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# GERMAN NATIONAL CINEMA

*Sabine Hake*

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7 *Viktor und Viktoria*. Courtesy of BFI stills, Posters and Designs.

## THIRD REICH CINEMA 1933–45

From 1933 to 1945, the German film industry produced more than one thousand feature-length films and an even larger number of short films, newsreels, and documentaries. These numbers suggest two things: that the industry under the Nazis was a formidable economic force and that films were considered an important part of everyday life, propagating National Socialist ideas and providing entertainment along the lines defined by the regime. In order to understand this dynamic between entertainment and ideology, pleasure and power, one needs to approach filmic practices in a way that does not reduplicate this period's own obsession with boundaries. Labels such as 'Nazi cinema' or 'Nazi film' suggest a complete convergence of narrative cinema, cultural politics, and Nazi ideology that was never achieved, given the continuing popularity of foreign films and the ubiquity of American products; the conflicting ideas about film-making among members of the industry and the Propaganda Ministry; the changing attitudes towards propaganda and entertainment before and during the Second World War; and the difficulties of controlling the actual conditions of film exhibition in the Reich and its occupied countries.

In coming to power in 1933, the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) under its leader Adolf Hitler promised a spiritual revolution that would bring dramatic changes to all areas of German culture and society. His political rhetoric combined conservative, nationalist, racist, anti-communist, and, above all, anti-Semitic views with an extremist *völkisch* ideology that culminated in the glorification of the Aryan race, the celebration of *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community), the myth of *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil) and the rejection of liberal democracy for the hierarchical structures associated with the leadership principle. Central to the regeneration of the German spirit was the integration of traditional, modern, regional, folkloric, and popular mass culture within an 'authentic', but in fact highly eclectic model of German culture defined less through internal principles than through its ritualistic purging by all progressive, democratic, cosmopolitan, and intellectual influences.

Although the basic structure of cinema under National Socialism was firmly in place by 1934, the years until 1945 saw considerable changes in the application of political principles to filmic practices; the approach to movie audiences and

exhibition practices; and the definition of entertainment and propaganda. Three main phases can be distinguished: (1) 1933–37: institutional restructuring and consolidation, (2) 1937–42: further economic concentration and expansion as part of the war effort, and (3) 1942–45: monopolisation and mobilisation of all filmic resources for the final victory. On the institutional level, the subordination of all aspects of film-making to the interests of the state began with the restructuring of cultural production in 1933 and culminated in the nationalisation of the industry after 1938. Yet, as a popular entertainment, the cinema continued to function through the double myths of being both within and outside ideology. Such an important cultural and socio-psychological function raises a number of questions: Were all films made during the Third Reich Nazi films? Can we distinguish between propaganda films and so-called apolitical entertainment films? Are there moments of aesthetic resistance in particular genres or in the work of individual directors? Is it productive to describe most of the films as escapist in nature, and therefore political only in terms of institutional affiliations, or must we conceive of Nazi ideology as all-pervasive and all-powerful? Can the effectiveness of film as a form of mass manipulation be identified on the level of textual characteristics, or are the ideological effects realised only in the larger social and political context and under specific conditions of reception? Do the films exhibit aspects of what has been called fascist aesthetics, or do the continuities with Weimar cinema and Hollywood cinema predominate?

Two approaches have defined the scholarship on this period: propaganda studies, which take a thematic approach and usually include narrative and non-narrative forms, and more theoretically informed studies on the relationship between cinema and ideology that focus on genres, narratives, and fantasy effects. In the beginning, most film historians limited their inquiries to the propaganda films while ignoring the vast number of genre films (Hull 1973, Welch 1985, Leiser 1974). Drawing attention to this *terra incognita* of private pleasures and desires, some historians used extensive quantitative analyses and historical overviews to assess the significance of popular traditions (Albrecht 1969, Drewniak 1987). Other scholars focused on the economic and political manifestations of cultural hegemony and examined the complicated relationship between narrative and ideology through textual and contextual practices (Becker 1973, Petley 1979, Lowry 1991). More recently, a number of critical studies have been published that suggest how popular genres offered a solution to conflicts and contradictions in society, and how modern mass media radically redefined the relationship between art and politics in terms of fantasy production and public spectacle (Witte 1995, Rentschler 1996, Schulte-Sasse 1996, Reimer 2000, Hake 2002). This revisionist process has drawn attention to the stylistic and thematic continuities of German cinema, including in its relationship to Hollywood; the similarities between Third Reich cinema and other 1930s state-controlled cinemas in Italy and the Soviet Union; and the inherent connection between classical narrative and the textual articulation of ideological positions, whether called sexism, racism, or nationalism. The greater emphasis on the 'failures' of Third Reich cinema has allowed scholars to move the conceptual

binaries of cinema versus politics, propaganda versus entertainment, and art versus ideology that, until recently, influenced critical assessments in not always productive terms.

### The restructuring of the film industry

The Nazis took over the film industry swiftly and efficiently, establishing the institutional framework on 13 March 1933 with the creation of a new ministry, the Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda (Reich Ministry for People's Enlightenment and Propaganda). Heading the effort to turn cinema into a continuation of politics with other means, Joseph Goebbels became the minister in charge of print media, radio, film, and, later, television; he controlled all aspects of political propaganda and mass communication. To industry representatives Goebbels announced that films should have a political tendency but that tendency and quality were not always the same. The resultant mixture of idealist phrases, economic promises, and political threats was an essential part of official film politics and stood behind the repeated calls during the 1930s for more *Gesinnung* (political attitude) and *Volkstümlichkeit* (popular taste) in the cinema.

The *Gleichschaltung* (forced integration) of the film industry in 1933 and 1934 completed the process of economic concentration and politicisation that had started in the late 1920s with the internal struggles at UFA. UFA, Tobis, Bavaria, and Terra quickly consolidated their positions as the largest film studios during the 1930s. Together they produced more than 80 per cent of all feature films. After 1933, writers, artists, actors, musicians, and so forth had to be organised in the Reichskulturkammer (Reich Culture Chamber), which controlled cultural production through its semi-autonomous chambers and a corporatist guild model that applied the National Socialist prescription for organising culture in a one-party state. The Reichsfilmkammer (Reich Film Chamber) was the first chamber to be created, an indication of the great importance attributed to film-making by the new regime. Only Germans, defined in terms of citizenship and racial origin, were eligible for membership in the Reich Film Chamber. This rule allowed the Propaganda Ministry to exclude all non-Aryans and politically unreliable persons from working in the industry and, in so doing, to purge German cinema of 'alien' influences; of course, exceptions were always granted. In 1935, the provisional revoking of screening licences for all films made before 1933 had a similar purging effect by rewriting film history from a National Socialist perspective. The names of Jewish directors were removed from the credits of older films, and political rallies organised against German films that still featured Jewish actors. The strategic thinking behind the enforcement of the new racial policies dissolved any remaining concerns about the future of film-making, and of society as a whole, into the antagonistic terms of anti-Semitism, with the Jews vilified as the ultimate other.

Most Jews working in the industry left Germany in 1933 and 1934 for other European countries, often with hopes of a speedy return. The forced integration of the industry had a devastating effect on individual lives; but it also destroyed a

lively cinema culture that had emerged in the 1920s with significant contributions by Jewish actors, directors, and producers. Like the European border crossings during the 1920s, the exile experience after 1933 must be considered an integral part of German cinema, whether in the form of structuring absences or through the import of German – or, to be more precise, Central European – traditions into other national and cultural contexts, especially the Hollywood film of the 1930s and 1940s. However, it would be misguided to claim the later films by Lang, Siodmak, or Wilder for the canon of German film history or to identify exile filmmakers with a position of subversive otherness within Hollywood. After all, the dream factory, whether in Hollywood or Babelsberg, had always thrived on incorporating and exploiting the spectacle of difference, including through the identification of famous stars with particular national stereotypes and ethnic cultures.

Pommer and Wilder were among the lucky few to leave for Hollywood as early as 1934, with studio contracts in hand. The largest number of exiles came to Hollywood in the late 1930s under less favourable conditions. The difficulties of exile were perhaps most pronounced in the case of actors, whom language problems often limited to bit parts and ‘accent parts’. Apart from Marlene Dietrich, only Peter Lorre, and Conrad Veidt, had significant American careers. Known for their professionalism and technical expertise, cameramen such as Rudolf Maté and Eugen Schüfftan quickly found artistic recognition, as did composers Friedrich Hollaender and Erich Maria Korngold. Directors Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder, Curtis (Kurt) Bernhardt, Robert Siodmak, and Douglas Sirk (Detlef Sierck) became famous for infusing classical American genres with traditional European cultural sensibilities and for articulating political concerns coloured by the experience of exile. Some of these exile sensibilities found expression in the bleak visions and dark moods identified with film noir (Hilchenbach 1982, Belach and Prinzler 1983, Horak 1984 and 1996, Koepnick 2002).

The purging of the film-related professions and the subsequent exile waves were only the beginning of more fundamental changes that brought greater state control over most legal, financial, and administrative, and, of course, artistic aspects of filmmaking. The *Reichslichtspielgesetz* (Reich Film Law) of 1934 clearly spelled out the new principles of film censorship (Maiwald 1983). Anything considered critical of National Socialism, from aesthetic styles to moral sensibilities, could be prohibited, banned, and confiscated. A more far-reaching pre-censorship based on submitted scripts replaced the standard post-production censorship; now the *Reichsfilm-dramaturg* (Reich Film Dramaturge) was in charge of the approval process. The close involvement of the Ministry in the pre-production phase limited the economic risks for the studios while extending ministerial control to all stages of production. Not surprisingly, the total number of censored films remained insignificant, with the majority of cases occurring during the early 1940s. Among the twenty-seven censored films mentioned by Wetzel and Hagemann (1982), the majority featured an actor or director who had become *persona non grata*. A few films were banned despite, or because, of their National Socialist fervour. In other cases, the censors

considered certain representations (for instance, of bombed cityscapes) too demoralising for wartime audiences.

An elaborate system of direct and indirect financing provided new incentives for struggling companies and proved just as effective as more direct forms of political control. Almost one-third of the feature films received distinctions, or ratings, of some sort, an indication of the Ministry’s considerable efforts to promote specific genres and subjects. Financial support was available through the Filmkreditbank (Film Credit Bank) which, by 1935, already provided financing to almost 70 per cent of the films in production; these loans were often not repaid. The system of distinctions, which included ‘educational’ and ‘artistically (especially) valuable’, came with certificates of tax reduction or, in the highest category, with tax exemption. To these existing distinctions, the Filmprüfstelle (Film Office) added ‘politically (especially) valuable’ and the honorary designation ‘film of the nation’, which was awarded only four times: to *Ohm Krüger* (1941), *Heimkehr* (1941, *Homecoming*), *Der grosse König* (1942, *The Great King*), and *Die Entlassung* (1942, *The Dismissal*). All four films were so-called *Staatsauftragsfilme* (state-commissioned films), big-budget films with clear propagandistic intentions commissioned by the Propaganda Ministry to promote key concepts of Nazi ideology in narrative form. Their stories focused on Prussia’s triumphs and defeats, the struggles of ethnic Germans abroad, and the heroic lives of great men. Many contributions confirmed race as the foundation of German character and turned to the past as a premonition of German manifest destiny. Because of their over-determined conditions of production, the state-commissioned films were essentially a genre to themselves, defined less through particular textual characteristics than through such contextual qualities as the transformation of opening nights into public spectacles and the many parallels between the events on the screen and concurrent political developments.

Goebbels, who supervised the implementation of these new policies, had a personal interest in film and, like Hitler, socialised extensively with people from the film world. Indeed, the film community – and, in other contexts, the literary and musical establishment – played a significant role in giving cultural legitimacy to the new regime. Courted by the power elite, many actors and directors lived in a world of luxury and privilege. For the most part, their encounters between the representatives of the Ministry took place in a collaborative spirit, and both sides profited equally from the undiminished popularity of German films with German audiences. Goebbels gave special permission to individuals deemed too valuable to be lost to the new membership laws. These exceptions concerned several Jewish actors and directors and banned authors such as Erich Kästner who, under the pseudonym Berthold Bürger, wrote the screenplay for *Münchhausen* (1943). However, the brute force that could always punish insubordination also manifested itself in two tragic incidents: the 1942 suicide of actor Joachim Gottschalk, who had refused to divorce his Jewish wife, and the 1943 death of director Herbert Selpin in a Gestapo prison after disputes during the production of *Titanic*.



Supported by the new political and cultural elites, the cinema after 1933 emerged as the most important medium for forging a national community beyond class boundaries and for staging political fantasies beyond the public-private divide. The new contingency system sharply limited the numbers of imported films and curtailed the participation of non-Germans in domestic productions. But even the concerted efforts by German directors to imitate Hollywood styles did not diminish the appeal of foreign films, which remained a strong presence until the war and compensated for the dearth of quality films with artistic ambition and social relevance. In 1933, almost half of all films shown on European markets were of American origin. After only one year, their market share declined to 20 per cent. Nonetheless, more than six hundred foreign feature films would still be seen by German audiences during the 1933-45 period, with the majority released between 1933 and 1939 in subtitled or dubbed versions. Confirming the undiminished influence of American popular culture in all areas of everyday life, audience favourites from the 1930s included the Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald operetta films, the musicals with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, and, of course, everything with Tarzan and Mickey Mouse. Clark Gable, Shirley Temple, Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford, and Gary Cooper all had a large following. In 1936, Dietrich could still be seen in the Lubitsch production *Desire*, despite official polemics against émigrés appearing in foreign films. It was only in 1939, after the release of Anatole Litvak's *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939), that American films were taken out of distribution entirely.

The Propaganda Ministry's close attention to the conditions of film exhibition and the psychology of mass reception reflected persistent anxieties about the actualisation of a film's intended meaning. Feature-length films always ran as part of a mandatory programme that consisted of newsreels and short cultural films. Because audiences often skipped these pre-films, movie-theatre owners were advised during the war years to close their doors to latecomers once the newsreel had started. However, the elusiveness of audience tastes remained a source of deep concern, even requiring secret reports from the movies by the Sicherheitsdienst der SS (Security Service). In an effort to reach larger segments of the population, the Propaganda Ministry instituted the *Filmvolkstag* (Film People's Day), on which audiences could attend special screenings for a nominal fee. The *Jugendfilmstunden* (Youth Film Hours), organised by the Hitler Youth since 1934, showed documentaries and short feature films aimed specifically at children and adolescents. In the 1942/43 season, these Youth Film Hours saw more than eleven million attendances by young people.

From the beginning, the leading film studios had to deal with the decline of their export business and, more generally, the effect of cultural isolationism on a visual medium that had always thrived on its international connections. Although there was little competition for German studios in neighbouring countries such as Austria and Switzerland, film exports, including to the United States, immediately declined by almost 80 per cent. Nonetheless, in 1939, 85 of the 272 foreign films shown in the United States were still produced by German (or Austrian) companies.

They found their small audiences in cities and states with a strong German-speaking immigrant population. The activities of various anti-Nazi groups put an end to such practices and increased public awareness of the difficult situation in Europe, including through the anti-Nazi films produced with the involvement of exile actors and directors.

Apart from ruining the export business, the Reich's withdrawal from the international film scene prevented much-needed artistic exchanges. The lack of creative talent after the purge in 1933 posed a serious obstacle to the studios' competitiveness in foreign markets. Co-productions remained limited to Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and, after 1939, to Italy and Japan. The Venice Film Festival was reduced to a showcase for expensive but undistinguished productions by the Axis powers. Contributing to the systematic eradication of all creative and critical impulses, film criticism after 1936 offered only factual information and appreciative commentary. The major trade journals, including the dailies *Lichtbild-Bühne* and *Film-Kurier*, deteriorated into mouthpieces of the Nazi culture industry. Under such conditions, the founding of the Deutsche Akademie für Filmkunst (German Academy for Film Art) in 1938 came too late to develop alternatives to the pervasive spirit of conventionality, provincialism, and mediocrity.

The years 1937 to 1942 saw the systematic elimination of all independent companies through various economic and political measures. Shrinking export revenues and growing production costs forced even large studios such as Tobis to accept secret loans from the Ministry. Film attendance increased steadily and significantly; during the record year 1938, for instance, almost 440 million tickets were sold. However, the average costs of making a film more than doubled from RM250,000 in 1933 to RM537,000 in 1937. In 1937, when the losses at UFA approached RM15 million, the Reich bought more than 70 per cent of their stocks through a middleman, Max Winkler of the Cautio Trust; similar deals with Terra followed suit. Now effectively under state ownership, Tobis, Terra, and Bavaria kept their names but were more actively enlisted in the new alliance between cinema and politics. After the invasion of the Sudetenland in 1938, the politicisation and militarisation of everyday life found expression in a sharper division between entertainment and propaganda, with expensive prestige productions now openly promoting nationalistic attitudes and fuelling anti-Semitic and anti-Slavic sentiments. The conquest of neighbouring countries opened up new export markets, set new attendance records, and eventually turned the film industry into the country's fourth-largest industry.

The gradual transformation of the audience into a manifestation of the national community extended these expansionist and exclusionary practices into the most mundane aspects of cinema culture, beginning with the rules of admission. After 1938, Jews were no longer admitted to cinemas; similar prohibitions applied to foreign labourers and POWs. These practices implicated movie audiences directly in the staging of highly politicised group experiences and made them part of the rituals and fantasies subsumed under the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft*. The political mobilisation of cinema as a place of collective experiences and an instrument of

ideological positioning required the implementation of stricter standards concerning programming practices (for instance, obligatory screenings of war newsreels). All of these changes contributed to the transformation of the motion-picture theatre into a public sphere where the nation could reach an illusory sense of self through a radicalised notion of cinema as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

The annexation of Austria in 1938 destroyed another German-speaking cinema that had offered extensive artistic exchanges and shared many cultural traditions. From its inception, Austrian cinema had conveyed an alternative image of Germanness in the larger context of national fictions and iconographies. With its decadent charm, ironic sentimentality, and old-fashioned *Gemütlichkeit*, the myth of Vienna provided more light-hearted but also more ambiguous interpretations of the conventional genres. Before 1938, Viennese studios had specialised in sound comedies with the inexhaustible Hans Moser, melancholy love stories with Willi Forst, and countless musical comedies and operetta films inspired by the identification of Vienna with music. The new Wien-Film, a state-controlled company established in 1938 under Karl Hartl, continued to specialise in these fictional constructs of Austrianness, producing musical biographies such as the Mozart films *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* (1939, *A Little Night Music*) and *Wen die Götter lieben* (1942, *Whom the Gods Love*), as well as Forst's famous Vienna trilogy, *Operette* (1940, *Operetta*), *Wiener Blut* (1942, *Viennese Blood*), and *Wiener Mädel* (1945/59, *Viennese Girls*).

The overall situation was very different in France after the German invasion in 1939. Since the invention of cinematography, France and Germany had enjoyed a close relationship, from the sharing of technologies and the exchange of actors to the many co-productions that continued throughout the 1930s (Sturm and Wohlgenuth 1996). In 1940 the Germans took over film production in occupied France through a sister company of UFA, Continental-Films, which, among others, produced Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Le corbeau* (1943, *The Raven*). Goebbels's goal was to produce films that retained their French qualities and could be promoted as domestic productions in the occupied zone. Maintaining an appearance of diversity was all the more important as American imports had an increasingly difficult time reaching European markets. However, such calculations failed to extinguish the spirit of resistance, as could be seen in the systematic boycotting of German films in the Balkans and the Netherlands.

Finally, in 1942, the film industry became fully nationalised, with Cautio acting as a trust company and the newly formed UFA-Film GmbH, sometimes also referred to as UFI, operating as a holding company with several subsidiaries. UFA-Film, which used the old UFA-quality label, was headed by Fritz Hippler as the newly appointed *Reichsfilmintendant* (Reich Film Administrator) responsible for co-ordinating all aspects of film production and distribution with official policies. Eleven firms were now united in one state-owned trust, including the UFA-Filmkunst, Terra-Filmkunst, Tobis-Filmkunst, Bavaria-Filmkunst, Wien-Film, Prag-Film, and Continental-Film. The monopolisation of film production made possible a more effective division of labour in the cinema among the competing

demands of propaganda, ideology, and entertainment. After several years of aggressive politicisation, the Ministry returned to the double strategy of producing a few big-budget propaganda films and a large number of conventional genre films with strong entertainment value. Under such conditions, the war ended up being highly profitable for the industry, raising the number of tickets sold from 624 million in 1939 to 1.117 billion in 1943. By the early 1940s, only the United States had more exhibition venues than the Third Reich with its approximately 8,600 theatres both in Germany and in the occupied countries and territories. Revelling in these successes, UFA celebrated its twenty-five-year anniversary in 1943 with the blockbuster production of *Münchhausen*, an all-star historical action adventure, shot in colour, which cost the studio an unprecedented RM6.5 million.

While the war effort continued in full force, frivolous subject matter returned to the cinema with a vengeance, as did more defeatist attitudes and melancholy styles. Any direct references to the present yielded to stories without a discernible time and place. Within such an illusionist structure, the eruptions of the real, whether in the form of particular words or images, proved a constant source of concern. For example, the inclusion of documentary material in war films such as *U-Boote westwärts!* (1941, *Submarines Westward!*) or *Stukas* (1941) corroborated the myth of individual heroism, but also drew attention to the difference between the war experience and its filmic representation. Likewise, in 1940, the commercial failure of the anti-Semitic historical drama *Die Rothschilds* (*The Rothschilds*), as well as some audiences' uneasiness about *Der ewige Jude* (*The Eternal Jew*), the infamous compilation film by Fritz Hippler, revealed the inherent dangers for film-makers in relying on all too simplistic assumptions about intended meanings and actual responses. Despite such problems, the Propaganda Ministry tried to supply war audiences with a constant stream of entertaining films, including many re-releases. Because of the massive destruction caused by allied bombing of cities, even many venerable state theatres were turned into movie-theatres. The Barrandov studios in Prague became the preferred place for war-weary film professionals. Until the very end, some film officials remained convinced of a German victory – if not on the battlefield of war, then in some imaginary cinema of the future.

### Third Reich cinema as popular cinema

While the institutional framework established in 1933 remained the determining factor in the production of films, their immense mass appeal must neither be confused with the all-pervasive power of Nazi ideology nor regarded as evidence of a cultural sphere unaffected by politics. Box-office receipts point to a popular cinema positioned within ideology precisely through its commitment to pleasure and entertainment. The list of greatest successes was led by *Die goldene Stadt* (1942, *The Golden City*) with 12.5 million tickets sold, followed by *Der weisse Traum* (1943, *The White Dream*) and *Immensee* (1943), each with 10.1 million, *Die grosse Liebe* (1942, *The Great Love*) and *Wiener Blut*, each with 9.2 million, and *Wunschkonzert* (1940, *Request Concert*) with 8.8 million tickets. A variety of factors contributed to

these phenomenal successes: their acceptance of genre as the most efficient form of addressing diverse audiences; their cultivation of the star system as a convenient structure for audience identification; their incorporation of other popular traditions such as folklore, operetta, literature, and broadcasting; and, most importantly, their reliance on the conventions and styles associated with the classical Hollywood film.

Not surprisingly, Third Reich cinema was from the beginning a cinema dominated by male and, above all, female stars. Famous stars established patterns of identification, imitation, and admiration beyond individual films. The collapsing of actor and role in the persona of the star provided an outlet for powerful emotions in a society oppressively concerned with sexual and racial difference and severely anxious over public and private identities. In contrast to character actors such as Gustav Gründgens, Heinrich George, and Werner Krauss, who endowed film with cultural significance, and unlike supporting actors like Grete Weiser and Theo Lingen, who added local wit and regional humour, the new leading stars became closely identified with the cinema's national and international ambitions. With their beauty, charm, and sex appeal, actresses conjured up a cosmopolitan atmosphere necessary for films' commercial success at home and abroad. Yet the transformation of the female body into a marker of national identity also introduced more problematic ideas about race and gender that proved essential to the socio-psychological function of mass entertainment during the Third Reich (Beyer 1991, Romani 1992).

Adored by their fans, photographed in the illustrated press, and written up in gossip columns, actresses embodied the other, unofficial side of post-1933 society associated with tolerance, sophistication, fashion, leisure, luxury, and eroticism. The Propaganda Ministry recognised the stars' public function by accommodating personal requests and paying sometimes exorbitant salaries. In 1937, for instance, Albers earned as much as RM562,000. By contrast, a skilled worker earned only RM2,500 a year. Secret lists circulated with the names of those actors to be employed at all times and those to be avoided as 'box-office poison'. Many famous actresses were modelled on Hollywood stars, with Zarah Leander promoted as a 'German Garbo', Harvey resembling Miriam Hopkins, and Marika Rökk frequently compared to Eleanor Powell and Ginger Rogers. While blond *ingénue* Kristina Söderbaum may have personified the ideal Aryan woman, the majority of actresses displayed physical features and character traits with little resemblance to official images of German womanhood. Through their exotic looks, refined tastes, and fashionable styles, they provided the extravagance and glamour that had been eliminated from official culture.

This identification with otherness was especially pronounced in actresses whose careers began after 1933. Many were foreigners (Söderbaum, Leander, Rökk) or made foreignness part of their erotic appeal. In contrast to the idea of female beauty prevalent in painting and sculpture, feature films promoted the slender, androgynous type embodied by Käthe von Nagy and Brigitte Helm. With the exception of strong mother figures, most female stereotypes were equally represented in the respective genres. Olga Tschechowa excelled in playing the worldly older woman.

Combining simplicity and inner strength, Austrian Paula Wessely brought emotional complexity to the woman's film. After Renate Müller's premature death in 1938, the young Ilse Werner became audience's favourite 'girl next door'. Often cast as a dangerous *femme fatale*, Brigitte Horney appeared regularly in melodramas but, like Tschechowa and Wessely, also lent her intense performances to several propaganda vehicles. Sibylle Schmitz, whose suicide inspired Fassbinder's *Die Sehnsucht der Veronika Voss* (1982, *Veronika Voss*), found a perfect showcase for her dark exotic beauty in highly stylised melodramatic settings.

With her classical features and theatrical training, Marianne Hoppe was predestined to cover the widest range as an actress, playing in light-hearted sophisticated comedies like *Capriolen* (1937, *Capers*) and melancholy marital dramas like *Romanze in Moll* (1943, *Romance in a Minor Key*), as well as in home front films such as *Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska!* (1941, *Goodbye, Franziska!*). While possessing some of androgynous charm that linked *ingénues* such as Harvey, Müller, and Nagy to their Weimar precursors, Hoppe became most closely identified with the difficulties experienced by modern women in reconciling the demands of career, marriage, and motherhood. Her screen persona combined a strong desire for independence, articulated in her playfulness and confidence, and a knowing recognition of the limitations put upon her by society. The casting of Hoppe as Effi Briest in the Fontane adaptation *Der Schritt vom Wege* (1939, *The Step off the Path*) took advantage of this tension and offered a subtle commentary on the emotionality of unfulfilled yearning and quiet subordination.

In contrast to female stars and their close identification with issues of gender, male actors were more directly implicated in the articulation of national identity. Romantic leads such as Willy Fritsch and Gustav Fröhlich became identified with the youthfulness of the new generation, whereas the more mature, heavy-set character actors from the theatre conveyed the kind of authority and strength associated with the past. Heinrich George brought his intense physicality to many historical settings. Werner Krauss and Emil Jannings specialised in rulers, industrialists, and inventors. All three regularly took leading roles in the propaganda vehicles. With the exception of the brash Hans Albers and the suave Willy Birgel, whose screen personas thrived on irresolvable ambiguities, most actors appeared either in romantic or dramatic parts. The available stereotypes included urbane charmers such as Hans Söhnker, quiet masculine types like Paul Hartmann, and, in more heroic roles, Carl Raddatz and Paul Klinger. The appeal of Heinz Rühmann hinged on his simultaneously humorous and pathetic compulsion to act out the petty-bourgeois desire for social acceptance with all of its psychological complications. As the personification of the little man – oppressed, repressed, but always in a good mood – Rühmann comically re-enacted the crises of masculinity in numerous comedies about the difficulties of everyday life. Yet his most famous films from the period, *Quax der Bruchpilot* (1941, *Quax the Crash Pilot*) and *Die Feuerzangenbowle* (1944, *The Red Wine Punch*), also brought out the underlying tension between male aggression and regression that sustained Rühmann's phenomenal career as the Reich's most popular comedian.



While there was no shortage of good actors, the lack of talented directors and screenwriters after the introduction of the Aryan clause remained a serious problem throughout the decade. Most directors were seasoned professionals who had started making films before 1933 and would continue after 1945. The prolific Carl Boese directed almost fifty films during the Third Reich, including many comedies set in the petty-bourgeois milieu. The credits of screenwriter and director Robert A. Stemmle are equally extensive. Carl Froelich worked with Henny Porten in the early 1920s, directed and produced throughout the 1930s, and, as a member of the Nazi party, was appointed president of the Reich Film Chamber in 1939. Froelich's best-known films include *Heimat* (1938, *Homeland*), a melodrama featuring George and Leander as estranged father and daughter, and *Die vier Gesellen* (1938, *The Four Comrades*), a romantic comedy about female friendship and the quest for self-fulfilment with the young Ingrid Bergman. Head of production at UFA since 1943, Wolfgang Liebeneiner's highly adaptable artistic sensibility allowed him to work with some of the greatest actors from the German stage. Liebeneiner specialised in light comedies before he applied his directorial skills to the infamous euthanasia film, *Ich klage an* (1941, *I Accuse*) and two biographical films about the 'Iron Chancellor', *Bismarck* (1940) and the aforementioned *Die Entlassung*.

Many directors established working relationships with famous actors or became specialists in certain genres that allowed them to capitalise on their cultural or ethnic backgrounds. Often in collaboration with the composer Robert Stolz, Hungarian Géza von Bolvary specialised in film operettas that nostalgically evoked Old Vienna in the mold of *Wiener Geschichten* (1940, *Viennese Stories*). Viktor Tourjansky made a name for himself with marital melodramas in the style of *Der Blaufuchs* (1938, *The Blue Fox*) and more dubious political parables such as *Der Gouverneur* (1939, *The Governor*). Beginning with *Liebespremiere* (1943, *Love Premiere*), Arthur Maria Rabenalt directed several films set in the world of show business, whereas Herbert Selpin preferred adventure dramas in the style of *Sergeant Berry* (1938) and *Titanic* (1943). Directors with pronounced political commitments were often strongly identified with the biographical or historical film. Hans Steinhoff, who emerged as a leading director with *Hitlerjunge Quex*, became a master at portraying great individuals, whether in the field of medicine (*Robert Koch*, 1939) or art (*Rembrandt*, 1942). From *Flüchtlinge* (1933, *Refugees*) to *Heimkehr*, Austrian Gustav Ucicky infused historical events with nationalistic sentiment, not least by extolling the virtues of male friendship and personal sacrifice. Popular formulas' precedence over political messages, especially when ideological positions were at stake, repeatedly threatened the career of Karl Ritter, an ardent National Socialist and anti-communist whose propagandistic zeal in *Verräter* (1936, *Traitors*), *Patrioten* (1937, *Patriots*), and *Pour le mérite* (1938) was not always appreciated by the Propaganda Ministry. Even with distinctions such as 'politically valuable', his high-profile films found outspoken critics among cultural polemicists such as Alfred Rosenberg, who regarded their nationalist, rather than National Socialist, rhetoric as an obstacle to a quality-based definition of political film-making.

In a national cinema defined primarily through popular genres and famous stars, was there any room for individual sensibilities and critical perspectives? Experiments were certainly not encouraged, but it would be reductive to explain the lack of innovative directors solely by the oppressive political conditions. Of course, it would be equally problematic to read all signs of creative film-making as a manifestation of aesthetic opposition or subversive meanings. To begin with, the early sound film brought back many dramatic conventions and staging techniques from the theatre and contributed to the growing preference for seamless narratives without authorial interventions. However, film-makers' emphatic rejection of modernist techniques such as montage and stream-of-consciousness was also driven by their aesthetic and ideological opposition to the two filmic styles that had distinguished German art cinema until that point: social realism and expressionism. Other traditions survived in modified forms. Using musical comedies as a conduit to the irreverent atmosphere of the late Weimar years, Reinhold Schünzel cultivated his visual and verbal witticisms in *Amphytrion* (1935), a political parody set among the gods of Antiquity. Similarly, Willi Forst conjured up an atmosphere of cosmopolitan sophistication in the amusing comedy-of-errors *Allotria* (1935, *Capers*). During the same period, the rediscovery of melodramatic forms allowed newcomers such as Detlef Sierck to explore stylisation as a means of distancing in *Schlussakkord* (1936, *Final Chord*), before perfecting this compelling mixture of formal and emotional excess in his famous films with Zarah Leander. While these exceptional contributions were sustained by larger developments within 1930s cinema internationally, later examples of film authorship must be explained through the gradual erosion of institutional controls and formal conventions during the last years of the war. In this light, Helmut Käutner's melancholy study of Hamburg harbour milieu in *Grosse Freiheit Nr. 7* (1944, *Great Freedom Street No. 7*) and his poetic realist study of Berlin's canals and bridges in *Unter den Brücken* (1946, *Under the Bridges*) can alternatively be read as moral defeatism, individual resignation, or passive resistance – all qualities that made Käutner well suited for postwar cinema.

Only one other director besides Riefenstahl was able to develop a unique filmic vision in full accordance with Nazi ideology: Veit Harlan. The elements that distinguished Harlan's most infamous films, *Jud Süß* and *Kolberg*, also predominated in his melodramas, but rarely in that extreme mixture of ideology, melodrama, and stylistic excess. Harlan preferred to work with the same actors, most notably his wife Kristina Söderbaum, and often relied on realist and naturalist authors in presenting his simple views about biology as destiny. Used for such deterministic scenarios, Hermann Sudermann inspired *Die Reise nach Tilsit* (1939, *The Journey to Tilsit*), Theodor Storm *Immensee* (1943), and Rudolf Binding *Opfergang* (1944, *Sacrifice*). Stylistically, Harlan aimed at a level of intensification and exaggeration that, from the use of ethereal music to the heavy colour symbolism, endowed even idyllic rural settings with an aura of artificiality, decadence and, ironically, degeneracy. His insistence on the sublimation of sexual desires and his morbid fascination with death revealed the true libidinal source behind the compulsive scenarios of fate, desire, and renunciation that made him the most recognisable auteur of the Third



Reich. Not surprisingly, the director of *Jud Süß* was singled out after the war to stand trial for crimes against humanity. The first trial in 1949/50 resulted in a not-guilty verdict; even subsequent law suits failed to stop Harlan from continuing his career throughout the 1950s.

A few exceptions notwithstanding, the denigration of film authorship and the validation of genre in the most affirmative sense meant the suppression of all artistic ambitions and critical intentions. With their familiar stock characters and dramatic complications, genres after 1933 tended to operate within clearly defined rules and structures. The introduction of variations into such a system of repetition and sameness produced aesthetic pleasure, while at the same time confirming the *status quo*. One of the main psychological functions of genre in general is to produce specific emotions (joy, fear, sadness) and process them through predetermined forms that offer imaginary solutions to social problems. During the Third Reich, the prohibition on addressing more serious problems put severe restrictions on this process. Film-makers were told to avoid detective films, courtroom dramas, and suspense thrillers that might draw attention to taboo subjects such as crime and violence. Literary sources allowed some directors to infuse familiar stories with new meanings. The popularity of musical forms confirmed the primacy of music in definitions of German national identity. At the same time, comedies provided a framework for expressing dissatisfaction with the available designs for living. All of these genres contributed to the normative discourse on identity shared by popular culture, official culture, and high culture. The narrativising of identity gave coherence to an eclectic system of beliefs, ideas, and attitudes about gender, family, community, and society. Yet the disruptions of identity also provided an imaginary space for engaging with a feared and vilified other defined in racial, national, and political terms.

With these conflicting investments, genres provided the most effective framework for accommodating various social groups and for catering precisely to the specialised interests and sensibilities that allegedly had been dissolved into the unifying concepts of nation and race. While the openly political films constituted the viewing subject in collective terms and addressed the audience as a unified body, the genre films participated in the illusory validation of differences: between social and individual norms, public and private behaviour, gender roles and class differences. This division between the collective experiences provided, for instance, by the state-commissioned films and the individual dreams and desires satisfied by the entertainment films acknowledged class and gender simultaneously as continuing sources of social conflict and individual crisis. Films addressed audiences through a model of identification – often associated with the ideology of populism or, to use the Nazi term, *Volkstümlichkeit* – that allowed them to participate, though only symbolically, in the creation of a unified, imaginary subject with specific ambitions and desires. That this subject position can be described as petty-bourgeois has a lot to do with the petty-bourgeois origins of the Nazi movement and its exploitation both of economic fears in the impoverished middle class and of fantasies of social ascent among members of the working class and lower middle

class. Spectatorship completed the shift from a political ideology that recognised social differences, though only in order to eradicate them, to the filmic fictions that used national and racial difference as the foundation of their all-encompassing dreams of *Volk*. The concept of Germanness allowed audiences to participate in visions of national greatness while at the same time confronting their own disappointments and inadequacies. In validating the perspective of the 'little man', which itself is distinguished by ambivalence and ambiguity, films were able to incorporate often contradictory impulses under the overarching principle of common sense and to celebrate the virtues of compliance through the pleasures precisely of being average. These stabilising effects informed the filmic articulation of petit-bourgeois consciousness and sustained the attraction of genre cinema throughout the 1930s, but as a cinema in which popular, populist, and petty-bourgeois positions had finally been reunited through the integrative category of *Volk*.

Almost half of the feature length-films produced after 1933 were comedies: romantic comedies, sophisticated comedies, family comedies, rustic comedies, and, above all, musical comedies. Many carried on in the tradition of the drawing-room comedy, with infidelity, boredom, temptation, and the need for revenge as the driving force behind heated exchanges, compromising situations, and inevitable happy endings. Comedies inspired by regional peculiarities and urban milieus offered formulaic stories of personal rivalries, family feuds, neighbourhood intrigues, and so forth. Only the white-collar comedies, which continued in the tradition of the early 1930s, retained some awareness of social and economic problems through their focus on competent young women and, increasingly, insecure and resentful petty-bourgeois men.

The relationship to Hollywood found paradigmatic expression in the irreverent spirit and quick pacing of sophisticated comedies such as *Glückskinder* (1936, *Lucky Kids*), the successful Fritsch–Harvey vehicle modelled on Frank Capra's 1934 *It Happened One Night*. However, these comedies did not just imitate the American originals or translate American situations and characters into German contexts. Film-makers developed their version of a Germanised Americanism by incorporating local and regional traditions and validating social and cultural differences. Likewise they modified the Prussian model of Americanism by relying heavily on the Central European tastes and sensibilities that had influenced many comic registers during the 1920s and early 1930s. Whereas the spirited banter between the sexes in the New Deal comedies was based on the recognition of social and economic inequities, the men and women in the comparable German versions expressed their psychological resentments outside all social and political categories. Highly normative assumptions about love, romance, and sexuality informed the characters' short-lived revolts against bigotry and hypocrisy. Without the kind of visual commentaries developed to perfection by Lubitsch, the humour in these comedies remained language-based and exhausted itself in the confirmation of social prejudices and traditional gender roles. The anxieties over questions of gender and class found an emotional outlet only in brief moments of transgression.

Especially the many instances of social mimicry, false identity, and cross-dressing provided a temporary release from typical 'German' qualities such as discipline, modesty, and reliability. But by acknowledging the constructed nature of identity, the comedies also demonstrated the importance of compliance and conformity; therein lay their less obvious socio-psychological function.

The equally popular musical genres confirmed the importance of music in defining national identity while also promising an escape from the pressures of everyday life through a greater emphasis on pleasure, illusion, and fantasy. Film operettas, opera films, musical comedies, revue films, and films about great composers and musicians all took advantage of the studios' close ties to public broadcasting and the recording industry. Popular musical styles ranged from the operetta scores of Eduard Künneke and Robert Stolz to the more contemporary sound of Michael Jary and the hit songs by Peter Kreuder. Many films featured international recording stars such as Jan Kiepura; others were adaptations of famous operettas, such as Johann Strauss's *G'schichten aus dem Wienerwald* (1934, *Stories from the Viennese Woods*) and Ralph Benatzky's *Im Weissen Rössl* (1935, *At the White Horse Inn*). The strong Austro-Hungarian influence produced countless films barely held together by the sentimental melodies and nostalgic feelings associated with Old Vienna. *Wir machen Musik* (1942, *We Make Music*) and a few other musical comedies from the 1940s cultivated more contemporary styles, including the kind of modified jazz tunes officially denounced as 'degenerate music'.

A generic hybrid, the popular revue film offered an alternative to the Hollywood musical through its different approach to elaborate song-and-dance sequences that emphasised the achievements of the individual (Belach 1979). Confirming the prohibition on erotic imagery, even La Jana's semi-nude dances in *Es leuchten die Sterne* (1938, *The Stars Are Shining*) and *Stern von Rio* (1940, *Star of Rio*) inspired above all thoughts of classical sculpture and racial health. Hollywood influences were most pronounced in revue films that, like *Wir tanzen um die Welt* (1939, *We Dance around the World*), used a professional dancing troupe to create ornamental choreographies inspired by Busby Berkeley but also eerily reminiscent of what has been described as the fascist mass ornament, given their marked preference for military costumes and formations. The revue film's peculiar mixture of optimism and aggression was developed to perfection by the inexhaustible Marika Rökk, who was known for her Hungarian 'Puszta charm'. Frequently working under the direction of her husband, Georg Jacoby, Rökk appeared in *Hallo Janine* (1939), *Kora Terry* (1941), and *Die Frau meiner Träume* (1944, *The Woman of My Dreams*). The Rökk character frequently had to choose between the freedom of artistic expression and the security of love and marriage – a typical female dilemma that only underscored the symptomatic function of the modern career woman as the object of punitive and transgressive fantasies.

With renunciation firmly established as a central motif in the romantic comedy and the revue film, the melodrama was able to explore more ambiguous views on gender and sexuality. During the early 1930s, melodramatic modes found

expression in the elusive mixture of sentimentality, melancholy, and irony cultivated by Forst in classic Viennese films such as *Maskerade* (1934, *Masquerade*). The genre's more typical combination of heightened emotionality and formal stylisation reached an ideal embodiment in Zarah Leander, the statuesque Swedish-born singer and actress. An acute awareness of femininity as a performance informed her signature roles in Detlef Sierck's *Zu neuen Ufern* (1937, *To New Shores*) and *La Habanera* (1937), as well as her later films with Rolf Hansen, *Die grosse Liebe* (1942) and *Damals* (1943, *Then*). The basic narrative elements are always the same: guilt and redemption, love and renunciation, transgression and punishment. The visual representation of female desire and its constant companion, female suffering, relied extensively on extreme close-ups, dramatic lighting, claustrophobic settings, and exaggerated costumes. Unquestionably, the increased production of melodramas during the last years of the war must be explained through their intended socio-psychological functions, namely, to translate suffering into aesthetic terms and to make pleasurable the delay of gratification. Nonetheless, these emotional and stylistic excesses sometimes had a destabilising effect on wartime audiences. For even as they contributed to the preservation of the *status quo* by presenting women as victims, melodramas at least recognised those strengths borne of victimisation and turned them into instruments of critical introspection.

As the 'guardians of morality' and the 'protectors of life', women played a key role in the battle over images and identities in the genre films. However, the representation of women in the feature film rarely reflected the normative definition of femininity in Nazi ideology; instead they functioned as complementary designs. Maternal melodramas such as *Mutterliebe* (1939, *Mother Love*), with Käthe Dorsch as the woman who sacrifices everything for her children, remained the exception in a popular cinema that, despite the official cult of motherhood, treated female characters above all as objects of male desire. Before the war, working women of the kind depicted in the misogynistic *Frau am Steuer* (1939, *Woman at the Wheel*) regularly inspired mockery and ridicule. Labour shortages in the war economy and the difficulties of the home front contributed to the need for more sympathetic portrayals of working women like the competent female math teacher in *Unser Fräulein Doktor* (1940, *Our Miss PhD*). Concerns about low birth rates stood behind the idealisation of family life in romantic comedies like *Hurra, ich bin Papa!* (1939, *Hurrah, I Am a Dad!*), that offered more positive portrayals of unwed mothers. For the most part, genre cinema confirmed traditional definitions of gender and portrayed independent women as a disruptive and destructive force. Femininity remained identified with a threatening sexuality that had to be contained. At the same time, the expectations about appropriate female characteristics, attitudes, and forms of behaviour were constantly adjusted to the changing demands of the times, especially during the war years. Under these conditions, genre films developed their cautionary tales of modern femininity through contradictory positions that could never be resolved, not through the melodrama's imbalance between strong women and weak men and not through the rustic

comedy's tacit understanding of male indolence and female competence (Bechdolf 1992, Traudisch 1993, Fox 2000).

In sharp contrast to the psychological interiors presented by the female-dominated comedies and melodramas, the male-dominated adventure film thrived on action, movement, adventure, discovery, and individual initiative. These action adventures often included elaborate stories about technological innovations and corporate power struggles. Remarkable athletic stunts and action scenes verging on slapstick distinguished the countless Harry Piel films in the style of *Der unmögliche Herr Pitt* (1938, *The Impossible Mr Pitt*). More dramatic films often featured Hans Albers who, with his blond hair, blue eyes, sharp profile, and tall muscular frame, came to personify the Aryan ideal of masculinity. Albers played modern adventurers in the futuristic thriller *Gold* (1934) and the seafaring drama *Unter heissem Himmel* (1936, *Under Hot Skies*) and conquered new territories in the Canadian Western *Wasser für Canitoga* (1939, *Water for Canitoga*). The genre's foreign locations and exotic settings did not only provide an imaginary landscape for the articulation of nationalist and racist principles; it also opened up another space, unmarked by social conventions and political pressures, that allowed for imaginary escapes from the ordinary and the familiar.

Closely connected to Nazi fantasies about *Volk* and *Heimat*, the *Heimatfilm* (homeland film) emerged as the most convenient narrative form for offering a romanticised, but completely depoliticised, view of country and nation. Quintessential German landscapes like the Bavarian Alps, the Rhine valley, and the Baltic Coast provided idyllic images of rural life where simple peasants lived in harmony with nature. The genre's regionalist orientation, especially in the folk dramas and rustic comedies produced in Bavaria, sometimes prevented co-optation by the more abstract concepts of racial theory and the ideology of 'blood and soil'. Featuring well-known folk actors, these comedies promoted their own brand of provincialism and xenophobia. The validation of traditional Bavarian culture, including as a counter-design to Prussianism, found expression in numerous Ganghofer adaptations, rustic farces with Karl Valentin and Liesl Karstadt, and humorous vignettes of traditional village life by the prolific actor/director Joe Stöckel. More dramatic treatments gave rise to rare instances of regional resistance and anti-capitalist struggle in the style of *Der ewige Quell* (1939, *The Eternal Spring*) and *Der ewige Klang* (1943, *The Eternal Sound*), whereas the association of *Heimat* with female strength and independence inspired yet another screen adaptation of *Die Geierwally* (1940, *The Vulture Wally*), this time with Heidemarie Hatheyer. Throughout the period, the genre's emphasis on regional culture offered audience an alternative to the highly politicised idea of nation that, in the historical films, culminated in the equation of Prussia with the Reich and that, in the state-commissioned films, reduced the abstract idea of *Volk* to that of race, rather than of ethnicity. Because of these elusive investments, the genre most frequently associated with Third Reich cinema also emerged as the one with the most problematic relationship to the more politicised fantasies of national community.

### Third Reich cinema as political cinema

In the same way that Nazi ideology was based on an eclectic and largely derivative mixture of political theories and philosophical ideas, the cinema of the Third Reich was held together less through a monolithic aesthetic or ideological structure than through the Ministry's institutional power over pockets of difference. Propaganda films made up only 10 per cent of the entire production and remained limited to historical dramas, war films, genius films, and a few home front films. Most popular genre films carefully avoided references to the regime – only to serve it by promoting the sexist, nationalist, and racist ideologies essential to its existence and by sustaining the illusory division between an official culture of political spectacle and the seemingly apolitical sphere of private pleasures, individual choices, and modern diversions. Ministerial directives about the length of films and the adequate portrayal of nationalities and professions confirm to what degree the apparatus tried to control all aspects of film-making. However, the inordinate attention to detail only underscores the ultimate failure of these efforts and explains the need for constant readjustment. Conflicting interpretations of ministerial guidelines and suggestions, tensions between various branches in the state bureaucracy and film industry, and personal rivalries among studio managers and cultural officials simultaneously strengthened and undermined the integrative power of the political system.

The changing definitions of film propaganda can be traced back to the different positions taken by Hitler and Goebbels in the early 1930s. Hitler expressed very decisive ideas about propaganda and its relevance to the movement. Film and other modern media, he argued, could be instrumental in winning followers and propagating National Socialist ideas; hence the need of direct emotional appeal. For Hitler, propaganda meant the condensation of complicated issues into a few simple ideas and their further intensification through repetition, exaggeration, and visual symbolism. Goebbels favoured a more indirect approach to propaganda that concealed its intentions and placed greater emphasis on the style of presentation than on the actual subject matter. For him, the politics of representation was more important than the representation of politics. These differences found expression in the intense controversies over three early feature films about the National Socialist movement. On the one hand, the movement films shared a number of characteristics: the celebration of youthful idealism and martyrdom; the validation of community, discipline, and solidarity; and the close attention to public ritual and the symbolic power of flags and uniforms. National Socialism was presented in terms of essences, as the result of a process of self-discovery rather than an expression of political beliefs. By aligning politics with emotional experiences, the three films offered a model of identification for all later propaganda films. On the other hand, the relationship between fascism and modernism introduced significant differences. *Hitlerjunge Quex* (1933, *Hitler Youth Quex*) showed the conversion of a communist working-class youth to the ideals and the spirit of National Socialism in a style reminiscent of Weimar social realism. By contrast, *SA-Mann*



*Brand* (1933, *SA-Man Brand*) presented the early years of the movement so crudely and simplistically that it was shunned by critics and audiences alike. And *Hans Westmar* (1933), inspired by the story of Horst Wessel, was initially withdrawn from distribution because the Nazis feared the commercialisation of their symbols and rituals. After 1933, the representation of comparable situations in other times and places proved much more effective than any direct references to the Third Reich and henceforth determined the political function of filmic stories and images within the larger framework of National Socialist ideology.

To what degree the aestheticisation of politics gave rise to what some critics have called fascist aesthetics has been the central question behind the ongoing scholarly debates about the most famous film of the period, Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* (1935, *Triumph of the Will*). Shot during the 1934 Party Congress in Nuremberg, the film stages the encounter between the *Führer* and the *Volk* in tightly choreographed forms that mythologise social processes (Barsam 1975). This merging of myth and modernity takes place through symbols such as flags, clouds, and fire and formal elements such as repetition, symmetry, and counterpoint. The process is predicated on the transformation both of the historical city into a stage set and of the party event into a visual spectacle. Riefenstahl's apotheosis of the national community culminates in the human ornaments of frozen perfection that become part of the monumental architecture. But her vision also gives rise to a cult of the beautiful that finds expression in the many close-ups of ecstatic faces and steely bodies. This aesthetics of racial perfection, including the cult of male strength and power, found an even more stylised expression in Riefenstahl's documentary about the 1936 Olympic Games, *Olympia* (1938), with its two parts *Fest der Völker* (*Festival of Nations*) and *Fest der Schönheit* (*Festival of Beauty*). Since then, Riefenstahl's films have found defenders who praise their formal qualities and detractors for whom the obsession with beauty remains an essential part of 'fascinating fascism' (Hinton 1991, Downing 1992, Riefenstahl 1993).

Despite all fantasies of harmony and unity, professional groups and cultural institutions continued to fight over their adequate representation in the grand narratives of German nation; the same problems haunted the representation of political enemies. To give only one example: when generals complained about the treatment of the army in *Triumph des Willens*, Riefenstahl made a short documentary, *Tag der Freiheit* (1935, *Day of Freedom*), to appease them. During the war years, propagandistic intentions could not always keep up with changing military situations and political alliances. While Bolshevism had always invited negative stereotyping, especially in the conflation of Bolshevik with Jew, the Non-Aggression Pact in 1939 inspired a brief wave of sentimental films about Old Russia, including the Pushkin adaptation *Der Postmeister* (1940, *The Postmaster*). Even the anti-Russian film *Friesennot* (1935, *Frisian Plight*) was banned in 1939 but, after the German attack on the Soviet Union, reissued in 1941 as *Dorf im roten Sturm* (*Village in the Red Storm*).

*Triumph des Willens* illustrates the workings of fascist aesthetics, but its exceptional status also underscores the fact that Third Reich cinema never gave rise

to a homogeneous body of work or consistent set of practices, even where official pronouncements suggest such coherence. The fundamental problem of controlling images and, more generally, meanings, can be seen in the Ministry's close attention to non-narrative forms with a greater investment in, or closeness to, questions of the real. Whether as party convention films, weekly newsreels or cultural films, these non-narrative forms played as significant a role in the redefinition of reality as those narrative forms more typically associated with fantasy and illusion. Considered the most effective tool of political propaganda, newsreels after 1933 became increasingly sophisticated in their rhetoric and style (for instance, through rapid editing and trick photography). Newsreels changed even more under the demands of total media warfare and the militarisation of public life. Already the invasion of the Rhineland in 1936 included cameramen and journalists. After 1939, all independent newsreels were consolidated in the *UFA-Tonwoche* which, in 1940, was renamed *Deutsche Wochenschau* (German Newsreel) to stress its patriotic orientation. Film footage from the front was provided by special military units, the *Propagandakompanien* (Propaganda Companies). Lasting up to one hour, the war newsreels relied heavily on incendiary commentary and dramatic music in order to create an aestheticised view of warfare free of death and suffering. Documentary footage and staged scenes were joined together to create a filmic reality ruled less by the ethical standards of news reporting than by the need to enlist the powers of the imagination in the pursuit of a final victory. In *Feldzug in Polen* (1940, *The Polish Campaign*) and *Sieg im Westen* (1941, *Victory in the West*), Svend Noldan relied heavily on maps, graphics, and animation to show the strength of the German army.

National Socialist ideology found privileged expression in the cultural films that were part of the supporting programme but differed from the newsreel because of their pronounced educational goals and artistic ambitions. Since the 1920s, screenings had typically included pre-films on topics ranging from geography and biology to ethnography and art history. After 1933, these themes, while always closely linked to the question of Germanness, were presented in more nationalistic tones. Compilation films such as *Blut und Boden* (1933, *Blood and Soil*) and *Der ewige Wald* (1936, *The Eternal Forest*) enlisted the familiar iconography of landscape, nature, and *Heimat* in anti-modern diatribes. Countless shorts presented the Reich's technological, architectural, and organisational accomplishments, from the building of the *Reichsautobahn* (federal expressway system), Albert Speer's grandiose building plans for Germania to the projects of the Reichsarbeitsdienst (Reich Labour Service) and the cultural programmes of the Kraft durch Freude (Strength Through Joy) organisation. Sometimes these non-narrative forms provided an opportunity for formal experimentation. Resisting the mixture of romance and heroism found in films such as *Wunder des Fliegens* (1935, *The Wonders of Flying*), with famous aviator Ernst Udet, a few documentary film-makers continued to present modern technologies in the cool New Objectivist style. Willy Zielke's *Das Stahltier* (*The Steel Animal*), commissioned for the centennial of the first German railroad line in 1934, as well as Ruttmann's *Deutsche Waffenschmieden*



(1939, *German Armaments Factories*) and *Deutsche Panzer* (1941, *German Tanks*), relied extensively on modernist techniques such as associative montage, rapid editing, unusual perspectives, and extreme close-ups to celebrate the convergence of modernism and modernity in the iconography of the beautiful machine. The influence of the Weimar cross-section film can be traced to Leo de Laforgue's *Symphonie einer Weltstadt* (*Symphony of a World City*), completed in 1942 and shown for the first time in 1950 as the last filmic record of Berlin before the bombings.

The division of labour between different mass media such as film, radio, and television played a crucial role in creating a seamless ideological continuum on the level of institutional structures and representational practices. Public broadcasting, which operated under total state control, offered the most effective form of political propaganda by bringing the voice of the *Führer* into almost every household. Aware of radio's untapped possibilities, the Nazis produced an inexpensive model, known as the *Volksempfänger* (people's receiver), that allowed them to forge an instant community of eight million listeners. The sense of accessibility, simultaneity, and omnipresence conveyed by the medium contributed to the era's prevailing fictions of communion and empowerment (for example in the famous Christmas broadcasts from the front). Yet at the same time, the conditions of reception created through broadcasting fragmented the public sphere and limited participation in political events to the auditory realm. Programming practices offered various surrogate forms of participation, from live broadcasts of classical concerts and variety shows to the popular request concert series depicted in *Wunschkonzert*.

Even in its early experimental stage, television promised to expand further the possibilities of mass manipulation (Reiss 1979, Zeutschner 1995). Telefunken presented the new technology at the Fifth German Radio Exhibition in 1928, and public television was experimentally introduced as early as 1935, though only on a limited basis and largely in public settings such as urban television lounges. The cost of a television set remained too high for most private citizens. The brief daily television broadcasts included newsreels, narrative shorts, cultural films, variety shows, popular music, and comic sketches; many older films were shown in abbreviated form. Even after 1939, when viewers in the Berlin area could receive regular programmes, television remained a technologically and aesthetically flawed experience.

The main contribution of feature films to the re-emergence of German nationalism lay in the displacement of present concerns into past events and the rewriting of collective history as individual melodrama. Most propaganda films were also historical films, with the meaning of history significantly changed in the process of ideologisation. To begin with, the many films about the trauma of the First World War and the despised Weimar Republic relied on traditional notions of cause and effect that found expression in the polemical rhetoric of humiliation and retribution. With the Third Reich firmly installed as the telos of history, the emotional effect of these narratives was not one of historicity but of urgent contemporaneity. To the degree that modes of address in the propaganda film made protagonists and

spectators identical, the latter were invariably implicated in the historical narrative as executors of its unfulfilled promises. The revenge for past suffering was a narrative construction that did not only help to legitimise new racial policies and ongoing military actions. Through the notion of *Volk*, the films also provided an identity beyond the problems of the present and provided the necessary sense of unity that justified all possible transgressions in the future.

Many films about the First World War used simple identification patterns to establish such historical parallels, and they depicted instances of German oppression with a clear view towards then-contemporary political conflicts. Accordingly, *Flüchtlinge* (1933, *Refugees*) recounts the fate of Volga Germans persecuted by the Bolsheviks during the postwar period. *Menschen ohne Vaterland* (1937, *People without Fatherland*) has German civilians fighting in the Baltics, whereas *Patrioten* (1937, *Patriots*) articulates the drama of national identity through the figure of a German pilot captured by the French. *Pour le mérite* (1938) reaches narrative denouement in the rearmament of Germany after a long period of self-denial, whereas Rabenalt's famous . . . *reitet für Deutschland* (1941, *Riding for Germany*) has an injured war veteran regain his strength after embracing the idea of nationalism. A few films responded indirectly to political events and military developments. *Menschen im Sturm* (1941, *People in the Storm*) used the suffering of Germans under the Serbs to justify the attack on Yugoslavia. And one of the more infamous contributions to the genre, *Heimkehr* (1941, *Homecoming*), dramatised the discrimination of ethnic Germans in Volhynia in a way that retroactively 'made sense' of the invasion of Poland in 1939.

The effectiveness of these propaganda films relied on the combination of repression and aggression that seduced private desires into the political arena; their appeal always extended beyond psychology and included the realm of the aesthetic. From the casting of stars to the conception of characters, the narratives were driven by very specific ideas about race, nation, and identity that assumed an essential bond between the individual and the nation. With identity dramatised along these lines, the propaganda films of the late 1930s and early 1940s often intervened directly in the organisation of public and private experiences. The resultant fictionalisation of politics eased anxieties about social and political change by reducing them to emotional constellations, while at the same time making the cinema the founding site of new definitions of politics based in the imaginary. The narratives of identity formation provided a transgressive space where emotions were validated through their inscription into new political scenarios, including the meta-narratives of race. Narrative denouement, the deliverance from alienation, could be achieved, if not on the screen, then in the reality of war and genocide. All filmic elements contributed to the dissolution of psychological and social conflicts into the unifying idea of national community and the mapping of identity across the body of the racialised other. The reintroduction of these fiction effects into the rituals of everyday life completed a cycle of symbolic representations sustained by the discourses of melodrama, history, biography, mythology, and folklore. Without such mediations, the propaganda film revealed its political intentions all too clearly and, despite

its effective use of racial and national stereotypes, often failed to translate political ideology into fictional terms.

The historical film provided sufficient distance from the present to emerge as the preferred propagandistic vehicle in the articulation of racist and nationalist ideas (Happel 1984, Schulte-Sasse 1996). The conflation of history and narrative blurred all distinctions between public and private, individual and collective, past and present. Everybody could become part of the nation's struggle for survival and, through identification with the historical leader, find a place in the interstices of the imaginary and the real. Perhaps most importantly, the new historical films provided a vehicle for dissolving history into the ostensibly eternal categories of nation and race. In so doing, history allowed for an imaginary return to the pre-industrial world of peasantry and agriculture; a validation of the community of *Volk* and the rootedness of *Heimat*; and an idealised view of German nation based on its beautiful landscapes, simple peoples, and great traditions.

Historical accounts of war and revolution and the mapping of expansionist fantasies on to the *mise-en-scène* of an imaginary Europe gave form to the founding myths of a new Germanness. Most often, history was enlisted in the self-representations of the regime through established patterns of causality and continuity. In such a teleological construction, the Third Reich appeared as the culmination of German history. Advocating the leadership principle, *Bismarck* (1940) retold the founding of the Wilhelmine empire from the perspective of the strong leader, whereas *Die Entlassung* (1942, *The Dismissal*) linked the political crisis after Bismarck's dismissal to the rise of liberal parliamentarianism. *Carl Peters* (1941) explained the struggle for German colonies in Africa through the continuous threat of British imperialism, while *Ohm Krüger* (1941) used the Boer Wars to justify the Reich's military actions against Great Britain. Parallels between past and present also surfaced in the representation of other national histories. Thus *Der Fuchs von Glenarvon* (1940, *The Fox of Glenarvon*) and *Mein Leben für Irland* (1941, *My Life for Ireland*), two anti-British films about the Irish uprising of 1921, treated these liberation movements as historical models for the struggle of the National Socialist movement during the 1920s.

As a sub-genre of the historical film, the Prussian film stood out through its unabashed glorification of the absolutist state and its autocratic ruler. Associated with authoritarianism, the myth of Prussia most satisfied National Socialist fantasies about a militarisation of public life. In the figure of the Aryan, Prussian virtues like discipline, order, duty, and obedience found their most radical expression. Prussian history showed the conditions under which war, to paraphrase Clausewitz, could become a continuation of politics through other means. The Prussian films focused on two historical periods: the period of Frederick II the Great, which brought the Seven Years War (1756–63) and the rise of Prussia as a major European power, and the War of Liberation (1813–15), through which Prussia freed itself from Napoleonic rule and created the conditions for the emergence of German nationalism. The Fridericus films, whose popularity during the 1920s and 1930s took advantage of the uncanny resemblance of Otto Gebühr to the Prussian king,

became closely identified with a number of ideological positions central to the new regime: the need for a political system based on absolute power; the importance of internal unity as a defence against foreign influences; and the acceptance of patriarchy as a model for the family and the state. The comradeship among the soldiers in the Prussian films was predicated both on the equation of love and death and on the repression of heterosexual desire in the building of a fully militarised society. The underlying tension between discipline and punishment, on the one hand, and suppressed desire and deferred satisfaction, on the other, was resolved in the almost godlike representations of Frederick the Great. Showing his transformation from the rebellious son into the lonely soldier king, *Der Choral von Leuthen*, *Der alte und der junge König* (1935, *The Old and the Young King*), and *Der grosse König* sketched an ideal-typical trajectory for the formation of the national comrade. Harlan's *Kolberg* (1944), which was shot with more extras than soldiers in the actual siege in 1807, almost reversed the relationship between history and narrative by paying more attention to the technical demands of image production than to the material needs of contemporary audiences. The film premiered in the beleaguered Atlantic fortress of La Rochelle and a bomb-weary Berlin: a telling indication of the ways in which fantasy and reality had finally become indistinguishable.

The representation of the leader figure as rebel and tyrant was of particular relevance to the propagandistic uses of history. Whether focusing on political leaders, great scientists, and famous artists, the so-called genius film confirmed male subjectivity as the foundation of German identity. In accordance with National Socialist myths about its revolutionary origins, the 'great men' expressed their innovative and revolutionary impulses through patriotic feelings and nationalist ideas. Likewise, the genre showed a marked preference for individuals – the physician *Robert Koch* (1939), the inventor [Rudolf] *Diesel* (1942), and the fifteenth-century Swiss scientist *Paracelsus* (1943) – whose quest for truth put them in conflict with the prejudices of their times. The creative individual's triumph over adversity was also thematised through the idealism of the young playwright *Friedrich Schiller* (1940), whose call for a national theatre caused the Nazis to claim him as a precursor of National Socialism; the stubbornness of 'Prussian Michelangelo' *Andreas Schlüter* (1942), whose programme for a national architecture prefigured the contribution of Speer; and the personal struggles of *Friedemann Bach* (1941), whose artistic and political rebellion against a dominant father resonated deeply with the oedipal self-representation of the Nazis as a movement of the sons.

The need for articulating nation and race within fully developed narratives found its clearest expression in the anti-Semitic films made between 1939 and 1940. Their main function was to prepare the populace for the 'final solution of the Jewish question'. The surprisingly small number of anti-Semitic films produced during the Third Reich suggest that ideological positions were as much articulated through structuring absences than through filmic representations. The mixed reception of these films increased the need for mediated approaches that could sustain

anti-Semitism as a unifying public discourse and, later, discriminatory and exclusionary practice. Ministerial directives to film reviewers prohibited any references to anti-Semitic representations. For the most part, stereotypes were presented as part of a larger system of defining others in ethnic and national terms. Because of the potentially disruptive effects of negative stereotyping, questions of racial difference were often displaced on to the problem of sexual difference, with the (sexualised) body of the woman standing in for the disturbance of race that needed to be contained. As a result, anti-Semitic sentiments surfaced in the unflattering portrayal of intellectuals and small businessmen and influenced the general approach to character development in screenwriting and casting decisions. The same mechanisms influenced the ways in which modernist styles were mocked and cosmopolitan attitudes denounced. Ethnicity and nationality provided a system of differences that, in the less successful films, reduced all characters to these external determinants. The defamatory conflation of Jew/Russian/Bolshevik in *GPU* (1942) resulted in such exaggerated stereotypes that it destabilised the entire system of representations. In the infamous *Jud Süß* (1940), Harlan proved much more effective by embedding anti-Semitic representations within the structure of classical bourgeois tragedy. Based on the story of Joseph Süß-Oppenhaimer at the eighteenth-century court of the Duke of Württemberg, the film offered historical justification for the persecution of Jews by, among other things, combining a critique of the political and aesthetic excesses of the Baroque feudal system with a race-based definition of the nation state built on 'typical' German traits such as modesty, honour, and duty. By adding the rape and subsequent suicide of a young German woman, the director exploited widespread myths about Jewish sexuality to articulate the question of race along gendered lines and to conjure up the threat of racial impurity and miscegenation. Thus Harlan's film combined two central aspects of anti-Semitism, namely the projection on to the Jews of those individual qualities that must be regarded as threatening to society and the identification of the Jews with exceptional abilities that are bound to incite social envy and resentment (Hollstein 1983).

An exception in many ways, *Der ewige Jude* (1940, *The Eternal Jew*) relied on the format of the compilation film to combine documentary images of ceremonial prayer and ritual slaughtering with excerpts from Weimar feature films betraying 'Semitic tendencies'. Made under the supervision of Reich Film Administrator Hippler, this vicious *Hetzfilm* (hate film) about the 'world Jewish conspiracy' attempted to demonstrate the 'self-explanatory' nature of these images and to uncover the more elusive aspects of the 'Jewish character' through an incendiary mixture of allusions, insinuations, and comparisons, including through the metaphor of swarming rats. The centrality of filmic images both to the construction of Jewishness and to the self-representation of the regime became painfully evident in a later pseudo-documentary about Theresienstadt made expressly to deceive a concerned international community. Directed by one of the inmates, the Jewish actor Kurt Gerron, *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt* (1945, *The Führer Grants the Jews a City*) presented the concentration camp as a model community,

a place of healthy work and wholesome entertainment – a troubling comment also on the powerful role of modern mass media in national and international relations.

Until the end of the regime, the cinema remained a work of compromise, serving the contradictory functions of entertainment and propaganda, satisfying different interests and tastes, and conveying both the populist arguments and politicised attitudes considered essential to its appeal. No matter whether genres continued in the tradition of Weimar cinema and imitated American models or whether styles specifically marked as German fed into the National Socialist propaganda machine, ideology remained an integral part of representational practices, from the way subjects were constructed in social and political reality to the way they partook in the remaking of national identity through filmic images and narratives. While the Propaganda Ministry determined the terms of productions and the forms of reception, the enduring popularity of the films since the postwar years has made them an integral part of German cinema. Especially the so-called *Überläuferfilme* (literally, deserter films), films started before 1945 but only completed or released after 1945, bring into relief the continuities and ruptures that defined the cinema of the Third Reich from the beginning to the end and still make it the perfect test case for more general reflections on cinema, nation, and ideology.