Meaningful, entertaining, popular and ‘Bavarian’: art into design in nineteenth century Munich

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Introduction

The long trajectory of this article is a set of designs which some Munich artists created during the second half of the nineteenth century and which carry the adjective Bavarian. By extension, the adjective is also used for all other artefacts found in the region, all those which are held to be authentic. To begin with, Bavarianism is a curious, and in some ways even a paradoxical phenomenon. To the Bavarians themselves it is abundantly clear what it entails. To the rest of the German tribes it constitutes a kind of other within their self, a special version of Germanness that is loved but not taken seriously. For all those outside Germany, the stereotype can be a confusing one: firstly, do ‘Bavarian’ and ‘Germanic’ not mean the same, personified, say, by the stolid beer-swilling Lederhosen-clad male? (Figure 1) Secondly, among other sights, ‘Bavaria’ also conjures up images of the
Alps. Why and how, many would ask, should one make significant distinctions between an Austrian, a Tyrolese, or a Swiss Alpine culture, and add a separate Bavarian one to it? Yet none of these labelling problems worried the devoted early Munich protagonists who feature in this article, neither have they really troubled anybody else since then. Forming part of ‘Germany’, the stereotype of the province of Bavaria was, and is, a non-political one and to anyone from outside the region it belongs almost exclusively to the sphere of entertainment and tourism.

The principal twentieth century definition of the kind of Bavarian art and design discussed here is ‘Volkskunst’. It was only late in the nineteenth century when this concept began to be fully understood, as comprising, to put it at its briefest, works of art and of crafts and trades of a ‘primitive’ kind, made in strongly localised and pre-modern kinds of environments. However, the preparatory time for this notion stretches back as far as the late eighteenth century, when the Romantic poets and theorists of literature began to stress what they saw as the special qualities of ‘popular’ and also of child-orientated literary productions, such as fairy-tales, myths and proverbs. This article begins the investigation into the rise of the ‘popular’ in design with the objects created by mid-nineteenth century artist designers who decorated them with subject matter taken from those newly evaluated ‘primitive’ literary sources. Already from the late 1840s some of the decoration of objects was slanted towards specifically ‘Bavarian’–Alpine themes, but the real impact of the love of regional folk art and design only came with the intensified efforts of the new Munich vernacular revival designers of the 1870s. The broad characterisation of ‘folk’ turned into a seemingly much more precise geographical label.

Investigating the history of folk art studies differs in many respects from the parallel history of the study of fine art. In the latter case, the concern is principally with the academic, the scholarly sphere, while contemporary art production itself appears of little importance. By contrast, when trying to comprehend the origins of the new notion of Volkskunst, a consideration of nineteenth century art and design is vital. With art history proper, the issue of history is paramount, while the definition of ‘art’ usually remains the ‘academic’, traditional Renaissance or Romantic one. With Volkskunst, ‘history’ hardly seems to matter, indeed essentialist definitions tended to see all Volkskunst as ahistorical. It was the definition of ‘art’ in Volkskunst which had to be newly established. Here, one has to turn to contemporary literature, fiction, travel writing, and also to painting, architecture and the applied arts; they all played a crucial role in forming the concept of a folk art, at least initially. It was primarily in the circles of artists where the artefacts of the ‘Volk’ were newly selected, described and illustrated, and thereby aesthetically valorised and socially ideologised through countless written and visual representations. The artists and architects then designed new objects which were shaped more or less in accordance with some of the found objects. In this new and complex process of observation, creation and valorisation the designers pointed to what was felt to be aesthetically attractive, be it a figurative scene, an ornament, a colour combination or the characteristics of a material, in any object now defined as ‘Bavarian’. Thus the study of ‘folk’ art objects continued to be accompanied by the
creation of new objects in a folk art style, something inconceivable in the realm of the fine arts, except of course in the case of fakes.

To proceed with the study of nineteenth century trends in art and design in order to try to and understand the valorisations of a Volkskunst is, of course, not limited to the study of Bavaria. The mutuality of appreciating the old and creating the new in an old manner applies to all those movements in that period which carry the umbrella terms Arts & Crafts and vernacular revival. At the end of the valorisation process, whether it was associated with a new design or a ‘genuinely old’ object, one arrives at a new kind of essentialist classification, implying ‘authenticity’, ‘tradition’, ‘eternal’ validity and universal acceptance, each object being labelled with a single geographical term and co-existing within a wide range of other, equally strongly emphasised national and regional identifications.

**Part 1  Meaningful and entertaining: the artist as designer of poetic and popular decoration for objects of common life**

**Munich, the ‘Kunststadt’**

Munich’s epithet ‘the city of art’ gained currency during the 1830s and ever since it has been paraded as such by chroniclers, critics and art historians, by the artists themselves and by the wider public, too. It was the spirit of art, the ‘holy spirit of the century’, that ruled the city, in the words of artist, critic and art historian Ernst Förster in 1846. Principally, Munich became a place where art was actually seen to be produced. The sequence of the immensely revered artists, nationally and internationally, began with the painter Peter Cornelius, the mentor of a whole generation, among them Förster and the painter and designer Eugen Napoleon.

My thanks for inestimable help go to Christoph Hölz, Nick Trend, Nick Warr and Sabine Wieber

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Neureuther, who both played crucial roles in the story told here. A major Munich hallmark was its conspicuous consumption of art. Approximately half of the population were in a position to spend considerable amounts of time on entertainment.\(^2\) One may reflect back here to the uses of art as entertainment in the older Central-European kind of ‘Residenzstadt’, the smallish or medium-sized seat where the ruler and his wider entourage tended to comprise a very sizeable part of the population. In the words of Munich’s King Ludwig I, the city’s mighty patron, ‘… religion should be the basis… but the young should enjoy life’.\(^3\) An enormous number of venues served the regular gatherings of the artists and their adherents, from small, exclusive clubs down to the cheapest Bierkellers. A frequent spectacle was provided by the large pageants which provided intensive work for all groups of artists and craftspeople; they could be appreciated as serious artistic work or as carnivalesque fun, or both. An artist whose principal task was to provide diverse forms of entertainment was Franz (Graf von) Pocci, with his illustrated books and his drawings caricaturing the Munich art world, including himself. Apart from being a graphic artist of note he was also a poet as well as a composer.\(^4\) Sociability went hand in hand with the close co-operation of several art forms that became a hallmark of much of Munich’s artistic production.

New ‘volkstümlich / popular’ subject matter and new popular media

The new art forms shown in this article served not the state or the church, but the individual in his or her private capacity, whether at home or while being involved with voluntary groups, including tourism.\(^5\) The principal innovation of the 1830s occurred through linking lyrical poetry as well as fairy tales and all child-specific themes with a new category of art which is inadequately called illustration, according to Munich critics a ‘volkstümliche Kunstform’ by definition.\(^6\) It is dealt with here briefly as the prelude to the innovations in design. New reproduction techniques brought new formal possibilities, thereby elevating the illustration from a mere servant to the text to its artistic equivalent. The young Neureuther had produced decorative painting for Peter Cornelius, but from 1829 turned mainly to lithography and etching, especially in the large and complex pages of his

\(^2\) Upper class, civil servants and students comprised 25%; ‘Literaten und Künstler’ 10%; trades 42%, whose owners were seen as ‘working little’, living chiefly ‘zum Vergnügen / for pleasure’; statistics of 1854, Michael Birnbaum, *Das Münchner Handwerk im 19 Jahrhundert*, PhD, Munich 1984, 30, 121.


Randzeichnungen (drawings on the margin) for some of Goethe’s poems. Förster praised the work as a ‘new system, one that connected poetry and painting in reciprocal action, causing images and words to pass before our eyes in close union and manifold combinations’.7 (Figure 2) The aged poet was thoroughly pleased with the work and this in turn greatly helped Neureuther’s career. Pocci soon adopted Neureuther’s graphic style in his high-class but medium-priced illustrated books. (Figures 3,4) From the mid-1840s, art illustration expanded massively with Braun & Schneider’s satirical journal Fliegende Blätter and the Münsterner Bilderbogen, a revival of the illustrated broadsheet. Cheapness, combined with artistic quality, remained the aim, as major painters, such as Moritz von Schwind or Carl Spitzweg, contributed drawings; Kaspar Braun, too, had worked with Cornelius. The young Wilhelm Busch was to make his debut with the group in the late 1850s.

Figure 2 Eugen Napoleon Neureuther, Randzeichnungen zu Goethes Balladen und Romanzen, 5th Heft, Munich: Cotta, 1839. ‘Gretchen’, from Faust, Lithograph.

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Figure 4 Franz Pocci (ed.), Alte und neue Studentenlieder, Landshut: Vogelsche Buchhandlung, n.d. [1844].
As regards the precise meaning of the term ‘volkstümlich’, an analysis in terms of the modern political and social sciences would be difficult. A word hardly known before the end of the eighteenth century, it would, by 1840, still only be very vaguely understood among very few. The sense of ‘popular’, simply referring to the high numbers of sales of an artefact must always have been present. But more significant was the emerging ideologisation of the term, ascribing certain virtues to the ‘Volk’; which will emerge gradually in the sections below.  

To many in the 1820s to 1850s, definitions of the new subject matter of Romanticism appeared simple enough. Some of Munich’s artistic gatherings were now infused by the practice of Medievalist mock chivalry and with the donning of ‘German’ medieval dress. For one of its most ardent participants, the writer Friedrich Beck, who was an outright Gothicist, the contrast between Classical and Romantic was a straightforward ‘pagan-foreign vs. Christian-Medieval-Germanic-ours’. For Förster who, as an art historian, wrote on Italy and Germany in roughly equal measure, the matter seemed more complex, it was principally to do with the respective psychological effects of the styles. The contrast between Mediterranean and Northern mythologies seemed to amount to a choice between ‘antique generality’ and romantic ‘all-encompassing individuality’. The Classical artist was likely to supply standardised and static repetitions of a small set of allegories or personifications, while Romantic imagery brought a plethora of individualised actions. However, in a later reflection of Förster’s on the work of the eminent sculptor Ludwig Schwanthaler – who practiced both modes, official Neo-Classicism during the day and Medieval mummery when partying during the night - the evaluation was somewhat reversed: images from antiquity lead to ‘stormy movement’, while ‘medieval dreams lead the heart to rest’. It meant a new association of Romanticism with relaxation which proved to be a crucial factor in the instrumentalisation of art for common surroundings, especially for the home and the holiday.

The predominant topic for Pocci was the world of the small child. It meant a state of constant idyllic happiness. Following Romanticism’s new child psychology, postulating a child-specific maivity, there was no room here for Classical heroes, nor for much Christian sentiment and moral exhortation. The actual content was derived from songs, fairy-tales, legends, fables and proverbs, some of which will be mentioned below where they have been applied to objects. Romantic poets and

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9 Stephan List, Die Münchner Romantik und die Gesellschaft von den drei Schilden, Oberbayrisches Archiv (Munich), 63, 1922, 92-93.
10 List, Romantik, 14.
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theorists had given all these texts a double valorisation: they were held in the highest esteem because they were deemed to have been created anonymously, or even ‘naturally’, with child-like naivety constituting a major component of this ideology. For the Brothers Grimm ‘real poetry is never without a relationship with life’.\textsuperscript{13} At the same time any of these works could be evaluated and appreciated as high-category literature.

As it happened, the poet Clemens Brentano, who, at the beginning of the century, had preceded the aims of the Brothers Grimm with his collection of ‘folk poetry’ and ‘Volkslieder / folk songs’ actually lived in Munich from 1834 to 1842. His advice for devising ‘Kleinkinderbücher’ could not have been more basic: ‘clear and pronounced [deutlich], childlike [kindlich] and full of fun [lustig] …’.\textsuperscript{14} In Pocci’s books all actors seemed to be fixed in their youthfulness, or as having just reached maturity. They thus appeared to be entitled to the constant enjoyment of entertainment. Students rarely study, hunters do not shoot and soldiers do not make war, but all prefer music, courting, and above all drinking.\textsuperscript{15} (Figure 4) Even children may enjoy a sip from the barrel or the jug. Pocci’s art was always seriously ‘light’. From the 1850s he even began to help revive old puppet theatre customs.

‘A plenitude of amusing [heiter] and serious thought, pious personages and waggish [schalkhafte] ideas’, thus Förster summed up what was required in the new art-led entertainment.\textsuperscript{16} No doubt, much of this constitutes a Munich parallel to the Merry Old England fashion of the 1820s to 1840s. As we will see below, the range of the carriers of the entertainment spirit began to be enlarged by including the ‘Bavarian’ Alpine peasant folk. The valorisations of nature, the child-like and the peasant ‘Volk’ appeared to belong together. As will be shown, for Neureuther, the illustrator, specifically ‘Bavarian’ themes began to play an important role from the early 1830s onwards.

Initially, Pocci followed the graphic style of the Nazarenes, relying principally on clear outlines, paralleling the Grimm’s literary demand for ‘simplicity’, ‘purity / Reinheit’ and the ‘blissful / selig’.\textsuperscript{17} Yet, from about the mid-


\textsuperscript{16} Förster, \textit{Zeitschrift} (see note 20) 1, no. 1, 1851, 3.

\textsuperscript{17} Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm,‘Vorrede’, \textit{Kinder und Hausmärchen}, 2nd ed. Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1819.
1840s, an idyllic array of the same sweet angelic face no longer provided sufficient excitement. Although the term realism was, as yet, hardly used, one does note a firmer rejection of Classical allegories and of most outer-worldly Medievalist drama, too. There was now a greater diversity of themes and more intensively rendered detail, which related more explicitly to ordinary contemporary life, often with a stress, again, on its comical moments. The desire for the contemplative appeared to give way to a desire for action, though a measure of contemplative distance still prevailed.

A speciality of the 1850s and 1860s was the combination of poetic fantasy with life-like detail, especially with animals and goblins. The latter range among the childlike creatures but at the same time they appear as older men, involved in all kinds of demanding activities. Notwithstanding their Classical ancestry of the good spirits of the house, the lares and penates, goblins were now held to belong to Germanic mythology as well as being associated with the new German Romantic utopianism of the busy and happy crafts people of the Middle Ages. The master of the whimsical goblins was the painter Moritz von Schwind. The chief source for humanised animals was the Classical fable, but its customary plain moral message was now reduced in favour of a greater specificity of each story and its personages and a much greater diversity of situations, including amusing ones. A new intensified zoomorphic precision was combined with copious details of human dress and human demeanour, for instance, in the much admired illustrations of Goethe’s version of an old European epic, Reinecke Fuchs, produced in 1846 by the illustrious Wilhelm von Kaulbach (see figure 12). Thus while the subjects of the stories were held to be anonymously created and therefore to be addressed to all, the actual words and images were devised by some of the major poets and artists of the day.

Art into manufacture: The new Munich design policies

To create, or to enable the creation of ‘Good Design’ has been a catchword for more than a century and a half. The common, traditional thinking is, of course, to see this as the concern of the individual trades and crafts and as a matter of how much the client wants to spend. But it now also became the concern of a new discourse which was mounted not by the trades but by a diversity of agents which included writers, artists and patrons. The term ‘design’ was far from familiar in the nineteenth century. However, the key wording, ‘entworfen von / designed by’ was present in Munich from the start. It means that an object is not understood as having been originated primarily by a craftsperson, or by a manufacturing firm, or a shop, but by a further agent, the ‘designer’, who makes all the major initial decisions for the production of an object: the choice of decoration and the way it is united with the overall shape which in turn responds to the object’s practical use, while paying due regard to the material and its possibilities. As the century went on, an ever greater unity, or fusion of all these factors was sought. (See figure 8) Also used here are the terms ‘applied art’ and ‘decorative art’. They are synonymous with design to an extent, but on a much lower level of sophistication; basically they signify the
presence of decoration, while ‘artistic design’ may well refer to objects which do not carry any added decoration.

By the mid 1830s some of the hard-core Munich Medievalists under the direction of Friedrich Beck proposed a multifaceted private institution, a kind of study centre, to train designers in Gothic ways, with a library and collection of ‘Risse’, of drawings, to be used for the instruction of woodworkers and stone carvers, as well as an undertaking to produce pattern books, but little came of all this. Other extensions of fine art into the trades can be found, from the 1820s onwards, in the state-organised production of medieval-style stained glass and in large-scale bronze casting for public monuments. Both became export successes for Munich. More of a commercial product, though an expensive one, was porcelain. Munich’s Nymphenburg manufacture was among the most renowned, however, in 1847, it appeared to need a fresh start and Neureuther was made its artistic director. Juliane Bauer has provided an exhausting study of his activities in the firm. A few years before, Neureuther had already produced designs for elaborate table decorations, thereby turning motifs from his graphic representations into plastic shapes. (Figure 5; see also figure 18.)

Figure 5 Eugen Napoleon Neureuther, an imaginary epergne, Illustration to J. W. von Goethe’s poem “Offene Tafel” [open table], 1846, etching, from E. W. Bredt, Das Neureuther Album, Munich: Hugo Schmidt, 1918, plate 75.

20 See Tafelaufsatz (epergne) for Kronprinz Maximilian, Schloss Hohenschwangau, Zeitschrift… (see note 21), 3, 4, 1853, plate 1.
Neureuther’s reforming role in Nymphenburg then leads us, in 1850/51, straight into the foundation of the Verein zur Ausbildung der Gewerke, the Association for the Instruction of the Trades / Crafts, where he also played a key role. From 1868/69 the society termed itself Kunstgewerbe Verein and as the Bayerischer Kunstgewerbeverein München it is still a force to be reckoned with. Although the Verein did receive grants from the state under Ludwig’s successor, Maximilian II, and it soon worked with a largely state-financed specialised school, essentially it was founded as, and remained, a ‘freie Vereinigung’, a self-constituting gathering. In fact it can be seen as just one more of the innumerable Munich clubs with the same notables and artists participating. One even notes plans for a ‘Zechstube’, a drinking den for the members, though for that they had to wait until the late 1870s. (See figure 33)

Clearly, there was a trend among Munich art producers to establish a position outside the dominating sphere of royal patronage. In this respect, Munich also contrasted strongly with neighbouring Austria where, from the 1860s, the state built up a powerful and complex system of institutions, of schools and museums devoted to the applied arts. As regards the royal patron himself, there was one initial link, in 1850, with the presentation of a ‘thank you gift’ for the king’s patronage, a highly ornate desk and bookrest, designed and made by the group which was to form the core of the Verein. For Ludwig I himself, it was now the time to look back. On the walls of his last museum building, the Neue Pinakothek, the gallery for modern art, completed in 1855, he commissioned a series of huge scenes, displayed externally, to be seen by all, which celebrated numerous aspects of his art patronage. One of the


23 Ernst Förster, ‘Kunst und Gewerke’, Zeitschrift ... 1, no. 1, 1851, 4; see E.Fentsch, ’Die Selbstständigkeit des deutschen Gewerkes’, Zeitschrift ... 10, no. 3, 1860, 17-19.

scenarios showed the festive presentation of the gift; for the Verein, all this marked the most high-profile presence it was ever to experience. (Figure 6)

Acting as the Verein’s early porte-parole was another familiar name, Ernst Förster. The group’s starting point was a fundamental criticism: however appreciative one had to be of the king’s patronage overall, there appeared something very wrong with the processes in which many of the buildings and their décor and furnishings were realised, or, more precisely, with the low esteem in which the executing craftperson’s work was held. The king, adhering to a highly idealist view of art, did not want to know about all of those kinds of manufactures, such as decorative textiles, which, for him, relied merely on passing fashions and which were only there to serve elegance and comfort. A resentful attitude had developed regarding the seemingly absolute power of the celebrated Cornelius and also that of the chief architect, Leo von Klenze, who advised the king also on decorative schemes; they had contributed to a state of ‘the utmost alienation [Entfremdung]’ of art from craft, to an ‘unbridgeable gulf’ between the two. There was now a regrettable habit of ‘Schablonismus’ - meant here very generally in the sense as patterning of the most repetitive kind in decorative work, or ‘factory work’, as well as in the narrower sense of stencilling - for instance in a ‘thousand-fold patterned wallpaper’. Related to all this was the ‘absence of the fundamental consideration for the material when devising the form’. By contrast to all this, Förster maintained that, in the Middle Ages ‘even the most insignificant object of daily life was treated with a sensitivity of feeling and mechanical work hardly existed’. As far as Munich’s new architecture was concerned, repetitiousness, the

‘Casernenstil’, the ‘barrack-style’ (Neureuther), seen in many new street fronts, was likewise to be condemned.26

The official, very briefly formulated aims of the Verein read like many such statements elsewhere: combine usefulness with taste and beauty, values which do not need to incur extra cost.27 Members demanded ‘the spread of simple beautiful forms into the sphere of Massenproduktion’28 or ‘good design / Wohlgestaltung’ for ‘simple household goods in the hands of the modest [schlicht] housewife’.29 However, while perfectly capable of explaining their principles when called upon, Munich designers did not seem to care for the wider propagation of their beliefs through tracts or manuals, or for issuing extensive pattern books, showing the ‘right’ kind of ornament; on the contrary, they went for the individualisation of design.

The principal aim of the Verein was to propagate artful / kunstgerechte ‘drawings for manufactured / crafts objects of all kinds’,30 for each individual object, and to select entries for exhibitions. All drawings are marked with ‘entworfen von / designed by …’. Every year sixteen ‘art supplements / Kunstbeilagen’ were published in the society’s journal. The quality of the illustrations held a middling position between the coarser British wood engravings and the contemporary luxury lithographs. With its main - almost its only - rationale, to publish new applied arts designs by a close group of named artists, the Munich Zeitschrift had no parallel at the time.

‘Gewerke’ in the Verein’s name was an antiquated version of ‘Gewerbe’, meaning both crafts and trades. Heads of manufacturers and craft masters made up half of the membership. Metal, ceramics and wood predominated, representing the city’s elite among the crafts; yet they had to hear from the designers that ‘all artistic sense had been lost and that nobody could execute an ornament from a drawing’.31 (See figure 23.) The names of the makers were usually given alongside those of the designers. In the event, however, most designs illustrated in the journal stayed just that. ‘Massenproduktion’ remained a distant dream. It seemed to fall upon the designers and the writers to demand ‘truth to the materials’: Peter Herwegen, one of the chief artists (who is discussed in greater detail below), affirmed that ‘the material, be it wood, bone, glass, lead … always determines the form and the

27 Satzungen des Vereins zur Ausbildung der Gewerke, (Munich, 1850), 1-2 (Munich, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, BAYHStA MH 14779).
30 ‘Mitgliederversammlung’, Zeitschrift ..., 2, no. 1, 1852, 1.
31 Festschrift (1876), 32.
construction’. Neureuther, in particular, often provided extremely detailed verbal and visual instructions for the makers. The designers voiced their regret that, in metals, the contemporary practice of moulding and stamping had driven out more individualistic kinds of wrought iron work. For wooden objects, it was claimed, there was the basic form of the board, that is, a piece of wood of the same thickness, which may receive fretsaw cuts, a mode we shall return to in the 1870s. A new rhetoric of equality was heard: in the Middle Ages, Förster wished to confirm, ‘the workshop of the locksmith worked according to the same laws as that of the goldsmith and the jeweller’.

**Individuality and meaningfulness for common objects**

Figure 7 The journal *Fliegende Blätter* provides a major source for the study of the art life in Munich. In the context of meaningfulness, the principal issue of this section, one may here refer to the images which point to a world of humdrum everyday surroundings, which were drawn as pale and attraction-less as possible. A manner arose to depict interiors, which appear neither rich, nor poor, they are featureless, conforming to the harmlessness of the jokes demonstrating the ‘meaningless’ world which the new artist–designers deplored. In the 1870s one meets, by contrast, illustrations where the issue was the surfeit of meaning. (See figures 30, 31)

33 See Bauer, *Neureuther*, 290.
34 Metal: Metalldruckerei und Hammerarbeit…; wood: ‘Beschreibung …’, *Zeitschrift…*, 5, no. 1, 1855, 8.
35 Förster, *Zeitschrift…*, 1, no. 1, (1851), 3.
‘One of the tasks of a husband. Friend of the family: “O dear, how the table wobbles! Wife (furiously to her husband): “I am sure, because of your stupid corns, you have again put your foot under the short table leg; how often have I told you so!” Fliegende Blätter [Munich] 17, no. 398, n. d. [1852], 112.

Figure 8 A seemingly complete theory of design: ‘What may become of an object, or the development of a boot jack. / Was aus einem Dinge werden kann, oder die Fortentwicklung des Stiefelziehers’, Fliegende Blätter 44, no. 1094, n.d. [1865]: 207. 1. The idea of the invention. 2. Rough beginning. 3. The ordinary trades. 4. The thinking trades. 5. Transition to art. 6. Applied art / Kunstgewerbe. 7. The linking of purposes. At the same time a terrible weapon. 8a. Refinement, closed. 8b. Refinement, open. 9. Practicality, can be folded. 10. The highest culture: boot jack for Christian-Germanic youths.’

The new Munich design led to a greatly expanded range of its ‘contents’, of the meanings conveyed by the decoration of the objects. (Figures 7, 8) As with the new kinds of book illustration, the contents created a new combination of the sphere of legends or fairy tales with that of common life. Much of the more lavish kinds of
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decoration took the festive world of the lower classes as its subject while the decoration on more utilitarian kinds of objects searched for suitable, often curious and humorous stories or allegories. These included, as the decade progressed, more and more elements of the local scene, such as the cult of beer, as well as specifically Bavarian-Alpine subject matter.

In practice, one may see the work sponsored by the Verein as the same kind of ‘package’ as the new illustrated book, moulding together all aspects of contents, style, layout and the specifics of the printing technique. In 1849, Neureuther explained his new procedures at the Nymphenburg manufacture to Samuel Carter Hall, the English critic and art organiser: Artistic forms of utensils must be in harmony with their implied uses, and thus themes like Apollo and the Muses are quite out of place on his ‘countrymen’s soup bowls’. Neither should decoration be understood as a matter of ‘simple patterning / stencil-work’. The subjects of pictorial representations should allude to the thoughts and recollections of the present time. In general, ‘forms are not Antique-Classical, nor Gothic, but country-like’, by which Neureuther meant, as will become clear below, scenes from Bavarian peasant life. (See figure 18, 19) In 1851 the Great Exhibition in London gave Neureuther a chance to show his beer tankards, for the kind of drink which, he maintained, was preferred by the whole of Munich, rich and poor - a recurrent trope in all accounts of the life of the city.36 (Figure 9)


Regarding historical style, the Verein’s theories sounded resolute but indeterminate at the same time. Förster rejects the ‘affected coldness of Classicism’, when ‘its allegories are badly applied, are lacking in spirit and give a frosty and ridiculous impression’.

The Rococo, at the time the principal style for most smarter domestic interiors, was ‘without meaning’, its rediscovery as something characteristically Bavarian being some way away. However, a ‘return to the German medieval forms’ did not mean that one has to stay with them. ‘The mere repetition of what has already been kills the warmth of life’.

As the Art Journal of 1852 summarised it: the Munich Verein aims to ‘… to develop the characteristic and beautiful and to diminish the influence of insipid and spiritless fashions’.

The key term was ‘Sinn’, which translates as meaning, but also as aim; it was the desire for the ‘sinnig’ object, for ‘Sinnigkeit’, for meaningfulness generally. One always had to strive for ‘bildliche Einfälle’, for (original) pictorial ideas.

‘Beauty in art gains its highest value through the addition of thoughts, through the gift of the imagination and through the expression of moods / psychic states / [Gemüth].’ When devising decoration, ‘the importance of sculpture and painting is such that every word on this matter is superfluous’. Notwithstanding the Verein’s fundamental criticisms of the ways in which much decoration was being produced in Munich, these stipulations did conform with Ludwig’s policy in a basic sense, namely to avoid all that is ‘saying nothing / nichtssagend’.

During the 1830s the king had his own new living rooms in the Königsbau, the Munich Royal Palace, decorated with greatly detailed scenes from a wide range of poetry, including recent German works, and Ernst Förster was actually one of the painters. But for Ludwig, meaningfulness had to be contained within the sphere of fine art and elevated literature in the narrowest sense of these terms and any other kind of decoration had only a lowly, a subsidiary function.

Although, unlike the illustrated books, the new decoration on objects rarely showed actual children, the sources of much of the ‘contents’ was the same: fairy tales, fables or proverbs. With its plethora of lively details this decoration also corresponded to the new ‘realism’ of the 1850s. The human figure remained the most important motif. ‘The life-quality of human nature ought to be felt from the masterly design of utensils’ wrote a critic in 1867, ‘it is clear that especially the human forms attached to, or forming the most prominent parts of an object, reveal

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38 Festschrift, 1901, 31.
39 Förster, Zeitschrift ... 1, no. 1, 1851, 1-5. See E.Förster, ‘Rückblick …’, Zeitschrift..., 5, no.3, 1855, 20.
41 ‘Beschreibung …’, Zeitschrift ..., 5, no. 1, 1855, 8.
42 Förster, Zeitschrift..., 1, no. 1, 1851, 1-5. See Moritz von Schwind’s sketches for small, highly decorated objects.
the fact that the work was created by humans for humans.∗∗∗∗∗ Among the motifs there was a preponderance of youth, both male youths / Jünglinge, and adolescent girls, as in Neureuther’s striking construction of a plant turning into a maiden, a ‘nymph’, the whole serving as a ‘Gasflammenträger’, a carrier of gas flames. (Figure 10) Next in line in terms of life forms were animals, and a great diversity of them, usually rendered in vigorous movement. Relating to the importance of hunting and feasting in the Alps, the most elaborate scenes can be found in the ‘hunting table services’.

Figure 10 ‘Gasflammenträger [gasflame holder] von Porzellan und Metall’, design by Eugen Napoleon Neureuther, c. 1850, Zeitschrift des Vereins zur Ausbildung der Gewerke 1, no. 1, 1851, pl. 3.

But the real significance of the new Munich kind of artistic decoration lies with the way it is related to the practical function of the object; what matters most,

Juliane Bauer stresses, is the ‘intrinsic link / innere Bezug’ between the two.\textsuperscript{45} Decoration poeticises the function and individualises the object. Any understanding of such works as utility-plus-stuck-on decoration, to be assessed as regards the quantity and the beauty of that décor itself, would be banal. Again, one may see parallels with the illustrated book: it is not a matter of merely applying conventional decoration to any kind of shape, but to treat the particular use of the object as a kind of theme, just as in the case of the subject of a text that is to be illustrated on the page.

In order to get closer to the ‘Sinn’ of the objects one ought to group them according to their functions, and less so in terms of the hierarchy of their ornateness. Clearly a strong social hierarchy does still apply when considering elaborate objects where the actual function may be understood as almost purely a decorative one. (Figure 11; see also figure 5.) With these works the Munich designers followed a well-established mode of sculptural decoration where a multitude of themes could be playfully indulged in. But the Verein also experimented with many utensils or gadgets that serve daily practical use. They can be divided into those of a stationary and more permanent existence, such as thermometers and clocks, as well as into those that belong to a new group of complex technical working gadgets, such as gas lamps or sewing machines, or they may be utensils that serve cleanliness, such as trays for cigar ashes or shoe cleaners, as well as the objects of constant use in the kitchen and the scullery. All appeared equally deserving of meaning and each time the decorative motifs had to be imagined afresh.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image11.png}
\caption{‘Parts of a Hunting Service in Porcelain’, designed by Eugen Napoleon Neureuther, c. 1850, \textit{Zeitschrift des Vereins zur Ausbildung der Gewerke} 3, no. 3, 1853: pl. 3.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{45} Bauer, \textit{Neureuther}, 279.
In the case of a thermometer, the whole object is turned into a little scene, with the actual instrument embedded into a vertical building, a tower house. This happens to be the seat of Malepartus, who is no other than Reinecke Fuchs, all taken directly from Wilhelm von Kaulbach’s already mentioned celebrated illustrations and the line inscribed comes directly from Goethe. The fox was one of the most frequently cited animals, ridiculed as well as feared; one of his many roles was to determine the weather. (Figure 12) For objects which serve hard work there was the idea that this could be assisted by goblins who act at night when they are not seen, as in the very rare case of a designer-decorated modern sewing machine - as a contrast, one ought to remember here the frequency, at that time, of the nostalgically revived spinning wheel. In the case of the machine, the goblins refer explicitly to August Kopisch’s extremely popular ballad, ‘Die Heinzelmännchen von Köln of 1836. (Figure 13)
The most daring designs in the sphere of the commonplace are those by the little-known Peter Herwegen. Principally a graphic artist, he also acted as an interior designer, where he tended to control the details down to ‘every hammered-in nail’. With his Gothic dress and forthright character he enjoyed himself ‘as a well-known personality in town’.46 In his design for a shoe-scraper of 1852 the brush above the container for the dirt is held in position by two hybrids with forceful expressions; ‘… dog and monkey compete for the honour to serve the guests …’, Herwegen wrote, turning the object into a little piece of action.47 (Figure 14) For Herwegen’s kitchen utensils, too, carried ‘new characteristic forms … pictorial ideas, proverbs …’, as in the case of a nested weight (i.e. a container for a set of weights, bearing an ornate lid with a fox on the lid who ‘in a melancholy way has to increase the weight and craftily looks upwards to the pointer of the scale’. (Figure 15)
In some other instances there were no figurative associations and the purpose was demonstrated purely through the form. The little weights ‘are formed in such a way that their heaviness, or the pressure which they effect, can be seen in their shape / Gestalt’. In Herwegen’s iron of 1857 the décor is strictly related to the constructional elements, emphasising the rivets which hold the parts together. With the impression of heaviness, even clumsiness, also due to the way the object is drawn, the artist goes beyond contemporary rationalist design theory and verges on the symbolic, or, in twentieth century terms, a ‘functionalist’ use and meaning of forms. (Figure 16)

![Figure 16 Iron, design by Peter Herwegen, c. 1851, Zeitschrift des Vereins zur Ausbildung der Gewerke 7, no. 2, 1857: pl. 3.](image)

Regarding the consumption of beer, the Munich/Bavarian stereotype was already in full swing by the 1850s. The designer’s task was to lend it a special visual presence. Picturesque or grotesque scenes of drinking had been a distinct iconography for some centuries. Many Munich painters now made it their specialisation. Eduard von Grützner remained a household name well into the twentieth century. This article cannot go into the details of the overflowing history of the special blend of Munich and beer. Pocci’s illustrations and Neureuther’s new kinds of tankards have already been mentioned. The Verein regularly published striking examples in ceramic, metal and even wood. According to Förster, ‘in the German Middle Ages it was the same spirit [Geist] which formed the chalice and the

48 ‘Beschreibung …’, Zeitschrift ..., 5, no. 1, 1855, 7-8; pl. 3.
Meaningful, entertaining, popular and ‘Bavarian’: art into design in nineteenth century Munich

‘Drinking vessels always provide a good basis for amusing thoughts.’ The most exciting detail is the handle which opens the lid of the jug, providing endless variations for figurative décor, animals, gnomes, maidens, armoury. (Figure 17) We shall come later to the more serious and comprehensive beer reform design.

![Figure 17 Krugdeckelknöpfe (knobs for the lids of tankards), design by H[ermann] Dyk, Zeitschrift des Vereins zur Ausbildung der Gewerke 6, no. 2, 1856: pl. 3.](image)

Towards a unified design: Neureuther’s arabesque

The term ‘design’ in the modern sense did not exist as yet in the applied arts, but we may imply here a holistic conception of the person whose task it is to ‘design’, by referring once more to the new Munich sense of the wording ‘entworfen von / designed by’. It may now be taken to mean rather more than just devising an element of decoration which is to be stuck onto the object. What has to be investigated are the means which were used to further integrate decoration and object in terms of overall form and according to the possibilities of the material. Predominantly referring to the work of Neureuther, the claim here is that this issue was taken more seriously at that time in Munich than in other centres.

49 Förster, Zeitschrift..., 1, no. 1, 1851, 3.
50 ‘Beschreibung …’, Zeitschrift ..., 1, no. 2, 1851, 15.
Nineteenth century ways of applying ornament to objects had, by 1850, already gone through a number of phases resulting in a diversity of approaches, such as its highly controlled selective application in Neo-Classical work or the perceived freedom and exuberance of Gothic decoration. By the 1840s another pair of alternatives had been established largely independent of historical styles, namely flat patterning vs. attached three-dimensional sculptural décor. The former went with the preference for clear, strong colour; it is clear that Munich designers preferred the second mode, three-dimensionality; colour, they claimed, detracts from ‘the gradations of light and its gentle modulations’ as well as obscuring the intrinsic look of the material itself.\(^{51}\)

A major attempt at convincing combinations of all elements of a design was derived from a new method in graphic art. The graphic artists of the 1820s and 1830s had in fact hit upon a way of decorating a page as a whole, which they called arabesque, a term referring to a mode of ornamentation practised from the Italian Renaissance right through the Rococo period. Its basic component was sets of more or less abstracted plant decoration, looking vaguely Arabic. Often in conjunction with grotesque motifs of décor, the arabesque (the two terms, grotesque and arabesque, were used interchangeably) served principally as a filler, on walls, on ceramics, or on a page in books. Mainly through the critical writings of Goethe and Friedrich Schlegel the arabesque had also become a catchword in literature and later even in music. It meant intricacy with regard to contents, it could for instance serve to combine and frame concurrent narratives. In a wider sense it stood now for an unlimited creativity. In the visual arts the arabesque changed from a decorative motif into, as Werner Busch put it, a ‘central structuring principle.’\(^{52}\) (See figure 2)

Apart from using Italian grotesques, the painters of Romanticism, such as Cornelius in his early graphic work, also found inspiration in illuminated medieval manuscripts as well as in late Gothic altarpieces with their complex and delicate interlacing décor. But the decisive find was the so-called Randzeichnungen, the drawings-in-the-margin in the Prayer Book of Kaiser Maximilian I by Dürer, which is kept in the Library in Munich.\(^{53}\) For Neureuther in his illustrated works from the late 1820s, the arabesque made possible a seemingly complete freedom in combing major and minor scenes, to oscillate freely between real plant forms and abstract lines, as well as between the structuring frame and pure, ‘loose’ ornament. As

\(^{51}\) E. Förster, ‘Über die Bemalung’, Zeitschrift..., 2, no. 1, 1852, 4-5.


regards the detail, there was a turn towards local, northern European vegetation, replacing the traditional standardised plant forms in Renaissance or ‘Arab’ work.

How then could the arabesque also be applied three-dimensionally? At a basic level one may see arabesques in all curly plant forms and in many grotesque motifs, such as goblins acting as caryatids, or in the complex ways in which human bodies assume a structural function, say, on the handle of a vessel; all this gives ‘the semblance [Anschein] of organic growth; individual parts of an object grow organically out of each other, a lively flow …’.

Most literally, the arabesque could simply be imitating a whole plant, such as the bush in Neureuther’s already mentioned freestanding Gasflammenträger. (See figure 10.) In the early Tafelaufsätze, or epergnes, the designer took on the central stem of a plant; growing from a broad base which may even indicate roots, leading up to intermittent platforms filled with decor. (See figure 5) In some porcelain goblets Neureuther alternates zones of decoration with completely smooth zones which greatly help with the impression of structural solidity, presenting, in his own words, ‘forms that correspond to the notion of carrying [Begriff des Tragens]’. (Figure 18) If the basic object forms a box then branches of a tree or a bush can be led like tendrils around the corners, giving at least some sense of an ‘organic’ whole. (See figure 24) The closest parallel can perhaps be found in the intensely figurative decorations of William Burges in the following decades. But here a structural frame is often lacking, the figurative elements themselves incorporate the structure.

Figure 18 ‘Schwanenpokal’, with Bavarian-Alpine folk scenes. Porzellan Manufaktur Nymphenburg, designed by Eugen Napoleon Neureuther, c. 1850, Schloss Linderhof near Ettal; Bavaria (Bayerische Schloesserverwaltung).

54 Dr. Lichtenstein, ‘Über Figurenbildnerei …’ (see note 43).
The three-dimensional arabesque was an important experimental design formula. However, it did not seem to contribute much to the search of decoration appropriate for common three-dimensional objects at that time. In Bavarian design of the following decades the arabesque reoccurs with light-hearted kinds of painting on the white faces of buildings (the so-called Lüftlmalerei, see figures 34, 35), derived principally from the Rococo period. It thereby returned to the flat surface.

Lastly, a reflection on the wider context of ‘design reform’ is needed here. Some of the contacts between Munich and London, the city in which the beginnings of design reform have been located, have already been mentioned. The question as to what extent the Munich ‘reforms’ were prompted by what was happening in London still needs to be investigated. A key factor in London was the copious publication in the *Art Union* [journal] of objects entitled ‘original design by…’, but with very few exceptions these designers played no further role in the London’s art life at all. Two other principal British characteristics, a secure state organisation and the propagation of sets of mostly geometrical theories of decoration were not shared at all by the movement in Munich. The Munich way of going for a great variety of decorative motifs was then clearly in line, internationally, with much that was shown at the 1851 London Exhibition, which demonstrated a diversity of applied decoration never seen before and probably never since. From a visit to Samuel Carter Hall’s home near London in 1851, Förster reported a stipulation that even in a tea service every cup should be shaped differently. Furthermore, the use of arabesque-like forms in décor was widespread at the time. However, some London promoters of abstraction tried hard to push aside the whole trend. In 1851 the principal early theorist of flat, abstract plant decor, the painter William Dyce, warned designers off the arabesque, which, when used in combination with the grotesque was, for him, rather ‘a kind of beautiful nonsense than … a species of art to be reasoned about’. The dispute of abstract geometrical vs. lively contoured plant motifs was to continue for many decades. In London, the flat pattern discipline was soon to be attacked, too, by Ruskin and Morris.

**Interim eclipse**

Why have the initiatives of the Verein and the work of its members never received the recognition they appear to deserve? Neureuther, although one of the city’s most

respected artists, hardly received a note in his biographies for his contributions to the Verein, and Herwegen’s name has disappeared almost completely. All this is not just the result of twentieth century art historical neglect. The problem goes right back to new, vigorous trends in the 1870s Munich art world, which will be briefly dealt with in the section after next. For the Verein it meant having to experience the misfortune of a new sense of the timing of happenings in art: young artists and their porte-paroles now adopted the habit of asserting that what they were doing at that moment was sensationaly novel and that what had come immediately before was to be entirely neglected, or even condemned. Later on, the comments surrounding Jugendstil were prime examples of such constructions of art-historical events. More generally there was, by the mid 1870s, a new profound turn as regards intricate figurative or literary meaning; many critics in the later nineteenth century grew tired of too much ‘content’. A remark of Théophile Gautier’s on German painting seemed to sum it up: ‘Elle ne fait pas des tableaux mais des poèmes’ [the Germans don’t produce paintings but poems].

In Munich, too, new kinds of evaluations, for instance of the work of Hans Makart, claimed ‘contents’ to be immaterial; instead, it is all ‘… just for the eye’, ‘a feast of colour and movement’. One could have doubts as to whether the complex decoration of so many of the Verein’s objects, however ‘meaningful’, could really serve a ‘volkstümlich’, a popular every-day use. Almost all of Neureuther’s published designs had piled up the décor and at the Nymphenburg manufacture his experimentations had piled up the costs, too. As will be shown, for the applied arts, new trends in the 1870s brought greater stylistic and formal discipline overall. The central meaning, or quality, of being close to the ‘Volk’, remained the basis of all pursuits, but it no longer tended to be attached to outer-worldly tales and myths; instead, it was now related to the real world of a specific region, its ‘folk’, its artefacts. With it went a new way of labelling: a single geographical-historical tag gained currency, which greatly helped to unite form and meaning. Individualisation had to give way to typification.

Part 2: Broadening and deepening the ‘popular’: ‘Bavaria’ and a new vernacular revival

There are few stereotypes that can match the strength and the comprehensiveness of ‘Bavaria’. Verbal and pictorial imagery as well the real, the everyday world, people, their character, their dialect, dress, food, drink, houses and furnishings, along with landscapes and even the overall character of the region’s capital, Munich: everything shares the same qualities. The ideologies interpret the visual, the visual, in turn, reinforces them. Yet, in spite of the seeming plausibility, Bavaria is tied into some considerable geographical complexities. Firstly, its primary component is the Alpine world which Bavaria - in actual fact, only Southern, or ‘Upper Bavaria’ - shares with many other countries. Secondly, Bavaria is a region within Germany;

59 Festschrift, 1901, 31.  
60 Pecht, Münchner Kunst, 314, 377.
thus it never showed itself at the nineteenth century World Fairs under its own label, hence beyond Germany Bavaria’s image is not clear to many. To the North German, and especially to the Prussian, the stereotyped Bavarian became his or her South German other. The Bavarians, in turn, ridiculed the Prussians as pompous, stiff and humourless – to be loved all the more for this by exactly those Prussians. Above all, Bavaria is a stereotype whose main characteristic was, and is, its pleasantness, its loveableness and its constant entertainment value. During the nineteenth century Bavaria became Germany’s number one tourist destination.61 ‘Bavaria’ thus constitutes a world of temporary escape for the outsider, intriguing, amusing, and that all the more so because it appears to be lived so intensively and authentically by the Bavarians themselves.

Bavaria, of course, belongs to a whole group of nineteenth century vernacular revivals.62 The actual vernacular world was now colonised by poets, painters, architects and designers and later on by mass tourism. Gradually it became a subject in academia, too. The terms Volk, volkstümlich and Volkskunde, the study of folk culture, stressed primeval oldness, unchangingness, and geographical specificity at the same time. There was again the notion of the authorless work resulting, in, to use the words of Jacob Grimm, a ‘profoundly innocent people’s poetry’, belonging to the ‘common German country folk’. As small children were held to be living in a ‘natural’ state, so was the peasantry.63 With its seemingly exceptional primitiveness, life in the Alpine world became the first complex marked out for a vernacular revival. Landscape painting stood at the beginning of the new evaluation of the regional, though for some time the snowy heights looked decidedly better from a distance and served principally as a backdrop for the


peasant folk. Invariably the latter was shown in the burlesque mood, even in the idyllic fête champêtre tradition.\textsuperscript{64}

By far the most important ‘component’ of the vernacular world was the local person. Writers recorded the ‘continuous growth’ of their own, ‘warm-spirited [gemütswarme] enthusiasm and love for the Bavarian tribe’.\textsuperscript{65} Bavarian folk combined seemingly contradictory traits: restraint with a friendly openness, or ‘Gröblichkeit / coarseness’, rough manners with pleasant sociability; all were ‘gifted with … genuine natural poetry [Naturpoesie]’.\textsuperscript{66} Bavarian humour, especially the


way it comes across ‘un-artificially’, is in a class of its own. All fit in naturally with Alpine life. The seemingly continuous merry-making proved most attractive to the townspeople. The enduring legacy is of course Munich’s Oktoberfest, going back to the early nineteenth century, where town and country combine in a gigantic spree of seriously vernacularised fun. More academic folkloristic kinds of studies grew in like measure, such as the philological study of the regional dialect. The Munich writers felt they had to use it, so as to be able ‘to access the soul of the people’. An exciting discovery was an old kind of lyrics or ballad in dialect, the Schnadahiipfl’n, or reaper’s song, presented especially at festivities. (Figure 19)

The qualities of the people were always related back to the extraordinary qualities of the landscape and were then again extended to every living creature. In the Alps even the animals are in a good mood, those ‘merry herds of cattle’, as the usually sober-minded writer-cum-researcher Ludwig Steub put it. In the summer they are crowding the high mountain slopes, the Alm, where they are watched by the ‘waggish / schalkhafte’ female cowherd, the lonely Sennerin, who is also permanently good-humoured, and even more so when the courting young peasants come to visit her. The young woman’s rough mountain hut - the Sennhütte - and its few basic utensils, kept tidily by her, is held up as an almost utopian environment.

However, these characteristics were not yet set in stone. A major shift occurred from the 1850s, in the context of what above was called realism. Now the demand was to abandon ‘sugary sentimentalising gloss’ and idyllic sweetness. A decided turn towards roughness occurred from the later 1860s under the banner of realism. Two factors contributed to this: a new European trend to glorify the hard-working peasant in painting and a view of the mountains which stressed their roughest regions. Franz Defregger was a Tyrolean from a poor background who rose to enormous fame at the Munich Academy, and who, in the late 1870s, sketched ‘nach der Natur’. (Figure 20) Life in much of the Alpine world here appears dirty, dilapidated and poor, certainly rough, while so far the always festive-minded Bavarian peasants had appeared orderly and often relatively affluent. The earlier


68 Pecht, Münchner Kunst, 43-44.


way of presenting everybody as tender and youthful was replaced by a newly formulated imposing, mature manliness.

Lastly, one notes that virtually everything reported here about the Bavarian vernacular world was formulated by writers and artists in, or from, Munich. But in contrast to other European regions - for instance Austria - the newly discovered Bavarian vernacular did not mean an absolute colonialist confrontation of a primitive hinterland vs. the civilised city. Praising the Bavarian ‘types’ on the part of a Bavarian-born writer meant a considerable measure of self-identification. The chief designers, who will be met as the formulators of the new vernacular revival, such as Seidl, Meggendorfer and Gedon, were all from Munich and saw themselves as ur-Bavarians. With the advent of the railway many Alpine locations could be travelled to from Munich easily and one could even return to the city during the


same day. And for the tourist coming from outside Bavaria, arriving in Munich meant having arrived fully in ur-Bayern already, not least because of the Munich beer, drunk in a characteristic Bavarian vernacularised environment. The fact was that in stark contrast to its ranking in the fine arts, Munich’s literary and scientific reputation lagged behind other German centres. In the 1850s the king lured a number of non-Bavarian writers and academics to the city; local society duly nicknamed them as the ‘Northern Lights / Nordlichter’. Increasingly the local culture was given a distinct meaning by being labelled ‘Munich’ and ‘Bavarian’. One of the most popular Munich revellers was Franz von Kobell, a polymath, professor of mineralogy, consummate huntsman (‘the chamois came up to him’), as well as being a poet, mostly humoristic, whose verses in dialect provided important inspirations for many illustrators and even for designers, as will be shown; but most importantly Kobell was a man who ‘never’ in his life experienced ‘adversities’. Unbelievably, the whole of the city’s life could be characterised by ‘humour and contentment in an atmosphere that remained constant’.

It took longer to see a special character in other artefacts of the Bavarian-Alpine environment, to go beyond the primary and familiar traits of the landscape and human character. Before the nineteenth century, low life had appeared much the same in every location. The early Romantics tended to brush over material details. But at least from the mid-century onwards it was the writer’s and the painter’s task to ‘develop something characteristic out of the ordinary’. Writers and musicians were aiming for a ‘Volkston’, cultivating Alpine legends and songs parading a new naivety and a ‘genuine simplicity’. The task now, one may say, was to also develop the Volkston’s visual equivalent in the applied arts. Parallel to the way in which the motifs of decoration propagated by the Verein were derived from fairy tales and fables, the motifs for the ‘Alpine’ design were derived from landscape painting and genre painting, as well as directly from poetry. Munich’s principal critic in the 1870s and 1880s, Friedrich Pecht, credited Neureuther with having introduced a more diversified ‘poetry of mountain life’, by expanding on many mundane details in his delicate line illustrations of the Schnadahüpfl’n from

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76 ‘Wiederwärtigkeiten …’, Dreyer, ‘Humor Kobell’.
77 ‘Der Humor und das Behagen in immer gleichbleibender Stimmung …’, Hermann Uhde-Bernays, Im Lichte der Freiheit: Erinnerungen aus den Jahren 1880 bis 1914, Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1947, 15.
1831 onwards. A style of ornament, but more importantly, sets of artefacts in their full materiality are now designated as ‘Bavarian’. A long-time interest had been the regional diversity of costumes. Again ‘Bavarian’ dress underwent some shifts during the nineteenth century, from an early prettiness (‘la jolie bavarose’) to a greater roughness, in the male case, with the short Lederhosen and Loden - coats being the key garments. Loden cloth also marked a typical process towards the new valorisations: a rough, common object acquires meaning through appearing formally (i.e. texturally) attractive and by being loaded with geographical specificity.

Another strong feature in most landscape paintings was the regional house; its old-fashioned woodenness, its projecting eaves and long balconies appeared as strongly Alpine traits. The inside of the peasant house, however, took much longer to be included in the poetic image, as the ‘stifling chambers / dumpfe Gemächter’ were rarely entered and the researchers had as yet little understanding of the ubiquitous Rococo decoration which later became a such a feature of the beloved ‘peasant furniture’. More attention was given from the 1870s to the special version of the Alpine house, the already mentioned Sennhütte, precisely because of its primeval roughness. A pronounced ‘woodenness’ of all surfaces inside a peasant home was the great discovery of the 1870s, by the Munich designers, of which more below. Among the furnishings there was one distinctive object, the Brettstuhl, the chair which was essentially put together from two boards; it became a veritable emblem of the lower class interior anywhere, an objet trouvé to which we shall also return. (Figure 21)

It took until about 1890/1900 before ‘Bavaria’ had been completely and comprehensively formulated, encompassing all aspects of life, the everyday and the festive worlds, the pleasant and the rough, the restful and the active, expressed in a combined literary, musical and visual ‘Volkston’. From here the movement branched out again. Firstly, for the collector and soon for the museums, the key value was ‘authenticity’. The immaterial as well as the material creations of the Volk, especially its Volkskunst, had to stay bona-fide uninfluenced by modern culture. The second was the full instrumentalisation of Bavaria for modern tourism, creating new images which combined the familiar landscape, people, dress and artefacts. Although there was among the Alpine tourists a growing subgroup which came exclusively for the roughest kind of mountain adventure and did not care for the folksy trim, the vast majority of travellers to Upper Bavaria swallowed the entertainment package as a whole. (Figure 22)

There was a third category, namely the already alluded-to recreations of Alpine artefacts by the artist designers and the architects. The pan-Alpine house type and especially its wooden decorations, was imitated in villas in almost all
Western countries throughout the nineteenth century, carrying the label ‘Swiss cottage’, or ‘chalet Suisse’. In the mid-fifties there were even attempts to import details of the wooden houses in Munich street architecture, but not for long, as this was considered contradicting their peasant origins. The Bavarians, too, built ‘Schweizerhäuser’, but, very plausibly, by 1870 they insisted on changing the nomenclature to bayerisch.84

In the applied arts the story most likely began around beer, when, as already mentioned, Neureuther was applying ‘country-like’ decoration on some of his tankards by 1850, insisting on ‘… alpine landscapes … and representations taken from the Schnadahüpfel’n’.85 (See figures 9, 18) For new designer versions of the plain–board-shaped kind of furniture Neureuther and the Verein had begun to open the field early on by their stress on the specific visual qualities of the flat board which may receive fret-saw cuts, a mode that came properly into its own in the late seventies. (Figure 23)


referring to a poem in dialect by Franz von Kobell. According to Förster it succeeded in presenting a ‘true rendering of the spirit’ of the ballad. It dealt with a maker who was an outstanding player at the same time, who incited a wooden Hansel and Gretel and a bear to dance. The critic then comments on the woodcarving as an activity ‘of our Alpine life’ and praises the use of the wooden forms taken from the Alpine house. Lastly he refers to the ‘unconstrained [ungezwungene] forms of nature’, that is, the arabesque-like treatment of the corners of the structure. (Figure 24) In the 1860s there were some attempts by designers to upgrade the Brettstuhl by thinning its legs and ornamenting its back. To elevate any artefact - including one of vernacular origin - to the level of art was still synonymous with a process of refinement, one had to apply high-grade literary and sculpted decoration, or at least delicate ornament; this conviction was to change radically after 1870.

86 ‘Preisaufgabe’, Zeitschrift ... 1, no. 2, 1851, 12; ‘Beschreibung ...’, Zeitschrift..., 2, no. 3, 1852, 22-3, pl. 3.
At this point a question arose, resulting from the double emphasis on folk authenticity and new creations in the folk style: could the latter kind of work achieve the same popular success as the real vernacular? With regard to the new dialect poetry, it was hardly appreciated outside the literary circles. In the field of oil painting, the new kinds of rough Bavarian and Tyrolean subjects of Defregger’s or, soon, the even more earthy peasant subjects in Wilhelm Leibl’s work were admired by German and international connoisseurs. It remains to be seen how the new artist and architect-led vernacular-revival design from the late 1870s fared in terms of appeal. Certainly, in those decades the designer’s efforts in the new direction enjoyed the full backing of the Kunststadt.
Part 3: solid ‘Bavarian’ domesticity

The newly invigorated *Kunststadt*

By the late 1860s, Munich had risen to the undisputed centre of the fine arts in all German lands and to second, or third rank, after Paris and London, in the whole of Europe. In 1870/1871 the hitherto quasi-independent kingdom of Bavaria was incorporated into the newly constituted (Second) German Empire, ruled from Prussia, a decision taken reluctantly by some; however, everybody in the new Reich blossomed economically and all works of the decorative arts gained a new opulence. King Ludwig II and his exuberant castles and palaces come to mind here, too, though there was very little in the art he fostered that linked up with the kind of work dealt with here. The now ensuing full formulation of old ‘Bavarian’ folksy ‘simplicity’ must be seen in the context of countering the image of newly opulent Prussia, as well as that of Ludwig II’s extravagance. It all brought a very specific political constellation for the art practice of Munich. Bavaria continued to use the term ‘national’ for its life and institutions (for example, with Munich’s Bayerische Nationalmuseum – in contrast, confusingly, to the (all-German) Germanische Nationalmuseum in what was now Bavaria’s second city, Nuremberg). But in contrast to all other European ‘national’ art movements, Bavarianism, located as it was, within Germany, did not entertain any national political ambitions.

As already mentioned, by the early 1870s, the work of the Verein was suffering from a lack of recognition. Only with its state-supported applied arts school it continued to play a moderately important role in the art life of the city. But the real, though unspoken, contribution of the Verein had been the foregrounding of the designer personality. This notion continued to be vital after 1870, too, but the designer now acted as an independent person, qua individual. A new situation arose whereby artists could act as each others’ patrons, something well-known from the contemporary London Aesthetic Movement. A few Munich designers now ranked alongside, and were close friends with, the top ‘Künstlerfürsten’, the painter-princes in the city. They were revered for the breadth of their capabilities, having been trained diversely in painting or sculpture, or architecture, as well as possibly in one of the crafts. An extraordinarily versatile artist was Franz (von) Seitz, who served the most elevated patrons, Richard Wagner and Ludwig II but at the same time devoted himself to the most mundane tasks of graphic work or domestic design, dabbling even in poetry and cooking. (Figure 25) One now moves towards a notion of ‘design’ which demands the completeness of each environment. For instance, artists now had to decorate their own studios in a distinctive way, with art and furnishings being presented in unison.87 In 1850 the Verein played a role that

would later be characterised as reformist. Such a word would hardly crop up in the Munich art world of the 1870s. Nevertheless the new richness was paired with a renewed rhetoric of modesty, a caring for the ordinary, postulating, most importantly, that the creation of an artful and comfortable home does not depend on the rank of the art and the decoration displayed inside. All this became a major impulse for the vernacular revival, too.88 As was already emphasised, some of the principal Munich designers exuded an ‘ur-Munich’ primitiveness themselves.

88 ‘Between “high” and “low” art, inasmuch we are concerned with the decoration of our domesticity, there is no fundamental difference’, Hirth, deutsche Zimmer, 100; see Stefan Muthesius, ‘The “altdeutsche Zimmer”, or Cosiness in plain Pine, a 1870s Munich Contribution to the Definition of Interior Design’, Journal of Design History, 16, no. 4, 2003, 269-290.

89 Wilhelm Lübke,'Das Kunstgewerbe und die Architektur', Blätter für Kunstgewerbe, 1, 1872, 17.

Figure 25 The artist Franz Seitz, self-portrait, water colour. Zeitschrift des Kunstgewerbeverins in München 33, 1883, plate 19.

Style and ‘Volk’

In the 1850s, the artist-designers in the Verein expressed comparatively little interest in style labels, largely because of the concentration on figurative decoration, although there was always, as we saw, a basic notion of the strong contrast between the Classical and the Romantic worlds. The Verein’s attitude was somewhat at odds with Ludwig I’s efforts to provide the city with buildings in many diverse styles. Indeed by 1870 the early work of the Verein was accused of ‘stylelessness’.89 Quite suddenly and obviously closely linked to the establishment of the new German
Reich in 1870/71, it appeared to German critics that the sixteenth century Northern Renaissance or Mannerist style of architecture provided just the right expression for the new unified country. It was duly named ‘German Renaissance’; at the same time it could also carry the older and very popular label ‘altdeutsch’. A new key notion was the designer as a bringer of stylistic innovation. Munich prided itself with having initiated the revival, in a façade for the Schack-Gallerie, designed by the artist and craftsman Lorenz Gedon in 1873.90 Something else that was missing so far was an overarching, a rallying term for all art applied to the crafts and trades, now ‘Kunstgewerbe’ provided an effective solution. A great plus was that, via ‘style’ it could be linked up directly with architectural design, especially in the domestic sphere.

A national label now appeared the most convincing one for a style. The critic Friedrich Pecht used a new thick verbosity of art writing to underscore his belief in the intrinsic links between the highest values of art and design with all-German national, popular / volkstümlich values. Styles of art originate from ‘the depths of the people’s psyche [Volksgemüth]’.91 Pecht was convinced of a profoundly popular appeal in Munich’s contemporary art. The dryness of Neo-Classicism and the sentimentality of the earlier Romanticism never spoke to ordinary people. What triumphed in Munich, according to Pecht, was a new honest, realist and localised art. The often-postulated Germanic roughness, even lack of literacy, opened the way for a descent down the social scale, to a level which, for instance, the contemporary Queen Anne Revival movement in London dubbed ‘artisan’. Thus alongside his celebration of the new united Germany, Pecht frequently underscored the Bavarian regionality, stressing again and again the double character of its people, coarseness combined with imagination and joyousness. On the other hand Pecht at times purposely avoided a clear distinction between Bavarian and German. It seemed, to cite Sabine Wieber, that ‘Germanness could be almost seamlessly intertwined with Bavarianness if not Munichness’.

All this only served to highlight Germany’s fundamental problems with the definition of its national character. The Romantics’ concept of ‘German’ was meant to comprise the whole of the nation or ‘Volk’. But to fill out that concept they went into much historical detail, big rulers, great art, which led one away from the

ordinary folk. Moreover, in its ‘deepest’ sense ‘Volk’ seemed to point to a more primeval, pre-political state of humanity which preceded the formation of nation states. It was the peasantry which appeared to have preserved many of these primeval traits. But this way of thinking also led to a new and stronger differentiation into sub-regional types, which again weakened an all-German conception, for instance in the case of the contrast that was constructed between Bavarians and North Germans. Pecht’s clinching argument was that the Alpine Bavarians had kept old Volk values more strongly than the other German tribes – taking up a familiar notion of the special nature and virtues of ‘old’ Alpine life first voiced for Switzerland in the eighteenth century.

The problems continued. ‘German’ styles came and went. Already from the 1880s onwards the new German Renaissance was judged overdone and vulgar and its claims to present an ‘altdeutsche’ atmosphere world no longer appeared credible. By the 1890s, further regional styles came to the fore in German lands, such as the ‘Nordic’, while Richard Wagner championed a supra-national pan-Germanic mythology. For the Munich designers all this had the advantageous effect of narrowing, and thus consolidating the meaning of ‘their’ Renaissance as something definitely Alpine-Bavarian-South German, as well as confirming its overall ‘lowly’ and thereby cosy vernacular character.

Meanwhile the panoply of styles had been extended by a new category, which was by definition a ‘low’ one, and one which belonged exclusively to the applied arts. With Austria-Hungary as well as Scandinavia taking the lead, from the late 1860s, a Europe-wide movement valued the abstract or geometrised flat patterning of home-made peasant-made textiles in remote regions (‘Hausindustrie’). While it greatly strengthened the notion of a specific visual language of the ‘folk’, few theorists or professional designers thought as yet that such patterning was something that could be newly created. From the start, the objects were destined for the collector and the museum as well being extensively shown at the world fairs. Given the Verein’s frequently cited abhorrence of schematisation, few in Munich would have wanted to see Bavarian folk design in that way, yet the impact of the ‘Hausindustrie’s’ formal preferences probably did help to reduce the devotion to refined sculptural decoration in Munich, too. (Figure 26)

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Bavarian vernacular revival design: Hirth, Seidl and Meggendorfer

At the great Munich Art and Applied Arts exhibition of 1876 the young Gabriel [von] Seidl shot into prominence with his ‘Zimmer im Stile der deutschen Renaissance’. A principal member of the Munich artist coterie and the architect of the villa of Munich’s most prestigious artist, Franz Lenbach, Seidl gradually became the most revered architect in the whole of Southern Germany, initiating a vernacular revival which found its fulfilment in the twentieth century Heimatstil. Some of his early designs for furnishing were created in partnership with Rudolf Seitz who was chiefly known as a graphic designer. In the early 1880s they even maintained a workshop, ‘Seitz & Seidl’ about which very little is known.94 (See figure 30.) Many of their designs were published in 1879/80 by the Munich newspaper owner, art

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publisher and art theorist, the non-Bavarian Georg Hirth (a protestant from Thuringia), in his massive book, *Das deutsche Zimmer der Renaissance. Anregungen zur häuslichen Kunstpflege* [advice on the domestic care of art]. Hirth’s, as well as Seidl’s new great theme was the visual unity of the domestic interior. Some of the book’s most effective illustrations were drawn by Lothar Meggendorfer, who had just finished training as a painter and was about to start his career as an internationally famed illustrator of children’s books.

![Illustration](image)

*Figure 27 ’16th century decoration, possession of Herr Reynier, Bern’, Georg Hirth, *Das deutsche Zimmer der Renaissance. Anregungen zur häuslichen Kunstpflege*, Munich: Hirth, 1879, p. 16.*

The illustrations of old interiors range from those in the small castles in the Alps (figure 27) to those in the richer Alpine farmhouse (figure 28). Likewise, Seidl’s designs range from a more refined Northern, or ‘German’ Renaissance décor to the coarsened design of an Alpine artisan level (figure 29). Strengthening a trend that had been initiated by the Verein in in the 1850s, Seidl’s output includes basic items, such as a small bedstead, or a plate-rack for the kitchen that could have cost no more than a few marks. (Figure 30)
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Figure 28 Lothar Meggendorfer, ‘Room in a farmhouse in Eppan [Tyrol] with panelling in cembra pine’, from the year 1595’, G.Hirth, Das deutsche Zimmer der Renaissance, Munich: Hirth, 1879/80, 5.

Figure 29 ‘Sketch for a Utility Room’, by Gabriel [von] Seidl, c. 1878, Georg Hirth, Das deutsche Zimmer der Renaissance, Munich: Hirth 1879/80, 39.
In terms of the new valorisation of the material the crucial contribution appears to have been Meggendorfer’s, who acted both as illustrator, as chronicler of the old and as designer of the new. By far the most important visual element of the largely untreated wood is now its grain, loved in all its variety and coarseness. In order to show the surfaces more prominently, Meggendorfer chose a peep-show, front-on way of viewing the whole room. In this way all surfaces appear extra prominent in their rectangularity and flatness, and that includes the hefty planks forming the floor. All this marked a bold step, the fact being that at that time the interiors of the actual farmhouses at that time tended to be fashionably painted in brown oil colours. Meggendorfer created a combination of the very roughest kinds of wooden interiors, the Sennhütten with the more ornate ones of the better class of Alpine houses. A key element is the plank of equal thickness, preferably of a freshly cut and planed board of pine; being a soft wood it had to be quite thick – all of it a world away from the cabinetmaker’s tradition of the delicate handling of hardwood. The prevalent fretsaw-type rectangular cut also emphasises the flatness and the consistent thickness of the plank. Already in the early 1850s Neureuther had given hints of this formalist kind of thinking (see figure 23). The translation of ‘plank’ in German is ‘Brett’ and the Brettstuhl remains the favourite object of the peasant environment, old or new. The Munich designers also follow the new truth-to-the-material doctrine, first brought up by many Neo-Gothicists and then dealt with in historical depth by Semper. It was a trajectory that started with a general moral formula and then proceeded to an ever greater sensitiveness for the different textural and especially the colour characteristics of all materials. For Hirth, the material is the crucial factor in creating Gemütlichkeit. He immerses himself in colour theory, which he turns into colour-psychology and physiology, applying it to

95 Leoprechting, Lechrain, 206.
the colour and textural effects of wood: ‘... a warm, lush colour atmosphere ... [of] browns, brownish red ... colours in which the “warm” rays predominate ...’; these provide the guarantee for a ‘simple, beautiful heart-warming homeliness’, a ‘cheerful restfulness’, and, so important for Munich, something permanent: ‘a lasting joyous feeling of secured well-being’.97

‘Design’, and the adherence to a specific style, now brings with it a strict discipline and a sense of co-ordination which one may call an architectural one. Gone is the decoration of the kind created by the Verein earlier on which strikes one with its utter individuality. Actually, there is now very little that can be called attached decoration at all. That said, the fret-saw cut contours can be quite fanciful and diverse, and in this respect we may look back, at least in vague terms, to the earlier Munich arabesque and its infinite variations. A favourite cut-out form which one may well call a popular domestic and child-specific motif, was the Herzl, the little heart, (Figure 30) which occurs as early as 1831 in Neureuther’s illustrations and which much later also became a favourite with domestic design specialists such as Charles Annesley Voysey in London. With a nursery wall decoration In Seidl’s early Villa Schön in Worms of 1881, by the young graphic artist Otto Hupp, child-oriented decoration was entering a new phase. The starting point for such scenes was no longer a medievalising Romantic sweetness or the elegant linear arabesque of the 1830s and 40s, but the Renaissance grotesque adapted to Northern fauna and flora; all is rendered slightly chaotic and coarse, rough but harmlessly friendly.98 (Figure 31)

Figure 31 Otto Hupp, Decoration in the Nursery in the Villa Schön, Worms (architect Gabriel von Seidl, destroyed), c. 1881, Zeitschrift des Kunstgewerbevereins in München, 36, 1886, pl. 35-36.

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Can one see here parallels with Defregger’s realism, his ‘honesty’, or can one even cite Pecht’s preferred qualities, such as ‘fresh, manly’ or ‘healthy to the core / kerngesund’? By the late nineteenth century the image of the Alps became strongly linked with perceptions of cleanliness and freshness. Like the new Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts homes in Britain, Munich design was totally opposed to the ‘French’ soft, puffy upholstery and any dust-collecting kind of comfort.

With regard to meaning, the last word should be given to Meggendorfer. It was the budding caricaturist’s acuity which pinpointed the dictates of fashion, the new way in which the elaborate, even aggressive revival style décor could inconvenience the practical use of the home. Throughout, the Fliegende Blätter provided a running commentary on all aspects of life in Munich, and especially on the city’s art life. Earlier cartoons had often characterised the banal, the uninteresting kind of domestic scene (see figure 7). Now caricaturists sense a new design world where everything is overloaded with meaning. Meggendorfer parallels Punch’s digs at the Aesthetes and looks forward to Adolf Loos’s parable ‘Von einem armen reichen Manne’ of 1900, in which a client is totally subjugated to the artistic whims of the designer. In 1878 the Verein’s journal must have got hooked on Meggendorfer’s own designs, showing in a number of examples his fascination with the old techniques of turning and fret-sawing, thereby vastly overdoing them. (Figure 33) Should these items of furniture be taken as caricatures, too? Meaning in Munich frequently was to be fun and it could on occasions be exaggerated. But now meaning comes through a new medium: while in the 1850s Herwegen created fun with the help of surprises in figurative décor, by transforming the object into a little story, Meggendorfer creates exaggerations in design and workmanship.

99 Pecht, Münchner Kunst, 1, 2.
100 Meggendorfer in Fliegende Blätter, e.g.: 70, no. 1761, n.d. [April 1879]; 75, no. 1897, n.d. [Second half 1881].
Figure 32 ‘The Renaissance Fez’. The Renaissance style has at times apart from its high points also its low points. I hardly pour a drop into the cup, and quickly the table loses its balance – its frame is that genuine’, by Lothar Meggendorfer, *Fliegende Blätter*, 70, no 1754, n.d. [early 1879] 72.


The Bavarian pub’s full development lies well beyond the period dealt with here. But its basic design theme was firmly anchored in the formulae created by the Seidl-Meggendorfer-Gedon team. The task was to lift the establishment’s reputation from that of the dirty and dingy tavern to an establishment of modernity, salubriousness, and thus respectability, presenting a pleasant and characteristic design, to be frequented by the whole family and by ‘all’ classes – that enduring Munich trope. The fortunate Gabriel von Seidl was the nephew of one of Munich’s most noted brewers, the producers of Spaten, and beer-houses were his first major buildings in the early 1880s, where he adopted a new rendered-brick-vernacular revival style on the exterior. As regards pub interiors, a very early forerunner was Gedon’s private members’ drinking den in the new Headquarters of the Verein of 1878, closely modelled on Seidl’s Bavarian-Alpine domestic interiors. (Figure 24) Best known was Seidl’s Spaten House in Berlin; externally Bavaria was expressed by the Lüflmalerei, informal decorative motifs taken largely from Rococo decoration on farmhouses, which includes much arabesque work. The arabesque has now returned, in vernacularised form, to where it originated from, to the flat surface and in retrospect one may now see Neureuther’s attempts to create the three-dimensional arabesque as an aberration, and yet, soon one may see parallels in the Jugendstil concept of design. Inside the establishment, contemporaries must have been struck by the roughness and bareness, utterly astonishing for a modern restaurant in the centre of Berlin. (Figures 35, 36) In 1884 Otto Hupp designed the Spaten ‘[Spade]’ logo, rated as milestone in the history of devising a sign for a ‘corporate identity’. Hupp, who became a specialist in heraldry, took on the shape of the spade and combined it with a new special typeface. (Figure 37) All in all, the
Bavarian Bierkeller became the region’s most enduring contribution to comprehensive design and branding, as well as being one of the most successful designer-led instrumentalisations of the genius loci.\textsuperscript{101}

Figure 35 Gabriel von Seidl, Spatenbräu Berlin (also called Sedlemayrsches Haus, destroyed), 1884, painted decoration by Rudolf Seitz (Carl Schäfer, 'Das Seldmaysche Haus in Berlin', (1885) in: Carl Schäfer, Von deutscher Kunst. Gesammelte Schriften ..., Berlin: Ernst & Sohn, 1910, 317-320.

Figure 36 Berlin Spatenbräu (see Figure 35)
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Designing tradition?

The principal proposition of this article was that many of the major concepts and visualisations of ‘Bavarian’ design were owed to the Munich art world, and to Eugen Napoleon Neureuther and Gabriel von Seidl in particular. Historians, and art historians in particular, have so far rated this kind of Bavarianism as a cultural-political cliché, as an undesirable stereotype. But this assessment overlooks the way in which there were factors beyond the political rhetoric which helped to create the stereotype and which resulted from new literary and artistic concepts. In as much as one can draw parallels with literary production, one may cite here the combined literary history and creative writing activity of the Brothers Grimm which resulted in their postulate of a ‘German’ ‘Volkston’, duly adopted in their celebrated fairly tales. As such, this ‘tone’ can also be taken as an invention of the Romantic poets themselves. In like manner one can stress that what Neureuther and Seidl-Meggendorfer held to be the key formal characteristics of Bavarian-Alpine peasant design sprang from their own intensive and selective observations. Like the ‘Volkston’ of the Grimms’, the designers’ shapes have been taken for granted as ‘volkstümlich’ ever since. And in parallel to the writers, all key design concepts of the Munich vernacular revival can also be traced back into the ‘top’ sphere of Munich art production. The arabesque goes back via Neureuther to the early work of Cornelius; the animal personifications owe much to Wilhelm von Kaulbach; the new Alpine design style was first developed out of landscape painting and was then linked to the new appreciation of wood among architects which, in turn, constitutes an important manifestation of the European ‘truth to material’ doctrine.

With regard to the hierarchy comprising fine art at one end and everyday design at the other, one may see Meggendorfer dealing, satirically, with the ‘top’ end, raising the issue of style-overkill, of too much meaning, as well as that of an exaggerated sense of novelty and designer individuality. Likewise, Meggendorfer pokes fun at the conviction of genuineness (‘… it is so authentic …’). Seidl, by contrast, created something that struck a balance; something that appeared to be entirely suitable for liveable everyday surroundings, enunciating cleanliness and order as well as solidity, while also speaking of what is perceived as the friendly atmosphere of an old Alpine peasant world. At the very least, Seidl’s wooden interiors are appreciated as a homely holiday destination, or as second homes, as a temporary and somewhat Spartan alternative for those who in their regular home inhabit either an older, rich, puffy upholstery or the straight, tightly-contoured shapes of Neo-Biedermeier or Modernism.

The all-important corollary of the first proposition was that the new visualisation and conceptualisation of ‘Bavarian’ comprised both the appreciation of the actual vernacular artefacts and all new work in that manner. The issue of authenticity may be of prime importance in a twentieth century Volkskunst museum, but within a Bavarian holiday environment the age of, say, a Brettstuhl, hardly matters. This Bavarian holiday environment has had an important result regarding the writing of the
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history of the Munich movement: as far as the generalised narratives of nineteenth century art architectural histories go, Seidl’s designs do not figure in the trajectory of the modern movement, nor are they, or were they cited much in the context of nineteenth century historicism, as condemned by the modern movement. In fact, so far, Seidl has existed in an art historical no-man’s land. What has not helped was the way in which Seidl sided with the traditionalists who rejected the new Munich Jugendstil furniture in 1897/98, where he missed’ … the love and devotion and joy for our land and its character…”

Just as in the case of the earlier works sponsored by the Verein, it appears that furniture by Seidl was never collected as such. The evaluation of vernacular revival designs has so far appeared a difficult task, in contrast to the situation in literature where, to cite yet again the Brothers Grimm, the topics derived from the ‘Volk’ could be written up in such a way so as to create the tone aesthetically desired by the modern writer, in that case a tone of ‘simplicity’ and ‘purity’. To the Brothers this procedure was ‘something self-evident’. A comment in the recent short monograph on Gabriel von Seidl still purports that it was all a matter of reviving ‘traditions’, reviving the given. Seidl was simply ‘reflecting back to rooted traditions which also manifested itself in a growing interest in folk art …’ while in another section of the book, stressing Seidl’s creativity, we read: ‘Like no other architect [Seidl] has left his mark on the way we still conceive of “Gemütlichkeit” today.’ Recently Glen Adamson has declared the valorised notion of ‘the crafts’ as a modern invention; should design of the kind dealt with here be understood in the same way?

Lastly, can one set ‘Bavaria’ against some other European vernacular and nationalist revivals from 1870 to the 1890s and the variation of their outlooks? A few hints must suffice. The artist-designed wooden houses and their décor in Russian Abramtsevo claimed a much more profound primitivism, as well as a strong nationalism, as did much of the work designed under the banner of ‘Nordic’ in Scandinavia. As regards new trends in England, the Arts and Crafts movement presented a more varied range of designs in diverse modes of often complex craftmanship. England also lacked an explicitly nationalist vocabulary, though it propagated several regional ones. Closer to Munich came the Polish ‘górale / mountain’ movement, combining Alpine-style folklore and wooden crafts with the claims of a ‘national’ style. As to Bavaria’s Alpine neighbours, comparable powerful vernacular revivals in design during that period have not so far been noted.

103 Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Kinder und Hausmärchen, Berlin: Reimer, 2nd ed. 1819, Vorrede.
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‘Bavaria’ into the twentieth century

Under the rule of Modernism, ‘Bavarian’ design, old or new, was sealed into a culturally low-ranking, non-creative entertainment and tourism sphere. As such it was and is, to this day, enjoyed by all. The North-German Thomas Mann who resided in Munich for many decades and who kept his conviction that Munich was the ‘unliterarischste Stadt par excellence’, yet the dialect was always music to his ears.106

By now, however, the image of Bavaria had become a more serious issue. So far, stereotyping had been conducted largely as an apolitical activity and, most importantly, never as an entirely serious one. Now politics came back with a vengeance. The long-standing ambiguity ‘Bavarian’ – ‘German’, the always present possibility to coalesce the two, notwithstanding the resulting implausible identification of Germany with beer-swilling Alpine hunters, shown at the beginning of this article. Now the pan-German stereotype was held up more and more forcefully, with Bavarianism completely subsumed under it. The earlier popular Bavarian political inertia was now turned into an active conservatism which soon merged with the German extreme right. Fatally, it brought forth also a new, pervasive anti-semitism - though it must be recorded that anti-Jewish statements can be found earlier in the writings of many opinion-formers, from Beck to Pecht and to the influential Munich folklorist Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl (though actually none of these writers were Bavarians by birth). Must one count Bavarianism in art as a contributory factor? The countless cartoons in the Fliegende Blätter, figuring Jews, have been seen in this light.107 Can objects serving daily prosaic uses foster racism? They may do, if there is an insistence on a folk - purity of the designers and makers. In any case, the Bavarian self-love was now overstepping its mark. Instead of the joking othering, by the minority, of the German-Prussian majority, there was now a hatred, by a majority, of selected minority-others. What

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