

# Cultural Bolshevism

**Cultural Bolshevism** (German: *Kulturbolschewismus*), sometimes referred to specifically as "**art Bolshevism**" or "**music Bolshevism**",<sup>[1]</sup> was a term widely used by critics in Nazi Germany to denounce modernist movements in the arts, particularly when seeking to discredit more nihilistic forms of expression. This first became an issue during the 1920s in Weimar Germany. German artists such as Max Ernst and Max Beckmann were denounced by Adolf Hitler, the Nazi Party and other right-wing nationalists as "cultural Bolsheviks".

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## History

The development of modern art at the beginning of the 20th century – but with roots going back to the 1860s – denoted a revolutionary divergence from traditional artistic values to ones based on the personal perceptions and feelings of the artists. This rejection of traditional authority – intimately linked to the Industrial Revolution and the advance of democracy as the preferred form of government – was exhilarating to some, but extremely threatening to others, as it took away the security they felt under the old order, and the very cohesiveness of Western culture and civilization appeared to be in peril.<sup>[2]</sup>

The modernist break occurred at around the same time as the October Revolution in Russia, and it was perhaps natural that those who felt threatened by the new artistic viewpoint would associate it with the group that came out on top after that revolution, the Bolsheviks with their Marxist–Leninist political philosophy. In reality, the connection between the modernism and Bolshevism was extremely tenuous, and primarily a matter of both existing at the same unsettled time in European history. Still, some artists in Western Europe drew inspiration from revolutionary ideals, to the extent that Dadaist Richard Huelsenbeck confidently declared in 1920 that Dada was a "German Bolshevik affair."<sup>[3]</sup>

The association of new art with Bolshevism circulated in right-wing and nationalist discourse in the following years; it was, for example, the subject of a chapter in Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Amid Hitler's rise to power the Nazis denounced a number of contemporary styles as "cultural Bolshevism," notably abstract art and Bauhaus architecture. After seeing a colleague beaten by Nazi supporters for comments sympathetic to modern art, typographer Paul Renner published an essay against Nazi aesthetics titled "Kulturbolschewismus?" Around the same time Carl von Ossietzky mocked the flexibility of the term in Nazi writings:

Cultural Bolshevism is when conductor [Otto] Klemperer takes tempi different from his colleague [Wilhelm] Furtwängler; when a painter sweeps a color into his sunset not seen in Lower Pomerania; when one favors birth control; when one builds a house with a flat roof; when a Caesarean birth is shown on the screen; when one admires the performance of [Charlie] Chaplin and the mathematical wizardry of [Albert] Einstein. This is called cultural Bolshevism and a personal favor rendered to Herr Stalin. It is also the democratic mentality of the brothers [Heinrich and Thomas] Mann, a piece of music by [Paul] Hindemith or [Kurt] Weill, and is to be identified with the hysterical insistence of a madman for a law giving him permission to marry his own grandmother.<sup>[4]</sup>

Once in control of the government, the Nazis moved to suppress modern art styles and to promote art with national and racial themes.<sup>[5]</sup> Various Weimar-era art personalities, including Renner Huelsenbeck, and the Bauhaus designers, were marginalized.

## See also

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- Degeneration theory
- Sexual Bolshevism
- Art of the Third Reich
- Cultural Marxism conspiracy theory
- Degenerate art
- Weimar culture
- Degenerate music
- Negermusik
- Reichsmusikkammer
- Jewish Bolshevism

## Notes

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4. von Ossietzky, Carl in *Weltbühne* ("World Stage") (21 April 1931) quoted in Dák, István *Weimar Germany's Left-wing Intellectuals: A Political History of the Weltbühne and Its Circle* ([https://books.google.com/books?id=5g6cJNfRN0cC&pg=PA2&lpg=PA2&dq=Cultural+Bolshevism+is+when+conductor+Klemperer+takes+temp+different+from+his+colleague+Furtw%C3%A4ngler&source=bl&ots=EUnQY\\_axmJ&sig=a63Fc6kqIdA\\_ifY0E39ghkUDiZc&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CCUQ6AEwAAVoVChMI4c3nub6VxwIVA6QeCh2NtgtU#v=onepage&q=Cultural%20Bolshevism%20is%20when%20conductor%20Klemperer%20takes%20temp%20different%20from%20his%20colleague%20Furtw%C3%A4ngler&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=5g6cJNfRN0cC&pg=PA2&lpg=PA2&dq=Cultural+Bolshevism+is+when+conductor+Klemperer+takes+temp+different+from+his+colleague+Furtw%C3%A4ngler&source=bl&ots=EUnQY_axmJ&sig=a63Fc6kqIdA_ifY0E39ghkUDiZc&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CCUQ6AEwAAVoVChMI4c3nub6VxwIVA6QeCh2NtgtU#v=onepage&q=Cultural%20Bolshevism%20is%20when%20conductor%20Klemperer%20takes%20temp%20different%20from%20his%20colleague%20Furtw%C3%A4ngler&f=false)). Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1968. p.2
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