und Biograph*, and *Deutsche Bioscope*.\(^{40}\) It is important to note that this film title list does not include the Kaiser’s many appearances in the weekly Pathé newsreels that resulted from the cooperation between Wilhelm and Pathé in the 1912-1914 period.\(^{41}\) Based on the nature of Wilhelm’s public appearances, it does seem plausible that the content of these newsreel segments would mirror the films mentioned above. That a foreign company had such valuable access to the Kaiser was not lost on officials in the German film industry. Producers and


\(^{41}\) Petzold states that Wilhelm appeared in these weekly newsreels 57 times between 1912 and 1914, including 38 times in 1913 alone (out of 52 weeks). Petzold, *Der Kaiser und das Kino*, 97.
industry observers felt it to be “shameful” that a French company had such
unprecedented access to “national” events, the “German army” and the “German navy.”

The film industry had a number of practical reasons for welcoming and promoting
Kaiser Wilhelm II as a film persona. For one, he provided a guaranteed celebrity.
German audiences could be expected to have interest in filmed scenes of the Kaiser. The
crowds that greeted his public appearances, speeches and parades, suggested that
Wilhelm could likewise draw paying customers into movie theatres. Further, the Kaiser’s
fondness for public appearances meant that he was an available film subject. As the
Sozialdemokratische Flugschriften noted derisively in 1913, “the amount of official
celebrations that the German Empire has had to endure over these last twenty-five years
has been seemingly endless. They follow each other as uninterruptedly as film reels do in
a cinema.” Wilhelm’s appetite for nationalist spectacle provided a regular reserve of
film-subjects. Finally, unlike the costly fiction filmmaking of the day, the Kaiser supplied
his own costumes, sets, and special effects. The ceremonies, parades, and military
maneuvers that made up many of Wilhelm’s film-friendly public appearances included
ornamental uniforms, adorned royalty and political elites, as well as displays of the
German military. As Martin Loiperdinger has observed,

no feature film from before World War I achieved the extravagance that the
Hohenzollern Dynasty could display at their public gatherings and social rituals.
The cult of monarchy in the German Reich supplied the actuality genre with a
wide range of unbeatable subjects that were also cheap to produce.

42 According to a managing director from Eiko in March 1914. Quoted in Petzold, Der
Kaiser und das Kino, 277.
43 Quoted in Bernd Sösemann, “Hollow-Sounding Jubilees: Forms and Effects of Public
Self-Display in Wilhelmine Germany,” in The Kaiser, eds. Mombauer and Deist, 37.
44 Martin Loiperdinger, “The Kaiser’s Cinema: An Archaeology of Attitudes and
Audiences,” in A Second Life, ed. Thomas Elsaesser, 47.
The merits of making the Kaiser—and other royalty—into a regular film-subject were evident to contemporary film producers.

The concept of a film star, a featured performer whose presence was integral to both film marketing and to establishing audience expectations, did not exist in Germany, or anywhere else in the global film marketplace until at least 1910. There were, however, stars who featured in films. Well-known stage performers, dancers, singers, magicians, strongmen, gymnasts, and others who made their living through live performance were filmed and included in early film programs. Thomas Elsaesser has differentiated between these stage-acts and the film stars who rose to prominence later by the suggestion that while the live acts were appreciated “for their special skills and extraordinary talents,” the first generation of film star was loved “for what might be called their uncommon typicality or special ordinariness.” Film stars appealed because of their power to serve as idyllic examples of expected social action for their audiences. Certainly, Kaiser Wilhelm II had much more in common with the operetta virtuosi and circus performers. It was his exceptional nature, his role as monarch, and his charisma, which made him a popular film subject. It might seem ungenerous to say that his special skill was being himself, but it should not be overlooked that to many Germans being the Kaiser was extraordinary.

However, the appeal of the ordinariness of the Kaiser should not be completely disregarded. A significant public fascination surrounded the private life the Kaiser and his family. Several of the films in which he was featured focused on depictions of his

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private life. For example, the Duskes-Kinematographen und Film Fabriken produced films made during the royal family’s 1909 holiday in Corfu.\textsuperscript{47} Such revealing glimpses of the Kaiser’s private life may also have had a political value. Amidst concerns for the popularity of the Kaiser and the monarchy in 1906, Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow encouraged Wilhelm to use his family to prop up his image and his authority. The Chancellor pressured Wilhelm to make the July 1906 birth of his grandchild, the first son of Crown Prince Wilhelm and Crown Princess Cecilie, into a national event.\textsuperscript{48} For Bülow it was the ordinariness of the Kaiser, his role as father and grandfather, which could endear him to his national public. Perhaps the personal life of the Kaiser was itself extraordinary.

Film scholar Richard deCordova has argued for the centrality of the personal in the creation of early film stardom. For deCordova the star emerged only in the last years before the war and was the culmination of a distinct discursive progression as actors became picture personalities and eventually, film stars.\textsuperscript{49} The latter two labels applied exclusively to individuals whose image emerged from their onscreen representation. While the earliest films depicted identifiable personalities—including well-known political figures like Wilhelm II—and actors, these individuals had meaning and identity outside of their appearance in the cinema. For already well-known figures, the role of film in the discursive construction of their identities could be negligible. As deCordova writes in reference to screen representations of George Dewey, U.S. Admiral of the Navy

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\textsuperscript{47}“Die deutsche Kaiser-Familie in Korfu,” \textit{Lichtbild Bühne}, 13 May 1909.
\textsuperscript{48} Röhl, \textit{Kaiser Wilhelm II: Into the Abyss of War and Exile}, 652-653.
\textsuperscript{49} Although deCordova studies the American context, parallels with the German case are fruitful. See Richard deCordova, \textit{Picture Personalities: the Emergence of the Star System in America} (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990).
\end{flushleft}
and prominent figure in films of the Spanish-American War, “although the cinema certainly capitalized on Dewey’s notoriety, it had neither a direct role in creating it nor the means to control it.” 50 Picture personalities, alternatively, were almost exclusively created out of onscreen representations, by personalities that existed across and between different films. As such, they were constructed by a discourse that was “produced and maintained largely by the cinema itself.” 51 Film stars were further differentiated from picture personalities in that while they traced their persona back to their onscreen roles, their public appeal depended on their existence outside the films. Their private and personal lives were of interest to the audience.

Wilhelm II’s persona existed externally to his cinematic image. The public perception of the Kaiser was the product of not only his mass media representations but also the daily public and political life of the empire. However, his persona did not exist independently of his cinematic representation either. Over more than two decades, Wilhelm appeared in hundreds of films, each one a text contributing to an onscreen image. DeCordova differentiates public figures from film stars by explaining that,

the cinema’s function in relation to these personalities was, in a sense, merely to represent them […] [U.S Presidents] McKinley, Roosevelt […] were the raw material in what was principally a new form of photojournalism. This cannot be said of stars […] who emerged out of an explicitly fictional mode of film production. The spectator did not pay to see a record of Mary Pickford’s movements, but paid, rather to see her activity in the enunciation of a fiction. 52

On film, Wilhelm II was not merely an object of photojournalism. He was, as this chapter suggests, party to the creation of both a personal media persona and by extension an image of the German nation. These were not fictions, but they were representations.

50 Ibid., 23.
51 Ibid., 51.
52 Ibid., 23.
Wilhelm II was not the only film star in the Hohenzollern family. Although they lacked the political power and did not possess the same level of fame as Wilhelm, other members of his family were well known enough to make enticing film subjects. Royal spectacle and the propensity for travel, particularly abroad, were aspects of their daily lives as well. Wilhelm’s wife, the Kaiserin Auguste Viktoria appeared in films with her husband, particularly in royal visits around the Reich and abroad. In total she appeared in roughly fifty films. Wilhelm’s brother, Prince Heinrich, appeared in nearly forty films, although the vast majority were filmed during his 1902 visit to the United States. Three different series were made of his time in America: Reise des Prinzen Heinrich nach Amerika was made by the American Edison company and was serialized over eleven parts; another American company Lubin, made an eight part series Prinz Heinrich in Amerika; and one German company, Internationale Kinematographen Gesellschaft produced the seven part Amerikafahrt des Prinzen Heinrich. The other dozen or so films featuring Heinrich were a collection of public appearances, including a memorable airship ride in 1908.

Arguably the member of the family whose cinema celebrity came closest to matching the Kaiser’s was his eldest son the Crown Prince Wilhelm. The prince appeared in more than thirty films, was featured prominently in articles in the film trade press, and as will be discussed below, received his own commemorative volume in 1913. The prince

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53 Among these films was that of a visit to Carl Hagenbeck’s Tierpark made by the Messter company in 1910. “Die deutsche Kaiserin in Hagenbecks Tierpark,” Kinematographische Rundschau, 10 February 1910.

54 The Prince Heinrich films have been identified using searches of the German Early Cinema Database. See also the discussion in Petzold, Der Kaiser und das Kino, 284-286. Heinrich was also filmed while hunting the Archduke Joseph in 1913, although it is not clear if this was merely for private viewing or received any type of distribution. See “Prinz Heinrich im Film,” Lichtbild Bühne, 13 December 1913.
seems to have had a working relationship with the German subsidiary of the French Eclipse film company, dating back at least to the making of Seine Kaiserliche und Königliche Hoheit der Kronprinz exerziert die Leibbatterie des Ersten Garde-Feldartillerie-Regiments in 1909. The company later made a film of the prince’s children, Die Kinder unseres Kronprinzenpaares, in 1910, and the military film Unser Kronprinz als Leibhusar in 1912.

Among the most-widely publicized films featuring the prince was the multi-part Weltreise unseres Kronprinzen. The series chronicled the lavish 1910 voyage taken by the German crown prince, Friedrich Wilhelm Victor August Ernst von Hohenzollern and his wife the Duchess Cecilie of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, throughout South Asia and North Africa. Released between January and May 1911, this actuality brought together two of the most popular non-fiction film subjects of the day: the German monarchy and the travelogue. The Eclipse film company supplied the camera chosen to accompany the crown prince on his journey and produced the film. The prince himself gave permission for the filming of his ceremonial appearances and access to his person. Although the

complete series has not survived, the substance of the film can be discerned from the summaries published in the film trade press. The film begins with the onset of the prince’s own voyage, and its first part presents his departure with his wife on the ship *Gneisenau*. It is only in the second part, featuring the pair arriving in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), that foreign places and peoples begin to feature prominently. From Ceylon the princess traveled to Egypt while the prince continued on alone. He traveled in India and is seen in the film celebrated by local dignitaries and British imperial officials alike. Among them, the prince is the guest of the Nizam of Hyderabad in his palace and is accompanied by the governor to a military parade in his honor in Secunderabad. After India, the prince went to Egypt and the later episodes of the series feature him travelling on the Nile and taking in a polo match in Heliopolis.

By 1911 the crown prince was a commodity at the German box office. As heir to the imperial throne, he was one of the most famous faces in Germany. Like his father, the younger Wilhelm was a film celebrity and, in the minds of the industry, an asset to the promotion of their medium. In article entitled, “Cinema and Patriotism,” which appeared in *Der Kinematograph* in 1912, the author used the Crown Prince as the first two examples of how film could fulfill a nationalist duty. Beginning with a discussion of press pieces on films of the Crown Prince visiting a military regiment, the article proceeded to argue against a recent complaint about the cinema made by the Social Democrats in the Reichstag. Special screenings in the prince’s honor were noted in the

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58 “Kinematograph und Patriotismus,” *Der Kinematograph*, 6 November 1912.
In 1909 the prince received a surprise birthday film screening—at his wife’s request—at the Marmor-Palace in Potsdam. Among the films shown for the royal couple were *Kaiserliche Parforcejagd, Momentbilder aus dem Leben des Deutschen Kaisers,* and *Dammbruch der Elbe in der Altmark mit der Besichtigung durch den Kronprinzen.*

Trade press coverage of other royals follows a similar pattern. A screening attended by Prince August Wilhelm and his wife in November 1913 was noted in the press for the reactions of the couple to film footage of the Balkan War and to the epic, *Kleopatra, die Herrin des Nils.* Five years earlier, the visit of King Friedrich August III of Saxony to the Ernemann Photographic firm had warranted a two-page article in *Der Kinematograph.* As symbols of German nationalism, royalty were used by the film industry to make the case for the new medium’s respectability and legitimacy. For a film industry that by 1911 was experiencing an emerging, but still nascent, star culture, the monarchy provided ready-made celebrities. In this respect the crown prince was second only to his father, Kaiser Wilhelm II. The many films produced before 1918 that featured the crown prince also included intimate portrayals of his family life, such as that in *Die Kinder des deutschen Kronprinzen beim Spiel* in 1909. As with his father, the familial component was central to his film celebrity.

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61 “Kinovorstellung beim Prinzen August Wilhelm,” *Der Kinematograph,* 19 November 1913.

The interest and enjoyment displayed by the Kaiser, the Crown Prince, and the lesser royal houses of Germany towards film were vital to the positioning of the cinema as an acceptable form of entertainment and information in the years leading up to the First World War. The monarchs were not the epitome of Germany to all Germans; in particular, many Social Democrats might have contested this point. Nevertheless, highlighting the affinity between film and the old conservative order was a fruitful positioning. It was also one that helped promulgate a particularly conservative nationalist conception of the German state. Through the cinema, millions of German citizens were given access to the authority and ornamentation of the monarchy. In so doing, that order was reinforced just as it was used to legitimize the cinema.

According to the film trade press, Kaiser Wilhelm was a “friend of the cinema.” That phrase, or others like it, appeared repeatedly in connection with stories about Wilhelm’s involvement with the film industry. What was meant by these epithets was that Wilhelm was good to the medium: he allowed himself to be filmed, he enjoyed going to films himself, and extrapolated from these activities, he was an advocate for film. With no shortage of loud cultural reformers criticizing the cinema, Wilhelm made a welcome patron. In an article under the title of “The German Kaiser, a Friend of the Cinema,” published in Der Kinematograph in 1907, Emil Perlmann connected the importance of Wilhelm’s interest in film to the opposition from the medium’s loud critics. “At the same time that there is no lack of attacks against the cinema in the columns of some newspapers,” he wrote, “the German Kaiser has made it known through an order that his opinions about the utility of ‘living pictures’ stand in sizeable opposition to the views of
those bigots." Wilhelm had given permission for films to be made of upcoming military maneuvers. In so doing, Perlmann believed, he had endorsed the technological and social value of film.

The Kaiser’s acceptance of the cinema played an important role in the film industry’s attempts to create a positive and respectable image of their product. In this early period it provided a patina of legitimacy to a developing medium and was an association that both film producers and the film trade press were sure to highlight at all opportunities. Wilhelm lent even more respect to film as a regular spectator himself. Allowing himself to be filmed could be seen as his acknowledgement of the popularity of the new medium and his own desire to promote his image. Mere willingness to be filmed would not necessarily entail his approval, but the Kaiser could not watch films without the implication that watching films was a respectable activity. An article in Lichtbild Bühne in 1914 remarked in relation to another of Wilhelm’s trips to Corfu that the Kaiser could not “forgo the cinema, even on Corfu.” Wilhelm was known to take films with him on his travels, and he held screenings for foreign dignitaries. On the 5th of July 1912 he hosted the Czar of Russia and his wife aboard the yacht “Hohenzollern.” Lichtbild Bühne reported that the royals were taken to a lavishly-decorated dining hall for a meal and then entertained with musical performances of works by Tchaikovsky, Glinka, and Ganne. Most relevant to the journal’s readers, the night ended with a film screening. Rather than any of the popular fiction films of the day, the Russian guests were shown

64 “Was die "L.B.B" erzählt,” Lichtbild Bühne, 9 May 1914.
film footage of their host. They watched footage from the Kaiser’s 1911 northern travels and his 1912 trip around the Mediterranean. It would not have been surprising to the article’s author or to the journal’s readership that Wilhelm had included films as part of the evening or that he was the main attraction of those films. The associations evident in this vignette—the royal audience, the classical music as opening act, and the most worthwhile of all film subjects—all speak to the legitimacy of the medium.

The Kaiser’s birthday was noted in the trade press annually, often in the form of “official” birthday greetings on behalf of the film industry. The occasion of Wilhelm II’s 50th birthday in 1909 was also commemorated with a special offering from the Deutsche Bioscop company. Moment Bilder aus dem Leben des Deutschen Kaisers brought together in a completed program a range of Kaiser-films. The advertisement made clear that the film featured Wilhelm II “in different uniforms, at parade, on the hunt, onboard the ship ‘Hohenzollern,’ in Sicily, and in conversation with foreign leaders.”

Moment Bilder aus dem Leben des Deutschen Kaisers captured the range of Kaiser films produced in this period. Public appearances by the Kaiser were by far the most prominent. An article in the Kinematographische Rundschau in October 1907 detailed the filming of the Kaiser at a military parade in Tempelhof and a naval parade in Heligoland. Although the details of these events were discussed, the article made sure to remind readers that the Kaiser “highly favored living pictures.” What was important for these contemporary

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67 “Der deutsche Kaiser und der Kinematograph,” Kinematographische Rundschau, 1 October 1907.
68 “Der deutsche Kaiser und der Kinematograph,” Kinematographische Rundschau, 1 October 1907.
observers was how these films demonstrated the Kaiser’s affinity for the cinema, and in turn, how that spoke to its respectability.

In the summer of 1912, Lichtbild Bühne ran an article explaining how Kaiser Wilhelm II had granted permission to the Pathé Frères company to film him at a number of recent events including a parade, military exercises, and a celebration of the 500th anniversary of the of the Hohenzollern dynasty in Brandenburg. Pathé also filmed the Crown Prince and Crown Princess, along with Prince Adalbert, and Princess Victoria Luise. The result of this filming soon found its way into German theatres. Five months later, in December 1912, Pathé was advertising films such as Frühjahrsparade 1912, S.M. der Kaiser besichtigt mit S.M. dem König von Bulgarien das Lehr-Bataillon, and S.M in Brandenburg a. H. in the trade press.

In their monarch the German film industry found a convenient film subject, a recognizable public persona whose appearances frequently came with their own pomp and ceremony. They also found a willing proponent, a fact that the film trade press often reiterated. “It might be generally known that Kaiser Wilhelm has a special interest in the cinema,” wrote one author in a July 1912 article in the journal Lichtbild Bühne, “and grants permission to film at every opportunity.” In these articles Wilhelm performed a double function. On the one hand, his presence in the particular films supplied them with a noteworthy subject. On the other, he was also a valuable part of the film’s marketing

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campaign. The advertisements explained that these – and other – films had been shown to the Kaiser and forty-two other noble guests at a special screening at Bückeburg palace. According to Pathé, it had been the company’s “great honor” to organize the screening.\textsuperscript{72} Moreover, the distinguished audience found the films to be of high quality, and “proclaimed their highest appreciation for the images and the presentation.”\textsuperscript{73}

1913: A Celebration of Celebrity and Authority?

The film industry’s celebration of Wilhelm reached its zenith with the 25\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of his coronation in 1913. That year was also the hundredth anniversary of the wars of liberation against Napoleonic France. The synchronicity of these two events resulted in a year of special national significance and (intended) celebration. Both anniversaries were marked by parades and ceremonies throughout the Reich. Major official commemorations of 1813 took place in Berlin, Kelheim, and Leipzig, where a national memorial to the Battle of Nations was dedicated in October.\textsuperscript{74} The official celebrations of the Kaiser’s silver jubilee took place in Berlin over the 16\textsuperscript{th} and 17\textsuperscript{th} of June. These events were intended by the regime as both celebration and reaffirmation of the legacy of the Hohenzollern dynasty.

Historians have interpreted the 1913 festivities in several ways. Jeffrey R. Smith has argued that many scholars have seen the events of that year as a celebration of

\textsuperscript{72} Advertisement for Pathé, \textit{Lichtbild Bühne}, 14 December 1912.
\textsuperscript{73} Advertisement for \textit{Lichtbild Bühne}, 14 December 1912.
\textsuperscript{74} On the celebration in Kelheim, see Petzold, \textit{Der Kaiser und das Kino}, 139-141.
German militarism and radical nationalism. Wolfram Siemann, for one, argued that the events of 1913 established an “emotional and ideological” precedent for the euphoria of August 1914. According to this view, celebrating the military victory against France a century previous stoked the fires of nationalism and defensive militarism on the Rhine; feting the Kaiser endeared the monarch to his people just as aggressive German foreign policy would ask them to undertake drastic sacrifices. In this interpretation, the pageant on display in 1913 was the best example of how the right-wing elites in imperial Germany manipulated the German people to acquiescing to their nationalist worldview, and how the groundwork was laid for the enthusiasm shown in August 1914.

Smith, on the other hand, has argued that such conclusions are based on a superficial reading of the commemorations, seeing them precisely—and narrowly—as state officials wanted them to be seen. For Smith, 1913 was a failure, the celebrations did more to reveal the tension between the monarch and his nation than they did to draw them closer together. He writes:

The leaders of the Kaiserreich were indeed attempting to legitimize the monarchy on a more popular level, hoping to cast Wilhelm II as a genuine Volkskaiser, under whom Germany’s social and political tensions would simply be overwhelmed in repeated celebrations of Prussia’s historic victory over Napoleon and of the power and prosperity Germans had enjoyed during Wilhelm’s first twenty-five years on the throne… In fact, upon a close examination of the 1913 commemorations, what on the surface seemed an “imperial offensive” began to assume the characteristics of a regime on the defensive.

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77 Smith, “The Monarchy versus the Nation,” 260.
According to Smith, critics across the political spectrum noted the lack of popular engagement in these events, which relied on hierarchy and “medievalism” rather than mass engagement. In reifying the traditional strata in German society, these commemorations actually demonstrated how dated the regime was, and how rigid a line existed between the monarch and his people. As a journalist in the liberal Neue Rundschau summarized it, the commemorations had “taken all the dedication, spontaneity, and free will from the natural feeling of devotion to the Fatherland.”

A reading of the part played by the film industry in 1913, however, warns against Smith’s hard conclusions about the “monarchy vs the nation.” If the popular image of the Kaiser as a symbol of the German nation may have been waning in 1913, even among those not inherently ideologically opposed, he remained a respected and legitimating presence in the cinema. The nature of that presence, however, was changing to conform more closely to cinema celebrity rather than to political authority. Both Lichtbild Bühne and Der Kinematograph devoted front-page articles to the Kaiser, his anniversary, and his relation to the film industry to coincide with the jubilee celebration in Berlin in June. Both also took the opportunity to not only salute their emperor, but to praise their medium. Emil Perlmann of Der Kinematograph wrote that, “The Kaiser […] has at all

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78 Smith uses the term medievalism to refer both the Kaiser’s “aura” of authority and the traditional corporatism celebrated in the festivities. See ibid., 267-268.
times expressed his interest in the cinema as both supreme warlord and as a father.”

This is a particularly significant phrase.

The image of the Kaiser as “warlord and father,” in not only his official, political role as military leader but also in his private persona as Hohenzollern patriarch, demonstrates the two facets of his cinema stardom. As “warlord” the Kaiser evoked the spectacle of military parade and “maneuvers on land and water” so common in his films. As “father” he was the celebrity figure, sharing his family with the cameras and his movies with his guests. As Perlmann explained, “the kinematograph in the Berlin Palace often shows the newest films to royal guests.” The King of England was apparently so impressed by one of the Kaiser’s screenings that he ordered a projector for himself.

The powerful position of the Kaiser as advocate and celebrity was marked in other ways throughout the film year. Along with the articles in the trade press, the film industry noted Wilhelm’s anniversary through specialized theater programming and a commemorative volume. Projections Aktien-Gesellschaft marked the occasion with the release of a film of *Film-Memoire aus dem Leben des Kaisers und der kaiserlichen Familie bis zum heutigen Tage*. In advertising this film to prospective exhibitors, the company was sure to stress that the film was being released specifically for the anniversary and a jubilee banner ran at the top border to the two page print advertisement.

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82 Ibid.
83 Projecktions Aktien-Gesellschaft Union or PAGU was founded by Paul Davidson and was an integrated film company, engaged in production, importing, distribution, and exhibition. It was considered one of the top film companies in Germany before the First World War. See the discussion of Davidson and PAGU in S.S. Prawer, *Between Two Worlds: The Jewish Presence in German and Austrian Film, 1910-1933* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 2-4.
To further make the respectability of the film known, the marketing also highlighted the quality of the production and insisted upon similarly high standards in exhibition.\textsuperscript{84} The film capitalized on the royal celebrations, as did other films that similarly contributed to Germany’s nationalistic film culture. The several parts of the historical drama \textit{Königin Luise} were released at this time, and that historical film was not the only one that celebrated the German past in the summer of 1913.\textsuperscript{85} The Olympia – Theater in Dresden ran an advertisement listing \textit{Film-Memoiren aus dem Leben des Kaisers und der kaiserlichen Familie bis zum heutigen Tags} and \textit{Königin Luise} among its offerings. The other films listed included \textit{Vermählungsfeier in Berlin, Deutschlands Ruhmestage, Parade}, and \textit{Friedrich der Große}.\textsuperscript{86} The advertisements make clear that monarchy films were but one part of the established nationalist cinema in Germany and speak as well to the popularity of the genre.\textsuperscript{87}

The commemorative volume produced by the German film industry ahead of the royal anniversary in 1913 was called \textit{Der Deutsche Kaiser im Film}. Published by the Paul Klebinder company in Berlin, the book was drawn from material from nine separate film companies, a list that included German, French, and American producers.\textsuperscript{88} The value of Wilhelm to their medium was likely apparent to them all. \textit{Der Deutsche Kaiser im Film} featured a number of articles about the relationship of the Kaiser to cinema over the years, as well as several other pieces exclusively focused on Wilhelm. There were also a

\textsuperscript{84} Advertisement for \textit{Film-Memoiren aus dem Leben des Kaisers und der kaiserlichen Familie bis zum heutigen Tage} in \textit{Lichtbild Bühne}, 31 May 1913.

\textsuperscript{85} See the discussion of \textit{Königin Luise} in Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{86} Advertisement for Olympia Theater, \textit{Lichtbild Bühne}, 28 June 1913. See the discussion of nationalist historical films in chapter three.

\textsuperscript{87} As discussed in Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{88} The companies were Max Reinhardt, Deutsche Mutoscop und Biograph, Duskes, Eclipse, Edison, Gaumont, Pathé, Projektions, and Vitascope.
number of articles on the history of cinema, and one on Thomas Edison. The publication of the book was a major event for the German film industry and articles in the trade press heavily promoted the volume.\(^8^9\) The inclusion of Edison, in particular, suggests a concerted attempt to write Wilhelm into film history—and perhaps Edison and film into the personal history of the Kaiser.

How does the book fit into either of the interpretations of 1913? Is it an agent of nationalist manipulation or yet another instance of officials’ views contrasting with popular feeling? One of the central points made by Smith is that so many of the official events were coordinated in ways that would, unintentionally, spatially reinforce the perception that Wilhelm was removed from his people. The erection of police barricades at public events, for example, created situations where the “population at large was relegated to the sidelines as passive bystanders.”\(^9^0\) *Der Deutsche Kaiser im Film*, on the other hand, worked to connect the monarch to the German audience through the cinema. The volume included two separate entries for the patriotic song “Heil Kaiser Dir.”\(^9^1\) A celebration of the monarch, the inclusion of the words, and the words and sheet music in the respective entries suggests the intention that the piece be performed during film screenings, and that performance be participatory and inclusive. Another of Smith’s observations about 1913 is the extent to which the pageantry of the events imagined Wilhelm as a “removed, medieval, divine-right monarch.”\(^9^2\) The image of Wilhelm gleaned from the pages of *Der Deutsche Kaiser im Film*, however, is of a modern man,


\(^9^0\) Smith, *A People’s War*, 28.

\(^9^1\) *Der Deutsche Kaiser im Film* (Berlin: Paul Klebinder, 1913).

\(^9^2\) Smith, *A People’s War*, 38.
actively engaged as fan and patron of the modern mass media. The inclusions of still photographs of the Kaiser’s family, including his wife and his grandchildren, present Wilhelm as a family man, not a removed and divine monarch.

The personal connection to the monarchy was even more central to a companion volume released just a few months after Der Deutsche Kaiser im Film. Kronprinzens im Film extended the already established pattern to Germany’s crown prince, Wilhelm. Like its predecessor, the volume included details on the life of its subject. The introduction included photographs of the Marmor–Palace at Potsdam where he was born and the section on his family contained photos of his children. Compared to the volume dedicated to his father, the prince’s book was more heavily illustrated. Photographs and film stills were featured prominently. The latter were used to highlight the articles detailing the prince’s long held and substantial connection to the cinema. Among these sections was one elaborating on the trip of the prince to India and Ceylon, chronicled in Weltreise unseres Kronprinzen. Less concerned with writing a history of the cinema than its predecessor, Kronprinzens im Film referred to films that featured the Crown Prince and his family in a way that presented them more as movie stars than as film pioneers. The volume was more personal, and by providing the public with access to the personal side of the prince, made the connection between the public and the ruling family much more intimate.

The two commemorative volumes connected the monarchy to the people in 1913, but they did so in ways that prioritized the Hohenzollerns’ personal celebrity over the

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93 Kronprinzens im Film (Berlin: Paul Klebinder, 1913). The forthcoming publication was announced in the press in the spring of that year. See, “Kronprinzens im Film,” Lichtbild Bühne, 8 March 1913.
Kaiser’s charismatic authority. The volumes did not undermine the image of the monarchy – there is no mention of public scandals or difficult policies. Focusing on the domestic side of the Hohenzollerns, however, on their pastimes and domestic spaces, served to highlight not *pace* Weber their “special qualities”, but rather their “special ordinariness,” to use Elsaesser’s description, or, following deCordova, their status as film “stars.” But this was a stardom still very much aligned with a particular image of the German nation. The nation as seen in the Kaiser’s films venerated his person, his family, the prestige of the military, and Germany’s place in the world. In 1913 that image was cohesive and intact. The First World War would tear it apart.

The First World War: From Wilhelm II to Hindenburg

The trials of the First World War resulted in the relative decline of Wilhelm’s film celebrity, as it also eroded his popularity and his subjects’ patriotic devotion to him. At the outbreak of the war thousands of Germans had marched down Unter den Linden in support of their Kaiser and their national cause. By the war’s end Wilhelm had fled to live in exile abroad. The progress of the war was inarguably the over-arching factor in the decline of the Kaiser’s popularity and the motivation behind the dramatic change in public opinion. Seen alongside the other collapses of 1917-1918, in Russia, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire, the end of the Kaiserreich becomes typical, even expected and normalized. But seen in the context of German political culture across 1917 and 1919, Wilhelm’s vilification requires further exploration. As Isabel Hull has noted, it is a historical “oddity” that “losing the war discredited only the monarchy, not the
military or the officer corps whose doctrines, policies, practices, and leadership were in fact chiefly responsible for that defeat."^94 That Wilhelm ended the war in exile while Hindenburg returned to political life as President of the Reich a short few years later speaks to the particular form of the Stab-in-the-Back myth the latter promoted after the war. It also is based in the image of each man cultivated in the mass media over the four years of hostilities.

Wilhelm was at the forefront of the national spectacle that erupted in Germany in August 1914. He was adored by crowds in Berlin and gave what some observers believed to be the greatest speech of his entire reign. When he boldly declared that “I no longer recognize any political parties, all I see is Germans,” he laid the foundation for one of the main ideological pillars of the war effort.^95 That phrase birthed the Burgfrieden myth, the illusory promise of national unity that influenced much of the subsequent wartime propaganda and had lasting implications for German politics over the next few decades.^96 In August 1914 his popularity was high. His political role, however, was already beginning to decline. Wilhelm had been an active player in the lead-up to war. He had personally encouraged Austria to stand firm against Serbia following the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, and weeks later, exhibiting his characteristic inconsistency, he actively spoke against the decision to engage in a full-scale European war. As then Prussian war minister Erich von Falkenhayn recorded at the end of July, “[the Kaiser] makes confused

^96 For the discussion of the ideas of 1914 and their role in film propaganda, see Chapter 4.
speeches. The only thing that emerges clearly is that he no longer wants war [...] I point out that he no longer has control over the situation.”

Full control of the political and military situation in Germany eluded Wilhelm in the summer of 1914 and remained outside his grasp for the duration of the war. As he had before the war, the Kaiser held the important power of appointing and dismissing military and civilian officials. This meant that the chancellor and the chief of the general staff served at his discretion. It was also within his constitutional powers to coordinate the efforts of the army, navy, and civilian authorities during wartime. It was a role, the historian Holger Afflerbach has argued, that Wilhelm was “incapable of fulfilling,” a situation that had “an adverse affect on the country’s war effort.” Practical power in wartime was given by Wilhelm to the Chief of the General Staff, and although Wilhelm spent the majority of the war with the military command, he was, by most accounts, not an active participant in shaping military strategy. This was likely a preferred option, as the inconsistency in his mood would have made effective leadership difficult. As Clark has described him, “Wilhelm could be moved to bloodthirsty exultation by rumors of success, but was also easily cast down and prone to bouts of defeatism.” On his own lack of involvement, which was to a significant degree voluntary, Wilhelm told one naval official that, “if people in Germany imagine that I command the army, they are very

98 For a detailed discussion and comprehensive document collection pertaining to the role of the Kaiser during the First World War, see Holger Afflerbach, ed., Kaiser Wilhelm II. als Oberster Kriegsherr im Ersten Weltkrieg: Quellen aus der militärischen Umgebung des Kaisers 1914-1918 (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2005).
99 Although this power did not operate in a vacuum, as the contested dismissal of Falkenhayn and his replacement with Hindenburg would demonstrate.
100 Afflerbach, “Wilhelm II as Supreme Warlord in the First World War,” 204.
101 Clark, Kaiser Wilhelm II, 310.
much mistaken. I drink tea and chop wood and like to go for walks, and from time to time, I find out what has been done.”

In practice, the war reduced Wilhelm to a passive role in politics and strategy. While his symbolic function was one that existed separately from his practical employment, the outcome was not drastically distinct. Wilhelm’s wartime inaction and inconsistency weakened his authority because it detracted from his reputation and from any sense of his charismatic leadership. A consequence of this was that even many of the staunchest monarchists began to question the place of the Kaiser in their conception of German nationalism. Among these groups were many in the military elite. As Hull has described it,

The military did not merely cut loose for the Kaiser institutionally, but also ideologically, and this turned out to be the most dangerous trend of all for the monarchy. The two, of course, are not unrelated. When the monarch himself failed as a symbol of loyalty and a justification for action, he was replaced by something more abstract, but infinitely more flexible and thus more useful: the future Germany, its security, its greatness.

Filling the vacuum left by the Kaiser, the nation itself began to be seen in “supernatural” and “exceptional” terms.

At the outbreak of the war Wilhelm’s positive public image extended to the cinema. Films of the Kaiser featured prominently in the special war programming that was common in German theatres. The first wartime newsreel offered by Eiko-Film at the end of August 1914 contained several actualities featuring Wilhelm II. These included his speech from the balcony of the royal palace, and his attendance—in uniform—at a service at the Berliner Dom. Other featured short films included street

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104 For more on war programming, see Chapter 4.
scenes of Berlin during mobilization, scenes of women volunteering with public
transportation, and Red Cross workers making preparations. There was also some
military footage, limited to scenes of troops in Berlin and two performances of the royal
lancers from a previous tour. The two lancer films were, at least, simulated attacks – one
a charge of the entire regiment and the other a mock firefight. Although the
advertisement freely admitted that the footage of the lancers came from pre-existing
performances, it was pointed out that “his majesty Kaiser Wilhelm II himself wishes the
public to have the opportunity to see these films.” Wilhelm’s role as film advocate
persisted.

After the enthusiasm of August had worn off, the cinematic Kaiser retreated from
view much as the political leader did. Only two films featuring the Kaiser were released
in 1915, Deutsche Mutoskop und Biograph’s Der Kaiser rief und alle kamen and Eiko’s
Heil Kaiser Dir. In 1916 there were only five films, one of a visit to Munich, another of
Franz Josef’s visit to Germany, and a three-part Seine Majestät der Kaiser bei unseren
tapferen Truppen im Westen. This last series was produced by the Militärische Film- und
Photostelle and represents a clear turning point, as the bulk of the films featuring the
Kaiser released in the last two years of the war—seven out of eleven—were what could
be termed official productions, six of the seven produced by the Bild- und Filmamt
(BUFA) as it became the state film agency in 1917. This list does not include any of
Wilhelm’s appearances in newsreels over the course of the war, and, as noted above, does
not offer any concrete information on the number of copies of each in circulation.
Nevertheless, it does suggest the extent to which the Kaiser had taken on a lesser role in

105 Lichtbild Bühne, 29 August 1914.
the national cinema landscape. In the cinema, the Kaiser’s place in the spotlight gave way to other stars and other symbols. This is not to say that he was without any box office appeal, certainly not before late 1918, but rather that he was no longer the preeminent figure. Eiko-film, for example, could still hope the attract audiences with Unser Kaiser im Feld in early 1917, the most prominently promoted studio film featuring the Kaiser in the second half of the war. But as with Seine Majestät der Kaiser bei unseren tapferen Truppen im Westen, the assumption could be made that the front setting was a not irrelevant feature. Wilhelm could be classified as one among many movie stars prominent during the war and one among several national symbols mobilized for the war effort.\textsuperscript{106}

In perhaps a telling illustration of the gradual shift in Wilhelm’s authority over the course of the war, his birthday in 1917 was not marked in the film press with another editorial devoted to the Kaiser, celebrating his political and cinematic accomplishments. As noted, this had been a common occurrence in the pre-war years. Instead, the occasion was marked with a letter from the Kaiser dedicated to the German people, highlighting the sacrifices necessary in war and their mutual love of the German fatherland.\textsuperscript{107} Instead of the industry praising the Kaiser for his support and dedication to the medium, the monarch celebrated the people for their loyalty and commitment to the common war effort.

Concurrent with the slow decline of Kaiser Wilhelm in the cinema was the rise of the film personality of Paul von Hindenburg.\textsuperscript{108} Retired at the outbreak of the war in

\textsuperscript{106} See the discussions in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.
\textsuperscript{107} “Ein Aufruf des Kaiser an das deutsche Volk!” Der Kinematograph, 17 January 1917.
\textsuperscript{108} For a detailed overview of Hindenburg’s image, see Jeko von Hoegen, Der Held von Tannenberg: Genese und Funktion des Hindenburg Mythos (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2007). For broader discussions of Hindenburg, see William J. Astore and Dennis Showalter,
1914, Hindenburg returned to service in time to oversee the successes on the Eastern Front against Russia at the Battles of Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes. From this victory Hindenburg’s fame rose and he became what historian Anna von der Goltz has called “Germany’s major symbol of victory against the enemy and of unity at home.”

Appointed Chief of the General Staff in 1916 and, with Erich Ludendorff, Germany’s de facto military ruler, Hindenburg’s film persona developed in ways that echoed his monarch. In September 1917 it was his 70th birthday that solicited greetings in the trade press. For the occasion Der Kinematograph published an article entitled “Hindenburg, promoter of the cinematic arts.” The author, Julius Urgiss, praised Hindenburg for the founding of BUFA, the state’s official film agency and a product, he suggested, of Hindenburg’s “creative spirit.” In phrasing that could have been lifted from numerous articles about the Kaiser and film, Urgiss stressed how Hindenburg “recognized the cultural, educational, and enlightening worth” of the cinema.

Hindenburg was also featured in two well-publicized films, the fictional Ostpreussen und sein Hindenburg made by Eiko in 1917, and the non-fiction Unser Hindenburg produced by the BUFA in the same year. Ostpreussen und sein Hindenburg was a film in two parts, with the first part focusing on the life and career of Hindenburg in the years leading up to


109 Goltz, _Hindenburg_, 23.
110 Goltz argues that Wilhelm was loath to appoint Hindenburg as he worried that the General’s celebrity would eclipse his own. Ibid., 35.
111 “Dem Marschall Hindenburg! Ein Gruss der deutschen Kinematographie zu seinem 70. Geburtstag.” Der Kinematograph, 26 September 1917.
113 Ibid.
the war and the second highlighting his time during the war and his defense of East Prussia against the invading Russian armies. Special screenings of the film were arranged that served to not only promote the release of the film, but also to act as fundraisers for East Prussian relief efforts.

The Hindenburg film was promoted in print advertisements as “the great national, dramatic film of the present.” Ostpreussen und sein Hindenburg was a tremendous wartime success for Eiko-Film. Asta-Nielsen Lichtspiele took out a full-page advertisement in May 1917 attesting the successful run of the film in their theaters. This success was in terms of both the impact the film had on audiences and its profitability. The company considered the film’s impact to have left on audiences “a deep lasting impression.” The box office returns of the film were “colossal,” and Asta-Nielsen considered the Hindenburg film to be “a success without equal.”

A brief summary of Unser Hindenburg suggests some of the ways that Hindenburg’s film image was cultivated. The film, little over six minutes in length, provides its viewer with a series of vignettes in the daily life of the field marshal. The film opens with a shot of a Hindenburg portrait. The first sequence shows Hindenburg and Ludendorff heading by car to brief Kaiser Wilhelm II, and then speaking with adjuncts as they walk across what appears to be a country estate. The second sequence has Hindenburg surrounded by an adoring crowd on a public street—“Hindenburg in the

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114 See the brief description in “Aus der Praxis,” Der Kinematograph 26 January 1917.
115 “Die Festaufführung von “Ostpreussen und sein Hindenburg”,” Der Kinematograph, 6 April 1917.
116 Der Kinematograph, 26 January 1917.
117 Der Kinematograph, 14 May 1917.
118 Der Kinematograph, 14 May 1917.
119 Unser Hindenburg BAFA 263. Available online at http://www.filmportal.de/video/unser-hindenbug
midst of a grateful people” the inter-title explains. The third sequence shows Hindenburg and Ludendorff at work, first walking with a crowd of other military officers and then alone, consulting documents and maps on a worktable. The final sequence is a tableau of a Hindenburg monument. In the foreground of the image is a tall pedestal with Hindenburg’s bust atop it. In the background is a line of archways and through these archways a host of Germans – children, peasants, bourgeoisie – enter the frame and surround the monument. The closing image of the film is this cross-section of the public cheering the monument, and by extension the man, as a line of marching soldiers passes beyond the archways in the rear of the frame. The film would be a clear veneration of Hindenburg even if it did not include two scenes of Hindenburg being venerated. His centrality to the war effort and to the state is made clear. This centrality is reinforced by the film’s formal components as Hindenburg is generally presented in movement with the camera following his progression through the film frame.

Over the course of the war, Hindenburg usurped the political authority, the cinema celebrity, and the primacy of place in the nationalist public imagination from Wilhelm II. But he did not reach the same levels of film stardom. Seen as a battle-tested hero, and the ideal leader for the challenges of wartime, Hindenburg became a cult figure, his likeness in poster, statue, and film appearing throughout the Reich. As Wilhelm II withdrew from the public eye, Hindenburg fostered a media image, granting access to the print and photographic press. In so doing he used the media to take on the role that Wilhelm had abandoned. Hindenburg’s image remained synonymous with the national cause of the war and his own place leading it. Unlike Wilhelm and the other Hohenzollern, Hindenburg’s personal life never garnered significant interest. His picture
personality remained tied to the military, the war, and the German people. The historian Christopher Clark has referred to Hindenburg during the later half of the war as a “surrogate Kaiser” for the German people. This was due in no small part to the actions undertaken by Hindenburg to cultivate – in Clark’s words – “his image as the father and warlord of the nation.”\textsuperscript{120}

Conclusion

From the first few living pictures projected on German screens Wilhelm II had cultivated a film persona. He believed himself to be the living embodiment of the nation, and to the first generation of German film-goers, he was its most common cinematic representative and its first film star. Politically, the cinema represented another medium through which Wilhelm could attempt to connect with his public and reinforce the persona foundational to his personal monarchy. For the film industry, the Kaiser was a vitally important figure in the development of the medium. He was an unrivalled film subject, and through words and deeds, a reliable film patron. By the end of the First World War, however, the film industry was much less in need of such an advocate. By 1918 cinema was reaching greater levels of respectability and immense heights of popularity. Other figures had taken on the role of promoter and film star.

If 1913 had been the pinnacle for bringing the Kaiser to the public through the cinema, his waning film presence during war was but one more factor that caused them to abandon him before he, literally, was forced to abandon them. Ultimately for Wilhelm,

\textsuperscript{120} Clark, \textit{Kaiser Wilhelm II}, 337.
the cinema presented an avenue to reach out to the modern mass public whose favor he sought out. The power of the Kaiser was tied to the popularity of his image. When that image receded from view, the fade-out for his power and his person could not be far behind.
In his seminal article on political demagogy in the Kaisersreich, the historian David Blackbourn writes, “The demagogy of the old elite […] was perilous precisely because it was not an act of manipulation, repeatable at will, but an attempt to harness forces that could not be fully controlled. The logic of their political effects was the logic of the sorcerer’s apprentice.”¹ For the “old elites” of imperial Germany this demagoguery proved self-defeating. Rousing the enthusiasm of the crowd meant raising their expectations as well, and when these expectations went unfulfilled the establishment’s political clout suffered as a result.² The gains to be made by stirring the public mood were provocative, but an appeal to plebiscitary power was not without its considerable dangers. With slight exaggeration, the early cinema could be conceptualized in a similar manner – and only in part because of its use in populist appeals. The medium was new, typically modern, and grew in popularity at what was, to some, an alarming pace. To contemporaries, its public attraction was obvious, while its potential power to affect the political, social, and national sentiments that influenced the attitudes and allegiances of the German citizenry was enticing. In a world of the “political mass market,” the cinema

could be the advertising medium par excellence. In the early years of the cinema, lobbyists on the radical political right actively projected onto German screens their view of Germany as an aggressive power with a strong navy and a global imperial reach.

The popularity of the cinema grew dramatically over the first decade of the twentieth century. And while it might be tempting to conceive of the cinema as a marginal entertainment – as an entertainment on the margins – owing to the seemingly impermanent nature of film exhibition in this period, the cinema was not outside the realm of Wilhelmine political culture. Rather, it played an important role in promoting political agendas. In particular, film became a political tool, and one that could be especially valuable in nationalist politics. This is especially significant given the subordinate place of German productions within the German film industry in this period. Foreign, particularly French, films dominated exhibition. According to some calculations, over 15000 films were exhibited in Germany before 1910, of which nearly half were made by French companies, and only one in every six was German. Nonetheless, cinema played a role in nationalist political discourse even before the emergence of a self-consciously German national cinema.

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4 Out of 15,188 total films, 7,429 were French, and 2,474 were of German origin. These numbers come from a database built and maintained by Joseph Garncarz and other researchers at the University of Siegen and the University of Cologne and based off of earlier work conducted by Herbert Birett. For an overview see Joseph Garncarz and Michael Ross, “Die Siegener Datenbanken zum frühen Kino in Deutschland,” KINtop 14/15 (2006): 151-163. The database itself is found at: http://www.earlycinema.uni-koeln.de.

5 As discussed in Chapter 3.
This chapter focuses on the years before the standardization of the industry around 1910. Ultimately, it explores the question of to what extent the early cinema was a tool of nationalist political manipulation. As an emerging and popular mass medium in an authoritarian state beset with often competing mass political movements, cinema was in a unique position to be employed in the service of national agendas. As this chapter illustrates, the cinema, by articulating certain national goals as visual spectacles, fostered a positive image of nationalist positions. In so doing it created a film image of the German nation that was militaristic (with particular emphasis on the navy) and colonizing—connotations aligned with the more aggressive manifestations of Weltpolitik.\(^6\)

This chapter begins with a section that explores in brief the issue of manipulation, focusing on its role in the historiography of the Kaisersreich, its relation to nationalist politics, and its applicability to the exhibitionary practices of early cinema. The power of the cinema to influence the public, and the presence of political agitators looking to do just that, created a promising intersection. Nevertheless, parliamentary political parties largely avoided the use of film and state engagement with the medium was limited to a range of regional censorship practices. These are explored in the second section below. As early as 1901 the Navy League was using the cinema as a means to elicit support for its program and endorsement of its purpose. The Colonial Society began hosting film screenings shortly thereafter. For popular patriotic pressure groups like the Navy League and the Colonial Society, film offered a means through which their simplified, nationalist

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message could be transmitted to a wide section of the public. These are examined in the third and fourth sections of this chapter, respectively.

The significance of voluntary associations has been seen as a prominent feature in the histories of German nationalism and political culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Operating outside both parliamentary parties and the inner circle of the Kaiser and his court—but hoping to influence or if necessary, overstep, both—these groups have been a favored subject for historians. One aspect of an international turn towards greater democratization and its attendant “politics in a new key,” these associations were, in the German instance, the result of both a constitutionally weak Reichstag and a plebiscitary tradition dating back to Bismarck. These societies had been prefigured by a tradition of national gymnastic, choral, and similar societies that emerged in the Vormärz. While these earlier groups promoted both their own parochial pastimes and the idea of a unified national state, the groups that emerged post-unification, by contrast, targeted a national membership—regardless of hobby—and devoted themselves to national goals. The Navy League and the Colonial Society are examples of “patriotic societies”: sizeable political organizations (some larger than parliamentary political parties) that sought to mobilize large segments of the population in political agitation for

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9 Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German*, 24-25.
10 See the discussion in ibid., 24.
“national” ends. Often militaristic or expansionist, these ends were nevertheless articulated by their proponents as a common—national—good.\textsuperscript{11}

**Manipulation and Attraction**

The extent to which manipulative policies and political actors dominated political culture in the Kaiserreich has long been a source of debate and contention among historians. Looking back to Bismarck’s unification of the nation “from above” and ahead to the totalitarianism of Hitler and the Third Reich, historians have explored the nature of political power, representation, and authority in a state that permitted a wide manhood suffrage hand in hand with weak parliamentary power.\textsuperscript{12} The political culture of the Kaiserreich possessed what Matthew Jefferies has referred to as an “essential paradox,” namely, “the co-existence of an authoritarian, undemocratic government appointed by the Kaiser, with a lively parliamentary assembly and comparatively free elections.”\textsuperscript{13} Debates about power, governance, and constitutional authority are outside the scope of this discussion. Three elements, however, are relevant. The first is that most historians do agree on the continued and expanding significance of parliamentarians over the years from 1871 to 1918. As Jefferies has summed up, “the importance of the Reichstag, its committees, and of the political parties represented in it, all grew markedly during the

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 25.
\item\textsuperscript{13} Jefferies, *Contesting the German Empire,* 90.
\end{footnotes}
The second, and perhaps more vital issue, is that although considerable power rested in the unelected executive, German voters voted nonetheless. As Margaret Lavinia Anderson has expressed it, despite the perception among historians that “the intimidation of voters on the one hand and their manipulation on the other undermined whatever challenges manhood suffrage might have posed to existing attitudes and structures of authority […] the fact remains that large numbers of Germans took the trouble to go to the polls.” In fact, voter turnout in Germany was at around 80 percent in the first decade of the twentieth century. The third relevant element concerning political culture in the Kaiserreich, one already referenced above and most germane to the discussion in this chapter, is that a wide scope of political agency was possible in extra-parliamentary political associations.

The shaping of popular sentiment, whether in support of a particular party, person, or issue, has also been seen as key for historians exploring the manipulative tangle of German political culture. The question of manipulation can been seen in two (related) lights. First, the belief that the “old elites” of imperial Germany were able to manipulate the strata below them is one of the central tenets of the Sonderweg thesis.

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14 Jeffries, *Contesting the German Empire*, 100.
17 Commentary on the Sonderweg thesis, its popularizers and its many critics, has been a feature common to writing on the German Empire over the last three plus decades. For a sympathetic overview, see Jürgen Kocka, “German History before Hitler: The Debate about the German Sonderweg,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 23.1 (1988): 3-16. For one recent reflection, see Helmut Walser Smith, “When the Sonderweg Debate Left Us,” in *Imperial Germany Revisited: Continuing Debates and New Perspectives*, ed. Sven Oliver Müller and Cornelius Torp (New York: Berghahn, 2011), 21-36.
Historians who are proponents of this thesis argue that German conservative elites employed a number of what Jefferies has labeled “cynical diversionary tactics.” Imperial projects such as colonial expansion, fleet building, and the like were aimed, according to this view, at turning the attention of the disaffected and marginalized sectors of German society away from domestic challenges and tensions. As Geoff Eley has summarized it, this was “a particular style of politics, consisting of the organized manipulation of popular sentiments across a wide range of issues: monarchism, militarism, support for the navy and colonies, anti-Semitism, the Slav peril, the fear of revolution.” Based on the precedent-setting work of Weimar-era historian Eckhart Kehr, this view of “social imperialism,” with its concern with the “primacy of domestic policy” helped explain in part the conservative alliance existent during the Kaiserrreich and suggested an explanation for the willingness of the mass of the German public to support a power structure that left them (seemingly) marginalized.

The Sonderweg view came under considerable sustained criticism after it became the “new orthodoxy” in the 1970s. Historians such as Eley and David Blackbourn in the late 1970s and early 1980s argued for a rethinking of the basic assumption of the Sonderweg thesis – the existence of a “normal” path of modernization exhibited in other Western European states from which Germany had “negatively” deviated. Moreover, they challenged the premise of social imperialism and manipulation from above. Hans-Ulrich Wehler had argued that “the authoritarian German state was able to control the

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18 Jefferies, *Contesting the German Empire*, 27.
self-interest of the pressure groups.”\textsuperscript{21} Eley and Blackbourn demonstrated how much of the nationalist mobilization in the Kaiserreich originated often from the bottom up, expressing popular sentiments and organized at the grass-roots level. \textsuperscript{22} The societies discussed below fall into this categorization. Whether or not the Navy League and other nationalist pressure groups were manipulated by the state, however, does not mean that they were not in themselves manipulative. They may not have been the puppets of aristocratic puppet-masters, but they were engaged in pulling the strings of public sentiment.

Second, an earlier concept of popular manipulation was put forward in the work of George Mosse. In his \textit{The Nationalization of the Masses}, Mosse focuses on a range of practices – the erection of national monuments, the holding of popular festivals, membership in clubs and organizations – that he termed examples of the “new politics.”\textsuperscript{23} Mosse’s new politics was the attempted fostering of spaces and symbols for a new national community:

\begin{quote}
The new politics attempted to draw the people into active participation in the national mystique through rites and festivals, myths and symbols, which gave a concrete expression of the general will. The chaotic crowd of the ‘the people’ became a mass movement which shared a belief in popular unity through a national mystique. The new politics provided an objectification of the general will: it transformed political action into a drama supposedly shared by the people themselves.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

For Mosse, this process originated in popular political movements following the end of the Napoleonic wars in the early nineteenth century. The “new politics” were

\begin{footnotes}
\item[21] Wehler, \textit{The German Empire}, 88.
\item[22] Most completely articulated in Eley, \textit{Reshaping the German Right}.
\item[23] George Mosse, \textit{The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich} (New York: Fertig, 1975).
\item[24] Ibid., 2.
\end{footnotes}
festive, participatory, and anti-state, in that the essence of the nation was seen as residing in the people and not in the authorities. In the Kaiserreich, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, Kaiser Wilhelm II, and others attempted to “annex the nationalist dynamic” for their own ends. The state attempted to invent its own festivals. The most well-known attempt to co-opt popular sentiment was Sedan Day (2 September), an official holiday marking victory over the French in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. According to Mosse, the top-down nature of the event contributed to the lack of popular enthusiasm that greeted it. “The Sedantag was a failure” he writes, “because it had been organized from above in a conservative manner, had stressed discipline, and gradually excluded popular participation.” Although Sedan Day may have been an unsuccessful official holiday, it does reveal an awareness in the Kaiserreich for the influential power of communal celebrations and public spectacle.

Jan Rüger has also taken up the relationship between manipulation, ritual, and spectacle. In his study of naval spectacle in Germany and Britain in the decades leading up to the First World War, Rüger examined both the form and the function of what he terms the naval theatre: the performances associated with ship launchings, parades and promotion. Taking up the various suggestions put forward by the Sonderweg orthodoxy, their revisionists, and Mosse, Rüger argues that the naval theatre was far too complex a construct to fit tidily into either a top-down or bottom-up model of political mobilization, and that the reactions of the masses to these naval spectacles could not be unproblematically termed manipulation or nationalization. Naval spectacle did not result

25 Ibid., 18.
26 Ibid., 91.
from “one source of agency, be it government initiative or the ‘radical right’ but a
dynamic relationship between a number of actors, local and national, official and private,
commercial and governmental, who shaped the celebration of the navy.”\textsuperscript{28} It is necessary
to highlight that Rüger concludes that audiences attended ship launchings or naval
parades for a variety of reasons, and that their attendance did not necessarily mean an
“agreement with those staging [these public rituals] or an acquiescence to their
politics.”\textsuperscript{29} Spectatorship could imply endorsement, but it could as easily be explained by
curiosity, or the entertainment value of these visual attractions.

Entertaining visual attractions, however, are themselves not necessarily without
manipulative pull. Peter Fritzsche has demonstrated how the appeal of aviation in
Germany can be explained as a combination of awe and patriotic feeling. As is clear
from the account Fritzsche cites, crowds cheering airships flying overhead could
simultaneously be part of a celebration of a technological marvel, a feeling of deep pride
in the capabilities of German inventors like Graf Ferdinand von Zeppelin, and an
exhibition of international swagger behind new industrial weaponry.\textsuperscript{30} Like the naval
theatre, the wonders of aviation could have a strong affective purchase on the German
public.

Political actors within the Wilhelmine state believed that public sentiment had to
be taken into account. Radical nationalist politics and national spectacle may not be
irrefutable evidence of a state intent on deflecting tensions away from itself or of one
successful in drawing the acquiescence of its citizenry into its patriotic aura. But they are

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 109.
\textsuperscript{30} See Peter Fritzsche, \textit{A Nation of Fliers: German Aviation and the Popular Imagination}
both aspects of a political culture whose participants took popular public support seriously. Early attempts to use the cinema to mobilize popular support, as discussed in the sections below, demonstrate the lengths some political actors would go to gain public favor as well as an open-mindedness to new and modern forms of communication.

But how did the cinema manipulate (or attempt to manipulate) the German mass public? What this chapter suggests is that in this period the cinema’s success as a political tool, including whatever manipulative forces it possessed, resulted from its ability to represent national ambitions as visual attractions. Film historians have suggested that the early period of cinema history was defined not only by the style of exhibition and the length of films exhibited, but by the nature of the spectator’s experiences with and expectations of the films themselves. The still popular framework for understanding the emergence of the cinema in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is American film historian Tom Gunning’s model of the “cinema of attractions.”

According to Gunning, the early period of cinema history, to about 1906, was governed by a concern for the attraction; film was about showing things rather than telling stories. As Gunning writes, “the cinema of attractions directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle – a unique event, whether

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fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself.”

In so far as there were narrative films during this period, their simplistic stories functioned as secondary vehicles through which the visual representations became possible.

Gradually, the cinema of attractions gave way to a cinematic model preferring narrative storytelling to visual attraction. The transition between these two took place between 1907 and 1913, “culminating” as Gunning writes, “in the appearance of feature films which radically revised the variety format.”

Writing on the development of German cinema, Corinna Müller identifies a similar shift, although she connects this process with a move from short to longer length films. Although narrative form usurped the centrality of attraction, the importance of visual spectacle has persisted. For Gunning, attractions continued in a wide-range of forms, chases and slapstick, spectacular set pieces and special effects, and in the work of the avant-garde. Film remains, above all, a visual medium; the power of the image remained salient. What the remainder of this chapter seeks to show is how central visual attraction was to the political function of the early cinema.

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Politics and Censorship

“A highly topical and very funny film that expresses through political satire and caricature all the details reported in the newspaper and those that will be reported in the coming week, but in a subtle way.” This was how a print advertisement promoted the release of *Wie Fritzchen sich die Reichstags-Kämpfe und Neu-Wahlen denkt* in the weeks leading up to the 1907 German federal election. This short film, produced by the Internationale Kinematographen- und Licht-Effekt-Gesellschaft m.b.H, offered a “topical, political, satirical, and comical” reflection of contemporary political culture at a moment of one of the most significant elections of the Wilhelmine era. Unfortunately, no copy of the film seems to have survived. As with the vast majority of films made during the first decades of cinema’s history, only traces, like this advertisement, remain. Perhaps the film was a scathing satire, presenting a biting critique of the politicized climate surrounding the so-called “Hottentot election.” Or perhaps it was nothing more than a ballot-box slapstick scene—exaggerated marketing was certainly not unheard of. What can be said about the film is that it was unusual, as films that addressed, or even alluded to, formal political machinations such as the electoral process, the affairs of the Reichstag, and the offices of the Imperial cabinet were rare. That the advertisement

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35 Advertisement for *Wie Fritzchen sich die Reichstags-Kämpfe und Neu-Wahlen denkt*, *Der Kinematograph*, 6 January 1907. The advertisement continued to run in *Der Kinematograph* for the next three weeks.
36 Ibid.
37 While the continued availability of journals such as *Kladderadatsch* and *Simplicissimus* provide ready access to Imperial Germany’s satirical print culture, almost nothing is known of the history of early film satire. On these periodicals, see Ann Taylor Allen, *Satire and Society in Wilhelmine Germany: Kladderadatsch and Simplicissimus* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1984).
made a point to mention the subtlety of the film’s political humor may hint at an explanation for this lack of explicit political engagement.

Before turning attention to the voluntary associations discussed below, something should be said about the other sites of cinema in Wilhelmine political culture: electoral politics and censorship. As discussed above, despite the democratic shortcomings of its political system, the Kaiserrreich did contain a vibrant electoral culture with active and engaged political parties, increasingly so in the years leading up to the First World War. As modern as these parties may have been in other aspects of their mass mobilization, the cinema does not seem to have been a popular or widely used tool. This was not true of other countries and other political systems at the turn of the twentieth century. Most pronounced was the use of the early cinema in American electioneering at the time. Famously, filmed images of William McKinley were used during the presidential hopeful’s “front-porch” campaign in 1896. A decade and a half later, an article in Lichtbild Bühne informed readers about attempts in America to steer popular support away from the political agenda of former President (and McKinley successor) Theodore Roosevelt through film and music hall propaganda. According to reports 325 cinemas and 100 music halls were to be used to these ends, with an estimated daily spectatorship of 325,000, the majority of whom were expected to be women.

Reports about the political usage film had been put to in other countries were not uncommon items in the German trade press. Typically, these articles dealt with how film was used to further domestic political agendas.\textsuperscript{41} In one instance, however, the concern was over the production of what was seen to be a film with implications for Germany internationally. In late 1909 \textit{Lichtbild Bühne} reprinted an article from the Pan-German League’s \textit{Alldutsche Blätter} condemning the release of “propaganda for German-hate” by Pathé in Belgium.\textsuperscript{42} The film in question was a drama set during the Franco-Prussian War, and the plot turned on the summary hanging of a boy by Prussian soldiers for attempts to cut their telegraph lines. Discovering this act, the boy’s grandfather proceeds to poison the soldiers and arranges their corpses in prostrate positions under the hanged body. According to the article, “the mostly dim-witted audience received the catastrophe with cheers.”\textsuperscript{43} For the Pan-Germans, what was most objectionable about this film was not that a French company had made it—that might be expected—but that instead of limiting this hate-filled “fairy tale” to their own countrymen, Pathé was distributing in a third country, an act that had connotations for Germany’s image in the world.

Observers were well aware of how cinema had been, and in Germany might yet be, used for political ends. Gustav Melcher, frequent contributor to the trade journal \textit{Der Kinematograph}, argued in a two-part article in 1909, that the cinema was a medium that could be as powerful as the press in influencing the public. If the press was the “domain of the printed word and the unmoving picture,” the cinema was that of “the living picture,

\textsuperscript{41} For another examples, from Great Britain, see “Kinematograph und Politik,” \textit{Der Kinematograph}, 24 November 1909. This article outlined the use of film by a British Unionist party to garner votes in an upcoming parliamentary election.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
the spoken and sung picture, and music.” For Melcher, the nature of the cinematic medium made it ideal to appeal to the public. The cinema “attacked all the senses” and “easily represented political tendencies.” Referencing the many diverse political objectives that the cinema had been put to, both in Germany by the Navy League and abroad in countries such as France, Melcher championed film as a political tool. “The living picture appeals to the masses not because it is silent,” he argued “but because it speaks an eloquent language, a language in some regards superior to verbal language.”

Regardless of the advocacy of commentators such as Melcher, and in contrast to other national contexts, the cinema was not harnessed for explicit electoral gain in Germany. That is, it does not seem to have been used for explicitly promotional purposes by politicians and political parties in the same manner as their contemporaries in the United States. Perhaps the limits of medium, its lack of a developed narrative during this early period, reduced its efficacy, or at least its perceived efficacy, in mobilizing large groups of voters towards political parties. On particular issues, however, the cinema could be of greater utility, as the discussion of film by the naval and colonial lobbies below will demonstrate.

Official state engagement with the cinema was limited primarily to censorship.

The rapid rise in the popularity of the cinema and the proliferation of Wanderkinos and,

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45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
later permanent theatres, brought with it a host of concerns about the influence of the cinema, its manipulative effect on the viewing public (particularly the young), and the place of popular attractions and mass media within German society. These in turn prompted questions about how the cinema should be regulated, what criteria theatres and exhibitors needed to meet in order to show films, and, eventually, what types of images were permissible to be projected on German screens.

Cinema censorship in Germany grew out of the medium’s initial association with the variety theatre. The first organized censorship began around 1906, developing along with, and because of, the establishment of permanent film theaters. Berlin seems to have been the first jurisdiction to approach film censorship in a systemic fashion. Like variety performers, films intended for exhibition in Berlin faced pre-censorship. At least three days before their initial projection, films had to be screened for the Berlin police chief, who had the authority to ban any films believed to be inappropriate for public viewing. This practice was based on an 1851 regulation placed on theatrical performances, which had to be performed and cleared by the police in advance of premiere. What was a logical policy for the theatrical performances opening in Berlin in a given week became an increasing burden as the film industry expanded. Initial practice had been for police

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48 Wanderkinos were travelling cinemas that were the dominant form of film exhibition in Germany before 1907 and remained prevalent, especially in more rural settings, until 1910. After 1907 permanent theatres, first converted storefronts and later purposefully built cinemas, became standard. See Joseph Garncarz, “Über die Entstehung der Kinos in Deutschland 1896-1914,” in Kintop 11 (2002):144-158.

49 Welch, “Cinema and Society in Imperial Germany,” 30.
authorities to visit individual exhibitors and view new films on site. This practice became an increasingly onerous investment of police time as more exhibitors entered the marketplace and as more films were imported and produced. To simplify this procedure, in 1907 the police acquired a film projector from the International Kinematographen- und Licht-Effekt Gesellschaft and had a special room converted in their headquarters for film screenings.\(^{50}\) Henceforth all films were submitted to the police.

There was no national film censorship in Germany before the First World War. Censorship policy and censoring practice were local affairs. Prussia had 24 film censorship offices, while Bavaria had one central office in Munich.\(^{51}\) These variations in practice allowed for some films to be deemed permissible in one locality and banned in the next.\(^{52}\) Such regional discrepancies reinforce the importance of local context for understanding the history of film exhibition.\(^{53}\)

\(^{50}\) "Aus der Praxis: Der Kinematograph im Berliner Polizeipräsidium," *Der Kinematograph*, 29 May 1907. One example of a district taking their lead from Berlin was Saxony, which also required the pre-censorship of films three days in advance. See "Behördliche Bestimmungen für kinematographische Vorführungen," *Der Kinematograph*, 6 January 1907.

\(^{51}\) Mühl-Benninghaus, “German Film Censorship during World War I,” 71.

\(^{52}\) Among the most well known examples of this discrepancy was the decision of the Berlin police censor, Kurt von Glasenapp to ban the film of the 1910 Jack Johnson-Jim Jeffries title fight in September 1911. The film, procured and imported to Germany at a high cost by the PAGU company, was called the “most expensive film in the world” in the trade press. Although banned in Berlin, the film had already played to sold out audiences in Hamburg, Bremen, and Mannheim the previous winter. For an account of the police crackdown of the offending Berlin theatre, see *Berliner Tageblatt*, 17 September 1911. On the Hamburg, Bremen, and Mannheim screenings, see "Der Film vom Boxerkampf Johnson-Jeffries," *Lichtbild Bühne*, 11 February 1911. On the wider international reception of Johnson and the film, see Theresa Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner: Boxing in the Shadow of the Global Color Line* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

\(^{53}\) For one example of the growing body of work on regional histories of the early cinema, see Brigitte Braun and Uli Jung, “Local Films from Trier, Luxembourg, and Metz: A Successful Business Venture of the Marzen Family, Cinema Owners,” *Film
In the early years of permanent cinemas, the prevalent concern about the cinema was not for the content that was being exhibited, as much as it was for the spaces of exhibition. First and foremost there was real and justified concern with theatre fires. The threat of fire was a necessary danger for cinema exhibition. Celluloid film was highly flammable, projection required a hot, bright light source, and exhibition took place in crowded and confined spaces. Permanent cinemas grew at an incredible pace between 1905 and 1910.54 As a result, many of these early theaters, which were nothing more than hastily-converted storefronts, often lacked proper safety designs. As such, fires were a not irregular occurrence and often came with deadly consequences.55

Protecting audiences against theatre fires was one of the primary concerns of early theatre regulators. Specific rules applied to how films were stored, in what contexts they could be exhibited and what safety precautions needed to be taken. The first four provisions of Bremen’s regulations for film exhibition in February 1907 demonstrate the state’s concern with fire prevention:

1. The projector must be housed in a room separate from the room containing the audience.
2. Three buckets filled with water and one bucket filled with sand must be kept in the projection room.
3. The film must be kept in iron cases. During the presentation the film must run through the machine to another iron case.
4. Used films may only be destroyed on the instruction of the fire department.56

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54 Taking the country as a whole, in 1905 there were fewer than fifty theatres nationwide, but by 1912 there were more than 3,000. See Garncarz, “Über die Entstehung der Kinos in Deutschland 1896-1914,” 153.
55 Reference to theatre fires and to developments in film stock designed to reduce its combustibility appear frequently in the film trade press in this period.
These types of provisions were typical of early cinema regulation. In Hamburg, authorities mandated that 20 liters of water needed to be kept on cinema premises. The authorities in Düsseldorf were even more detailed in their ordinances. All projectors in Düsseldorf needed to be enclosed within rooms insulated with asbestos or with another similar fire-retardant substance in the floors and ceiling. The film itself, when not being projected, had to be kept at a minimum of 1.25 meters away from the projector. The police in Berlin set policies on how projectors were to be stored and which substances were acceptable to act as the light source. Authorities in Nuremberg extended their own regulations to the doorways, doors, and locks in their theatres.

The ever-present fear of fire was the basis for much of the official regulation of film theatres, but these spaces possessed other dangers according to some corners of the public imagination. In the summer of 1907 one advocate took to the pages of the trade journal Der Kinematograph to contest derogatory claims made against the cinema in the popular press. According to the author one paper had labeled film theatres as “a hotbed for sex crimes.” The basis for the claim was the context of film spectatorship. In a dimly lit room, where unsupervised children sat next to adults, there existed considerable

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60 “Behördliche Bestimmungen fur kinematographische Vorführungen: Nürnberg,” Der Kinematograph, 8 May 1907. Concerns about theatre exits were perhaps motivated by the legacy of the deadly Iroquois theatre fire in Chicago in 1903 that left more than 600 people, many of them children, dead. For a discussion of the Iroquois theatre fire see Joanna Bourke, Fear: A Cultural History (London: Virago, 2005).
61 “Zum Kampf gegen die Kinematographen-Theater,” Der Kinematograph, 31 July 1907.
“opportunity for fornication.”\textsuperscript{62} Regulating the times of day when children could attend the cinema and setting strict guidelines regarding minimum ages for children to gain admittance was an attempt to quell these fears. In Hamburg, for instance, no child was allowed in a cinema without the accompaniment of an adult relative until they finished their years of compulsory education.\textsuperscript{63}

Children were believed to be especially susceptible to the dangers lurking in the dark of the theatres. They were also particularly vulnerable to the images up on the screen. Despite pre-censorship there were a considerable number of films whose content was seen as base and sensationalistic attraction. Bemoaning the interest that school children viewed such scenes of “gruesome murder, jealousy, adultery” and the impact these films had on their minds, one similarly minded author wondered in the trade press on what it would take for the youth to be similarly amenable to quality films and to educational films.\textsuperscript{64}

The film industry after 1910 was typified by increasing calls for reform, the continued growth in permanent theatres, and more importantly, by the emergence of what are now commonly referred to as feature–length films. These were interrelated developments. The converted storefronts that were the first generation of permanent cinemas were gradually replaced by larger, purposefully built theatres, culminating in the picture palaces that emerged in the years preceding the outbreak of the First World War.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{64} G.B, “Wie unsere Schuljugend über “belehrende” Films denkt,” \textit{Der Kinematograph}, 14 October 1908. These were the concerns that informed the cinema reform movement discussed in the next chapter.
Travelling Cinema and Naval Spectacle

The political imagination of German nationalism in the Kaiserreich was ideally suited for the new medium of motion – or as they were commonly referred to in the first decade after film’s invention, living – pictures. Battleships at sea with cannon firing, the exotic landscapes of the colonial empire, these were compelling and alluring film subjects. The ability of film to capture, mass reproduce, and widely exhibit these images enabled their political message access to the range of the whole German nation. But how and why did these images appeal?

The first group to explicitly use film as political propaganda in Imperial Germany was the Navy League. Operating as a right-wing pressure group for naval issues – in particular the support of legislated budgetary expenditures for battleship building—the Navy League was one of the most influential political societies in Imperial Germany. Founded in 1898, the organization quickly rose to nearly 300,000 members, a number it maintained until the First World War. The newsletter of the organization, Die Flotte, was a key outlet of the organization, as were the regular meetings of members. These meetings typically included performances of patriotic music, as well as lectures. Often these speakers would use magic lantern projections of slides about the navy to enhance their presentation. They also used film. Slides and films became such a key aspect of

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65 There was also limited discussion of what practical military applications film might have. See, for example, “Kinematograph und Skioptikon und ihre Zukunft in der deutschen Armee,” Der Kinematograph, 24 February 1907.
67 Loiperdinger, “The Beginnings,” 306, and Eley, Reshaping the German Right, 220.
the work of the Navy League that by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, *Die Flotte* was publishing regular news briefs about photographic and cinematic equipment.  

The promotional activities of the Navy League were themselves part of a larger naval popular culture. As Rüger has illustrated, the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth saw a marked change in the ceremonial culture of the Navy. Influenced in part by similar practices in Britain, attempts were made to transform what had been ceremonial custom into mass spectacle. The launching of new ships and the parades that accompanied the Kaiser’s presence at naval maneuvers were the most obvious and most highly promoted examples of this naval public visual culture. For Rüger, the increase in the scale and presentation of naval ceremony was indicative of the changing political culture at the turn of the century. As he elaborates,

> This was the fundamentally changed context in which public ritual was situated at the end of the nineteenth century. The coming together of new communication and consumption practices with significant extension in the franchise and new strategies of mobilizing voters and consumers opened up a dynamic public market in which politics and culture were increasingly inseparable.

The film exhibition undertaken by the Navy League was not merely the promotional undertaking of a political pressure group agitating for a specific goal, although it certainly was that. But it was also part of a larger visual culture of naval—and by extension, national—might.

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68 Under the title “Photographic Apparatus (Lichtbilder Apparat).
69 See Rüger, *The Great Naval Game*. Despite the considerable effort placed on these public naval spectacles, Kaiser Wilhelm II was quoted as claiming that his navy, unlike the British, did “not exist for ceremonial, but for war.” Rüger, 28.
70 Rüger, 54.
As both Geoff Eley and Martin Loiperdinger note, film’s most valuable function was not in making meeting evenings more pleasant for existing members – something it likely achieved – but in its ability to recruit new members and to win over mass popular support. As a visual medium, film could provide citizens with more than merely the idea of a strengthened and improved navy. Through the representation of the end goal of their support – scenes of naval ships in action – naval films turned a political program into a sensational spectacle. In August 1900 the Navy League chapter in Kattowitz arranged for an exhibition of a battleship that visitors could tour in person. This event proved so popular that the branch attempted to recreate their success the next year. When no ships were available, naval footage was presented by Deutsche Mutoskop und Biograph instead. An estimated 24,000 spectators attended screenings over a week and half in March 1901. The practice of presenting naval films to the German public began in earnest thereafter.

While it is difficult to ascertain direct links between support for the navy and Navy League film exhibitions, there is considerable proof that the films were popular and suggestive evidence that they did result in an increased membership. Although the exhibition patterns varied, the records of film screenings noted in Die Flotte suggest a number of continuously touring performances. In November and December 1902, for example, touring exhibitors stopped in locations in Pomerania (for eighteen days of screenings), the Rhine Province (fifteen days), and the Kingdom of Saxony (ten days). These performances were seen by an estimated 27,000 spectators. Over the course of

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72 This incident is recounted in Loiperdinger, “The Beginnings Of German Film Propaganda,” 307.
1903 Navy films screened on well over 500 days, reaching an estimated audience of nearly 720,000 spectators and resulting in roughly 1,200 new members for the society. The annual report for 1904 recorded that 1,400 screenings had taken place in 512 localities resulting in a grand total of 650,000 spectators.\(^\text{73}\) By the end of 1904, films had toured just under 1,000 German cities and towns and played to more than two million spectators.\(^\text{74}\)

The use of film as a promotional tool became a standard practice of the Navy League. By 1903 \textit{Die Flotte} was publishing a regular notice on cinema performances in the “Aus dem Vereinsleben” section of the publication. These “Biograph-Vorführungen” and “Kinematographische Vorführungen” sections appeared monthly and updated the journal’s readers on the successes of public cinematic exhibitions. The dates and locations where film exhibitions had taken place were given as well as how many people had attended. Perhaps most importantly, the number of new members recruited was also given. In May 1903 film screenings were reported to have taken place at locations in Bavaria, Oldenburg, Hesse-Nassau, the Rhine Province, Thuringia, and Silesia. More than 34,000 spectators attended these screenings across the country.\(^\text{75}\) A month later, in June 1903, there were reported exhibitions in the Rhine Province, West Prussia, and Württemberg that resulted in nearly 200 new members for the Navy League.\(^\text{76}\)

The popularity of these film programs is evident, but what types of films were audiences watching and why did they entice the German public? While there are no listings in \textit{Die Flotte} of the exact films screened, film historians have used the listings of

\(^{73}\) “Kinematographische Vorführungen,” \textit{Jahresbericht 1904}, 5-6.
\(^{74}\) Loiperdinger, “The Beginnings Of German Film Propaganda,” 309.
\(^{75}\) “Kinematographische Vorführungen,” \textit{Die Flotte}, May 1903.
\(^{76}\) “Kinematographische Vorführungen,” \textit{Die Flotte}, June 1903.
the early film companies to get a sense of the types of films that were available. An examination of the records of the American parent company of Deutsche Mutoskop und Biograph, the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, reveals a few general hints. Between 1899 and 1902 the company advertised films depicting the Kaiser and royal family in Hamburg, a launching in Kiel, maneuvers of the ship Odin, and the return of the German China fleet. While these productions do predate the relationship between the Navy League and Deutsche Mutoskop und Biograph, the listing does provide a sense of the types of films that would have been available from the company for film screenings.

Films of life and ceremony aboard ship, royal visits, and scenes of ships in action remained indicative of navy films for most of the first decade of the twentieth century. By 1906, a different company, the Deutsche Bioskop-Gesellschaft, was supplying films to the League, and its autumn offerings for that year included titles such as Ein Besuch an Bord des Schulschiffs “Grossherzogin Elisabeth,” An Bord S.M. Seekadetten-Schulschiff “Stosch,” Die Schlachtflotte in Kiellinie, and Übungen der Rettungsstation Warnemünde. In 1910 the navy’s former supplier, the Deutsche Mutoskop und Biograph, was still offering naval films for distribution. Their film, An Bord des S.M.S. “Deutschland,” was described as “an interesting picture of life and activity aboard a

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78 Martin Loiperdinger, “Filmpropaganda,” in Geschichte des dokumentarischen Films in Deutschland Band I: Kaiserreich, ed. Uli Jung and Martin Loiperdinger (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005), 130-131. Of these, a surviving print of Küstenpanzer “Odin” im Gefecht is held at the Film museum Amsterdam and the National Film and Television Archive, London.
79 Loiperdinger, “Filmpropaganda,” 144.
modern warship,” and a particular highlight was that the audience could see for themselves “the exactness” with which each exercise on the ship was performed.\(^80\)

Although officials considered the film programs to be promotional successes they were considerably less enthusiastic about their financial outcomes. In the League’s yearly report for 1904, the author proclaimed that the film exhibitions had “proven themselves to be excellent advertising for bringing the goals and objectives of the Navy League to the breadth of the population.”\(^81\) But the same report noted that recurring problems with cancelled or delayed performances as well as other interruptions had resulted in some not unsubstantial financial losses for the League. The author recommended that perhaps exhibitions in more profitable areas be used to offset the losses incurred in other regions.\(^82\) To some in the League hierarchy, the loss of funds was justifiable. In 1902, the 2,035 new members attributed to film screenings made the 4,200 M deficit that the screenings cost the league justifiable.\(^83\) A move to grounding the screenings more in their local contexts ultimately seems to have become one response to the financial risks associated with film exhibition. In January 1907 an article in *Die Flotte* elaborated on the agreement with Deutsche Bioskop-Gesellschaft, who would henceforth supply films to individual regional League chapters.\(^84\) Subsequently, other companies offered similar packages, offering individual films or films programs to local League groups.


\(^{81}\) “Kinematographische Vorführungen,” *Jahresbericht 1904*, 5.

\(^{82}\) “Kinematographische Vorführungen,” *Jahresbericht 1904*, 5-6.

\(^{83}\) *Jahresbericht 1902*, quoted in Loiperdinger, “Filmpropaganda,” 139.

\(^{84}\) “Der Kinematograph,” *Die Flotte* January 1907, 9. Deutsche Bioskop-Gesellschaft was distinct from Deutsche Mutoskop und Biograph. Deutsche Bioskop was founded in 1897 and ran one of the top film factories in Berlin at Neubabelsberg. Ursula Hardt, *From
The Minerva Gesellschaft began its operations offering films for naval screenings in 1909. Minerva’s offerings for the 1910-1911 winter season provide further insight into the types of films exhibited in these early film programs. Included in the film listing were a number of films taken aboard naval vessels. Maneuvers of the fleet as well as specific vessels, such as torpedo boats, were common. Also featured were ceremonies aboard ship and footage of admirals and their staffs. Included in these offerings was also a film taken during Wilhelm II’s northern voyages earlier in the year.

What these films provided to audiences was a visual access to a German Navy that they might only see in port, or for many Germans, not at all. In this way, the films contributed to the growing visual culture of the navy. Like the launchings and parades they recorded, these films transformed the navy into spectacle, or, to articulate this in the language of early cinema studies, into attraction. Scenes of the navy appealed to the visual pleasure and curiosity of spectators, offering them images that would otherwise have been inaccessible. For early audiences who went to screenings expecting such exciting attractions, naval films proved ideal.

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86 “Minerva,” Die Flotte, September 1910. Films listed included: Die Flotte auf den Marsch, S.M.S Westfalen voraus; - klarschiff zum Gefecht; - Geschützterverzieren; - Panzerschiff, feuernd; - Turnerische Uebungen am Schnursprunggestellt, Keulenschwingen, Reck – und Barrenturnen; - Musterung in Divisionen; - Reinschiff; - Manöver der X. Torpedo-Halbflottille auf hoher See; - Post- und Befehllep宴 auf hoher See; - Die Flottile in voller Fahrt; - Ein Bild auf die Kommandobrücke; - Kohlenforderung an Deck; - Nach dem Dienst; - Die deutsche Hochseeflotte im Manöver; - S.M.S “Westfalen” und verschiedene Marschformationen der Flotte; - Admiral von Holzendorff mit seinem Stabe auf der achtern Kommandobrücke der “Deutschland”; - Signalisieren; - Postuebergabe auf hoher See (eine andere Aufnahme wie oben); - Schraubewasser; - Drehen der Panzertürme; - Bootsmanöver; - Kutter fieren usw. ”
As late as 1914 films continued to be supplied to Navy League chapters for screenings.\textsuperscript{87} Given how much the film industry had changed in the previous decade and a half, the persistence, even in a significantly lessened form, of Navy League screenings is striking and suggests that all designations of periodization need to be treated with caution.\textsuperscript{88} By the eve of the First World War the film supplier of choice was the Carl Steen firm. Its offerings for the 1914 season included the expected films of the Kaiser, the fleet, and other national subjects – in this case footage of the Graf Zeppelin airship. Also included was a short entitled, \textit{Der Losgerissene Elefant!}\textsuperscript{89} In the article about the firm and its catalogue in \textit{Die Flotte}, a special point was made highlighting the inclusion of humorous films in the available program. \textit{Der Losgerissene Elefant!} in particular was said to “arouse roars of laughter” in audiences.\textsuperscript{90}

That a comedy about a run-away elephant was deemed suitable for inclusion in Navy League film programs suggests an additional edge of cinema’s utility as a political tool. The films screened by the League had not always been naval, nor had they been exclusively nationalist. An article in the \textit{Hagener Zeitung} describing a Navy League program in 1903 listed, in addition to the expected naval scenes, a number of other films that would have been typical fare for any Wanderkino program.\textsuperscript{91} These included films of well-known international figures such as U.S. President Roosevelt and Pope Leo XIII,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{87} Naval films continued to make appearances in film programs and in company catalogs after the heyday of Navy League film screenings. For example, in 1911 the Eclipse company was advertising \textit{Deutsche Marinebilder} in the trade press. “Neue Films: Eclipse: \textit{Deutsche Marinebilder, Der Kinematograph}, 6 December 1911.
\item \textsuperscript{88} \textit{Die Flotte} stopped publishing regular film attendance figures in 1907.
\item \textsuperscript{89} “Die kinematographischen Lichtspiel-Vorführungen,” \textit{Die Flotte}, February 1914, 35.
\item \textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{91} “Biograph- Vorführung,” \textit{Hagener Zeitung} 20.1.1903. Quoted in Loiperdinger, “Filmpropaganda,” 133-137.
\end{itemize}
short actualities of a swarm of seagulls and the Buffalo Fire Department, and several comedic titles. The role and value of these films is open to speculation. There would, of course, be practical reasons for their inclusion. It was especially true for this early period that the supply of films was limited; films with explicitly nationalist themes, all the more so. These other films could merely have been a practical solution to the problem of filling out a full program.

Alternatively, rather than acting as filler to the main program, these films could themselves have been central to the screening’s propaganda function. In 1905 a commentator in Die Flotte complained about the competition that League screenings faced from the growing number of Wanderkinos. These theatres possessed an upper-hand, it was argued, because they offered “more comedies and more choice” than the League exhibitors who had “essentially only naval films.” This suggests that there were concerns that the naval films themselves were not enough to incline audiences to Navy League screenings, at least not as the medium developed and the number of exhibitors grew over the course of the first decade of the twentieth century. This is not to say that the popularity of League screenings were because the Navy League was screening films – at all – rather than because it was screening naval films (in particular). Navy League members believed films were a component of naval propaganda—otherwise they would have had little reason to continue screening them. But they were also aware that the attractions of the early cinema, which included naval spectacle, brought the public into their orbit of advocacy.

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Naval spectacle’s appeal extended well beyond League film screenings. As Bernhard Rieger has explored in depth, the great trans-oceanic vessels of the first decades of the twentieth century were a source of considerable excitement for a public infatuated with the wonders of modernity. In the cinema several companies made films with naval subjects. In 1907, Internationale Kinematographen- und Licht-Effekt Gesellschaft released *Mit dem Norddeutschen Lloyd nach Neu-Guinea.* The film combined scenes onboard the steamship *Preussen* with those taken at various stops along its route to the German colony in New Guinea. The shipping line’s cooperation with film producers resulted in at least one other film, Eclipse’s *Unsere Zukunft liegt auf dem Wasser* in 1909. Borrowing its title phrase from a quote by Kaiser Wilhelm II, the film depicted activities onboard the training vessel *Cecilie.* The film featured scenes of future sailors at the helm, lowering a lifeboat, fixing sails, and using a compass and other tasks essential to their training and to daily life at sea.

A similar interest in regimented daily life can be seen in films about the German army. The army figured prominently in films of the Kaiser and his appearances at parade and maneuver. Army maneuvers were also film subjects in their own right. The French film company Raleigh & Robert capitalized on the interest in military films—and the transnational nature of the early film industry—in 1908 with the release of *Das Deutsche*

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94 Advertisement for *Mit dem Norddeutschen Lloyd nach Neu-Guinea,* Der *Kinematograph*, 3 April 1907.
95 “Neue Films,” *Der Kinematograph*, 29 December 1909. See also the advertisement for the film in *Kinematographische Rundschau*, 13 January 1910. The advertisement refers to the film as a “hit.”
96 “Neue Films,” *Der Kinematograph*, 29 December 1909.
und das Französische Heer, which featured scenes of both national armies in the field. Made with “great difficulty” the film combined footage of German maneuvers in Alsace-Lorraine with footage of the French army training within France.97 The advantage of such a film, according the Raleigh & Robert, was that it allowed audiences to compare the two armies. Several non-fiction films were also made of daily life in the German army. Ernemann Film-Neuheiten, for example, released Unsere Pioniere in 1909. The film presented a “highly interesting” day in the life of German troops, “from washing and coffee drinking, to field service of all types, to popular evening activities like cleaning guns, washing gears, and peeling potatoes.”98 As with the navy, even the most mundane aspects of daily life in the army could be sold as a cinematic attraction.

The films exhibited by the Navy League were akin to military films and part of a popular nautical culture present in Imperial Germany. This does not detract from the argument that in the cinema the Navy League found a medium ideally suited to communicate the message that they had come to see as most valuable in soliciting support for their cause: celebrating the spectacular nature of naval ship-building. At Kattowitz, the ability to see a ship had been all that was required to convince members of the public of the appeal of naval building. Film offered a more practical alternative and in the years that followed, the increase in membership that accompanied naval film screenings suggested some proof of success. The films succeeded in rendering visible the League’s political goals. But what drew audiences to the films was an excitement for

naval attractions and not necessarily an ideological fidelity with Navy League’s aggressive vision.

Colonial Politics and the Exotic Empire

The appeal of a film like *Mit dem Norddeutschen Lloyd nach Neu-Guinea* was two-fold. As suggested above, its scenes of life onboard ship spoke to a nautical popular culture. But through its images of New Guinea, the film might also have attracted audiences interested in scenes of the overseas colonial empire. Like the Navy League, the colonial lobby similarly engaged in the politics of film spectacle. German colonial filmmaking was linked to the projects of German colonialism. The colonies provided the subjects and settings for the films, allowing filmmakers to project to German audiences an experience of the exotic animals, landscapes, and peoples of the extensive – and hopefully expanding – German overseas empire. Further, the movement that developed among the supporters of colonialism provided the necessary financial backing required to justify the high costs associated with colonial filmmaking. In their efforts to advocate to the government for colonial involvement and expenditure, colonial enthusiasts used cinema as means to solicit support from members of colonial – and other nationalist – organizations, as well as the wider public. In so doing they created a marketplace and an audience for colonial films. They also fostered a cinematic image of German as an expansive colonizing power.

Germany’s colonies had long been seen as being of marginal importance to the imperial state and the colonial project has been understood often as a popular political
distraction—a novelty attraction for the German public. In relation to the other European powers, Germany began its period of colonization late, only acquiring its first colonies in 1884, and ended it early, losing its entire extra-European empire at the end of the First World War. Despite possession of the third largest territory and fifth largest population of any western imperial power, Germany was seen to have had too brief a colonial period for the experience to have significantly influenced the metropole. Judged on the grounds often employed by proponents to justify colonial expansion, Germany’s African and Pacific possessions were not seen as financially lucrative or as a valuable destination for German emigrants. The political purpose for colonial expansion, some historians have argued, was as a form of social imperialism – national adventures abroad united Germans under the Kaiser and Chancellor at home. The appeal of colonialism was intended to work against the rising strength of social democrats and to “divert internal tensions to the periphery.” Recent scholarship, however, has suggested that colonial issues may have exacerbated rather than bridged Germany’s political divides.


101 See the discussion of the manipulation, social imperialism, and the Sonderweg above.


103 Perras argues that in the 1880s and 1890s colonial issues provided ammunition for political fighting and not a unifying distraction against it.
Despite their questionable economic and political value, the colonies impacted imperial society. Colonialism affected conceptions of German nationhood and of national belonging. The act of colonization influenced how Germans understood themselves as colonizers and their nation as a colonial power.\textsuperscript{104} Informed by the work of cultural historians, the history of the so-called “colonial imagination.”\textsuperscript{105} studies the cultural products of colonialism. Images and invocations of colonialism in literary and popular writing, in art and advertising, in postcards and magazines, and in the cinema, all contributed to the image Germans’ held of themselves as a colonial nation.

A more recent body of work by historians such as David Ciarlo, Jeff Bowersox and others has explored how colonialism permeated the everyday life of Germans through advertising, education, and mass consumption.\textsuperscript{106} These studies have added further complexity to conceptions about the value of Germany’s colonies. As Volker Langbehn explained in the introduction to a collection on visual culture and colonialism, “the richness of visual material supports an understanding of German colonial history that consists of many interwoven threads […] there is no overarching master narrative for

\textsuperscript{104} See, for example, the essays collected in Michael Perraudin and Jürgen Zimmerer, \textit{German Colonialism and National Identity} (New York: Routledge, 2007).


understanding the history of German colonialism.”

Among these threads, though, was a clear appetite for the attractions of colonialism. In print advertising, in popular toys, or in the cinema, there was a market for the visual spectacle of empire. Bowersox makes the point succinctly: “In a crowded marketplace, a sensationaly exoticized world, made topical through associations with current events, proved an effective way to titillate consumers.”

Colonial filmmaking had its beginnings in the work of the colonial lobby, although it came to feature in public theatres as well. The Colonial Society (Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft) was founded in 1887 in a merger of two preexisting colonial lobby groups, the Deutsche Kolonialverein and the Gesellschaft für deutsche Kolonisation. The society worked at both the local and imperial level to increase public support for colonialism, to push the government for a more colonial action, and to support its own colonial projects. By 1914 the Colonial Society had 439 branches and more than 43000 members.

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108 Bowersox, Raising Germans in the Age of Empire, 11.
110 For a brief overview of the Colonial Society, its history, and its structure, see Richard V. Pierard, “The German Colonial Society,” in Germans in the Tropics: Essays in
Film’s ability to present the German public with clear visual evidence of the products of the work done by nationalist pressure groups was an important component of its relationship to the colonial lobby. Film provided supporters of colonial projects with the ability to communicate the merits of the colonial expenditure and the lure of colonial adventure to both like-minded fellow proponents and the broader public as well. To the German public, films of the German colonies were glimpses of the exotic, and it was the novelty and sensation of seeing the German colonial world of peoples and wildlife, the attraction of German colonialism, that brought them to screenings.111

One of the most prominent advocates for film’s role in colonial promotion was Karl Müller. Müller was an Altenburg merchant and, according to film historian Guido Convents, “seems to have been the first person in Germany, and probably in the whole of Europe, to have succeeded in achieving good images in the tropical countries of Africa.”112 In April 1905 Müller exhibited a number of films he had shot of the German colonies at the Colonial Museum in Berlin. According to Convents, the highlights of the film for the crowd in Berlin were the images of everyday life of Germany’s colonial subjects in East and Southwest Africa.113 Building on the support that he garnered with

111 This view of the exotic, however, was by no means unproblematic. See Assenka Oksiloff, Picturing the Primitive: Visual Culture, Ethnography, and Early German Cinema (New York: Palgrave, 2001).
112 Guido Convents, “Film and German Colonial Propaganda for the Black African Territories to 1918,” in Prima di Caligari: Cinema Tedesco, 1895-1918, ed. Paolo Cherchi Usai, (Pordenone: Edizioni Biblioteca dell’immagine, 1990), 60. The links between German merchants, the colonial society, and colonial filmmaking were many. As Fuhrmann explains, the economic message of colonial films motivated merchant organizations to patron screenings. Fuhrmann, “Locating Early Film Audiences,” 291-304.
113 Convents, “Film and German Colonial Propaganda,” 60.
this screening, Müller proposed to tour the nation, presenting his films to the many branches of the German Colonial Society for the modest sum of expenses and 200 Reichsmarks for each lecture.\textsuperscript{114}

The Colonial Society’s sponsorship aided Müller with the finances and opportunity to continue his colonial filmmaking. He travelled to Africa during the winter of 1905-1906 and shot more footage of the German colonies. He returned to Germany in the spring and soon began touring and exhibiting his films once again. On June 29 he premiered two hours of these new films, again at the Colonial Museum in Berlin. Taken in Togo, Cameroun, and Southwest Africa, these films were praised by those in attendance for their quality.\textsuperscript{115}

Through Müller’s work, thousands of Germans were given visual access to the broader world of their colonial empire. Following the June 1906 screening at the Colonial Museum, Müller took his new films on a national tour. At Colonial Society events and other public presentations across Germany, he screened his films for enthusiastic colonial proponents and curious spectators. In March 1907 a number of screenings took place in Württemberg. In Stuttgart on March 1, 1200 schoolchildren and 1100 soldiers watched Müller’s new films. On March 4 the films were screened in Heidenheim, where approximately 1000 students took in two performances. In Ulm on March 5\textsuperscript{th} and 6\textsuperscript{th}, 300 children, 500 soldiers, and 800 other members of the public watched Müller’s films.\textsuperscript{116} In some cases these may have been the first photographic

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} "Kinematographische Erstvorführung," \textit{Deutsche Kolonialzeitung}, 7 July 1906. See also the discussion in Convents, “Film and German Colonial Propaganda,” 60.
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Deutsche Kolonialzeitung}, March 17, 1907. See also, Convents, “Film and German Colonial Propaganda,” 62.
images of the colonies these audiences had ever seen. For most, if not all, of the German citizens who attended these screenings, these were the first moving images of the colonies they experienced. These living pictures of the colonies shaped their conception of the reaches of Germany’s empire.

Müller’s early success with both the public and the Colonial Society was noted by other would-be colonial filmmakers and film-producers. Individuals such as Georg Furkel, who went with the support of the Colonial Society to German Southwest Africa in 1907 in enough time to film hostilities between the German army and the Herero, and Robert Schumann, whose later company, Deutsche Jagdfilm came to promote Germany’s colonies as a place of masculine adventure, sought to follow in Müller’s footsteps. The use of film by individuals looking to promote the colonies continued to be popular throughout the pre-war period. In 1913 the Kammer-Lichtspiele at Potsdamer Platz in Berlin ran a program for a week under the title *Mit Büchse und Kamera durch Afrika*. The performance included a lecture by a Dr. Bongard, highlighted by films and magic lantern slides.

Film exhibitions promoted by the Colonial Society never came close to reaching the same heights as those of the Navy League. Despite the considerably greater costs associated with filming in the colonies, film remained a supporting element of colonial propaganda. Films were used as additional selling points for the more standard practices of lecturing. Lectures on the colonies would include film footage to highlight and

117 According, at least, to Convents, see ibid.
118 Advertisements for Deutsche Jagd-Film productions, as the name suggests, highlighted the thrill of the animal hunt. See for example the advertisement for “Nashorn-Jagd in Deutsch-Ost-Afrika,” *Der Kinematograph*, 3 December 1913.
illustrate the points being made by the speakers. In this sense, the use of film footage was an extension of the use of magic-lantern slides. Nevertheless, the principle of showing as part of colonial propaganda, of making the colonial project a colonial attraction, remained a key feature.

The appeal of colonial films was apparent to organizations looking to promote colonial ideas. In February of 1907, the Colonial Office began organizing daily film screenings at the Colonial Museum in Berlin. From 5-6pm and again from 8-9pm the public could view, free of charge, footage taken in Southwest Africa, East Africa, Cameroun, and Togo.\textsuperscript{120} In 1910 the Propaganda Society for the German Colonies was founded with the stated purpose of “demonstrating to the German people through film, accompanied by the appropriate lectures and explanations, everything worth seeing in the colonies.”\textsuperscript{121} In December 1910 the society hosted a screening in Dessau of a film depicting a voyage from Hamburg to Southwest Africa and then travels through the colony.\textsuperscript{122}

Colonial film exhibition was largely conducted by and for the society’s various branches. As Wolfgang Fuhrmann has explored, colonial film screenings represent one of the alternative networks of film distribution and exhibition that characterized the developing film industry before 1910.\textsuperscript{123} As with Navy League screenings, the hope was that the cinematic images would “support the work of a local branch and act to bind the

\textsuperscript{120}“Die Deutsche Kolonial-Abteilung,” \textit{Der Kinematograph}, 10 February 1907.
\textsuperscript{121}“Kinematographische Vorführung Deutsch-Südwestafrikas,” \textit{Lichtbild-Bühne}, 21 January 1911.
\textsuperscript{122}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{123}Fuhrmann, “Locating Early Film Audiences,” 291-304.
members to it.” According to Fuhrmann, screenings in colonial society branches were a grassroots reaction to the tedium of colonial lectures. Colonial films never reached the same level of popularity that the Navy League screenings had attained, and frequently relied on the League’s membership and films to buffer its own presentations. In 1907, with the League’s attendance in decline the two organizations began to offer joint screenings. Outside of the purview of the Colonial Society, Colonial Office, or Colonial Museum, the exhibition of colonial film was limited. In 1909 Deutsche Bioscop-Gesellschaft advertised their film Leben und Treiben in Tanga (Deutsch-Ost-Afrika) on the cover of Der Kinematograph under the banner title of “a German colonial-film.” But such wide promotion was rare.

One still-extant film made a few years later, Staatssekretär Doktor Solf in den Kolonien (1914), provides an approximation of what many of these short colonial films would have been like. Wilhelm Solf was a scholar of Sanskrit and a longtime diplomat in the foreign office. He had served as governor of Samoa from 1900 until he was appointed colonial secretary in 1911, a position he would continue to hold through the First World War. The brief film depicts some highlights from Solf’s 1913 visit to the German colony of Togo. This series of short scenes emphasizes both the power of the German colonial project and the exotic nature of the colonial world. The film opens with

124 Ibid., 296.
125 Ibid., 294.
126 Ibid., 299.
127 Der Kinematograph, 10 November 1909. Deutsche Bioscop held the contract for film exhibition from the Colonial Society from 1907, as it did with the Navy League. On Leben und Treiben in Tanga (Deutsch-Ost-Afrika) see the discussion in Fuhrmann, “Patriotism, Spectacle, and Reverie,” 153-155.
128 This is the title of the film as it appears in the German Early Cinema Database, where the camera work is attributed to Hans Schomburgk. Its title in the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv is Staatssekretär Dr. Solf besucht im Oktober 1913 Togo. BAFA K254651-1.
the arrival of Solf, greeted by civil and military officials. This shot is followed by a
march past of colonial troops, and then a sequence of shots of Solf and his party touring
the colony, shaking hands with representatives of the indigenous and settler populations.
There are two separate sequences where Solf and his attendant officials are presented
with performances of (presumably) traditional local dances. There is also an extended
parade sequence, which includes Togolese troops both on foot and horseback, more
Togolese dancers in traditional dress, and other colonized Togolese, dressed in neither
exotic traditional dress nor German military uniform. The film celebrates the exotic
 colonial world, in particular its landscape and its customs. The film clarifies the authority
of the German colonizers by presenting the deferential hierarchy to German officials and
the presence of German military strength. By portraying the colony as a space of order
peopled with obedient subjects, dutiful officials, and disciplined soldiers, the film
reinforces the objectives and aspirations of the German colonial project.

As with the films exhibited by the Navy League, films depicting the German
colonies need to be seen as part of wider visual culture. Interest in the exotic was not
limited to what might be termed the German colonial exotic. Travel films – or nature
films as they frequently overlapped – were a popular component in many film programs,
and scenes of a variety of foreign locals were not uncommon on German screens. 129 An

129 The travelogue was one of the most popular forms of early actuality film. For a
detailed study of the place and purpose of travelogues in the early cinema, see Jennifer
Lynn Peterson, Education in the School of Dreams: Travelogues and Early Nonfiction
Film (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013). Travelogues were not limited
to international travel, these films could also allow Germans to experience other parts of
their own country. Available in 1910, for example: “Neue Films: Deutsche Bioscop-
Gesellschaft: Sans-Souci im Schnee,” Der Kinematograph, 9 February 1910; “Neue
Films: Messter-Film: Ein Fahrt durch Berlin,” Der Kinematograph, 3 August 1910;
“Neue Films: Eclipse: Im Park Sanssouci,” Der Kinematograph, 14 September 1910;
advertisement for films offered by the Eclipse film company in January 1909 listed five “marvelous nature films” in addition to its dramas and comedies. Their titles were direct and provided clear indication of the exotic visuals offered: *Bilder aus Sizilien, Bilder aus Aegypten, Bilder aus Kabylien (Nord-Afrika), Eine Feuersbrunst in Konstantinopel, and Eine Zuckerplantage in Argentinien*. Some companies, like the French firm Raleigh & Robert, specialized in nature films filmed in exotic locations. Their 1907 offerings included *Die Viktoriafälle mit dem natürlichen Regenbogen, Ein afrikanisches Idyll, Die Schlacht von Casablanca von 18 August 1907*, in addition to *Sonnabend Nachmittag in London and Die einsamen Tapper im Wilden Westen*. The images of the Victoria Falls were so popular that the film seems to still have been in active circulation in 1911.

Travelogues were a popular film type. As Jennifer Peterson has demonstrated, it was the novelty of these films, the sense of wonder they could provide—in short, their visual attractions—that made them popular with early cinema audiences. For the cinema’s critics, the seemingly education nature of this form of nonfiction filmmaking gave the films cultural value and respectability. But travelogues were not without an ideological, and in particular an imperialist, component. Although not identical to explicitly state-sponsored undertakings such as map-making and census taking, travelogues nevertheless sought to order and explain the world, and in so doing were

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133 Peterson, *Education in the School of Dreams*, xiii.
“deeply implicated in power relations.”¹³⁴ As Fuhrmann argues in his readings of the
German colonial travelogue Südwest-Afrika (1907) and Leben und Treiben in Tanga
(1909), travelogues could be used to gloss over the violent tensions of colonialism and
replace these with simple narratives about stability and progress.¹³⁵

The filmmaker Robert Schumann continued the colonial travelogue tradition.
Schumann’s films contrasted the implied order of travelogues with the dangers of the
natural environment. Although the ability of the colonizer to master these was never in
doubt. Schumann’s company, Deutsche Jagdfilm-Gesellschaft, began releasing films in
1913. The company specialized in films taken by Schumann during his year-long travels
in Africa. Its offerings were unique, according to its promotional materials, because the
films captured both the hunter and the prey in the same shot.¹³⁶ This was only possible,
the advertisement explained, because of the cold-bloodedness of the hunters in the film.
The first film released by Deutsche Jagd-Film was Nashornjagd in Deutsch-Ost-Afrika,
in December 1913. Promotional advertisements from the film included a collage of
several film-stills depicting various scenes from the hunt with the central image in the
collage the “unique” shot of the hunter taking aim at the titular animal.¹³⁷ The heroism of
the German hunter was of central importance, and his ability to master the exotic
environments and to conquer the powerful wildlife of the colonies worked to strengthen

¹³⁴ Ibid., 139.
¹³⁶ Advertisement for Deutsche Jagd-Film Gesellschaft, Der Kinematograph, 12
November 1913.
¹³⁷ Advertisement for “Nashorn-Jagd in Deutsch-Ost-Afrika,” Der Kinematograph, 3
December 1913.
conceptions of German superiority as colonizers. On February 16th 1914, Robert Schumann screened his films before the Kaiser, members of the royal family, and other invited guests, including Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, at the Chancellor’s Palace in Berlin. The title of Schumann’s presentation is telling. He spoke to the assembled dignitaries on the topic of “What the wild gave me and what I wrestled from it.”

Colonial films served to recreate visually a colonial project that may have seemed abstract to most Germans in order to reinforce the value of the nation’s colonial undertakings. Like the broader category of exotic travel films to which they belonged, their appeal was based in the attractions they offered. These films, to paraphrase Gunning as quoted above, solicited spectator attention, incited visual curiosity, and supplied viewing pleasure. That these attractions were based in the exotic, a widely popular category, should not render inconsequential the fact that they were images of the German colonial exotic, in particular.

Conclusion

Already in the first decade and a half of its existence the cinema had begun to present the German public with images of the nation. The cinematic Germany was an empire of attractions, where the goals of an aggressive foreign policy became the

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138 Films of colonial expeditions had been in circulation since the first screenings of the Colonial Society. See in this latter period, for example, “Eine deutsche Motorboot-Expedition durch Afrika,” Lichtbild Bühne, 30 September 1911, “Neue Films: Eclipse: Eine Expedition in Deutsch-Ost-Afrika,” Der Kinematograph, 8 November 1911.
spectacle of great war ships and exotic colonial landscapes. By the end of the first decade and a half of its existence, the cinema had already established a place within the political culture of Wilhelmine Germany. Although not utilized by political parties for electoral gain, film proved itself to be a useful tool in nationalist politics. For voluntary associations, groups who were themselves outside the Reich’s formal parliamentary structure, the early cinema was a tool of their nationalist aspirations. The nation was projected to the public and made into enticing visual attraction. For pressure groups such as the Navy League and Colonial Society, film provided a particularly appropriate medium through which to reduce their political aspirations to cinematic attractions. The viewing experience of the early cinema was centered on attractions that excited, astonished, and peaked the curiosity of viewers. The impressive modernity of the navy and the exotic alien landscapes of the colonies were ready-made attractions.

Imperial attractions offered a market to film companies anxious for their own assertive expansion. But useful as the cinema may have been as a political tool, developments in the film industry began to leave the cinema of attractions behind, and with it those groups reliant on film for their promotion. By 1910, the film industry had expanded and consolidated its position in German everyday life. As a result, the voices of critics became louder and harsher again. Concerns about the national good of the cinema would extend into the birth of a national audience and nationalistic film culture on the eve of the First World War.

Moreover, while the navy and the colonies were identifiable symbols of the nation in imperial Germany, these were only symbols of a particular form of German nationalism—one that favored monarchy, militarism, and expansive foreign policy. This
was not the only possible image of the nation, a fact commented upon by contemporary observers. An article in *Der Kinematograph* in February 1908 lamented the negative impact that Navy League screenings were having on some local film exhibitors. According to the unnamed author, the travelling navy programs would arrive in a community and, under the banner of patriotism, steal away the best spaces for exhibition, even pressuring the owners of theatres, halls, and other spaces to cancel long-standing contracts. While supportive of the League and its objectives, the author nevertheless wanted to make the point clear that most film exhibitors were themselves “as good patriots as the Navy League” despite the fact that they did not feel the need to “wrap themselves in the same patriotic cloak.” As proof of the absolute patriotism of film exhibitors, the author cited the work of the cinema reform movement. That movement is discussed in the next chapter.

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Chapter Three

Germanizing the Movies:
The Emergence of a Nationalist Cinema and a National Audience, 1906-1914

In the introduction to his monograph, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany*, Sebastian Conrad stresses the co-dependency at the turn of the twentieth century between the growth of German nationalism and emerging economic globalization. “The search for particularity and for the elements of unchangeable national identity,” he writes “was not a threatened relic of a pre-global world order, but rather an actual effect of processes of cross-border circulation.”¹ In contrast to previous accounts of nationalism—pertaining to Germany as well as other European states—that typically attribute the “dynamics of nationalism” to mechanisms operating within the nation-state, Conrad argues that the transformation of nationalism in the last years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth was as much the result of “the larger processes we retrospectively call globalization” as it was of those “internal trajectories.”² Conrad’s subject is the mobility of labor, but a similar generalization, as this chapter will show, can (and indeed should) be made about the German cinema of the immediate pre-war years. Within an international film industry dominated by foreign companies and in response to concerns about the negative impact of a rapidly expanding cinema on the

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German public, domestic producers responded with a turn towards explicitly German films. In so doing, they promulgated a popular image of the nation that valorized the German past.

The German film industry grew dramatically after 1910. More films, typically longer in length, were exhibited in an increasing number of theatres, typically larger in capacity. Both a booming transnational film trade and an increasingly movie-mad public at home spurred on this growth. Fewer than 3,500 films were released in Germany in 1909; more than 6,000 films were released in 1913. German-made films rose from 417 in 1909 to 581 in 1911 to 806 in 1913.³ In 1907 there were fewer than 500 permanent theatres across the Reich; by 1909 this number had more than doubled, and would do so again by 1912.⁴ An article in the trade press in early 1913 indicated how far the film industry had come. By 1913, 2,900 film theaters were being operated in Germany.⁵ Each of these theaters averaged a daily attendance of 480 spectators, resulting in an estimated 1,392,000 audience members across the nation. Seated in the theatre, each of these spectators could expect to view a film program of an average two hours (and 1,800 meters) in length, including six to ten separate films. New films were released at a rate of 150 titles per week, and produced by more than 40 domestic and international film companies. These companies made an average of 63 copies of each film, and each copy, it could be expected, would last an average of five weeks of daily presentation. Over the

³ These figures taken from searches of the German Early Cinema Database [http://www.earlycinema.uni-koeln.de](http://www.earlycinema.uni-koeln.de). It should be noted that although the numbers of German films released grew each year, the market share (in terms of film titles at least) remained at around 12% of the total.


⁵ This overview taken from an article in *Lichtbild Bühne* in early 1913. “Allerlei Interessantes vom Kinematographen,” *Lichtbild Bühne*, 1 March 1913.
course of its run then, each copy would reach an average audience of just over 100,000 Germans, and each film a total of near six and a half million. The biggest hits could reach twice that number.⁶

This chapter explores the emergence of a particularly German nationalist cinema in this period of rapid growth, consolidation and standardization of the film industry. In short, it examines the process whereby the cinema in Germany started to become self-consciously German (Germanized). This process is approached in two ways. First, this chapter argues for the existence of a national audience, which defined its own film-tastes and was a subject of considerable consternation for cinema reformers. Second, taking into consideration scholarship on the symbolic function of the national past in Wilhelmine Germany, the presence of a vibrant nationalist film culture will be demonstrated and the significance of its representations will be explored.

For many film historians the outbreak of the First World War has been taken to be the watershed moment in the development of a German national cinema. The pre-war cinema continues to be described as “essentially international, both in orientation and distribution.”⁷ Sabine Hake assesses the situation in her recent survey, German National Cinema, “While the pre-war years saw the emergence of a popular cinema with strong international ties, the propagandistic uses of film during the First World War closely

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⁶ Ibid. Of the films released in Germany in 1912, non-fiction films, such as actualities, nature films and scientific films, sport films, and industry films, made up sixteen percent. The majority of the actualities were in fact French newsreels. Animated films made up another two percent and fairytales (presumably any fantasy film) one percent. The vast majority of films were narrative fiction films. Comedies made up twenty percent and dramas (“Schauspiele, Tragödien usw.”) a dominating fifty-eight percent. Historical films made up only two percent of the total tiles exhibited.

aligned the cinema with the goals of German nationalism.”⁸ But as Conrad points out, not only do internationality and nationality not have to be mutually exclusive, they are in fact closely inter-related. As this chapter will demonstrate, it was against the backdrop of the economic internationalism of the global film market place that a German nationalist cinema developed. Drawing parallels with the early American film industry is useful.⁹ In the early years of the twentieth century, the American film market was dominated, like its German counterpart still would be a decade later, by international, particularly French, products. In response, American producers drew on the typical American genre of the Western as a means of articulating a uniquely national film culture that marginalized the inherently un-American European producers as foreign elements. The efforts to “Germanize” the German film industry were never undertaken with the same dedication and forcefulness as was employed in the United States. The process in Germany was less direct. While there was no German equivalent of the western, no popular genre seen as typically German, the German film industry did have its movie stars, and it did develop a body of uniquely German historical films.¹⁰

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¹⁰ While I would like to conceptualize these historical films as an identifiable group, without a close formal study of the films (which are almost entirely lost) it would be
Siegfried Kracauer’s judgment on the origins of German national cinema in his 1947 work *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* was that “it was only after the First World War that the German cinema really came into being. Its history up to that time was prehistory, an archaic period insignificant in itself.”\(^{11}\) Lacking what he believed to be the requisite industrial and artistic development, the German cinema had “the traits of […] an uneducated creature running wild.”\(^{12}\) This chapter, indeed this dissertation, rejects this claim. In order to do so, however, it is important to understand what film historians like Kracauer refer to when they speak about national cinema. For Kracauer true German cinema was defined by both aesthetic quality and the ability to reflect the national psyche, and it was only in the years after the war that German producers created films that measured up to this standard. To him, many of the films made after the war were artistic “achievements” that impressed international observers while at the same time revealing to Germany’s former enemies the “macabre, sinister, morbid” characteristics of the “German soul.”\(^{13}\)

The study of German national cinema begins with, and generally returns to, the work of Siegfried Kracauer. His *From Caligari to Hitler* takes as its premise the belief inaccurate to attempt to classify them as an identifiable genre, as the term is commonly used. See Barry Keith Grant, ed. *Film Genre: Theory and Criticism* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1977), Barry Keith Grant, *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology* (London: Wallflower, 2007).


\(^{12}\) Ibid., 16.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 15.
that films, as products of collective effort and as commodities of mass culture directed at wide audiences, cannot help but reflect the “psychological dispositions” of a national audience.\textsuperscript{14} Kracauer’s specific test case was the German cinema before 1933. Focused primarily on the cinema during the Weimar Republic, Kracauer saw in those films a growing sense of cultural chaos and an increasing predilection for the authority of tyrants. This was the affinity that explained how Hitler could come to power. Kracauer’s book was written during the Second World War and based on both the author’s own memory—he had been a film and cultural journalist in Germany during the 1920s—and on copies of films held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Written, as is often noted, in exile, the book took as its ambitious subjects both a history of German film before the Nazi seizure of power and a history of the national mind that allowed power to be seized.\textsuperscript{15}

While pioneering, Kracauer’s conception of a national cinema as one that revealed the “collective mentality” of the nation at a specific historical moment is blunt and absolute. It established, in the words of Anton Kaes, the “basic premise that films must not be separated from their political, social and cultural habitat” and that they “signify something not \textit{in abstracto} but concretely at a certain moment in time, at a certain place and for a certain audience.”\textsuperscript{16} The fault of the work was that it read too much history into the films (or too much of the films into recent German history). In correlating movie-tyrants with a real-life dictator, the book drew a direct and rigid line

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 5-8.  
\textsuperscript{16} Kaes, “German Cultural History and the Study of Film,” 49.
between cinema and nation. As Kaes notes, the book’s legacy has also been its “essentialist,” “reductionist,” and “determinist” take on film and history.\(^\text{17}\)

The concept of a national cinema is one that remains a fundamental category for film scholars.\(^\text{18}\) In contrast to Kracauer, the goals of most film scholars studying national cinema are to understand the films first and the nation by extension. As a descriptive term, national can refer simply to the country of origin of a film’s director or production company—i.e. a film from Germany. Alternatively, it describes a classification of its content, as in an ethnographic film—i.e. a film about Germans.\(^\text{19}\) As an analytical term, its meaning has typically been theorized in one of three ways.\(^\text{20}\) In the first, and most general usage, national cinema has been taken as shorthand for the entire range of products of a country’s domestic film industry. The benefit of such an all-encompassing definition is its wide scope, which avoids the risk of selectivity and determinism lurking in other formulations. That same breadth, however, lacks an analytical precision, resulting in a category that is more identifying than illuminating; it classifies films but does little to explain them. In practice, casting such a wide net is impractical. More than 3,000 German films were made in the five years before the outbreak of the First World War. Even if the bulk of these were not lost, it would be a challenge to synthesize such a

\(^{17}\) Kaes, “German Cultural History and the Study of Film,” 49.


large group coherently.\textsuperscript{21} Moreover, the idea there is something inherently German in every German film risks the type of determinism criticized in Kracauer. \textsuperscript{22}

The second formulation of a national cinema narrows its parameters to films produced within a domestic film industry that share a common style. Such national styles can refer to visual or narrative motifs, the expression of similar outlooks and areas of interest, or a ‘worthy’ art cinema. While this definition does provide an evaluative framing on a group of films, the very act of selecting the criteria can determine the parameters of analysis. Regardless of whether or not German cinema in the pre-war years may not have had a distinctive style, it did have its own stars and several German-specific film types.\textsuperscript{23} The Danish actress Asta Nielsen made her film debut in 1910 in Urban Gad’s \textit{Afgrunden}, and became thereafter the most popular star in German cinema and a main player in many of the popular melodramas of the period.\textsuperscript{24} Henny Porten was

\textsuperscript{21} There are several edited collections that do strive to provide a representative overview of the early German cinema. See Thomas Elsaesser, ed. \textit{A Second Life: German Cinema’s First Decades} (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), Thomas Elsaesser and Michael Wedel, eds. \textit{Kino der Kaiserzeit: zwischen Tradition und Moderne} (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 2002). Herbert Birett in compiling a detailed reference work on films made in Germany before 1911, has attempted to cover the scope of this wide definition of national cinema, but lacks, unsurprisingly, any analytical precision. Herbert Birett, \textit{Das Filmangebot in Deutschland, 1895-1911} (Munich: Filmbuchverlag Winterberg, 1991)

\textsuperscript{22} Such all-encompassing judgments can refer to film form as well as psychology. For example, Barry Salt has compared nine multi-reel German films made between 1912 and 1917 with contemporary American productions on the basis of average shot length, scale of shot, depth of shot, lighting, and script. Finding a discernable distinction between the two sets of films he argues for a typically slower pace in German-made film, Barry Salt, “Early German Film: the Stylistics in Comparative Context,” in Thomas Elsaesser, ed. \textit{A Second Life: German Cinema’s First Decades} (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 225-236.

\textsuperscript{23} Although, as noted above, Salt does posit a distinctive pacing to German films.

\textsuperscript{24} See Heide Schlüpmann, “Asta Nielsen and Female Narration: The Early Films,” in \textit{A Second Life: German Cinemas First Decades}, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996) 118-122, Heide Schlüpmann \textit{The Uncanny Gaze: the
another leading female star, although her image was generally more conservative than the provocative Nielsen. Although actresses featured more prominently, actors such as Albert Basserman and Paul Wegener became recognizable stars as well. The latter was known famously for Der Student von Prag (1913) and later, Der Golem (1915), which he also had a hand in directing.\textsuperscript{25} Particular directors also came to prominence at this time, including Ernst Lubitsch, Max Mack, Joe May, and Franz Hofer. These provide an incomplete list to be sure, but one that demonstrates the presence of identifiable film personalities in the German cinema.\textsuperscript{26}

In terms of types and genres, there were distinctive German melodramas, detective films, slapstick comedies and even (unsuccessful) German westerns. As will be discussed in some detail below, nationalist films like German historical epics made up another, distinctively German, film type. Another type, the Autorenfilm, emerged in response to the particular criticisms levied against the German cinema.\textsuperscript{27} By the end of the first decade of the century, reformers and critics had begun to voice forceful opposition to the cinema. In response, German producers began adapting the work of famous writers, in an effort to demonstrate the medium’s literary potential. As Corey Ross has expressed it, the films were “deliberately conceived to cleanse the cinema of its


\textsuperscript{25} Both Der Student von Prag and Der Golem were, to Kracauer, examples of the haunted German soul. See Kracauer, \textit{From Caligari to Hitler}, 28-31.


plebian odor and disarm its many educated critics.”²⁸ The films, in contrast to the risqué melodramas and sensationalist crime thrillers whose damaging impulses they were meant to counteract, were not popular with audiences. This points to the problem with defining a national cinema along the lines of specific criteria determined by critics and scholars: it may bear little resemblance to the actual desires or interests of individual members of the national community.

The third conception of national cinema is one that aligns national cinema with national popular taste, seeking to identify the most popularly received films (generally in terms of box office success) as indicators of a national audience. Although it places the public rather than the critic at the centre, it also runs the risk of being influenced by promotion and distribution rather than a genuine group preference.²⁹ Nevertheless, it is the most representative, taking into account that the taste of the public may include non-domestic productions and that they may feel little affinity for stylistically national films. Joseph Garncarz has argued persuasively for the value of film preferences as an analytical category, particularly in relation to understanding the development of national audiences in Europe. Garncarz uses the term “national film culture” for his taste-determined categorization.³⁰

I would like to define national culture as the popular culture of the majority of a country’s population, independent of the national origin of the most popular products and without normatively defining the function of these products. Thus,

²⁹ This is not to presuppose any national homogeneity, as elaborated upon in the section on audiences below.
my concept of a “national film culture” is based on demand, not supply. Consequently, one can speak of national profiles of film preferences.  

The nation in Garncarz’s formulation, it is important to note, is “the geographical boundaries of a state, not the general ideas and values that are associated with certain language communities or their cultural productions,” although he does agree that “the longer societies are separated by state boundaries, the higher the probability that cultures acquire distinct features.”

Most significantly for thinking about a national audience, Garncarz argues that audience tastes are nationally specific. Along with a team of researchers at the University of Siegen, he has compiled a database of film programs from permanent cinemas for the years from 1905 to 1914. From these programs Garncarz has extrapolated the most popular films of the period. His conclusions are based on the assumption that the more frequently a film appears on a film program, the more demand for the film exists, and therefore the more popular with audiences the film had proven to be. The findings reveal that German audiences preferred German-made dramas. In 1912 dramas made up 42% of all films, but over the 1911 to 1914 period 86% of the most popular films were dramas. Further, German films comprised only 17.5% of all films but 35% of the most popular. Garncarz also notes three distinct film groups among the most popular. The first were melodramas with narratives that typically explored “a woman’s breach of taboos.” That these were typically German films dealing with the transgression of German social mores strengthens Garncarz’s assertion that these were nationally specific.

31 Ibid., 186.
32 Ibid., 185.
33 Garncarz discusses his methodology, finding and conclusion at length in ibid., 185-194.
34 Ibid., 189.
35 Ibid., 190.
tastes. The second group of popular films were adventure films or historical epics, the majority of which were imported to Germany. The third group of films were what Garncarz refers to as “‘national’ films in the narrow sense,” which “presented German history in a manner intended to incite patriotic emotions and construct national identity.”

The nationalist films examined in this chapter belong to the “patriotic” type or “national in the narrow sense.” The intentions of film producers can be difficult to identify with any certainty, and so the discussion below will focus more on how the films in question may have incited patriotic emotions rather than the question of why they attempted to do so. Clearly, these films represent small sub-groupings of German films made in the period. But they were significant films that presented a particular image of the German nation to the German national audience. It is that image that is discussed in depth below.

The Nationalization of the Audience

In April 1913 a short article was published in *Lichtbild Bühne* on the subject of German films in China. The author, Dr. Franz Kuhn, informed readers on the current state of German film exports to the region. The domestic Chinese film industry was

36 Ibid., 191.
growing, and in the coastal cities and trading centers, he explained, specifically European theatres were presenting European films to foreign residents. While this development spoke to the growing strength of the cinema (and in particular the film industries of Europe) on a global scale, it was also significant for tying transnational populations back to their European “imagined communities of nationality.” As Kuhn explained, for expatriot residents, “film had an even higher meaning, if it brought them images of their own country, and for a brief moment, conjured before their eyes a Fata Morgana of their beloved homeland.”

German films were almost entirely absent from the main coastal cities of Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Tianjin. There were some German films present, however, in the Russian communities of northern Manchuria. These offerings, it seemed, could well be more damaging than beneficial to Germans abroad. The films, Kuhn lamented, were mostly:

- sentimental love dramas, where lustful passions, sexual aberration, adultery, trespasses, and suicide were at the center of the plot; where abhorrent rakes, pimps, Apaches, and prostitutes were the heroes of the films, where gambling dens, racetracks, public dancehalls, brothels, and filthy pubs constituted the preferred milieu.

Kuhn’s concern was that for those in the audience who had never “set foot on German soil” the films were presenting an image of the country as in “an utterly murky and immoral state.”

Kuhn’s anxiety about the image of Germany projected abroad highlights the tensions at the centre of the development of a German national audience. At least three can be identified. First, the episode demonstrates that contemporaries understood there to

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39 Dr. jur. Franz Kuhn, “Deutsche Films in China,” Lichtbild Bühne, 5 April 1913.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
be something called German films, which were distinctive in relation to the films of other countries. This suggests awareness in some form of a German national cinema. Second, there was concern with German films on levels of not just quantity, but perhaps more importantly, quality – artistic and moral. This was a fact exaggerated abroad, but resonant still at home. Third, contemporaries appear to have conceived of a German audience, a group defined by both a common country of origin and a shared relation to the cinematic products of that country – in China, a German national audience abroad. By 1913, there was a national German community that went to the cinema and that identified with a German national cinema.

The cinema reform movement had developed in the middle of the first decade of the century in response to growing concerns about the negative impact of the cinema on the national community. The rapid rise in the popularity of the cinema and the proliferation of Wanderkinos and, later, permanent theatres brought with it a host of concerns about its influence, its effect on the viewing public (particularly the young), and the place of popular attractions and mass media within German society. These in turn prompted questions about how the cinema should be regulated, what criteria theatres and exhibitors needed to meet in order to show films, and what types of images were permissible to be projected on German screens.

The Cinema Reform Party, which emerged as the leading voice in the cinema reform movement, was one part of a much larger collection of social and morale welfare

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associations active in Imperial Germany. Motivated by a desire to order the social welfare of the public, these reformers worked actively on a wide variety of issues and causes related to poverty, child care and education, crime, housing conditions, sanitation and general public health. Nonetheless, reformers saw these issues in national terms, as work that was aiding in the proper cultivation of a national community. Their ends may have been diverse, their practices informed by a range of confessional, political, local, and scientific worldviews, but their nationalism was a constant. As Edward Ross Dickinson has expressed it, among reformers “there was considerable disagreement […] as to what the nation was, what it meant, what it required. But there was clear consensus that the nation was a good thing.”

The impact of cinema attendance on children, both negative and positive, was a favorite subject for early film critics and commentators. As one writer expressed the tendency, “For some time, as film theaters have sprung up like mushrooms from the earth, there has been general excitement over the question of whether children should be

43 As listed in Dennis Sweeney, “Reconsidering the Modernity Paradigm: Reform Movements, the social and the state in Wilhelmine Germany,” Social History 31.4 (2006): 405. Sweeney positions recent work on reform alongside discussions of modernity and biopolitics. Other historians have highlighted the more progressive aspects of the reform movement. See for example, Kevin Repp, Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity: Anti-Politics and the Search for Alternatives, 1890-1914 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), and Andrew Lees, Cities, Sin, and Social Reform in Imperial Germany (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002). On media and reform in Germany in this era in particular, see Ross, Media and the Making of Modern Germany.

allowed to attend these events. Teachers, in particular, were vocal about their concerns. Likely prompted by these sorts of worries, one teacher in Berlin surveyed students about their film-going habits in 1907. The results were that of forty-nine students consulted, only two had never in their lives attended the cinema. On the other hand, twenty of them had been more than ten times while twelve of these had gone more than twenty times. More than half of the students had been to the theatre without their parents and many had been there as late as eleven o’clock at night. Despite pre-censorship there were a considerable number of films whose content was seen as base, sensationalist, and not appropriate for young—or any respectable—audiences. According to film historian Gary Stark, one pastor, in an extraordinary act of national commitment, took in over 250 of the melodramas and thrillers popular with audiences. In sum, the pastor endured “a total of twenty-seven murders, fifty-one adulteries, nineteen seductions, twenty-two kidnappings, forty-five suicides, 176 thieves, twenty-five prostitutes, thirty-five drunks, and a veritable army of police, detectives, and executioners.” Bemoaning the interest with which school children viewed such scenes of “gruesome murder, jealousy, adultery” and the impact these films had on the their minds, one similarly minded author wondered

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46 “Zick-Zack: Die Berliner Lehrer und die Kinematograph,” Der Kinematograph, 4 September 1907. Discussions with other teachers suggested that these figures were not uncommon.
in the trade press about what it would take for the youth to prove to be similarly amenable to higher quality films and to educational films.\textsuperscript{48}

While the criticism that these reformers leveled at the cinema was real, it is important to keep in mind that for many (although not all) of the loudest voices, especially before 1910, their critiques were based in a belief that the cinema could have a profound and powerful positive impact on the nation. Many of those who identified as members of the cinema reform movement in particular did not reject the medium outright, but were rather concerned with specific types of problematic films in particular. As one cinema reformer succinctly expressed the basis of his movement in \textit{Der Kinematograph} in 1907, “I want to convert the question of ‘how should the cinema be combated’ to one of ‘how can the cinema be reformed.’”\textsuperscript{49}

Of the prominent film trade journals in Imperial Germany, \textit{Der Kinematograph} was firmly in the camp of the cinema reformers. Herman Lemke, a Brandenburg elementary school rector, who, according to Corey Ross, sought to “promote the use of film—even entertainment film—for educational purposes”, founded the journal.\textsuperscript{50} As a journal that took advocacy of the medium seriously, articles that defended the cinema against its harshest critics and fought against the stigma placed upon it were frequently published. Reformers openly discussed claims made against the cinema, highlighted studies that validated their premises, and satirized the positions of their critics. On the latter point, one commentator, Hanns Heinz Ewers, mocked the alleged moral and artistic superiority of those opposed to cinema. “There are people who never go to the cinema,”

\textsuperscript{50} Ross, \textit{Media and the Making}, 89.
he wrote, “there are also people who never bathe. Both types are highly unsympathetic to me.”

The activities of cinema reformers culminated in two main reform endeavors: the establishment and operation of reform theatres that would exhibit exclusively films deemed to be of high educational and artistic value, and the creation of pressure group, the Cinema Reform Party. Coordinated by Lemke, among others, in 1907, this pressure group brought together film producers, film exhibitors, educators, and members of the press.

Lemke elaborated on the “objectives and purpose” of the Cinema Reform Party in a lengthy editorial in Der Kinematograph. In his mind, the movement was necessary due to a number of problems arising from contemporary film exhibition, the majority of which were commonly voiced concerns: there were too many sensational films playing in the theatres, too many children spent too much times exposed to these films and were often in attendance late into the night. For Lemke, however, it was vital to keep in mind the educational possibilities of the cinema. Whereas the opponents of the cinema always had a simple solution to the problems arising from film exhibition and spectatorship – “call the police to close the theater” – the approach taken by the Cinema Reform party was more nuanced, and, he believed, ultimately more constructive.

The Cinema Reform Party’s approach addressed both the spaces of film exhibition and the content of the films exhibited. Of primary importance was to keep

52 “Mitteilungen aus dem Leserkreise: Kinematographische Reformpartei,” Der Kinematograph, 4 September 1907.
53 “Die Kinematographische Reformpartei, ihre Aufgaben und Ziele,” Der Kinematograph, 16 October 1907.
54 Ibid.
separate film programs aimed at children and those intended for adult viewers. Children and youth programming was to take place between 4 and 6pm in the afternoon, during which time educational films would be featured prominently, sensational films were to be excluded, children had to pay their own admission, and the bar would be closed.\textsuperscript{55} It was also important that a clear distinction be made between reform theaters and the preexisting model. Reform theaters were not intended solely for children, but also for adults looking for a more uplifting film experience. Reformers intended their theaters to be places where “a father could take his adult daughter, where a father could take his entire family.”\textsuperscript{56}

For Lemke and the Cinema Reform Party the path to their objectives was through agitation. But it was not government regulations and censors that they sought to influence, but the film industry. As Lemke expressed it, “we want to win over film producers to our way of thinking, we want to win film exhibitors to us, we want to have the teachers, and we want above all things to appeal to the press, so that they might help us as we work to educate the people and elevate the German industry.”\textsuperscript{57} They saw their cause as a national one.

The first reform theatre was opened on 31 July 1907 in the Friedenau area of Berlin. Its expressed purpose was to challenge the prevailing concept of the cinema as a place of “disrepute” and “sensual thrills” – that is, of base attractions.\textsuperscript{58} On the opening of the theater, the reformer Leo Stachow expressed his own hopes and intentions for

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
reform theaters, ideas that had motivated him to help found the theater. Stachow narrowed his basic precepts to three:

1. In would only be permissible to present films that improved and instructed, that left in children and adults a pleasant impression, and inspired a wish for regular attendance.
2. That the youth would be absolutely protected from pernicious influences, which sensational-films regularly aroused in the mind.
3. That the theatre itself must have a worthy form and sufficient control.59

Stachow’s concern was for the national audience. The films they were to see would to be of high value, the young would be protected from base sensationalism, and the spaces designed for film-going would be appropriate and well-administered.

Reform theaters and the reform movement afforded the Cinema Reform Party the ability to extend their message to the film-going public. By November 1907, the party was offering to rent out films for reform programs. New and once-used films could be had for 140 M for 100 meters, films that had been in use for four or five weeks for 90M, and older films at 40M.60 To get a sense of what these programs offered, one can look at a description of what played in the first reform theater. During the first week of the theater’s operation, its programming reflected the values of Stachow and Lemke. One observer found the program “well-conceived.” The children’s program included images of animals and foreign lands, but also inoffensive comedies. This was typical of early cinema programming. The adult-aimed evening exhibitions similarly featured a mix of educational and amusing films, and the accompanying music matched the character and tempo of the images. Overall, the program was received with “great applause” by the

60 “Reform-Filmaustelle der Kinematographischen-Reformvereinigung,” *Der Kinematograph*, 6 November 1907.
That applause did not lead to lasting popularity or profitability. While the ideas put forward by reformers persisted, the continued growth of the film industry marginalized their exhibition practices.

If the fears of reformers were tied to the growth on film spectatorship, the years after 1910 would have seen their worst fears realized. Based on the Early German Cinema database, an estimated 2,1371 film titles were “available on the German market” between 1911 and 1914. Almost a third of these films, 7,033 titles, were French. Another 5,996 films were American, 3,266 Italian, 847 British, and 566 Danish. Over the same period, 2,731 German films were released, making up roughly 13 percent of the total number of available films. Arriving at the nationality of each film is a more complicated process than one might expect. Many foreign companies had distribution arrangements with German distributors or set up domestic branches, as was the case with Deutsche Mutoskop und Biograph and Deutsche Éclair. Film titles alone do not provide a comprehensive picture of film exhibition, although they do offer a rough approximation. Determining total market share would require more complete knowledge on the lengths of each title and the number of copies of each in circulation. In her 1912

62 For an overview see Joseph Garncarz and Michael Ross, “Die Siegener Datenbanken zum frühen Kino in Deutschland,” Kinop 14/15 (2006): 151-163. These numbers have been arrived at using the online database: http://www.earlycinema.uni-koeln.de.
study of cinema-going in Mannheim, *Zur Soziologie des Kino*, Emilie Altenloh provides partial data that further supports this approximation.\(^{64}\) Although Altenloh compiled her numbers along genre lines, a rough picture of the film market is apparent:

New Releases in German Film Market between 15 August and 15 October 1912  
By Country of Origin and Genre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Drama (in meters)</th>
<th>Comedy (in m)</th>
<th>Nature (in m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>137 (43603)</td>
<td>79 (16929)</td>
<td>26 (4654)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>73 (31027)</td>
<td>79 (15081)</td>
<td>34 (3407)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>71 (31683)</td>
<td>136 (27068)</td>
<td>78 (10314)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>41 (24984)</td>
<td>11 (4066)</td>
<td>4 (874)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>16 (4755)</td>
<td>12 (2374)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>11 (9714)</td>
<td>8 (1868)</td>
<td>6 (740)(^{65})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Along similar lines, in February 1913 *Lichtbild Bühne* published data compiled by the federal statistics bureau on film import and export for the previous year.\(^{66}\) According to the bureau, in 1912 approximately 239 000 kg of film had been imported into Germany. Of this, 152 100 kg came from Britain, and 56 700 kg from France. Italy and Denmark were third and fourth on the list with much lower totals of 9300 kg and 8000 kg respectively. The surprisingly high totals for Britain reflect a practice whereby most American film would be imported to Germany indirectly via Britain. The author of the article noted that a meter of film weighed approximately seven grams, meaning that Germany imported approximately 34 million meters of film in 1912. In the same period, it exported 1,44,500 kg (or 2,064,500 meters) of film.\(^{67}\) It is worth noting that the statistics bureau did not differentiate between exposed and unexposed film. That is, some of the

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\(^{65}\) Ibid., 10.

\(^{66}\) “Deutsche Film-Infer und -Augsburg,” *Lichtbild Bühne*, 1 February 1913.

\(^{67}\) The largest export markets were France (42800 kg), Italy (36300kg), Britain (14800 kg), Austria-Hungary (11000kg), and the United States (10100 kg). “Deutsche Film-Infer und -Augsburg,” *Lichtbild Bühne*, 1 February 1913.
film imported represents actual finished films, while much of it was raw film used in German film production. The article’s author hoped that the bureau would begin to make this distinction in the future in order to provide a much more comprehensive view of the development of the German film industry. As imprecise as these various sets of statistics are, they do provide a clear picture of the transnational quality of the film industry in the years preceding the war, even if that picture itself appears in less than perfect focus.

Further, 1913 was a watershed year in the growth of the German film industry, as its international trade balance shifted dramatically. Between January and September 1912 1,848,000kg of film had been imported into Germany and 949,000kg had been exported out. Over the same period in time for 1913, only 1,896,000kg of film were imported and 1,961,000kg exported. This was a stunning reversal, even to contemporary observers. As highlighted in an article in Lichtbild Bühne, popular opinion still held that “the French film industry accomplishes everything in the area of film exports, and the German, nothing.” A brief rejoinder followed: “That might once have been so.” Over the first nine months of 1913, 643,000kg of film, a third of all exports, went to France, while only 640,000kg came into Germany. Assuming that pattern of trade continued through the end of the calendar year, by the beginning of 1914 Germany was a net film exporter—although one that still relied on foreign products for a little less than half of its materials.

Despite the growth in domestic production and the alleged preference among audiences for German-made films, exhibitors still relied on foreign film imports. The growth in theatre attendance in the period resulted in a high market demand. This was a demand that the domestic industry could not have fulfilled even without strong

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68 “Deutscher Film-Export,” Lichtbild Bühne 22 November 1913.
69 Ibid.
competition from foreign companies. To provide some sense of this growth: in the first quarter of 1910 Berlin cinemas counted 330,924 visitors. Over the same three months in 1911 cinema attendance in the capital was 440,502. These numbers represent a growth in spectatorship of more than 30% in one calendar year. Such expansion was not unique to Berlin. In Düsseldorf ticket sales grew at a similar pace, from 281,416 between 1 July and 30 September 1910 to 394,336 in the same period in 1912. It is impossible to ascertain how much of this growth was due to an increase in the actual size of the audience—if more people adopted cinema-going as part of their regular leisure activities—or if it represents an increase in repeat visits. Likely, both factors contributed.

An increase in film spectatorship resulted in an increase in anxieties over the social impact of cinema-going. Many contemporary observers were critical of its social impact. These critics called for a more substantial policing of the cinema. They agreed that film could be powerfully influential, but they saw that influence as malicious. The psychology professor Robert Gaupp expressed his particular criticisms of cinema in 1912. According to Gaupp, films:

Distorted pictures of misery and hardship, poverty and disease, generate tormenting ideas about the injustice of the world and destroy respect for law and state authority[…] a lascivious eroticism still manages to seep through […] gruesomely graphic representations of criminal life[…] The deterrent force of a moralistic ending counts for nothing against the profound impressions that the heroic deeds of an audacious criminal leave on youthful minds.

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71 Ibid.
Historian Peter Jelavich suggests that the standardization of the cinema after 1910 fueled the criticisms of what the trade journals frequently referred to as “the enemies of the cinema.” According to Jelavich it was only with the establishment and popularity of permanent cinemas and the rise of longer fictional film-dramas, that the Bildungsbürger became aware of the medium and its dangers. 73

One of the most vocal of these critics was Dr Karl Brunner. Like many other reformers, Brunner had a background in education, having been a Gymnasium teacher before devoting himself to reform and censorship. Originally a vocal opponent of trash literature, Brunner became the Berlin police’s “expert literature consultant” in 1911 and soon thereafter its official film censor. 74 Brunner concerned himself with prohibiting films that “might threaten public order, undermine state and religious institutions, or damage public morality, especially that of young people.” 75 Scenes of violence, crime, sexual immorality, or political or social subversion were banned. In all, it is estimated that Brunner banned 2 per cent of all films submitted to him, and excised material from almost half. 76 Brunner’s appointment as chief censor in Berlin demonstrates the strength behind the reform movement. It was a movement that the film industry had to take seriously. In reaction to these criticisms, and their adverse effect at the box office, producers had to make their medium respectable.

For many commentators, the clear route to respectability for the cinema was through its educational uses. Films purposed to educate the public were mainstays of the offerings of reform and reform-minded theatres. These groups were by no means unique

73 Jelavich, “Am I Allowed to Amuse Myself Here?”, 229.
74 Ross, Media and the Making of Modern Germany, 67-68.
75 Ibid., 69.
76 Ibid.
in identifying such a “good” use for the cinema. Highlighting the various ways that film could be used both in the pursuit of knowledge and in communicating information to the public was a popular topic in the film trade press. These articles highlighted the modernity of the cinema and the many uses to which the new medium could be put. As one unknown author editorialized in the journal *Kinematographische Rundschau*:

> In the industrialized world there is nothing that has as bright a future as the cinema […] The mind cannot embrace rapidly enough the new horizons opened up by living pictures. Education, botany, history, religion, politics, geography and ethnography, drama and art, these are just some of the fields to which the general culture of the cinema is assigned, on which it will obtain new and unexpected results.

These lofty aspirations for film were based not merely on the wishful imaginations of those already invested in the film business. They were demonstrated through the uses of film already practiced, and through the established utility of still photographs in fields such as medicine, astronomy, and criminal justice.

For cinema reformers and others actively engaged in film exhibition, the uses of film in scholarship and research were of much less concern than its ability to communicate knowledge to an audience and to the impact that such screenings would have on those in attendance. The range of educational films included films about scientific subjects, but also those that focused on the natural world, technology, commerce and industry. All of these non-fiction films were seen as holding value because they informed their audiences about worthwhile topics, notably the cutting edge of

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77 The phrase “Der Kinematograph im Dienste…” preceded education, science, hygiene and many other topics in the film trade press.
scholarship and celebrated industrial progress. These topics were seen as not only “edifying” but also “interesting.”80 Writing in the journal Der Kinematograph, one author made sure to highlight the fact that “the processing of a tobacco field in Batia also provides a lot of stimulation, as does the demonstrations of the work in a large […] cigarette factory.” Similarly worthwhile was “the installation of a warship, whose launch etc. provides a wealth of inspiration.”81

Specifying what types of films could be properly considered educational for the public, particularly for children, was a popular question of discussion and debate for cinema reformers and public officials. For example, on 11 March 1911 a group of 120 educators, doctors, economists, lawyers, and other interested persons attended a conference at the Reichstag on the questions of “How the cinema could be made into an educational resource for the people,” and “the ways and means to eliminate the damage associated with the operation of the cinema.”82 Organized by the sociologist, economist, and commentator Ernst Schultze, the conference brought together individuals from across the Reich.83 Of primary interest was the impact of the cinema on children and youth audiences. One participant, Fräulein Dr. jr. Dünsig, explained that her work on the Berlin cinemas had failed to demonstrate any negative impact in children resulting from film attendance, and argued that the positive benefits of the cinema—“a gift from heaven that gladdens children”—should offset any “pedagogical and hygienic” doubts about the

81 Ibid.
82 “Der Kinematograph als Volksbildungsmittel,” Der Kinematograph, 29 March 1911.
83 A prolific author, Schultze also published a work on the cinema. See Ernst Schultze, Der Kinematograph als Bildungsmittel: eine kulturpolitische Untersuchung (Halle: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1911).
medium. Her opinion was in the minority, however. Most discussants viewed the cinema in more skeptical terms and found common cause with individuals such as the “well-known” pediatrician Herr Professor Baginsky, who argued that the cinema could induce madness and a turn to thievery in children, or the Hamburg school superintendent Fricke, who stated that in it was his experience that films left children “mentally” and “physically” ill.

Educational films were seen in a stark and necessary contrast to so-called Schundfilme (trash films). This “trash” was characterized by its depiction of many of the aforementioned vices bemoaned by Kuhn, Gaupp, Fricke, and others. The campaign against Schundfilme emerged from and built off of similar actions against smut and trash literature that had begun in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In part a middle-class response to the growing popularity of commercial culture, the anti-trash movement was another aspect of Wilhelmine Germany’s reform culture. The movement was comprised of many of the same educators, clergy, and others concerned with the moral health of the nation, in particular the influence of immoral material on the nation’s youth. While rooted in a range of political and ideological foundations, from conservative nationalists to liberals to socialists, most campaigners shared the belief that smut and trash were detrimental to the national community and that even commercial culture should work to educate the mass public. Lectures and meetings dedicated to the perils of Schundfilme and the potential educational uses of the cinema were part of the regular

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84 “Der Kinematograph als Volksbildungsmittel,” Der Kinematograph 29 March 1911.
85 Ibid.
86 For an overview of the anti-trash reform movement, see Ross, Media and the Making of Modern Germany, 64-74.
87 See in particular the argument in Jenkins, “The Kitsch Collections and The spirit in the furniture,” 123-141.
activities of many of the national organizations devoted to literary reform and popular education.\(^{88}\) While good or quality films reflected the literary or educational values of the nation, trash films worked to undermine those same traditions.

Opposition to Schund was as much a commentary on the relative susceptibility of a national audience, a national film-going public, as it was about the quality of individual films. In the minds of the various reformers and activists, there existed a national audience that needed to be protected from the negative influences of moving pictures. The threat of trash films to the national community was, in the eyes of some contemporaries, attributable to the fact that many were foreign productions.\(^{89}\) One author, the Hagen Gymnasium instructor Adolf Sellmann, lamented that foreign films were prompting German producers to lower the quality of their own products as they attempted to match and surpass foreign firms in the production of what he labeled “sultry” films.\(^{90}\) For Sellmann the sensationalism and immorality of Schundfilms was not the only threat posed by the cinema to the national audience—all foreign-language films were potentially damaging. In the chapter on “Trash Films and their Pernicious Effect,” in his 1912 work *Der Kinematograph als Volkserzieher?*, Sellmann argued that an abundance of foreign films would result in an increased foreign influence on German identity. As he


\(^{90}\) Sellmann, *Der Kinematograph als Volkserzieher?*, 29.
elaborated on the negative effects of foreign films resulting from their promotion and their themes:

What does it mean if you are suddenly met on the street of a small German town with titles such as “The Quarrel on the Cliff,” or “La Findazata di Messina or “Le Calvaire d’une Mère.” In general there is still far too little home air blowing in cinemas and far too much foreign air; bizarre American comedies, spicy French erotic films, weepy Italian sentimentalities are the spiritual food for our German people.  

Further, foreign films threatened to change the very spirit of the national audience. In response Sellmann suggested that German producers create films that focused on “German nature and German art, German landscapes and German history, German crafts and German industry, German customs and German national character.”  

The remedy for pernicious foreign influences was a turn towards German film subjects.

When reformers like Sellman or Brunner worried about the influence of the cinema on the German public, the public that needed to be protected was typically understood as uneducated and often, young. The notion that film theatres were filled with these impressionable and potentially disruptive groups appears rooted in fact. Emilie Altenloh found in Mannheim that the lower classes, in particular sub-proletarian and proletarian men, made up a sizable portion of cinema-goers. These groups did indeed prefer the crime, action, and erotic films that frustrated and antagonized middle-class reformers. Indicative of the cinema’s problem with respectability, those individuals employed in white collar or upwardly mobile professions maintained a preference for military and historical films. These status-oriented groups, however, did attend the

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91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
93 This point is made by Miriam Hansen in her discussion of Altenloh. Hansen, “Early German Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?” 177. See also Altenloh, Zur Soziologie des Kino.
cinema much less frequently, choosing to attend “the theatre, the opera (predominately Wagner), concerts, and educational lectures.”\(^9^4\) Women’s spectatorship, interestingly, was found to be much more consistent across class lines. According to Altenloh, women in Mannheim preferred social dramas and romances, and were more interested in the aesthetic rather than the educational value of the cinema.\(^9^5\)

Between Altenloh’s research on Mannheim and the concerns of reformers, a tentative sketch of the social composition of cinema audiences before the First World War is discernable. But a German national audience needs to be understood by more than the gender, sex, class, and age lines that differentiated its members. As cinema-goers, these individuals were also part of a shared community. In writing on German reading public in the nineteenth century, Lynne Tatlock describes a “reading nation” by which she means “those who regularly read German-language printed books, but also to those who by reading participated in the German national culture that was being made and supported by book production.”\(^9^6\) A German national audience needs to be conceived on similar grounds, as a community who attended German theatres and in so doing contributed to the creation of a national German film culture.

\(^{9^4}\) Ibid., 177.
\(^{9^5}\) Ibid., 178.
German Films

Internationally, in the half-decade before the outbreak of the First World War films became longer, their narratives more complex, and their production values more lavish. In short, aspirations in the global film industry were heightened. In large part this change was the result of efforts by filmmakers to bestow on their product an aura of quality, to make films artistic and the cinema respectable. Typically, filmmakers found their inspiration in two places: in a venerated canon of literary masterpieces, or in a celebration of the biblical or historical past (which themselves were frequent subjects of the fine arts of literature, sculpture, painting, and opera). By associating their products with these markers of high culture, producers hoped to win for themselves a similar place in the cultural hierarchy. They also hoped that such productions would be profitable. On the most basic level, quality films playing in the clean, comfortable and newly-built theatres to wealthier audiences could charge higher prices for admission than smaller theatres in lower class neighborhoods.

Although the (re)orientation towards respectable audiences was international, the criteria for what types of art were best to mimic—or, more generously, be inspired by—varied. These variations were attributable to a number of competing factors having to do

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97 Although the turn to quality films was an international phenomenon, the motivations for this turn differed in distinct national contexts. For a discussion of audiences and respectability in Germany and the United States, see William Uricchio and Roberta E. Pearson, *Reframing Culture: the Case of Vitagraph Quality Films* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), and Hansen “Early Silent Cinema: Whose Public Sphere,” 147-184. For a discussion of these movements in the American, French, and Italian contexts, see Rob King, “The Discourses of Art in Early Film, or Why Not Rancière,” in *A Companion to Early Cinema*, ed. André Gaudreault, Nicolas Dulac, and Santiago Hidalgo (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 141-162.
with the worldviews of particular producers, the (perceived) class, confessional, ethnic, and gendered composition of their audiences, and the circulation and reception of other literary and artistic forms. But national patterns seem to emerge. For the early American cinema, William Uricchio and Roberta E. Pearson have suggested how one company, Vitagraph, worked to reposition the cinema—at least its own films—as respectable entertainment for a wide audience rather than cheap fairground amusement through the production of particular literary, historical, and biblical films that “forged a discursive alliance with the institutions of cultural production.”\(^98\) For Germany in the period between 1910 and 1914, film producers attempted to align the cinema with a glorious representation of the national past.\(^99\)

While reformers in Germany worried about the national good, film producers and exhibitors sought respectability for its financial returns. As Altenloh’s study demonstrates, men concerned with their perceived social status and professional reputation were less likely to attend the cinema. Respectable films could widen the film-going audience. What’s more, quality fiction films would have a much better chance at competing with the sensationalism of the crime, melodrama, and erotic pictures than the scientific and industrial films championed by reformers. As Miriam Hansen has expressed it, “it seems unlikely that anyone even loosely connected with the film business would have considered scientific and educational documentaries a drawing card at the

\(^{98}\) Uricchio and Pearson, *Reframing Culture*, 41.

\(^{99}\) Some German literary masterpieces did make it to the screen. In 1909 the (French) film company Raleigh & Robert released a film adaptation of Friedrich von Schiller’s ballad *Die Bürgschaft* to coincide with the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the poet’s birth. In advertising the film in the trade press, Raleigh & Robert highlighted its quality and detail and described the film as a “artistic” achievement that children and adults alike should not miss. “Neue Films: Raleigh & Robert,” *Der Kinematograph*, 3 November 1909.
box office." Historical films, however, proved popular with German audiences. The list that Garncarz has assembled of what he argues were the most popular films among German audiences between 1911 and 1912 include several historical films, such as *Aus Deutschlands Ruhmestagen* (1911), *Der Deutsch-Dänische Krieg 1864*, and *Der Film von der Königin Luise* (1912). These films typified the historical dramas produced by German companies in this period. In making historical films, German producers were aligning themselves with global trends in film production, but more importantly, were catering to an established public interest. In popular literature, historical fiction was an established and preferred genre. According to Brent O. Peterson in his work on German reading culture in the nineteenth century, “the historical novel was the century’s most popular literary genre.”

In the Kaiserreich, historical fiction was more than a popular leisure activity; it was part of a popular culture that gave shape to a German national consciousness. For a newly-created state bringing together a population that possessed a diverse range of local, confessional, and even linguistic affiliations, historical literature helped to foster a particularly German identity. The German national identity that converged in the nineteenth century was, according to Peterson, shaped by assumptions that all Germans shared “a common origin, history, and destiny,” as well as “a single geography, culture, and language”; and that they “belonged together in one, and only one, continuous and

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101 Garncarz, 190.
102 Both *Aus Deutschlands Ruhmestagen 1870/71* and *Königen Luise* were produced by the Deutsche-Mutoskop und Biograph company. *Der Deutsch-Dänische Krieg 1864* was actually a Danish film and it is not clear how the war was represented in the film.
contiguous nation state.” These assumptions still shaped thinking on national identity in the post-unification period, but its specificity was becoming more refined in one very important way. Prussia was assuming the central role in definitions of Germany’s origin, history, destiny, and culture. As Peterson expressed it, “along with – and probably more important than – Prussia’s seizure of political power in Germany came the articulation of a national narrative, shared by most Germans, in which Prussians played all the leading roles.”

Mark Hewitson makes a similar point regarding the symbolic character of German nationalism by the turn of the twentieth century. He identifies two “overlapping clusters of figures and legends” at the core of a national symbolic vocabulary. The first were the heroes of mythological, ancient, and medieval German pasts, and were closely connected to the German landscape and to more recent figures who shared the “independent minded and deep-thinking” characteristics of the older pantheon. The second cluster was a body of identifiably Prussian “symbols and stories” that came to be extended to a broader German identity. In addition to a range of Prussian rulers, such as Frederick the Great, who became German national heroes, two central moments in the nineteenth century—the (Prussian-led) campaigns against Napoleon between 1806 and 1815 and the (Prussian-orchestrated) unification of Germany

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104 Ibid., 9-10.
105 Ibid., 3.
106 For a full discussion, see Mark Hewitson, “Nation and Nationalismus: Representation and National Identity in Imperial Germany,” in Representing the German Nation: History and Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany, ed. Mary Fulbrook and Martin Swales (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 19-62.
107 Ibid., 28. The environment provided a link between the past and present. The Rhine which held the Nibelungen treasure, the Teutoburg forest where Hermann had defeated the Romans in 9 AD, and the Thuringian Kyffhäuser mountain where Emperor Friedrich I ‘Barbarossa’, these were all important national landscapes. Hewitson identifies figures such as Beethoven, Schiller, Wagner, and Nietzsche as part of this German tradition.
108 Ibid., 29.
between 1864 and 1871—exemplified the inscribing of Prussian history into the centre of the German national narrative.

These patterns continued in German film, as will be discussed in detail below. Although historical films dominated, they did appear alongside other clusters of national themes and German heroes. In particular, the naval scenes and colonial encounters that had been part of the earlier cinema of imperial attractions persisted as settings for melodramas and adventure stories that celebrated the spirit, bravery, and, if necessary, sacrifice of individuals personifying the values of the German national community. For example, the 1910 film *Pro Patria*, produced by Deutsche Mutoskop- und Biograph, venerated military service and self-sacrifice. The protagonist is Lieutenant Schindler, a naval officer assigned to a U-Boot crew. After interceding—“chivalrously”—on behalf of a woman in a dispute against her husband, he finds himself challenged to a duel. Before the duel can take place, Schindler’s commanding officer, an Admiral, orders him to sea. Although he feels that his honor has been wounded when he has a vision of his opponent and other observers arriving for the scheduled duel unaware, he recognizes that his duty also obligates him to serve his country. While at sea the u-boat falters and begins to take on water. Schindler and the rest of the crew, despite their courage, all perish. The film ends with the Admiral consoling Schindler’s family, giving them the comforting sentiment that the young officer sacrificed himself in “the service of the Fatherland.”

Historical films offered a combination of cultural respectability and visual and dramatic excitement. Great effort was made towards establishing both the historical

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110 Ibid.
authenticity of the events depicted in the films, and their fidelity to known, and respected, works of art. In contrast to the two clusters of national symbols identified by Hewitson, the bulk of the historical films of the pre-war years were limited to subjects from the nineteenth century. There were, however, exceptions. One such exception, made in 1914, was Des Deutschen Heeres Entstehung von der Germanenzeit bis zur Gegenwart.\footnote{Des Deutschen Heeres Entstehung von der Germanenzeit bis zur Gegenwart BA FA 1466.} This four-minute actuality film is little more than a filmed procession of re-enactors in appropriate historical costume, but it explicitly connects the ancient and medieval past with the German present. The procession is divided by costume and inter-title into “The Teutons,” “The Journey of Emperor Charlemagne,” “Barbarossa’s Crusade,” “The Thirty Years War,” “At the time of the Great Elector,” “Frederick the Great,” “From the Wars of Liberation, 1813-1815,” and “Out of Germany’s Time of Greatness, 1870-71,” (which gives special attention to an individual dressed as Bismarck). The final sequence, “A Hurrah for our Brave Army and the Glorious Military Procession,” includes men dressed in contemporary military uniforms.

One notable historical film set before the nineteenth century was Dr. Martinus Luther produced by Deutsche –Bioscop-Gesellschaft in 1911.\footnote{Summary taken from the synopsis of the film published in the trade press. See, “Neue Films: Deutsche Bioscop-Gesellschaft: Dr. Martinus Luther,” Der Kinematograph, 23 August 1911.} The film was described in the trade press as “a historical living picture in 18 scenes,” with its settings adapted from “old paintings and engravings.”\footnote{Ibid.} To highlight its historical authenticity and educational value, the film included dates in its inter-titles, down to the day for those moments of particular historical relevance. The film’s historical scenes provided...
audiences with an overview of the life of Luther, from an upbringing under strict
discipline to his choice to enter religious life following the death of a dear friend, through
to his theological development, his opposition to the papacy (including his nailing of the
95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517) and his eventual
marriage to Katharina von Bora. The film ends with Luther’s death in Eisleben in 1546.
Although his personal relationships are given significant attention, it is his religious work
and his opposition to the church hierarchy that take up the bulk of the film’s eighteen
scenes. Such an interpretation was in line with the thinking of contemporary theologians,
who saw Luther as an important progenitor of their current nation. As James Stayer has
summarized these views, Luther enabled the “breaking free from the inferior religiosity
of medieval man, [which] prepared the way for the Wilhelminian Reich […] in which
Protestants were morally superior to Catholics, Jews, and Free-thinkers.”  

Martin Luther was among a select group of national cultural heroes whose lives
were adapted for the early German cinema; another was the nineteenth century composer
Richard Wagner. Wagner was an explicitly nationalist composer, and had, in the
unification era, seen himself as the ideal “cultural standard bearer” of the emerging
German nation.  

Wilhelmine Germans were well aware of nationalist connotations of
the composer and his compositions. Messter produced a film biography of “the master,”

114 In particular, Adolf von Harnack, according to James Stayer, Martin Luther, German Savior: German Evangelical Theological Factions and the Interpretation of Luther, 1917-1933 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 2000), 12.
Richard Wagner, to mark the hundredth anniversary of his birth in May 1913. The film was promoted as a quality production and “the most interesting film of the year.” Exhibitors and audiences were assured that the film had the “the best director,” an “authentic milieu,” and “first-class photography.” Still images from the film that appeared included in the print advertisements – generally reserved for the most expensive features – underscored the film’s high production values. Such messages reveal the extent to which Messter wanted to ensure that their film was seen as both appealing to the public, but also the end result of noteworthy craftsmanship and scholarship. Upon viewing the film, at least one contemporary review was critical of some of its historical inaccuracies, but did praise Richard Wagner as having “substantially more art” than some other historical films of its day.


117 Advertisement for Richard Wagner, Der Kinematograph, 30 April 1913. The advertisement also noted which firms had been given distribution rights to the film: Projections-A.G. Union for Berlin, Dresden, Hesse, Württemberg, Baden, Alsace-Lorraine, and the Saar; Martin Dentler in Hamburg, Lübeck, Bremen, Schleswig-Holstein, Hannover, Oldenburg, and Brunswick; Johann Dienstknecht in Bavaria and Pfalz; Tonhallen-Theater in the Rhineland and Westphalia.

118 Advertisement for Richard Wagner, Der Kinematograph, 16 April 1913. Oddly, the same advertisement also noted that the film had “specifically composed music.”

119 O. Th. Stein in the journal Das Lichtbild-Theater 6 May 1913. Quoted and discussed in Uli Jung, “‘Kilometerfilme’: Umbrüche durch Einführung des Langfilms (1912-1914),” in Geschichte des Dokumentarischen Films in Deutschland Band I 1895-1918,
The most prominent historical films produced took as their subjects the two most mythologized patriotic wars of the nineteenth century: the wars of liberation against Napoleon in 1813, and wars of unification in the 1860s through 1871. The legacies of these wars underscored a national narrative of unity, military strength, and patriotic sacrifice. The latter was particularly prevalent in the subjects of two historical dramas released to coincide with the hundredth anniversary of the victory against Napoleon in 1813: *Theodor Körner* and *Königin Luise*, both produced by Deutsche Mutoskop und Biograph. *Theodor Körner* was a film biography about the nineteenth-century poet and ultimately, volunteer in the Lützow Freikorps. Killed in battle in August 1813, Körner’s life (and death) and poetry became potent symbols for German nationalists. Even during its production the film’s nationalist and educational value was apparent to observers. Commenting on the filming of some of the picture’s large battle scenes – done by a “skillful director” – a reporter for *Der Kinematograph* forecast that the film would “be joyfully received wherever courage and strength burn in German hearts.” Another writer opined that the film would be an ideal accompaniment for the celebrations of Sedan Day. Similarly, after the film’s release one reviewer noted efforts that had been

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ed. Uli Jung and Martin Loiperdinger (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 2005), 367. The criticized films were *Theodor Körner* and *Königin Luise*, discussed below.


121 “Streiflichter aus der deutschen Filmmetropole,” *Der Kinematograph*, 31 July 1912.

122 *Patriotische Kino-Vorstellungen,* *Lichtbild Bühne*, 7 September 1912. The exhibition of patriotic films to coincide with the celebrations commemorating the victory against the French in 1870 was noted as an especially good use of film. See “Sedanfeier im Kino,” *Lichtbild Bühne*, 9 September 1911, “Sedanfeiern im Kinematographen,” *Der Kinematograph*, 11 September 1912. Film in Sedan Day commemorations was also
made to show the film to schoolchildren. After all, a filmed version of German history was bound to have a “greater effect on the mind and spirit than the dry words in a reader.”

The other major film made about the wars of liberation was the multipart Der Film von der Königin Luise (also referred to as just Königin Luise), released in 1912/1913. A historical epic about the life of the much-revered Prussian Queen of the Napoleonic wars, its premiere included a special presentation for Kaiser Wilhelm II, his family, and other noble guests in the theatre of the new palace at Potsdam. Like Theodor Körner, its release was widely anticipated and had garnered attention in the film trade press even during its filming. A number of exterior scenes were filmed at the Brandenburg Gate, and even more notably, this required the cooperation and permission of both the military and the Berlin police. The film received its wide release in January 1913, its opening scheduled to coincide with Wilhelm’s birthday on January 27th.

Queen Luise held a special place in German historical imaginary. As Eva Giloi has explored, the cult around the Prussian Queen who stood up to Napoleon and then died tragically at only thirty-three years of age, persisted throughout the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century. Notably by Adolf Sellman as among the good uses of film. Sellmann, Der Kinematograph als Volkserzieher ?, 39

124 “Neue Films: Der Film von der Königin Luise,” Der Kinematograph, 19 March 1913.
125 “Der Film von der Königen Luise vor dem Kaiser,” Lichtbild Bühne, 21 December 1912. Screening films for Wilhelm and other royals at private residences rather than public theatres was standard practice. Uli Jung notes that in this respect the release of Richard Wagner, which did not have an “official” premiere, was the exception. See, Jung, “‘Kilometerfilme’: Umbrüche durch Einführung des Langfilms (1912-1914),” 367.
126 “Königin Luise: Historisches Film-Schauspiel von der Deutschen Mutoskopen-Gesellschaft,” Lichtbild Bühne, 19 October 1912. This cooperation was considered noteworthy by the author of the article.
the twentieth century. The resonance of the queen in the popular imagination, according to Giloi, was tied to a sense of her national martyrdom. That she had suffered and perhaps even died—it was commonly believed that her death was in part related to the difficulties of French occupation—for her country was a source of national sorrowful pride and fostered a compassion for the monarchy. Luise’s suffering had another legacy as well. Luise was, along with Frederick the Great and her own son, Wilhelm I, one of monarchs for whom

suffering and vulnerability were core factors of their legends, remaining ever present. Even after victorious wars of the 1860s and 1870s, hubristic triumphalism was tempered by an equally pronounced public strain of self-pity, martyrdom, and (wished-for) innocence. Re-emerging at the most inappropriate times, the self-perception of victimhood provided an alibi of righteousness to the Prussian wars of aggression.128

The films released to commemorate 1813 reminded Germans of a national victory, but they did so through narratives celebrating national martyrs.129

The pattern found in the discourse around films about 1813 is present in those about 1871 as well. The films highlighted patriotic service and sacrifice and their quality was appraised in terms of historical authenticity and educational and national purpose. One example is Aus Deutschlands Ruhmestagen 1870-71, produced by Deutsche

127 Giloi discusses the Luise cult as one aspect of her study of the material culture of the Prussian monarchy. See Eva Giloi, Monarchy, Myth, and Material Culture in Germany 1750-1950 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
Mutoskop und Biograph in 1913. The film covers the period from July 1870, when Prussian-French tensions culminated in a French declaration of war, until the proclamation of the German Empire in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles in January 1871. Historical figures are featured prominently, as the soon-to-be German Emperor Wilhelm I is a key figure in the film, as is Bismarck. The promotional material made clear that the history presented in the film was based on weighty historical scholarship, supported by hundreds of primary documents from the time. Many of the scenes were—allegedly—drawn directly from works of art, most notably, Anton von Werner’s *Proclamation of the German Empire*. The advertisement for the film that ran in the trade press highlighted that the film included the famous hall of mirrors scene. While a clear importance was placed on the respectability of the film, through its education value as a historical document, *Aus Deutschlands Ruhmestagen 1870/71* would have also appealed to those more accustomed to sensationalistic fare. As a war film, it was not without its depictions of action and violence. Judging by the titles, promotional stills, and summary, combat was very much a key feature. The titles also suggest that there were scenes of bombardment at the battle of Sedan as well. Moreover, the tone of battle scenes, as described in the promotional material, was darkly positive. As one battle is described:

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130 The exact relationship between this film and the one of a similar name released by the same company in 1911 and listed among Garncarz’s popular film list, is unclear. The 1913 version was referred to as the second edition and was 800m in length, while the 1911 version was only 450m. For this 1913 version both the censor card from the Berlin police censor and an accompanying promotional booklet with a film summary and stills survive and are held in the BAFA.
131 “*Aus Deutschlands Ruhmestagen 1870/71*” BAFA.
132 As King notes, adopting tableaus from famous works of art was a common strategy employed by film makers with pretensions towards artistic and reputable films. See King, “The Discourse of Art in Early Film,” 142.
133 Advertisement for *Aus Deutschlands Ruhmestagen 1870/71*, *Der Kinematograph*, 26 February 1913.
“The August sun shone on bloody days. Comrades fell, the earth reeked with blood: but forwards, ever forwards.”\(^{134}\) In addition to selling both historical fact and cinematic violence, the film presented a version of history that highlighted French aggression, the inevitability of German unification, and the valiant sacrifice of brave German soldiers for that cause.

The wars of unification were also part of another prominent historical film from the period, Eiko film’s *Bismarck* (1914). The narrative structure of the film was reminiscent of other “film-biographies” like *Martinus Luther*. The film begins with Bismarck’s birth, depicting his time as a student and then covers his political career through unification. Bismarck’s role as chancellor of Germany is also featured, highlighting the formation of the three-emperor’s alliance and his 70th birthday. The film ends with Wilhelm I’s death, Bismarck’s resignation and his final years in retirement.\(^{135}\)

In addition to Bismarck’s fame and his importance in recent German history, considerable effort was put into the promotion of the film. As with other historical films, the main message in this promotion was the film’s respectability. One advertisement called it “the best of the national Bismarck memorials,” and listed Bethmann Hollweg among a group of politicians and civic officials who endorsed the film.\(^{136}\) Another advertisement asked the question of “What are people saying about *Bismarck*?”\(^{137}\) The responding quotes came from an assembly of respectable figures: police officials, the

\(^{134}\) *Aus Deutschlands Ruhmestagen 1870/71*” BAFA.

\(^{135}\) This summary taken from a published overview of the film. “Bismarck,” *Lichtbild Bühne*, 14 February 1914.


\(^{137}\) Advertisements for *Bismarck* in *Der Kinematograph*, 4 February 1914, *Lichtbild Bühne*, 31 January 1914.
creator of the Hamburg Bismarck memorial, military officers, and educators.\footnote{The individuals were Kurt von Glasenapp in Berlin’s police headquarters, Baron von Seckendorff in the military, Dr. Hugo Lederer, the creator of the Hamburg Bismarck memorial, the “well-known” educators were Prof. Dr. Erich Wetzel, and Prof. Dr. Becker. Advertisements for Bismarck in Der Kinematograph, 4 February 1914; Lichtbild Bühne, 31 January 1914.} The connection between the film’s promotion and these bastions of Prussian authority is significant not only for the apparent alliance between the traditional power bases of the empire—police, military, university—but also because these voices further granted respectability to the film.\footnote{Not included among the list of impressed reviewers was Kaiser Wilhelm II. Given his prominence in the cinema and the number of special screenings of similar films (such as Königin Luise) held in his honor, this omission might be telling.} Bismarck added to a cinematic articulation of the German past, but it also contributed to the improving cultural legitimacy of the medium. To at least one contemporary, the film’s ambitions were realized. In praising the film, one reviewer predicated that the film would be beneficial in efforts to support the Bismarck national monument and that it would also bring “honor to the art of film.”\footnote{“Aus der Praxis: Bismarck,” Der Kinematograph, 25 March 1914.} Produced only a decade and a half after the death of its subject, Bismarck was one aspect of a wider celebration of the first chancellor in German popular culture. A sizeable Bismarck cult developed among the German public, which, as Robert Gerwarth has put it, “found expression in a vast outpouring of postcards and written ephemera, as well as in the naming of countless Bismarck streets and Bismarck schools.”\footnote{Robert Gerwarth, The Bismarck Myth: Weimar Germany and the Legacy of the Iron Chancellor (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), 21.} Hundreds of Bismarck memorials were also built in the years between his death and the outbreak of
the First World War. The film also played into the combative nationalist culture of late Wilhelmine Germany. For Kaiser Wilhelm, the shadow of the Iron Chancellor and the legacy of his dismissal persisted as a potent counter point to his own rule in the arsenal of radical nationalists critical of his policies. The film itself does not seem to have been particularly radical in its nationalism. But it did celebrate Bismarck’s place in the national narrative. While historical accuracy might have been important to filmmakers seeking out a legitimate audience, the use of national symbols was more fluid. When right-wing groups invoked Bismarck’s legacy it was as the embodiment of the Germany they envisioned: decisive and aggressive in its foreign policy, strong in its military, tough on “outsiders” at home. Ultimately, the body of historical films released between 1910 and 1914 helped define the German past, and in so doing, they defended the respectability of the German cinema.

Conclusion

A German national cinema emerged in the years after 1910. By the summer of 1914 Germany possessed both a national film audience and a nationalist film culture. The movie-going public was sizeable and had developed its own unique tastes in film stars and film types. Although an opposition of critics and reformers aligned against the cinema remained persistent and vocal in their anxieties over the influence of the cinema on the German public, the popularity of the medium continued to expand. The decision of

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142 Gerwarth suggests that at least 250 Bismarck memorials were erected in Germany, Austria, and Bohemia in this period. Perhaps twice that number were commissioned. Ibid., 22.
143 See the discussion in Richard E. Frankel, Bismarck’s Shadow: the Cult of Leadership and the Transformation of the German Right, 1898-1945 (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 49-86. See also Gerwarth, The Bismarck Myth, 11-29.
filmmakers like Deutsche Mutoskop und Biograph, Messter, and Eiko to produce
German historical films was integral to both the growth of domestic film production and
the growing respectability of cinema. Historical dramas were favored by audiences and
their scholarly aura and national purpose made them acceptable to critics.

Historical dramas also helped to shape Germany’s imagined community of
nationality. These films celebrated figures of cultural and historical significance and
events upon which the course of German history had, purportedly, turned. The image of
the German past that these films put into focus was one of Prussian achievements. The
plot of the Prussian-German nation’s historical narrative was more often than not moved
forward on the battlefield. The exceptionalism of individuals and the honor of national
sacrifice were its key themes. These ideas, and these films, would be mobilized again and
put to renewed patriotic purpose with the outbreak of the First World War.
Summing up historical literature on public opinion at the outbreak of the First World War, Roger Chickering has written, “despite all the attention that has been devoted to it, an air of hesitancy and inconclusiveness hovers over the question of popular responses in Germany and elsewhere to the outbreak of the war.”¹ Once assumptions of near-universal nationalist pride and martial enthusiasm seemed clear: the sizeable crowds marching down Unter den Linden (most famously) revealed an unqualified and ultimately tragic, enthusiasm for war. More nuanced and empirical research has refuted this generalization, providing judgments that are much more complex and reserved.² Germany’s streets were, at times, sites of celebration, but also home to much more anxiety and fear. An examination of the mass public demonstrations can nevertheless be illuminating: it can reveal a range of emotions, such as patriotism and panic, anxiety and enthusiasm; it can uncover the fractured pathways of communication, where insight, misinformation, certainty, and speculation traveled among the press and the general public.

public alike; it can demonstrate the fissures inside Wilhelmine society as protests against the war and against the socialist (and others) for being against the war belie the Kaiser’s claim that there were “only Germans.” The experience of August 1914 was multifaceted, and it was widespread. As this chapter explores, it extended into the interiors of German cinemas. Inside these cinemas, the venerated image of the nation as it was promoted by the film industry ran headlong into the anxieties about the national audience felt by state authorities.

The response of film producers and, perhaps more importantly, film exhibitors to hostilities proceeded along two interconnected trajectories: as a modern industry that was faced with an abrupt and radical shift in its business practices, and as a nationalist medium, imbued with a new patriotic purpose. This chapter explores how the film industry reacted to the sudden loss of the foreign films that it relied on so heavily, and to renewed criticism and calls for censorship. It also examines the new opportunities and audiences that the war opened. These opportunities were caused by the impact of the war experience, including the popular commitment and the mass anxiety that arose as Germany shifted into mobilization and violence. These trajectories are explored in the sections below.

The mood of excitement and anxiety felt throughout Germany in August 1914 manifested itself in film exhibition as well. In this moment the cinema portrayed itself as a site of civic engagement, a space of national belonging. In the film theatres, surrounded by other members of the national community and presented with images venerating national symbols, Germans could feel like Germans. The first section below explores the nature of this war mood in its historical and historiographic context. The second
examines the reaction of the film industry to the national mood in August 1914 through
the creation of new, specific, war programs. The popularity of patriotic films
demonstrates that film exhibitors attempted to re-stage their cinemas as key sites of
nationalist engagement. This patriotism also played a role in the most substantial
transformation in the German film industry since the travelling cinemas had given way to
permanent film theaters more than five years previously: the shift away from a reliance
on foreign films—a shift mandated both by the embargos of wartime and by calls for a
genuinely German national cinema. This process is explored in the third section. So is
censorship and the continued criticism levied at the film industry—a call to limit, if not
outright ban, the potentially damaging moral and political impact of the cinema during
the “serious” days of war. In addition to its function as a moral medium, the cinema was
also a form of mass communication. The fourth section of this chapter explores the place
of the newsreel as part of war reportage and as a means through which Germans could
access the experience of the front. Finally, this chapter will address the advent of
fictionalized films about the war, which like the war programs of the early weeks of the
conflict, looked to capitalize on morale and maintain national pride through narratives of
the meritorious actions of the national community. Ultimately, these expansions of
cinema’s national function simultaneously allowed for and were only possible through, a
similar shift in official perceptions. The outbreak of the war posed challenges to the film
industry. Ultimately, it provided an opportunity for greater prominence and enhanced
respectability.
Enthusiasm and Mobilization

Were Germans enthusiastic for war in 1914? Making sense of the role of the cinema in the first half of the war and in the period of mobilization more specifically necessitates some clarification of what the public mood was like. Did the German public openly embrace the opportunity for a nationalist crusade against their perceived enemies? Interwoven with sentiments of cause, guilt, and identity, responses to this question have been offered and contested from the moment the war broke out in 1914. The answer, according to most historians, however, is a qualified “no.”

The illusion of German enthusiasm for war in 1914 was shaped by several key factors. The first is the persistence of the claim that Germany’s leaders actively brought about the war. Seminal in this line of thinking was Fritz Fischer’s thesis concerning Germany’s grab for world power.³ In the 1960s, Fischer famously argued that Germany bore the greatest responsibility for the escalation of hostilities in 1914 as part of a policy meant to deflect social unrest to outside of the state and as a manifestation of a standing desire to assert German hegemony over much of continental Europe.⁴ Decades after Fischer, scholars have come to find an interpretation centered on failed diplomatic gambles over a limited war in the Balkans much more plausible.⁵ In a recent diplomatic

³ Christopher Clark, writing in 2012, commented that “a diluted version of the Fischer thesis still dominates in studies of Germany’s road to war.” See Clark, Sleepwalkers, 560.
⁵ See for example the discussions in Volker Berghahn, Imperial Germany, 1871-1914 - (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1994), 264-273, Roger Chickering, Imperial Germany
history of the outbreak of the war T.G Otte has concluded that although the summer of 1914 as a whole should best be seen as a failure of international relations, that “No-one in Berlin willed war; there was no criminal intent; [...] But their miscalculations and their reckless blunders brought about this war more than anything else.” Historians may now largely agree that Germany’s military, civilian, and royal leadership did not seek out war in 1914. But the stigma left by Fischer’s argument persists. In part this is due to its seeming continuity with the foreign policy of the Third Reich, and in part because the reaction of the German leadership at the declaration of war—glad congratulations in the War Ministry, Wilhelm ordering champagne—presents an easy picture of official war enthusiasm.

A second factor contributing to the illusion of war enthusiasm is the legacy of Prussian militarism. On the extreme, there were contemporaries such as General Friedrich von Bernhardi who believed that war was a “biological necessity of the first importance,” and the fundamental force in German history. “The military successes and the political position won by sword laid the foundation for an unparalleled material

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6 Otte, *July Crisis*, 519.
7 Recounted in Hastings, *Catastrophe 1914*, 80.
prosperity” Bernhardi wrote, “It is difficult to imagine how pitiable the progress of the
German people would have been had not these wars been brought about by a deliberate
policy.”

Much more common was the popular celebration of the military as a national
symbol, both as an institution in the present and for its achievements in the past—
including its portrayal in film. As the previous chapters have discussed, however, the
depth of these affinities are at best ambiguous.

Finally, the illusion of enthusiasm has been based in a selective (but evocative)
reading of the mood on German streets in July 1914. Beginning with the announcement
of the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia on July 23rd, perhaps peaking with Kaiser Wilhelm
II’s announcement of mobilization on July 31st, and carrying into the early weeks of the
war in August, Germany was consumed by the excitement of war. Crowds gathered in
public squares, patriotic banners were flown and nationalist songs were sung. Modris
Eksteins has described these “hectic and exuberant” days with aplomb:

Life has become a Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk in which material concerns and
all mundane matters are surpassed by a spiritual life force. / Elsewhere in
Munich, Breslau, or in Karlsruhe, the scenes are similar. Princes are mobbed. The
military is idolized. Churches are packed. Emotionally Germany has declared
war […]

However expressive it appears, our picture of this enthusiasm needs to be tempered.

Jeffrey Verhey has complicated this generalization and muddied any clear image
of war enthusiasm. Verhey has explored the reaction of the German people to war and the

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9 Ibid., 43.
10 As discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three.
11 Modris Eksteins, Rites of Spring, the Great War and the Birth of the Modern Era
(Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1989), 60. Most histories of the outbreak of the war note
that there were clear moments of enthusiasm in most of the major belligerent capitals.
12 Ibid., 62.
legacy of the ‘Spirit of 1914’ that sprang forth during those heady days.\textsuperscript{13} According to Verhey many press accounts, particularly those in the conservative and right-wing publications, often exaggerated the size of the jingoistic crowds and downplayed the scale of any dissenting voices, such as those organized by the Social Democrats in opposition to the war.\textsuperscript{14} Further, closer inspection suggests that it was inaccurate to hold that these crowds stood for all Germans. Many of the most boisterous crowds consisted disproportionately of students and other youth. Further, the crowds were a typically urban phenomenon, infrequently found in the countryside.\textsuperscript{15} More significantly, even when the crowds were large and more representative, they were not uniformly enthusiastic. There was support for the war and for the Kaiser, but there was also significant apprehension. The prospect of a major European war left many with a sense of dread. Curiosity likely also played its part. Most of these crowds had their beginnings in citizens assembling awaiting newspapers or waiting to hear announcements. It was by being part of these crowds that many Germans learned about the decisions of foreign states and the actions of their own government. The crowds’ conflicted and competing attitudes – patriotism, anxiety, and an appetite for information – created the need that the cinema sought to address. It is in response to the mentality of the crowd that the film industry’s mobilization for war took shape.

The outbreak of the war engendered in the German public not monolithic enthusiasm—in truth, perhaps very little of it—but a multitude of feelings. Of these,

\textsuperscript{13} Jeffrey Verhey, \textit{The Spirit of 1914}.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 34.
Alexander Watson has suggested that two were particularly acute: fear and solidarity. Germans were afraid to lose their own lives and to suffer the losses of their friends and families. Those on the home front worried about how they could make ends meet with many of their breadwinners mobilized. Among the population there was war panic and spy hysteria—the Danish film actress Asta Nielsen was attacked as a Russian spy on Unter den Linden. In the face of this fear, Germans were, as Watson suggests, “remarkably united.” For a moment at least, the class and confessional tensions in German society seemed less significant. Verhey argues that the real power of 1914 lay in the legacy it left in the minds of the German public. Central to the idea of an August-experience was the Burgfrieden. Under this “fortress truce” Germans put aside the many divisions that pulled against the fabric of German society in the name of unitary patriotic purpose. The Burgfrieden was made more palatable in 1914 because the German public believed themselves to be fighting a defensive war against a Russian aggressor. Whatever fateful and ill-conceived decisions in the German command had brought on the war, the Russians had mobilized first and thus allowed the Germans the excuse of a reactive, defensive war. As Max Hastings has written, “Russia’s mobilization solved a critical political problem.” As will be explored below, public perceptions of the war were

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16 Watson, Ring of Steel, 73.
17 See Hastings, Catastrophe 1914, 116.
18 Watson, Ring of Steel, 78.
19 Hastings, Catastrophe 1914, 81. Of course, the populations in the other belligerent states also believed themselves to be fighting a defensive war. See Neiberg, Dance of the Furies, 6. On the Russian threat, see also Cramer, “A World of Enemies,” 291, Hewitson, Germany and the Causes of the First World War, 7. For a fuller discussion of the development of anti-Russian sentiment in Imperial Germany, see Troy R.E. Paddock, Creating the Russian Peril (Rochester: Camden House, 2010). There is a long-standing argument that German foreign policy had been based on the perceptions of defensive wars and the Reich’s vulnerable position in the middle of Europe. This historical legacy
shaped by state control of the mass media. Irrespectively, in 1914 the German public did not blame their own government for the war; they were united in a Burgfrieden.20

The sentiment of a people unified in a fortress truce was a powerful one. This myth of the spirit of 1914 continued to shape German perceptions and expectations. It was conceived, according to Verhey, as “an experience and a goal, as a holy memory and a utopian future.”21 This was a legacy that would continue to inform German popular nationalist culture and national propaganda throughout the war. At the prospect of war the German people felt unity and pride, but also curiosity and fear. How the cinema attempted to respond to this mood will be discussed below.

The Right Films for the Right Time

On 5 August, 1914, in the first issue published after the declaration of war, the publishers of Der Kinematograph placed a notice on their journal’s first page. “Der Kinematograph will appear regularly throughout the war, despite the extraordinarily difficult circumstances.”22 Elaborating, the publisher and the editorial team committed themselves to this task, they explained, “first and foremost to meet the requirements of its role as an employment aid to the film industry, but also because these terrible events, of

of continually threatened “defeat and annihilation” was demonstrated from the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) through the Seven Years War (1756-1763) and on to the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815). See the discussion in Kevin Cramer, “A World of Enemies,” 270-298.
20 Watson, Ring of Steel, 71.
21 Verhey, Spirit of 1914, 3.
22 Der Kinematograph, 5 August 1914.
which we will be witness, will find their historical portrayal in film."\(^{23}\) The responsibility of the journal, as they understood it, was to the film industry, the cinematic medium, and the course of German history – past, present, and future. The beginning of the war was a mass event and the cinema a mass medium. The same journal described the role of the cinema in the first weeks of the war with the following image:

The public eagerly awaits definitive news. The streets are densely populated until the late hours of the night, and for many it is a highly welcome opportunity to be situated in a cinema, to spend a couple of hours in a film theatre, to appease, with the help of flickering images, angst, turmoil, and agitation. The colorful frames on the screen, the transition from serious to humorous, from education to amusement, from landscapes to military scenes, accommodate the mood of the human psyche, as hardly any other performance.\(^{24}\)

The public mood in August 1914 resulted, at times, in a turn away from the concerns and challenges of the everyday, a chance to be lost in the “flickering images.” But it also resulted in an expanded role for the cinema as a means to appease the “angst” of mobilization with nationalist feeling. How exactly this took place, what form this reaction took, can be discerned in part from an analysis of how the war affected cinema programming. That programming can be identified through an examination of advertisements aimed at film exhibitors and film audiences published in the film trade press. Such a study beginning in August 1914 demonstrates that the war mood present in German society was most certainly not absent from German screens. Advertisements for films and for film programs offer a clear view of what was playing on German screens and present a unique window through which to glimpse the tastes and desires of film audiences. Making equations between content and reception remains a risky proposition, particularly when studying the early cinema. Ultimately, the content of the

\(^{23}\) *Der Kinematograph*, 5 August 1914.

\(^{24}\) “Krieg und Kino,” *Der Kinematograph*, 5 August 1914.
advertisements were, at the very least, what was playing in the theatre and represents what distributors and exhibitors believed their audience wanted to see. That these programs continued to be offered over time suggests a degree of resonance. Cinema programming changed dramatically in August and September 1914 as exhibitors looked to increase the number of “patriotic” films they could offer to the public. These films were the same types that had helped to define Germany’s nationalist film culture in the years before the war: depictions of the Kaiser, the military, and the German national past.

In the first issue of Der Kinematograph published after German mobilization, the Express-Film company ran an advertisement under the banner “War! War!” in bold typeface. Without even the slightest pretense to anything other than the exploitation of the current situation, it suggested that “the moment is here for you to achieve unprecedented success with our film, Mit der Kamera in der Schlachtfront.” This was not a film about the war that had just begun; it was a year old and about the Second Balkan War (1913). The film had been first released in late 1913 “under the order of Kaiser Wilhelm II,” (according to its print promotion) and had promised audiences the “fearful atrocities of modern war.” As discussed in previous chapters, such an explicit blessing from the Kaiser provided the film with an aura of respectability. The print advertisement, however, made sure to highlight the film’s more sensational aspects. According to the advertisement, the film contained images of “bayonet-assaults,” “shell

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25 Der Kinematograph, 5 August 1914.
26 Advertisement for Mit der Kamera in der Schlachtfront, Der Kinematograph, 17 December 1917. The film seems to have been at least mildly popular with audiences because it was still being promoted in the trade press in February 1914. See the advertisement in Der Kinematograph 18 February 1914. For a general discussion of German foreign policy and the Balkan wars, see Edgar Feuchtwanger, Imperial Germany, 1850-1918 (London: Routledge, 2001), 162-164.
and shrapnel strikes,” “the dead and wounded in the line of fire,” along with the “selfless
actions of the Red Cross” as they worked to care for “the multiple awful wounds of
hundreds of poor soldiers.”

When promoting the film at the beginning of August 1914, the same visceral
elements were highlighted. The advertisement proceeded to explain how the political
crisis had put war at the forefront of everyone’s minds and showing *Mit der Kamera in
der Schlachtfrent*, with its depiction of all the “terrors, horrors and devastation,” of
modern war was an ideal way to capitalize on that fascination. Express-Film’s
approach to the war and to war films was blatantly exploitative. As it had the year before,
the company tried to sell the horrible spectacle of war. Express-Film anticipated the
public fascination with the war. The argument could be made, however, that they grossly
misjudged how to properly capitalize on that feeling. This form of sensationalistic
marketing was not repeated in the other advertisements for films released in the first
weeks of the war.

A more typical industry response could be seen three days later, in the August 8th
issue of *Lichtbild Bühne*. Here, Monopolfilm-Vetriebs-Gesellschaft m.b.H and
Hanewacker & Scheier, a film distribution company with offices in Munich, Berlin and

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27 Advertisement for *Mit der Kamera in der Schlachtfrent*, *Der Kinematograph*, 17
December 1917.
28 *Der Kinematograph*, 5 August 1914.
29 Or in the subsequent promotion of *Mit der Kamera in der Schlachtfrent*. By mid
September, the advertisement for the film noted only that it was a “war film” and that it
was “authentic.” Advertisement for *Mit der Kamera in der Schlachtfrent / Mit der
Kamera im Ewigen Eis*, *Der Kinematograph*, 16 September 1914. Express-Film was not
alone in its attempt to capitalize on the current war fever by promoting whatever war
films were at their disposal. Engelke & Co. G.m.b.H similarly advertised their “war
drama” *Die Schlacht bei Gettysburg*. Advertisement for *Die Schlacht bei Gettysburg,
Lichtbild Bühne*, 5 September 1914.
Düsseldorf, took out a two-page advertisement. Under the title of “serious words in a serious hour,” the advertisement explained how wartime required a change in film programming, a change that they generously offered to sell in the form of an “original war program.”

Even as “the sons of the fatherland marched East and West against Germany’s enemies [...] the cinema had to perform its highest and most difficult task [...]. We must keep the cinemas open and recognize that in this serious situation a depressed nation is looking for special programming to distract from its worries.”

To facilitate their public duty they even offered a personalized courier to insure delivery and relieve any fears that anxious theatre owners might have had over the uncertainty of postal service during general mobilization. Instead of a reliance on the visual spectacle of violent warfare, the central message of the advertisement was the cinema had a serious and respectable purpose.

Four films made up Monopolfilm-Vetrieb-Gesellschaft m.b.H and Hanewacker & Scheier’s “original war program”: Unsere Marine, which promised “colorful images of the German naval fleet;” Lieb Vaterland magst ruhig sein!, a collection of war and soldier images from 1768 through to 1914; Der Ueberfall auf Schloß Boncourt, a fiction film about the heroic actions of a guard officer during the 1870/71 Franco-Prussian War.

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30 Lichtbild Bühne, 8 August 1914. See also a similar advertisement in Der Kinematograph, 19 August 1914. This latter advertisement also assured exhibitors that the firm’s rental rates were “as cheap as possible.” The rates were on a sliding scale depending on the total number of weeks the film was loaned. A theatre renting the film for one week would pay twenty-seven percent, but at the other end of the scale, one renting for eight weeks would only pay seven percent.

31 Lichtbild Bühne, 8 August 1914.

32 Ibid.
that led to German unification; and Deutsche Disziplin, a military parody. Although certainly a diverse collection, which was a common format for early film programs, these films were all linked through their depictions of the German military and the German military past. What the company offered for the seriousness of the moment was not an avoidance of reality—as “distraction” is sometimes understood—but rather a version of reality that was filled with romanticized and heightened version of national purpose.

Whereas Express-Film had hoped to capitalize on a voyeuristic fascination, Monopolfilm-Vetriebs-Gesellschaft m.b.H and Hanewacker & Scheier looked to profit by positioning their films in the nationalist euphoria of the moment. The company attested to the success of their approach in an advertisement in the trade press a month later. Text contained within the outline of an iron cross informed readers that “due to its enormous success,” additional copies of the war program were being made. Moreover, the film titles were not included, suggesting that the war program itself had become the main selling feature. An accompanying advertisement for the same company promoted a

33 Lichtbild Bühne, 8 August 1914, Der Kinematograph, 19 August 1914. Of the films Der Ueberfall auf Schloß Boncourt was the longest at 1100m, Lieb Vaterland magst Ruhig sein! was 800m, Unsere Marine was 300m, and Deutsche Disziplin was 140m.


35 Advertisement for Monopolfilm-Vetriebs-Gesellschaft m.b.H and Hanewacker & Scheier, Der Kinematograph, 2 September 1914.
slide show of ten “prominent sayings in a time of greatness,” accompanied with “portraits by famous painters of patriotic history and the present glorious days.” Patriotic slide shows with nationalist themes were also part of war programs. The Carl Rudolph Monopolfilm advertised images of the Kaiser, the military, and the colonies as ideal for the “serious iron times.” The titles of these series reinforced the perception of a defensive war. In addition to *S.M.S Kreuzer Ariade*, and *Das Kaiserbild 1914*, the colonial images of *Kiautschou, die bedrohte Colonialperle*, and *Unsere bedrohten Kolonien in Afrika* were also available.

The notion that the cinema could be put to “serious” purposes was a common feature in film advertising in August and September 1914. “Serious” films need not have been explicitly nationalist ones, as in the war programs; quality films that uplifted the national audience were also marketed as appropriate. Doubtless, what companies attempted to sell as apropos was not unrelated to what films were available to them. The Nordische Film Co. declared in its advertising: “in these difficult times, the cinema also

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37 Advertisement for Carl Rudolph Monopolfilm, *Lichtbild Bühne*, 5 September 1914. The company also insisted that its films were only German, America, or from friendly countries.
38 Ibid.
39 The need to justify the medium as serious was tied to a perception, explored in Chapter One and Chapter Three above, that film was a frivolous entertainment activity. Such frivolity was not befitting the mood of mobilization. Each and every insistence that films were serious was also an argument against closing the cinemas. See the discussion in the next section below.
40 Ludwig Gottschalk, for example, promoted, alongside the short actuality film *Die Kriegsbereitschaft unseres Heeres*, a collection of their most popular titles. Gottschalk insisted that the films, including *Cleopatra, Das fremde Mädchen, Frau Satan, Excentric Club*, and *Shylock von Krakau*, were “cheap” and could be “played during the war to great success” Advertisement for Düsseldorfer Film-Manufaktur Ludwig Gottschalk, *Der Kinematograph*, 29 September 1914.
has a mission.” The company further elaborated that in order to be “comforting and uplifting to the many thousands with anxious concerns about the Fatherland and their loved ones in the field” it was up to exhibitors “to show only good, first-class films.” The insistence that quality films could be used as a national balm suggests the extent to which the pre-war discourse on the worth of film had been internalized within the film industry.

The bulk of the targeted war programming followed the pattern seen in the Monopolfilm-Vetriebs-Gesellschaft m.b.H and Hanewacker & Scheier program. Non-fiction films depicting military and imperial themes and historical dramas about Germany’s military past continued to define the film industry’s reaction to the outbreak of the war. Although the war program of several short films was common in these early days, longer films were also appropriate war programming. An advertisement that ran for the drama *Kriegsgetraut* in the August 29th issue of *Lichtbild Bühne* only provided the title, the label that it was a “great patriotic film in 2 acts,” and a reminder to exhibitors that the film was “newly completed and highly topical.” Produced by Heinrich Bolten-Baechkes Film Fabrikation, the film was distributed by Martin Dentler G.m.b.H. Martin Dentler advertised *Kriegsgetraut* along with other films such as the “1870-1871 war drama” *Im Feindesland*, and the “patriotic drama of Prussia’s difficult times” *Das treue

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42 Ibid.
43 For contemporary commentary on war programs, see “Das Programm in Kriegszeiten,” *Der Kinematograph*, 30 September 1914.
44 *Lichtbild-Bühne*, 29 August 1914.
“Kriegsbilder.” The company’s message to theatre owners was that “these are the films which must be shown in every German theatre,” because they were “the right films for the right time.”

Deutsche Mutoskop and Biograph, which produced both *Im Feindesland* and *Das treue deutsche Herz* and sold the distribution rights to Martin Dentler, was well-positioned to capitalize on the patriotic sentiments of the early weeks of the war. In the years before the war, the company had produced such popular German historical epics as *Theodor Körner*, the two versions of *Aus Deutschlands Ruhmestagen 1870-1871*, *Pro Patria*, and *Wilhelm Tell*. These films were all re-released and promoted in the early weeks of the war. The company’s own advertising explained that they “recommend especially for the current time, patriotic films,” which they had in strong supply. In addition to their longer historical dramas, Deutsche Mutoskop also promoted several shorter non-fiction actuality films of the German military. Some of these, like the naval films *Manöver der Deutschen Hochseeflotte* and *Deutsche Matrosen an Bord*, had been originally released as long ago as 1910. Others, like *Des großen Königs Friedrich II v. Preussen 200 jährige Geburtstagfeier zu Potsdam am 24 Januar 1912* and the 1913 *Herbstübung des Husaren-Regiments v. Zieten in Rathenow* were more recent.

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46 Advertisements for Martin Dentler G.m.b.H in *Lichtbild Bühne*, 5 September 1914, *Der Kinematograph*, 16 September 1914. Both films were produced by Deutsche Mutoskop und Biograph and Martin Dentler held the distribution rights for both for all of Germany.
47 *Der Kinematograph*, 16 September 1914.
48 *Lichtbild Bühne*, 5 September 1914.
50 All four films were Deutsche Mutoskop und Biograph productions.
Perhaps the film that resonated more than any other, at least according to its publicity, was Eiko’s historical epic, Bismarck. The film company began advertising the film in the August 22nd issue of Lichtbild Bühne and on the cover of the August 26th issue of Der Kinematograph. These advertisements explained that Eiko had “the most suitable and successful film for these serious days of war—Bismarck.”51 Indeed, the film about the life and career of the chancellor responsible for German unification was the most frequently and prominently advertised film during the first few months of the war. The advertisement placed as late as in the November 12th issue of the Der Kinematograph called it simply “the most effective film of the present.”52 The popularity of the Bismarck film was aligned with the broader symbolic use of the Iron Chancellor in 1914. Robert Gerwarth has noted how the “‘spirit of 1914’ was quick to appropriate the Bismarck myth.”53 For many contemporaries, the war, particularly the war against France, was seen as a defense of the nation that Bismarck had made. Those marching bravely off to war did so believing that they had “seized the sword that Bismarck had forged.”54

The motivations behind war programming were not merely a make-shift response. A renewed and increased public interest in films depicting the military, the monarchy and the glories of the German past conforms to what we already know about other symbolic activities that Germans took part in during the summer of 1914. In July and August

51 Lichtbild Bühne, 22 August 1914, Der Kinematograph, 26 August 1914. See also, “Geschäftliches: Der ‘Bismarck’ Film,” Lichtbild Bühne, 22 August 1914.
52 Der Kinematograph, 12 November 1914. Bismarck continued to be available for exhibition throughout the war. See the advertisements in Der Kinematograph, 31 March 1915, Der Kinematograph, 3 August 1915.
54 Ibid., 24.
crowds frequently congregated at statues, government buildings and other national sites. More patriotic songs were sung and more imperial flags flown – even in working class areas long resistant to the pomp of nationalist culture.\textsuperscript{55} The turn towards the German past to find justifications for the present was as much the product of historical scholarship as popular mythmaking.\textsuperscript{56} The cinema became a part of the articulation of this symbolic vocabulary of heightened nationalism. The movie theatre became a place where Germans could come together and take part physically and, perhaps emotionally, in a larger patriotic ritual. In December 1914, the Hamburg filmmaker A. F. Döring made a number of films that “illustrated” German lieder.\textsuperscript{57} Invoking the sentiments of a traditional national folk community, the films were aimed to prompt audiences into participating in public nationalistic ritual activity.

In this way the German film industry performed a function similar to those industries in other belligerent nations at the time. In Britain, cinema owners who had heard many of the same criticisms about the value of their medium and the appropriateness of their theatres as their German colleagues worked diligently to make their establishments useful to the war effort.\textsuperscript{58} For Canada, exhibitors likewise turned

\textsuperscript{55} See Verhey, \textit{The Spirit of 1914}.
\textsuperscript{57} “Das deutsche Volkslied im Film.” \textit{Der Kinematograph}, 16 December 1914.
\textsuperscript{58} Theatres were used in recruiting drives, for patriotic film screenings, and for special screenings for soldiers. Some theatres even presented what were called Roll of Honor Films, which listed the names of local men who had enlisted (at first) or later, been killed in action. See Michael Hammond and Michael Williams, “Goodbye to All That or Business as Usual? History and Memory of the Great War in the British Cinema,” in \textit{British Cinema and the Great War}, ed. Michael Hammond and Michael Williams (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2011), 3-5.
cinema-going into a patriotic event beginning in August 1914.\textsuperscript{59} In her work on the cinema in the United States during the First World War, Leslie Midkiff DeBauche has elaborated in detail on the ways cinemas became sites of national engagement, staged in patriotic décor, featuring patriotic films and welcoming public speakers and war recruiters.\textsuperscript{60} DeBauche considers this part of what she terms “practical patriotism” – national service that was also mutually beneficial to the film industry. For DeBauche that give and take is vital. As much as the film industry may have wanted to act in a patriotic fashion, it was also aware of itself as a business. As the early American studio mogul Adolph Zukor put it, “In giving of the best that is in us, we shall be best serving ourselves and our industry.”\textsuperscript{61} Or as DeBauche herself has summed it up, “Service would have a pay check.”\textsuperscript{62}

The choice of “practical patriotism” was true in Germany as well. The frequency with which the seriousness of the moment was invoked in the promotions for war programming was surpassed only by references to how affordable or profitable the available films would be (ideally, both). The film industry faced a number of challenges to its operating model in August 1914. It was not clear to those involved that it was not their very existence at stake. These challenges are explored in the following section. But

\textsuperscript{59} Paul S. Moore, \textit{Now Playing: Early Movie-Going and the Regulation of Fun} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008) 199-224. Moore has suggested that through their own war-programs and through specific fund-raising nights, the cinema became part of not only the war experience but also the war effort. His conclusions about this development is that, “The film industry and local showmen made movie going into an act of citizenship, but in ways attuned to the local, and now national, culture of their setting.” Moore, \textit{Now Playing}, 210.

\textsuperscript{60} Leslie Midkiff DeBauche, \textit{Reel Patriotism: the Movies and World War I} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 75-103.

\textsuperscript{61} Quoted in ibid., 195.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
that there were such financial incentives does not make the national function of the cinema in the early weeks of the war any less meaningful.

German Films in German Theaters

While war programming represented the film industry’s own contribution to the nationalist mood of the early weeks of the war, it was by no means a forgone conclusion that there would be any role for cinema at all. To many in German society, cinema was seen as trivial entertainment tainted with foreign influences. The long-standing anxieties vocalized by cinema reformers before the war were given a heightened pitch in the new social and political climate. As a result, there were calls to close cinemas along with other frivolous and distracting entertainments.63 As seen above, film distributors and exhibitors responded to these allegations by insisting on the solemn and serious nature of their products. Defenders of film in the trade press proclaimed the need, when “times are difficult and grief-stricken” for a medium already capable of “diversion and distraction” to “grow, under the given conditions, new duties and new rewarding tasks.”64 The perception that the cinema was a foreign medium, reinforced by the sizeable share of the industry that had belonged to foreign film companies before the war, was a similarly damning association. But it was one that the isolation of the German film market at the outbreak of the war at least helped to diminish.

63 Hence Monopolfilm-Vetriebs-Gesellschaft m.b.H and Hanewacker & Scheier’s insistence that the cinemas be kept open.
64 “Schliesst die Kinos nicht!: Die Aufgabe der deutschen Filmindustrie,” Der Kinematograph, 19 August 1914.
With the outbreak of the war, Germany fell under martial law. Under the 1851 Prussian siege laws that came into effect, twenty-four army commanders, one for each of Germany’s military districts, became responsible for law enforcement in their respective areas. Complicating matters further was that the twenty-four districts did not align with the pre-existing civilian administrative boundaries. Although the military deputies held the power, they could not administer without the aid of the local governments whose own authority could lie in whole or in part within the military district. In addition to the maintenance of public order and the recruitment of new soldiers, matters such as transportation and censorship were also responsibilities of the military commanders. On this latter point, the siege law allowed for the suspension of “the right to express opinion freely by word, print, or picture.” Of word, print, or picture, authorities were primarily concerned with the first two, and mainly concerned with the publication of information that might affect morale or endanger military secrecy. As Gary Stark explains in his work on literary censorship in Imperial Germany, “Police censors were instructed by military authorities to intervene against any printed matter that undermined the war effort by “disturbing the [Burgfrieden].” While the publication of sensitive information or anti-war (and anti-state) views might have been the obvious intended target, there was nevertheless a considerable amount of leeway left for interpretation and enforcement.

On August 1st the publishers who operated the press were given a memorandum from the

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65 For this system and the problems it engendered, see Chickering, Imperial Germany and the Great War, 33-34.
66 Quoted in David Welch, Germany, Propaganda and Total War, 1914-1918 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 30.
68 As Stark writes, “State control of printed material expanded enormously during World War I, while judicial restraints on censors all but disappeared.” Ibid., 7.
military. They were reminded of the invaluable role they played in the nation and the heavy responsibility they bore to the public and the state. They were advised to err on the side of caution, because “refraining unselfishly from publishing military reports […] will spare the military and naval authorities the necessity of taking legal action.”69 Official information on the war was to come from the military briefings given every few days in Berlin.

Although the printed press was the primary object of authorities’ interest, the cinema was also targeted. Of special concern was any footage taken of mobilization and troop movements. Scenes of departing troops were popular with filmmakers because they were topical content that was also locally accessible. Authorities, on the other hand, were concerned with what uses these images might be put to by their enemies. Cameras were not permitted to film marching troops in Dresden or street scenes in Hamburg.70 Some restrictions were placed on filming in streets and public places in Berlin.71 Readers of Lichtbild Bühne were similarly informed on August 15th that all photography and cinematography of military movements of any sort would result in immediate arrest and the confiscation of equipment.72 As this pronouncement indicates, the restrictions placed

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69 Quoted in Welch, Germany, Propaganda and Total War, 31. The main areas of concern for the military were reports of troop location, troop movement, troop size, the state of infrastructure and military equipment, and any war ships that had been damaged. See Troy R.E. Paddock, “German Propaganda: The Limits of Gerechtigkeit,” in Troy R.E. Paddock, ed. A Call to Arms: Propaganda, Public Opinion, and Newspapers in the Great War (Westport: Praeger, 2004), 117.
70 Mühl-Benninghaus, “German Film Censorship,” 74.
72 Lichtbild Bühne, 15 August 1914.
on filming were by and large extensions of policies also in place regarding still photography.

The preeminent concern of authorities was with how the cinema might impact the public mood. The ministry of war made this point clear to its deputies and relevant civilian authorities, but not until December 1914. The memorandum forwarded explained that,

the cinematographic theatre presents many pieces which, because of their superficiality and shallowness, are unsuited for the seriousness of our times […] How much of the people’s healthy common sense is destroyed by such poison? On the other hand, by presenting pictures of the fatherland and other noble images of a serious or a humorous nature, these well-frequented theatres could contribute to the cultivation and preservation of a love for the fatherland and valuable morals in general.73

The Berlin police had expressed the same concern in August, when they warned theatre owners to be careful in their programming. Foreshadowing the government concerns four months later, the police informed exhibitors that their programs would need to match “the seriousness of the time and the patriotic feelings of the public.”74 The cinema could work against the nation and even undermine the war effort if it distracted the public from the sober needs of the moment or failed to contribute to the patriotic euphoria of the populace. The risks of running afoul of the authorities, of failing to live up to their expectations, were severe. The deputy commanders had the power to close the cinemas. Out of fears that the cinema was a negative influence, some of them did just that. In Munich theatres were closed for ten days in August. Theatres in Strasbourg were also closed in August, but they remained closed for two months.75 It should not be surprising,

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73 Quoted in Mühl-Benninghaus, “German Film Censorship,” 75.
74 “Was die ‘L.B.B.’ erzählt.” Lichtbild Bühne, 15 August 1914.
75 Mühl-Benninghaus, “German Film Censorship,” 74.
then, that the language used by film companies in their advertising was the same as that expressed in the authorities’ concerns.

Another criticism levied was that the cinema was a “French” invention. The heavy investment of French companies in the German market before the war and the widely held view of the role played by Frenchmen like the Lumière brothers in the invention and pioneering of the medium influenced this association. Alfred Mellini, frequent contributor in *Lichtbild Bühne* made the argument that even though the cinema was a French invention, it should not be discarded simply on that basis. Ultimately, the harshest calls to close the cinemas were not realized. By the second week of hostilities the cinemas were again widely open for business, and “wanting to entertain the public with patriotic films at cheap ticket prices.” The heavy promotion of historical and nationalist films that followed addressed the immediate problems of the moment, but other, pressing problems remained to be addressed.

The war closed the borders of a transnational film business. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the domestic film industry was already making rapid progress by 1913, doubling its relative market share in pure film volume (if not in actual numbers of

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76 Alfred Mellini, “Die Politik und der Film,” *Lichtbild-Bühne*, 29 August 1914.
77 “Ruhiges Blut bewahren!” *Lichtbild Bühne*, 8 August 1914.
78 The major exception in this was the continued import of Danish films, with the Nordisk Films Kompagni remaining a strong presence in the German film market. Due to Denmark’s neutrality and the company’s existing investments in Germany, Nordisk was a major player in the wartime film industry, even making propaganda films for German audiences. See Isak Thorsen, “Nordisk Films Kompagni Will Now Become the Biggest in the World,” *Film History* 22.4 (2010): 464-478. Nordisk’s continued role was a source of some apprehension for within the film industry, government and state authorities. This anxiety culminated with the company being absorbed into Ufa in 1917. See the discussion in the following chapter. See also, Evelyn Hampicke, “The Danish Influence: David Oliver and Nordisk in Germany,” in *A Second Life: German Cinema’s First Decades*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser with Michael Wedel (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 72- 78.
films). But with the war, many foreign producers were pushed out and ultimately banned from the German marketplace. Danish filmmaker Ole Olsen, founder of the Nordisk Film Kompagni was well aware of the patriotic turn in Berlin at the outbreak of the war:

What enthusiasm! People walked in the streets and cheered. In the cafés people stood up and sang the national anthem, and God have mercy on the poor foreigner who didn’t understand what had happened and remained sitting. He was kicked out of the door before you could say knife.  

Although Olsen was able to maintain his business relationship in Germany, many other formerly influential foreign companies were not. The German branch of the French Pathé company, among the largest and most dominant film companies in the world, was put into receivership in September 1914 and its film library sold to the German Projektions-AG Union (PAGU).

Nationalist sentiment could impact the reception of any foreign-made film, but it affected films from enemy countries most fiercely. Companies that were foreign-owned but not enemy-owned maintained their access, but faced difficulties of transportation – particularly from the United States – and a patriotic atmosphere. Although French and English films were no longer reaching the German market, many older films were still in circulation, as demonstrated by PAGU’s purchase of Pathé’s films. Already at the beginning of September there were calls to rid German theatres of “enemy” films. In a letter published in Der Kinematograph at the beginning of September, one observer urged German distributors and theatre owners to cease their trade in English and French films.

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79 “Deutscher Film-Export,” Lichtbild-Bühne, 22 November 1913.
80 Quoted by Isak Thorsen, “Nordisk Films Kompagni will now become the Biggest in the World,” 464.
films, or “provisionally, at least, not to buy any more.”

The author refuted the notion that French films were necessary for any acceptable film program and argued that there were sufficient “first-class” film companies already in Germany to meet demand. Many theatres began advertising that they refused to play films made by Germany’s enemies. For those who were not quick to follow this lead, an organization called the Deutsche Filmbund requested of theatre owners that they agree to no longer exhibit films of French, English, or Japanese origin.

For domestic film producers, the outbreak of the war and the nationalist mood that followed were an extremely favorable turn of events. Almost overnight the companies that had held the controlling share of the market were excluded from it, creating an unprecedented opportunity for existing and would-be German producers. This shift was not lost on many within the film industry and the film trade press. Articles with titles such as “the Benefits of the War for Film Theatres” speculated on the new opportunities.

There were challenges as well. The domestic industry, already undersized, was further weakened by the loss of many of the young men who worked in production and exhibition to mobilization. With the industry so imperiled, many theatre

83 Ibid.
85 “Aus der Praxis, Der Kinematograph, 9 September 1914.
86 “Die Vorteile durch den Krieg für das Kinotheater,” Der Kinematograph, 14 October 1914.
87 Another difficulty, and one often overlooked in histories that over-rely on narratives about the weakness of the German film industry before 1914, is that the war also cost
owners considered closing their movie houses. In response, articles in the film trade press attempted to dissuade this course of action and to offer advice on how to remain operational in these difficult times. Prominent among these suggestions, exhibitors were encouraged to adopt the war program – to re-use footage with national themes and films representing the glorious German past. Further, the authors in the trade press implored exhibitors to stay open, insisting that it was their duty to do so.

The changes experienced by the German film industry in the early weeks of the war were seen not only in economic terms, but it national ones as well. Theatre owners had a national obligation to remain in business and serve the film-going needs of the national audience. Most dramatically, the retreat of French film companies in 1914 was seen as reminiscent of another French defeat a century prior. One article in *Lichtbild Bühne* described the situation as, a “war of liberation against the French thumbscrews.”

Just as Napoleon and the French army had occupied and oppressed the German lands before his defeat in 1815, French film companies had exerted their will on German audiences for far too long. With the outbreak of the war, the same author continued, “there is now through our industry a liberating sigh, a casting off of the foreign yoke […] now the time will come when a German public will be able to watch German films in German theatres.”

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German film companies many of their export markets. According to one article, half of the filmmaking equipment produced in Germany before the war was destined for export markets. “Aus der Praxis: Die kinematographische Industrie,” *Der Kinematograph* 9 December 1914. See also, “Verlorene Exportgebiete der deutschen Kino- und Photo-Industrie,” *Der Kinematograph*, 6 January 1915.


Reporting the War: Actuality and the Newsreel

While authorities were concerned that the fiction films shown in German theatres displayed the appropriate level of seriousness, military officials in particular had special concerns for non-fiction films. As the regulations against filming military personnel that were enacted in August 1914 demonstrated, the military authorities believed that inadequately censored film images of mobilizations, movements and maneuvers could have damaging effects. From a security standpoint a dangerous possibility was that Germany’s enemies could use film as a source of information. Operating under the assumption that foreign spies operated not only inside the neutral countries where German films would be exported but also within Germany itself, the military wanted to exert considerable control over what film was shot in order to remain vigilant against possible espionage. The determined vigilance of the military authorities, however, was in direct opposition to the desires of a large portion of the German public. This public on the home front wanted to see the war for themselves as best they could. On a personal level, many likely wanted to know what their friends and relatives on the fronts were experiencing. On a political level, Germans wanted to be updated on how the war effort was progressing. According to some observers, the cinema had already become the ideal medium to capture the current moment. As one article in Der Kinematograph expressed it:

The cinema is the most splendid mirror of our time, these days more than ever

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91 Oskar Messter suggests that this was a significant concern. Oskar Messter, Mein Weg mit dem Film (Berlin: Max Hesses Verlag, 1936), 128.
previously. What moves our German people until the deepest depths of its soul, what takes its full intellectual interest in aspiration, arouses its passions, determines its thoughts and feelings, we find it on a white wall crystallized into a clear, lucid image. Against the powerful contemporary events since the outbreak of the war must all others of life’s interests, that earlier occupied us more or less, step far into the background. In the cinema, this distinctive spirit of the times is documented through the dominant position of current films over all others.\(^\text{92}\)

In the early months of the war the newsreel emerged as solution to both the concerns of the military authorities that images of the front be tightly regulated and the desire by the population to remain informed.

Newsreels were a standard part of the cinema-going experience before 1914. As discussed in previous chapters, non-fiction actuality films of what were considered to be newsworthy events had been in circulation from some of the very first film exhibitions in the 1890s. By 1910, many of the large international film companies had established sophisticated networks to facilitate the filming, editing, and regular—often weekly—distribution of new newsreels.\(^\text{93}\) As in other aspects, it was French companies that were the main distributors of newsreels in Germany before 1914. French firms Pathé, Gaumont, and Éclair had begun producing newsreels in 1908, deciding to assemble their short current event films into slightly longer collections.\(^\text{94}\) In Germany before the war

\(^{92}\) “Zeitgemässe Films in den Berliner Theatern,” *Der Kinematograph*, 7 October 1914. The article proceeded to elaborate that actuality should not be only for the revue or newsreel, but for longer and hits films.

\(^{93}\) Ibid.


these French firms produced the most prominent and widely-viewed newsreels.\textsuperscript{95} The first German-owned newsreel premiered in late 1911. Der Tag im Film called itself “the first daily German cinematic reporting,” and was produced by Express-Film.\textsuperscript{96} It was more than two years before the second German newsreel, the Eiko-Woche, launched in March 1914. The Eiko-Woche was produced by Eiko-Film and owned by August Scherl, whose other business interests included the Berliner-Lokal Anzeiger newspaper.\textsuperscript{97} After the outbreak of the war forced the French newsreels out of the German market, their place was taken by several German owned-companies. Of these, only two survived throughout the war years, Eiko-Woche, and the Messter-Woche. The latter was founded in September 1914 and produced by the influential inventor and businessman Oskar Messter.\textsuperscript{98}

German newsreels received a newfound popularity with the outbreak of the war. While the wartime newsreels built upon an already familiar form and established practice, their appeal, one might even speculate their role, was new. The extent to which they were advertised in the trade press, at least, suggests as much.\textsuperscript{99} The war was without question the most significant and all-encompassing event that Germans had experienced.

\textsuperscript{95} Messter, Mein Weg mit dem Film, 129. See also, Uli Jung, “Von der >Ansicht< zum dokumentarischen Genre,” in Geschichte des Dokumentarischen Films in Deutschland Band I: Kaiserreich, ed. Uli Jung and Martin Loiperdinger, (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 2005), 239.

\textsuperscript{96} Jung, “Von der >Ansicht< zum dokumentarischen Genre,” 240-241, 243-244.

\textsuperscript{97} Upon its inception Eiko was advertised as the “living Berliner-Lokal Anzeiger.” For an overview of the Eiko-Woche, see Jung, “Von der >Ansicht< zum dokumentarischen Genre,” 244-248.

\textsuperscript{98} For an overview of the Messter-Woche, see Jung, “Von der >Ansicht< zum dokumentarischen Genre,” 248-252.

\textsuperscript{99} Newsreels had not been prominently promoted before the outbreak of the war. From August 1914 on, however, advertisements, particularly those for the Eiko-Woche and the Messter-Woche were placed prominently in publications such as Der Kinematograph and Lichtbild Bühne.
in a generation—certainly since the invention of the cinema. Film companies rushed in the early weeks of the war to shoot, distribute, and exhibit anything which could be labeled war editions, issues, reports and the like. Even with the strict regulations imposed by the military authorities, many companies still shot films of soldiers in the streets, public speeches, and government officials and passed those off as images of the war.

The first war newsreel was produced by Eiko. As a pre-existing newsreel producer, they were well-positioned to take advantage of both the departure of the French companies from the market and the public’s appetite for war footage. The advertisement that the company ran in the 29 August issue of Lichtbild Bühne highlighted the range of relevant films offered by the company, as well as the limits of early newsreel production. Under a title that assured exhibitors that they suffered from “no shortage of actualities,” Eiko listed off fourteen different offerings from their “war edition.” These films portrayed various aspects of the war experience thus far. Both this experience and Eiko’s access to it, were limited. The following films were included in the “war edition” of the Eiko-Woche:

*Ansprache des Kaisers vom Balkon des königlichen Schlosses*
*Berlin während der Mobilmachung*
*Die Verkündigung des Kriegszustandes*
*Die Abgeordneten verlassen nach der Reichstagssitzung das Schloss*
*Der Kaiser in Felduniform auf dem Weg zu Gottesdienst im Dom*
*Frauen im Dienst der Straßenbahn*
*Die Franzer ziehen ins Feld*
*Auszug der Alexander*
*In Neu-Babelsberg werden vom Roten Kreuz die letzten Vorbereitungen getroffen*
*Die letzte Besichtigung der Königs-Ulanen und der 73er in Hannover durch den Kaiser*

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100 For example, “The Newest Photography from the Scene of the War,” Advertisement for Fried’s Film Kassenmagneten, Lichtbild Bühne, 5 September 1914.
101 Advertisement for Eiko-Film, Lichtbild Bühne, 29 August 1914.
These films included footage of Wilhelm II’s public appearances, street scenes of Berlin during mobilization, and women volunteering for the war effort. All were certainly scenes related to the war, but not of the war. In addition to these films, there were also a few examples of “combat” footage included in the list, limited to performances of the royal lancers from a previous tour. Despite the seeming banality of their offerings, Eiko quickly established its Eiko-Woche as an invaluable source of war-related material. In the 16 September issue of Der Kinematograph, the company ran an advertisement that listed for theater owners the names and addresses of distributors carrying the Eiko Woche throughout Germany. As a further endorsement of their product, the company informed Der Kinematograph that their first edition had even been acquired by the General Staff.

Eiko transitioned quickly from its reliance on street scenes and footage of the Kaiser. The company was seemingly aware as early as late August that their war issue was scarce with actual war material. The advertisement that ran in Lichtbild Bühne mentioned at the very bottom of the page that Eiko’s cameramen “have been in the field

102 Advertisement for Eiko-Film, Lichtbild Bühne, 29 August 1914.
103 The two lancer films were, at least, simulated attacks – one a charge of the entire regiment and the other a mock firefight. Although the advertisement freely admitted that the footage of the lancers came from pre-existing performances, it was clear to point out that “his majesty Kaiser Wilhelm II himself wishes the public to have the opportunity to see these films.” Advertisement for Eiko-Film, Lichtbild Bühne, 29 August 1914.
104 Der Kinematograph, 16 September 1914. Major cities such as Berlin, Düsseldorf, Munich, Hamburg, and Leipzig all contained multiple distributors.
105 “Aus der Praxis: Die Eiko-Film- Ges. m.b.H.” Der Kinematograph, 30 September 1914.
since last week!" Every indication was made, then, that genuine war footage would be forthcoming in future installments. The second wartime edition of the Eiko newsreel included several films of a likely foreign origin: *Unser Feind, Belgische Truppen, Das englische Königspaar besichtigt französische Truppen, Poincaré dekoriert Offiziere,* and *Englische Garde.* It also offered first scenes from the German front: *Häuser, aus deren hinterrücks auf unsere Truppen geschlossen wurde, sind zur Strafe demoliert worden; Feldküche im Eingang eines belgischen Theaters; and Unsere Landwehr in Feindesland.* In an article in *Lichtbild Bühne* two weeks later, entitled “Cameramen on the battlefield” Eiko explained that their technicians were actively engaged in filming in Belgium and that they were sending material back to Germany daily. The brief article informed its readers that the filming was done in cooperation with the military authorities. It also made clear that the material collected would be “accepted with excited interest in German theatres.” Advertisements for the Eiko-Woche newsreels were often part of a larger advertisement for the company’s many war-related films. It was not uncommon in its early months for Eiko to list both its fiction film releases and its new actuality offerings as part of the same advertisement. The listings of the non-fiction films promoted in the press the first week of September shared space with the re-release of *Bismarck,* for example. A cover advertisement by Eiko in *Der Kinematograph* only a

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106 *Lichtbild Bühne,* 29 August 1914.
107 Advertisement for *Eiko-Woche, Der Kinematograph,* 9 September 1914.
110 Ibid.
111 *Lichtbild Bühne,* 5 September 1914. Additionally, Eiko ran an advertisement on the cover of the 16 September issue of *Der Kinematograph* that informed readers that the
week later simplified the company’s message. In bold letters in declared that “Eiko-Woche is the best war reportage,” before continuing to announce that the new issue included material from both fronts and footage of the Crown prince and his wife.\footnote{\textit{Der Kinematograph}, 23 September 1914.}

Eiko had reason to feel the need to assert its own superiority because by the end of September rival newsreels were challenging its place in the film market. In early October 1914 Nordisk distributed its own newsreel, an “authentic world war report,” that included “new war material from the west and east.”\footnote{Advertisement for Nordisk, \textit{Der Kinematograph}, 7 October 1914.} True to its adopted role of benevolent (and practical) neutrality, Nordisk explained that it would be exhibiting its films in neutral countries such as the United States, Australia, Italy, and Spain in order to “exemplify the true brave behavior of our German troops.”\footnote{Emphasis added. \textit{Der Kinematograph}, 7 October 1914. The company also described their offerings as “the cheapest wartime offer.”} Other, smaller, companies, like Hubert also attempted variations on the newsreel early in the war.\footnote{See the brief discussion of Eiko and Hubert in “Neuheiten in den Berliner Theatern,” \textit{Der Kinematograph}, 11 November 1914.} Eiko’s chief rival for preeminent wartime newsreel was the Messter-Woche. Messter-Film, the company owned and operated by the influential film producer Oskar Messter, began producing its own newsreel in September 1914. Messter’s first attempted to market his war material under the title of “Documents of the World War,” but changed the name to the more newsreel-sounding Messter Woche with the release of the first issue at the beginning of October.\footnote{Messter, \textit{Mein Weg mit dem Film}, 129. For both Eiko and Messter during the first few months of production their newsreels were numbered. So that during the week of 14}
Writing his memoirs twenty years later, Messter insisted on the strong propaganda value of his newsreel, particularly when it was presented in neutral countries. Whether or not this was the intention from the outset is a matter of debate. Messter himself did volunteer for the military almost immediately even though, as he notes, he was already 48 years old. This may suggest a very strong patriotic feeling within him, but there was also an aspect of practical propaganda to his service. Through his ties to the military Messter was able to secure permission to film at the front. Wolfgang-Mühl Benninghaus argues that it was only following Messter moving into an advisory role with the military that filming in the war zones was accepted by the military authorities. His established relationship with the military certainly eased the process. Messter was not the only company to be given this access. Eiko, the Martin Knopf company in Munich, and the Express-Film company in Württemberg were also allowed to send cameramen into military zones. But these companies represented a fraction of those that wanted

October 1914 Messter released Messter-Woche Nr. 2 and Eiko, Eiko-Woche Kriegs-Ausgabe 7.

Messter, Mein Weg mit dem Film, 129. Eiko also shared the belief that the newsreels helped foster a positive image of Germany in neutral countries abroad. See “Aus der Praxis: Die Eiko-Kriegswoche im Dienste der Auslandsaufklärung” Der Kinematograph, 1 September 1915, “Aus der Praxis: Grosse Erfolge der “Eiko” im Dienste der Aufklärungs Amerikas,” Der Kinematograph, 20 October 1915

Messter, Mein Weg mit dem Film, 128.

Limited access to the front for camera operators was not a challenge unique to Germany, the military authorities of other belligerents were similarly restrictive. In France, for example, it was only in the spring of 1915 any filming was allowed in war zones, and only after considerable pressuring from major companies such as Pathé and Gaumont. See the discussion in Laurent Véray, “1914-1918, The First Media War of the Twentieth Century: the Example of French Newsreel,” Film History 22.4 (2010): 408-425.


Ibid., 177.
authentic war footage. After the adoption of strict regulations for the licensing of war footage in early October, some companies that had sent cameramen to the front in violation of existing policies in August and September were forced to suspend filming and banned from exhibiting anything they had shot.\(^{122}\) Messter capitalized on the permission he was given not only in securing war footage that other companies lacked, but also by making that fact explicit in the marketing for his newsreels. An advertisement that ran simultaneously with the second issue of the *Messter-Woche* made this point. Messter informed readers that from this point on only companies with explicit permission from the military general staff could produce footage from the front. Of course, the advertisement also made sure that the largest font on the page announced that the *Messter-Woche* was a production that had such permission.\(^{123}\)

The material contained in the early Messter newsreels was similar to that contained in those of its rivals. *Messter-Woche* Nr.2 featured footage from the Eastern Front, the Western Front, and from Berlin.\(^{124}\) From the east, Messter brought back images including a bridge destroyed by the Russians, and captured Russian prisoners of war. The footage from the west came from fighting around Longwy in France – images of the captured French fortress, a cemetery wall the French had used as a defensive position, a house the French had destroyed, and the “friendly local inhabitants welcoming the German troops”. Scenes from Berlin included the return of wounded soldiers, most notably the youngest son of the Kaiser, Prince Joachim, a column of automobiles and the ascension of an observational balloon. *Messter-Woche* Nr. 4, one of the select few

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\(^{122}\) Ibid., 176.

\(^{123}\) *Der Kinematograph*, 14 October 1914.

\(^{124}\) Advertisement for *Messter-Woche, Der Kinematograph*, 14 October 1914
newsreels that has survived, featured images from the western front of a destroyed bridge (and the German-made replacement “built quickly” next to it), and several scenes in and around the recently taken Fort Ayvelles, which included troops leaving the fort, the artillery casemate, and the German artillery used to capture it. Also included was a short scene from Berlin of Red Cross dogs, and from Austria-Hungary of officers mustering and receiving a blessing.125

These early newsreels demonstrate both the types of material that featured in newsreels throughout the war, as well as some of the ideas that were central to the German national image promoted in wartime propaganda. Due to the nature of wartime filmmaking, the majority of images shot were not battles themselves, but damaged buildings and landscapes following a battle, troops marching to or from a battle, or officers discussing a battle. Activity away from the front of encamped soldiers or volunteers and other civilians on the home front were also featured regularly. Finally, there was a predilection for highlighting the technologies of war, the armaments, equipment and vehicles that enabled Germany’s troops their success on the battlefield.126

The messages this reportage highlighted were perhaps more central to wartime propaganda. German soldiers were shown as exceptional individuals, brave and, frequently, victorious. Their sacrifice was valiant, and injured soldiers were cared for by a grateful nation. The fatherland’s enemies were destructive and vicious, while the Germans themselves were constructive, even welcomed.

125 Messter-Woche Nr. 4, BAFA 3786. This and other editions of the Messter-Woche are also available online at Filmportal.de, http://www.filmportal.de/videos?title=messter.
126 Perhaps related to the impulse toward non-fiction films about industry and technology by cinema reformers and the like.
By October 1914 the newsreel had emerged in the format in which it would continue for the remainder of the war. By this point both Eiko and Messter had adopted unique designs for their weekly advertisements that drew on German national symbols. The Eiko advertisement featured a large eagle wearing a crown perched on the Eiko-Film logo. Messter’s advertisement was much more detailed. Messter had its own crown-wearing eagle logo (although his also held a sword in its beak) and featured a backdrop of the Palace, the Brandenburg Gate, and the Siegessäule.

The popularity of the newsreels in the early part of the war was the result of the enthusiasm and anxiety of those tumultuous first few months. As the months of war continued on, audiences became less interested in filmed war reportage. A continued lack of films that actually depicted the fighting did not help matters. Audiences, frustrated with the progress of the war and tired with the shortcomings of its weekly “authentic” cinematic representation, came to view newsreels as derivative, unwelcome, and extraneous. Mühl-Benninghaus has commented that “cinema audiences were beginning [by March 1915] to regard the war newsreel as something of an annoying interruption in the evening’s programme, which had meantime returned to entertainment fare.”

The advertising used by Eiko and Messter to promote their films hints at this waning public interest. Although the occasional advertisement did list the stories contained in the newsreels, the efficiency and appeal of the newsreel itself, the promotion of the Eiko or Messter brand, was highlighted. To attest to its popularity, one Messter advertisement

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127 For example, see Der Kinematograph, 7 October 1914.
128 For example, see Der Kinematograph, 14 October 1914.
130 For example, the Eiko-Woche advertisement published on the cover of the 4 August 1915 issue of Der Kinematograph listed scenes of Hindenburg, fighting near Warsaw,
featured an illustration of respectably dressed film-goers rushing forward, presumably toward the cinema to catch the new *Messter-Woche*.\textsuperscript{131}

Not to be outdone, Eiko highlighted in their own advertisements the exciting spectacles they purported to be filming. One print advertisement featured cartoon silhouettes of riders on horseback with drawn swords, another featured the phrases “exploding minefields, striking grenades, bursting shrapnel and much more.”\textsuperscript{132} Another, two-page, advertisement, contained illustrations of seven images in sequence. In the first, two men communicated by telephone, relaying the news story. The next three were images of camera operators filming on the eastern front (men on horseback charging machine guns), the western front (a fiery airplane crash), and at the Dardanelles (from under a palm tree). The last three cartoons featured the film being rushed to the Eiko factory for development, a full house in a large movie theatre, and a theatre owner with a safe full of money.\textsuperscript{133} The wishful thinking behind the advertisement shows the idealized function for not just the *Eiko-Woche*, but for other newsreels as well. The images were never as dramatic, the audiences never so eager to embrace the wartime newsreels – at least not after the mood of 1914 had dissipated.\textsuperscript{134}

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\textsuperscript{131} See for example, the cover advertisement, *Der Kinematograph*, 12 April 1916.

\textsuperscript{132} See the advertisements for *Eiko-Woche* in *Der Kinematograph*, 2 June 1915 (allegedly of footage taken from the Austrian-Italian front), *Der Kinematograph*, 14 April 1914.

\textsuperscript{133} Advertisement for Eiko-Film, *Der Kinematograph*, 13 October 1915.

\textsuperscript{134} This is not say that the newsreels did not continue to feature prominently in German theatres over the duration of the war. They did, however unpopular they may have become.
The national mood in the early months of the war prompted exhibitors to promote pre-existing patriotic films and producers to film and screen the war as it happened in newsreel reportage. This same mood led the film industry toward the production of war films, films set against the background of, if not outright within, the war experience. The first war films were released in the fall of 1914 and although some war films continued to be released until 1918, their popularity seems to have peaked in the first year of the war. Most historians agree that the more standard and commercial genres remained in the majority and that the bulk of films produced in Germany, as Sabine Hake has expressed it, “avoided all references to the ongoing war and completely ignored the social problems that contributed to the fall of the monarchy.”¹³⁵ The war might not have been front and centre on German screens, but it was not a complete absence, either. Particularly in the first half of the war a number of actualities, dramas, and even comedies brought representations of what the war was like and what the nation was fighting for to the German film-going public.¹³⁶ In what follows, a selection of these films will be discussed. While this list is by no means exhaustive, it does demonstrate the typical form and narrative focus of the war films exhibited in German cinemas.

¹³⁵ Sabine Hake, German National Cinema (London: Routledge, 2002), 25. A cursory overview of the films listed in the trade press supports such a generalization.

¹³⁶ Short form comedies had been included in some of the war programs and humorous takes on the war experience in films such as Fräulein Feldgrau (1914), about a young woman from a good family caught up in the outbreak of the war on the Belgian border, and another front comedy Schipp, Schipp, Hurra! (1915). On Fräulein Feldgrau, see “Neuheiten auf dem Berliner Filmmarke,” Der Kinematograph, 25 November 1914. On Schipp, Schipp, Hurra!, see the advertisement in Der Kinematograph, 3 February 1915.
The actuality war films released in the first half of the war drew on established patterns of non-fiction filmmaking and offered in an expanded form the visual representation of the war promised in the emerging newsreels. These films were topical, celebratory of the established actuality stars of the monarchy, and by and large supported an official view of the war experience. Given the tight hold the authorities maintained over access to the military and the front, the tradition of imperial actualities from the pre-war years, and the nationalist mood, such an outlook is not surprising. Among the topical offerings was a short documentary commemorating the event that had set the war in motion – the assassination of Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie in Sarajevo on June 28th.137 The film titled *Sarajewo*, combines the last film footage taken of the archduke and his wife with scenes from the aftermath of the assassination.138 An opening inter-title explains that the film opens with “The last recording of the royal pair on their reception at the town hall after the failed bomb attack.” The scene that follows shows the couple exiting their car and entering the building. This scene is followed by several other similarly brief sequences. Several shots display debris littering the streets of Sarajevo in the aftermath of the assassination as crowds and policemen look on. Then the film jumps ahead from June 28th to the repatriation of the bodies, as an inter-title introduces “the last homecoming at Trieste.” Two small boats pull up alongside a dock, aboard the first are a number of dignitaries dressed in uniform, and aboard the second, the two caskets. The

137 Later in the war, another actuality would “commemorate” another tragedy that pushed the war down a different path. Nordisk released a “highly topical” film of the “last voyage of the torpedoed steamer” Lusitania in June 1915. It is not clear what footage the 120m long film contained, or, given the relationship between the Danish, American, and German film industries at the time, what position on the sinking the film took. See the advertisement for Nordisk, *Der Kinematograph*, 2 June 1915.

138 *Sarajewo*, BAFA, E193954.
caskets are taken off and a clergyman, surrounded by the dignitaries and soldiers, blesses the caskets before they are placed on an awaiting carriage. The final section of the film shows, as the title explains, the “Palace Arstetten on the Danube, the last resting place of the heir to the throne and his wife.” As propaganda, the film is seemingly lacking, devoid of any Serbian vilification or calls for national revenge. By choosing to focus on veneration over vengeance, Sarajewo coincides with many of the films made to celebrate Kaiser Wilhelm II, other royalty, and later, Hindenburg.\(^{139}\) These films functioned to connect these individuals to the public – in life or in death.

As they had before the war, the Hohenzollerns continued to feature in wartime actuality films. One of the first films of the front released in 1914 was *Mit der Armee des deutschen Kronprinzen vor Verdun* in December.\(^{140}\) The crown prince’s military command presented filmmakers Express- Film with an opportunity to combine the cinema-celebrity of the prince with appeal of images of the front in a two-act picture.\(^{141}\) Express-Film also took the opportunity to include a scene of its own camera operators working at the front – further “proof” of the authenticity of the film and the company.\(^{142}\) Along with his son, the Kaiser also continued his presence in film. Wilhelm’s birthday in 1914 was noted by Eiko-Film with the release of *Heil Kaiser Dir*. The company

\(^{139}\) See the discussion in Chapter One.

\(^{140}\) See the advertisement in *Der Kinematograph*, 2 December 1914.

\(^{141}\) Uli Jung and Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus, “Ästhetischer Wandel. Dokumentarische Propagandafilme,” in *Geschichte des Dokumentarischen Films in Deutschland Band I: Kaiserreich*, ed. Uli Jung and Martin Loiperdinger, (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 2005) 440. The authors describe the film was little more than a collection of sequences only tangentially related to the prince’s visit to the front. The authors also note that the film is a prime example of how “the step from simple reporting to cinematic propaganda took place only slowly.” Jung and Mühl-Benninghaus give the film a 1916 release date.

described the film as “A living tribute poem and patriotic portrait in one act of captivating effect and vaterländische, glowing, triggering enthusiasm.” Such films maintained the connection between the monarchy, the nation, and the war effort.

Other actuality films worked to maintain the connection between the state and the nation. In the early weeks of 1916 Monopolfilm-Vetriebs-Gesellschaft m.b.H and Hanewacker & Scheier released a short documentary film called *Wie unsere Kriegs-Invaliden wieder arbeiten lernen*. Shot at the royal orthopedic military hospital in Nüremberg, the film depicted the treatment and rehabilitation of German soldiers injured during the war. The brief article on the film that appeared in *Der Kinematograph* promoted the film as “highly recommended by the authorities,” and assured theatre owners that despite its subject matter, the two-act film was approved for youth audiences. The broad appeal of such a film, particularly to young audiences, may seem questionable. The film needed to be made in conjunction with the military authorities that administered care for disabled veterans, as filming at the hospital would have been unthinkable without their support. Additionally, the film openly depicted (and even promoted) disabled soldiers, a choice that could have had serious implications for the morale of the German citizenry. Displaying the preference for educational films common to cinema reformers, the film is an example of a form of film propaganda that believed didactic images were more persuasive than enticing spectacles.

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143 Advertisement for *Heil Kaiser Dir!*, *Der Kinematograph*, 13 January 1915.
The dramatic fiction films made about the war promised realistic and thrilling depictions of the front line experience and stressed the importance of duty and the need for patriotic sacrifice. Two clusters of films highlight these tendencies: films made in the first months of the war that were set on the front lines, and naval films. Attempting to capitalize on the mood of mobilization, the first fictional war films were in release by October 1914. Film companies made a discernable effort to stress that their products were, to use the phrase so common in film advertisements of the time, “highly topical.” Eiko-Film, for example, released the film Ich kenne keine Parteien mehr, drawing its title from the pronouncement by Kaiser Wilhelm II at the outbreak of the war. In promoting the film Eiko made sure to stress not only that its two act war drama was “highly topical” but that it had endured considerable censorship difficulties before finally being released on the market. Whether this was merely to update eager exhibitors who had been waiting for the opportunity to loan the film, or an attempt to hype the film’s topicality and strongly suggest the sensational nature of its images, is unclear. Eiko-Film pulled another title from the slogans of the moment with Das Vaterland ruft! Also released in October 1914, the film was described as a vaterländisches war film in three acts. Two familiar elements were highlighted in the promotion of the film. One was the visual spectacle of the film, with its “impressive battle scenes” and “splendid

146 See the advertisement for Ich kenne keine Parteien mehr, in Der Kinematograph, 14 October 1914.
147 See both the advertisement and a brief note in “Geschäftliches: Ich kenne keine Parteien mehr,” Der Kinematograph, 14 October 1914.
148 See the advertisements for Das Vaterland ruft! in Der Kinematograph, 14 October 1914, Der Kinematograph, 21 October 1914, Der Kinematograph, 11 November 1914.
scenery.”\textsuperscript{149} The other was the film’s artistic quality as attested to by the inclusion of the highest production values from the Berlin stage and the casting of the best Berlin theatre actors in the leading roles.\textsuperscript{150} A note on the film in the trade press explained that the film succeeded in “leading the viewer along with the infantry and the artillery fire amidst the turmoil of battle.”\textsuperscript{151}

Appealing and authentic representations of warfare were major promotional points for these early war films. According to the film’s promotion, a battle between “our field grays” (German soldiers) and “Cossacks” was a pivotal scene in the film \textit{Für’s Vaterland}, released in November 1914.\textsuperscript{152} The film told the story of a patriotic east Prussian mother who loses her sons to the war. One son falls in “the faithful fulfillment of his soldierly duty,” and the other redeems his life of “a ratty drinker’s existence” by sacrificing himself in combat as well, having found his inner strength in “the hour of need.”\textsuperscript{153} The author writing on the film in \textit{Der Kinematograph} noted its importance for offering a “new tone on a much-treated basic theme” and for its success in “arousing the sympathy of the public.”\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{149} \textit{Der Kinematograph}, 14 October 1914. The involvement of numerous extras and soldiers in filming was also noted.
\textsuperscript{150} \textit{Der Kinematograph}, 14 October 1914, \textit{Der Kinematograph}, 21 October 1914.
\textsuperscript{151} “Aus der Praxis: Neues vom ‘Eiko,’ ” \textit{Der Kinematograph}, 11 November 1914.
\textsuperscript{152} See the advertisement for \textit{Für’s Vaterland} in \textit{Der Kinematograph}, 11 November 1914. The advertisement for the film included only the information that the film was about a “the patriotism of an east Prussian mother,” and the “Our field grays battle with the Cossacks.”
\textsuperscript{153} This summary comes from “Zeitgemässe Films in den Berliner Theatern,” \textit{Der Kinematograph}, 28 October 1914.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.
The theme of redemption and sacrifice was also central to the plot of *Auf dem Felde der Ehre*. Made by a new German producer, Rensie-Monopol-Film, the film specifically addressed the outbreak of the war and the spirit of 1914. The film’s protagonist is Hans von Stolzenfels, an army lieutenant and son of Major von Stolzenfels. Prior to the war he is dishonored through an affair with a woman claiming to be a Russian princess, and forced to resign from his office. He reclaims that honor by re-enlisting in the military after the war breaks out. The nobility of service and sacrifice to the nation is the central theme of the film. To make clear that the moral of the film is aligned with the feelings of August, the film includes the words of the Kaiser’s address that “I no longer know any parties, I know only Germans,” in an inter-title. The message is stressed in the scene that accompanies it, as the disgraced Hans, after seeing a number of war volunteers march past, joins hands with a “brawny worker” and a “quiet spiritual man.” Thus the cracks in German society are symbolically erased as the aristocratic son of a proud military family finds brotherhood and comradeship across lines of class (and likely political allegiance) and confession.

Sacrifice in war films was commonly stressed by the melodramatic convention of separated lovers. This was, of course, a motif that the context of wartime made it easy for audiences to identify with. Two other releases from November 1914—the Deutsche Mutoskop-und Biograph Gesellschaft produced *Eine Nacht im Felde* and the Luna-Film Gesellschaft made *Deutsche Helden*—both played upon the theme of a romance.

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155 The following summary is taken from the synopsis of the film published in “Neue Films,” *Der Kinematograph*, 11 November 1914.
separated by hostilities. Like the more explicit commitment portrayed by Hans in *Auf dem Felde der Ehre*, the strain on these romantic pairings also highlighted the sacrifices that were necessary for a country at war. Romance in wartime also seems to have been the subject of the highly promoted *Das Eiserne und das Rote Kreuz*, made by Treumann-Larsen Film Vertrieb, and starring the well-know actors—and likely producers of the film, Wanda Treumann and Viggo Larsen. Eiko’s *Ein Wiedersehen in Feindesland* released in January 1915 seems to have been similarly intended. While the patriotic mood of the first months of the war may have implied an inevitable German victory, the first cluster of war films made sure that the stakes of the war were clear. Victory was likely to require glorious, patriotic sacrifice on behalf of the national community.

**Conclusion**

August 1914 was a defining moment for the German film industry. Before the war the film business in Germany had relied on foreign films and on an uneasy acceptance from the police and governing authorities. With the outbreak of the war, it could no longer count on either one. But the war also brought new opportunities. The sudden deficit in films created an opportunity for existing companies to expand and for new ones to be founded. Perhaps just as importantly, the war provided the chance for filmmakers and exhibitors to demonstrate the uses to which the medium could be put. Cinemas could

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156 Brief synopsis of both films provided in “Neuheiten auf dem Berliner Filmmarkte,” *Der Kinematograph*, 25 November 1914.

157 See the advertisement in *Der Kinematograph*, 16 December 1914.

158 See the advertisement in *Der Kinematograph*, 16 December 1914. Along with the title, the picture included in the advertisement depicted a couple, with the man in uniform, in a solemn embrace.
be important sites for national engagement. Film could provide an effective method of communicating what the nation was fighting for (or against), how well the war was progressing, what the war looked like, and how Germans should feel about it.

An image of the nation at war was constructed out of recycled historical films, officially sanctioned newsreel reporting, and patriotic melodramas. It was an image of a nation with a strong military character and sense of communal obligation demonstrated through a predisposition for sacrificial martyrdom on behalf of the national community. The soldiers marching east and west against Germany’s enemies were inheritors of a noble tradition and destined for victory and a welcome reception as worthy conquerors. In these ways the cinema internalized, re-packaged, and promulgated the most positive elements of the spirit of 1914. But those soldiers were not destined for victory. As the war continued and hardships multiplied, the importance of the cinema for the war effort increased. It was at this moment that the state finally began to commit itself to the control and production of film propaganda.
In her study of poor women and everyday life in First World War Berlin, Belinda Davis frames the revolution of November 1918 as the result of a loss of popular legitimacy, a moment when “the effete state collapsed largely from within, unable finally to act successfully in the role of a government as the populace now fashioned it.”¹ The suffering and defeat of war brought on the end of the Kaiserreich, an oft-acknowledged bookending, as a state born on a battlefield in 1871 perished on another between 1914 and 1918. In the most general terms, the end of the imperial state was, like those in Russia, Austro-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire, the result of the war. More specifically, the revolution in November 1918 was the consequence of the belief, held by a growing cross section of German society, that the state as it existed and operated no longer defended their interests, let alone their security. According to Davis, this lack of perceived validity was tied to public expectations about how the state should provide for its citizens, expectations forged in the food crises of the war years.² Other historians have identified this loss of legitimacy in other areas.³ Consistent among their accounts is the

² Ibid.
³ To cite a few key examples: Jeffrey Verhey has suggested that the state became illegitimate when the public realized, only in the early fall of 1918, the extent to which the authorities had “failed to respect their basic dignity” by deceiving them about the progress of prospects of the war effort. See Verhey “War and Revolution,” in *Imperial Germany 1871-1918* ed. in James Retallack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 261. For Roger Chickering it was the political institutions of the state that came to be seen as
belief that the war experience prompted Germans to reevaluate their relationship to the state, and to rethink their idea of what they believed to be the objectives and obligations of their government. The abdication of the Kaiser, the dissolution of the existing political order, and the bold pronouncements of new republics were responses to actions undertaken and attitudes adopted by the segments of the German nation searching for a new political legitimacy for the German state. This chapter explores the role of the cinema in that process.

If the revolution of November 1918 was a product of the widespread and popular rejection of the status quo, does fault, in some part, have to be assigned to the successes and failures of wartime propaganda? This chapter examines the “official” cinematic representation of the war and the German nation from 1916 through to the end of the war in November 1918. Although the extent of the official attention paid to the cinema was new, the films were shaped by many of the same considerations that had informed national film propaganda over the preceding two decades. The first section situates the German film industry in the second half of the war in the context of media and increasingly illegitimate over the course of the war as wide sections of the public looked to democratic reforms as compensation for wartime suffering. See Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 158. Jürgen Kocka has also identified a loss of legitimacy as a central precondition of the revolution, although in economic terms as the state was no longer seen by either owners or workers as capable of ensuring either of their interests. See Kocka, *Facing Total War: German Society 1914-1918*, trans. Barbara Weinberger (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1984).

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4 This is not to imply that the revolution of November 1918 was universally acclaimed. The collapse of the old state and the competing visions for the new resulted in a period of prolonged, bitter, and violent antagonism. On German wartime film propaganda, the main works are Hans Barkhausen, *Filmpropaganda für Deutschland im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1982), David Welch, *Germany, Propaganda and Total War, 1914-1918: the Sins of Omission* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), and Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus, *Vom Augusterlebnis zur UFA-Gründung: Der deutsche Film im 1. Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Avenus, 2004).
propaganda policy. The second section charts the development of official film propaganda, exploring the processes that contributed to the founding of the Deutsche Lichtbild Gesellschaft in 1916, and the propaganda and business program that company built. The third section explores the rationale behind the founding of both the Bild- und Filmamt (BuFa, the photograph and film office) and Universum Film AG (Ufa) in the year that followed. The fourth section presents a reading of a select group of propaganda films: those made in support of the war loan drives. The fifth and final section focuses specifically on how the end of the war was experienced and presented in German theatres.

Despite the accumulation of daily press reports, film newsreels, and letters home, Germans remained in the dark when it came to their fleeting prospects for victory. The war they thought they knew was the one the Oberste Heeresleitung (OHL, the Supreme Army Command) and the Kriegspresseamt (KPA, the War Press Office) provided for them. While these agencies may have had considerable influence over what the public knew about the war, the greater challenge was in dictating what the public felt about it, and more importantly, what the public felt about the state waging the war.

Total War and National Morale

The use of propaganda developed over the course of the war in step – although not always in perfect step – with burdens placed on the belligerent populations. This was
true in Germany as it was amongst the other warring nations.\textsuperscript{5} The war required an immense amount of manpower at the front. Some 13,123,000 German men served in the military between 1914 and 1918, and of these more than two million were killed, and approximately four million wounded.\textsuperscript{6} The war also required the support of the populations on the home front, for whom the eroding quality of daily life and the mounting lives lost at the front piled difficulty upon difficulty.\textsuperscript{7} The war had begun in 1914 with promises of a national unity exemplified in the Burgfrieden ideal and a quick and victorious outcome to hostilities. By late 1916 the hopes for a short war were long passed, and the ideal of national unity was severely tested.

The tenor of the war changed in 1916. The war on the western front had been in a stalemate since 1914. In an effort to break free of this stasis General Erich von Falkenhayn planned instead for a war of attrition. Unrestricted submarine warfare would break the blockade of Germany and weaken the British by crippling imports while France was drawn into a land engagement that would result in a paralyzing loss of personnel.\textsuperscript{8} Neither plan came to fruition. Although the debate about the use of unrestricted submarine warfare continued throughout the year, the decision to implement was not made until January 1917. In practice the policy resulted in the loss of more than 500,000

\textsuperscript{5} On film propaganda during the First World War in other national contexts, see Nicholas Reeves, \textit{British Film Propaganda during the First World War} (London: C. Helm, 1986), Geoffrey H. Mallins, \textit{How I Filmed the War: A Record of the Extraordinary Experiences of the Man Who Filmed the Great Somme Battles, etc.} (London: Imperial War Museum, 1993), Karel Dibbets and Bert Hogenkamp, eds. \textit{Film and the First World War} (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), Leslie Midkiff DeBauche, \textit{Reel Patriotism: The Movies and World War I} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 104-136, as well as the special issue on “Cinema during the Great War,” in \textit{Film History} 22.4 (2010).

\textsuperscript{6} Chickering, \textit{Imperial Germany and the Great War}, 95-100.

\textsuperscript{7} For a detailed account of the response these challenges, see Davis, \textit{Home Fires Burning}.

\textsuperscript{8} Chickering, \textit{Imperial Germany and the Great War}, 66.
tons of goods per month in the first half of 1917, but failed to bring about the expected capitulation of the British. On land, the plan to “bleed” the French into defeat was attempted at the battle of Verdun. Here, between February and December 1916 more than 1.2 million French troops were committed to hold the fortress from the Germans, resulting in 365,000 French casualties. But the German losses were nearly as high, at 336,000 soldiers. In an effort to relieve the pressure at Verdun the British attacked the Germans at the Somme at the beginning of July. Lasting until November, the Somme came to epitomize all the war’s bloody but ineffectual battles. In total, approximately 1.5 million German soldiers were killed or wounded in 1916. By the end of the year the brutality of the war had reached new heights, but it was no nearer to a resolution.

The failures of 1916 led to Falkenhayn’s dismissal and his replacement by General Paul von Hindenburg and General Erich Ludendorff. The two men had made sizable reputations for themselves through their successes on the Eastern Front and their appointment was received with considerable and wide-spread enthusiasm. Once in power they embarked on a period of military dictatorship and unprecedented social, political, and economic control. The introduction of the ambitious Hindenburg Program,

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11 Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War*, 70.


13 Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War*, 74. Chickering makes the point that this “popular jubilation” was evident even among SPD members.
initiated in 1916, aimed to mobilize the entire economy to meet the requirements of total war. The goal was to double munitions, triple artillery, and move millions of additional workers into the armaments workforce.\textsuperscript{14} The attendant Auxiliary Service Law of December 1916 forced all men of working age to work and restricted mobility of employment.\textsuperscript{15}

Mounting military losses and intensified expectations on the home front meant that the state’s need for popular support only grew with each passing month. The maintenance of good public morale was essential if the authorities wanted to ensure the requisite effort among soldiers and civilians. On the home front in particular the cooperation of the public at large was necessary to maintain the levels of industrial and agricultural production needed for the war effort. In addition to providing labor, members of the public were also asked to pay, in large part, for the financial costs of the war. The twice-annual war loan drives, as will be discussed below, were an essential source of income for the government and continued public contributions were tied to continued public support for the war effort.\textsuperscript{16} Finally, as became especially apparent after the events in Russia in 1917, poor morale among a highly burdened population could have disastrous political consequences.

Support for the war was increasingly challenged over the last two years, culminating in the events of November 1918. The most vocal and organized opposition came from the labor movement. Although pacifist groups had been condemning the war

\textsuperscript{14} Chickering, \textit{Imperial Germany and the Great War} 76, Verhey, “War and Revolution,” 248-249.
\textsuperscript{15} Verhey, “War and Revolution, 249.” Working age was determined as above 17 and under 60 years.
\textsuperscript{16} Welch, \textit{Germany, Propaganda, and Total War}, 77-78, Chickering, \textit{Imperial Germany and the Great War}, 104-105.
since before the mobilizations in 1914, their voices lacked the mass base and political platform of the organized labor movement and of the Social Democratic Party (SPD). These latter groups had initially supported war in 1914, but had never abandoned their pre-war internationalist, Marxist, and anti-capitalist leanings. By 1916, opposition had become sizeable. On 1st May, thousands of protestors in Berlin demonstrated for “Bread, Freedom, and Peace.” When one of the demonstration’s leaders, the socialist Reichstag deputy Karl Liebknecht, was convicted of treason for his role—he had spoken to the crowd about ending both the war and the current government—his sentencing prompted mass strikes of tens of thousands of workers in Berlin, Stuttgart, Bremen, and other locations. From 1916 on, mass strikes increased at a frantic, and to the authorities alarming, pace. For the over-taxed war economy, such stoppages had significant ramifications. Moreover, as the aforementioned strikes demonstrated, the purpose of these mass actions became increasingly political.

Protests against the war increasingly became protests against the state. David Welch has rightly suggested that while protests through the first half of the war had been largely a means to address issues of material scarcity, beginning in 1916 they became increasingly political in nature, often calling for dramatic, democratic political reforms to benefit the German public. Chickering has referred to this shift as “a critical transformation in popular thinking about the war,” as protestors began to reject the

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17 On pacifists and other oppositional groups, see the chapter in Welch, “Dissenting Voices: Pacifism, Feminist Ferment and the Women’s Movement,” in Germany, Propaganda and Total War, 135-160. For a brief synopsis, see Chickering, Imperial Germany and the Great War, 149-150.
18 Chickering, Imperial Germany and the Great War, 155.
19 See the graph in ibid., 156.
20 Welch, Germany, Propaganda, and Total War, 162.
legitimacy of the war and instead opened themselves up to “a radical reading of the war, which traced misery to institutional injustice and the obstinacy, if not the evil designs, of Germany’s leaders.”

Faced with this criticism and the promise of further political opposition, the authorities had good reason to consider carefully their propaganda strategy.

Propaganda in its various forms had been a concern for authorities at several levels since the beginning of the war. For the commanding military officials both at the front and throughout Germany, the chief propaganda concerns were with access to information. By dictating what the press had access to and what they were able to print, they hoped to shape the narrative of the war in ways beneficial to the war effort as they understood it.

For the foreign office, on the other hand, the main propaganda concern was with maintaining a positive image of Germany among neutrals, particularly in response to the violation of Belgian neutrality.

David Welch provides a detailed examination of the development of official propaganda policy. Domestically, the state’s primary concern—as it had been since the

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21 Chickering, 155-155.
22 According to Welch, when the KPA was founded in 1915 as an effort to bring military press policy and practice into a cohesive structure, it was tasked primarily with these same objectives. Welch identifies the major tasks of the KPA as follows: “1. To facilitate co-operation between the OHL and the civilian authorities with regards to the press. 2. To provide as much controlled information as possible to the various authorities and to the press. 3. To establish and supervise the uniform application of the censorship.” Welch, *Germany, Propaganda, and Total War*, 36-37.

23 More than two dozen propaganda agencies were established abroad in the first few weeks of the war. In October 1914 these came under auspices of Centre Deputy Matthias Erzberger and Baron von Mumm with the creation of the *Zentralstelle für Auslandsdienst* (ZfA, Central Office of the Foreign Service). See Welch, *Germany, Propaganda, and Total War*, 22-23.
first months of the war—was with maintaining the unity of the Burgfrieden.\textsuperscript{24} The main messages put forward were intended to clarify why Germans were fighting and to reassure the public that Germans would be victorious. The war was presented as a defensive struggle against Russian aggression and British underhanded double-dealing, but despite this unjust antagonism, propaganda assured the public, Germany would win out due its military discipline, technological advances, and not insignificantly, its cultural superiority.\textsuperscript{25} When Erhard Deutelmoser, then head of the KPA, identified areas of propaganda instruction in 1916, he highlighted the aspirations and cruelty of Germany’s enemies, the prolongation of the war, and chances for German victory as of central importance.\textsuperscript{26} For Deutelmoser, the place of the enemy loomed large, as did the length of the war and the hardship it had placed upon the German public. A year later, the key points of Ludendorff’s program of patriotic instruction highlighted the burden placed upon the German military, the need for duty and obedience, the enemy threat and confidence in an ultimate German victory.\textsuperscript{27} Irrespective of these initiatives, Welch argued, the messages put forward through propaganda could only achieve so much. The war continued, conditions on the home front worsened, and a struggling and dissatisfied population went largely ignored. While authorities became adept at controlling information and disseminating propaganda, they nevertheless squandered this talent—and

\textsuperscript{24} Welch, \textit{Germany, Propaganda, and Total War}, 25.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., Paddock, “German Propaganda,” 135.
\textsuperscript{26} Welch, \textit{Germany, Propaganda, and Total War}, 117. The questions Deutelmoser posed were: “What do our enemies want? Who is prolonging the war? How are we shortening the war? Can we win? The cruelties of our enemies. Lies of the enemy press. Enemy losses. War provision.” Although one of many such lists compiled over the course the war, this list does highlight the issues that the authorities thought to be points of particular contention.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 207.
sacrificed their legitimacy—because they “refused to heed the German people’s wishes for political and economic reforms to compensate for the hardship and sacrifices endured over four years.”

The revolution, then, was not the result of failed propaganda. But the narratives put forward by German propaganda did influence how the war and its impacts were felt by the German public.

The messages put forward by authorities in an effort to maintain morale relied on three assumptions that became increasingly questioned, if not untenable, by 1918. The first was that the war was a protective action taken against aggressive international enemies. The second was that victory would make wartime sacrifices worthwhile. The first assumption came under criticism from dissenting voices on the left and was challenged by the evidently expansionist terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Persistent inaction and inattentiveness from the state implied that the second was highly unlikely. The third assumption was that hardened commitment would lead to victory. By October 1918 this was revealed to be illusory as well. Reflections of these assumptions could be found in German film in the second half of the war. In film, as in life, they were not merely aspirations; they were the beliefs that helped define the German national community at war.

28 Welch, Germany, Propaganda and Total War, 7.
The institutionalization of film propaganda during the second half of the war was the result of cooperation, but also competition, between private enterprise and military authorities. As discussed in the previous chapter, government film policy to this point was largely based around censorship. The military determined when, where, and what producers could film, and local regional administrations—again often in conjunction with the military—decided which films could be exhibited and to which audiences. Just as it was the film industry that promoted cinema’s potential as a medium of patriotic entertainment and a source of information in the first half of the war, it was private business concerns, most significantly those whose financing backed the Deutsche Lichtbild-Gesellschaft (DLG), that prompted the state to coordinate its propaganda efforts and to expand the reach of its propagandistic apparatus. An important concern for DLG (and later, Bußa and Ufa) was the image of the German nation, how it was perceived at home and how it was broadcast abroad. For the greater war effort, this image could determine favorable support for Germany amongst both friendly and neutral nations. But DLG was also a business concern, and the pursuit of a favorable image could result in lucrative financial returns.

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30 This history has been thoroughly explored by film scholars, most extensively in the works of Hans Barkhausen, David Welch, and Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus. The overview offered in the next two sections borrows heavily from their work. See Barkhausen *Filmpropaganda für Deutschland im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg*, David Welch, “A Medium for the Masses: Ufa and Imperial German Film Propaganda during the First World War,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 6.1 (1986): 85-91, and Mühl-Benninghaus, *Vom Augusterlebnis zur UFA-Gründung.*
The *Deutsche Lichtbild-Gesellschaft* was founded in November 1916 under the auspices of the industrialist and media magnate Alfred Hugenberg and the publishing executive Ludwig Klitzsch. The stated purpose of the organization was to “organize the promotion of German culture, economy, and tourism at home and away through the image, in particular film and slide images, on a national, not-for-profit basis.” While the organization claimed that its film work was not motivated by financial returns, there is no question that economic considerations played a significant role for the business interests, primarily in heavy industry, which supported the company. The ability of the cinema to shape public opinion in general, and to supply a positive image of Germany and its commercial output abroad in particular, were the assumptions that informed DLG’s creation. For industry, the cinema was to provide favorable access in foreign countries that would leave them well positioned for further expansion when the war came to its eventual end.

German business had conceived of an organization akin to DLG in the years before the war. In late July 1914 representatives from 120 economic and local organizations met in Berlin at the invitation of the Leipzig publisher J.J Weber, where

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Klitzsch was employed, and the *Bund deutscher Verkehrsvereine*. They discussed the possibility of creating a company that would produce films for both the national and international market, intended to promote the business interests of the subscribing member companies. Although the organization failed to come together before the outbreak of the war, many of the same actors, including Weber, came together again in April 1916. By the time of the second meeting, conditions suggested that the creation of a promotional film company was now “an urgent task for the present.” Investors envisioned films that would depict the natural beauty of Germany as well as the country’s highly developed infrastructure and industrial capabilities.

At the same time, officials within the foreign office came increasingly to turn their own attention towards the cinema as an instrument of German foreign policy. Discussions at a meeting on 29 July 1916 attended by members of the foreign office as well as representatives from the Prussian War Ministry, the Army General Staff, the Navy, and the Ministry of the Interior, extolled the strengths of film propaganda, acting “at times defensively, at times offensively.” The reach of German newsreels, chiefly, the Messter-Woche and the Eiko-Woche, received particular attention. The Messter newsreel, it was reported, regularly reached 34 million viewers. Of these, 12.5 million were Germans, 8.5 million were in Austria, 5.8 million were in neutral countries, 4

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35 Ibid., 175.
36 Quoted in ibid.
37 Ibid., 175-176.
38 Barkhausen, *Filmpropaganda für Deutschland*, 67. Those in attendance included: Generalkonsul Thiel, Major Würz (Prussian War Ministry), Major Nicolai and Captain Kroeger (Field Army General Staff), Major Schweitzer (Deputy General Staff), Captain Wittmann (Navy and Admiral’s Staff), Lieutenant Colonel von Haeften (Military Branch of the Foreign Office), Landrat Freiherr von Braun (Ministry of the Interior), Director Schumacher (Central Office of the Foreign Service).
million were in the USA, and 3.5 million in South America.\textsuperscript{39} The foreign office noted the potential audience for German film productions and recognized the opportunity for film to influence public opinion both during the war and in the post-war world.\textsuperscript{40}

Despite their growing interest in film propaganda, the foreign office and the military were ultimately left out of the founding of the Deutschen Lichtbild-Gesellschaft in November 1916. They were purposely excluded—the leadership roles in the new organization were assumed up by Hugenberg and Klitzsch.\textsuperscript{41} The other organizations that committed to DLG on 18 November included the \textit{Allgemeines deutsches Bäderverband}, the \textit{Bund deutscher Verkehrsvereine}, the \textit{Bund der Industriellen}, the \textit{Deutsche Handelstage}, the \textit{Deutscher Städtetage}, the \textit{Messausschuss der Leipziger Handelskammer}, the \textit{Reichverbände der deutschen Städte}, the \textit{Deutsches Ueberseedienstes G.m.b.H}, the \textit{Verein für das Deutschtum in Auslände} and the \textit{Ausland G.m.b.H}.\textsuperscript{42} Max Rötger, who had previously served as chairman of both Krupp and the Central Association of German Industrialists, was elected chair of the company.\textsuperscript{43} The film executive Josef Cöboken was chosen as director and DLG was headquartered in J.J. Weber’s Berlin offices.\textsuperscript{44} The founding of DLG was welcomed in the trade press. The journal \textit{Der Kinematograph} remarked that this new company should result in many new commissions for the film

\textsuperscript{39} Barkhausen, \textit{Filmpropaganda für Deutschland}, 67.
\textsuperscript{40} Mühl-Benninghaus, \textit{Vom Augusterlebnis zur UFA-Gründung}, 180.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 180-181.
\textsuperscript{44} “Aus der Praxis,” \textit{Der Kinematograph}, 6 December 1916.
industry. Internationally, DLG pursued film markets at present and commercial markets for the future in neutral Scandinavia, the Balkans, and the Ottoman Empire.

DLG was also presented as an invaluable agent in the promotion of Germany’s image abroad. Speaking at a DLG general meeting in the summer of 1917, Klitzsch justified the company’s formation in relation to the influence already obtained and exerted by British, American, and French film companies internationally. He cited in particular the influence of British propaganda in the United States, and attributed recent reports of anti-German sentiment in South America to the film propaganda exported by Germany’s enemies. The DLG, he explained, would strive to oppose the negative depictions that the nation’s enemies had promoted abroad. Klitzsch pledged “to bring

46 The Balkan-Orient Filmgesellschaft had been founded the previous November with the support and involvement of the Central Office of the Foreign Service. As with DLG, the impetus for the company was the desire to expand German commercial interests, in particular into the Ottoman Empire, and to promote the German national image in a region where French film still held considerable influence and popularity. The stated objective of the company was for “the purchase and sale of films within the Balkans and the Orient, with particular consideration for economic and cultural enlightenment within these lands.” In January 1917, DLG acquired half of the shares of the Balkan-Orient-Filmgesellschaft. The company’s founding capital was 200 000 Marks, of which half was supplied by the Central Office of the Foreign Service through the person of Josef Schumacher. Schumacher, as director of the Bundes deutscher Verkehrsvereine, was involved with the founding of DLG as well. The remaining capital came from major German film producers such as Messter, Eiko, and Deutsche-Biosop, and smaller firms such as Greenbaum, Luna, and Imperator. The breakdown of investment for the other companies was as follows: Messter 27,400 Mk, Eiko 26,400Mk, Deutsche Bioscop-Gesellschaft 27 300 Mk, Greebaum Filmgesellschaft 6,300 Mk, Luna-Filmgesellschaft 6 300 Mk, Imperator Filmgesellschaft 6 300 Mk. For the terms of the transfer, see BA R901 72030, 29-30. See also, Mühl-Benninghaus, Vom Augusteplebcns zur UFA-Gründung, 185-186, 197-201. On the history of the Balkan-Orient Filmgesellschaft, see Barkhausen, Filmpropaganda für Deutschland, 53-60. For the full founding document of the company, see BA R901 71925, 22-34.
47 Klitzsch’s address was published under “Filmpropaganda im Staatsinteresse,” in Der Kinematograph, 4 July 1917.
German films to the foreign and overseas cinemas,” and to ensure that German films “achieved prestige” abroad.  

DLG’s major impact on the domestic film industry came in the form of the “DLG-Beiprogramm.” The company set out to distribute a program of several films, totaling 900 to 1,000 meters in length, which would provide an appropriate combination of entertainment and education. A portion of the program was to be made up of comedies and animation films, while the remainder were to be films on nature, technology and industry, and of scientific interest from the areas of the natural sciences and geography. Actualities and even war films were also to be included. DLG guaranteed the novelty of all the films included in the program, declaring that they “would not be previously seen in Germany.” In announcing their program in the trade press, DLG explained that it was responding to a need within the German film market place—“the urgent emerging complaint of theatre owners over the lack of short films.” DLG’s short films, according to the advertisement, would address this shortage. Moreover, the films were made by the “best German minds” and displayed “the proven strengths of German cinematography.” Having argued for the market need they addressed and having attested to the quality of its product, the DLG announcement proceeded to instruct exhibitors that they had a “duty of honor” to screen this program. If they did screen it, 

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48 “Filmpropaganda im Staatsinteresse,” in Der Kinematograph, 4 July 1917.
49 See the notice for the first program in Der Kinematograph, 20 June 1917. Quoted and discussed in Mühl-Benninghaus, Vom Augusterlebnis zur UFA-Gründung, 189.
50 Mühl-Benninghaus, Vom Augusterlebnis zur UFA-Gründung, 189. See also the advertisement for DLG, “An die Herren Theaterbesitzer!” in Der Kinematograph, 1 May 1917.
51 Der Kinematograph, 20 June 1917.
52 Advertisement for Deutsche Lichtbild-Gesellschaft, “An die Herren Theaterbesitzer!” in Der Kinematograph, 1 May 1917.
53 Ibid.
however, they could be assured of “the appreciation of the authorities, the audience, and the broad public would be thankful.”

DLG cast its program as an important achievement for the development of the German cinema. In its promotional materials DLG claimed that the quality of its films and the national purpose to which they were directed were clear refutations of any negative attitudes about the medium that authorities might hold. Echoing more than a decade of reformers and advocates, DLG insisted that its program succeeded in making the visual and didactic potential of the cinema apparent. By 1917, such advocacy on behalf of cinema’s educational value, and a championing of informative documentaries about technology, industry, science, and nature was hardly revolutionary. The films were meant to be educational and of instructional benefit to their audiences. But these educational films served a double purpose. The industry and technology that DLG was so keen to educate its audiences about could also serve to promote the very business interests that underwrote the company.

DLG envisioned itself as serving the interests of both the German nation and German heavy industry. It served the nation through educational films exhibited at home and by promoting a positive image of Germany, its geography, its people and its industry abroad. The advertisements that ran for the program in the trade press offered a patriotic tone. The principal image DLG used was a knight dressed in armor, a sun shining behind him, and only the words DLG and Beiprogramm below him in the image. Simplistic in

54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 Advertisement for DLG Beiprogramm, Der Kinematograph, 4 July 1917.
its design, the advertisement drew from a Germanic tradition and suggested an aggressive yet protective role for the company and its films.

DLG served industry through flattering depictions on film and through the possibilities for expansion brought about by those positive images internationally. These objectives were not limited to the short films of the Beiprogramm alone, but were extended to DLG’s longer films as well. For example, in November 1917 the company released *Aus des Deutschen Reiches Waffenschmiede*, a film which brought together its industrial and patriotic aspirations.57 The film was a documentary about the Krupp workshops. The stills featured in the promotional advertisement for the film depicted workers assembling a variety of armaments for the war effort. The slogan promoting the film in the trade press described it as “the work of our home army.”58 The advertisement also noted that the film had been favorably received at a press screening.

The adoration of the Berlin press aside, it is difficult to imagine an eager and sizeable audience for an industrial documentary that had to compete with the melodramas, comedies, and war films of the day. The challenges of basing propaganda campaigns on educational documentaries were not lost on Ludwig Klitzsch. He recognized that in order to meet this goal, DLG would need to balance their educational and propaganda films with more appealing content. As he wrote to the President of the *Zentralverband Deutscher Industrieller* in October 1916, “with German industrial, cultural, and transportation films alone will one never break into foreign theatres… the serious core of German propaganda must be veiled with the opulent padding of dramas,

57 See the two advertisements for the film in *Der Kinematograph*, 7 November 1917. See also the brief mention of the film in Jung and Mühl-Benninghaus, “Firmengründungen,” 419.
58 *Der Kinematograph*, 7 November 1917
comedies, and so forth." Nevertheless, these documentaries remained the bulk of DLG’s wartime output. Further, even such thinking reveals the short-sightedness of DLG’s propaganda. Whereas earlier right-wing nationalists propagandists such as the Navy League had relied on the visual attraction of the cinema to win over audiences, DLG relied instead on educational films screened in conjunction with comedies, and other films that might contain more sensationalist content.

DLG may have wanted to project itself as a cinematic sword and shield for the German nation, but officials in the military command and foreign office were less willing to acquiesce. From its founding, and with its exclusion of the military and Foreign Office, DLG was met with criticism. This criticism came from both official quarters and from the private sector. Competing commercial interests, particularly in chemicals, electronics, and shipping, were concerned that DLG would be used as a conduit for Hugenberg and heavy industry to expand into foreign markets at their expense.61 These groups used their influence with the Reichsbank to work against DLG, aligning that financial institution instead with the military authorities and eventually supporting the founding of Ufa.62 Military authorities had their own reasons for being wary of DLG and its ventures, not the least of which was Ludendorff’s own suspicions of civilian interests and his preference for the military control of propaganda.63 DLG was seen as a propaganda voice

60 For a full title list of DLG films, see http://www.filmportal.de/institution/deutsche-lichtbild-gesellschaft-ev-dlg-berlin_8f02e33b7e8a4e8a9428dfe0a1ac9b87.
61 Spiker, Film und Kapital, 23. See also Kreimeier, The Ufa Story, 20.
62 Spiker, Film und Kapital, 23.
63 Kreimeier, The Ufa Story, 23.
in competition with the official line, an unlicensed purveyor of representations of the
nation.

Official Propaganda: The *Bild- und Filmamt* and *Universum Film*

The push for a consolidation of official propaganda efforts had been in discussion
in the Foreign Office throughout 1916, as seen in its distanced relationship to both DLG
and Balkan-Orient, and received greater attention from the military as the overall mood in
Germany worsened in the second half of the year.\(^6^4\) An important impetus came from
reports sent back to the Foreign Office from officials abroad who reported that audiences
in friendly neutral countries found German films to be lacking in quality, and thus a poor
reflection of the German national image.\(^6^5\) The culmination of these discussions was the
creation of the *Bild- und Filmamt* (Bufa) organized in the late fall and officially founded
on 30 January 1917. Bufa brought together the film offices of the military and those of
the Foreign Office. In terms of administration, the new company was under the auspices
of the Military Section of the Foreign Office (MAA, *Militärische Stelle des Auswärtigen
Amts*), but as Ludendorff made clear in January 1917, the section was responsible to him
and the military.\(^6^6\) At the head of the MAA was Oberleutnant Hans von Haeften, who

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\(^{6^4}\) Mühl-Benninghaus, *Vom Augusterlebnis zur UFA-Gründung*, 197.

\(^{6^5}\) Rainer Rother, “*Bei unseren Helden an der Somme* (1917): the creation of a ‘social
event’,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 15.4 (1995): 526. See also the
discussion in Andrés Mario Zervigón, “A Political Struwwelpeter”? John Heartfield’s
Early Film Animation and the Crisis of Photographic Representation,” *New German

\(^{6^6}\) Mühl-Benninghaus, *Vom Augusterlebnis zur UFA-Gründung*, 205-206. For lengthier
expositions on the founding of Bufa, see Barkhausen, *Filmpropaganda für Deutschland,
76-77*, Kreimeier, *The Ufa Story*, 21-23, Mühl-Benninghaus, *Vom Augusterlebnis zur
would play a central role in official film policies over the last two years of the war.\textsuperscript{67} Klaus Kreimeier has characterized von Haeften as “every inch Ludendorff’s man.”\textsuperscript{68} Importantly, von Haeften saw a “defensive position against” DLG as one of Bufa’s main tasks.\textsuperscript{69}

The intended scope of Bufa’s control of German wartime film propaganda was vast.\textsuperscript{70} Bufa would direct film production at the front and the creation of film propaganda through the use of between six and nine separate film troops, each comprised of an officer, a camera operator and various support personnel. Footage would be sent back to Berlin and redistributed by Bufa into three distinct film markets: the domestic audience, the public in friendly neutral countries, and the soldiers serving at the front.\textsuperscript{71} In all three cases, the central task was promotion of the war effort. More than a propaganda agency, Bufa was also an example of the mentality of total war, as von Haeften, Ludendorff and others held designs that it would come to oversee both the production and distribution of film stock and all domestic and foreign propaganda policies as well.\textsuperscript{72} In essence, Bufa would supplant private film companies in the production of war films and come to regulate large sections of the film industry. In practice, Bufa never obtained this level of control, although many of the same motivations informed the later plan for Ufa. But Bufa

\textit{UFA-Gründung}, 196-207. For a chart laying out the divisions and hierarchy of the organization, BA R901 72030, 86.
\textsuperscript{67} Barkhausen, \textit{Filmpropaganda für Deutschland}, 73. Kreimeier, \textit{The Ufa Story}, 21, Rainer Rother, “\textit{Bei unseren Helden an der Somme},” 527.
\textsuperscript{68} Kreimeier, \textit{The Ufa Story}, 23.
\textsuperscript{69} Quoted from and translated in Kreimeier, \textit{The Ufa Story}, 21
\textsuperscript{70} For a draft report on Bufa’s founding objectives, see “\textit{Entwurf}” 27 February, 1917, BA R901 72030. For summaries of Bufa’s responsibilities, see Barkhausen, \textit{Filmpropaganda für Deutschland}, 76-77, Kreimeier, \textit{The Ufa Story}, 21-22, Mühl-Benninghaus, \textit{Vom Augusterlebnis zur UFA-Gründung}, 205-206.
\textsuperscript{71} “\textit{Entwurf},” 27 February, 1917, BA R901 72030, 88.
\textsuperscript{72} Kreimeier, \textit{The Ufa Story}, 22.
did succeed in the production of a number of war films that received significant attention from contemporary observers and the German public. Moreover, these films illustrated what officials believed to be the ideal and most effective forms of film propaganda.

One of the first productions released under the Bufa banner was *Bei unseren Helden an der Somme* in 1917. L lingering concerns about the comparative poverty of German film propaganda informed the production of the film, as it was made as a direct response to the British film *The Battle of the Somme* of the previous year. The British film was by most accounts a tremendous success. Some historians have estimated that upwards of 20 million people saw the British Somme film during its initial run. As film historian Rainer Rother argues, the German authorities, always suspicious of their own domestic propaganda effort, were envious of the British film and attempted to copy its successes for their own purposes. The premiere was highly publicized. A verbose endorsement of the film, written by screenwriter Hans Brennert, appeared in the German press. Brennert celebrated the film’s production. “From the Hell of the Somme, from the flaming earth,” he wrote, “heroic German film team operators, at the command of the

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73 Film is held in the BAFA and available online at [http://www.filmportal.de/video/bei-unseren-helden-an-der-somme](http://www.filmportal.de/video/bei-unseren-helden-an-der-somme). See also “Der “Somme-Schlacht”- Film,” *Der Kinematograph* 5 January 1917.
75 Number cited in Rother, “*Bei unseren Helden an der Somme*, 526.
76 Rother, “*Bei unseren Helden an der Somme*,” 526.
77 Advertisement for *Bei unseren Helden an der Somme* in *Der Kinematograph* 31 January 1917. Düsseldorfer Film Manufaktur Ludwig Gottschalk held the monopoly film rights for Rhineland- Westphalia. The advertisement refers to Brennert as “an important German author.” Brennert’s work on wartime propaganda was considerable. He wrote the script for the 1916 war film *Das Tagebuch des Dr. Hart*, directed the 1917 Bufa documentary *Der magische Gürtel*, and wrote inter-titles on some the films made for the war loan drives, including *Das Säugetier*. 
highest military leadership, have created the greatest cinematic document of this terrible war.”\(^7\)

Although much of the film is in fact of questionable authenticity, *Bei unseren Helden an der Somme* presents an optimistic vision of German military successes and offers a positive representation of the German nation.\(^7\) The bravery, nobility, and resilience of German soldiers is contrasted sharply with the destructive villainy of the nation’s enemies. The film also supplied the long sought-out images of fighting at “the front.” Despite what are now recognized as obvious recreations, the contemporary press, whether unaware of this staging or wishing to avoid state censors, was largely positive about the film. The critical response endorsed the view that the film gave “civilian

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\(^7\) Quoted from the original article in *BZ am Mittag* by Rother, see Rother Rother, “*Bei unseren Helden an der Somme,*” 527. The same text appears in the advertisement in *Der Kinematograph,* 31 January 1917.

\(^7\) Rother, “*Bei unseren Helden an der Somme.*” 525-542. The film is divided into three parts. The first depicts German activity behind the front, while the latter two present scenes of “combat” in the Saint-Pierre-Vaast forest and near Bouchavesnes. The first part of the film repeats many of the elements that had been common in newsreels since the first weeks of the war: images of soldiers marching or at ease behind the lines, wounded enemy soldiers, and numerous bombed and burned out buildings, clearly the result of the wanton destructiveness of the British. Considerable attention is also given to the everyday life of the German soldier. Rother argues that these sequences imply a narrative of German preparedness, inevitable victory, and German moral superiority. The scenes in the first part of the film are authentic—even if some of the elements, such as the helmets worn by the German soldiers, suggest the footage is earlier than 1916 The second and third parts, however, are predominately inauthentic. Most obviously, the scenes of battle are shot in locations unscathed by real fighting or artillery bombardment. Rother finds particularly telling the attention the first part of the film gives to German supplies and reserves, wounded enemies, the material destruction brought about by the Entente attacks, and “German trains [protecting]French refugees from being fired upon by their own countrymen” (as explained in an inter-title).
audiences, through the medium of film, a sense of what the men on the front had experienced, something civilians had so little chance to experience personally."

The promise of the allegedly authentic visual landscape of war and “the sense of what the men on the front had experienced,” was central to two other Bufa releases from 1917, both documentaries about the navy. Graf Dohna und seine “Möwe” was a documentary shot aboard the auxiliary cruiser S.M.S. Möwe. Under the command of Nikolaus Graf zu Dohna-Scholldien, the Möwe’s wartime service consisted of running the British naval blockade and attacking British shipping. The ship and its crew were celebrated in wartime propaganda. The footage used by Bufa as the basis of the film was taken by the ship’s first officer, Kapitänleutnant Wolf. The film’s reviewer in Der Kinematograph nevertheless praised the quality of the images. The authenticity and the national value of the film were also noted in the author’s effusive prose: “Truly, here is a

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80 Rother, “Bei unsere Helden an der Somme,” 537. Rother suggests, however, that the film was only “moderately successful” with audiences.

81 The Bufa naval films were part of a larger trend in naval war films during the war. The bulk of these were produced by Imperator Film Co. m.b.H, such as, Im Feuer der Schiffskanonen!(1915), Stolz weht die Flagge Schwarz-Weiss-Rot (1916), and Hoch klingt das Lied vom U-Boot-Mann! (1917). These films were also made at least in part with the involvement of the Navy League. See Geoff Eley, Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck (New Haven: Yale, 1980), 221. See also, the advertisement for Im Feuer der Schiffskanonen! in Der Kinematograph, 12 May 1915, the advertisement for Stolz weht die Flagge Schwarz-Weiss-Rot, in Der Kinematograph 28 July 1916, the advertisement for Hoch klingt das Lied vom U-Boot-Mann! in Der Kinematograph, 9 May 1917, and “Sondervorführung “Hoch klingt das Lied vom U-Boot-Mann” in Mozartsaal,” in Der Kinematograph, 16 May 1917. This article includes the lyrics for theater-goers to sing proceeding the Prolog.

82 Two books were published about the Möwe during the war. Nikolaus Graf zu Dohna-Scholdien, S.M.S. “Möwe” (Gotha: Perthes, 1916), and Nikolaus Graf zu Dohna-Scholdien, Der Möwe zweite Fahrt (Gotha: Perthes, 1917).

83 According to articles and promotional material relating to the film. For example, the advertisement for the film in Der Kinematograph, 9 May 1917. On the film, see Uli Jung and Wolfgang Mühl Benninghaus, “Grenzen deutscher Filmpropaganda im In-und Ausland,” in Geschichte des dokumentarische Films in Deutschland. Band I: Kaiserreich (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 2005), 460-462.
piece of world history alive before us and will remain vivid for all the future. The images
will proclaim the fame of Germany’s strength and the courage of its brave seamen for
eternity.” 84 The review went on to mention the long list of notable individuals who
attended the film’s premiere at the Deutsches Opernhaus on May 2nd, including
representatives from the military, the government, foreign dignitaries, and the crown
princess with her three sons.

Der magische Gürtel was the second naval documentary produced by Bufa in
1917. 85 The film followed the crew of U-boat U 35 as it attacked Entente shipping. It was
filmed by a Bufa camera operator who spent several weeks aboard the vessel off the coast
of Spain and Portugal in the spring of 1917. During that period, U 35 raided 23 ships and
destroyed 68,000 tons of goods. 86 Uli Jung and Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus have
suggested that the combat tactics employed by U 35’s commanding officer, Lothar von
Arnauld de la Perière, of sinking enemy shipping with its canon and not with torpedoes,
was particularly well-suited for filming, as it could be done on deck and in daylight. 87 It
is certainly a tactic frequently depicted in the film, which is largely a collection of daily
life aboard the ship interspersed with scenes of sinking enemy vessels. Although
obviously unable to capture the tension, claustrophobia, fear, or other emotions connected
with life aboard a U-Boot in wartime, the film is able to share one aspect of the sailor’s
experience—or at least something like a rough approximation of it. Aesthetically,

84 “Der “Möwe”-Film,” in Der Kinematograph, 9 May 1917.
85 The film is held in the BAFA K 20148-3. On the film, see Jung and Benninghaus,
“Grenzen deutscher Filmpropaganda im In-und Ausland,” 462-467.
86 Jung and Mühl-Benninghaus, “Grenzen deutscher Filmpropaganda im In-und
Ausland,” 464. Over the course of the war U 35 sank 194 ships and 453,716 tons of
goods.
87 Ibid.
positioning the camera on deck as the captured ships were fired upon and sunk allows the viewer to be positioned in the point-of-view of the sailors aboard the ship, fostering a strong sense of identification between the spectator and the crew. In terms of morale and message, the progression of surrendered and sinking ships implies a narrative of military success.

As the examples of Bei unseren Helden an der Somme, Graf Dohna und seine “Möwe,” and Der magische Gürtel demonstrate, Bufa was focused on making films on the front lines of the war. In a moment of total war, contemporaries worried that this neglected other fruitful avenues of film propaganda. As one consular official wrote from Stockholm regarding Bufa’s offerings, “Film propaganda is conceived as the presentation of films from the front alone, but it is also in the presentation of images of German cities, German art treasures, German river banks, of outstanding German men of science, etc.”

Missing from Bufa, in this view, was a positive representation of the broader German nation, the same type of images that DLG was purporting to offer to promote German culture, economy and tourism. Bufa did expand its production and did develop its own versions of the film program, offering both a “Beiprogramm” to theatre owners and a

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89 Although these scenes were not well received in neutral countries. See the discussion in Jung and Mühl-Benninghaus, “Grenzen deutscher Filmpropaganda im In- und Ausland.”

90 Quoted in Mühl-Benninghaus, Vom Augusterlebnis zur UFA-Gründung, 270-271.
“Youth Program” that could be shown to children and exhibited in schools.\textsuperscript{91} Example youth programming included a mixture of educational actualities as well as appropriate propaganda films.\textsuperscript{92} One such film \textit{Jan Vermeulen, der Müller von Flandern} presented an altruistic view of the German occupation in Belgium.\textsuperscript{93} In the film, one Flemish mother refuses to interact with the occupying Germans, including the schoolteacher instructing her son. She has a change of heart when her son is saved from drowning by those same Germans, and she is able to (properly) recognize “how a German heart beats.”\textsuperscript{94}

The desire for such an all-encompassing approach to film propaganda was one of the motivating factors behind Ludendorff’s push for the creation of Ufa. Another was an attempt to extend its reach as well, a process where Bufa had been frustrated through a repeated lack of cooperation from DLG. Kreimeier casts Ludendorff’s motivation in the creation of Ufa in terms the broader annexationist policies of the military command in the latter part of the war.\textsuperscript{95} Ufa’s birth, according to this view, is best seen in line with the Hindenburg Program and Brest-Litovsk. In addition to its goal of extending the range and reach of German propaganda, Ufa was also the solution to two other problems facing

\textsuperscript{91} The youth program is discussed in “Jugendprogramme des Königlichen Bild- und Filmamts,” in \textit{Der Kinematograph}, 31 October 1917. An advertisement for the Bufa Beiprogramm was published in \textit{Der Kinematograph}, 27 February 1918.
\textsuperscript{92} The actualities discussed in the October article in \textit{Der Kinematograph} included a short film about daily life in Jerusalem, and another on the production of grenades. “Jugendprogramme des Königlichen Bild- und Filmamts,” in \textit{Der Kinematograph}, 31 October 1917.
\textsuperscript{93} Presented in the same program discussed in “Jugendprogramme des Königlichen Bild- und Filmamts,” in \textit{Der Kinematograph}, 31 October 1917.
\textsuperscript{94} While it is unclear if this phrasing was included in the film’s inter-titles, it was used in the discussion of the film in “Jugendprogramme des Königlichen Bild- und Filmamts,” in \textit{Der Kinematograph}, 31 October 1917.
\textsuperscript{95} Kreimeier, \textit{The Ufa Story}, 24.
wartime film policy – or rather, two problematic film companies. The first was the competition between Bufo and DLG. Von Haeften and Ludendorff wanted DLG to be subordinate. DLG wanted its independence and understood the creation of Ufa as a direct affront to their organization and its policies. As Hans Barkhausen highlights, Klitzsch called the Ufa founding a “battle against DLG.”96 The second problem was the influential role played by the Danish Nordisk Film company in the German marketplace. Nordisk owned and operated 40 large theatres in Germany, made some of the most successful fiction films at the time and had a distribution network in neutral countries such as Switzerland and Holland.97 As a foreign company, even one from a friendly neutral, its influence was an area of concern for German nationalists.98

Ludendorff and von Haeften had initially entertained the idea of the OHL investing in Nordisk as well as some of the larger German film firms, but this plan was abandoned and Ufa was created in its stead. The creation of Ufa as a quasi-independent company in a public-private partnership was a response to both practical financial considerations and propaganda concerns. The Reich Treasury Office was worried about the cost of the endeavor and the return on its investment, which prompted von Haeften and Major Alexander Grau, director of the press office in the War Ministry, to seek out private investors and the involvement of the Deutsche Bank.99 In terms of propaganda,

96 Quoted in Barkhausen, Filmpropaganda für Deutschland, 134.
97 According to Major van den Bergh of the Prussian War Ministry at meeting to discuss the newly formed Ufa held on 31 January 1918. Translated and reproduced in Welch, “A Medium for the Masses,” 87. See also notes from the same meeting, “Aufzeichnung über die Sitzung im Kriegsministerium vom 30.1.1918,” BA R901 71975 pg. 13-15.
99 Kreimeier, The Ufa Story, 24. According to Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus, the financial investment in Ufa came from the state through the Deutsche Bank (3 million
there was concern that any financial investment by the state into the film industry would be seen as an attempt to co-opt and dictate acceptable film production.\textsuperscript{100} This was, of course, the exact objective that Ludendorff and others had in mind for the company, but it was believed that it would counteract the effectiveness of the propaganda produced if the public was suspicious of the government and its involvement – the state’s financial and administrative involvement was to remain a matter of secrecy.\textsuperscript{101}

Ufa was officially founded on 17 December 1917. Its founding purchases were the Nordisk, Messter, and Union (previously PAGU) film companies.\textsuperscript{102} With these purchases Ufa obtained a sizable chain of movie theatres both within Germany and abroad, as well as networks of film distribution, and companies engaged in film production. Both Oskar Messter of Messter film and Paul Davidson of Union joined the company on salary and profit sharing in an advisory capacity.\textsuperscript{103} All three companies were active producers with stables of talent on contract and these technicians, directors, writers, and actors all came to Ufa as well. In addition to its foray into the commercial film industry, Ufa also took oversight of Bufa, which became the intermediary between

\textsuperscript{100} As highlighted by Welch, “A Medium for the Masses: Ufa and Imperial German Film Propaganda during the First World War,” 85.

\textsuperscript{101} As reiterated by Major van den Bergh at the meeting of 31 January. Welch, “A Medium for the Masses: Ufa and Imperial German Film Propaganda during the First World War,” 91.

\textsuperscript{102} Nordisk was purchased for 10 million Mk, Messter for 5.3 million Mk, and Union for 1.1 million Mk. “Niederschrift über die Sitzung des Arbeitsausschusses der Universum-Film Aktiengesellschaft vom 15. Januar 1918,” BA R71975, 27.

\textsuperscript{103} Kreimeier, \textit{The Ufa Story}, 30.
Ufa and the military and was intended, ultimately, to transition to primarily archival responsibilities.\textsuperscript{104}

The material impact of Ufa on German film propaganda during the war is generally taken to be negligible. This is frequently attributed to its late arrival. Formed at the very end of 1917, the company was still consolidating its branches (and acquiring new ones) in the first half of 1918.\textsuperscript{105} The official film propaganda that was made in 1918 was done under the auspices of Bufa. It was Bufa’s film troops, for example who accompanied the army in its spring offensive, and were under specific orders to make films that highlighted the “ever forward” momentum of the advance, the destruction of the enemy positions, and the “annihilation of England and the bleeding to death of the French.”\textsuperscript{106} Another factor that worked against Ufa’s propaganda effort in the first year of its existence was the competing visions for the company held by the military stakeholders and the civilian personnel. The production plans for 1918 looked to the commercial viability of the company and marginalized the propaganda purpose Ludendorff had envisioned for it. The momentous and ultimately failed military preoccupations of 1918, Kreimeier suggests, played no small part in allowing the civilian film leadership considerable influence within Ufa.

Ufa was founded due to a lack of administrative cooperation between government and commercial interests. Those same organizations were also producing propaganda that was frequently dissimilar. DLG sought to expose audiences to the merits of German

\textsuperscript{104} Welch, “A Medium for the Masses: Ufa and Imperial German Film Propaganda during the First World War,” 87.
\textsuperscript{105} For example, the purchase of May-Film and the retention of the actress Mia May and her director husband, Joe May. Kreimeier, The Ufa Story, 43.
\textsuperscript{106} Quoted in Barkhausen, Filmpropaganda für Deutschland, 144.
industry by surrounding its propaganda films with more commercially appealing title. Bufa succeeded at the opposite extreme. It created popular films that valorized the soldiers fighting the war, but in doing so it tied its propaganda to the war effort and not the larger idea of the German nation. These organizations also neglected to celebrate the very group that made up the majority of their audiences – the civilians struggling on the home front. As is explored below, this group figured more prominently in the films made in support of the war loans.

War Loan Films

War loans films provide a unique case study on the form and content of German film propaganda during the latter half of the war. Unlike most films of the era, a considerable number of the films have survived. Their use was to publicize the various war loan drives and to encourage German civilians to support the war effort through the directed investment of war loans. Paying the high cost of the war effort was one of the great challenges faced by the German government. Motivated initially by a steadfast belief in a short war, and throughout by a desire not to lay the burden of paying for the war on German taxpayers or to become indebted to foreign investors, the choice was made to finance the war largely through the issuing of war loans to the German public. Of the estimated 155 billion marks needed to pay for the war, 60 percent was to be raised through loans.¹⁰⁷ Such a policy placed much of the burden for the war at the feet of the German public and tied the financial strength of the nation, its very ability to fight

¹⁰⁷ Welch, Germany, Propaganda and Total War, 77-78. See also Chickering, Imperial Germany and the Great War, 104-105.
successful campaigns, to the support of the mass public. As long as morale was high, a solid financial foundation could be expected. But as morale waned, so did the necessary income generated by war loan sales. It was the need to maintain public morale and to encourage the purchase of war loans that motivated the turn towards the cinema.

The first several war loan issues were a series of tremendous financial successes. As David Welch has suggested, the patriotic feeling of the early war years and the idea that war loans presented a unique opportunity for those on the home front to do their own part for the national cause lead to the easy success of the early drives.\textsuperscript{108} More than 2.5 million citizens purchased war loans in the second war loan drive in 1915.\textsuperscript{109} By 1916, however, this previously relied upon support was beginning to weaken. Small investors purchased fewer loans and the amount of debt increased substantially. This trend may have reflected a lack of support for the war or a decrease in patriotic feeling.\textsuperscript{110} Alternatively, as the loans were also presented as investment opportunities, a weakening public interest could reflect a similar lessening in public confidence for the financial security of the state. As will be seen below, a close examination of the films released in support of the latter war loan drives speaks to both of these issues.

Concern over the declining support for war loans prompted Ludendorff to push for a more concerted propaganda campaign in support of the war loan drives. Posters extolled the public to purchase loans with images of romanticized German families under need of protection, noble Teutonic knights acting as sword and shield of the fatherland,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{108} Welch, \textit{Germany, Propaganda and Total War}, 78.
\item \textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{110} Welch points out that some public sentiment existed that if the government were not able to support the war financially, the war might come to a more expedient conclusion. See Ibid., 79.
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\end{footnotesize}
and with Hindenburg himself asking the public for their finances, and, by extension, their loyalty. 111 Postering placed war loan advertisements in public spaces. Advertisements in support of purchasing war loans also appeared in print, and the film trade press was no exception.112

The popularity of the cinema made it an ideal medium for war loan propaganda. While there do seem to have been films made and exhibited that consisted of only filmed images of existing posters, many short films were made for this purpose as well.113 These films would be screened as part of typical film programs or preceding feature presentations. *Hann, Hein und Henny*, which featured the famous actress Henny Porten as herself, was among the most successful of these films.114 In the film, two sailors, discouraged with their lack of provisions, write to Porten.115 Receiving their note on a film set, a supportive Porten proceeds to invite both men to her parlor for a drink and to

111 Ibid., 210-213.
112 See for example, a two page editorial, “Die fünfte Reichskriegsanleihe,” and the advertisement “Zeichnet die fünfte Kriegsanleihe!” *Der Kinematograph*, 13 October 1916. The article explained not only the patriotic, but also the financial benefits attached to the purchase of war loans. The advertisement focused on an appeal to the patriotic feelings of wartime and the threats posed by Germany’s enemies.
113 The tradition of such simple films extends back to the Flag films, literally a continuous shot of a flag, produced by Thomas Edison in America during the Spanish-American war. The archived collection of war loan films held by the Bundesarchiv-Filmarciv Berlin contain at least one of these poster films, although it remains unclear to what extent this simple images were used. See *Kriegsanleihe-Werbefilm der Reichsbank Teil III (1917-1918)*, VHS BAFA 340.
114 Welch refers to a film press report calling the film an “overwhelming success” with audiences. Welch, *Germany, Propaganda and Total War*, 210. For a broader discussion of German film stars in wartime, see Ramona Curry, “How Early German Film Stars Helped Sell the War(es),” in Karel Dibbets and Bert Hogenkamp, eds. *Film and the First World War* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995) 139-148. See also the film referenced in the trade press, “Kriegsanleihe –Filme I” in *Der Kinematograph*, 26 September 1917.
share her inspired solution with them. The final sequence of the film (presumably their solution) is an image of Porten and the two sailors against a black backdrop as the phrase “subscribe for the seventh war loan,” appears onscreen. By acknowledging the perception that public support was in decline, the film engaged directly with an audience that had lessened its figurative and literal investment in loans over three difficult years of wartime. The question of public support for loans (and by extension, the war effort) was a recurring motif in subsequent films.

The central figure behind the production of war loan films was Julius Pinschewer and his Vaterländische Filmvertrieb. Pinschewer was a pioneer in both advertising and animation films, and many of the war loan films were produced under his direction.116 Beginning in 1916, from the fourth war loan on, he extolled German exhibitors and theatre owners to allow for short films promoting war loans to be presented in their theatres. In an advertisement taken out by Pinschewer in Der Kinematograph in October 1916 (during the fifth war loan drive), a direct appeal was made. The advertisement was directed at “German” theatre owners, who should “fulfill a duty to the Fatherland through the voluntary support of advertising war loans.”117 To aid these exhibitors with their patriotic obligations Pinschewer listed three films that had been produced in conjunction with the Reichsbank. Based on titles alone, the three films listed seem to echo the approach taken to war propaganda by DLG and Bufa. Die Eröffnung der Zeichnung der

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117 Der Kinematograph, 20 October 1916.
Kriegsanleihe in der Reichsbank, Eine gute Kapitalsanlage, and - sie wachen für Euch educated viewers on the activities of the Reichsbank, highlighted the investment potential of the loan system, and targeted the sacrifice and heroism of German soldiers fighting to protect the nation, respectively. To assuage any concerns that exhibitors might possess, Pinschewer let them know that shipping was free and that the films were appealing. “You can be certain,” the advertisement assured, “of the thanks of your visitors.”

An advertisement run by Pinschewer one week later offered another potent national symbol – a film of Field Marshall Hindenburg.

The Reich was thankful for Pinschewer’s activities. As Der Kinematograph reported in January 1917, Pinschewer had informed Dr. Karl Helfferich, Secretary of the Treasury, that almost all German theaters had devoted time on their screens to the exhibition of war loan films during the previous two drives (fourth and fifth). Helfferich had responded by giving Pinschewer, as representative of the film industry, the “warmest thanks” of the Reichsbank and the state for their voluntary support of the loan drive initiatives.

Pinschewer, the Reichsbank, and theatre owners contributed to supply the public with films that implored them to support the war effort and to subscribe to the various war loans. A brief examination of surviving war loan films indicates that the propaganda value of the films was understood in at least four ways: through the negative depiction of Germany’s enemies, by framing the appeal in the symbolic language of German nationalism, through highlighting the potential financial benefits of war loans, and

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118 Der Kinematograph, 20 October 1916.
119 Der Kinematograph, 27 October 1916.
finally, through a direct representation of what supporting war loans meant for German troops in the field.

Films that attempted to influence the public through a condemning representation of Germany’s enemies did so in ways common to wartime propaganda more broadly: by vilifying these nations and by highlighting the direct threat they posed to Germany and its population. Here, Great Britain seems to have been the primary target, and it was Britain’s aggressive imperialism that was commonly criticized. The British John Bull caricature was a prominent target for propagandists who used the character to personify the British nation. In *John Bull* an animated Bull is seen reacting to the numerous German war loan drives.\textsuperscript{121} Beginning with an indifference at the first loan drive, his expression grows increasing surprised and annoyed with each successive drive, culminating with complete shock and disbelief at the prospect of a seventh war loan. A similar conception is used in another animated film, *Der beste Schuss*.\textsuperscript{122} Here, a target is hit by a series of arrows labeled as first, second, third, etc through until ninth. Each arrow is meant to represent a war loan drive. After all the arrows have found their target, the shot pulls back to reveal John Bull, wounded by each arrow and by the dedication of the German loan subscribing public. The idea of war loans as an attack on John Bull directly is also evident in the film *Ein Boxkampf mit John Bull*.\textsuperscript{123} In this animated film, John Bull attempts to box a large bag labeled “8 Kriegsanleihe,” which proves impervious to his assault and proceeds to knock him out instead in a few short blows. In these films, John

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{121} *John Bull, Kriegsanleihe-Werbefilm der Reichsbank Teil III (1917-1918)*, VHS BAFA 340.\textsuperscript{122} *Die Beste Schuss, Kriegsanleihe-Werbefilm der Reichsbank Teil III (1917-1918)*, VHS BAFA 340.\textsuperscript{123} *Ein Boxkampf mit John Bull , Kriegsanleihe-Werbefilm der Reichsbank Teil III (1917-1918)*, VHS; BAFA 340.}
Bull not only provided a clear symbol against which the German public could position itself, but it also drew a causal connection between the purchasing of loans and the thwarting of the enemy. These films make explicit the contribution to ultimate victory made by the German public when purchasing war loans.

The John Bull character was presented as more than merely a foil for animators wishing to exaggerate the strength of Germany’s war loans. The character was also used to represent the threatening nature of Britain and its empire for both Germany and the world. Union Film used the character in Das Saugetier, drawn by Leonard Verse and written by Hans Brennert. In the film, John Bull is depicted as an ape-like creature sitting on top of England on a world map and gazing through a telescope. Bull surveys the extent of the British empire, which includes animated images of racial caricatures of diamond miners in South Africa, canal diggers in the Suez canal, coffee growers in Ceylon, and rum workers in Jamaica. The message that the British empire exists to exploit the resources of the world is reinforced as the ape-John Bull is transformed into a monster with tentacles spread out to the corners of the world and planting Union Jack flags wherever its tentacles rest. John Bull grows increasingly obese until finally a series of U-boats, planes, and Zeppelins appear to bomb Bull (and to liberate the world from the exploitation of British imperialism).

The British were not the only enemy target of propaganda. In Der Heimat Schützengraben the threat to Germany comes from the Russian army. The film opens

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124 Das Saugetier BAFA 3094. See also the reference to the film in the trade press in “Kriegsanleihe-Filme I,” in Der Kinematograph, 26 September 1917. The film is also available online at http://www.filmportal.de/video/das-saeugetier.
125 Der Heimat Schützengraben, Kriegsanleihe-Werbefilm der Reichsbank Teil I, VHS; BAFA 338.
with two men sitting on a bench in a rural German village. One tells the story of his own village, which was attacked and pillaged by the Russians. Playing on the image of Russian barbarism and the need to defend the homeland present in earlier propaganda, the film includes an extended sequence of Russian soldiers burning the village and killing its civilian inhabitants. Following this flashback, the second man goes home and reflects on his own son in the army, remembering their parting as the son went off to war. These recollections prompt him to collect what money he has and to use it to purchase war loans. The men prompt others in the village to do the same, and the film ends with the sentiment that “We have to strengthen the front. That is why we are all subscribing to the war loans.”

Other war loan films connected the motivations for fighting to national symbols. In *Jung Siegfried*, the battle between the mythic German hero and the dragon is re-created. Parallels are drawn between Siegfried’s sword as a weapon to slay the dragon and war loans as weapons to defeat Germany’s enemies in the present. In the invocation of a more contemporary symbol, *Ein Wort Hindenburgs über die Kriegsanleihe* used the war hero to endorse war loans. The film presented Hindenburg and accompanied his image with the phrase “a good investment.” Support for war loans, then, was support for a national hero, and a reliable wartime leader. This appeal to—and from—German heroes appeared within print advertisements as well. In the final months of the war,

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126 Jung Siegfried, *Kriegsanleihe-Werbefilm der Reichsbank Teil I*, VHS; BAFA 338.
127 *Ein Wort Hindenburgs über die Kriegsanleihe, Kriegsanleihe-Werbefilm der Reichsbank Teil I*, VHS; BAFA 338.
128 “Ein gute Kapitalanlage.” Hindenburg’s image was featured on war loan posters as well. As David Welch noted, one poster featured Hindenburg’s bust accompanied by the phrase, “The man who subscribes to the war loans is giving me the best birthday present.” See Welch, *Germany, Propaganda and Total War*, 210.
illustrations of figures of historical, political, and cultural renown were used to inspire war loan subscriptions. Bismarck, Beethoven, and Schiller were among those who made appearances in these half-page advertisements.\(^{129}\)

The issue of investment potential was one that recurred in several war loan films. In the film *Deutschlands Volksvermögen*, stop-motion animation was used to symbolize the financial security attached to war loan investing.\(^{130}\) Sacks of money representing yearly income and assets move across the screen. Germany’s national assets are symbolized by a bag labeled by 375 billion marks, annual income listed at 48 billion, and annual increase in assets at 10 billion. These represent the security against which the war loans are to be insured. Two final bags symbolize war loans (60 billion) and the interest on those loans (3 billion). Removed from the rhetoric of national purpose so prominent in other films, this film focuses on calming fears that the war loans will prove to be an unwise and imprudent investment. Another, untitled, stop-motion film focuses solely on the return war loans supplied on their investments.\(^{131}\) Rather than bags of money, this film used a box of war bonds. Text on the screen explain that a 1000 mark / 5 percent war loan costs only 980 marks and bring 50 marks a year in interest. To symbolize the interest, a roll of coins enters the frame and fifty coins line up.

The use of these animation techniques allowed the filmmakers to make a perhaps complex seeming financial transaction—the purchasing of war loans, the interest they provided, and the return on investment—into a straightforward and memorable

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\(^{129}\) For Bismarck, see *Der Kinematograph*, 18 September 1918, for Beethoven, see *Der Kinematograph*, 25 September 1918, for Schiller, see *Der Kinematograph*, 2 October 1918. Each advertisement used quotes and an appeal from the respective figures.

\(^{130}\) *Deutschlands Volksvermögen, Kriegsanleihe-Werbefilm der Reichsbank Teil III*, VHS; BAFA 340.

\(^{131}\) Included on *Kriegsanleihe-Werbefilm der Reichsbank Teil I*, VHS; 338.
animation. A blatant visualization of this process occurred in the film *Die Zauberschere*.\(^{132}\) In this film the 1000 mark loans are again the central feature. The biannual return of 25 marks is indicated through the combination of a clock, a calendar, and the titular magic scissors. As time passes on the clock and calendar, the scissors cut out certificates from the war loan sheets. Simultaneous with this cutting, piles of coins appear on screen and grow with each certificate cut. The film extends this process through to 1937, when, a title informs the viewer, the initial investment will have been doubled.

The film *Worauf wir vertrauen*, similarly, uses stop-motion animation to present to the film spectator many of the standard items in a soldier’s kit.\(^{133}\) The film opens with a tabletop covered with a white cloth. A rifle moves into the frame and rests on the table. Two boxes of bullets enter the shot and the bullets leave their boxes and load themselves into the rifle. A knife, three grenades, a canister, a gas mask, and a helmet follow in sequence. Finally, stacks of coins and paper bills enter into the frame reminding the viewer that German money is needed to properly outfit German soldiers. The film’s appeal to the audience is based on these simple images. It solicits support for the war loan drive by making visible the real equipment (or at least some of the supposed equipment) that the war loan drives will provide. On one level, *Worauf wir vertrauen* uses animation and the visual attraction of film to appeal to its audience, on another, it reinforces the contribution that war loans make and in so doing reminds its audience of their own valuable part in the war effort.

\(^{132}\) *Die Zauberschere, Kriegsanleihe-Werbefilm der Reichsbank Teil II*, VHS; BAFA 339.

\(^{133}\) *Worauf wir vertrauen, Kriegsanleihe-Werbefilm der Reichsbank Teil III*, VHS; BAFA 340.
This combination of attraction and patriotism is also evident in the slightly longer, fiction film Āgir, made by Pinschewer. The film depicts the tour of a sea god across the range of the German military effort. After reading in his morning newspaper that the upcoming war loan drive might be a failure, he decides to visit Germany and see for himself. Surfacing on a U-boat, he is warmly greeted by its captain and has a meal and drink on the forecastle deck. A seaplane pulls up alongside the U-boat and Āgir climbs aboard and flies to Germany. Once on land he is taken by car through a tour of Berlin, passing through the Brandenburg Gate and pausing (self-referentially) at the Neptune fountain. Finally, his car arrives at the Reichsbank. Inside, he meets a soldier wounded in Flanders but still supporting the war effort – and his comrades – by purchasing war loans. He speaks as well with other civilians in line in the bank to subscribe for their loans. Concluding that there is in fact tremendous support for the war loan drive and affirming that each German will do his or her part, he returns to his home beneath the waves. En route, he returns to the U-boat and assures the crew that their countrymen and countrywomen, the German people, stand behind them.

Āgir brings together many of the threads of official German propaganda. In highlighting the various technologies available to the German military and the day-to-day process of war loan subscription at the Reichsbank, the film nods to the educational approach desired by DLG. Its inclusion of front line sailors echoes the predilections of Befa. Its message, common to many war loan films, was to insist on the continued solidity of public morale and popular support for the war. In so doing, it valorized the civilian German public as well as those serving on the various front lines. It

\(^{134}\) Āgir BAFA 327.
accomplished this with a fantastical framing device that made war loan subscription into its own imperial attraction.

War loan films addressed the national audience directly. The purpose of the films was to influence members of that audience to commit their personal financial resources to the national cause. The films engaged spectators as a necessary contributing part of the ongoing war effort. Certainly, the German troops on the front lines were celebrated in these films, but so too were those on the home front lauded for the own boldness and sacrifice. Ägir merely took the valorization of the public implied – or at least aspired to – in other war loan films and put it on screen. Further, in honoring the national audience, war loan films also honored the industry itself. It was the medium that was helping the public fulfill its patriotic duty. As Max Jacob, president of the Schutzverband der Film Fabrikanten Deutschlands, implored German film exhibitors in an article titled “The Triumph of Film” in the pages of Der Kinematograph during the seventh war loan drive in late 1917:

German film houses! Off to work on the skills that the state needs in order to defend us. In the last week of the war loan drive, play all the propaganda films distributed by the Schutzverband der Film Fabrikanten Deutschlands. Play them, confident that the state authorities will appreciate the films’ worth, and with it the complete worth of your existence.\textsuperscript{135}

The national service of the film industry in support of the war loan drives was another opportunity for the medium to demonstrate its worth, quality, and respectability.

As examples of early German cinematic achievement and as evidence of the mobilization of media for the war effort, the war loan films are, retrospectively, incredibly valuable. In the last two years of the war, however, their value was

\textsuperscript{135} Max Jacobi, “Der Triumph des Films,” in Der Kinematograph, 10 October 1917.
circumscribed by the successes and failures of the war effort. Framed as contributing to a final victory, war loan appeals appeared as vacant as other propaganda rhetoric when that victory became impossible. But in highlighting the role of the German public, and invoking the military and the past as symbols of the nation, these films did contribute to the changing symbolic vocabulary of German nationalism.

The German Cinema and the Spirit of 1918

One of the final films produced by DLG before the end of the war was a historical epic. *Der Friedensreiter*, released in September 1918, was labeled a “DLG-Monumental-Film,” in promotional advertisement. *Der Friedensreiter* depicted the journey of Dutch peace envoys to the peace conference at Münster at the end of the Thirty Years War. Reviews of the film in the trade press, and in DLG advertisements highlighted the same elements that had been used to sell historical fiction films since the years before the First World War: lavish settings, historical costumes, and the use of historical research and historical paintings in the preparation and production of the film. But the film was also particularly timely. Parallels between the ending of one brutal and painful war in the

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136 See the advertisement for the film, which included a lengthy excerpt for the press, reproduced stills from the film, and highlighted the involvement of the city archivist Dr. Schulte in Münster, the Westphalian Heimatbund, and Westphalian museum director Dr. Giesberg in *Der Kinematograph*, 2 September 1918. See also the prominent place given to the painter Gerard Terborch, the screenwriter Dr. Freidrich Castelle, and Schulte again in a subsequent advertisement in *Der Kinematograph*, 23 October 1918. For a discussion of the film in its historical context, see Arthur Loening, “Ein Friedensfilm,” *Lichtbild Bühne*, December 1918.
1640s and the current moment did not escape contemporaries. Writing about the film in the journal *Lichtbild Bühne* in December 1918, one month after the armistice, a contributor, Arthur Loening discussed the broader historical context of the film. He also noted the lessons that those embarking on a new peace could take from history. “Peace is upon us. Whether it will bring true salvation remains to be seen. But also with this peace decisions will be made that will determine the fate of humanity for centuries to come.”

*Der Friedensreiter* was not unique among films released in the final months of the war and in the early months after November 1918. Other films were able to capture the changing political mood of the moment as well, although—unsurprisingly—these productions were not as closely associated to Hugenberg and the Fatherland Party. Targeting an audience at the opposite end of the political spectrum from Hugenberg’s rightwing nationalists, Rudolph Meinert-Film released a film autobiography of Ferdinand Lassalle, the nineteenth-century political activist and key figure in the development of the German socialist movement. *Ferdinand Lassalle* was based, as its promotion made clear, on a book by Dr. Alfred Schirokauer, and made sure to capture “the spirit and fashion” of its time. According to Rudolph Meinert, director and producer of the film, its release

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137 The motivating factors behind the decision for nationalist DLG to make a film about peacemaking in early 1918 are unknown, but their interests in the Dutch film market place could offer one possible explanation.


139 This is not say that such themes overwhelmed exhibition at this point in time. In fact, the impression taken from the trade press is how much of the film business continued as usual between October and December 1918. In part this reality was tied to production schedules. *Der Friedensreiter*, for example, was being advertised to exhibitors in early September and still playing in theaters in December.

was somewhat of a fortuitous coincidence, as he had been attempting to have the film made for at least two years.\footnote{Jacobsohn, “Ferdinand Lassalle: Zur Berliner Uraufführung des Rudolf Meinert-Films,” Der Kinematograph, 2 October 1918.}

The timing of its release placed *Ferdinand Lassalle* at the forefront of a reorientation of German nationalism in German cinema at the end of the war. Labeling the film a “democratic monument,” a reviewer in *Der Kinematograph* suggested “no time could be as favorable for the success of the film as these days, when [SPD politician Philip] Scheidemann is Secretary of State.”\footnote{Ibid.} This was written in early October. In an advertisement that ran for the film in the trade press the first week of November, its distributor, Scala-Film Verleih G.m.b.H capitalized on the changing political order. “On the path to a free Volksstaat […] Ferdinand Lassalle built the first step.”\footnote{Advertisement for *Ferdinand Lassalle*, Der Kinematograph 6 November 1918.} Reinforcing this point, the advertisement later continued that “the current hour brings the fulfillment of his work” and labeled the *Ferdinand Lassalle* “the great political film of the hour of struggle and love, fatherland and freedom.”\footnote{Ibid.}

As it had in August 1914, the film industry adjusted to the transitioning political moment. Distributors, and likely exhibitors, responded to peace, and to the collapse of the imperial state and the abdication of the Kaiser, with an appeal to the popular nationalism of its audience. What was different in 1918 was how that nationalism was imagined. It was democratic and populist, with the people at its centre. Aside from exceptions like Rudolph Meinert, the film industry was largely unprepared for peace (as it had been for war four years previously). And like 1914, one of the business practices undertaken was
to re-use whatever existing films might be seen as appropriate and commercially appealing in the moment. This may explain the lengthy exhibition runs of films such as *Der Friedensreiter* and *Ferdinand Lassalle*.

One company that was quick to capitalize on the political mood was Universum Filmverleih.\(^{145}\) Universum promoted and distributed Danish films as *Söhne des Volkes* (which had been previously titled *König des Lichts*) and *Die Waffen Nieder*, the 1914 film version of Bertha von Suttner’s antiwar novel of the same name.\(^{146}\) In promotion *Söhne des Volkes* was referred to as “a new film for a new time,” and associated with the “union of socialist groups against Bolshevism.”\(^{147}\) The rhetoric around *Die Waffen Nieder* was similarly evocative, if not quite as revolutionary. Advertisements for the film declared that “The cinema is the theater of the people” and extolled the exhibitors to “Lead the masses on the path to knowledge, help raise the idea of the League of Nations.”\(^{148}\) *Die Waffen Nieder*’s titular phrase – “Lay Down Your Arms” was similarly

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\(^{145}\) The relationship between Universum Filmverleih and Ufa is unclear. Despite its close name association, Universum’s logo was distinct from Ufa’s and its political and pacifist leanings would seem to clash with Ufa’s practices. However, Universum’s offerings were Danish Nordisk productions, and Nordisk had sold its German holdings and enterprises to Ufa. Universum may have been an attempt by Nordisk founder Ole Olsen to reintroduce himself into the German film marketplace.


\(^{147}\) See, respectively, the advertisements in *Der Kinematograph*, 6 November 1918, and *Der Film*, 23 November 1918.

\(^{148}\) Advertisement for *Die Waffen Nieder*, in *Der Kinematograph*, 6 November 1918.
invoked as “the call of the world, the call of every nation.” These were to be the ideals of the new German political reality.

The re-articulation of German nationalism that took place in the cinema at the end of the First World War moved the people to the centre of the national symbolic vocabulary. An advertisement in *Der Kinematograph* from the appropriately named National-Film A.G, featured a neoclassical image of a male figure breaking a sword across his knee. Below the figure and in large and prominent font ran the words “Freedom, Equality, Fraternity” in bold letters. Older symbols such as the monarchy and the military gave way to democratic ideals and a celebration of the national community. These symbols were by no means uncontested, as the atmosphere of defeat, collapse, revolution, and the creation of a new republic resulted in an impermanence and state of flux. But in that moment the legitimacy of the nation was firmly connected to the people, to the German national audience.

**Conclusion**

In the last two years of the First World War the German state finally came to recognize the propaganda potential of the cinema. Motivated by a willingness, born of dire circumstance, to utilize any potential weapon they could muster in the service of their total war effort, officials within the military, the Foreign Office, and the Supreme Command turned to film as a means to maintain morale at home and solicit support abroad. The film propaganda they developed was a continuation of the forms that had

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149 See the advertisement in *Der Kinematograph*, 6 November 1918.
150 Advertisement for National Film AG, *Der Kinematograph*, 6 November 1918.
been used in years previously by private film companies, conscientious reformers, and extra-parliamentary agitators. By the end of the war the cinema was an important aspect in the state’s propaganda campaign.

But even in the context of total war, it was still private enterprises and individuals, such as DLG and Julius Pinschewer, who took the lead in the popularization of film propaganda and in attempts to define the national community on screen. When the state came around it was by following their lead, or in response to their initiatives. Nevertheless, for the film industry, this acceptance represented the pinnacle of their path towards cultural legitimacy and respectability. A medium that had its very existence questioned as not “serious” enough in 1914, had its worth as a medium for “information and influence” proven in the context of war.

The messages put forward in film propaganda attempted to convince the national audience of the brave, patriotic commitment of German soldiers – and to a lesser extent, civilians, the destructive threat posed by Germany’s enemies, and the inevitability of a German military victory. When the stream of successes depicted in propaganda films (and other media) did not lead to victory, but rather to shocking defeat, the legitimacy of the state was called into question. In its stead, the public sought to redefine the basis for the national community. New symbols were needed to define this new vision of “fatherland and freedom.” In November 1918, Germans turned towards a more democratic political system, centered not on the monarchy but on the German people.
Conclusion

Ufa ushered in the New Year in 1919 with warm greetings for the German film industry. The company ran a one-page advertisement in *Der Kinematograph* that featured a sketch of young women dressed in evening wear, sitting atop an Ufa nameplate with a cocktail glass raised above her head, and a banner reading “Prosit Neujahr” circling around her.¹ This was the celebratory manner in which Ufa, the company created by a military dictatorship to mobilize public attitudes and to help Ludendorff and Hindenburg win the war, welcomed the first new year of the democratic post-war, post-Kaiserreich world. The anticipated year to come would see the horrific political violence of the Spartacist uprising, the damning treaty of Versailles, and the beginning of production on Robert Wiene’s *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*.

In the years and decades to follow the German cinema would articulate and contest representations of the national community. For some film scholars, the Weimar cinema was the manifestation of a post-war national community that was “haunted,” or “shell-shocked.”² For others, the period reveals a self-conscious attempt to derive and promote a “German” film style as a means garnering international prestige, gaining a foothold in lucrative foreign film markets, and rehabilitating the image of the German

¹ *Der Kinematograph*, 1 January 1919.
nation in the world. But the way in which the optimism of the Ufa advertisement fits awkwardly with our perceptions of this historical moment and of “Weimar Cinema” more generally, warns against over-emphasizing continuity. This dissertation makes no sweeping claims as to how the competing visions of the national community that populated the Wilhelmine cinema influenced the Weimar cinema, let alone that of the Third Reich. What it does demonstrate, is that attempts to articulate a particular national community were not new developments in 1919 or 1933. Rather, they were nearly as old as the German cinema itself.

Before 1910, Kaiser Wilhelm II was the most prominent representation of the nation projected onto German screens. His image was an important aspect of the charismatic public persona. He was also Germany’s first film star. His fame and the pomp of his public appearances at parade and military maneuvers guaranteed public interest at the box office. His fondness for film and his willing cooperation with the industry made him a much-needed “friend of the cinema.” But Wilhelm was not the only national symbol in the cinema during this early period. Extra-parliamentary pressure groups such as the Navy League and the Colonial Society used the cinema to advocate for their own image of the German nation. The images they projected in travelling shows, museums, and the very first permanent theatres transformed the objectives of an aggressive foreign policy into otherwise unseen imperial attractions.

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3See, Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany’s Historical Imaginary* (London: Routledge, 2000). If the trade press is any indication, film makers were eager and more than ready to assert themselves into the global film marketplaces in ways that they had not thought possible in 1914. Indeed, articles in the trade press had been discussing how to prepare the film industry to take advantage of the war’s end since 1917.
Between 1910 and the outbreak of the First World War, film exhibition in Germany came to be typified by influential foreign companies, large permanent theatres, longer and more narratively complex films, and growing anxiety about what this medium meant for the masses who attended it with growing regularity. The popularity of German historical films, which revered the great figures and glorious wars of the German past, responded to all these developments. These films were obviously German films, sufficiently expensive to appeal to a large audience, and respectable enough for the cinema’s critics. Kaiser Wilhelm II, lionized in the 25th anniversary of his reign in 1913, continued to provide Germans with a film star and the cinema with reputable endorsement.

At the outbreak of the war, the cinema’s affinity for the nation enabled it to take advantage of the mood of enthusiasm and anxiety that typified Germany in 1914. In the early weeks of the war, the exhibition of nationalist films made the cinema a valuable space for patriotic excitement. As mobilization lead into hostilities, the ability of film to bring images of the war experience, if not (precisely) the front line experience, to the German public in the form of actualities and newsreels made the cinema a potentially worthwhile source of information. Both uses justified the continued operation of cinemas in opposition to authorities and critics who questioned the medium’s seriousness and its appropriateness for the momentous days of war. Combining patriotic sentiment with promised visualizations of the world war, war films assured audiences of the nobility of the German war effort, the necessity of sacrifice, and inevitable victory of Germany’s heroic soldiers. These soldiers became personifications of the German nation as the
cinematic (and political) persona of Kaiser Wilhelm II, prominent in August 1914, gradually faded into a supporting role.

Between 1916 and the end of the war, state authorities, in particular Erich Ludendorff and leading voices in the military and Foreign Office, came finally to recognize the value of the cinema for propaganda purposes. Not uncoincidentally, this realization came at the moment when the need for such a tool was most pronounced. Once won over to the cinema’s power their approach to the medium was total, pushing for both propagandistic films and near total control of the film industry itself. Although the idea that the cinema could be profitably put to such a purpose may have seemed revolutionary to them, the similarities between the propaganda at the end of the war, and the nationalist uses of film in the preceding decades suggests that this moment was a culmination rather than a radical shift.

As this dissertation has argued, the cinema is an important site upon which to map the competing representations of the German nation. Kaiser Wilhelm II saw himself as a national symbol, the personification of the German nation in life and on screen. While his political popularity held and before a star system emerged that could offer other compelling personalities, he was to many German film spectators exactly that. Proponents of naval strength, colonial expansion, and a German “place in the sun” presented their own image of the German nation. Aided by the visual appeal of technologically impressive battleships or the exotic allure of the colonial world, these groups transformed the goals of a radical nationalist foreign policy into “living pictures” onscreen. Historical films about the honored heroes and glorious moments of the German past provided a national audience with a movie-made myth about their imagined
community of nationality. At its core, this myth was about a historical and Prussian-centric Germany and the requisite virtues of patriotism, militarism, and sacrifice required to move boldly into the future. This myth was reinforced and expanded upon at the outbreak of the war. The patriotic ethos evident in the German cinematic past was transported to the brave military heroes of contemporary war films. When, at the end of the war, the state became actively engaged in the creation of film propaganda, its overriding concern was about the image of the nation – its industry, its military, and what it was that caused the “German heart to beat.”

Second, this dissertation has argued that early cinema should be seen as part of the political culture of the Kaiserring. Although film was not actively employed in electoral culture, it did reflect many of the most significant political questions of the day. Cinema promoted the image and influence of the monarchy. The personal rule of Kaiser Wilhelm II was in large measure dependent on how powerfully his persona resonated with the public. His image in the cinema was part of the crafting of that persona. Similarly, the extent of the influence of extra-parliamentary groups such as the Navy League and Colonial Society was tied to the size of their memberships and the public support for their ambitions. Film exhibitions proved invaluable in winning both. Cultural reformers saw the cinema, with its sensational images and ungoverned mixed audiences, as emblematic of many of the dangerous shortcomings of modernity. Advocating for the improvement—if not the eradication—of the medium, was one aspect of a wider attempt to reform German society. The key political issues of the war years concerned public support and popular morale at home and a sympathetic image of Germany abroad. Film
was central to both these issues, a fact that was evident to those within the film industry in 1914 and became apparent to state authorities over the course of the war.

Third, this dissertation has demonstrated the centrality of the cinema’s nationalist engagement in the development of the medium in Germany. The nation provided the early cinema with film subjects and by extension, audiences. Nationalist spectacles of the navy, the colonies, and the Kaiser provided popular attractions in the era of travelling cinema exhibition. When longer, narrative films became the industry standard the national past, with its epic drama and lavish settings, proved especially appealing with a regularly film-going public. The war offered further opportunities. A national cause could be romanticized or reported upon, or both.

Perhaps equally as important as the film subjects available through nationalist engagement was the respectability such a relationship brought to the cinema. Although the cinema expanded rapidly it faced continual pressure from its “enemies.” These voices sought to limit, regulate, or at times, ban outright film exhibition. Even if they were unsuccessful in this endeavor, the stigma attached to the cinema limited the size of its audience. Although the process was slow, engagement with the nation offered the cinema respectability. Kaiser Wilhelm II was a reputable supporter. The national past was a worthy film subject. The war offered a national purpose, which brought a further level of legitimacy. Ultimately, the more the cinema represented the German nation, the more the nation shaped the history of the German cinema.
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