

From traditional regionalism to national distinction: German television co-productions through time

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Abstract

This article offers a historical perspective on co-productions of high-end television drama in Germany. It argues that such co-productions have seen three distinct phases that although overlapping, are described by industry insiders and critics as distinct periods where one form of co-production is dominant at a particular time but then becomes residual as other forms take over. These three forms are, first, public broadcaster-led co-productions, second, ‘Europudding’ co-productions, and finally, distinctive co-productions in TVIV. This article shows that these phases are connected to stylistic as well as industrial changes, which do not always overlap with the description of industry insiders.

Keywords

Co-productions, German television, high-end television drama, transnational television

Introduction

Klaus Zimmermann, producer of television dramas such as *Death in Paradise* (2011–present) and *Borgia* (2011–14), suggests that co-productions on German television have gone through three different stages: first, a phase dominated by public service broadcasters collaborating in the 1990s; second, a period (from the late 1990s to mid-2000s) of large-scale co-productions that often involved commercial broadcasters; and third, the more recent period (from the late 2000s onwards) which is determined by an overcrowded market-place and in which cultural specificity is used as a means to stand out

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(Zimmermann in Harris, 2018). Zimmermann's periodisation is useful in understanding both past and contemporary co-productions and can help us understand the trajectory of transnational co-productions in television's multiplatform era. However, his periodisation is not entirely accurate, nor is it entirely helpful to suggest that one form of co-production is replaced by another, as his account suggests. Rather, as Raymond Williams (1977: 128) has suggested, periods involving forms of cultural production are often determined by dominant, residual and emerging forms of culture, which create a 'structure of feeling'. Building on the work of Williams, this article argues that particular forms of co-production, such as those made by public service broadcasters or those involving broadcasters and SVODs (subscription video-on demand), emerge as 'dominant' at one time but are likely to remain residual even when another form of co-production starts to dominate.

Williams's concept of the 'structure of feeling' has been widely utilised in media and cultural studies to highlight the role of affectivity in the process of classifying media and culture and the role of style in creating this (see Sharma and Tygstrup, 2015). The present article, too, will use the concept to gain an understanding of why industry insiders such as Zimmermann, but also academics such as Michele Hilmes (2014), claim we are now in a new phase or period of co-productions. As such, I am offering an analysis, based on Williams's ideas, because the focus on a 'new period' overlooks the co-presence of different forms of co-productions which Williams's work allows us to theorise: they co-exist, but are perceived as either residual or emerging. Williams (1977: 131) defines the 'structure of feeling' relatively vaguely, but points to 'a quality of social experience' that is perceived as historically distinct. Indeed, he defines 'structure of feeling' by writing: 'What I am seeking to describe is the continuity of experience from a particular work, through its particular form, to its recognition of a general form, and then the relation of this general form to a period' (1973: 9). What this definition makes visible is that periodisation is based on an affective experience which is triggered by a perceived generalisability of style and form. As Williams argues later (1977), styles are perceived to be residual when they are experienced to have been dominant in the past, apparently dominant when they preoccupy the affective popular consciousness, and emerging when they are perceived to belong to the future. Zimmermann's articulation of distinct periods for German co-production, can, as I will argue, be understood as a 'structure of feeling' the effect of which is to consign certain forms of co-production to the past even though the different forms of co-production continue to coexist. Perhaps more importantly, Zimmermann's periodisation helps to clarify that the affective periodisation of co-productions is not just based on style and form, but also on changing industrial conditions which, like the style and form they give expression to, are perceived to largely replace older ways of producing television. This means that this article attempts to consider wider conditions as well as textual elements of television in its historiography, even though, due to space limitations, it cannot provide the analysis of the 'complex interplay' of older and newer media, as well as political, social, and financial conditions that Joan Kristin Bleicher (1999: 58) argues for.

In this article, I take Zimmermann's description as a starting point to examine how different forms of co-productions for German-produced television drama coexist even when his affective experience leads him to suggest that some have become residual. In

other words, I use Zimmermann's structure of feeling of distinct periods of co-production as a starting point to provide a historical examination of what different co-production arrangements have existed in Germany: this involves an examination of co-production arrangements (who has worked together and why), as well as their connected styles and forms (Williams, 1977).

To offer such an examination, a mixed-method approach was taken to data collection and analysis. It combines archival research, textual analysis and the analysis of secondary literature. The period of analysis reached as far back as the 1960s when I could find evidence of early co-productions on German television and stretched all the way to recent releases. Archives include both press releases and film and television archives. I use press releases to get an insight into how co-productions were framed in relation to national origin, quality of production and authorship amongst other aspects. Older press releases were largely accessed through the ZDF archives, while more recent material was found in national and regional newspapers and general magazines. Film and television archives were used to bring insight into television content that was no longer in circulation, and I conducted textual analysis of a number of television dramas to examine their style and form. Secondary research provided further context as well as evidence of comparable periods, particularly regarding the phase of the 'Europudding', in the academic literature. In addition, to facilitate comparability, I have here focused on period dramas, although other genres, such as the crime drama, would have provided similar insights.

While German television is determined by its unique history, many similarities can be found in other countries that make the case study of Germany relevant beyond its borders. In addition, Germany remains one of the most important television markets in Europe as well as a very active co-producer and co-financier (Bondebjerg et al., 2017: 80), meaning that its history gives us an insight into transnational coproduction arrangements as well as the structure of feeling, experienced by industry insiders and arguably also some academics that has led to a sense of distinct periods within this history. The article will briefly introduce some contextual background, including a definition of co-production, before providing in three separate sections an analysis of the three periods of co-production as experienced by Zimmermann.

Examining co-productions

Research into co-productions has increased significantly since the early 2000s. Most publications define co-productions by pointing to the collaboration and creative input of at least two companies from different nations (see, for example, Buonanno, 2009; Selznick, 2008). However, Hilmes (2014) has indicated that what we class as co-production needs rethinking because of changing industrial conditions, including the influx of multinational streaming providers (Dunleavy, 2020), and a diversification of how productions are financed and circulated nationally and – more importantly – transnationally. Indeed, Hilmes suggests that this requires us to think of them as 'transnational coproductions' rather than international ones. What this suggests, is that fundamental to co-productions is the combination of financing and collaboration of more than one company, one of which operates primarily in the transnational realm, as well as the need to consider national and

international audiences for whom these co-productions are produced. While Hilmes argues that this is specific to this current era, I would argue that considerations of national and transnational distribution was likely to determine earlier decision making, too, particularly for television drama that was considered as a hybrid between film and television, and indeed was often distributed as film internationally.

Nevertheless, how these co-productions are organised has become more diverse. One of these are co-financing arrangements which [Brandstrup and Redvall \(2005\)](#) have shown German broadcasters are often involved in. Here, the co-producer (that is the German broadcaster) concedes any creative input but offers finance for national distribution rights. While this suggests that transnational concerns may be deprioritised by the national producer-commissioner, it is the knowledge that the production will be circulated beyond national borders that creates the conditions for the automatic inclusion of a transnational element ([Weissmann, 2012](#)). Such a combination of the national and transnational in co-production can also be found in other co-production arrangements. Trisha [Dunleavy \(2020\)](#) has made a convincing argument for classing direct commissions by multinational SVoD services as co-productions. The reason for classing these as co-productions is that these direct commissions also combine ambitions for local and international reach and thus require the production of content that considers the requirements of both national and international audiences. In this article, collaborations between different distributors in one country will also be understood as co-productions. An example of this is the co-production between the terrestrially-based public service broadcaster ARD and the commercial, satellite service Sky Deutschland as is the case for *Babylon Berlin* (2017). The reason for adding this to the list is that such co-productions require the collaboration of two distributors for financial reasons because the dramas are designed to be presented as prestige output for the involved distributors – both nationally to viewers and internationally to audiences that include the increasingly transnationally integrated industry as well as transnational, cosmopolitan audiences ([Havens, 2018](#)). Thus, although the collaboration happens nationally, the considerations of the involved distributors include a transnational element. While [Hilmes \(2014\)](#) argues that the ‘transnational’ co-productions of our current period are particularly marked by the knowledge of transnational circulation, I want to emphasise that all co-productions – including those of the past – were inevitably marked by national *and* transnational considerations: even when co-producing partners were willing to cede all control as in the case of co-financing, the knowledge that a product would circulate in another country will inevitably impact on the production, be that by emphasising more strongly the national origin of a production or making this less visible.

This is particularly true for dramas that this article will foreground, namely those produced at the high-end of television drama (that is, the costliest, prestige dramas, see [Dunleavy, 2018](#)) where, in their form, function and style, productions often involve elements of convergence with film. As Thomas [Elsaesser \(1989\)](#) has shown, German broadcast television became central for the production and distribution of German film, particularly for the New German Cinema, a largely male-auteur-led cinema which displayed an art-house sensibility and saw the rise of key German directors such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog and Wim Wenders. However, its legacy has lasted

beyond those days, as the example of *Das Kleine Fernsehspiel* (*The Small Television Play*, 1963-) indicates (see Sandberg, 2020). There is, therefore, a specific legacy of convergence between film and television in Germany. However, this legacy has shifted over the years, meaning that it is not just the specific conditions of co-production that undergo change, but also the changing ways in which German film has converged with German television drama.

Accordingly, the structure of feeling that impacts how different forms of co-production are perceived as either dominant, residual, or emerging is shaped by some specific aesthetic sensibilities, as suggested by Williams (1977), derived from these evolving elements of convergence. This includes narrative elements, which this article will analyse with the help of some exemplary case studies. As the article will argue, the first form of co-production was determined by a largely popular art-house aesthetic tradition that was formed by German public service broadcasters' relationship to New German Cinema. The second form, which involved a greater number of commercial players, including commercial broadcast channels and distributors, can be aligned closely with the aesthetics of the American made-for-television movie and mini-series. Finally, the third, and most recent era for German co-production has been one that brings different television players together. Most often these newer partnerships combine public service broadcasters and multiplatform providers (including both satellite and SVoDs platforms). These coproduced dramas display and have emulated the kind of 'arthouse' sensibilities and cinematic aesthetics that were pioneered in US television by premium cable providers, beginning with HBO.

The article examines these periods as a structure of feeling: as apparently changing periods of co-production with their different aesthetic sensibilities connected to changing industrial conditions, which create a sense that a generalisable form of co-production dominates each period. However, I will also show that these practices of co-production continue and indeed may even dominate in terms of the quantity of productions produced in that way. I will now turn to the first period: that which is dominated by public service broadcasters.

Public service broadcasting, film and traditional regionalism

Co-productions between European public service broadcasters are presented in Zimmermann's description as the first period (in roughly the 1990s), and thus are clearly experienced as residual: belonging to the past, even if some dramas continue to be coproduced in this way. The structure of feeling that underpins his periodisation includes its emphasis on period drama, a tendency to take mini-series form, and the evidence of creative compromise that Zimmermann terms, 'Europudding'. A closer examination of co-productions between public service broadcasters, however, suggests that they continue to be the most regularly used form of German co-production as this section will demonstrate. In addition, this form of co-production began well before the 1990s, and they were often less determined by creative compromise than Zimmerman suggests. Indeed, in her discussion of the *Fernsehspiel*, Bleicher (1999: 185) suggests that the *Fernsehspiele* during this time achieved aesthetic distinction as a result of them being 'coproductions'

between film and television. It is also the fact that they aspired to filmic qualities that led to larger budgets that made co-productions necessary between different national public service broadcasters. In Europe, this was of course determined by the fact that until the 1980s and 1990s, most television was dominated by either state or public service broadcasters (Hickethier, 2016). In West Germany, the public service broadcasters were the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten Deutschlands* (ARD, Consortium of the Public Service Broadcasters of Germany) whose constitution was largely modelled on that of the BBC (Shattuc, 1995: 23), the *Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen* (ZDF, Second German Television) and a regionally-specific third channel (*Das Dritte*, The Third) which was part of the ARD. Until 1985, when the first commercial cable channels emerged, these providers held a monopoly in German television.

Historically, it was primarily the ARD and the ZDF who commissioned television drama whose budgets were large enough to necessitate a co-production arrangement. While some of these dramas were produced in-house, some of them were outsourced to companies such as the then called Bavaria Film Atelier (now Bavaria Film GmbH). Interestingly, both public service broadcasters became deeply connected with German film, with the category that came to be known as New German Cinema. As Jane Shattuc (1995) chronicles, the development of the ARD was heavily influenced during the immediate post-war period by the British, who took greater responsibility for broadcasting whilst the USA exerted greater control over German film. As Knut Hickethier (2016: 72) suggests, the British influence was also greater as German personnel, working on the (re-)establishment of television after the war, rejected the Americanisation of culture. After the Second World War, Germany was divided by the Allied Forces into what were initially occupied territories with Britain being in charge of much of the north west, France, of the south west, the USA, of the middle and south east, and Russia, of the east of Germany. The Allied Forces helped to rebuild Germany as well as to establish new forms of administration, across which this central task was divided, allocated and undertaken. This work included the reformation of cultural policy and institutions with the broadcasting institutions of the Third Reich being disbanded and replaced by allied-led local broadcasters. It was the North-German example, at one point under the leadership of Hugh Carlton-Greene, that was most influential to the development of German television (Hickethier, 2016): the Nord West Deutscher Rundfunk (Nord West German Broadcaster, NWDR – which was later divided into the Sender Freies Berlin, SFB, Norddeutscher, NDR, and Westdeutscher Rundfunk, WDR) was fundamental to the establishment of West German television, in terms of technical and institutional infrastructure and programme policy (Hickethier, 2016). In East Germany, television was influenced by Vladimir Lenin's conceptualisation of broadcasting as 'newspaper without paper and distance' which could operate as 'collective organiser' (cited in Hickethier, 2016: 96) out of which emerged the centrally-controlled state broadcaster DFF (*Deutscher Fernsehfunk*, German Television Broadcasting).

Discussing the developing German television programming strategies from 1945 into the 1960s, Shattuc (1995) suggests that the close relationship between television and New German Cinema was born out of Germany's penchant for high culture and served to

legitimise a medium which it otherwise regarded with significant distrust, particularly as far as Americanisation is concerned (see also [Hickethier, 2016](#)). As she writes:

Such scepticism – bordering on an expressionist nightmare – has pervaded political, aesthetic, and psychological discussions of German television throughout its nearly forty-year history. As a result, German television has lived a constant legitimization crisis as it has sought to prove that it can be a medium of democratic individualism as well as of aesthetic merit. The history of the television drama, or *Fernsehspiel*, results from the intertwining of two contradictory views of fascism and the mass media: the Allied positivist view of broadcasting as a constructive instrument of German reeducation and a German liberal-to-Marxist intellectual tradition of distrusting the media's ability to create the individualism of democratic thought (1995: 33–34).

This concern about the medium, and the wish to use it to educate and morally lead the population ([Hickethier, 2016](#)) meant that decisions about programming were often based on significant debates within and without the institutions of television. Television drama in the early years drew inspiration from the theatre, while in the 1960s, the *Fernsehspiel* became a key site for moral betterment, which was meant to 'offer enlightenment' according to a key proponent of the time, Egon Monk ([Hickethier, 2016](#): 242, see also [Bleicher, 1999](#)). As [Hickethier \(2016: 246–248\)](#) suggests, this at first meant a continuation of aesthetics borrowed from theatre that were only gradually, but then decidedly replaced by those of film and which aimed to engage its audience in politics, a tradition that continued on the ZDF with *Das Kleine Fernsehspiel*. The latter, according to [Hickethier](#), became 'the central place [where] the experimental trials of filmic narration' of the auteur filmmakers of the Oberhausener Manifest could be explored ([2016](#): 348).

Television's close relationship to New German Cinema was the result of several developments that included the fact that it was the USA who yielded responsibility over film production in the immediate post-war period. As [Shattuc \(1995\)](#) and [Elsaesser \(1989\)](#) both show, one of the key oversights of the American administration of German film was the lack of a distributor which would provide its industry with access to national and international cinemas. To step into that breach, television came to operate as a key national distributor, particularly as cinemas started to disappear in the 1960s and 1970s. In addition, [Elsaesser \(1989\)](#) and [Shattuc \(1995\)](#) indicate that German television was increasingly made responsible for funding film production, largely as a result of lobbying from the film industry, and in response to the Oberhausener Manifest. The pressure thus exerted led to the Film Subsidy Bill (*Filmförderungsgesetz, 1967*) and its companion law Film and Television Agreement (*Filmförderungsanstalt, 1974*) which solidified such demands in law. But this also meant that German television developed a complex dual identity. On the one hand, it became, as [Shattuc](#) puts it, 'the state's protector of an explicitly German film culture. Television was promoted as the enlightened and benevolent non-commercial producer of German film, the final barrier to the ever-growing menace of American conglomerate filmmaking' ([Shattuc, 1995](#): 52). On the other hand, television continued to be perceived with suspicion and scepticism as the site via which German mass audiences would potentially become corrupted. Thus, although both the

WDR's television dramas and the ZDF's *Das Kleine Fernsehspiel* have often been considered to have produced 'quality' productions through their films and their use of auteur film makers, these have often been emphasised *as films* rather than as television. This includes many Rainer Werner Fassbinder-directed television films, which are the focus of Shattuc's book and which she discusses in relation to their origin within a convergent context.

Fassbinder's films, like those of other key German film makers, such as Werner Herzog, were often distributed both as film and television nationally and as film internationally. Two of the exceptions were *Acht Studen sind kein Tag* [*Eight Hours Don't Make a Day*] (1972-1973) and *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (ARD, RAI, 1979), which with their eight and a half and 15 and a half hours were simply too long (though Fassbinder had originally hoped to edit *Berlin Alexanderplatz* down for international film distribution and both have been shown in cinemas as special screenings). Shattuc nevertheless discusses *Berlin Alexanderplatz*'s reception in relation to "the popular response" to an art film' (1995: 164), implying that this drama has largely been understood in the context of film. I here want to draw more attention to the industrial side of this production to explain the dramas' identity as television. *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is a co-production, and as so often for Fassbinder, one that makes use of complex financing arrangements. It was made by the Bavaria Film Atelier, a key production company for German film and television, for the ARD and the Italian public service broadcaster RAI (Radiotelevisione Italia). It was one of the most expensive productions of its era, though considered in terms of its cost per minute, it was cheaper than the average television programme (Shattuc, 1995: 166). Nevertheless, at 13 million marks for the 15 and a half hours, a complex funding arrangement, including a coproduction agreement between the ARD and RAI, was considered necessary.

As can be seen from the above, these co-production arrangements were often forged between public service broadcasters who could see the resonance or importance for their local audiences. The Italian connection was partially facilitated by the Italian reception of the original book, which was quickly translated into Italian and widely reviewed, if at first negatively (Bent-Ghita, 1996). However, co-productions were and continue to be facilitated by examples of successful international collaborations, as was the case for RAI, which had coproduced *L'Odisea/Die Odyssee* (1968) with the ZDF (Buonanno, 2015). Germany and Italy also share significant historical links, via the Holy Roman Empire and alliances under their respective fascist regimes, pointing to the potential for a geo-cultural sharing (Straubhaar, 2007) that transcends language barriers. Thus, the collaboration between the ARD and RAI was facilitated by some supportive conditions, especially the geo-cultural connections noted above, and the resonance of the book with Italian readers.

It is these cultural ties, as well as a geographical proximity, that continue to inspire coproductions between Germany and other European countries. This also includes coproductions with its direct neighbours of Austria and Switzerland of which there are a lot, including the largely forgotten multi-seasonal drama *Alpensaga* (ORF, ZDF, 1976-1979). This form of co-production continues until this day with relationships of power shifting from production to production, depending on which of the two broadcasters has commissioned the show and is thus more invested in its success. One example is *Andreas*

Hofer – Die Freiheit des Adlers [The Freedom of the Eagle] (ORF, BR, 2002), which focused on the Tyrolian titular folk hero. Although featuring Bavarian troops, it is largely about Austria's place in Europe during the Napoleonian wars. It also unashamedly uses thick Austrian accents in its portrayal of the different characters, which Northern German audiences would find difficult to understand. In contrast, *Das Ewige Lied [The Song for Forever]* (BR, ORF, 1997), about the story of 'Silent Night', is set in the (changing) border regions of Bavaria and Austria and accents are toned down so that a general German audience would be able to understand it. Both productions were classed as films and exhibited in cinemas, yet both were commissioned and/or created for the Austrian and Bavarian (Third) public service broadcaster.

As the examples of *Andreas Hofer* and *Das Ewige Lied* demonstrate these co-productions were not unique to the period of German broadcasting when public service broadcasters held a monopoly. Rather, these partnerships between German and European public broadcasters continued into the next two periods of German co-production under examination in this article, where their role in the overall production ecology became less visible and/or acknowledged. Accordingly, this form of co-production appears as a residual one, as an overhang from the period of the public service monopoly. However, such a framing underestimates the sheer quantity and the quality of co-productions between public service broadcasters. For public service broadcasters in Europe, co-production and co-financing continue to be central for the development, commissioning, production, and distribution of television drama, not only for high-end productions but also for less prestigious television dramas, which often enjoy large popular appeal. This broader pattern can be seen in the role that co-financing and co-production have played not only in the rise of Nordic Noir (see [Bondebjerg and Redvall, 2015](#)), but also in Germany's most popular television dramas, including *Tatort [Crime Scene]* (ARD, ORF, SRF, since 1970), which rather than a traditional co-production presents a pooling of resources of different regional and national broadcasters in an anthology-like series with episodes from the different regions (see [Eichner, 2018](#)) and *Der Bergdoktor [The Mountain Doctor]* (ORF, ZDF, since 2008).

Coproducing made-for-television movies for a pan-European cultural identity

Zimmermann suggests that the period of public broadcaster-led and Europudding co-productions are one and the same, but such an assertion is likely to be partially political as Zimmermann himself works in the German commercial sector. Nevertheless, his argument that there was a period in the 1990s when co-productions produced 'Europuddings' is part of a wider cultural 'structure of feeling' that imagines the co-productions of the past to have produced bland television drama. Milly Buonanno, in her overview of Italian television drama, describes the 'Europudding' as 'an abstract idea of pan-European television' (2015: 199) that led to 'highly formulaic co-productions [...], involving financial, infrastructural, productional and artistic contributions from a variety of international partners' (2015: 199–200). While Buonanno does not give specific examples of these productions, she nevertheless points to them having existed in 'the (not

so distant) past', a periodisation that aligns approximately with Zimmermann's (Harris, 2018). While for Zimmermann, these Europuddings were often driven by the public service broadcasters, attention needs to be paid less to who had originated these productions, and more to the kinds of stories these could tell about European identity.

Few people fully define what makes a Europudding; though Roberto Olla's description of a collaboration between a number of staff that is premised on treaties that specify how much artistic and productional input each country should have (in Hammett-Jamart, 2018: 248) is useful and widely embraced, including by Zimmermann (Harris, 2018) and Buonanno (2015). But the term 'pudding' suggests a problematic and bland blending that affects the television text negatively and underemphasises European national differences in favour of an imagined unity, one element of which is that it yields a kind of stylistic blandness. This problem informs Buonanno's description of 'formulaic co-productions' (2015: 199). The overemphasis on unity, Monica Sassatelli (2015) argues, is typical for a particular discourse about European identity that she, too, locates in the past. Comparing her own research with that of Klaus Eder (2009), she points to an imagined story of a 'unique European culture with a shared "murderous past"' (2015: 29), but that this model has been superseded by one that emphasises 'unity in diversity' (2015: 29). This last idea suggests that a pan-European identity can and should be formed through the acceptance and celebration of cultural differences that exist in Europe.

This opposition between a past emphasis on a pan-European unity versus a current focus on unity in diversity is also chronicled in Manuel Damasio's (2021) blog, in which he outlines the European Union's policy from the Television without Frontiers Directive (1989) to the most recent iterations of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (2019). He argues that early policy was based around free trade and the flow of television within the European Union. This also included cable and satellite ventures, which were set up to deliberately cross boundaries and aid European integration (Hallenberger, 1992). Even in the early days, responses to the Television without Frontiers Directive made apparent a concern that the free flow of television within the European Union was perceived by some television institutions as being counterproductive to national distinctiveness (see Curwen, 1999). Damasio, however, shows that the Maastricht Treaty (1992), despite arguing for cultural distinctiveness, did propose a pan-European cultural heritage which led to funding initiatives through the MEDIA programme that suggested cultural unity. Again, while much of this is perceived to have existed in the past (Damasio points to changes to the MEDIA programme since its first iterations in the 1990s), this does not necessarily mean that programmes emphasising unity and a pan-European cultural heritage do not continue to be made, as will be discussed below.

What is interesting, however, is that a lot of the programmes that emphasise pan-European unity and identity are not made or solely produced by European public service broadcasters, but often have the involvement of non-European television institutions and European commercial organisations. A good example is *The Odyssey* (1997), a two-part made-for-television movie which was coproduced by a group of companies, including Hallmark, American Zoetrope, as well as the German Kirch-Gruppe and ProSieben Media AG, the latter being one of the medium-sized commercial broadcasters which were established after the German public service monopoly came to an end in 1985. ProSieben

was also a subsidiary of the Kirch-Gruppe, though is now part of ProSiebenSat.1 Media SE, a medium-sized German commercial television company. As a result of the co-production involvement of the Kirch-Gruppe, ProSieben had the distribution rights in Germany, although it did not screen the two-parter until six months after the initial NBC broadcast in May. However, this delay was likely to be due to the programme requiring dubbing for German transmission.

While *The Odyssey* was widely celebrated and received several awards, made-for-television movies sit somewhat uneasily in the history of the convergence between US film and television industries. Movies were first produced for American television in the 1960s when there was a notable decline of Hollywood films which meant that a crucial high-profile slot on the broadcast networks could no longer be filled, leading to the production of films made directly for broadcast television (Segrave, 1999). These productions were originally extremely popular with audiences who also could not distinguish them from Hollywood films. However, they were often critically derided until the development of the high-budget television miniseries form in the 1970s. This led to a greater endorsement in the national press of American television miniseries as ‘quality’ in part because they could be praised for both their high production values and their stylistic rootedness in British period drama (Weissmann, 2012: 110–115). These period-based miniseries became less important as the 1980s progressed, while made-for-television movies tended to focus either on real crime or on melodramatic narratives, the latter often foregrounding female perspectives. As Bleicher (1999: 187–8) shows, these formulae were taken over by German commercial broadcasters when they started to produce their own television drama in the 1990s. Importantly, German television movies were often either modelled or indeed coproduced with American companies which is also the case for this case study. *The Odyssey* broke the mould of low cultural prestige somewhat not only because it prioritised a male perspective, but also because it returned the narrative into the (mythological) past and expanded it over two episodes, a decision that reconnected the made-for-television movie with form and ‘quality’ credentials of the 1970s American mini-series. *The Odyssey* was also distinctive because of its European influences.

The Odyssey is closely based on Homer’s original story and includes an international cast of American, Italian-Australian, Greek, British and Italian-American actors, as well as a crew made up of primarily American, but also Russian, a few German and other nationals. The relative dearth of a German crew in the production points to the imbalance of creative input that was largely derived from the involvement and relative influence of powerful American companies. Thus, rather than adhering to the distribution of roles that was traditional for an international coproduction, as a project *The Odyssey* was largely dominated by the non-European companies. On the level of content, however, while telling an Ancient Greek story, it clearly imagines this era as central to a pan-European identity in which the birth of Odysseus’s child, which begins the narrative, provides a symbolic representation of the birth of this pan-European community.

The unity of Europe represented here, however, was neither matched in the European television industries by the internal integration of the European market nor by an external integration into the international flow of television production and distribution in this era. ProSieben and the Kirch-Gruppe are both part of the Munich media cluster which is a

central production hub for the German film and television industry. As analyses of the collapse of the Kirch-Gruppe in 2002 indicate (Babthelt and Gräf, 2008; Zademach, 2009), in the late 1990s and early 2000s this cluster was still largely internally connected, rather than operating outwardly towards the rest of Europe or beyond. Thus, *The Odyssey* was in many ways unusual for its time, connecting its European companies to a wider international market for high-end television production. But because this process was only beginning, the relationships and power dynamics, including how much control the US producers should relinquish in favour of European creative input and the potential for distinctiveness, had not been negotiated. What is clear, is that it is this period – as one of nascent international integration of the European television market into the international flow of television production – that is usually charged to have produced Europuddings. This connection suggests an unease within the European industries about how this international integration operated and an awareness of the noticeable power-imbalance that impacted representational issues.

The integration of the European television market into the international flow of television productions has now reached another stage, and this has also affected the Munich Media Cluster. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that this is not a process that can be thought of as complete. One of the companies to emerge as leading regarding external connections is Tele München which was a co-producer for the RAI-commissioned mini-series *The Name of the Rose* (2018). This series was partly financed through the MEDIA programme which in recent years has focused more strongly on distribution within Europe, giving funding to projects that can show significant international interest before production has even started (Weissmann, 2018). Interestingly, the series presents an image of a shared, pan-European cultural heritage, based on interpretations of the bible and the cultural influence of Christianity, that creates an element of shared cultural identity in which unity is decidedly emphasised over diversity. In addition, while creative control might have remained in Italy, it is nevertheless noticeable that the international cast includes actors from the UK, the USA, Germany and Italy, thus pointing to an international collaboration which is matched in a crew list that suggests a rather formulaic use of artistic, financial and production elements as Buonanno (2015) discussed.

Thus, the examples of *The Odyssey* and *The Name of the Rose* point to the role of increasing commercial interests in international co-productions and the gradual shift towards a television market that is integrated into larger distribution and financing flows. As television production diversified at the end of the European public service monopolies, European film and television production and distribution companies became increasingly involved in the co-production of high-end television drama, some of which was initiated within Europe and some from without. While these coproductions do not necessarily involve the ‘formulaic’ distribution of production, financial and creative roles as discussed by Buonanno (2015), many clearly do. These industrial conditions create a structure of feeling which leads to a perception of creative compromise that is experienced as detrimental to the quality of the production. Moreover, these productions are seen to also often emphasise a pan-European unity, based on a shared, often murderous cultural heritage. As with the ‘period’ of public-service focused co-productions, which apparently

preceded this one, this ‘period of the Europudding’ is perceived to lie in the past, namely in the 1990s. This was the time when the Maastricht Treaty and the first iterations of the MEDIA programme emphasised this pan-European unity, and when the European television market was only beginning to integrate into the international flow of television production. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that such co-productions continue, suggesting that they too have become residual in the structure of feeling that affects our periodisation of co-productions.

Transnational coproduction, diversity and cultural distinction

If the previous period is dominated by a sense that the European market is in the process of integrating into larger transnational structures, then the current period is perceived to now operate with transnational organisations and institutions that make this international integration a fact (Barra and Scaglioni, 2020: 2–3). Again, these industrial conditions create the conditions for a structure of feeling that suggests a distinct period of co-production has emerged. This structure of feeling is derived from a high-end aesthetic of a strongly self-referential style which Zimmermann describes as ‘standing out. When you try to sell television, you need to have something that no one else has’ (in Harris, 2018: 325). This section will set out what elements contribute to the structure of feeling that enable this new form of co-production to appear dominant and what stylistic markers create this feeling.

The new form of co-production is perceived to be facilitated and necessitated largely by increased competition (in Zimmermann’s words ‘crowded market place’, quoted in Harris, 2018: 325) and diversification as a result of what Mareike Jenner has called ‘TVIV’ (2016). This period, as Jenner (2016) argues, is marked as a progression from TVIII by:

...a move away from the television set. One significant marker of TVIII is its move towards multi-platform forms of distribution and storytelling, but it has always kept some (however tenuous) link with the technology, branding and programming strategies, and social connotations television traditionally carries (2016: 259).

The loosening of television’s traditional social relations has involved the increasing convergence of television with other media, not just with film but also with telecommunications, in addition to the development of new social relations for screen production industries that have opened new funding streams and led to more complex financing and production arrangements.

In Germany, this diversification included the increasing closeness of television and film production (Krauß, 2019). Thus, production companies now often make both film and television productions, and high-end television drama production is often handled by ‘fiction’ departments that also include film production because high-end drama is perceived as just as risky as film production (ibid.). This also means that television drama is increasingly seeing the influx of personnel previously better known for their film work

such as Tom Tykwer and Volker Schlöndorff and thus also presenting an emphasis on stylistic flourishes in television drama (see below).

One additional development is the increasing co-production between distributors located within the same country who theoretically compete against each other for audiences but are willing to pool their resources in an acknowledgement of rising costs and continuing audience fragmentation. What I mean with the latter is that, in addition to convergence culture involving audiences, ‘who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of experiences they want’, as Henry Jenkins (2006: 3) argued, audiences are also habitually turning to the same distributors to search for this content. The pooling of resources suggests that broadcasters, satellite and other platforms have become aware of their core audiences who habitually turn towards them or others for most of their content. This leads to relatively stable audience groups who remain too small nationally for the production of expensive content, but who can be combined to form a critical mass to justify the economic risk that high-end productions entail if financed nationally. These high-end productions are necessary for national broadcasters in an internationally integrated television marketplace because they facilitate access to an international audience that has become increasingly important to the brand-building of all television content providers. Indeed, this access is necessary to provide high-end drama producers and financiers with revenue streams that they can no longer recuperate at a national level.

Such co-productions are becoming more evident, particularly between legacy media, including public service broadcasters, and more globally-oriented subscription services (Dunleavy, 2020). Dunleavy sees these collaborations as part of larger developments of increasingly complex co-production arrangements, which is why she opts for the use of the term ‘transnational coproductions’ as introduced by Hilmes (2014). As Dunleavy (2020) highlights, this period sees different forms of co-productions in existence, where one form is the ‘cross-platform coproduction’ as she calls the local broadcaster-international platform collaborations. ‘Direct commissioning’, another term proposed in Dunleavy’s article, consists of one or several local production companies producing content for an international platform, usually a streaming service such as Netflix or Amazon Prime Video. Importantly, by co-commissioning and co-financing this content, international streaming services have enabled the above two approaches to transnational co-production.

In Germany, both these forms of production have become more important, largely because of strong competition between Netflix and Amazon Prime Video who both aim to establish sizeable subscriber bases in one of Europe’s largest and most affluent markets (see Budzinski et al., 2021). Direct commissioning is evident in many examples, including *Dark*, made by Wiedemann & Berg Filmproduktion for Netflix (2017-20) or *You Are Wanted*, produced by Pantaleon and Warner Brothers Deutschland for Amazon Prime (2017-18). These developments sit within larger shifts in German broadcasting towards high-end programming, a shift that Susanne Eichner (2020) argues is closely interlinked with the development of subscription services. Here I want to focus on one programme that brings a subscription service together with a public service broadcaster, namely the cross-platform coproduction *Babylon Berlin* (ARD, Sky Deutschland, Berlin, 2017).

Babylon Berlin is only one of a succession of German cross-platform co-productions, which includes national collaborations such as *Parfum* (ZDFneo, Netflix, [Parfum, 2018](#)) and international ones such as *Deutschland 86* (Amazon Prime, RTL, [2018](#)) which was a UFA Fiction production partially financed with South African, European and German money. What is interesting in Germany, is that these collaborations between platforms are very diverse in terms of the institutions involved. For example, *Babylon Berlin* was produced for a public service broadcaster (ARD) and a German satellite channel (Sky Deutschland) which is part of an international conglomerate (now Comcast). The series is hence distributed internationally via other Sky channels, including Sky Atlantic and Now in the UK. Beta Film was an additional co-producer who came on board for the international distribution rights, highlighting that the series, even in its development phase, targeted both national and international audiences. In contrast, the *Deutschland* series were at first produced for RTL, before Amazon Prime acquired first distribution rights in Germany and internationally, meaning that it shifted from a national production which was internationally very successful to a production that was made for a transnational subscription on-demand platform, while RTL kept (the delayed) linear distribution rights. Finally, *Parfum* was initially developed for ZDF's on-demand portal, ZDFneo, and devised for the broadcaster's young adult audiences. However, *Parfum* required additional funding from Netflix to make it the 'TV event' that ZDF wanted it to be. It is because of this Netflix investment that *Parfum* is internationally available exclusively on Netflix.

All these dramas combine the high-end aesthetics we have seen proliferate internationally yet entail a foregrounding of the specifically local. While such a focus on a high-end television drama designed for international consumption has been discussed by others ([McElroy, 2013](#); [Pearson, 2021](#)), it involves an interesting twist for German television. Like many high-end dramas, *Babylon Berlin* offers multiple perspectives. However, as is also a tendency in such dramas, it foregrounds two complementary characters. These are Gereon Rath (Volker Bruch) who looks at Berlin as an outsider and offers many reference points to a specifically West German history ([Weissmann, 2021](#)) and Charlotte Ritter (Liv Lisa Fries) whose perspective is that of a conflicted insider, connected to both the communist working class, through her poverty, and to an underground, but stylish Berlin where the distance between prostitution and liberal celebration is only marked by a set of stairs leading into the basement. These different dominant perspectives allow *Babylon Berlin* to frame its story through a polysemic mixture of multiple cultural markers. It means that many of the key tropes and traumas are not only specifically German but are also specific to particular areas of Germany. Examples include the Western Front and Konrad Adenauer for West Germany and Cologne in particular (where Adenauer was mayor before becoming the first post-war chancellor in the West), and the communist connections to Russia, the working-class uprising and the cosmopolitan and liberal vibrancy for Berlin.

Importantly, the way this is presented is through an aesthetic that at once is specific to Germany and at the same time is more widely recognisable because it has travelled internationally. As Lothar Mikos ([2020](#)) highlights, such a national-transnational aesthetic is widely adopted in the current period of fiction production in Germany, as productions are usually aimed at both national and international audiences. *Babylon Berlin* draws on

several tropes developed in Weimar cinema – including Expressionism and the Expressionist-inspired Film Noir, as well as the *Kammerspiel* (Hall, 2019) – to make Berlin the centre of its attention (see Eichner and Mikos, 2017; Wilkins, 2021). As Kim Wilkins (2021) argues, this allows the series to deploy tourist gazes to emphasise both the fascination with the Roaring Twenties and the catastrophe that was to follow, namely the Nazi Reich. While both periods have shaped German history, it is important to underline here that they are also central to the way Germany has been mediated globally. Thus, a series about the descent into Nazism, but presented in association with the glamour of Art Deco and Expressionism was unlikely to have difficulty finding an international audience. This was particularly true because, by drawing on the aesthetics of Weimar cinema, the serial foregrounds style in ways that are comparable to that of US ‘quality’ drama, including acclaimed US premium cable examples. *Babylon Berlin*’s use of style provides a recognisable self-consciousness and referentiality that international audiences have learned to appreciate in both American art house cinema and ‘quality’ TV drama (Newman and Levine, 2012). *Babylon Berlin* therefore must negotiate a number of different perspectives. These include a recognition of the culturally specific background of West and East Germans, the transnational appeal of Berlin, and the international allure of Weimar Berlin. It does this very well and is joined in this success by the other TV dramas mentioned in this section. Nevertheless, all the examples in this section raise the question of what kinds of stories can be told. The examples highlighted here involve at least one central character that is spatially mobile, thus pointing to narratives that necessarily involve some form of outsider perspective.

Thus, high-end transnational co-productions discussed in this section are experienced within a structure of feeling that makes them appear as dominant at the time of writing. As with the two earlier ‘periods’ of public service monopoly and *Europudding*, which are now perceived as residual, distinctive stylistic and formal elements (foregrounding of style, an outsider perspective, complex, interwoven narratives), as well as particular conditions for production (complex financing arrangements that require the collaboration of different providers within and without Germany), work together to contribute and produce this structure of feeling. In German high-end co-produced television drama, style and form work hand in hand with industrial conditions to forge a certain structure of feeling (whether or not this is fully warranted), to yield a capacity for concrete periodisation.

Conclusions

This article has examined different forms of co-production for high-end drama in German television which are experienced as separate periods by industry insiders such as Zimmermann: the ones co-produced by public service broadcasters, those focusing on a pan-European identity and those emphasising stylistic distinction in order to stand out in the multiplatform age. While there are unique German elements to this (such as the interrelation between the public service broadcasters and New German cinema), the different forms presented here can be found also in other countries. Rather than seeing these co-production forms belonging to separate periods, these arrangements co-exist and

continue, but they have become experienced as less dominant in the consciousness of industry insiders such as Zimmermann and some academics. While Williams argued that the structure of feeling is largely based on stylistic and formal elements which we affectively generalise, this article has shown that in the case of co-productions the industrial arrangements are also central to how co-productions are classified into periods. This suggests that our affective responses to television co-productions are not just based on stylistic and formal elements, but also on our observations of industrial relations.

The first period was marked by co-production arrangements between national public service broadcasters. These co-productions were largely facilitated by existing geo-cultural and geo-linguistic links. While many of these co-productions were marketed and organised around creative ‘authors’ who gave television production the cultural kudos of New German Cinema and could warrant the kind of high-end budget that necessitated coproduction, more recent co-productions between national broadcasters include some of the most popular television series on German television. This may help explain why Zimmermann (in [Harris, 2018](#)) classifies them with an element of disdain. Nevertheless, this form of co-production created drama which was aware of specific cultural relations and emphasised cultural distinction as a particular style, particularly when it operated at the high-end.

The second period is that of the Europudding when the European market started to integrate more fully into the international flow of television. This involved the increasing role of commercial forces within production and distribution, including the involvement of American production companies. Here, the aim, in line with the Maastricht Treaty (1992), was to emphasise unity: a pan-European unity that is often imagined as a shared ‘murderous past’. In addition, productions were often marked by the rather formulaic sharing of production, technical and creative roles, which led to stylistic and formal compromises that brought high-end productions closer to the American made-for-television movie, which indeed it emulated ([Bleicher, 1999](#)).

The final period, the one perceived as dominant now, is that of the transnational co-production. It entails collaboration between local or national and transnational or multinational organisations to create high-end television drama that can successfully compete with high-end US-produced dramas. Here, the distinction is achieved by providing both locally specific content (see [Eichner, 2020](#)) while also operating with a transnational perspective, which may include the adoption of well-recognised styles and outsider perspectives. This period, then, emphasises diversity, but a diversity that can be integrated into the international flow of content via a form (through the emphasis on style as well as the complex multi-perspective narratives) that aligns with American quality drama. The dramas produced in this multiplatform era of collaboration, particularly those co-productions that include public service broadcasters, provide dynamic and innovative programmes, which have facilitated the significant rejuvenation of German television. While this seems a cause for celebration, the fact that so far much of the television that has been made in this way has returned to well-established narratives and styles points to some limitations.

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