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# Cinema and the Swastika

The International Expansion of Third  
Reich Cinema

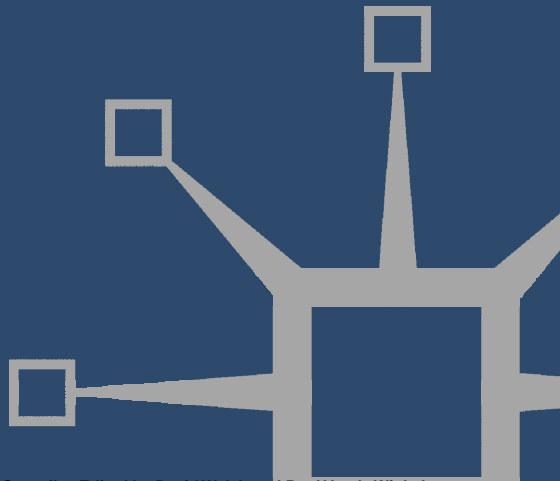
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Edited by

Roel Vande Winkel

and

David Welch



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# 1

## Europe's New Hollywood? The German Film Industry Under Nazi Rule, 1933–45

*David Welch and Roel Vande Winkel*

This chapter, together with the following chapters on the International Film Chamber and the Hispano-Film-Produktion Company, serves as an introduction to the many case studies of German activities on the international film market, and offers a brief introduction to the National-Socialist 'reorganisation' of the domestic film market. For the purpose of this book, it provides an overview of how the German government, and most notably its propaganda ministry, tried to streamline German film production and regulated film distribution and exhibition.

### **The Nazi party and film before the takeover of power<sup>1</sup>**

The film activities of the Nazi Party before 1933 were of little relevance to the film industry of the time, but they illustrate the Nazi party's growing awareness of the importance of a well-coordinated organisation and opportunism for learning and adapting new propaganda techniques. The idea that film was an important propaganda medium was present from the early beginnings of the Party. But at this stage they had little finance and even less experience in their propaganda department of the complexities of film. Films produced by the party were amateurish and mainly shown to closed party gatherings.

Towards the end of 1930, Joseph Goebbels, who had been steadily building up the Party following in Berlin since 1926, decided to establish the Reich Film Cells (*NSDAP-Reichsfilmstelle*, RFS) in the capital for the purpose of distributing films throughout Germany. However, the project proved to be optimistically premature as the Nazi leadership was not convinced of its necessity and refused to supply the necessary capital. It was only by October 1932 that all *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP) film activities were finally transferred to Berlin under Goebbels' control. During this

period the film industry in general was still recoiling from the continuing effects of the recession in world trade and the advent of sound films, which involved considerable expenditure at a time when total receipts were falling, companies were going bankrupt, and cinemas were changing hands at an alarming rate. The German film industry responded with the so-called *SPIO Plan* of 1932. The *Spitzenorganisation der Deutschen Filmindustrie* (SPIO) was the industry's main professional representative body and its principle concern was to strike a satisfactory relationship between the production, distribution, and exhibition sectors while at the same time retaining the traditional structure of the industry. Significantly SPIO was dominated by the large combines and it was no surprise that they should produce a plan that discriminated so blatantly against the German Cinema Owners' Association (*Reichsverband Deutscher Lichtspieltheater*) whom they accused of flooding the market with too many cinemas, price cutting, and retaining a disproportionate share of total receipts.

This conflict within the film industry placed the NSDAP in a rather delicate position. On the one hand, the Nazis did not have to worry about making their own propaganda films at this stage. Alfred Hugenberg, press baron, leader of the German National People's Party (*Deutschnationale Volkspartei*) and sympathiser of the Nazis, had bought the largest and most prestigious German film company, Ufa (*Universum-Film-Aktiengesellschaft*).<sup>2</sup> Hugenberg had acquired Ufa to 'preserve it for the national outlook', which in practice meant producing overt nationalist films; but on the other hand, they had believed for some time that the cinema owners were an important element in their future operations. There were also at this stage divisions within the NSDAP itself over the nature of the German film industry. The struggle between these elements both within the industry and the NSDAP and the questions they posed for the future of the German film industry would be answered by the new Nazi government in less than a year after assuming power.

### **The Gleichschaltung (coordination) of the German film industry<sup>3</sup>**

As early as the 1920s the National Socialists had infiltrated their members into many spheres of public life. The entire organisation of the Party, the division into administrative sectors, and the structure of leadership were built up as a state within a state. The Nazis were therefore well placed to take control of a film industry which had to a large extent prepared itself to be controlled. The *Gleichschaltung* (coordination)<sup>4</sup> of the German cinema was affected behind the scenes by a process of which the ordinary citizen was largely unaware. To achieve this end, a plethora of complex laws, decrees, and intricate state machinery was instigated to prevent any form of non-conformity. Pursuing a policy that was to become traditional in the Third

Reich, the Party organisation was kept separate from state administration at both national and regional levels, while at the same time remaining closely linked.

In the months following Hitler's appointment to Chancellor in January 1933, the divisions within the Party which had flared up in 1932 became an issue again. Certain organisations such as the Nazi Trade Union (*Nationalsozialistische Betriebszellen Organisation*, NSBO) and the Fighting League for German Culture (*Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur*, KfDK – led by Alfred Rosenberg) put forward radical solutions to the film industry's problems, demanding centralisation and the banning of all films which offended the National-Socialist world-view (*Völkische Weltanschauung*). Goebbels, on the other hand, was more realistic, and appreciated that the German film community did not welcome these forces of Nazi extremism. He was unwilling to undertake an immediate nationalisation of the industry not only on ideological grounds but for the pragmatic reasons that Hugenberg, who owned Ufa, was in the new cabinet as Minister of Economics and that the Party in general depended on big business for its finances.

Cinema owners were not the only sector of the industry to be effectively 'coordinated' in this manner. Throughout March and April 1933 the NSBO had been active in all spheres of film production – from cameramen to film actors and composers. When the Nazis banned all trade unions in early May, the industry's 'official' trade union DACHO was dissolved and absorbed initially into the NSBO<sup>5</sup> which was itself transferred automatically to the German Labour Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*, DAF), the only permissible trade union. It was during these months that Goebbels was making final plans for a Propaganda Ministry that would assume control over all aspects of mass communication. Eventually Goebbels was appointed head of the Reich Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda (*Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda*, RMVP) on 13 March 1933. In June Hitler was to define the scope of the RMVP according to which the new Minister would be responsible for 'all tasks of spiritual direction of the nation'.<sup>6</sup> Not only did this vague directive give Goebbels room to manoeuvre against the more radical elements within the Party (like Party ideologue Alfred Rosenberg, who also tried to exercise influence over the German film industry<sup>7</sup>), it also gave the mark of legality to what was soon to be the Ministry's complete control of all that mattered most in the functioning of the mass media in the Third Reich.

The film industry presented a number of structural, economic, and artistic problems for the builders of the new German society. Corresponding to its importance as a medium of propaganda, film was immediately reorganised after the takeover of power. The RMVP was already established when a provisional Reich Film Chamber (*Reichsfilmkammer*) was set up in July 1933. Shortly afterwards, in September 1933, Goebbels decided to extend the idea to the whole of German cultural life and form the Reich Culture Chamber (*Reichskulturkammer*). The Reich Film Chamber became one of the seven

Chambers which made up the Reich Culture Chamber, the others being literature, theatre, music, fine arts, press, and radio.

The creation of the Reich Film Chamber is an excellent example of the process of coordination in that it allowed the RMVP to exert its control over both film-makers and the film industry as a whole. As Propaganda Minister, Goebbels acted as President of the seven Chambers, and through him their jurisdiction spread down to both the nation's regional administrations (*Länder*) and the Party's own specifically political areas (*Gaue*). This not only facilitated the RMVP's control over individual Chambers but, equally importantly, it allowed the Ministry to coordinate its propaganda campaigns. The structure of the Reich Film Chamber was scarcely changed after it had been incorporated into the Reich Culture Chamber. Its head and all-responsible President was subordinate only to the President of the Reich Culture Chamber, that is the Propaganda Minister. The various sections of the German film industry were grouped together into 10 departments. These 10 departments controlled all film activities in Germany. The centralisation, however, did not lead to what the Propaganda Minister claimed – the harmonisation of all branches of the industry – but it did harm the substance of the German film by limiting personal and economic initiative and artistic freedom.

To gain control over film finance, a Film Credit Bank (*Filmkreditbank*) was established. It was announced on 1 June 1933 as a provider of credit and help for a crisis-ridden film economy. The Film Credit Bank was to create the beginnings of the National Socialists' disastrous film policy and to result in the dependence of the private film producers on the Nazi state. However, at the time, the Film Credit Bank was greeted with great enthusiasm from all sides of the film industry. The Film Credit Bank took the form of a private, limited liability company and functioned to all intents and purposes as a normal commercial undertaking except that it was not expected to make large profits. The procedure for securing finance from the Bank was that a producer had to show that he could raise 30 per cent of the production costs as well as convincing the Film Credit Bank that the film stood a good chance of making a profit. The film then became the property of the Bank until the loan was repaid. Thus, private finance was excluded from all freedom of credit and opportunities for profit. Within a short time this financial body would also become an important means of securing both economic and political conformity. The Bank, acting on behalf of the government, could refuse all credit at the pre-production stage until a film reflected the wishes of the new regime. Significantly, there is no evidence to suggest that the film industry was unwilling to accept this form of self-censorship.

Originally the Film Credit Bank was inaugurated to assist the small independent producers; however, by 1936 it was financing over 73 per cent of all



German feature films dealing almost exclusively with producers (and distributors) who could guarantee that a film would be shown nationwide.<sup>8</sup> The result was that the smaller companies' share of the market continued to decline as the process of concentration was relentlessly increased. This was a further step towards creating dependence and establishing a state monopoly in order to destroy any form of independent initiative.

Apart from regulating the financing of films, one of the main purposes of establishing the Reich Film Chamber was the removal of Jews and other 'degenerate artists' from German cultural life, since only racially 'pure' Germans could become members. Whoever wished to participate in any aspect of film production was forced to become a member of the Reich Film Chamber. Goebbels was, however, given the power to issue exemptions to these conditions should he require to do so.<sup>9</sup> The man entrusted by Goebbels for the *Entjudung* (removal of Jews) was Hans Hinkel, who in May 1935 was given overall responsibility for all matters relating to Reich Culture Chamber personnel policy. Hinkel brought about a radicalisation of the Reich Culture Chamber policy. Eventually, by arranging for the Jews to have their own separate cultural organisation, Hinkel justified the total elimination of Jews from German cultural life. Not surprisingly the result of such policies was the emigration of all those who either could not or would not submit to these conditions. The loss of talent was naturally severe but the Nazis were able to retain the services of many highly qualified technical and artistic staff, and a veritable reservoir of talented actors.

### **Tightening the straitjacket: The new Reich Cinema Law<sup>10</sup>**

To consolidate his position Goebbels still desired more power than he had hitherto secured through the Reich Culture Chamber legislation. He also needed some form of legal confirmation to be able to supervise films in the early stages of production. Goebbels settled both these issues by creating a revised version of the Reich Cinema Law (*Reichslichtspielgesetz*), which became law on 16 February 1934 after long and careful preparation. This decree attempted to create a new 'positive' censorship by which the State undertook to encourage 'good' films instead of merely discouraging 'bad' ones. The new Cinema Law anticipated three ways of achieving this positive censorship: a compulsory script censorship, an increase in the number of provisions under which the Censorship Office (*Filmprüfstelle*) might ban a film, and a greatly enlarged system of distinction marks. The most significant innovation of the new Cinema Law was the institution of a pre-censor (*Vorzensor*) undertaken by an RMVP official called the Reich Film Director (*Reichsfilm dramaturg*). The Reich Film Director could supervise every stage of production. The orders issued and the changes suggested by him were binding. As the representative of the RMVP, he could even interfere with

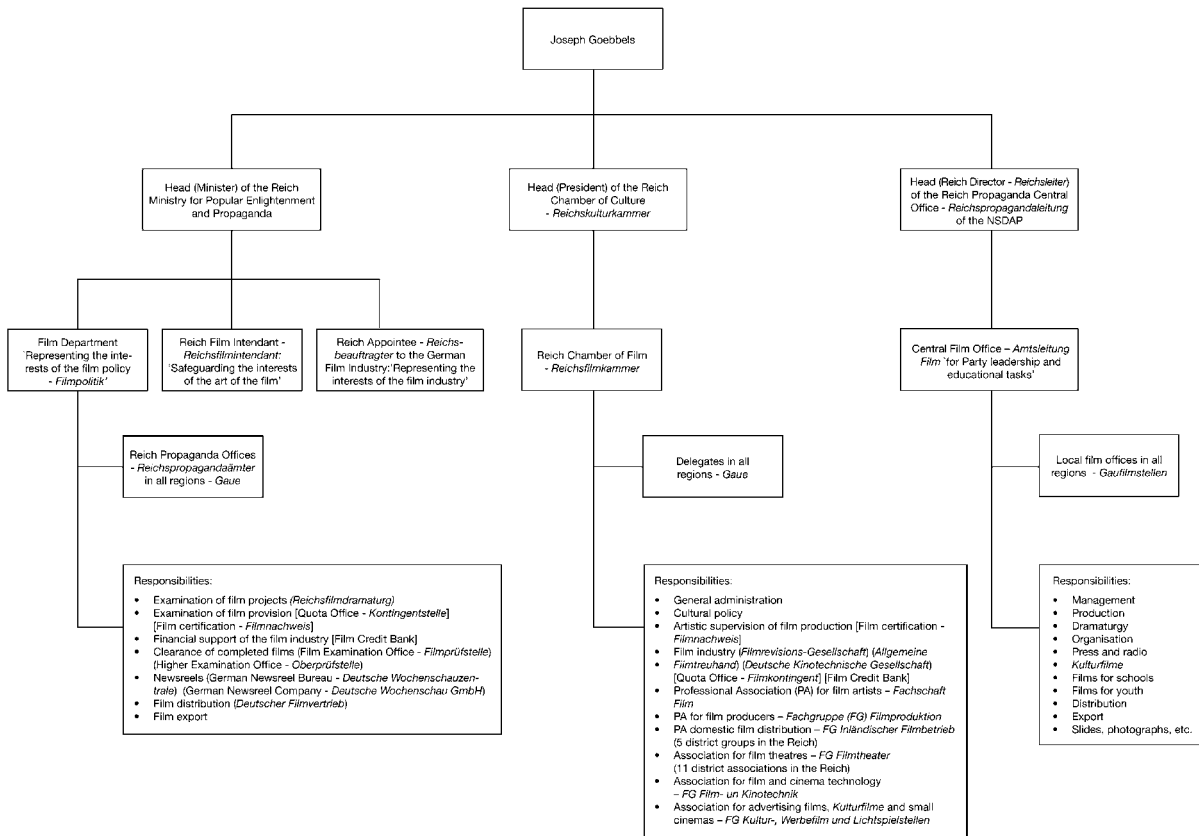
the censorship exercised by the Censorship Office (*Prüfstelle*) in Berlin. After the 1934 Cinema Law had been in operation for just 10 months, the law was changed (13 December 1934) to make the submission of scripts optional instead of compulsory.

According to the new Cinema Law, all kinds of films were to be submitted to the censor. Public and private screenings were made equal in law. Even film advertising in the cinemas was censored. In all matters concerning censorship, the Propaganda Minister had the right of intervention. In the second amendment to the Cinema Law (28 June 1935) Goebbels was given extra powers to ban, without reference to Censorship Office, any film if he felt it was in the public's interest. Not only was the entire censorship apparatus centralised in Berlin but the previous rights of local authorities to request a re-examination of films was now the exclusive prerogative of the RMVP.

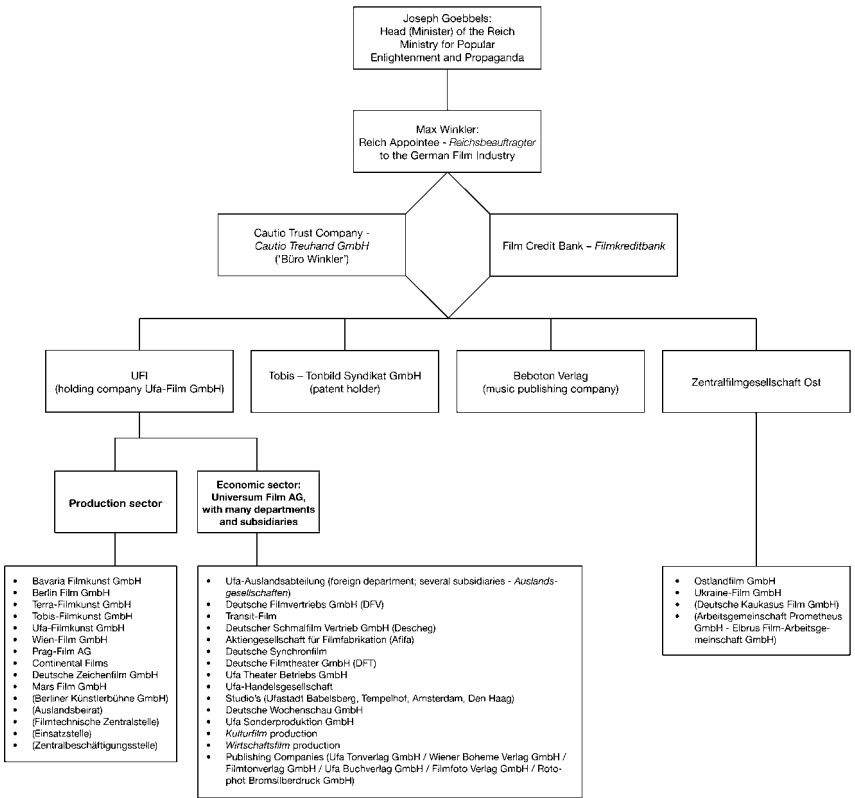
In addition to direct censorship the film industry depended on a system of distinction marks (*Prädikate*), which was really a form of negative taxation. As film allegedly improved, the range of the *Prädikat* system was extended. Before 1933 the distribution of *Prädikate* was an honour and an opportunity to gain, according to the degree of the distinction mark, tax reductions, but now every film had to obtain a *Prädikat* not only to benefit from tax reductions but to be allowed to be exhibited at all. Films without these distinction marks needed special permission to be shown. A further incentive was that producers with a *Prädikat* now received an extra share of the film's profits. By 1939 the law provided for the following distinction marks:<sup>11</sup> Instructional (1920); National education (1924); Politically and artistically especially valuable (awarded from 1933); Politically especially valuable (1933); Artistically especially valuable (1933); Politically valuable (1933); Artistically valuable (1933); Culturally valuable (1933); Valuable for youth (1938); Nationally valuable (1939); and Film of the Nation (1939).

The highest distinction marks meant that the entire programme would be exempt from entertainment tax while the lower *Prädikate* reduced the tax proportionate to their value. The system not only produced certain financial advantages but also helped to establish the appropriate expectations and responses on the part of cinema audiences. 'Politically valuable' was clearly a film which completely reflected the aims of the NSDAP. This title was given not only to documentaries like *Triumph of the Will* (*Triumph des Willens*, 1935) but also to feature films with a political message such as the euthanasia production *I Accuse* (*Ich klage an*, 1941). The combination of 'politically and artistically especially valuable' signified a special quality and credibility. The distinction marks 'artistically valuable' were understood in the sense of cultural propaganda and were given only to prestige films and those reserved for export.

Under the pretence of discarding all the old hypocrisies surrounding the film industry, the Cinema Law assumed powers which in fact only served



Main state and party organisations controlling the German film industry (state of affairs since 1942). Subordinate offices are placed in square brackets when they occur twice, in round brackets when they occur only once. *Source:* Albrecht (1969), p. 34; Petley (1979), p. 97.



Structure of the German film industry (state of affairs from early February 1942). *Source:* Spiker (1975), p. 226; Petley (1979), p. 83; Barch R 109/1483.

to create the formation of a film monopoly controlled by the Party and the State. The result was the adjusting of cinema terminology to fit the ideas of National Socialism, in terms of both the language used in Nazi films and the phrasing of the Cinema Law which was kept as ambiguous as possible so that it could be applied according to the wishes of the moment and the official viewpoint. The producer was informed of the current aims of the government by having his particular film project checked by both the Film Credit Bank and the Reich Film Director. A film was often passed by the Censorship Office only one or two days before its premiere.<sup>12</sup> This suggests that within a short period of time legal censorship became a mere formality, the real censorship being done elsewhere at an earlier stage in the process of the film's production.

When discussing the implementation of the Nazi Cinema Law it is important to consider the attempts to control film criticism at this time.

On 13 May 1936, Goebbels issued a proclamation that banned the writing of critical reviews on the same evening as the performance (*Nachtkritik*). In November of the same year, the RMVP banned all art criticism by confining critics to writing merely 'descriptive' reviews.<sup>13</sup> In practice film criticism came more and more to resemble publicity material associated with any film company attempting to promote a new product. A film deemed important by the RMVP would be introduced to the film public before its première by progress reports on its production. The first performance would be accompanied by an extravagant illustrated report and then, perhaps one or two days later, by a favourable analysis which would place the film within its political context. Thus with slogans following the propaganda principle of repetition, the press introduced the public to the films, explained them, and fitted the events of the film into the topical context. Even for a patently bad film a positive review had to be found and 'politically valuable' films were praised on principle. The press were guided in the formation of definitions and the use of language by directives from the RMVP, enabling it to present a common approach in its film reviews. In spite of all these regulations, some differences could still be found. A newspaper such as the *Frankfurter Zeitung* would (until it was pulled out of publication in 1943) continue publishing reviews that (under the given circumstance) were quite opinionated.<sup>14</sup> Publications that were produced by and for specific sections of the Nazi apparatus, such as the *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* (published by the NSDAP) or *Das Schwarze Korps* (published by the SS), disregarded Goebbels' regulations and were sometimes very explicit in their judgement of specific films, actors etc.

It should, in spite of the variety of measures described above, however not be assumed that all films produced under the aegis of the RMVP were overtly propagandistic. An analysis of the different types of film made during the Third Reich reveals a good deal about Goebbels' *Filmpolitik*. Of the 1097 feature films produced between 1933 and 1945 only 229 (about one-fifth) were, according to assessments of the regime,<sup>15</sup> overtly propagandistic with a direct political content. Less than half of these films (96 out of 229) were 'state-commissioned films' (*Staatsauftragsfilme*), which included the most important films from a political standpoint and were given disproportionate funding and publicity. Of the entire production of feature films, virtually 50 per cent were either love stories or comedies, and 25 per cent dramatic films, such as crime thrillers or musicals.<sup>16</sup> Regardless of the genre, all of these films went through the pre-censorship process and all were associated with the National-Socialist ideology in that they were produced and performed in accordance with the propagandistic aims of the period. From the breakdown of films made, it can be seen that there was no clearly formulated policy regarding the percentage of films that were to be allocated to each particular genre. However, it is discernible that as the war dragged on – particularly after Stalingrad, when disillusionment set in – the number of





Foto: Adolf G. Hoffmann



Foto: Witz



Reich Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels and some of his closest collaborators in the field of cinema. From left to right: Leopold Gutterer, State Secretary in the RMVP (1941–44) and chair of the Ufa and Ufi board; Max Winkler, Goebbels's financial genius and Reich Appointee (*Reichsbeauftragter*) for the German film industry; Fritz Hippler, Head of the RMVP's film department since 1939 and *Reichsfilmintendant* from 1939 to 1943; Ludwig Klitzsch, Chairman of Ufa. Source: Unnumbered pages of O. Kriegk, *Der Deutsche Film Im Spiegel Der UFA – 25 Jahre Kampf um Vollendung* (Berlin: Ufa-Buchverlag, 1943).

political films declined, and the Nazi cinema served increasingly to facilitate escapism (*Wirklichkeitsflucht*) that would divert people's attention from the war. These figures both reflect the diversification of the film programme and illustrate Goebbels' intentions of mixing entertainment with propaganda.

It should also be mentioned that, in spite of all the efforts to streamline film production, the RMVP failed to condition the actual content of the films, let alone the ways in which audiences interpreted them – if only because the meaning of a film can be interpreted in so many ways.<sup>17</sup> The ability for people to read or interpret a film with free will, probably explains the (later) huge international success, even in occupied territories, of a film such as *The Great Love* (*Die grosse Liebe*, 1942). The film wanted to bring home the message that German women had to support – and stay faithful to – their beloved ones at the front, to understand that Germany's final victory was more important than their personal happiness. However, this did not prevent foreign cinemagoers brushing aside that pro-militaristic, pro-German discourse, to indulge the melodramatic love story between a famous but lonely singer (Zarah Leander) and her handsome pilot fiancé (Viktor Staal) and to sing along with the Leander songs that would remain popular for several decades to come. Moreover, it has been demonstrated that even well-produced propaganda films failed to exercise long time influence over its audiences.<sup>18</sup> By offering the people escapism and diversity, German films probably helped the Nazi regime to maintain its power. In its entirety, however, the film industry of the Third Reich failed 'to disseminate a coherent political message and to "nazify" German society'.<sup>19</sup>

### **Conditioning film exhibition: Newsreel, *Kulturfilm*, and feature film<sup>20</sup>**

Cinema owners were tied by the regulations mentioned above and had, which was especially true for the larger cinemas in cities, virtually no say in the composure of 'their' film programme. The state-controlled companies decided which film went to what cinema and which productions were to be shown before or after the feature. But that was not the end of it. The RMVP wished not only to control national cinematographic production/distribution, but also to condition circumstances under which audiences (Aryan audiences, as Jews were not allowed) viewed films. In 1934, the RMVP obliged all cinemas to include a non-fiction short, known as the *Kulturfilm*, in the supporting programme of each feature film. In November 1938, the screening of a newsreel was also made obligatory. This way the ministry established a compulsory 'cinematic trinity' of newsreel, *Kulturfilm* and feature film that was often – but not always and everywhere – shown in that order. When, in subsequent years, Nazi Germany conquered many European countries, allowing the Propaganda Ministry to 'reorganise' local film industries and orientate them towards Berlin, most occupied territories



were forced to adopt this three-pronged cinema programme. While German cinemas already often showed such programmes before it became obligatory, the system was new to many foreign cinemas that used to have a 'double bill' of two feature films, sometimes headed by a newsreel. The advantage of this film programme was twofold: it diminished the need for feature films (a need the German industry could not fulfil without imports) and it increased the propagandistic potential of film screenings. Indeed, 'propaganda and enlightenment' were often a stronger presence in the *Kulturfilm* and (particularly) in the newsreel than in the feature.

The notion of *Kulturfilm* is specifically German and to be preferred over the English translation ('cultural short') for *Kulturfilme* did not only treat cultural subjects. Hilmar Hoffmann described their thematic variety as follows:

From the cellular division of an amoeba to an artistic giant such as Michelangelo, the *Kulturfilm* deals with everything that is being investigated by biology and medicine, by research and technology, art and literature, ethnology and geography and incorporates it all into a more elevated way of looking at the world that is peculiar to this genre.<sup>21</sup>

Although the educational component was crucial, it was not unique to the genre. In other words: every *Kulturfilm* was at some level educational, but not every educational short was a *Kulturfilm*. Long before the Nazi takeover, Ufa and many other enterprises produced *Kulturfilme*. Since their educational component was widely known and accepted, it was manifestly logical that Nazi propagandists show an interest in the *Kulturfilm*. Nevertheless, Nazi's ascension to power did not result in a real break in *Kulturfilm* production. It is true that everyone involved in the *Kulturfilm* sector was subject to the Reich Film Chamber and was therefore controlled by the Propaganda Ministry. It is also true that some professionals produced propagandist *Kulturfilme*, which had been specifically commissioned by the party or the state. The fact that a number of *Kulturfilme* were deployed for propaganda purposes should, nevertheless, not be interpreted as a goal-oriented direction of the entire *Kulturfilm* production. A first attempt to centralise the sector was only made around March 1939, when preparation for war required a halt to an uncoordinated accumulation of similar *Kulturfilm* projects. This led to the creation of the German *Kulturfilm* Centre that was officially established in August 1940. The setting up of the German *Kulturfilm* Centre (*Deutsche Kulturfilmzentrale*) served a political as well as an economic purpose because it facilitated the production of propagandist *Kulturfilme* while assuring the production of a sufficient number of *Kulturfilme* during the war years. In February 1942, the duties of the German *Kulturfilm* Centre were transferred to another service but remained controlled by the Propaganda Ministry.

Although their efficacy in terms of real influence on public opinion has often been exaggerated, newsreels were undoubtedly an important Third

Reich propaganda medium, especially during the war years. Soon after its foundation, the Propaganda Ministry created a department that facilitated the work of newsreel cameramen and suggested topics that could/should be covered. In 1935, the RMVP increased its influence on German newsreel production by establishing a German Film News Office (*Deutsches Film-Nachrichtenbüro*, 1935). By that time, the number of different newsreels distributed in German cinemas was, taking into account the size of Germany, surprisingly low. This can mainly be attributed to the expansionist politics of Ufa owner Alfred Hugenberg, under whose guidance several smaller newsreels had been taken over and absorbed by Ufa. There were only four different newsreels, two of which were produced and distributed by Ufa: the *Ufa-Tonwoche* and *Deulig-Tonwoche*. The other two newsreels were the *Tobis-Woche* and the *Fox-Tönende-Wochenschau*, respectively produced/distributed by Tobis firm and by the German branch of the American Fox company. In 1938, the German Film News Office transferred its tasks of controlling newsreel editorial offices and censoring the final results to another service within the ministry, the so-called German Newsreel Bureau (*Deutsche Wochenschauzentrale*). As responsibilities for newsreels were transferred from one ministerial department to another, they increased slightly. Until the war broke out, the above-mentioned ministerial services successively controlled the four existing newsreels to an increasing extent but nevertheless allowed their separate editorial offices to co-exist. Replacing all of them with a single department would certainly have facilitated the Propaganda Ministry's tasks but it would also have highlighted the ministry's role. The full reason for Goebbels' reluctance to nationalise and monopolise the German newsreels is to be found here, in his clear preference to conceal propaganda mechanisms. As the Wehrmacht made its final preparations to invade Poland, the Propaganda Ministry nevertheless realised that to control newsreel coverage of the campaign it would have to combine the different editorial offices. From September 1939 onwards, coinciding exactly with the German invasion, the *Ufa-Tonwoche*, *Deulig-Tonwoche*, *Tobis-Woche*, and *Fox-Tönende-Wochenschau* were merged into a single war newsreel. They kept their respective opening titles until June 1940. After that the merger was made public by the use of a single new opening title: *Die Deutsche Wochenschau* (DW) or the German Weekly Newsreel. As the Propaganda Ministry's newsreel centre transformed from a powerful watchdog into a proper newsreel editorial office, Goebbels considered subcontracting it to a separate organisation. These plans were finalised with the foundation of the German Newsreel Company (*Deutsche Wochenschau GmbH*), officially set up on 21 November 1940. Although legally speaking, a subsidiary of the (in the meantime state-owned) Ufa film company, all of its employees were directly subordinate to the Propaganda Ministry. The German Newsreel Company also produced a foreign weekly newsreel, or *Auslandstonwoche* (ATW). The ATW was not just a foreign version of the DW, but a fully fledged newsreel in its own right, a continuation of

the newsreels Ufa had exported since 1927. From late 1940 onwards, foreign editorial boards making local versions of the ATW were established all over Europe, in occupied as well as in neutral territories. In Germany as in many occupied regions these Nazi newsreels were compulsory before each film screening, which made them accessible to a wide audience.<sup>22</sup>

### **Enlarging the German film market and nationalising the German film industry<sup>23</sup>**

In 1934, an NSDAP handbook claimed that German films should continue to sell extremely well in international markets. It calculated that foreign sales would take an upward turn and that the industry should be striving to achieve 40 per cent of its total income from the sale of German films abroad.<sup>24</sup> But in 1934–35, instead of rising, German film exports went into an alarming decline, accounting for only 8 per cent of the industries' income and in 1938–39 this figure dropped to 7 per cent.<sup>25</sup> A number of reasons accounted for this catastrophic state, the most important being the growing political hostility towards Germany. The film industry found itself in a difficult position; on the one hand the government wanted to reduce film imports, but because of foreign countries' quota systems, this made exporting difficult. Moreover, many foreign Jewish distributors simply refused to accept German films. The situation was further complicated by the Censorship Office, which tended to object to foreign films on ideological and racial grounds. The result was that within a short time, foreign distributors gave up trying to exhibit their films in Germany. This led German artists with an international reputation to leave the country and German films became even more parochial and nationalistic.

The decline in exports would not have been so alarming had it not been accompanied by a sharp increase in production costs in 1935–36. In the same year the President of the Reich Film Chamber (Dr Fritz Scheuermann) warned Goebbels that production expenditure had increased by 50 per cent since 1933. Two years later, the Film Chamber Yearbook (*Jahrbuch der Reichsfilmkammer*) was gloomily reporting that costs had risen by 35 per cent since the previous year. As far as the RMVP was concerned, this situation called for state intervention. There were a number of options open to Goebbels, he could either support the independent film-makers or he could increase the government's hold over the large production companies. In choosing the latter, the gradual nationalisation of the film industry, the concentration of film as a propaganda medium was carried out with great care. The task of clearing up the economic problems of the nationalisation and disguising them was given to a private company.

Goebbels' agent in these transactions and later Reich Delegate to the German film industry was Max Winkler, who had been active as a trustee on behalf of successive German governments since 1919.<sup>26</sup> By disguising the real

nature of the transactions, Goebbels was able to claim that the government takeover had been motivated by purely artistic and not commercial reasons. Winkler, in fact, had convinced Goebbels that the best way of achieving the ideologically committed films that he had been demanding was not to force the film industry to become National-Socialists but instead to guarantee them financial stability.

In 1936, the shaky financial position of the two major film companies, Ufa and Tobis (*Tonbild-Syndikat AG*, a German company owned by international investors and dominated by Dutch shareholders<sup>27</sup>), gave the RMVP the opportunity they had been seeking. Winkler's method of control was to establish a trust company, *Cautio Treuhand GmbH*, which was to act as a majority shareholder and would administer the assets of the various companies. The preparations for the state monopoly took place in almost complete secrecy. The takeover of these firms was achieved by the purchase of the majority of the shares and the transactions were always carried out as separate dealings. The film press scarcely commented on them, or, if so, only briefly. Thus the process of nationalisation went completely unnoticed. *Cautio* simply bought out ailing companies and administered them for the State as trustee. Interestingly enough, they were referred to as *staatsmittelbar* (indirectly state-controlled), rather than state owned.

Ufa, which itself had swallowed many smaller companies in the 1930s, was the first company to be acquired in March 1937. Two months later, Winkler decided that Tobis should be broken up. In August of that year, Terra Film AG (an Ufa subsidiary of Swiss origin<sup>28</sup>) was amalgamated with one of Tobis' distribution companies (Tobis Rota) to form a new production company, *Terrakunst GmbH*. Four months later, in December, the original Tobis was transformed and given the new title, *Tobis Filmkunst GmbH*.<sup>29</sup> The most pressing problem at this stage, however, was how to finance these *staatsmittelbar* companies. If nationalisation was to be effective, Winkler appreciated that a radical reorganisation of film finance was needed. This came in the form of a new company called *Film Finanz GmbH*. Film credit was determined by a supervisory board consisting of representatives of the RMVP, the Reich Finance Ministry, the Reich Credit Company, *Cautio*, and the *staatsmittelbar* companies. The first meeting was held in November 1937 and RM 22 million was allocated (RM 10 million to Tobis and RM 6 million each to Ufa and Terra).<sup>30</sup>

Shortly afterwards, *Cautio* purchased the holding of Bavaria Film AG and on 11 February 1938 it became known as *Bavaria Filmkunst GmbH*. It was during this time that Goebbels announced that a National Film School, the *Deutsche Filmakademie*, would be entrusted with the task of training new technicians and artists in the service of the National Socialist State.<sup>31</sup> There were 23 different courses, including scenario writing, direction, set and



ZARAH LEANDER



*Marika Röck*



*Kristina Söderbaum* 1938  
*Kristina Söderbaum*



*gewilligtes*  
*Heinz Rühmann*

Some of the greatest stars of Third Reich cinema. From left to right: Zarah Leander; Marika Röck; Kristina Söderbaum; Heinz Rühmann. Source: Vande Winkel/De Paep Collection.

costume design, photography, sound recording, acting, even distribution, house management, and laboratory work. The new German cinema, it was claimed, now rivalled Hollywood in terms both of scope and resources. While this was an exaggeration, it is true that when war came in 1939, the German cinema had attained an expertise and technical mastery that was unequalled on the European continent.

Winkler, meanwhile, had not finished the process of state intervention. In 1938 the *Anschluss* (annexation) of Austria provided further opportunities. Because of a common language and culture the Austrian film industry had always had close ties with Germany. On 16 December 1938, the whole industry amalgamated to form a new *staatsmittelbar* company, *Wien Film GmbH*, which immediately came under the jurisdiction of Winkler's *Cautio*.<sup>32</sup> Later a similar reorganisation was carried out in Czechoslovakia with the formation of the *Prag-Film AG*.<sup>33</sup>

By 1939, all the major film companies were *staatsmittelbar*. Not surprisingly they quickly dominated film output. In 1939, they accounted for 60 per cent of all feature film production; in 1941, this figure had risen to 70 per cent. The aim behind this reorganisation was to rationalise film-making so that it could respond quickly and efficiently to the demands of the RMVP; in practice this meant simplifying the financing of films and maintaining a strict control over the content of feature films. *Staatsmittelbar* film companies were not intended to compete with each other but to cooperate in producing quality films that would represent the intrinsic values of National Socialism both at home and abroad.

The outbreak of war in September 1939 created initial problems for the film industry in that shortages of labour and raw materials tended to increase production costs. Another factor which increased costs still further was the disruptive effect of tighter censorship during the making of films. Another cost-inducing factor were the rocketing salaries of popular movie stars, who could play production firms (although all important companies were state-owned) off against each other and were given huge wages and all kinds of benefits. However, there emerged as a result of the war important developments that were hoped to offset these difficulties. First, the military conquests of 1939–40 had created a German-dominated film monopoly in Europe. At the end of 1939 German distributors were in the fortunate position of having 8300 cinemas at their disposal.<sup>34</sup> This number increased in 1940–41, as the Wehrmacht conquered territory in Western and Eastern Europe. Several measures, notably the enforced closure of American film distributors (outside the Reich, in occupied territory, American films were outlawed in August 1940; within the Reich the measure was announced around the same time, but only implemented in early 1941) further expanded the market for German films. This also allowed for the exploitation of films that had not been authorised for screenings in Germany. All over

Europe, Ufa and Tobis either established new distribution branches – such as the *Film-und Propagandavermittel-Vertriebsgesellschaft GmbH* (FIP) in Poland – or were able to strengthen the market position of already existing subsidiaries (for instance the Belgian branch of the *Alliance Cinématographique Européenne* (ACE), which in the summer of 1941 was turned into *Ufa-Films SPRL Brüssel* or Ufa Brussels).<sup>35</sup>

Sometimes new production centres (which often incorporated existing local companies) were established as well: *Wien-Film* in Austria,<sup>36</sup> *Prag-Film* (above) in Czechoslovakia,<sup>37</sup> *Continental Films* in France,<sup>38</sup> and the *Zentralfilmgesellschaft Ost* and its subsidiaries (*Ostland Filmgesellschaft* and *Ukraine-Filmgesellschaft*) in Poland and the occupied zones of the Soviet-Union.<sup>39</sup> In other countries too, the Netherlands<sup>40</sup> for instance, local studio facilities were primarily used to produce German (instead of local) films. Studio facilities of ‘befriended’ states were also used: such as Cinecittà in Italy and Hunnia in Hungary. Meantime, Max Winkler’s *Cautio* openly or secretly acquired foreign theatres (preferably prestigious film palaces that attracted large audiences) in order to recuperate more ticket office revenues. Such tasks were usually carried out by plenipotentiaries such as Alfred Greven.

### Creating the UFI trust<sup>41</sup>

This unprecedented growth also created problems for the German film industry. The major problem at this stage, in spite of the establishment of new production centres, was the supply of films. Winkler was particularly concerned that if Germany was to exploit her position in Europe the industry should be producing at least 100 feature films per year. However, during 1941 it became increasingly clear that the target of 100 films was not going to be reached. The only solution seemed to lay in a complete take-over by the state.

On 10 January 1942, a giant holding company, *Ufa-Film GmbH* (called Ufi to distinguish it from its predecessors), assumed control of the entire German film industry and its foreign subsidiaries. As an umbrella organisation, Ufi was entirely controlled by the Propaganda Ministry and by *Cautio*. Ufi consisted of production firms (*Ufa-Filmkunst*, *Bavaria-Filmkunst*, *Tobis-Filmkunst*, *Terra-Filmkunst*, *Prag-Film*, *Wien-Film*, *Berlin-Film*, *Deutsche Zeichenfilm*, *Mars-Film*). This resulted, for instance, in Ufa subsidiaries all over Europe incorporating local branches of Tobis. The Ufi umbrella organisation would not only facilitate a much closer supervision of the industry’s economic and political development but from Goebbels’ point of view it would also protect the film industry from the financial demands of the Finance Ministry who were causing him considerable anxiety.

Ufi had a capital of RM 65 million, which was initially held by *Cautio* and represented the entire assets of the *staatsmittelbar* firms. Although they

remained largely unchanged, they were now referred to as 'state-owned' (*staatseigen*). To facilitate the purchasing of film theatres throughout Greater Germany a single company, the *Deutsche Filmtheater GmbH*, was set up with the intention of regulating the profits from exhibition. Similarly, in order to keep distribution costs to a minimum, the *Deutsche Filmvertriebs-GmbH* was formed; although a centralised, non-profit-making distribution organisation, it is significant that all films were still distributed under their old production companies' names. This served to retain a link with the past and also to disguise the State's monopoly.

Finally on 29 February 1942, Goebbels announced to an audience of film-makers a new body within the Ufi called the *Reichsfilmintendanz*. It would be headed by Dr Fritz Hippler who was already in charge of the Film Section of the RMVP and was the director of the virulent anti-Semitic film *The Wandering/Eternal Jew (Der ewige Jude, 1940)*.<sup>42</sup> The *Reichsfilmintendanz* was to concentrate on matters of film 'art' allowing the RMVP to dictate the political affairs of the industry. In practice there was no duplication of labour in that Goebbels was overlord of both bodies and therefore the *Reichsfilmintendant* (Head of the *Reichsfilmintendanz*) was directly subordinate to him. Theoretically, the *Reichsfilmintendant* could also be competing with the Reich Film Director (*Reichsfilmdramaturg*). In reality, that post seems to have disappeared by the time the office or *Reichsfilmintendanz* was created.<sup>43</sup> The office of *Reichsfilmintendant* was held by Hippler until June 1943, when the latter fell out of grace and, in April 1944, was replaced by Hans Hinkel.<sup>44</sup> As all of this demonstrates, that because Goebbels took the most important decisions and created various posts, he did not need every post to be filled permanently.

The Propaganda Minister's weaponry was now complete. Ufi had taken over the responsibilities of the Cautio with Winkler once again in charge. The Nazi film industry would remain virtually unchanged for the rest of its existence. Every aspect of film-making, from the selection of subject-matter to production distribution and eventually exhibition, was now the immediate responsibility of Ufi. The Reich Film Chamber had become merely a bureaucratic administrative machine and Ufi, thanks to its vertical organisation, was a mere receiver of orders from the RMVP. This represented an enormous concentration of a mass medium in the hands of the National-Socialist State and more specifically, the Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda.

The nationalisation of the German film industry put an end to the incredible rise in production costs and allowed for film production without annual state interventions (Ufi recorded net profits in 1941/42 and in 1943/44) but the production target of 100 films a year was never achieved. This can be explained partially by the production of too many state-commissioned films, with big budgets and few time constraints. But the most important factor is probably to be found in the production of individual



films, which were slowed down by numerous state interventions and bureaucratic requirements. Also, a considerable number of films were never completed and/or never released, because the people involved, the setting or the events depicted, became considered undesirable.<sup>45</sup>

### Downfall

In March 1943, a huge gala was organised to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Ufa. To lend lustre to the occasion, the company released a new colour film with state-of-the-art special effects (*Münchhausen*, 1943). The festivities also led to the organisation of an exhibition on Ufa's history, which travelled Germany and foreign countries, and to the publication of a commemorative book.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, there was, from a German viewpoint, no real reason to celebrate in the spring of 1943. The German defeat in Stalingrad (January–February 1943) had shown that the Soviet Union was not on its knees, but ready to drive the German forces back. Meanwhile, the German troops (and their Italian allies) were retreating from Africa, where they would in May 1943 (in what the German population soon after ironically referred to as 'Tunisgrad' – to draw a parallel with Stalingrad) capitulate in Tunisia.

The German film industry, spearheaded by Ufa, had conquered the European film markets thanks to the successes of the Wehrmacht, so it was only logical that it would lose those areas again as the German troops were 'shortening the frontline', a euphemism used by Nazi propagandists to avoid the term 'retreat'. In 1944–45, the film industry was not only losing its foreign markets (and production centres) and hindered by the military draft of film personnel and the shortage of raw film stock, but above all troubled by the bombing of German cities, which led to the destruction or closure of many cinemas. In Berlin alone, between June 1943 and June 1944, 174 cinemas were repaired or in the process of being repaired.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, Goebbels and his collaborators kept developing film projects and invested, in the final stage of the war, an incredible amount of money and men in Veit Harlan's *Kolberg* (1945), a film that was supposed to teach the German population that it was better to die than to surrender. The film had its premiere on 30 January 1945, but was only seen by a very limited audience.

When Germany capitulated (shortly after Hitler and Goebbels had killed themselves) in May 1945, nearly 100 film projects of the Ufa trust had been halted. Some films were finished, but had not been premiered for practical or for political reasons. Some of these (the 'innocent' ones) were released after the war, others were forbidden by the new authorities too. Some of the unfinished projects were never completed, but many others were finished after the war, either in Austria or in Germany.<sup>48</sup> The best known is probably Leni Riefenstahl's *Tiefeland*, filming for which had begun in 1940 and which was released in 1954. Another famous example is *Life goes on* (*Das Leben geht weiter*), Wolfgang Liebeneiner's contemporary film on life in wartime Berlin, scheduled for release in June 1945 and never finished.<sup>49</sup>

In the 21st century, the film legacy of the ‘Third Reich’ is almost entirely handled by Transit, a company established in 1966 and entirely owned by the Federal Republic of Germany. As this company and its partner, the Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau Stiftung, show little interest in producing scholarly editions of key films produced in Nazi Germany, film-historians and media scholars are unfortunately forced to buy illegal copies, that are in low quality but in high demand.

## Notes

1. D. Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933–45* (London: IB Tauris, 2001 rev.), pp. 5–8; T. Hanna-Daoud, *Die NSDAP und der Film bis zur Machtergreifung* (Köln–Weimar–Wien: Böhlau, 1996).
2. K. Kreimeier, *Die UFA-Story. Geschichte eines Filmkonzerns* (München: Wilhelm Heyne Verlag, 1992).
3. D. Welch (2001 rev.), pp. 10–18; W. Becker, *Film und Herrschaft. Organisationsprinzipien und Organisationsstrukturen der nationalsozialistischen Filmpropaganda* (Berlin: Verlag Volker Spiess, 1973); J. Spiker, *Film und Kapital* (Berlin: Verlag Volker Spiess, 1975).
4. *Gleichschaltung* was the term employed by the Nazis which loosely referred to the obligatory assimilation within the state of all political, economic, and cultural activities.
5. NSBO had to share DACHO with Alfred Rosenberg’s KfDK.
6. The decree is reproduced J. Wulf, *Theater und Film im Dritten Reich* (Gütersloh: Sigbert Mohn Verlag, 1964), p. 94.
7. See, for instance, Chapter 23.
8. Bundesarchiv (Barch), R55/484, *Akten des Reichsministeriums für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda, Filmkreditbankbilanz*, 1943.
9. G. Albrecht, *Nationalsozialistische Filmpolitik. Eine soziologische Untersuchung über die Spielfilme des Dritten Reiches* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke Verlag, 1969), pp. 208–9. In fact a number of ‘half Jews’ and ‘quarter Jews’ did remain in the Reich Film Chamber.
10. D. Welch (2001 rev.), pp. 10–18; Becker (1973); Spiker (1975).
11. The dates refer to the year when the *Prädikate* were first awarded.
12. K.-J. Maiwald, *Filmzensur im NS-Staat* (Dortmund: Nowotny, 1983); W. Moritz, ‘Filmzensur während der Nazi-Zeit’, in S. Barron (ed.), *Entartete Kunst: das Schicksal der Avantgarde im Nazi-Deutschland* (München: Hirmer Verlag, 1992), pp. 185–91.
13. The decree was issued on 27 November and is reproduced in Wulf (1964), pp. 119–20.
14. S. Tegel, *Nazis and the Cinema* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 44.
15. G. Albrecht (1969); Welch (2001 rev.).
16. A full breakdown of the different genres can be found in Welch (2001 rev.), p. 36.
17. This goes for other cultural products too. ‘In contrast to what the Nazis envisioned, it was impossible to streamline popular culture; instead a strange parallelism permeated the popular, allowing a number of non-simultaneous discourses to exist.’ A. Ascheid, *Hitler’s Heroines: Stardom and Womanhood in Nazi Cinema* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), p. 7.
18. D. Welch (2001 rev.).

19. J. Bruns, *Nazi Cinema's New Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. i.
20. D. Welch, 'Nazi Wartime Newsreel Propaganda', in K. R. M. Short (ed.), *Film & Radio Propaganda in World War II* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1983), pp. 202–19; R. Vande Winkel, 'Nazi Newsreels in Europe, 1939–1945: The Many Faces of Ufa's Foreign Weekly Newsreel (Auslandstonwoche) versus the German Weekly Newsreel (Deutsche Wochenschau)', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 24:1 (2004), pp. 5–34; P. Zimmermann and K. Hoffmann (eds), *Geschichte des dokumentarischen Films in Deutschland. Band 3: 'Drittes Reich' (1933–1945)* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 2005).
21. H. Hoffmann, *'Und die Fahne führt uns in die Ewigkeit.' Propaganda im NS-Film* (Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag, 1991).
22. For an analysis of some of these newsreels see, D. Welch, 'Goebbels, Götterdämmerung and the Deutsche Wochenschauen', in K. R. M. Short and S. Dolezel (eds), *Hitler's Fall. The Newsreel Witness* (London, New York, Sydney: Croom Helm, 1988), pp. 88–99.
23. D. Welch (2001 rev.), pp. 23–9; M. S. Phillips, 'The Nazi Control of the German Film Industry', *Journal of European Studies*, 1(1) (1971), pp. 37–68; Spiker (1975), pp. 182–239.
24. W. Plugge, 'Wesen und Aufgaben des Films und der Reichsfilmkammer', in E. A. Dreyer (ed.), *Deutsche Kultur im neuen Reich. Wesen, Aufgabe und Ziel der Reichsfilmkammer* (Berlin: Schlieffen-Verlag, 1934), p. 123.
25. Barch, R2/4799, *Akten des Reichsfinanzministeriums*.
26. M. Behn and M. Töteberg, 'Diskrete Transaktionen: Bürgermeister Winkler und die Cautio; Die graue Eminenz: Bürgermeister Max Winkler', in H.-M. Bock and M. Töteberg (eds), *Das UFA-Buch* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1992), pp. 389–91.
27. K. Dibbets, 'Tobis, Made in Holland', in J. Distelmeyer (ed.), *Tonfilmfrieden/Tonfilmkrieg: Die Geschichte der Tobis vom Technik-Syndikat zum Staatskonzern* (München: Edition text + kritik, 2003), pp. 25–33.
28. T. Kramer and D. Siegrist, *Terra. Ein Schweizer Filmkonzern im Dritten Reich* (Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 1991).
29. Details taken from Barch, R109 1/431, *Akten derUfa-Film GmbH*.
30. Barch, R2/4807.
31. The decree is dated 18 March 1938. It is reproduced in Wulf (1964), p. 302. See also H. Traub, *Die Ufa-Lehrschau: Der Weg des Films von der Planung bis zum Vorführung* (Berlin: Ufa-Buchverlag, 1941).
32. See Chapter 4.
33. See Chapter 8.
34. Barch, R2/4799.
35. See Chapter 5.
36. See Chapter 4; Spiker (1975), pp. 183–6.
37. See Chapter 8; Spiker (1975), pp. 187–9.
38. See Chapter 9.
39. Spiker (1975), pp. 190–2; Becker (1973), pp. 216–17.
40. See Chapter 15.
41. D. Welch (2001 rev.), pp. 23–9; Spiker (1975), pp. 182–239. J. Petley, *Capital and culture: German Cinema 1933–1945* (London: British Film Institute, 1979), pp. 81–94.

42. R. Vande Winkel, 'Nazi Germany's Fritz Hippler (1909–2002)', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 23:2 (2003), pp. 91–9.
43. The function was given to Willi Krause in 1934, transferred to Jürgen Nierentz in 1936 (when Krause started directing, under the pseudonym of Peter Hagen) and in 1937 awarded to Ewald von Demandowsky. When von Demandowsky became head of production at Tobis in 1939, he was replaced by Carl-Dietrich von Reichmeister and Kurt Frowein. His real powers of decision were probably unofficially taken over by Fritz Hippler. See F. Moeller, *The Film Minister: Goebbels and the Cinema in the 'Third Reich'* (Stuttgart, London: Edition Axel Menges, 2000), pp. 51–3; I. Buchloch, *Veit Harlan. Goebbels' Starregisseur* (Paderborn – München – Wien – Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2010), p. 276.
44. Moeller (2000), pp. 54–56.
45. K. Wetzel, K. and P. Hagemann, *Zensur – Verbotene deutsche Filme 1933–1945* (Berlin: Volker Spiess Verlag, 1978).
46. H. Traub, *Die Ufa. Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des deutschen Filmschaffens* (Berlin: Ufa-Buchverlag, 1973).
47. N. Reeves, *The Power of Film Propaganda: Myth or Reality?* (London, New York: Cassell, 1999) pp. 101–2.
48. The interesting story of Goebbels' 'film legacy' can be found in H. Theuerkauf, *Goebbels' Filmerbe. Das Geschäft mit den unveröffentlichten Ufa-Filmen* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1998).
49. C. Blumenberg, *Das Leben geht weiter* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1993).