

Chart. 84 | The Exploitation of Culture

High Culture played an important role in polishing the aesthetics of politics and contributed to the false image of the regime. The seizure of power by Hitler led to the emigration of many exposed and racially discriminated artists, scientists and intellectuals. The loss of creativity and artistic and cultural potential was high, and the mediocrity of the National Socialist could not replace this. The cultural effect was expected to be propaganda orientated. Either through themes and motives that supported the world view, or via entertaining topics that sustained the image of a “peaceful” world. It was not only the National Socialist engaged artists that reinforced the façade that Goebbels’s Ministry for Propaganda and Information had as a goal. Artists who lived only for their art or who were reclusive would, so long as they did not criticize the National Socialist doctrine, be internally and externally exploited. Otherwise they would be threatened with expulsion from the Reich Culture Chamber and not allowed to practice their craft. The engaged and democratically orientated Art of 1933 would be wiped out. The façade of a civilized culture was maintained in so far as it was of use to the regime. The cultural and artistic accomplishments of the “Third Reich” can be defined as regressive, lacking in humanism, pacifism and emancipation.



1. Hitler during the opening of the Reich’s Theatre Week in Dresden, 1934.

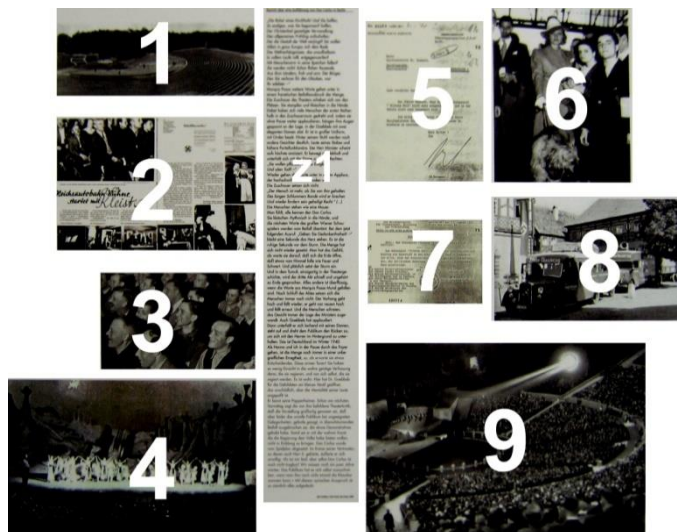
German Historical Museum

Chart. 85 | Thing Games and Theatre

The National Socialists aimed at rebuilding German theatre to fit into the “Spirit of National Socialism”. In order to realize this goal, the left orientated republican theatre of the Weimar era had to be eradicated and was orientated by the new theatre central. This task was assigned to Otto Laubinger the branch leader of Goebbels` Ministry of Propaganda; Laubinger was also the President of the Reich Theater Chamber. Being a member of the Reich Theater Chamber was a requirement in order to work in German theatres.

Between 1933 and 1935, the cultural political officials demanded the formation of the “Thing Games” that was supposed to embody a new form of National Socialist theatre. The “Thing” was originally a folk and judicial assembly that dates back to old Germanic and Viking times. The “Thing Games” was seen as a contributing factor for the “People’s Community”. The staging of great historical events, especially the “Success Story” of the National Socialist Movement were thematically part of the program. These “Choral – Folk Game” form of theatre, allowed for many opportunities to host mass performances, marches, rallies and the displaying of symbols and flag. Open air theaters, so called “Thing Sites”, would be built: large masses would be gathered and arranged into formations here. The goal was for every larger location and regional center to possess grounds that could host up to thousands of visitors. However, the “Thing Movement” would lose on momentum already by 1935; only a fraction of the planed enclosures would be realized, amongst other things a “Thing Place” on Bergen and Rügen.

Due to a lack of “Volkstheatr” and literature, the National Socialists would turn towards the German classics with the intention of reinterpreting it from their point of view. This was done to impress the outside world and to create the image of cultural continuation. Selected works of the Weimar Classics would be staged. Nevertheless, the theatre would prove to be quite resilient towards National Socialist ambitions: attempts at assimilation would often fail.



1. Thing- Square“ in Rostock

Baugilde, 1935

2. Coverage of a Theatrical Performance for Autobahn Drivers.

Arbeitertum, 1936

3. Theater crowd during a performance for Autobahn drivers.

Friedrich Heiss, „By us in Germany“, 1938

4. Scenes from the performance Kabarett „In Outerspace with ‚Strength Through Joy“.

Arbeitertum, 1936

5. A letter from the „Führer Head Quarter“ to the Reich's Minister Lammers, from the 3rd of June, 1941. „The Führer wishes that Schillers play „Wilhelm Tell“ is no longer performed.“

Federal Archive Berlin

6. Marlene Dietrich on her way to emigration after her arrival in Paris, 1939. Nevertheless, the Regime paid famous actors a high wage and many of them remained in the “Third Reich”.

Picture Archive of the Cultural Heritage Foundation.

7. A Letter from Minister Lammers to various Reich officials, with the instruction that the play „Wilhelm Tell“ be no longer taught in School lessons, 13th of August 1941.

Federal Archive Berlin

8. Theatre Train of the KdF

Under the Sun Wheel, 1938

9. Although the „Thing Movement“ came to an end in 1936, a new highlight was organised to correlate with the Olympics. Performance of the “Frankenburger Game of Dice“ at the „Dietrich Eckart Stage“ at the Olympic Grounds in Berlin.

Under the Sun Wheel, 1938

z1 A Report about the performance of Don Carlos in Berlin, 1940

„The peace of a church yard! Yet they hope, to finish, what they begun?

Hope, that Christendom's current transformation, can halt the Spring, that renews the World?

In all of Europe alone, they throw themselves against the wheel of Global Destiny?

To fall with human limbs into the spokes?

They will not! Thousand have already fled,

from their Lands, joyful and poor. The Citizen,

who they lost for their beliefs, was their most noble.”

Marquis Posa's words go under in a frantic outbreak of applause, erupting from the masses.

The audience in the theatre rise from their seats. They stomp and clamp their hands. At the same time, many people in the first row would turn their heads, and without ceasing their clapping, fix their eyes with anticipation on the balcony where Goebbels is sitting with two elegant women.

He is wearing a great uniform, peppered with Medals. Behind his chair, there are other faces which become apparent, people from his staff and party functionaries. The Minister seems highly amused. He moves in a lively manner and converses with the lady to his right.

“They wish to plant for Eternity, yet sow death?

Once again, the words drown in applause, that swells and never wants to end. The audiences do not sit.

“A Human is more, than what has been expected before.

The long slumber he will break

and claim his holy Right”

One gets the impression that all have heard of Don Carlos. They clap rhythmically with their hands and the following words from the great Vienna actor go under in the applause. With the following exclamation: “Allow Freedom of Thought!”, all hearts stood still for a second. It was the calm before the Storm. The masses did not sit down again. One gets the impression that they are waiting for the Earth to open, that something was to fall from the Heavens like fire and swords.

And suddenly the Storm is unleashed. And within the turmoil, unique in the history of the Theatre, the third act is hastily brought to an end. Everything else is irrelevant, when the words leave the mouth of Marguis Posas. The curtain rises and falls again; again it rises and falls. And the people are screaming, the faces always on the balcony. Even Goebbels is applauding.

He then begins to chat with this ladies, stands up and turns his back to the audience, in order to talk with the gentlemen behind him. This is Germany during the Winter of 1940.

As Hanna and I go through the foyer, the masses are still in a state of anticipation, as if they are waiting for something crucial. These poor fools! They have so little insight into the true mental condition of those that control them, or for that matter, any insight into themselves. It is true: this is where Dr. Goebbels has opened a small valve for the educated, that harmlessly moulds to the mentality of his people.

He knows his yuppies. Already on the following day, the theatre critics that were hired by him, claim the performance was amazing, however the audience would begin to applaud during inconvenient moments, symbolizing something demonstrative.

Consequently, this would mean that the high art which the regime wanted to connect with the populace, cannot occur harmoniously.

Don Carlos was dropped from the schedule. To the inner circles of his intimates, of which Herr S also belonged, he said: “I am sorry but even Don Carlos is unsuitable! We must wait a couple of years. The audience can only blame itself, if we can’t even offer one of the classics to them”. This cynical sentence pretty much sums everything up.

Tami Oelfken, Fahrt durch das Chaos, 2003

Chart. 86 | Literature

The pictures of gathered crowds watching SA men in uniforms throwing books unto a flaming pile, are deeply embedded into the collective German memory. The “Book Burnings” are considered exemplary of the spiritual and cultural suppression within National Socialism. By contrast though, this was a symbolic new beginning in which the majority of the population would participate in the event.

Immediately after coming to power, the “Reich Ministry of Folk Education and Propaganda” along with members of the “German Student Body” would be engaged in the campaign, “Pro German Spirit”. Part of the campaign would include the creation of a black list, in which publications by communists, socialists, democrats, Jewish philosophers, poets or political writers would be listed. The lists would build the foundation for the ‘cleansing’ of private and public libraries; the books would be confiscated and withheld from the public. Forbidden was also the reprinting and any open reading of these books. Parallel to the confiscations, various university towns would hold public “Book Burnings”. Professors, students and National Socialist functionaries would participate in the burnings by making “fire quotes”, in which the author’s name would be officially announced and the book demonstrably thrown into the flames.

One of the discredited and defamed authors was Erich Kästner. Kästner witnessed the burning of his books on the 10th of May 1933 at the Berliner Opernplatz: “I stood before the University wedged between students in SA uniforms, the ‘future’ of our nation. I saw them throwing our books in the flames and heard the schmaltzy tirades from that little liar [Joseph Goebbels]”. The List would prove to have dire consequences for the writers: It meant the end of their career in National Socialist Germany.

Principally, new publications would be censored during National Socialism, by commissaries of the “Reich Literature Chamber”. This allowed the regime to be able to alter or ban books in order to suite the regime: the result would be a regulated book market, that would in particular trivialities.



1. Erich Kästner’s (1899-1974) works, especially his Poetry, was banned and burned. Despite this he stayed in Germany and wrote under a pseudonym, the script for the Ufa Anniversary Film „Münchhausen“, photo from 1925.

German Historical Museum Berlin

2. „Schiller’s 175. Birthday“- the back cover of the AIZ from the 10th of November 1934, photo montage by John Heartfield.

German Historical Museum Berlin

3. Banning of advertisements regarding books written by Heinrich Heine, 12th of February 1937.

Federal Archive Berlin

4. Misuse of classic German literature in order to justify racial fanaticism. From the publications of the J.F. Lehman Publishing House.

Private Property

5. Bertolt Brecht and Lion Feuchtwanger during the Second World War, in California.

German Historical Museum

6. Publication list of scripts forbidden by the Reich Publications Chamber, 25th of April 1935

Federal Archive Berlin

7. The successful censoring for published books, are not meant to be pointed out, 15th of May 1937.

Federal Archive Berlin

8. Steering the contents of the newly published books via the Propaganda Ministry

Federal Archive Berlin

9. Publishing Ban of the works by Richard Hinkeolmann, 14th of September 1943.

Federal Archive Berlin

10. „His Struggle with His Struggle“- title page from the AIZ 23rd of August, 1934. Photo montage by John Heartfield.

German Historical Museum Berlin

11. The public burning of books at the Opera Square in Berlin, 11th of May 1933.

Federal Archive Koblenz

12. Title Page of the Kdf Novel, „Brandelmann Great Journey“ by Gerhard Starcke, 1936.

13. Thomas Mann in his working room by Pacific Palisades California, 1951.

Picture Archive of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation

Z1 List of forbidden Authors

Federal Archive Berlin

z1 List of forbidden Authors

Federal Archive Berlin

z2 As the Fire Speeches are recited, the Books are tossed into the Flames

1. Caller: Against Class Struggle and Materialism, for the People’s Community and Idealistic Living! I give to the flames, the writings of Marx and Klautsky.

2. Caller: Against Decadence and Moral Decay! For Discipline and Custom within the Family and the State! I give to the flames the writings of Heinrich Mann, Ernst Gläser and Erich Kästner.
3. Caller: Against Deception and Political Betrayal! For commitment to the Folk and the State! I give to the Flames the writings of Friedrich Wilhelm Förster.
4. Caller: Against the soul devouring curse of the sexual drive, for the Inner Noble of the Human Soul! I give to the flames the writings of Sigmund Freud.
5. Caller: Against the corruption of our history and the vilification of its great leaders, for reverence and history! I give to the flames the writings of Emil Ludwig and Werner Hegemann.
6. Caller: Against foreign journalism of Jewish democratic origin, for responsible collaboration in building the Nation! I give to the flames the writings of Theodor Wolff and Georg Bernhard.
7. Caller: Against the betrayal of the soldiers of the World War, for the education of the folk in the spirit of combat! I give to the flames the writings of Erich Maria Remarque.
8. Caller: Against the dark adulteration of the German language, for the fostering of the priceless Good of our people! I give to the flames the writings of Alfred Kerr.
9. Caller: Against insolence and arrogance, for respect and reverence of the immortal German spirit! Consume, flames, the writings of Tucholsky and Ossietzky.

Hans-Jochen Gamm, The Brown Cult, 1962

Chart. 87 | “German” and “Degenerate Art”

For the National Socialists, art was an instrument for influencing the masses, a means for propaganda. An emphasis of National Socialism was on the destruction of modern art and architecture in favor for a “new German Art” that was to represent the image of the “Aryan Man”. In order to justify the open critic on modernity, individual cases would be pointed out that embodied an attack on the public education. The stance of the National Socialists towards modernity was apparent: National Socialism would openly integrate offensive racial and political perspectives. The “Battle for Modern Art” would be accompanied by the campaign “Degenerate Art”; art itself would be orientated towards mass culture. Modern art would be categorized as “bolshevist” or “Jewish” and would be viewed by the regime as possessing political suspicious sentiments.

A central event that gave brief insight into the National Socialist mentality towards art, was the Great German Art Exhibition of 1937 in Munich., that was accompanied by its “antithesis” the “Exhibition of Decadent Art”. Organized as a mass event, the Exhibition became an important media spectacle. The thematic focus on different body images presented the viewers with the principles of the National Socialist’s “health” and “social” politics. They were orientated along the category of “healthy and sick”, “accepted and unaccepted”. The powers that be could not polarize all artworks into ‘specie specific’ and ‘non specific’ categories; a large number of artworks could not be categorized into this system so easily.

Another aspect of the cultural politics was the assimilation of tradition. This was absorbed in order to build up National Socialism on the grounds of historical ‘facts’ and ‘foundations’. The popularized tradition should serve as a medium for the simple “Folk Comrade” towards consuming art, in order to build a National Socialist world view. Next to various art projects, ambitions to build a Museum similar to the Louvre in Paris was intensified. Specific workers would be instructed to buy, black mail or confiscate and “Aryan- ise” Art masterpieces, in a manner that was never seen before.



1. Racial Ideal Typ – Water sports by Albert Janesch, 1936

German Historical Museum Berlin

2. „This is how the Jew sees the German Woman“ – Anti-Semitic propaganda in „Der Stürmer“, November 1937

Federal Archive Berlin

3. Judgement of Paris by Ivo Salinger, 1939.

Female nudity, often in reference to classical mythology, was a central theme of National Socialist artwork.

German Historical Museum Berlin

4. The Sunny Life by Richard Heymann, Öl on Canvas, 172x100 cm, 1939.

The traditional portrayal of the Mother with her child was given new meaning during National Socialism and the role of the woman as mother was glorified.

German Historical Museum

5. Poster for the Exhibition „Degenerate Art“. The traveling exhibition showed artwork from alienated Artists, whose artwork was earlier confiscated in Museums and Galleries.

Federal Archive Koblenz

6. Poster for the „Day of German Art“ in Munich 1937. The exhibition gave an overview of the art that was promoted by the National Socialists.

German Historical Museum Berlin

7. On the opening day of the „Great German Art Exhibition“, Goebbels would lead visitors through the „House of German Art“ in Munich, 26th of July 1941.

Archive of the Prussian Heritage Foundation Berlin

8. „Departure“, painting by Willy Waldapfel.

Archive of the Prussian Heritage Foundation Berlin

9. Room 3 of the exhibition „Degenerate Art“, with artwork by Baum, Belling, Campendank, Dixel, Felixmüller, Eugen Hoffmann, Klee and Nolde.

German Historical Museum

10. View of „Room 3“ from the Exhibition „Degenerate Art“, with artwork by Haizmann, Hausmann, Klee and Schwitters.

German Historical Museum Berlin

11. View of Room 5 from the exhibition „Degenerate Art“, with artwork from Beckmann, Fuhr, Kirchner, Müller, Nolde, Rohlf's and Schmidt Rottluff.

German Historical Museum Berlin

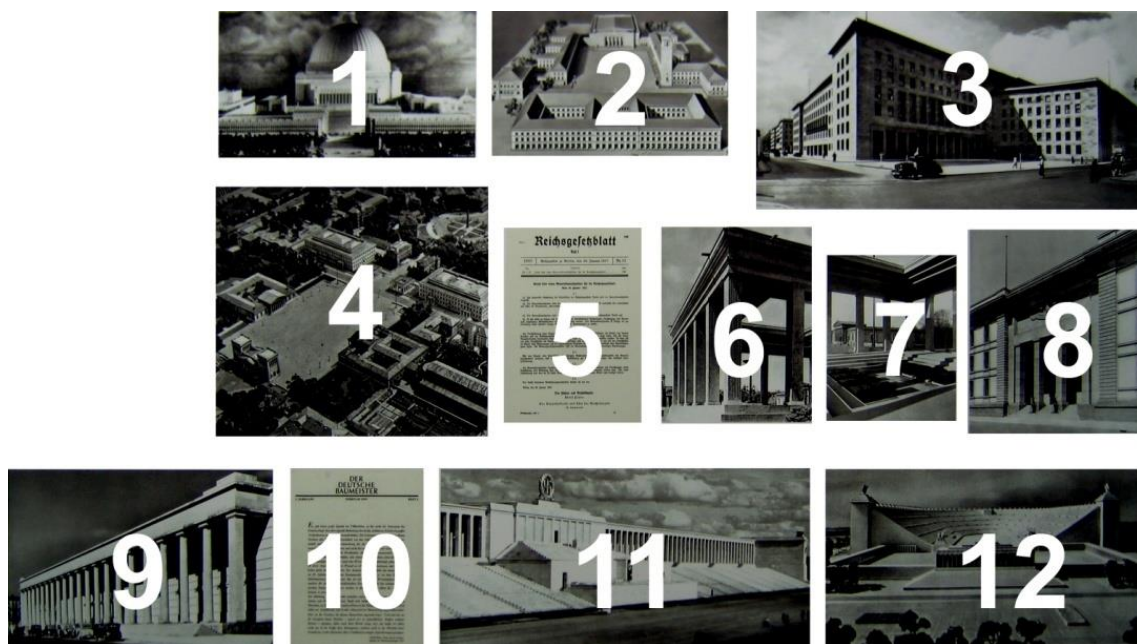
12. „Farmer's Evening Off“, Erwin Knirr, Oil on Canvas, 140x100 cm, 1944. Within the framework of the "Blood and Soil" Ideology, Farm scenes would embody a wide spectrum of NS artwork.

German Historical Museum Berlin

Chart. 88 | “The Word of Stone” – Architecture within National Socialism

Architecture and city planning had fixed roles and functions within the Third Reich, and was summarized under “Building Art”. The public domain was considered a permanent stage, perfect for Power Demonstrations, and was meant to be shaped by the responsible architects: architecture became an instrument for National Socialist propaganda. In connection with the consolidation of political power, architects and city planners would be give system stabilizing roles. The National Socialist demands for power demonstration and monumental self portrayal would compliment the building industry’s interests. The architectures, especially by 1937, had to materialize an adequate representation of the NS state, “The Word of Stone”. New designs for Berlin, Hamburg, Munich and other regional cities were planned.

The “Law for the New Designing of German Cities” received judicial foundations on the 4th of October 1937. Based on the premise of an expansive and aggressive foreign policy, Berlin should be rebuilt into an enormous power Center of the Reich, in order to make it an expression of political goals, National Socialist power and architectural pomp. Planning and implementation was under the authority of the “General Building Inspector for the Reich’s Capital”. This new wave of buildings, was to shed the practicality of the first wave of architecture in favor for, a more political ideological content. The new orientation would disregard elements such as functionality and purpose for a more power stabilizing representation. Without taking economic consequences into consideration, buildings would take on a memorial like character. The expenditure of these building could only be justified in that they were legitimized as “works of art”. This validated the high interest rates that they generated.



1. A hall for 180,000 people - a model of the „Great Hall“ planned for the North South Axis in Berlin, designed by Albert Speer, 1939-1941.

German Historical Museum

2. Model for the Adolf Hitler Square in Weimar, designed by Hermann Giesler, 1936- 1943.

Albert Speer (Hrsg.), New German Building Art, 1941

3. Reichsluftfahrtministerium (Reich's Aeronautic Ministry) Berlin, designed by Ernst Sagebiel, 1936 Berlin, Entwurf Ernst Sagebiel, 1936

Friedrich Heiss, „Bei uns in Deutschland“, 1938

4. Kings Square in Munich with the party buildings of the NSDAP: Führer Building, Honor Temple and Administration Building, designed by Paul Ludwig Troost.

Albert Speer (Hrsg.), New German Building Art, 1941

5. Decree regarding the General Building Inspector for the Reichs Capitol.

Reichs Law Gazette, 1937, Nr. 13, from the 30th of Januar, 1937

6. Honor Temple at the King's Square in Munich, designed by Paul Ludwig Troost

Albert Speer (Hrsg.), New German Building Art, 1941

7. Honor Temple with the coffins of „Blood Witnesses“.

Albert Speer (Hrsg.): New German Building Art, 1941

8. New Reichs Chancellery in Berlin, designed by Albert Speer, 1937-39

Albert Speer (Hrsg.), New German Building Art, 1941

9. Paul Ludwig Troost, House of German Art, München, 1937

Friedrich Heiss, „Bei uns in Deutschland“, 1938

10. „Building Structures, in order to strengthen our Authority!“

Hitler during the Culture Convention at the Nuremberg Rally, 1937 (Hitlers auf der Kulturtagung des „Reichsparteitages“, 1937)

The German Architect, 1939

11. Reichs Party Compound in Nuremberg, the „Main Tribune“, at the Zeppelin Field, designed by Albert Speer, 1935- 1937.

Friedrich Heiss, „Bei uns in Deutschland“, 1938

12. The „German Stadium“ at the Nuremberg Rally Compound in Nuremberg, design by Albert Speer, planned as from 1937.

Albert Speer (Hrsg.), New German Building Architecture, 1941