1. An Aesthetics of Aggression: German Fascist vs. Classical Hollywood Melodrama

Melodrama, as Linda Williams asserts, is the "fundamental mode of popular American moving pictures."[1] According to this account, almost all Hollywood films can be considered melodramatic, including "male genres" such as Westerns, war films, film noir, and action films. Melodrama, of course, can also be considered the fundamental mode of fascist film. Nazi cinema, like Italian Fascist cinema, tended toward simplification and dualistic perspectives. The Nazi propaganda minister disapproved of film scripts in which conflicts were not clearly and simply drawn. Characters in Third Reich film projects had to represent primary social functions and be immediately legible types rather than complex individuals. Film, according to Goebbels, should not speak to the intellect, and melodrama's concentrated affects were well suited to elaborating clear moral choices and embodying these in characters of limited complexity. One of the telling ways that Goebbels expressed his disapproval of films was to dismiss them as "literature," which implied a deemphasizing of emotional effect in favor of a more ambiguous portrait of character psychology.[2]

Despite the disdain that virtually all fascists displayed toward femininity, the melodrama as a genre was no less privileged in Nazi cinema than it was in Hollywood of the classical era. In both cinemas, films now considered "women's pictures" were often accorded the highest budgets and the greatest recognition by film reviewers and audiences. However, romance and domestic melodramas were not viewed by Nazi filmmakers and party leaders as being primarily for female audiences; the concept of gendered spectatorship, and particularly of gendered genres, was less developed in Germany in the 1930s

and '40s than in the United States at the same time. Consequently, melodramatic affect was not viewed by the Nazis as thoroughly tainted by effeminacy.

This does not mean that their relationship to the genre was entirely nonconflicted. On the one hand, melodrama was granted a privileged status in the Third Reich; on the other, there were constant efforts to contain the risks inherent in melodramatic excess. Goebbels was vigilant about not allowing melodrama to go too far, for fear that the very same narrative and formal devices that produced desirable spectator effects could, when exaggerated, become alienation devices that could interrupt the process of ideological interpellation by making the spectator aware of the workings of the filmic text. Pathos, while necessary, could easily be overdosed. Goebbels felt that the American film melodrama delivered exactly the right dose, while the Italian Fascist melodrama failed to conform to an ideal Nazi aesthetics. The Third Reich melodrama was thus to be largely modeled after Hollywood examples.

However, there were a few significant stylistic distinctions between German melodrama of the period and its American counterpart. Hollywood cinema's greater emphasis on the communicative codes of mise-en-scène, dynamic editing, and camera movement was countered in Nazi cinema with a greater stress on bodily displays and a theatrical acting style that subordinated the intimacy of the face in close-up to the authority of the actor's voice and scripted dialogue. As we will see in a comparative analysis of a characteristic Nazi melodrama, *Der Postmeister* (1940), with the Hollywood film *Anna Karenina* (1935) at the end of this chapter, subtle formal and narrative differences in the Nazi melodrama encouraged a more aggressive form of voyeurism than was common in the Hollywood melodrama, in accordance with the Nazis' recruiting of romance to support imperial expansion in the east. Instead of the masochistic aesthetic of many Hollywood melodramas, therefore, the Nazi melodrama distinguished itself by its formally encoded appeals to spectatorial sadism and by the masculinity of its pathos.

Film Genre, Gender, and Spectatorship in the Third Reich

According to Thomas Schatz, the melodrama, the comedy, and the musical are "genres of integration," and war, action, and crime films are "genres of order."[3] Whereas the latter allows for a violent removal of adversaries or threats to the social system, the former tends toward their reeducation and a more subtle reestablishment of harmony. Surprisingly, perhaps, the Nazis generally found cinematic integration more useful than order—or at least more popular. Overall, the feature film production of the Third Reich was

composed of approximately 76 percent of the first category (genres of integration) and 17 percent of the second (genres of order), and about 30 percent of all films produced in the Third Reich were melodramas.[4] Almost all films of the Third Reich fulfilled some kind of propagandistic or ideological function, but some were more recognizable to contemporary audiences as explicitly political films, and the number of these was (arguably) quite small.[5]

Likewise, there is much evidence that melodramas were not recognized as such at the time. The term "melodrama" was rarely used in the Third Reich; instead, terms like "dramatic fate" or "tragedy" were sometimes employed in descriptions of films in a melodramatic register. However, the avoidance of the term "melodrama" did not so much indicate an inferior status of the mode as an underdeveloped concept of cinematic genres during the Third Reich; the Nazis made extensive use of melodramatic conventions without attempting to theorize a genre taxonomy or hierarchy. In contemporary film reviews, general descriptions were given in the form of plot synopses, but there was usually no attempt to categorize films in generic types. The Reich Film Archive did make use of categories when compiling a catalogue of films from 1933 to 1942, but these were remarkably vague; melodramas were described by terms such as "dramatic narrative film," "serious entertainment film," or "historical narrative film."[6] The lack of genre theory led to an inability to adequately describe differences in narrative type and emotional register among individual films. This suggests that the production of films in the Third Reich followed a somewhat random pattern rather than a carefully planned proportion of films according to intended audience. It was not until after the war that a systematic genre categorization of films from the Third Reich was attempted.[7]

Following postwar classifications, it is evident that the distribution of melodramatic subgenres in the Third Reich differed from classical Hollywood cinema. The maternal melodrama and the family melodrama, both core subgenres for American cinema of the 1930s through the 1950s, were far less significant in terms of production numbers for Nazi cinema than the love story, the subgenre that made up the majority of Third Reich melodramatic production.[8] The *Heimatfilm,* a romance or family melodrama that celebrates rural life, is specific to the German cinema and has no genuine Hollywood equivalent (though it was a less significant subgenre in the Third Reich than in the postwar era of Konrad Adenauer.[9]) Likewise, several Hollywood melodramatic subgenres were missing in the cinema of the Third Reich, and these absences reveal some distinctions between the Nazi uses of melodrama and those of American cinema. The American "medical discourse" melodrama—in which a woman afflicted with physical or mental illness becomes the object of study and the erotic interest of a male doctor who attempts to unravel her

mystery and cure her—was virtually impossible to copy in the Third Reich, since the Nazis had more interest in eliminating than curing the sick; the film that stands perhaps closest to Hollywood melodramas like *Dark Victory* (1939) and *Now, Voyager* (1942) is the notorious euthanasia film *Ich klage an* (*I Accuse,* 1941). The "medical discourse" film, as Mary Ann Doane has outlined it, was a result of the explosion of interest in psychoanalysis in America during the 1940s.[10] No comparable interest in solving the riddles of feminine desire and its repression could be found in Germany at the same time. Freud was banned by the Nazis, and German exiles, who had explored psychoanalysis in Weimar films, took the subject to Hollywood.

There was also no genuine equivalent of gothic melodramas such as *Rebecca* (1940), *Suspicion* (1941), and *Gaslight* (1944) in the cinema of the Third Reich.[11] According to Tania Modleski, such films expressed a paranoid consciousness and spoke to the fantasies of women who suffered from the nuclear family structures that were romanticized in the majority of classical Hollywood features. Modleski connects the renewed popularity of gothic melodramas in 1940s Hollywood to women's wartime experiences, chiefly to a fear of what would happen when men returned from war and reassumed their positions as head (or tyrant) of the household and workplace.[12] In Germany such paranoid visions were rarely so openly expressed. Furthermore, as we will see in the next chapters, the image of the nuclear family was generally less stable in the Reich than in the United States, and there was ultimately less risk that German men would return from the war, particularly after 1942. The absence of the gothic melodrama also coincided with an extreme scarcity of the mode of horror in the cinema of the Third Reich.[13] The Nazis had little tolerance for the uncanny, and even the fantastic was repudiated in favor of an unambiguous classicism. Hitler disapproved of all forms of the gothic as tainted with religiosity; as Goebbels wrote: "The Führer is a man who is completely antiquity-oriented. He hates Christianity . . . What a difference there is between a gloomy cathedral and a bright, free antique temple. He wants clarity, brightness, beauty. That is also the ideal of our time. In this respect, the Führer is a totally modern man."[14] Even the Third Reich film melodrama was expected to convey an impression of transparency, in concert with fascist modernity's revival of the imperial style of antiquity. Accordingly, even melodramas were supposed to conform to Nazi cinema's compulsory optimism and to avoid too much "effeminate" gloom and rumination by stressing the heroic value of sacrifice.

It is a common assumption today that family melodramas and romance films address themselves primarily to female spectators, while crime and action films are "male" genres. The gendering of narrative types has led to a

hierarchy of genres along male/female lines: while the "male" action genre has taken its privileged position as the big-budget blockbuster and is thus the very prototype of postclassical Hollywood cinema, romance films are relegated to a special-interest ghetto. Similarly, the gender divisions and their accompanying quality labels are still in force in popular thinking about classical Hollywood cinema: while film noir has been elevated to the status of art, 1930s and '40s romances remain low-culture kitsch. Scholarship of the last forty years has certainly done much work to rescue melodrama from its earlier critical dismissal as trivial, and the label "woman's film" has become a productive critical category.[15] For most cinemagoers, though, it remains a derogatory designation.

However, this genre hierarchy is a relatively recent invention, as Stephen Neale has shown. According to his study of film reviews in industry journals of the 1930s to 1950s, the classical Hollywood melodrama was by no means considered an inferior form by producers or critics, and the term "melodrama" was not employed in a negative or derogatory sense, as it often is in contemporary film reviews. According to Neale, melodrama was also not identified exclusively or even primarily with female spectators: the prison drama *The Big House* (1930), for example, was called a "virile realist melodrama" by the contemporary reviewer.[16] Even maternal melodramas were not seen as trivial, B-list productions at the time of their original release; rather, films such as *Stella Dallas* (1937) were considered "prestige projects" by their producers.[17]

Similarly, melodrama was not considered a trivial or inferior form in the Third Reich either but was actually privileged in many respects. Indeed, some of the highest production budgets were invested in love stories starring Zarah Leander. As Felix Moeller has pointed out, melodramas had the deepest effect on Goebbels personally.[18] The language Goebbels used to describe his reactions to films suggests that he saw melodramas as producing the most intense and most politically desirable spectator effects. Goebbels often wrote that he was "moved" (*ergriffen*), "swept away" (*mitgerissen*), or "spellbound" (*hingerissen*) by a film, all words that connote a violently imposed emotion, a forcefully "moving" experience that only the melodramatic mode is capable of producing.[19] Likewise, Third Reich film reviewers sometimes praised films by calling them "distressing" (*erschütternd*),[20] and this positive valuing of the experience of shock or distress suggests a sensationalism that is at the heart of melodrama. Although he was not particularly articulate or consistent in his judgments, Goebbels's comments on film suggest that, for him, melodrama also had the highest aesthetic potential. In his March 1933 "Kaiserhof" speech, Goebbels praised the 1927 Greta Garbo melodrama *Anna Karenina* (alternatively titled *Love*) for delivering purely cinematic art and proving that

film is not a debased "surrogate of theater," and he proposed the Hollywood production as a model for Third Reich filmmakers to copy.[21]

The fact that Goebbels was particularly moved by Garbo melodramas proves that, according to his thinking, films with female main protagonists did not preclude male spectator identifications. Like classical Hollywood producers and critics who could describe a film as a "virile melodrama," the Nazis also did not think of melodrama as a form for women only. In fact, there is little evidence that they generally thought of genres as gendered, even if they did feel that male and female spectatorship were somehow different. Some films were certainly planned with female spectators in mind, but they were rarely advertised openly as "women's films." On the contrary, melodramas were marketed to both genders, and some love stories were apparently more warmly received by male than by female viewers. Veit Harlan's *Immensee* (1943) is a well-known example of a romance melodrama that was very popular with male viewers, especially soldiers, although this sentimental tale features a female protagonist caught in a love triangle with two men and it celebrates feminine self-sacrifice. Kristina Söderbaum, the film's star, referred to *Immensee* as a film that "gave male spectators the most," and she added that it appealed to adolescent males in particular.[22] Correspondingly, Astrid Pohl's study on melodrama in the Third Reich has identified a whole subgenre of "men's melodramas."[23] Third Reich crime films, on the other hand, often feature female main protagonists, and the crime film was by no means considered an exclusively male genre as it often was in Hollywood. Even war films were apparently supposed to appeal to female spectators. Battle- and war-related historical films were shown to girls during the compulsory film screenings of the League of German Girls (Bund Deutscher Mädel, or BDM), as well as to boys in the Hitler Youth (Hitlerjugend, or HJ).[24]

In general, Nazi cinema aimed to be universal and to appeal to spectators of both sexes and all regions of the Reich, yet spectators did not always react to films as the propaganda minister intended. The issue of spectator response became even more crucial after 1939, since, as Goebbels said, cinema and the good moods it manufactured were "decisive to the outcome of the war."[25] Starting in October 1939, the Security Service (the Sicherheitsdienst, or SD) of the Schutzstaffel (SS) provided Goebbels and other leaders with reports on the opinions and morale of the civilian populace. Many of the spies were placed in cinema seats; an important section of these reports concerned reactions to newsreel and feature films. The SD noted the differing reactions of men and women as well as regional variances in responses. Based on these reports, Goebbels recognized that the reception of films was not uniform and that spectator response could not be entirely planned, but this fact often

took him by surprise. As late as 1942, for example, he noted in regard to an SD report: "I get word from various cities that the film *Die Entlassung* [*The Dismissal,* 1942] is not enjoying the sort of success in certain sectors of the population that we expected from it. It is a typical men's film, and because it doesn't represent any real women's conflicts, it is generally being rejected by women . . . when one measures it by a higher standard, it doesn't seem to completely fulfill the hopes that we initially had for it."[26] Although Goebbels does speak here about "men's film," suggesting some awareness of gender differences in spectatorship, he also reveals his previous expectation that one film could successfully speak to all viewers. His comments furthermore reveal his somewhat limited grasp on audience film preferences. The leaders of the Nazi regime were clearly preoccupied with the effectiveness of their propaganda efforts, but there was little empirical audience research conducted during the Third Reich, in contrast to the United States. Hollywood studio heads were regularly informed about audience opinions through Gallup polls and preview screening interviews, and they would alter films accordingly. Because of the general Nazi hostility toward "democratic" methods of opinion polling, the SD reports were more anecdotal than systematic.[27]

Consequently, few reliable statistics exist on the percentage of female spectators in Third Reich cinema audiences, and information about their preferences is sparse. One survey was conducted in 1944 in an attempt to discover which films were preferred by young German audiences, and included responses by 1,260 girls and 686 boys who were members of the BDM and HJ. The survey's author, A. U. [Anneliese Ursula] Sander, listed the film titles most popular among the youth in aggregate and did not distinguish between titles preferred by girls and those favored by boys. She did, however, find that girls under eighteen went to the cinema far less frequently than boys: while only 14 percent of girls went to the cinema regularly (fifty times per year or more), 38 percent of boys went an average of once per week.[28] After age eighteen, Sander added, girls began to go to the cinema more frequently. Sander's study says little about female viewing preferences in general, but it does suggest that the notion of a widespread feminine *Kinosucht* (cinema addiction), which had given high culture proponents so much concern during the Wilhelmine and Weimar eras, was largely fiction. Sander's study coincides with the findings of Emilie Altenloh's 1914 survey of German cinema spectators, which stated that women overall went to the cinema less frequently than men.[29] Against Siegfried Kracauer's conception of the "little shopgirls" who made up the cinema masses, Altenloh's statistics showed that it was primarily the little shop and office boys, the young men of the petit bourgeois class, who were addicted to film and who also went to see

melodramas.[30] Supporting these conclusions were a few studies conducted during the Third Reich that, although limited in scope, showed that women were often too overburdened with their double duties of paid work and housework to attend films frequently; rural women and middle-age women in particular went to the cinema less often than their male counterparts.[31] Thus, the notion of cinema audiences as being predominantly female, a claim that was often made by American commentators in the 1930s and 1940s and repeated by a few Nazi journalists, was not entirely correct.

Journalists and academics in the Third Reich shared some views of female spectatorship with American researchers, though their ideas of gendered spectatorship were less clearly defined. In a 1938 article in the *Film-Kurier,* Walter Panofsky, a professor at the Institute for Film Studies at the University of Munich, referenced both American surveys of film audiences and a small survey of German female spectators and concluded: "Generally, it could be said that female viewers demand the dream world of film much more often than men. Particularly the comments gathered in medium and small theaters proved that the episodic representation of a housewife cleaning her apartment—thus a representation of her daily work—was often rejected by means of appropriate statements ('But I see that every day!')."[32] Panofsky contrasted this female rejection of representations of quotidian realities with the enthusiastic reactions of male railway employees to a film set in their own work world, the crime film *Gleisdreieck* (*Rail Triangle,* 1937). He therefore suggested that men were more open to realism, but women primarily sought escapism through a mise-en-scène of artifice. This was also the dominant opinion of the time among American producers and critics, though the American commentators tended to stress the consumerist motivations behind female spectator pleasure more heavily. In a 1939 book, for example, American critic Margaret F. Thorp wrote about female spectators in a characteristically contemptuous tone:

> What the adult American female chiefly asks of the movies is the opportunity to escape by reverie from an existence which she finds insufficiently interesting. Better ways of enriching her life, society has not yet taught her . . . The adult female goes to the movies as she reads luxury advertising, so that she may be familiar with the ultimate in Fisher bodies and sable coats . . . Beauty, luxury, and love, those are to her the desirata of life and, being either overworked or indolent, her idea of bliss is to attain them practically without effort.[33]

While similarly condescending opinions could no doubt be found among German film producers, the view of female spectatorship was less consistent in the Third Reich. As Sabine Hake has shown, the Nazis generally dismissed

women, but at the same time they were often seen as ideal spectators: "Identified with an unhealthy emotionalism and a lack of critical detachment, they personified the failures in the balancing act between fantasy and reality. On the other hand, women were often chosen to embody the audience in its purest, most desirable form."[34]

Critical detachment was not what was desired from spectators in the Third Reich, and emotionalism was by no means considered entirely unwelcome. Five months after Hitler took power, the ideologically conformist film journal *Der Film* ran an article on the question of female spectatorship and emotional response titled "She Cries in the Cinema." The article cited letters to the editor about the concerns of a man whose wife appeared to have excessive reactions to films (though the wording suggests that the letters may have been written by the editorial staff themselves, who in any case supported the opinions presented in them). A typical letter, from a Dr. K. in Rostock, read: "If you look at it completely objectively, you should be happy that you have such a strongly emotional, and therefore truly feminine wife. The ability to experience film and theater action in a lively, concentrated manner is absolutely commendable . . . Men have and need feelings too, and the manly man is even superior to the feminine woman when it comes to the depth and persistence of his emotional life . . . In some circumstances, tears are in no way shameful, even for the male hero."[35] In this characteristic example, tears and intense identification were valued as appropriate spectator responses. The Nazi leadership also viewed emotionalism as advantageous. Hitler, as is well known, thought of the masses as essentially feminine and thus easily manipulable, as did Mussolini.[36] However, not only the masses but also "the people"—a much more positively connoted category for the Nazis—were described by Hitler as feminized: "The people [*das Volk*] is in its vast majority so feminine in its inclinations and opinions that it is emotional sensation rather than sober reflection that determines its thoughts and actions," as he wrote in *Mein Kampf*.[37] Since the German populace was considered to be constituted by men and women of essentially irrational natures, melodrama appeared to be a particularly appropriate form for popular film art (*Volkskunst*). Melodramas, the Nazis believed, would address the people through their most common desires rather than through sober and abstract rhetoric.

Correspondingly, Pierre Cadars has suggested that melodrama's manipulation of desire and its emphasis on sacrifice and passive suffering make it uniquely suited for use by totalitarian systems, that melodrama and fascism share an intimate relationship: "the melodrama diffuses a moral of resignation to superior forces that is not so different from the politics of submission which every dictatorship assumes."[38] This suggests, however,

that melodrama's emphasis on pathos over action works to neutralize critical energies rather than to manufacture active support for moral, or ideological, systems: passive resignation follows, but not necessarily a passionate attachment to "superior forces."

Thomas Schatz has also emphasized the tone of resignation inherent in melodrama. Melodrama, he says, is comedy's inverse: whereas comedy deals with the transgression of social conventions, melodrama shows resignation to them.[39] Yet melodrama is also heavily concerned with transgression, even if its protagonists almost always fail in their attempts to achieve personal freedom. Ultimately, comedy's transgressions may also be more controlled and its effects generally more reliable than that of melodrama. In terms of production numbers, the Third Reich did invest more heavily in comedy than in melodrama. Karsten Witte has described comedy's function in the Third Reich as the neutralization of critique: "The comedy's methods follow a double strategy: to first mobilize a departure from propaganda policy (by ironizing current events, for example), in order to then immobilize the critical energies created by the comic effects."[40] The Third Reich comedy, Witte added, also functioned to mobilize desirable emotions: "Through its double function of exclusion and integration, it conditions the audience for an emotional consensus with the propaganda line."[41]

This suggests that comedy serves fascist goals just as well as, or even better than, melodrama; laughter can be as tyrannical as tears, perhaps more. Both comedy and melodrama concern themselves with violations of social norms and the reestablishment of order, and both may address ideological questions. However, melodrama sides with the victim, while comedy chooses victims for ridicule. Somewhat paradoxically, comedy's absurdities and implausibilities also serve to naturalize ideologies rather than undermine them. The viewer of the comedy accepts the film as an unlikely proposition, an opposing image to the world of the real, which remains untouched by the comedy's temporary transgressions. Melodrama, on the other hand, concerns itself with dualistic structures that are posited as genuinely existing, and therefore it may open fissures for doubt that reference the world of the real.

Furthermore, the conditioning of spectator emotion is by many accounts more difficult with melodrama than with comedy, since melodrama primarily mobilizes sexual desires. This is especially true of melodramas that feature female main protagonists. As Pam Cook asserts, the ideological effects of the woman's picture are difficult to control completely: "It has to stimulate desire, then channel it through identification into the required paths. It negotiates this contradiction between female desire and its containment with difficulty, often producing an excess which threatens to deviate from the intended

route."[42] Melodrama constantly borders on the excessive, and this risk is a multiple one. This can be a stylistic problem, a use of signs that is either overfamiliar or destabilizingly unfamiliar: both the cliché and the strange are forms of excess that threaten to undermine spectator identifications and send them outside of the text. Or their identifications may become too intense, producing excess emotion. Once spectator desires are mobilized, they may also attach themselves to the wrong objects. Filmmakers of the Third Reich had to be constantly concerned with negotiating these risks, and as we will see in the next section and in upcoming chapters, melodramas posed particular stylistic and ideological challenges for which there was no obvious solution in the form of a clearly defined "fascist aesthetic."

The Aesthetics of Nazi Melodrama

Third Reich films were intended to have a strong emotional effect upon spectators of both sexes, but this effect was never supposed to appear so carefully calculated that audiences would become aware of the workings of ideology. The propaganda minister, as Sabine Hake has pointed out, watched carefully over film projects to make sure that they did not have a boomerang effect: "any excess of representation might threaten the precarious balance between aesthetic and political intentions and give rise to dangerous forms of 'reading against the grain.'"[43] Melodramas proved to be particularly problematic for Goebbels, because their emotional effects sometimes led in the wrong direction. After previewing the Zarah Leander melodrama *Das Herz der Königin* (*Heart of a Queen,* 1940), Goebbels wrote that the film "should be anti-English and anti-Church and has become pro for both. Still has to be changed a lot. And that will cost us a lot of effort. I could work forever just eliminating the psychological mistakes in my area."[44] Goebbels's comments suggest that the risk of "psychological mistakes" may have been greater for melodramas than films of other genres, since subtle directorial choices in camera work, editing, and acting could turn a film in entirely the opposite direction from the script. Comedy, on the other hand, was particularly based upon dialogue in the Third Reich, and thus was presumably easier to control at the script stage.

Goebbels had particular difficulties with explicitly political films, since their melodramatic attempts to engage spectators' emotions quite often fell on the side of excess. Overbearing patriotic pathos was a recurring problem. Goebbels noted regarding Luis Trenker's *Feuerteufel* (*Fire Devil,* 1940), for example: "Horrendous patriotic rubbish. I have to cut it drastically."[45] *Über alles in der Welt* (*Above All in the World*), a film of the same year, received a

similar critique: "Too naïve and primitive . . . Ritter says nationalistic things with a lack of inhibition that would make another man blush."[46] Similarly, he noted in March 1940 about the more female-oriented *Heimkehr* (*Homecoming*): "Still too consciously pathetic. Has to be substantially changed."[47] Later that year, Goebbels worked particularly hard to achieve the right psychological effect with the propaganda film *Wunschkonzert* (*Request Concert*) and wrote some of its scenes himself. Melodramatic moods were enlisted for emotional effect, but Goebbels tried to ensure that pathos would be balanced with opposing moods. Therefore, a brief, pathetic scene in which a mother mourns the death of her soldier son was balanced by longer scenes featuring buffoonish Bavarians chasing a pig. The mixed mode evidently succeeded, since *Wunschkonzert* became the most popular film of 1940.[48]

Despite Goebbels's vigilance, spectators still sometimes rejected a film as excessive after it had been approved and released.[49] Italian films created particular problems in this regard. For political reasons, productions from the Italian Cinecittà studios were shown in the Reich, and Italian directors were invited to make films in Germany as coproductions with German studios. Goebbels had disdain for most of the Italian Fascist cinema, however. He repeatedly complained that Italian films were not up to his aesthetic standards, but he could not prohibit their release or make the kind of cuts he could with German productions. About Guido Brignone's 1941 film *Vertigine* (released in Germany as *Tragödie einer Liebe*), he wrote, for example: "Then I examine an Italian film . . . that falls so far below normal artistic standards that I actually would like to ban it."[50] About *Rote Orchideen* (*Red Orchids,* 1938), Goebbels wrote: "a completely awful and pushy affair. [Nunzio] Malasomma as director. Good for nothing."[51] The description "pushy" (*aufdringlich*) indicates that this Italian film failed its negotiation between aesthetic and political intentions by presenting what were for Goebbels excessive stylistic markers or a too-blatant message.

The reception of Italian films in the Reich, both by the leadership and mass audiences, belies the notion of a "fascist aesthetic" common to the Nazi and the Italian Fascist cinemas. Based upon the available evidence, it is clear that the German public's reaction to Italian Fascist films was overwhelmingly negative. The SD reported in 1942, for example, on spectator responses to an Italian film released in Germany under the title *Vorbestraft* (*With Previous Conviction*): "Part of the audience also described this film narrative as too naïve, the dialogue too full of pathos, and the whole thing as bordering on kitsch."[52] Italian films were repeatedly described as kitsch, which suggests that their stylistic and narrative conventions differed significantly from

those of German cinema of the same time, since they exceeded the types of filmic signs that Germans accepted as "realistic." The SD added: "New Italian films are often approached from the very beginning with particularly critical eyes and a certain ingrained contempt. There is a widely held opinion that the average Italian film is far inferior to the average German film . . . In the available reports, Italian film is generally described as too 'theatrical,' and the German spectator has a different concept of 'faithfulness to reality.' Again and again, a certain depth of mood and feeling is lacking, and in its place is only a 'flat sentimentality.'"[53] The Italian Fascist cinema, it seems from this report, was understood by German audiences to be more theatrical because it was more rooted in silent-era expressiveness than the cinema of the Nazi period, with a higher emphasis on gesture and facial expression in Italian films. Also crucial was that the Italian Fascist melodrama made more recourse to maternal pathos and to Catholic iconography than did the Nazi melodrama, differences that may have contributed to their rejection by Third Reich spectators as "flatly sentimental."

While Italian films were found to be excessive, threatening boomerang effects with German audiences, American films were admired for their ability to skillfully negotiate between emotional and ideological effects. Goebbels was particularly impressed with Hollywood melodramas and repeatedly noted that they were to serve as models for German filmmakers. About *Gone with the Wind,* he wrote: "Magnificent color and moving in its effect. One becomes completely sentimental while watching it. Leigh and Clark Gable act wonderfully. The mass scenes are captivatingly well done. A huge achievement of the Americans . . . We will follow this example."[54] The Americans, it seemed, were even better at directing the masses and moving them to tears than the Germans. American melodramas even induced covert feelings of inadequacy in Nazi culture producers. When *Gone with the Wind* was shown in a closed screening to a group of film journalists in 1940, some damage control was deemed necessary. The journalists were supposed to be impressed with the film, but Goebbels also feared that they would be so completely moved that an inferiority complex might result, one that would show up in the pages of the Nazi film press. This fear was expressed in the minutes of Goebbels's conference in the Propaganda Ministry on November 21, 1940:

> The Minister gives head of ministerial section Fritzsche, who will screen *Gone with the Wind* with a small number of chief editors this weekend, the following guidelines for an introductory speech. It should be said that the film is based on a book with worldwide success, that it was worked on for three years, that the costs of the film production have run up to 15 million dollars. It should

> also be mentioned that the climate conditions in America facilitate the production of color films, and that the style of representation in American films is fundamentally different from the German style. The latter concentrates on deepening the narrative, while the Americans portray the milieu and present numerous "gags" on the margins of the narrative. Additionally, it should be said that Czech cameramen shot the film, while the German film [industry] is fundamentally constrained to working with German personnel.[55]

The strength of American capital, the superiority of its émigré film technicians, the popular appeal of scripts based upon American best-selling novels, and the Californian weather were all given as excuses for the Hollywood melodrama's finer visual quality and emotional effects. Meanwhile, Nazi film scholars and journal editors were encouraged to assert the superiority of German cinema, a superiority based primarily on its quality of being German. Quite often the reference to "German film art" in Nazi writing takes on the character of incantation, as if by repeatedly speaking of it, it might suddenly appear.

Peter von Werder was one such writer, a fervent Nazi who also fervently wanted Nazi cinema to be exceptional. In his 1941 book *Trugbild und Wirklichkeit im Film* (*Illusion and Reality in Film*), von Werder claimed that a specifically German film aesthetics was in the process of being formed. Characteristically, however, he simply listed films that he found to be exemplary but evaded any attempt to describe their specifically German or specifically Nazi character. Instead, he invoked only a general subjective feeling about German film's difference:

> Recent film production has finally shown that German cinema is in the midst of a fundamental transformation. One only has to think of films such as *Unternehmen Michael* [*The Private's Job*/*Operation Michael,* 1937] or *Urlaub auf Ehrenwort* [*Furlough on Word of Honor,* 1938], as well as *Bismarck* [1940], *Schiller* [1940] or *Ohm Krüger* [1941], *Der Postmeister* [*The Postmaster,* 1940] or *Operetta* [1940], or *Heimkehr* [*Homecoming,* 1941] or *Ich klage an* [*I Accuse,* 1941], to realize that a new film style is announcing itself here, one that we can feel, more and more, is our own. Such a feeling, which still cannot be captured in rules or principles, comes from the fact that we sense in these and similar films strong tendencies toward a conception of reality consistent with our era.[56]

Von Werder's claim that Nazi film had a specific "conception of reality" suggests a confusion or collapsing of film style into ideology, and most of the films on his list are explicit propaganda features that directly satisfied his Nazi sensibilities. As Sabine Hake has shown, Nazi film writing often transforms the concept of realism from a formal principle to a mode of reception; ac-

cording to Nazi thinking, realism is not a particular aesthetic but, rather, whatever the receiver feels to be realistic.[57] However, von Werder's feeling about stylistic specificity was perhaps not completely incorrect. Although Nazi films by and large follow classical Hollywood models, the spectator of Nazi films is often left with the sense of an elusive but nonetheless palpable difference in cinematic style, independently even of ideological differences.

Among contemporary film scholars, Eric Rentschler has offered the most concise summary of primary differences in the style of Third Reich films from their Hollywood counterparts. While much of his description is accurate, some points require reevaluation. He writes:

> In an attempt to control the articulation of fictional worlds, only a small proportion of films was shot outdoors or on location . . . Features of the Third Reich favored carefully crafted artificial realms and showed a predilection for studio spaces, costume design, and script logic . . . Film narratives of the Nazi era generally privileged space over time, composition over editing, design over movement, sets over human shapes. Compared to Hollywood movies, most features of the Third Reich appeared slow and static. They were more prone to panoramas and tableaus than to close-ups, decidedly sparing in their physical displays (very little nudity, few stunts and action scenes). Nazi film theorists stressed the importance of kinetic images as well as galvanizing sound tracks. Music worked together with visuals to make the spectator lose touch with conceptual logic and discursive frameworks.[58]

Let us now look at each of these points more closely before moving on to a comparative close analysis of a Nazi melodrama with its classical Hollywood counterpart.

Rentschler notes that there was a greater frequency of location shooting and more movement in Hollywood than in Nazi films, and suggests that this can be attributed to a unique obsession with control over mise-en-scène in the Third Reich. Yet location shooting or the lack thereof, I would like to suggest, was more a function of genre and financial constraints. Melodrama, in both Hollywood and the Third Reich, offered few location shots, and the proportion of exterior sequences in melodramas was about the same in Nazi Germany as in Hollywood. The "predilection for studio spaces" is actually a feature of the classical style as such, a style that demands harmony, closure, and the extraction of ambiguities.[59] However, the studio spaces were larger and the sets more elaborate in Hollywood than they were in the Third Reich, with higher budgets that allowed for more camera movement and more range of camera angles. Camera movements were rarely used in films of the Third Reich for expressive effect on their own and were generally limited

to small and unobtrusive pans and slight tracking shots. This was partly because producers in the Third Reich were concerned with reducing costs, especially during the war. For the 1940 melodrama *Das Herz der Königin* (*The Heart of a Queen*), for example, a low-cost trompe l'oeil set was built in which an essentially flat wall was painted to mimic the three dimensional space of a grand hall. Since the space was not actually three-dimensional, camera movements had to be avoided. The film journal *Der deutsche Film* praised German set-building ingenuity when it reported that *Das Herz der Königin* was made cheaply and entirely without camera pans.[60] According to Goebbels's plan, such technical limitations were eventually to be remedied through the conquest of new filming space beyond the borders of the Reich.

Rentschler points out that the impression of stasis in Third Reich films is also due to less dynamic editing and the favoring of fixed compositions, which may also be attributable to a differing aesthetic. Instead of the shot/countershot constructions preferred by Hollywood, Third Reich films often make use of a two-shot construction, a more theatrical staging in which the actors move to and from the camera, alternately facing it and turning away or presenting themselves in profile during a dialogue. As a result, the camera work of Third Reich films privileges the face of the actor less than Hollywood films do but includes the body more. As Erica Carter has argued, the actor's body in Nazi cinema was called upon to carry a different ideological weight by functioning as the representative of a national "soul" and the conduit of a neo-Kantian aesthetics. Film writing of the Nazi period distinguished between German cinema's treatment of the body and Hollywood's, as Carter explains, by favoring "the performing body over the cinematic apparatus as a source of 'soul' . . . [and] regularly extoll[ing] the specific national qualities of cinematic practices that masked the medium's technological nature."[61] In an effort to disguise the apparatus, Nazi films tended to avoid shots that emphasize editing and reference offscreen space. Correspondingly, bodies are framed so that they are visible in Third Reich films, while faces are treated with fewer and shorter close-ups than in Hollywood films. The result is that the spectator often cannot observe the fine reactions of actors, and this lessens the sensation of intimacy and the melodramatic effect of Nazi films. Emotion was primarily conveyed through actors' voices rather than through their facial expressions or gestures; therefore "script logic" or dialogue was indeed privileged over editing and movement.

If melodrama is a "text of muteness" in which gesture and mise-en-scène speak for the inarticulate protagonist,[62] then the spoken texts of Third Reich melodramas are louder than usual. The voice has a more important role than gesture in German sound cinema. In general, actors usually say what they

mean rather than having the mise-en-scène speak for them—or against them, as it does in the most interesting of Hollywood melodramas. Set design and costuming are certainly very important sign systems in Nazi melodrama, but the camera is generally not allowed to make use of the languages of décor and dress to their full expressive extent; objects, like actors, generally do not receive many close-ups. Rentschler's conclusion about the primacy of sets in Nazi cinema, therefore, is only valid for genres in which sets are by nature primary and in which the body itself is transformed into décor: the musical comedy and the revue film.

Rentschler suggests that Hollywood films of the 1930s and '40s offered more to the voyeuristic eye than films of the Third Reich, yet this point must also be qualified. Nazi cinema did have fewer stunts than Hollywood, but it had far more nudity. Actresses were filmed either partially or fully nude in numerous Nazi films, while the common mise-en-scène of dressing rooms allowed for voyeuristic looks at women removing clothing.[63] Bedroom scenes were not banned in Third Reich films, and couples were not required to sleep in separate twin beds as were Hollywood's married men and women. Likewise, Third Reich cinema had few scruples about premarital seductions, as we will see in later chapters. More sexual situations and physical displays were allowed by German censors than by Hollywood's Production Code standards, following a conscious attempt by the Nazis to assert cultural superiority through fascist body culture. As film writer Rudolf Oertel claimed in a 1941 book, Nazi cinema's "healthy" attitude toward nudity distinguished it from the hypocritical morality of "bourgeois" cinema: "The concept of nudity has lost for us that sinful overtone of a false, bourgeois world, which was sometimes full of virtue on the outside and full of corruption on the inside . . . Body culture, sports and a natural relationship of the sexes to one another have prepared the way for our healthy view of the world. We also know that a beautiful naked body seems less erotic than a refined décolleté."[64] Despite their repeated claims that German film was inherently "clean," the Nazis made extensive use of both naked and erotically costumed bodies, as the female body in particular was exploited as one of the central attractions of Third Reich cinema. Indeed, Laura Mulvey's critique of the misuse of woman's image in classical Hollywood cinema might be considered even more applicable to Nazi cinema, especially since, as we will see later in this chapter, an aggressive form of voyeurism predominated over more scopophilic displays in Nazi films.[65]

When Rentschler writes that Nazi theorists emphasized the importance of music, he suggests that the Nazis were even better at manipulating the emotions of viewers through sound tracks than were Hollywood filmmakers. However, it is not clear that this was true in practice. Nazi melodramas

and musicals certainly had some effective music, as the popularity of Zarah Leander's hit songs proves. Song sequences differ from sound tracks, though, since they break the flow of the narrative and the texts of songs are often contrapuntal to the plot rather than adding up to a complete, overwhelming synthesis. And there is some evidence that Nazi melodramas actually made less effective use of sound tracks than Hollywood melodramas. Ever wary of excess, film critics in the Third Reich often wrote disapprovingly of the use of music to punctuate emotional moments in films. *Das Mädchen Irene* (*The Girl Irene,* 1936), for example, is an exceptional Third Reich melodrama, one that attempted to give music and camera work a higher degree of expressive power, and in which gesture is sometimes allowed to replace speech. The reviewer for the *Film-Kurier* commented on the film's music as follows: "the use of the orchestra in crucial scenes is occasionally a bit overbearing."[66] Goebbels's reaction to *Das Mädchen Irene* was even more damning, and he was so disgusted by the film that he cut short his private screening.[67] In contrast, many films of which he did approve had comparatively sparse sound tracks. *Der Herrscher* (*The Ruler*), Veit Harlan's propagandistic melodrama and the winner of the 1937 Nationaler Filmpreis (national film prize), included long sections in which there was no musical accompaniment, even between the many long pauses in dialogue—hardly an effective use of the sound track for emotional intoxication. The Security Service also repeatedly reported that spectators preferred more sparing sound tracks and that film music was not entirely successful in galvanizing audiences.[68]

Lighting was generally also not used to the same expressive effects in the Third Reich as in Hollywood, usually remaining comparatively inconspicuous. Nazi crime films and melodramas did make use of low-key lighting, but the lighting in Third Reich films rarely became as artistically expressive as in Hollywood film noir, following the Nazis' general disapproval of ambiguity and filmic style for style's sake. As Erica Carter has shown, there is also a crucial difference in Third Reich filmmakers' lighting of actors in that they avoided the "halo effects" of Hollywood-style lighting and placed more emphasis on the ensemble of performers than on illuminating the individual star.[69]

Indeed, the image of the small ensemble was more common than both the individual and the mass in Third Reich melodrama, despite the privileged place that the geometrically ordered mass holds in film scholars' understanding of Nazi film style. Fascist aesthetics are most commonly described as the abstracted composition of "human shapes," as the ornamental massing of bodies. According to Karsten Witte, fascist film aesthetics are characterized

by the "rigorous over-designing, standardization and ultimately the corrosion of topical patterns, which all lead to a hypertrophy of the mass ornament."[70] Witte's account corresponds to Susan Sontag's description of Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* as typical of fascist aesthetics, characterized by "overpopulated wide shots of massed figures alternating with close-ups that isolate a single passion, a single perfect submission . . . [and] the rendering of movement in grandiose and rigid patterns."[71] However, these descriptions of fascist aesthetics apply primarily to the dramaturgy of party meetings, parades, and other street spectacles, but such aesthetics are rarely to be found in Nazi feature films. Mass scenes are not common in the cinema of the Third Reich, since few filmmakers were accorded the budget to organize large groups of extras (Veit Harlan with his literal armies of extras for the filming of *Kolberg* being the most obvious exception). Yet overall the spaces of the Nazi narrative film are tight rather than monumental, characterized more by a mediocre rigidity of style than by a grandiose rigidity of ornamental movement, and bodies are much more commonly grouped in couples than in masses.

In the following section I will extend some of these general comments on film style by comparing a characteristic melodrama from the Third Reich to a Hollywood model. Of the films that Peter von Werder listed as representatives of a specifically German film style, *Der Postmeister* presents perhaps the most opportune example for close study. Contemporary audiences reportedly felt that it was one of the best German films ever made, and it was repeatedly described in the press and among spectators as a great work of art. However, there were apparently many criticisms of the film's narrative and setting, so the film's "art" was seen by contemporary audiences as being independent of its subject matter. *Der Postmeister* seems therefore a particularly good test case in the effort to isolate a characteristic Third Reich melodramatic film style. As a Nazi recycling of the classic "fallen woman" theme, this melodrama also allows for close comparisons with Hollywood films of the same genre.

Der Postmeister was one of the most popular melodramas of the Third Reich,[72] though this may seem barely conceivable today. The film is grim in mood, claustrophobic in its scenic construction, and overbearing in its acting style. These, however, were perhaps precisely the elements that struck contemporary viewers as artistic and as characteristically German. The journal *Der Film,* in a typical review of *Der Postmeister,* called it "shining proof of German cinematic creativity."[73] Goebbels noted in his diary that the film was a "a great work of art," and he particularly praised the "outstanding portrayal of milieu."[74] As with most films designated as examples of German cinematic high art, however, there is little in the film that can be singled out

as a specifically German invention. The film is set in Russia and borrowed from a foreign literary source, Alexander Pushkin's short story "The Stationmaster." The film also owes much to classical Hollywood models, which was openly admitted at the time; *Der Postmeister* was positively compared in the Nazi press to George Cukor's *Camille* (1936).[75] It is likely that the film's director, Gustav Ucicky, also looked very closely at another Greta Garbo vehicle, *Anna Karenina* (1935), following Goebbels's citation of Garbo's 1927 silent version as a model for German filmmakers to copy.[76] *Der Postmeister* particularly invites comparison to *Anna Karenina* because both are set in nineteenth-century St. Petersburg, share Russian literary sources, and are narratives of a woman's downfall through illicit sexuality into suicide.

Der Postmeister's narrative concerns a young woman who is seduced by an aristocrat, lives for a time as his mistress, and begins to suffer the social consequences of this role. The girl, Dunya (Hilde Krahl), leaves her father (Heinrich George), the postmaster of an isolated provincial outpost, and moves to St. Petersburg with her seducer, Count Minskij, on the pretense that she will marry him. Once in St. Petersburg, she attempts to separate herself from Minskij, takes a job as a seamstress, and becomes engaged to the naval officer Mitja (the conventional "worthy and innocent young man"[77]). Meanwhile, Dunya's father hears that his daughter has become a prostitute and comes to St. Petersburg in a drunken rage with the intention of murdering her. Dunya escapes, but is then filled with such tenderness for her father that she returns to Minskij and asks him to stage a fake wedding so that her father will be deceived into thinking her relationship with Minskij was legitimate. Dunya's actual fiancé, Mitja, who knows nothing about her past relationship with Minskij, happens to arrive at the fake wedding and, realizing that Dunya is not the woman he imagined her to be, calls off the engagement and loudly humiliates her. Dunya takes her father to the train station after the wedding, they have a melodramatic parting, and the postmaster returns to the provinces, still under the illusion that his daughter has married an aristocrat. Dunya then shoots herself in Minskij's apartment, but just before dying, she asks him to write to her father that she died of an illness.

A close comparison of *Der Postmeister* to *Anna Karenina* reveals some differences in film style, direction, plot, scenic construction, and, finally, in ideology. Overall, *Der Postmeister* is darker in tone than *Anna Karenina.* Whereas most scenes in *Anna Karenina* are brightly lit with halo effects around the star Garbo, much of *Der Postmeister* is filmed with low-key lighting. Differences in lighting point to differences in the imaginary of the Russian milieu in the two films: whereas *Anna Karenina* offers nostalgic, glamorous, though at times also farcical visions of the St. Petersburg upper class, the

low-key German version of Russia suggests a primitive and somewhat sordid environment. Camera work in the respective films underlines this difference in the vision of Russia, and as we will see, the differing mise-en-scène had further political implications. The first sequence of *Anna Karenina* serves to characterize the milieu: men in extravagant white and gold military uniforms engage in gluttonous feasting and excessive drinking in a large and luxurious ballroom. The sequence opens with a close-up of a bowl of caviar and features an extended movement down a long table filled with candelabras and food, a background-to-foreground sweep that is a virtuoso display of camera technique. This movement, staged in the space of a two-story-high studio set, adds to the impression of lightness and luxury that pervades most of the film (even as Garbo begins suffering, she does so with dazzling lighting and the full luxury of costly costuming and décor). The large spaces of *Anna Karenina* allow for large movements of the main characters and the many extras, all of which add a lively quality to the overall impression of the film. By contrast, the initial sequences of *Der Postmeister* are shot in the cramped space of a comparatively cheap-looking studio set, the limited number of characters confined in two shots or medium close-ups. This pattern continues even after Dunya has departed her village to live in luxury in St. Petersburg. Again, this tight framing and lack of large movements not only indicates a distinct, peculiarly fascist aesthetic but also points primarily to material constraints.[78] *Der Postmeister,* which indirectly supported Hitler's campaign to conquer new "living space" in the east, testified to the lack of studio space in the Reich.

There were some similarities in the imagination of milieu, however. Naturally, neither film was shot on location, and both films imagine St. Petersburg mostly as a series of interiors. In both films, scenes are played out in the spaces of a men's sauna and in a music hall, and a comparison of these sequences shows some interesting variations. The sauna scenes of both films have similar narrative functions, though the effects of their staging are quite different. In both films, two male characters discuss the heroine while taking a steam bath. In *Anna Karenina* the discussion takes place as the two main male characters are being awkwardly flogged with branches by other corpulent men in towels. There is a brief suggestion of homoeroticism, but this impression is quickly neutralized through physical comedy, as a bucket of cold water is abruptly poured over the head of one of the characters at the end of the scene. The military men in *Anna Karenina*'s sauna are treated farcically, an effect that is heightened by the placement of the sauna sequence directly after the opening feast sequence's parody of Russian military life as elaborate, ritualized drinking and gluttony. The differing staging of the two sauna scenes, it may

be noted, is actually consistent with Goebbels's claim that American films tend to retard narrative progression by means of "gags," whereas the Nazi melodrama is concerned with intensifying the forward drive of the narrative. *Der Postmeister,* unlike *Anna Karenina*, does not attempt to reroute the sexual undertones of its sauna sequence and even attempts to deepen them through dialogue while simultaneously foreshadowing upcoming plot events. Perhaps referencing Riefenstahl's sauna scene in *Olympia,* the athletic bodies of *Der Postmeister*'s military men are allowed to retain their erotic appeal; there is no effort to undercut voyeurism through comedy. The tone remains serious even when the man on the top bench of the sauna turns over to look at Mitja on the bottom and asks, in reference to Dunya, "You've fallen head over heels in love, haven't you? . . . Tell me, have you done it with her yet?"

Similar distinctions are evident in the music hall sequences of each film. In both films the ballroom party sequences serve to signify a decadent side to Russian life, and in both the presence of "gypsy" musicians and dancers connotes a milieu of loose morality. In *Anna Karenina,* however, their costuming remains firmly within Production Code standards. Their lascivious lifestyles are connoted with oversized jewelry, but their chests and shoulders are fully covered. The framing of the dancers does not in any way emphasize their bodies; one of the women is placed with her back to the camera so that little of her is visible, and the view of the other woman is blocked by the table. Rather than visual pleasure, therefore, this music hall scene is played for comic effect: while Anna's very drunk brother speaks lovingly of his wife and ineptly flirts with the dancers, a clownish violin player hangs over their heads.

The corresponding sequence in *Der Postmeister,* on the other hand, appeals to an aggressive voyeurism. The first scene set in St. Petersburg, it begins with a traveling shot along a staircase adorned with sculptures of nude female torsos, and ends on a shot of a woman sitting on a man's lap, framed with another sculpture of a naked torso just above her head. (By contrast, the sculptural décor in *Anna Karenina*'s music hall is of a geometric, nonrepresentational pattern.) Soon this woman, Mascha, is shown unbuttoning her shirt, jumping down from the balcony, and throwing off her blouse for a vigorous topless dance. Reaction shots of male audience members underline their pleasure and approval, modeling the expected response of the nondiegetic audience. The camera then moves in to offer the spectator a better view of the dancer, alternating between shots of her chest and close-ups of her exposed legs as her skirt spins open. The cutting between these alternating body fragments is quick, and the editing is synchronized with the music, creating a rhythmic and rousing effect. Curiously, the pacing of the editing

Nazi cinema's sadistic voyeurism: the dance sequence of *Der Postmeister* (1940). Copyright Studiocanal Video

of the dance in *Der Postmeister* only has its parallel in the rapid editing of *Anna Karenina*'s death scene, the alternating shots of legs and breasts in *Der Postmeister* corresponding to the alternating shots of train wheels and Garbo's horrified face in *Anna Karenina.* The editing rhythm of both of these sequences connotes a sense of intensification before release. (The death scene in *Der Postmeister,* by contrast, is performed in a rather perfunctory manner.) These differing points of intensification suggest what was most important to each respective film: stimulation of an aggressive eroticism on the one hand, and the stimulation of a melancholy mood of loss on the other. Indeed, this relatively heavier emphasis on sexualized violence than on mourning may be considered paradigmatic for Nazi melodrama in general.

Most spectators of *Anna Karenina* certainly came to the cinema primarily to look at Garbo and watch her suffer beautifully. Its melancholy sentiment is supported by camera work and framing. There are abundant, relatively long close-ups of Garbo's face in the film as the camera lingers lovingly on her in hazy soft focus. In contrast, there is little glamorous treatment of Hilde Krahl in *Der Postmeister*; the camera work instead supports an undertone of brutality throughout the film. Although there are a significant number

of medium close-ups of Krahl in the film, the camera rests on her only long enough to register reactions necessary for the progression of the narrative but not long enough for the audience to develop a strong sense of intimacy with and sympathy for her character. Lingering on Krahl would hardly have been productive, since she was in no way as auratic as Garbo and there was little subtlety of feeling to be read on her face. In the scenes in which she must mimic separation trauma from her father on a train platform, shouting is substituted for tender camera work and more subtle acting registers, which is consistent with the Nazi melodrama's tendency to place greater emphasis on the voice than on gesture, framing, or editing. Krahl, who was born in Croatia, had a hard, dialect-tinged delivery and a voice that actually suggested an inability to suffer.

Hence, acting style is perhaps one of the most noticeable differences between films of the Third Reich and their Hollywood counterparts, and the variations in actor types likewise suggests variations in audience identification patterns. Except for the two Swedish stars Zarah Leander and Kristina Söderbaum, most of the actresses of the Third Reich were not particularly good at portraying melodramatic suffering. Other actresses often used in Third Reich woman's films—Hilde Krahl, Marianne Hoppe, Brigitte Horney, and Ilse Werner—were better at interpreting hardworking and optimistic characters with boyish allure, and this is generally the preferred type in cinema of the Third Reich. Their appeal is quite comprehensible; identifying with such characters provided women in the Third Reich with "illusions of female autonomy" and the illusion that fascism was modern in a liberating sense.[79] Male actor types of the Third Reich, on the other hand, are less comprehensible in their appeal. The star of *Der Postmeister,* Heinrich George, was, along with Emil Jannings, one of the most influential actors of the Third Reich. It is a peculiarity of Nazi cinema that these two could elicit audience admiration, since they do not have parallels in Hollywood films of the same time period. Hollywood cinema had little use for excessively corpulent men who sweated profusely, panted, growled, and screamed, except perhaps as parodic figures. In their Third Reich films, both Heinrich George and Emil Jannings specialized in portraying fathers and husbands, their violent rages alternating with sentimentality. A postwar star study describes Heinrich George's style thus: "So this colossal giant with the booming voice that demanded obedience stomped through his great roles. Even when his face turned red and clouds of rage gathered around his powerful forehead, one still sensed that there was a soft core in this stocky primal phenomenon. His vital feelings simply had to pass through him and out of him."[80] Many Third Reich spectators presumably identified in some fundamental way with this

release of violent feelings. Whereas the patriarchal figure in *Anna Karenina,* Anna's husband, Karenin, plays his role with cool, soft-voiced detachment, *Der Postmeister* offers a characteristically German despot who screams and demands obedience. The spectator was apparently supposed to take pleasure in searching for the soft center among his powerful rage.

Characteristically also, it is to this figure that the spectator is asked to attach his or her sympathies. Whereas the central identificatory figure in *Anna Karenina* is clearly Garbo's Anna, the main protagonist of *Der Postmeister* is actually George's father figure, with the titles of the two films announcing these respective orientations. The identification patterns are set up mainly through dialogue, but also through camera cues. The scene in which the postmaster comes to kill his daughter is an example of how *Der Postmeister* attempts to position the spectator on his side and manages to justify his murderous anger. The murder-planning scene is staged in Dunya's tenement room, which she shares with her friend and coworker in the dress factory, Elisawetha. The postmaster waits for Dunya while she is on a date with the soldier Mitja (and thus is in effect made innocent through association with the military, though we are asked to sympathize with the father's intentions nonetheless). The postmaster is sitting on Dunya's bed as Elisawetha enters the room, and as she sees him, she shrinks away from him in fear. He forces her down on the bed next to him, and the emphasis on his strength suggests the potential of rape. At the end of the sequence, there is a shot of Elisawetha, who, despite the threat of physical violence to which she has just been subjected, watches the tyrannical patriarch tenderly as he exits the tenement, adding, "I think he is an unhappy man. I think one should pray for him." Later in the film, another character observes the postmaster and remarks, "He is really a magnificent man!" The father is thus framed by dialogue that suggests to us the correct interpretation of his character: a splendid dictator. Most importantly, however, the spectator is asked to identify primarily with his suffering, and not with that of the suicidal woman.

Two train station sequences further underline the difference in identification structures in *Der Postmeister* and *Anna Karenina*. In the German film, a final parting between Dunya and her father takes place on the nighttime train platform, and the scene is supposed to express the pathos of separation. There is a conventional shot: the train pulls away, wrenching the two lovers apart (the father being Dunya's most significant lover in this film). Somewhat contrary to expectation, however, the camera is placed inside the train so that we see Dunya on the platform in disappearing perspective. There is no corresponding reverse shot of the father pulling away in the train. The camera is thus placed in the physical position of the father,

and the spectator watches the woman disappear from the male point of view. In *Anna Karenina* the nighttime train station platform sequence is Anna's suicide scene. Here she is alone, without diegetic male spectators. The camera takes her position, alternating between the shots of her face and the wheels of the train, so these close-ups of the wheels are presented as her vision, with which the spectator is invited to identify. In *Der Postmeister,* on the other hand, there are no point-of-view shots from Dunya's perspective in the suicide sequence. Rather, the sound of the pistol shot is edited over a shot of Minskij, thus the spectator is asked to react to Dunya's surprise death as he does.

Notably, although both *Der Postmeister* and *Anna Karenina* are generically woman's films, the plotting in both cases allows the main female protagonist to be framed by male speech. In both films the protagonist's fiancé/lover (Mitja/Vronsky) is presented on screen first, and the dialogue in these scenes introduces the woman before she appears. In both films also, the man has the final word. The final scenes of both *Der Postmeister* and *Anna Karenina* are constructed as epilogues and follow the suicide sequences. In both cases the woman's lover expresses his regret at her suicide and asks whether he might have been somehow responsible for her death. (Thus, both serve the melodramatic convention of the final recognition of virtue, in the tear-jerking tense of the "too late.") Both films also costume the lover in military uniform and direct him to deliver this recognition speech to a comrade who is also in uniform. In *Anna Karenina,* however, a close-up of the lover Vronsky gives way to a camera movement screen right to a close-up of a portrait of Anna. The camera rests on this image before fading out, the final shot returning us to female subjectivity. Somewhat inappropriately for the historical setting, this portrait is a contemporary photograph rather than a painting, which would have placed her image in the past rather than the present. The photograph comforts the spectator with the sense of the ever present and suggests that Anna's vision persists, that she still has lively eyes that can witness her vindication and can still look back, even though the narrative has required her to die. No such final image of Dunya is offered in *Der Postmeister*: the final shot in this film is of Mitja's carriage disappearing into a snowy landscape that is empty except for a few dead trees, an image that marks the extinction of the woman's vision. This differing final vision is a further indication of the way in which identification structures in *Der Postmeister* side with the male protagonist, whereas they are clearly on the side of the female protagonist in *Anna Karenina*. Although *Der Postmeister* has been classified generically as a *Frauen- und Sittendrama* (women's and moral drama) in a postwar lexicon,[81] it is a woman's film hijacked by male subjectivity.

This apparently did not go unnoticed by female spectators at the time. For example, an SD report from April 1940, when the film was released, noted: "The members of the Frauenschaft in Augsburg regret that, in this hit film, the woman is once again represented from the negative side."[82] This wording suggests that the NS-Frauenschaft (National Socialist Women's League) primarily objected to the "negative" representations of Masha and Dunya as sexual and somewhat calculating individuals. If this is true, then the discomfort caused by the film's construction of point of view and spectator identification was almost certainly expressed in the more localizable terms of character representation. In any case, women realized that the film was not on their side, at least not on a side with which they identified themselves. Interestingly, the public reportedly also responded negatively to the film's narrative, particularly its resolution in suicide. The SD commented:

> The film is generally being praised as a great artistic achievement and is considered one of the best German films ever. But reports about the public reception of the film also express a much more critical view in regard to the film's content . . . [Viewers] feel that it is pointless now that we are at war to allow Slavic material into German films again, especially since this film narrative ends in a passive and suffering inactivity that stands in crass opposition to the heroic contemporary experience of the German people.[83]

Thus, audiences felt that melodramatic suffering did not conform to the historical moment, to the thrills of the Blitzkrieg. The public apparently wanted less self-sacrifice and more celebratory optimism. The other hit of 1940, *Wunschkonzert,* apparently better fulfilled the public's momentary generic needs by mixing battle with musical comedy.[84]

Most spectators could not foresee how *Der Postmeister* corresponded to historical circumstances, and they could not anticipate the film's propagandistic value. Eight months after the conclusion of the Hitler-Stalin pact, and fourteen months before the invasion of the Soviet Union, the film served to draw (or redraw) Russia onto the mental maps of German spectators. *Der Postmeister* was presented as a quasi-documentary vision of the Russian landscape and an explanation of the Russian soul. The reviewer for the *Film-Kurier,* for example, wrote that the film was such a "realistic" portrait of Russia because it was a Viennese production: "Here they know the Slavic mentality better than anywhere else. So what first makes a strong impression in the new film is the authentic-looking atmosphere of the Russian milieu and its convincing Slavic essence . . . When the screen fades in on the troika as it drives through the godforsaken, snowy solitude and stops in front of a deserted straw-covered postal cottage, then there is Russian atmosphere.

Then one feels the endless expanses of the landscape in which souls become melancholy and humble."[85] Heinrich George, acting out this Nazi notion of the "Slavic essence," played his postmaster as a semi-illiterate, childish, but touchingly violent character. The extras in the film, representatives of the Russian proletariat and peasantry, were costumed in rags and unruly wigs and directed by Ucicky to play their characters as hunched-over, shuffling idiots. The Russians would be easy to conquer, the film suggested, since they were all essentially melancholic and full of humility. (Mitja and his fellow army officers were somewhat problematically presented as having stiff-standing Prussian natures, but the film was set, of course, under the Czarist monarchy. In the arrogant German imagination, the contemporary Bolsheviks no longer possessed such attractive uniforms or evidenced any militarist discipline that could compete with their own.)

As for the German aesthetic imagination, the artistry of the film was defined in reviews mainly as a series of great and realistic performances by the actors. *Der Film* commented that it was the acting in particular that proved Ucicky's directorial talent and added: "The postmaster Heinrich George was a grandiose example of highest acting perfection with his portrayal of farmer's humility and boundless fatherly love, with his touching humanity, in anger, rage, desperation and happiness, in boasting vanity and naïve anxiety . . . The artistically perfect film, masterful and brilliant in its acting and staging, deeply impressed the audience."[86] It is doubtful, however, that all of the spectators of *Der Postmeister* went to the film primarily to experience great German art, or were simply lured to the cinema by the star allure of Heinrich George. Certainly, no small percentage of cinemagoers were tempted by suggestions of mastery of another kind.

The topless dance sequence follows shortly after scenes in the postmaster's dark house, in which he pulls Dunya onto his lap and expresses his love for his daughter, whom he calls his "feast for the eyes" (*Augenweide*). This "boundless fatherly love" is clearly incestuous; the kisses and other physical contact between the two step over the boundary of what is usual between father and adult daughter. *Anna Karenina,* for its part, offers us a very tender scene of a mother putting her son to bed and certainly does not lack appeals to incestuous desire. But the German equivalent of this family romance is much more suspect. As is typical for Nazi melodramas, the mother is missing from *Der Postmeister*; Dunya's other parent has been killed off before the film plot even begins. Thus, whereas the Hollywood melodrama engages oedipal or even pre-oedipal desire for the maternal, the Nazi melodrama supports the father's aggressive phallic power by extinguishing the maternal entirely. Gaylyn Studlar has argued that the "masochistic aesthetic" characteristic of

Hollywood's masochistic maternalism: *Anna Karenina* (1935). Courtesy the Kobal Collection at Art Resource, New York

the Hollywood melodramas of Josef von Sternberg appeals to the spectator's desire for the pre-oedipal mother, and thus for a union with a femininity imagined as all-powerful and lacking nothing.[87] In contrast, *Der Postmeister* appeals more to sadistic voyeurism and the pleasures of masculine mastery.

Shortly after the father-daughter scene in *Der Postmeister,* the paternalistic aristocrat Minskij enters the house, fixes Dunya with a desirous look, praises her figure, and then grabs her from behind, forcing a kiss as she struggles against him. Since they are framed next to a smoldering fire and an over-boiling pot of water, the spectator is invited to accept such rape fantasies as naturally ignited passion. Much of the film was composed of rather dubious erotic attractions, and this was clearly a conscious strategy. Posters for *Der Postmeister* show that the topless dance sequence was advertised as a main attraction of the film. The advertisement in the May 1940 issue of *Der deutsche Film* shows photos of Heinrich George and Hilde Krahl in the foreground and the topless dancer in the background, just above their heads. The breasts of the dancer are airbrushed into hazy indistinctness; spectators had to buy a ticket to see the rest of the striptease. Reviewers understood that the topless

dance sequence was an essential part of *Der Postmeister*'s appeal, and, accordingly, they did not neglect it in their praise of the film's art. The reviewer for *Der Film* praised the "brilliantly masterful scene," which showed "Mascha in Petersburg, suddenly and wildly flying with her bare chest in whirling dance lust."[88] The official Nazi Party film journal, *Der deutsche Film,* also praised the topless sequence, while adding an ideological justification for it: the dancer Margit Symo presented the audience with a "bursting dance from far-off Asia," as the reviewer wrote.[89]

Thus, in a characteristically duplicitous manner, the exposing of Symo's body was explained as a supposedly realistic document of cultural difference, described in terms of the "Asian" nature of Russian culture, and the voyeuristic gaze was employed for propagandistic purposes. *Der Postmeister* put St. Petersburg on the mental map of viewers as a place where women tear off their clothes and dance wildly, an image that no doubt served the upcoming military campaign against the Soviet Union. The dance scene is also a typical example of Nazi cinema's strategic use of eroticism. As we well know, Hollywood cinema—and classical narrative cinema as such—also relies on the spectacle of the female body to create the sensation of pleasure in the (male) spectator.[90] However, the spectacles of *Der Postmeister* are intensified beyond that which is conventional for comparative American films of the same era, and its very palpable sense of sexual violence exceeds the boundaries of what was allowed—or desired—of Hollywood melodramas.

Of course, sexual violence, as David Rodowick has noted, is central to the melodrama as a narrative form. But in Hollywood melodramas this violence is usually suppressed, "regulated only by an economy of masochism which often gives the narratives a suicidal thrust."[91] In *Der Postmeister* this conventional violence is more released than suppressed; although the film, like *Anna Karenina,* ends in suicide, its economy is ultimately more sadistic than masochistic. This distinction, I propose, holds true for most Nazi melodramas in comparison to their Hollywood counterparts. Both *Anna Karenina* and *Der Postmeister,* on a manifest level, offer similar ideological messages. Both films provide images of Russian "decadence" (i.e., the propensity to drunkenness or "indecent" behavior) and thereby in some fashion serve the anticommunist politics of both the United States and Nazi Germany. Following the convention of "fallen woman" melodramas, they are also warnings about what could happen to women who choose to step outside the boundaries of accepted behavior and seek their own experiences independently of male authority. But *Anna Karenina* and *Der Postmeister* address different spectatorial subjects and engage different desires, inviting female identifications on the one hand and male pleasures on the other. Both films make use of

melodrama's traditional sympathy for the victim. *Der Postmeister,* however, manages to reroute this conventional sympathy and convince its spectator that it is not the dead woman but rather the man with murderous intentions who is actually the victim. In this way it is truly a great example of Nazi style.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter has been to delineate the generic and aesthetic differences between film melodrama in Third Reich and classical Hollywood cinema, and to a lesser extent, between German and Italian Fascist film. These subtle distinctions, as will be elaborated further in upcoming chapters, corresponded to the distinct political goals and the practical constraints of German fascism. Melodrama was as central to Nazi cinema as it was to American cinema of the same era, though there were variances in the types of subgenres produced: maternal and family melodrama were less significant for Nazi cinema than for classical Hollywood, as were Hollywood melodramatic subgenres that specialized in the exploration of psychic instability. Despite the centrality of melodrama (and comedy) in the popular cinema of the Third Reich and the regime's keen concern with the reception of films by audiences, the Nazis lacked clearly articulated genre and spectatorship theories and a strong concept of genres as gendered. Because emotional response was expected of all viewers in the Third Reich, melodrama was privileged as a highly effective mode and was not considered to be exclusively or even primarily for female spectators. The Nazi view of female spectatorship was similar to the American view in the common belief that women sought escapism more often than men, though American critics stressed the consumerist element in female spectator pleasure more openly than the Nazis. As we will see in chapter 4, this difference had important implications for spectator address in wartime home front films. In comparison to American critics and film producers, Nazi officials had a less systematic understanding of film spectatorship, particularly of gender differences in film-viewing preferences. Even melodramas were primarily designed with male spectator pleasures in mind.

Despite being a privileged mode, melodrama posed problems for the Nazi minister of propaganda, as it proved difficult to control spectator responses to the pathos and hyperbolic style of melodramatic films. This was particularly true of imported Italian films, which reportedly were received skeptically by Third Reich audiences because of their excessively melodramatic style, and which therefore shed doubt on the existence of a transnational fascist film aesthetic. Although Goebbels dismissed most Italian Fascist films, he recommended that Nazi filmmakers study Hollywood melodramas for lessons

on how to blend ideological effectiveness with aesthetic quality. Nazi filmmakers derivatively emulated Hollywood films, but there did remain some slight stylistic differences between Nazi melodramas and their American counterparts, including a more theatrical acting style, less dynamic camera movements and editing, a greater emphasis on voice and dialogue than on facial expression and mise-en-scène, a more restrained use of music to punctuate emotional moments, and more overtly voyeuristic physical displays. Of these differences, only the last one was likely a consciously calculated formal strategy rather than the effect of limited material resources, limited skill on the part of Third Reich filmmakers, and apprehension regarding stylistic excess on the part of the propaganda minister. As my comparative analysis between *Der Postmeister* and its American model, *Anna Karenina,* has aimed to demonstrate, Nazi melodrama was structured to appeal to a more intense form of sadistic voyeurism than classical Hollywood melodrama. The next chapter examines in greater detail how romance melodramas elicited erotic investment in the aggressive, expansionist designs of the Reich.

2. The Nazi Modernization of Sex: Romance Melodrama

According to a statistical analysis of the titles of films produced during the Third Reich, *Frau(en)* and *Liebe* were the most common nouns used in naming products of the Nazi cinema.[1] "Women" and "love" were the terms deemed most effective for drawing audiences to the theaters, and presumably they were also considered the most effective for the drawing out of nationalist energies and the erasing of internal conflicts. The erotic drive can be considered the main motor of German fascist cinema, the very basis of spectator pleasure, narrative construction, and the creation of meaning. In this it was entirely consistent with the interests of classical Hollywood. As Mary Ann Doane has pointed out, film narrative and film meaning in American cinema also depend on romance: "the couple is a constant figure of Hollywood's rhetoric and some kind of heterosexual pact constitutes its privileged mode of closure."[2] The cinema of the Third Reich, following Hollywood, placed the heterosexual couple at the rhetorical and narrative center of almost all of its films.

Romance, one could say, formed the very basis of Third Reich cinema, the scaffolding onto which all other genres built their specific architecture; comedies, musicals, and even war and crime films were built upon the core of coupling, their generic patterns inserted over the basic structure of romantic relations. Not all romance was melodramatic, of course. Romance was more often taken lightly in Nazi cinema than seriously; in fact, the majority of films with "*Frau*" (woman) or "*Liebe*" (love) in their titles were comedies.[3] But the focus and ideological task of each romantic mode varied. Whereas romantic relations in comedy were most often the vehicle for elaborating problems of the social order, such as class conflicts, the romance melodrama took

coupling seriously and privileged it over other thematic concerns, investing its energies into the production and management of sexual desire.

The romance melodrama, although somewhat less extensive than the romantic comedy in terms of production numbers, was nonetheless a privileged genre in the Third Reich, receiving far more screen time than war films. The Nazis' cinematic obsession with the mechanics of desire was surprisingly central for a society that specialized in technologies of death. Far more feature film footage was used for defining sex roles and suggesting sex acts than for defining concepts of national character, generating hatred of enemies, or fabricating notions of race—ideological tasks that were more commonly left to the press and cinema's paratextual discourses.[4] Whereas the Nazis needed little internal negotiation to carry out their genocidal "final solution" to racist paranoia, gender and sexuality were issues that film melodrama had to continually readdress. As Goebbels stated in 1937, "The issue of women's rights [*die Frauenfrage*] is our most difficult problem."[5]

For the fascist man the problem lay in the question of how to maximize women's productivity and reproductivity while minimizing the costs arising from her own demands for fulfillment and recognition. Evidently, even if the vast majority of Nazi film narratives circled around sexual concerns, romance films still had military implications. Women were to be made serviceable for the Nazi regime's massive project of imperial expansion, and the cinema helped to articulate what role they would play in an expanding Reich and ultimately in colonial territories abroad. The shifting borders of the regime's dominion over both foreign and domestic populations necessitated recalibrations in its gender ideology. One of the most problematic issues concerned women's participation in paid labor, which was considered undesirable at the beginning of the regime due to high unemployment rates but ultimately became indispensable as the Reich moved closer to war. Love stories in Nazi cinema often took up the issue of women's place in the public sphere and addressed the issue of the relative values of professional and private life. Contrary to common assumption, most Nazi romance films did not advocate a return to traditional feminine roles or oppose the Weimar era's advances into sexual modernity. Instead, Nazi romance melodramas often supported a turn away from domesticity while arguing for the maintenance of hierarchical structures and self-sacrificial positions in the workplace. This was true of prewar as well as wartime films.

Nazi romance melodramas also spoke to men and aimed to condition male desire as well. As noted in the last chapter, melodramatic spectatorship in the Third Reich was not assumed to be primarily female. The melodra-

matic love story appealed to male viewers via lead actresses and supporting dancers who were explicitly selected for their erotic charms. As the present chapter shows, the choice of male romantic heroes followed a primarily racial-eugenic logic, while the choice of romantic heroines supported Nazi cinema's imperial ambitions. These ambitions included the annexation of new audiences abroad. The sexual content of Nazi films was calculated to exceed that of Hollywood in an attempt to make Nazi rule appear more attractive to German, occupied, and neutral audiences. The romance melodrama supported an image of Nazi culture as revolutionary; rather than forcing a return to tradition, Nazi love stories often promised to liberate spectators from the constraints of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sexual mores, which were denounced in Nazi media under the heading of "bourgeois morality." Contrary to the assumptions of scholars who have argued that the Nazis attempted to desexualize the cinema, historical evidence shows that Goebbels and his subordinates explicitly recruited the erotic attractions of female performers in order to suppress political critique.[6] Yet the "woman question" continually threatened to interfere with the propaganda minister's instrumentalization of the female body. Nazi cinema's deployment of the erotic sometimes backfired, resulting in excessive film texts and resistant spectators. There is evidence that some female spectators declined to embrace the Nazi vision of romance—a fascist love that was, at its heart, the romance of war.

The Functions of Romance: Gender Coding and Imperialism

In the classic melodramatic structure elaborated by nineteenth-century theater and early twentieth-century silent cinema, conflicts are simplified in dualistic forms and embodied as a clash of characters who represent either preferred forms of identification or prohibited desires. In the most simplified melodramatic form, excessive desire is located in the villain, and it threatens a heroine who is innocent and thus without illegitimate desire. Film melodrama of the 1930s and 1940s, however, alters this model; instead of a struggle of innocents against villains, conflicts of desire are generally internal, based in an overabundance within the heroine herself. Her desires are multiple and mutually exclusive and thus impossible within the economy of the classical film narrative, or they are forbidden by some generally accepted moral code. The melodramatic narrative thus attempts either to limit her desire and focus it on one object or to purge her of illicit desires. In this way

such narratives may serve a pedagogical or ideological function by warning of the consequences of illicit acts or by training desire to attach itself to the "correct" object.

Romance can thus be recruited for political service; even if it does not name an external enemy, as does the most original form of the melodrama, it can form desire in ideologically useful ways. On the most primary level, romance melodrama serves to define erotic objects. Usually it does so by a process of elimination of excess desire—of desire for what is politically or socially undesirable, usually embodied in personal or sexual terms by conflicting characters. Alternatively, the elimination of excess desire follows a pedagogical process of surrender and self-correction. In Molly Haskell's taxonomy of the classical Hollywood woman's film, love stories are generally either "choice" films, in which the female protagonist must choose between potential lovers, or "competition" narratives, in which she must struggle against a rival. Or they are "sacrifice" films, in which a choice has to be made between love and another life goal, usually work.[7]

Nazi romance melodramas largely conform to this scheme as well. The triangle was one of the most common shapes for romance narratives in the Third Reich. In innumerable melodramas and comedies, a woman finds herself in competition with another for the affections of a man, or she must choose between potential mates. The choice of mates was often also a choice between marital fidelity or infidelity. The ideological advantages of such a narrative pattern are clear: through the eventual elimination of one of the participants in the triangle, romance films could demonstrate preferred forms of identification while reinforcing the traits and values connoted by the "successful" partners. Likewise, "sacrifice" narratives provided lessons in accommodation to social norms. However, the forms of identification promoted by Nazi melodramas and the desires they elicited did not always conform to the most familiar fascist pronouncements about the restoration of woman to her "natural" position as housewife and mother.

Romances instruct audiences in partner choice, an issue that was of no small concern to a state obsessed with eugenics. As Reichsfilmintendant (Reich General Director of Film) Fritz Hippler asserted, the Nazis were very aware of how cinema conditioned male desire in particular: "the right woman, chosen for her external appearance as well as her internal qualities and characteristics, if used repeatedly and successfully in the cinema, can unconsciously but significantly influence the general level of taste and the ideal of beauty in a great number of men to very advantageous results."[8] It may not be immediately clear how the actresses who were cast the most often in Third Reich films were advantageous to the racist Nazi state. As has often

been noted before, the feminine beauty ideal offered by stars of Third Reich films was not always consistent with the racial ideal promoted elsewhere in Nazi media.[9] While the press repeatedly insisted on the inbred superiority of blondes and asserted that German-ness itself was synonymous with beauty, some of the most privileged stars of the Third Reich were dark-haired foreign-born women, such as Hitler's favorite actress, Lil Dagover, and Goebbels's favorite mistress, Lida Baarova. Blood-and-soil ideologues praised the purity of the farm woman and railed against the urban, androgynous styling of both genders in the Weimar cinema, yet most Nazi female film stars were clearly cosmopolitan in origin as well.[10] And although other forms of visual culture in the Third Reich sometimes idealized maternal and hyper-feminine figures in retrograde imitations of nineteenth-century styles, in the cinema such thoroughly domestic types were generally considered unappealing.

Indeed, the chaste, housewifely model of femininity was rarely romanticized in Nazi cinema, a fact that was long overlooked by film scholars who took the blood-and-soil Nazis at their word.[11] Romantic heroines were generally energetic and boyish in the manner of Marianne Hoppe, Brigitte Horney, and Ilse Werner, the latter of whom a postwar star study described as "the German pin-up girl" and who influenced the tastes of the World War II generation by being "energetic, quick-witted and independent."[12] Other lead actresses of romance melodramas, such as Zarah Leander and Olga Tschechowa, exuded an air of worldly sophistication that made them unsuitable for roles as contented, provincial German wives. However, the choice of actresses in the Third Reich was not made primarily according to the values of middle-class domesticity or the perverse logic of racial engineering. The cinema supported an image of Nazism as a modern, revolutionary movement, and its star system had psychological occupation in mind. The foreign and masculinized female faces of Nazi cinema promoted the imperialistic aims of both the militarist state and of the film industry itself. Goebbels justified the continuing reliance on foreign-born stars by pointing to the coming extension of the German film industry's empire: "We have to expand our [actress] types, since we will have to provide films to many more peoples after the war," he wrote in 1941.[13]

Likewise, the Nazi trade press was often concerned with the international success of German cinema and asserted that film actresses had to give a new face to the new state. In a 1937 article titled "Stop 'Gretchen'!" the editors of the *Film-Kurier* suggested that romance films had long given German femininity a bad reputation abroad and had failed to correct the enduring image of women in Germany as passive, suffering housewives. However, the *Film-Kurier* suggested that Nazi culture had actually begun to change this

image. The German actresses and dancers who had taken part in the 1937 "German Art Week" in Paris had given the French another impression, the editors claimed, citing the commentary of French journalists who "realized, with no small amount of surprise, that these German girls were anything but 'Gretchen-like,' but rather appeared as slender, athletic Amazons and as beautiful, lively, attractive beings."[14] German cinema, the editors of *Film-Kurier* insisted, should export an image of German women as erotic and dynamic rather than prudish and homebound: "In this respect, German film, which constantly travels beyond the German borders into foreign countries, can clear up misunderstandings . . . German cinema must also help to overcome the stereotypes with which the German woman and the German girl are still frequently viewed abroad. Our young femininity no longer represents the Gretchen of yesteryear, who was marked by a 'sour respectability,' a 'conceited humorlessness' and domestic skills that suffocated all life."[15] And in fact the classic melodrama of feminine innocence threatened by male Faustian drives rarely played on Third Reich screens. The typical heroine of Nazi romances was neither domestic nor entirely chaste; instead, she advertised the joys of international border crossings and the pleasures of seduction. The romantic heroine of Nazi cinema was often a privileged adventuress who did not have to possess household skills, since she had servants to perform the suffocating duties for her. Fixated on upper-class fantasies, German film romances most often narrated the love lives of star stage performers or members of the international moneyed elite, regardless of Nazi ideology's claim to represent the Germanic masses. Yet the cultivation of this type of gender imagery had a logic. The heroine of the Nazi romance melodrama was a prototype suited to the conquest of new territories, imaginable either as an imperious German mistress of newly seized *Lebensraum,* or as the attractive foreign territory itself, as the spoils of war.

The film *Man spricht über Jacqueline* (*Talking about Jacqueline,* 1937) is one such high-society romance and is about the training of an Amazon of sorts. Premiering the same year as the *Film-Kurier*'s call to end representations of passive German femininity, this mediocre melodrama was a classic competition narrative, pitting a sexually assertive tomboy heiress against her more demure and Gretchen-like younger sister. The Jacqueline of the film's title is masculine and adventurous enough to be called Jack or Jacky for short and is referred to by her male best friend as "the best guy [*Kerl*] in the world." She is described both in the dialogue and in the visual iconography of the film as untamed and even impossibly wild. Played by the dark-haired Wera Engels, she is predictably coded as more decadent than her sister, played by the blonde Sabine Peters. While Jacky jets between

luxury hotels in London, Rome, and Biarritz, her sister, June, stays in one place (Paris), dutifully studying music. Despite the fact that the younger sister does show some career ambitions and leads a metropolitan existence, the design of the two characters opposes one sister as a representative of modern, independent femininity and the other of more traditional, cloistered womanhood. Jacky is costumed in manly riding boots and hunting suits and is shown eternally in motion, either on trains or on horses, while her more static sister appears in monastic black dresses with white trim around high necks. Accordingly, the primary distinction between the two characters is one of sexual knowledge. Jacky smokes lots of cigarettes and has multiple erotic adventures, but June remains a model of self-denial and sexual innocence. At the beginning of the film, Jacky also flatly rejects marriage, preferring instead to engage in short affairs of her own choosing. Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, the film's sympathies clearly lie with her; she not only wins the romantic competition but also gets far more screen time than her less erotically appealing sister.

In this regard *Man spricht über Jacqueline* participated in a common convention of romance melodramas, which often favor initially transgressive female roles. The narrative and iconography of *Man spricht über Jacqueline* could be compared to the later Bette Davis romance *Dark Victory* (1939), which features a similarly willful horse-riding heiress. Not surprisingly, in both romance melodramas the heroines eventually fall from their high horses. The riding iconography that appears in so many Nazi and Hollywood romance melodramas makes for an appealingly gender-bending visual design, though it also suggests that unfettered female desire is akin to a wild bestiality and requires eventual reining in by a dominant trainer-lover. The romance film in virtually all classical cinema evidences a hypocritical morality in that the narrative trajectory ends in the punishment or retraining of the liberated woman, even while it simultaneously makes her freedom appear enviable.

However, unlike in *Dark Victory* and other Hollywood "medical discourse" melodramas, female sexuality is the explicitly articulated problem at the center of *Man spricht über Jacqueline,* not an invisible illness that requires diagnosis and sympathetic treatment by a paternalistic doctor husband. In many Third Reich romances it is the woman who is lusty by nature, while her male partner is restrained. Jacky's primary love interest, Michael, is a rigid middle-age divorcé taking a break from his position as an overseer of unspecified British colonies. As he soon makes clear, he tolerates no insurrection on the "dark continent" of female desire, just as he tolerates no political resistance by colonized peoples. He refuses to play along with Jacky's flirtation and is

Suggestions of sexual modernity: *Man spricht über Jacqueline* (1937). Source: Deutsche Kinemathek

overtly disgusted when she takes the sexual initiative. Women, he says, are all as unreliable as his unfaithful ex-wife: "They are all the same: unbridled and uninhibited," he proclaims, later taking a horse whip into his hands and threatening to use it on Jacky to retrain her. Still, the uninhibited and somewhat masculine girl is considered more desirable than her virtuous sister. At the end of the film, Jacky has been tamed via Michael's brutal masculinity and has repented her promiscuous past (but still wears transparent lingerie in postmarital hotel beds, thus transferring ownership of her stimulating sexuality to her husband). Her more properly dressed sister, briefly in the running for Michael's attentions, fails in the end to attract a mate. Evidently, the high-spirited object of sadistic discipline was considered a better match for the colonial master, since in her new position as mistress of a foreign estate, she would be more likely to turn the whip against colonized others than would a more cloistered type.

Man spricht über Jacqueline's "taming of the shrew" format was reproduced in many other Third Reich romances. Curiously, this structure can be seen as opposite to the conventional form of Anglo-American literary romances,

which tend toward the domestication of the male partner through a recognition of the woman's virtue. As Tania Modleski has observed in regard to American romance novels of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries: "Like the Harlequins of the present day, the novels repeatedly insisted on the importance of the heroine's virginity . . . in novel after novel, the man is brought to acknowledge the preeminence of love and the attractions of domesticity at which he has, as a rule, previously scoffed."[16] Unlike such American literary romances or the classic American film melodramas of D. W. Griffith, Nazi film romances usually do not insist on the chastity or the domesticity of the heroine, even if they do warn against female sexual excesses.

Indeed, women in Third Reich romances are granted enough signs of autonomy and androgyny to make them appear modern and occasionally almost liberated, though ultimately they may still be subject to the authority of conventional narrative closure. Third Reich romances often end their battles of the sexes in vicious forms of capitulation of the female partner (sometimes signaled by an at least partial surrender of masculine traits). However, these films do offer female roles that were considered somewhat transgressive at the time the films were screened, since their thematization of sexuality was more than what Hays Code–era Hollywood melodramas were able to risk. The forceful reining in of such transgressions was certainly viewed by much of the audience as necessary to prevent sexual chaos, but at the same time, such liberties were what sold Nazi films in the Reich and abroad.

Clearly, what was at work in Nazi film romances such as *Man spricht über Jacqueline* was not a reestablishment of traditional roles and representations in complete opposition to the gender imagery of the Weimar Republic, but rather an extension of Weimar's sexual modernization—though with a sadistic fascist edge. Historian Dagmar Herzog has stressed that Nazism promoted an intensified liberalization of sexuality, at least for the heterosexual, non-Jewish segment of the Reich's population: "Although in countless instances, above all in its thorough racialization of sex and in its heightened homophobia, the Third Reich represented a brutal backlash against the progressivism of Weimar, Nazism brought with it not only a redefinition but also an expansion of preexisting liberalizing trends."[17] One aspect of these liberalizing tendencies was the maintenance of fluidity in gender styling.

Despite the Nazis' rabid homophobia and their mass murder of gays, female androgyny of the sort found in *Man spricht über Jacqueline* remained very much a staple of Third Reich visual culture. The ambiguous gender identity of Nazi cinema's highest-paid star, Zarah Leander, has often been noted by postwar film critics and was even acknowledged during Third Reich

as well. In the advertising materials for the 1937 Leander melodrama *Zu neuen Ufern* (*To New Shores*), there was a suggestion of the star's bisexual appeal: "The secret of Zarah Leander's effect is that she touches equally on masculine, as well as feminine feelings."[18] In an effort to cultivate masculine feelings, Nazi cinema often presented women in drag costuming. Marlene Dietrich–style cross-dressing in top hat, trousers, and tailcoat was common for both film and stage revue numbers in the Third Reich, as was the manly, aristocratic horse-riding ensemble.[19] Some film narratives go even further than mannish fashion and allow women in drag to pass as men, thus blurring the borders of "essential" sex differences.[20] Such gender ambiguity, however, was not intended as covert support for lesbianism or female emancipation. Rather, manly costuming corresponded to the general masculinization and militarization of German society and to German cinema's efforts to remain at the forefront of industrial modernity.

As a result of such imagery, many contemporary viewers of Third Reich films certainly considered the gender roles presented in them to be highly modern rather than regressive.[21] The Nazis cultivated a falsified self-image as a revolutionary movement, and many contemporaries correspondingly believed that Nazi culture offered the potential for sexual revolution, both in terms of style and in sexual behavior. In 1934 Wilhelm Reich cited the following report that he had received from a former colleague in Germany, who believed that he had seen a clear change in sexual morality under the Nazis: "'The boys and girls of the Hitler Youth (H.J.) and of the League of German Girls (B.d.M.) enjoy unheard-of freedom at school and at home, which naturally manifests itself, inter alia, in sexual activity and friendships. In the past, no girl of school grade would have dared to be seen with a boyfriend picking her up after classes. Today, boys (especially H.J. boys) wait outside the school in a crowd, and everybody accepts this as a matter of course. Everybody says that B.d.M. stands for Bubi-drück-mich (I-wanna-be-hugged).'"[22] Wilhelm Reich insisted that such examples were not actually proof of a new degree of sexual freedom under the Nazis, and he emphasized that Nazism was in fact deeply reactionary in its sexual ideology. But the popular sense that Nazi culture promoted a liberation of sexual morality was widespread at the time, regardless of how repressive the rhetoric of the more extreme Nazi ideologues and the reality of gender relations in the Third Reich actually were. Many observers, both in the Reich and abroad, felt that there had been an eroticization of public life under Hitler and that morals of the masses were loosening according to a master plan. In 1942 Herbert Marcuse wrote in regard to Nazism and its self-representation in art:

> Sexual life has become a matter of political training and manipulation . . . Official encouragement is expressed in the deliberate herding of boys and girls in and near the labor camps, and in the stimulating distinctness with which National Socialist artists expose the erogenous zones of the human body . . . This new National Socialist realism fulfills its political function as an instrument for sexual education and inducement. The political utilization of sex has transformed it from a sphere of protective privacy in which a recalcitrant freedom could endure to a sphere of acquiescent license.[23]

In fact, the Propaganda Ministry did view the intensified eroticization of Nazi culture as an effective political strategy. In 1937 Goebbels noted approvingly in his diary that liberalization was already taking effect: "Sex life in this gigantic city somewhat loosened. It has to be that way."[24]

The cinema of the Third Reich attempted to create and capitalize on such illusions of sexual liberation. Just like the *Film-Kurier*'s article about modern German femininity, Third Reich media often compared past moments of repressive bourgeois morality to the Hitler era's more "enlightened" sexual morals and gender roles. Goebbels, at least, felt that the Third Reich was at the forefront of a cultural revolution that showed itself in its feminine beauty ideals. Nazi women were more modern than their repressed Wilhelmine grandmothers, he noted in his diary in 1939: "We chat at the Führer's about the variability of the concept of female beauty. What was considered beautiful 40 years ago is now chunky, fat, flabby. Sports, permissiveness, gymnastics, and the battle against hypocrisy have changed humanity . . . We are racing at full speed toward a new antiquity. And in all fields, we are the pioneers of this revolution."[25] Film, of course, was Goebbels's preferred medium for beauty revolutions. Continuing the fight against nineteenth-century styles of living, Nazi cinema consciously cultivated the erotic attractions of its female stars.

Documents that remain from a state-sponsored program of training camps for future Nazi film stars (*Nachwuchsforderung*) show that actresses with a strong sex appeal were actively recruited. Prospective candidates were given screen tests and evaluated according to their physical features and their general attractiveness. The candidates' body and facial shapes were analyzed in detail, though what was sought was less an impression of ideal beauty or even racial purity than of erotic appeal. This appeal was generally synonymous with a sense of the exotic, not necessarily of the *Volk* (people). Candidates who had what the Nazis considered to be ideal facial and racial features were nonetheless rejected if they failed to excite male fantasy, as the following memo from Reichsfilmdramaturg (Chief Script Editor) Frank Maraun regarding the screen test of one candidate showed: "The shots show that

[she] has a pretty figure, nice legs and an appealing naturalness in her manner and acting. But her face seems a bit boring and expressionless. It reveals a nice but rather unimaginative ordinary person without the attractions of an individual personality. Therefore it does not appear justified to make a further attempt with [her]."[26] Nice legs were not enough for the Nazi cinema if they suggested only the banal beauty of the average German girl; what was desired on the screen were not female representations of "the people" but rather of less common and more individual, even willful, types. Despite the often-repeated rhetoric of the Nazi press and other forms of printed propaganda insisting that the form of femininity desired in the Nazi state was based on *völkisch,* racialized aesthetics and rural values, the femininity cultivated on the screen was of a distinctly wealthier and worldlier class.[27]

The Nazi leadership's rejection of what they viewed as bourgeois morality did not necessarily extend to bourgeois or aristocratic style; there was a clear discrimination against rural, proletarian, and petit bourgeois types in the Nazis' cultivation of stars. In 1941 Goebbels wrote that the selection of trainee actors and actresses who make a "petit bourgeois impression" should be avoided, because "in almost no case do they have the possibility of gaining international clout."[28] One candidate, whom Frank Maraun described as an exceptionally talented actress with an already successful stage career, was nonetheless rejected for film roles because she had a "pronounced poor-person-characteristic in her face."[29] By way of contrast, another female candidate, who was given a screen test in 1942 and whose last name indicated aristocratic origins, was chosen for star training even though she had no acting experience, because she could "probably be developed into a sophisticated type of young socialite [*Salondame*]."[30] What was worth developing in the socialite type—besides the attractions of wealth and glamour—was the image of self-aware female sexuality; the upper-class mistress of the salon consciously applied erotic charm, the appeal of which was international.

In general, Third Reich actresses who showed an ability to portray characters that clearly possessed sexual knowledge were preferred over more wholesome types, particularly for use as the heroines of romance melodramas. Sometimes eroticism could even take precedence over ideal physiognomy, and occasionally an actress was chosen specifically for her less sophisticated, rawer form of sex appeal. Maraun's assessment of the facial features of another female candidate in May 1942 is surprising in this regard: "As a result of her low hairline and her noticeably small forehead, her face has a pronounced animalistic quality. The expression around the mouth intensifies the impression of a whore. But this tendency toward whorishness in the candidate is not unappealing. One could imagine that the candidate could develop into

a striking and useful type."[31] The fact that Maraun considered this actress to have a usefully "whorish" look indicates the extent to which eroticism was consciously instrumentalized by Nazi culture producers. His use of the terms "*prägnant*" (striking, or fertile) and "*einsatzfähig*" (useful, or capable of being deployed) in describing the desirability of this type of actress reveals that the female body was considered a key weapon on both domestic and international fronts. Nazi cinema, like Nazi society in general, clearly had a continuing need for prostitutes.[32] Usually they appeared as minor background figures rather than romantic leads, lending harbor bars and colonial nightclubs their fascinatingly exotic atmospheres (as in Helmut Käutner's melodrama *Grosse Freiheit Nr. 7* [*Great Freedom Nr. 7*], 1944). In lead roles the prostitute was generally promoted to the level of wealthy courtesan and given the tragic higher art status of a fallen woman, as in *Der Postmeister.*

Another of Hilde Krahl's lead roles, however, offered the reversed logic by rescuing a woman from a brothel and integrating her into Hanseatic high society. At the beginning of the 1939 romance/adventure film *Die barmherzige Lüge* (*The Merciful Lie*), Krahl's heroine Anja is coded as a prostitute, and, more remarkably, her national and ethnic origins remain somewhat uncertain throughout the film. The initial sequences are set somewhere along the Manchurian-Mongolian border, in a town that, as the introductory titles proclaim, is the starting point of dangerous expeditions into frontier regions. At the center of the mise-en-scène of this wild East outpost is a female-owned tavern and brothel (offering, as a sign indicates, "Equipment of All Kinds"). Anja, the niece of the brothel owner, is shown in her first scene on horseback, winning a race against a group of male riders. When she returns to the tavern from her riding expedition, she is propositioned by a French man who offers her furs in exchange for favors, and she brushes him off with a bored "maybe," after which a wandering camera explores the other Eurasian prostitutes' legs and chest regions. This eastern wilderness is represented as a space where everything can be either purchased or taken by force, and where individual Europeans have the right to explore unmapped territories and to colonize what they find useful.

The hidden potential of this fertile ground and its main character is revealed in the next sequence, when the viewer discovers that the wild rider Anja is also the single mother of a half-German baby. Within a few cuts the unwitting father of the child (the "explorer" Dr. Thomas Clausen) unexpectedly returns in colonial khaki, ready for another expedition into the Soviet-controlled borderlands. Determined to unite with the father, Anja watches in disappointment as he helps another woman out of his tank-like truck. This rival is the explorer's German wife, and her character is constructed

The "eroticism-filled air of colonial surroundings": *Die barmherzige Lüge* (1939). Rights: Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-Stiftung; Distributor: Transit Film GmbH

to provide an obvious contrast to the vampish Anja. Unlike Anja, the legal wife is sexually naïve and unexciting, a young blonde with the virginal name Maria, who takes care of her husband with complete devotion. In one scene she explains their marriage thus: "He needs someone to sew on his buttons, and I also transcribe his journal," to which her husband sarcastically answers, "What would I do without you?" She also inquires what the male fur hunters are doing in the tavern, failing to understand the sexual economy of this world. The contrast between the sexual knowledge of the two women is also connoted through dress: while Maria covers herself in respectable wool suits, Anja appears in a low-cut dress with a feather boa and a coquettish fan. Significantly, though, the chastely dutiful Maria is also childless, and here the viewer is perhaps supposed to infer a connection between her ignorance about the facts of prostitution and her own lack of fruitful sexuality. At this point in the narrative, we might expect the competition structure to be resolved according to the standard international convention for melodrama, whereby women of ambiguous sexual morals are punished and eliminated in order to make room for "pure" heroines and to reaffirm the status quo of marriage. However, in *Die barmherzige Lüge* it is the sexually innocent legal wife who is given a quick offscreen death, while the prostitute and premarital mother is finally recognized as the legitimate romantic partner. After Maria dies of food poisoning and Thomas disappears on an expedition, Anja travels to Germany and integrates herself into his wealthy Bremen family, masquerading as the dead Maria.

The vision of German family life portrayed in the rest of the film is typical for Nazi romances, and also typically at odds with the official Nazi ideology of large families comprised of classless members of a national community. The Germany of Third Reich romance films is populated by corporate directors, abundant servants, and few children. When Anja brings her son into the family mansion, there is a flurry of dynastic excitement, since she has succeeded in finally rescuing the imperiled family corporation by means of a male heir and future director. The supposedly valuable child, it should be noted, does not receive more screen time than is necessary to simply state its existence, since the interests of the film lie more with adult situations. This, as we will see in the next chapter, is fully consistent with Nazi cinema's ambivalent attitude toward children.

Although she is not eliminated, the sexualized heroine in *Die barmherzige Lüge* does go through a retraining process before her final integration into the couple, but this process is less brutal than in the earlier *Man spricht über Jacqueline.* While in Bremen, Anja smokes, unpacks and fondles her sequined

dress nostalgically, and offers herself for casual sex to a friend of the family, but she soon surrenders these markers of her past life in order to assimilate into upper-class society for the sake of her child. The final shot of the film has Anja complacently sitting in the springtime backyard in a flowered dress, surrounded by her son and his father (presumably now her legitimate husband, though no wedding is ever shown). The transformation from fur to floral prints, from horse riding in the steppe to a chair under an oak, marks a classic taming-of-the-shrew narrative. It should be noted, however, that while a retraining process occurs here—as in most romance films that feature somewhat transgressive heroines—there is no explicit punishment. Rather, the formation of the family and the heroine's rise in class status at the end of the film is presented as a final recognition of the inherent legitimacy of the premarital mother.

Thus, although the ending of *Die barmherzige Lüge* is entirely conventional, this film is another example of how the sexual morality of Nazi melodramas often differed significantly from that of Hays Code–era Hollywood. This difference can perhaps be explained by the same political intent evident in Hilde Krahl's later starring role in *Der Postmeister*. Like the later film, *Die barmherzige Lüge* does double duty by picturing the spaces of war and suggesting the sexual possibilities of wartime conquest while setting standards for gender roles at home. The Manchurian setting of the beginning sequences of the film clearly locate it in an area of conflict related to the upcoming military campaign. If *Der Postmeister* promised erotic adventure as a main attraction awaiting the soldier/colonizer in the Soviet East, *Die barmherzige Lüge* paved the same road by providing a similar spectacle of foreign bodies that could be either taken by force or purchased with goods acquired by guns. The eastern territories pictured in *Die barmherzige Lüge* seem to offer something to female military-entrepreneurial spirit as well. Anja's aunt Vera is not only a madam but also a merchant of materiél for European expeditions, and she is described in the film's dialogue as making a highly profitable *Bombengeschäft* (literally, a "bombing business") in doing so. She is also the most powerful person in town, commanding an army of subordinates. There was thus a subtle lure written into this script, a promise of new economic possibilities in the East for Nazi women. In the German Reich, it also made clear, making large sums of money remained a hereditary male trade.

While suggesting the attractions to be found in the business of war, the film's voyages across the two spaces of foreign and domestic, East and West, also created a hybrid model of femininity that was typical for Nazi melodramas. Romances required their female leads to display both erotic appeal and public restraint, fertility and masculine energy, self-sacrifice and individualized

character. Though the previously wild heroine becomes partially domesticated through insertion into urbane society, she is still clearly in possession of the skills that allowed her to survive at the borders of civilization—and is ready to unpack them again for German wartime use. The western movement of the heroine in *Die barmherzige Lüge* conformed to the *Heim-ins-Reich* (return-to-the-Reich) structure of many Nazi melodramas that featured women abroad. By first locating the heroine in foreign territory and then repatriating her into the Reich, such films fabricated an integrated national body whose aggressive arms reached across many continents. Curiously, though, the heroine of *Die barmherzige Lüge* is never explicitly identified as being of German ethnicity; thus, nationalization occurs here with a woman of ambiguous origins.

This ambiguity of origins was not at all atypical for Nazi romantic heroines, since Nazi cinema as a whole relied heavily upon the allure of the foreign in terms of both casting and setting. The contradiction between the Third Reich's racial policies and its cinematic imaginary was a thorn in the eyes of some Nazis who insisted on ideological consistency. In his 1941 treatise on the ideals and failings of Nazi film, Peter von Werder criticized what he saw as a still rampant preference for exotic types and suggested that German cinema's eroticization of foreigners and even non-Europeans was being carried out at the expense of German women. This had to be changed, von Werder insisted: "the colored woman is still not represented in film in a way which reflects our actual views. A corresponding correction of the female image as it appears in the foreign and therefore particularly pungent eroticism-filled air of colonial surroundings is practically and theoretically important: practically with regard to the colonial expectations of the Germans and theoretically with regard to the overall attitude toward the German woman."[33] Erotic fantasies of dark-skinned women, von Werder implied, were threatening the ability of German men to be both efficient administrators of colonial territories and pure breeders with German women. Films should be structured according to racial motives, he asserted: "A romantic admiration for the foreigner, especially in his most private area, is not appropriate . . . The dramaturgical objection that foreign eroticism creates a first-class attraction for the cinematic form takes second place to ideological-political considerations, as well as to the racial law of breeding."[34] Even in the Third Reich, as von Werder implies here, film producers depended upon eroticism as the main foundation of cinematic effectiveness, and fantasies of the foreign remained a primary source of spectator pleasure. Von Werder, however, clearly neglected to understand just how central such fantasies were to the Nazi imperialist (and even racist) project.[35] As we have seen in *Der Postmeister* and *Die barmherzige Lüge,* the erotic gaze onto foreign territories and bodies

indeed supported the "ideological-political" aims of militaristic expansion, as did Nazi cinema's visions of femininity in general.

However, I would suggest that the standards set by actors in romance melodramas were actually more crucial for the Nazi racist logic than those of actresses. Representations of femininity were perhaps not always consistent, because they were less central to the fascist project than rigid conceptions of masculinity. The eroticized or romanticized foreigner, as von Werder suggested, was therefore primarily a female role. With the exceptions of the Dutch actors Johannes Heesters and Frits van Dongen, almost all the male stars of Third Reich romance films were German or Austrian. This fact did have a basis in the divided attitudes towards inter-ethnic reproduction: Nazi leaders often accounted for the fact that German soldiers would produce children with foreign women, particularly through prostitution or rape, which they considered natural effects of war and colonization. According to their perverse logic, this could only further the ultimate goal of the Germanization of the world. Since German men would not be expected to take responsibility for children fathered with women abroad, their foreign affairs would have no effect on the ethnic constitution of the Reich. On the other hand, German women's romances with foreign men would lead to a disastrous degeneration of "the blood" and the contamination of the "national body," according to Nazi thinking.[36] The fact that Nazi propaganda did not manage to entirely eradicate German women's attraction to foreigners, especially to non-"Aryans," was a constant source of anxiety for the authorities.[37]

Thus, Nazi cinema allowed for some foreign attractions when it came to the choice of actresses, but its choice of male romantic leads was less adventurous. Classical cinema's conventional gender divisions also influenced the choice of actors. In Germany, as in Hollywood, the actresses were the primary spectacle. The male leads of Nazi romances were so similar in their physical type that for today's viewers they may be virtually indistinguishable from each other, and their character types were also standardized. They were uncomplicated winners, as this contemporary description of the popular actor Hans Söhnker demonstrates: "He has always been given victorious roles, men who not only always get their due and attain their goal, thus remaining the hero in the sense of the old cinematic norm, but who also stand on the sunny side of life, and who, above all, must never go through any tragic transformation themselves, or make any steps toward devilish temptation."[38] The typical Nazi romantic hero was always right and was never asked to undergo character developments.[39] Male actors were often chosen according to their ability to create an impression of "manliness," which, as we have seen in *Man spricht über Jacqueline,* was often synonymous with sexual restraint. An actor who

seemed too arrogantly aware of his seductive powers could be rejected as being too feminine, as proved by another of Frank Maraun's memos regarding the screen test of a male candidate for actor's training. Maraun wrote: "All in all, an unmanly appearance. Is unpleasantly self-satisfied and has the presumptuous superiority of a young hairdresser who gets girls easily, for my tastes altogether too soft . . . In sum: training does not appear worthwhile."[40] Male seducers did not often appear on Nazi screens, since sexual awareness and gender flexibility were considered female properties.

Indeed, the Nazi image of masculinity and the gender roles of German men were more determinate than that of women. Male androgyny was much less common in Third Reich media than images of female androgyny, and intimations of male homosexuality were rare in Third Reich cinema. An important reason for the greater flexibility in female representations lies in the fact that lesbianism was considered less threatening to the Nazi system than male homosexuality. Whereas gay men appeared to undermine the reproduction goals of the Third Reich, lesbians theoretically could still produce future soldiers. Furthermore, in the Weimar era there had been a greater degree of institutionalized homophobia directed toward men than toward women. While male homosexuality had been punishable by law since 1919 under Paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code, no law officially existed on the books during the Weimar Republic or the Third Reich to punish female homosexuality. Weimar-era opponents of Nazism, we should remember, also made use of homophobia in their anti-Nazi rhetoric.[41] Nazism's association with male homosexuality in the popular imaginary had become a political liability by the early 1930s, and Nazi leaders sought to limit such associations through the murder of gay members of the paramilitary SA (Sturmabteilung), and by controlling images of masculinity in Third Reich media.

As a result, male leads in Nazi films were generally strict and efficient, lacking in the sort of character development that arose from the conflicting desires of female protagonists. The romance film's triangular choice structures confined male subjectivity into the isolation cells of either winner or loser. Much stress was placed upon the class status of male protagonists, with the winning romantic hero in Nazi melodramas almost always a man of means; there was nothing socialist about the National Socialist romantic imaginary. A favorite lead figure for Nazi melodramas before 1939 was the British aristocrat or high-level colonial administrator (as in *Man spricht über Jacqueline, Eine Frau ohne Bedeutung* (*A Woman of No Importance,* 1936), and *Das Mädchen Irene*). After the start of the war he was replaced by the figure of the *haut bourgeois* shipping executive from Bremen or Hamburg (as in

the romance melodramas *Frauenliebe–Frauenleid* [*Women's Loves–Women's Sorrows,* 1937] and *Opfergang* [*Sacrifice,* 1944]). Other romance films feature business leaders with colonial connections, such as Willy Birgel's Berlin industrialist moonlighting as a pilot/adventurer in North Africa in *Verklungene Melodie* (*Dead Melody,* 1939).

Male romantic leads were commonly also medical doctors or Herr Doktors; in most instances romantic heroes represented some kind of authority figure. Although many women in Third Reich melodramas had professions, their matches were almost always higher on the professional ladder, and quite often their matches were their supervisors both at work and at home. Men in Third Reich romances were usually many years older than their female counterparts, which, as we will see in the next chapter, often gave rise to suggestions of incestuous attractions. Heroines of Nazi love stories were often barely even of legal age, and any objection to such intergenerational romances was often portrayed as outmoded bourgeois prudery. Most notably in this regard, the romances *Reifende Jugend* (*Ripening Youth,* 1933), *Arme kleine Inge* (*Poor Little Inge,* 1936), *Liebe kann lügen* (*Love Can Lie,* 1937), and *Ihr erstes Erlebnis* (*Her First Experience,* 1939) all pair teenage schoolgirls with their teachers.

Reifende Jugend was one of the first productions of the Third Reich to be highly praised in the Nazi press, and it was one of the first to address the place of girls and women in the new regime. It is particularly conflicted in its reinforcement of patriarchal structures, since it also critiques educational discrimination and pretends to present a modern and progressive perspective on gender. The film concerns a trio of girls who transfer into an elite, all-male high school in the patrician city of Lübeck so that they can study for their university entrance exams, a course of study not available to them in their gender-segregated school. Many of the all-male teachers of the school see the presence of the girls as an attack on traditional values and academic quality, a position that the film initially sets out to correct. The Latin teacher, the most sexist of the group, is caricatured as hopelessly out of date, his ideas on gender as outmoded as his Wilhelmine-style middle part and fencing scar. The boys in the school initially treat the girls with macho disdain, until the girls succeed in proving themselves against all expectations by excelling in math and science, while the hormone-driven boys begin to write love poetry and neglect their schoolwork.

Reifende Jugend stars Hertha Thiele as the main protagonist, Elfriede, and she lends a lot of the independent, intelligent vigor that she displayed in her roles in *Mädchen in Uniform* (*Girls in Uniform,* 1931) and *Kuhle Wampe, oder: Wem gehört die Welt?* (*Kuhle Wampe, or Who Owns the World?* 1932) to

Confronting sexism in the schoolgirl romance film: *Reifende Jugend* (1933). Source: Deutsche Kinemathek

this role as well. Though the earlier film has often been cited as a classic of lesbian cinema, it was also openly admired by film journalists in the Third Reich, and consequently it was clearly a model for *Reifende Jugend* and other youth films after 1933.[42] In fact, *Reifende Jugend* replays many of the same elements as *Mädchen in Uniform,* but substitutes a heterosexual choice narrative for the Weimar film's homosexual crush. The film ultimately performs a switch by shifting the focus from the issue of girls and science education to the question of which romantic partner Elfriede will choose—either her adoring classmate Knud or her authoritarian physics teacher, Dr. Kerner. Naturally, the much older man wins the competition, becoming both the final examiner and the fiancé of the schoolgirl. Although all the girls pass their final exams with high marks, in the end it remains unclear whether they will go on to careers in medicine or simply marry. The initially progressive impulse of the film toward gender equality is thus partially defused and rerouted into romance, which is configured as a hierarchical rather than an egalitarian structure.

It was not only in schoolgirl romances that this occurred but also in many other choice narratives of Nazi cinema. In the standard choice scheme, a young and comparatively sensitive man competes for the heroine against

an older authority figure who, in most cases, shows contempt for or disapproval of her. The older man almost always prevails, as if film producers feared that women might be tempted to flee the hierarchical fascist order with a young male comrade and set up a democratic community of two. A subsidiary plotline in *Man spricht über Jacqueline* provided another example of just such a training in partner choice. The young, male best friend who calls Jacky "the best guy in the world" and clearly desires her in her original form is rejected in favor of the older man who, as the heroine says, can "make what he wants out of a woman." At the end of the film, the winner, Michael, proclaims in relation to the chastised Jacky, "I tortured her because I love her." As is usual in Third Reich films, the cruel, authoritarian male is presented as the preferable choice, and brutality is presented as the very proof of love. In Nazi romances the lovers are adversaries rather than virtuous allies besieged by a villainous foe, in contrast to earlier conventions of romance.[43]

Despite their seemingly autonomous, willful characteristics, romantic heroines often proclaim in Nazi scripts that they want men who can dominate them, who are stubborn *Dickschädel* (thick heads), not tender lovers. This is perfectly consistent with international generic conventions for classical cinema, since melodramatic heroines, in both Germany and America, usually prefer men who show contempt for them. As Pam Cook stated in regard to the Hollywood romance: "the problematization of female desire in the women's picture means that her choice of the romantic hero as love object is usually masochistic, against her own best interests, and she suffers for her desire."[44] For Cook, Hollywood's problem lies in the very irreconcilability of femininity and desire, in the essential impossibility of conceptualizing feminine subjectivity within the classical representational system. Even if the heroine's choice is painful, in essence there is really no choice at all.

Labors of Love: Work Romances

In many romance films, of Hollywood as well as the Third Reich, the central conflict of interest is a woman's irreconcilable attachment to both love and work. The conventional solution to this form of triangular desire in all classical cinemas is the surrender of the latter for the former. In most Hollywood films of the 1930s and '40s, as in the majority of Third Reich films, women ended their careers in marriage. As Molly Haskell commented, female autonomy was merely a narrative ploy in American films of the era: "their mythic destiny, like that of all women, was to find love and cast off the 'veneer' of independence."[45] Casting off independence was generally equivalent to discarding the illusion of subjectivity, the claim to desire.

However, in some instances work actually appeared stronger than love. It is clear from many romance films of the Third Reich that the veneer of autonomy was still quite appealing, and the desire for recognition in the workplace remained strong among many female spectators. In the 1938 romance *Die vier Gesellen* (*The Four Companions*), the process of surrendering to a conventional female destiny appears particularly painful. The film argues that female claims to financial independence are doomed due to the ever present double standard in the economic sphere, yet it simultaneously evokes utopian desires for an egalitarian world where talent would be rewarded regardless of gender. Love, on the other hand, appears somewhat unattractive in comparison.

Die vier Gesellen stars Hans Söhnker as a professor of advertising and graphic design, and the beautifully brooding Ingrid Bergman (in her only appearance in a Third Reich film) as his art school student. At the beginning of the film, Söhnker's character lectures his soon-to-graduate class about the difficulty of making money with drawing and painting and then addresses his four female students directly, warning them about the particular futility of their career efforts. Bergman's character, Marianne, he says, suffers from "misguided feminine ambitions," so he offers her a job as his housewife instead. A subsequent scene begins to express the frustrations of a woman with ambition in an unequal world. Söhnker as the chauvinistic professor surprises her in the school kitchen as she is preparing food for the graduation party, and tells her that an apron is really the most flattering work wear for her and that cooking is the most advanced "feminine science." Bergman/Marianne responds with a furious look, leans into a loaf of bread with an enormous knife, and then drops a greasy sausage into a boiling pot of water. Not taking much notice of her castrating gesture or of her legitimate resentment, the professor details her other future job duties, such as sewing on his buttons and darning the holes in his socks, before complaining that the sandwich she has just prepared was obviously not "smeared with love." He adds that she will still have plenty of time to learn how to butter bread correctly, and then slaps her on the back and growls "*Wiedersehen!*" before exiting the room. The camera work in this scene serves to align the viewer with the female protagonist's perspective, since it reveals the rather disgusting materiality of the food that Marianne is preparing, and creates a very palpable sense of dread with regard to the daily work of a housewife. But this film does not intend to offer an escape. It is already clear at this early point in the film that this man is indeed her future husband, although the film barely maintains a discourse of love. Instead, marriage is presented in dreary economic terms, as a form of cheap labor like many others, but the rest of the narrative works on breaking down the woman's resistance to this

Foregrounding the romance of work: *Die vier Gesellen* (1938). Courtesy bpk, Berlin/Art Resource, New York

position. The film thus reflects what Marcuse referred to as Nazism's "cynical matter-of-factness," according to which all private need was subordinated to the demands of industrial efficiency.[46]

Die vier Gesellen directly addresses gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the work world, presenting both of these as unavoidable facts of life and the result of a strained economy. After the heroine's demeaning encounter with her professor and future fiancé, she becomes determined to prove him wrong by launching her own career in advertising. A montage sequence follows with shots of Marianne searching for a job, cutting out newspaper announcements, traveling through the city, and experiencing one rejection after another—a montage that is clearly indebted to Weimar-era proletarian films like *Kuhle Wampe.* A close-up of her shoes reveals holes in their soles, directly visualizing the physical costs of feminine ambition. During one interview a lecherous company director says he might consider trying her out, with the editing of the sequence suggesting in what capacity she would be expected to work. His voice track is added to a visual montage of fragmented shots of the legs and breasts of wooden mannequins modeling lingerie, as if to suggest by analogy that female bodies are still the main unit of exchange in the business world and that they are as interchangeable as the limbs on a mannequin.

The central section of the film does manage to briefly awaken hope of escape from this oppressive sexual economy. When Marianne joins forces with the other underemployed female graduates of her design program and they launch their own advertising firm, the all-female company appears almost as a viable—though militaristically disciplined—alternative to marital life. They receive one short-lived design contract, and an ecstatic scene follows as the young women see their advertising poster hanging in the Friedrichstrasse, Berlin's main commercial street, and view the results of their work as publicly visible and validated. But once it becomes known that the firm is female-owned, the contracts do not continue, and soon they can no longer find money for food and rent. When Marianne's former professor comes to visit and renews his offer of marriage, she is already swooning from hunger, her entrepreneurial will broken. Marianne's capitulation to housewifery at the end of the film suggests the necessary failure of women's business ambitions. The only escape for the ambitious, exceptional woman, the film suggests, was in the higher sphere of fascist "fine art." Three of the four business partners end up with unplanned pregnancies or in unappealing marriages, while the fourth, the woman coded as the most masculine, remains single and finds her calling in the painting of massive, propagandistic canvases; consistent

with Nazi cinema's frequent equation of the artist with the soldier, she is effectively recruited to serve the state in a warlike fashion.

In *Die vier Gesellen* paid work and marriage are considered mutually exclusive, and the film's denouement does give priority to the latter. The rest of the film, however, manages to awaken the desire for both gender equality and for same-sex community much more effectively than the desire for heterosexual love. The battle of the sexes is not resolved in a joyful embrace of romance in this film; Bergman's character agrees to marry Söhnker's because she is literally starving, and because it is the most conventional form of narrative closure. The mystique of marriage is barely maintained here, and as in so many Nazi romance melodramas, only a sense of resignation remains. As we will see in the next chapter, this is not the only Third Reich film that evidences ambivalence toward the institution of marriage.

Die vier Gesellen is also not the only film of the Third Reich that speaks to female desires for public recognition of accomplishments, even if Nazi cinema had no genuine intention of advancing an autonomous female subjectivity. *Reifende Jugend,* as we have seen, thematizes male prejudice in regard to female talents in the sciences and creates a vision of a potential world of equal access, though it derails this possibility through romance with a dominant mate. There are a few notable exceptions to the "taming of the shrew" mold. In the 1939 romance *Illusion,* a stubborn rural aristocrat demands that his successful actress fiancée give up her career to marry him, and she suffers many melodramatic torments until she finally breaks off the engagement at the end of the film and decides in favor of her audiences, a choice validated by the Nazi overvaluation of the political function of art. In several films, the work/love triangle is actually resolved in a more balanced manner. In the 1943 romantic comedy *Unser Fräulein Doktor* (*Our Miss PhD*), the heroine marries and maintains her professorial position. In *Die Großstadtmelodie* (*Melody of a Great City*), a woman's film from the same year, a photojournalist perseveres in the face of her industry's chauvinism until she finally couples with a famous photographer who encourages her work.

Most Nazi romances that address the problem of a love relationship in conflict with work do end in a surrender of career ambitions for the sake of marriage. But this can be considered as much a concession to international generic and gender standards as to specifically fascist ideologies. Most romance films in all the classical cinemas of the 1930s and 1940s ended in an implicit marital pact and a broken work contract. Molly Haskell has even proposed that this was due to market concerns in accordance with spectator preference, that the conventional endings of Hollywood films were the ones desired by female audiences themselves: "After all, most women were

housewives and they didn't want to be made to feel that there was a whole world of possibilities they had forsaken through marriage or inertia; rather, they wanted confirmation of the choice they had made."[47] In an insecure world of limited options and male resistance, progressive images of successful female professionals certainly provoked more anxiety than pleasure for some female spectators.[48]

The seemingly ambiguous attitude toward women's careers in Nazi romances may point less to ideological inconsistencies in Nazi film policy and more to calculated tactics when it comes to addressing female spectators. As Claudia Koonz has asserted, the appeal of Nazism for some women was actually the promise that they would be able to return to traditional gender roles. Many German women, particularly from the lower classes, did not romanticize the work world: "While American feminists were demanding entry into paid work, poorly paid German women dreamed of escaping from it."[49] Many women voted for the Nazis in the hope that they could become housewives, but this promise for the most part went unfulfilled: "German wives and mothers who had rallied to a revival of domesticity felt cheated when Nazi policy threatened them with 'modernization' worse than the threat of New Womanhood in the Weimar Republic."[50] Both Nazi policy and Nazi imagery offered mixed messages to women, in the face of which they could easily be misled, or to which they could choose their own preferred interpretation. The Third Reich created conditions for which it pretended to be the solution, creating anxiety while promising to alleviate it in return for allegiance. Nazi propaganda promised to "restore womanhood" to a former place of esteem, a promise that appealed to women who felt maltreated by Weimar-era commodification. Nazi cinema, on the other hand, offered illusions of continuity with Weimar culture that certainly soothed those who were concerned about Nazi ideology's regressive tendencies.

For women who wished to work, Nazi cinema did offer some encouragement, since films in which a single female main protagonist does not have an identifiable occupation are in the minority.[51] Images of married professional women were less common in Nazi cinema, and in films that did feature a married woman, her main occupation was usually extramarital romance (as we will see in the next chapter). When proper housewives appeared on screen, they often did so as minor characters and negative examples. Housewives were sometimes even figures of ridicule, and working women were often contrasted favorably to women with no profession.[52]

A scene in the 1938 melodrama *Heimat* (*Homeland*), for example, actually argues for the moral superiority of the woman who can earn her own living. Although generically more a family melodrama than a romance film, it is

worth considering here. Zarah Leander stars in the role of Magda, a woman who has made a highly successful career as a singer in America and returns to her Prussian hometown to both pay a visit to her stern father and settle the score with the man who many years ago made her a single mother. Upon arrival in her otherwise stifling and hostile *Heimat,* she is invited by an enlightened young prince to give a public performance of her music at a royal ball. The ball guests and members of the local gentry are caricatured in the scene as representatives of an outdated puritanical morality—a morality that, as the film implies, had been overcome by the new morals of National Socialism. As the review of the film in the popular magazine *Filmwelt* emphasized, Magda was to be understood as a proto-fascist fighter against the prudish standards of Wilhelmine high society:

> In the seclusion of the upper class there were iron rules that were supposed to be civilized, but were often inhumane. This film, *Heimat*, freely adapted from Sudermann's play, tells us how a strong heart overcame such obstacles, in order to correct a moral code that was suffocating in ruffles and whale bones . . . In this way, this female fighter in the best sense of the word comes to the great sentence: "I believe, ladies, that every person has the right to live his own life as he, within the context of society, sees fit."[53]

Both this review and the film suggested that the traditionalist Wilhelmine women in whalebone corsets were the main enforcers of a hypocritical morality that reigned until fascism cleared the way for the more liberated lifestyle of the working woman. All plump, older housewives, they are costumed in the Third Reich's usual way of indicating an unsympathetic and outmoded style of femininity: with high-necked black lace gowns, Victorian brooches, and bonnets or oversized feathered hats. Magda, on the other hand, is costumed in a gold-trimmed, low-cut ball gown and has uncovered hair. She is repeatedly framed in shots with groups of admiring men, while the ladies are separated in their own shots or are visible in the background of the mise-en-scène, nosily inspecting Magda's provocative dress through lorgnettes. This use of eyeglasses indicates that they have control over vision and that women determine social manners in this supposedly skewed society. Directing her critical look to Magda, one woman whispers disapprovingly, "Morals are certainly loosening to an alarming degree!" Even more, the unsightly matrons are disgusted by Magda's mobile lifestyle and her refusal to settle into a more traditional domestic role. When one protests that a respectable woman should have a "cozy home" (*trauliches Heim*), Magda responds, "In my life, I have learned that it is more important to have work, a profession."

The heroine invites audience identification through her consciously sexual provocations, and by the approving glances of the men, including the young prince who accompanies Magda on the piano as she sings a cabaret song. The matrons are so horrified by the lascivious text of her chanson that they gasp and send away their daughters and then complain indignantly to a Protestant minister who is also in attendance. But even the minister, like most of the men at the party, who are clearly impressed by Magda's talents and décolleté, defends her and sanctifies her combative will, as did the propaganda minister himself. Rather than viewing the film as a celebration of love for the provincial German homeland, Goebbels primarily embraced the film's anti-prudery message: "Milieu of the prewar era is brilliantly captured . . . The mask is pulled down on a false and hypocritical morality of honor," Goebbels wrote after viewing *Heimat.*[54] Melodramatic effect is achieved by the end of the film when Magda regains the recognition of her father, as he finally abandons his moralistic objections to her sexual history and embraces his illegitimate granddaughter. Thus, *Heimat* explicitly argued for women's work, and its construction of viewer identification supported the position of the eroticized career woman and single mother.

Nazi cinema, in fact, did more to promote female careers than Nazi society in general. A remarkable number of Third Reich films of all genres feature professionally oriented women as central protagonists. Most commonly in melodramas, as in *Heimat* and most other Zarah Leander films, the woman is an artist or performer, and her work is described as being a result of her exceptional talent. But spheres of activity other than the arts were also represented, and some films suggested that women had skills that were more commercial as well. Although *Die vier Gesellen* suggested that a female-owned business was inevitably doomed to failure, a few other films did cast women in positions as the directors of companies.[55] A surprising number of Third Reich films also featured women in traditionally male careers such as science, medicine, and law.[56] Nazi cinema was even more liberal than the Nazi legal system; at the same time that the Nazi film industry was producing seemingly progressive images of female doctors, the Nazi justice system was severely restricting women from practicing medicine,[57] reflecting the strategically mixed messages of the Third Reich in general.

In 1937 women with advanced degrees lost the right to be called "Frau Doktor,"[58] yet many films, such as *Reifende Jugend,* highlight women's education and the social status that academic titles brought.[59] Such films anticipated actual changes in the university populace during the war. By 1942 not only were female students in the majority in many German universities, but they also outnumbered men even in departments of mathematics and sciences.[60]

According to Security Service reports that tracked changes in the student population, economics and medicine were particularly popular fields of study for new female students. The Nazi leadership, while taking note of this change with some concern about women's readiness for and commitment to higher education, concluded that it would be necessary to encourage women to complete advanced degrees in order to make up for the dire lack of professors and professionals in the Reich. Academia was to become a more female sphere after the war; as one 1943 report concluded: "One hopes to fill some vacancies in the academic professions by increasing the number of female students. It will become increasingly necessary to take this route, since a not insignificant portion of male high school graduates and students who are now serving in the war will no longer be returning from the front."[61] In Germany, unlike in the United States, women were not considered to be in the work world only "for the duration." While America was plagued by the fear that women would refuse to surrender their jobs to returning soldiers and once again become housewives,[62] Germany was preparing for the eventuality that its soldiers would not return and that "housewife" would no longer be a profession widely available in the postwar period, and Nazi romance films anticipated this change.

Predictably, however, women's work was ultimately described less as a means to autonomy than as a further form of servitude to the state. As Sabine Hake has pointed out, women's ambition in the Third Reich was explained "in the context of the Protestant work ethic and its rhetoric of duty and sacrifice."[63] The *Film-Kurier* commented on the representation of a woman's career as medical researcher in the 1944 melodrama *Das Herz muss schweigen* (*The Heart Must Be Still*) in a corresponding manner: "Here . . . the sacrifice of the woman in service of science and thus for the benefit of humanity is shown. And that is not an exceptional case, since women have been engaged in many fields of scientific life, as researcher, physician, chemist. They have even sacrificed their own lives, and continue to do so, side by side with men, in service of the people."[64] The writer of this article on "women's careers on screen" thus rewrote work outside of the home as a feminine duty, and added that films representing their heroines primarily as lovers or housewives were passé, because such women were engaged only in luxuriously private, emotional concerns. The modern woman, the article suggested, could no longer allow herself to languish in the private sphere, but had a responsibility to serve science and the state, and cinema had to reflect the contemporary turn away from domesticity. Recent productions showed "how great the responsibility of film is as a proclaimer of reality, which today means that women can no longer just devote themselves to their private inclinations, but are making use of their strengths and their skills in all spheres of life."[65] Nazi melodramas

such as *Das Herz muss schweigen* were thus to be employed against convention, by encouraging female sacrifice in the public sphere rather than only in the home.

It is not surprising that a film journal would promote the total mobilization of female energies in 1944, a year when the "total war" was intensified. Contrary to what we might expect, however, the cinematic promotion of women's work was not exclusively a wartime policy but actually predated it. From 1936 on, *Film-Kurier* repeatedly highlighted female careers. The journal promoted women's careers on screen in film narratives as well as off screen in film production. A 1937 article, for example, was titled "Women's Professions Created by Film" and highlighted "feminine" jobs in the film industry, such as costume designer, production assistant, and film editor, while another article published the following week underlined the importance of female film journalists and newspaper editors.[66] While promoting women's work in the film industry and elsewhere, *Film-Kurier* also called on film producers to alter their representations of female characters, which they claimed no longer reflected contemporary reality in the 1930s. Conventional romance film narratives reinforced outdated notions of female inferiority, they said: "A couple of months ago we first pointed out in the *Film-Kurier* the fact that in German films, young girls are partly represented as having inferiority complexes in relation to men, which absolutely does not reflect the attitude of the young girl of today. One can see that, in film narratives which underline their modest salaries, girls look up at wealthy men with only a humble glance . . . And that's not all—stuttering with embarrassment, they even express their worries about being so small and insignificant."[67] Quoting an editorial from the women's magazine *Koralle,* the *Film-Kurier* also subscribed to the following (limited) expression of female independence, which it described as "the general opinion of audiences" in the Third Reich: "We wish the young girls of the coming generation to know how important it is to find the man with whom one belongs and how terrible it is to be together with a man with whom one doesn't belong. They should seize for themselves the genuine self-confidence that comes from the *proud feeling of independence,* the knowledge that, when need be, they can cope with life on their own and—as it should finally be called—be *woman* enough to stand up for themselves [*ihre Frau zu stehen wissen*]."[68] But it was not the happiness of the individual woman that was truly at stake here. If cinema was successful in teaching German women not to rely on men and to come to terms with life alone, this had obvious benefits for a society that was continually preparing for industrial and imperial expansion.

One romance film that made a case for female autonomy and altered gender roles was *Eine Frau wie Du* (*A Woman Like You*), shot in the summer

Illusions of liberation for the female professional: *Eine Frau wie Du* (1939). Source: Deutsche Kinemathek

of 1939 and premiered while the Wehrmacht was trampling Poland. It is an uncommonly tender romance, one whose battle of the sexes appears more as a friendly, outdoor sport. Directed by Viktor Tourjansky, who also directed the 1941 anti-marital romance *Illusion, Eine Frau wie Du* offered exceptionally compelling images of sexual liberation and the illusion of personal freedom within the Nazi state. Its model of coupling was also somewhat different from the standard hierarchical constellations of teacher-student romances like *Reifende Jugend* and *Die vier Gesellen.* Here, the romance occurs between two lovers of relatively equal rank. Brigitte Horney stars as Dr. Maria Prätorius, a psychologist treating workers in a large factory who begins a romance with the factory's attorney, Manfred. Notably, it is the woman in this couple who owns the car, and much is made of Maria's self-reliant nature. One of her defining characteristics is her love of camping and fishing, and when she takes Manfred out for a weekend camping date, he is forced to reveal his comparative incompetence at pitching tents and baiting hooks. Despite his lack of outdoor skills, Manfred clearly proves his masculine abilities when the couple retires to the tent and he impregnates the Fräulein Doktor. This

development is ultimately treated by the film not as a catastrophe but as a fortunate event, a treatment consistent with Nazi cinema's overall promotion of premarital pregnancy and single motherhood.

The central conflict of the film is that between monogamy and sexual freedom, work and pleasure. Here, somewhat unusually, it is the man who represents both freedom and pleasure, and the woman restraint and duty. While Maria spends her weekends alone engaging in outdoor sports, Manfred spends them drinking at parties and nightclubs with his friends, a collection of wealthy, glamorous young people (including a two-time divorcée), most of whom have sworn off marriage and monogamy. Manfred also dreams of escaping both work and Germany. After their camping trip there is a scene on an open, tree-lined highway where Manfred begins to sing "O sole mio" in Maria's convertible and says: "It's terrible, such a weekend! To have to go home already . . . Ah Maria, let's just keep driving, farther and farther!" She, the representative of the German fascist work ethic, laughs and answers that she has to be in the office at eight the next morning. Duty to the factory wins in the end, but the film still presents brief moments when a more liberated lifestyle appears possible for the youth of the Third Reich, a summery illusion. In a brief shot at the beginning of the film, a sign posted outside Maria's factory announces the true outdoor activities that the Reich intended for its youth: along with a swastika, the slogan "We are marching together!" is momentarily legible. With its apparent loosening of sexual standards and definitions of femininity, *Eine Frau wie Du* served to create the illusion of a progressive society—instead of one in which women worked for the advancement of a murderous military dominance.

A similar message was presented by Nazi love stories that thematized the medical profession. Unlike in Hollywood, where the romantic heroine was generally the patient/research object of the hero, the heroine of Nazi medical romances was often his employee. Such workplace romances emphasized total commitment to professional duties and, just like the teacher-student romances, reinforced authority structures at home and on the job. The 1938 romance *Die Frau am Scheidewege* (*The Woman at the Crossroads*) even suggested that a woman's duties in the hospital were more important than those in the home. The film opens in an operating room, where the director of a university clinic, Dr. Henrici, is performing his seventh operation in a row. He is observed by a crowd of male and female medical students and accompanied by his loyal assisting surgeon, Dr. Hanna Weigand (Magda Schneider). A film cut brings the camera to another room, where a male servant comments to a nurse that the chief surgeon never thinks of himself and sacrifices his own health for the sake of science, and the nurse responds

admiringly that the doctor has virtually superhuman capabilities. Another cut back to the operating room follows, and the chief surgeon orders Hanna to go another round; she agrees, but then passes out from exhaustion. In a tender two shot of the sort usually reserved for lovers' discourse, he then tells her with his arms around her shoulders that her "way of assisting is exemplary," that she is "an ideal colleague," and that he "can't work without her." He then orders her to take some time off and get some rest in the interest of increased productivity, while she protests against this forced vacation under tears.

While on vacation at a seaside resort, Dr. Hanna is courted by Fred, a macho but much less disciplined graphic artist (Hans Söhnker, essentially repeating his role in *Die vier Gesellen*). A few weeks later Hanna returns to work a soon-to-be married woman, much to the professor's displeasure. He is concerned that she will quit her job to become a full-time wife, but she reassures him by saying, "God forbid! I just couldn't live without my work!" and adds that she will have to be the main breadwinner of the couple, since her fiancé does not earn much. However, once Hanna and Fred marry and move in together, he quickly becomes disgruntled by the fact that she is al-

The romance of divorce: *Die Frau am Scheidewege* (1938). Source: Deutsche Kinemathek

ways at the hospital and not at home doing housework. Instead of trying to reconcile the heroine to a housewife role, the film encourages the audience to view housework as a waste of her professional calling. When Fred ironically refers to Hanna as "the little *Hausfrau,*" a reaction shot of Dr. Henrici shows a wince of disgust at this lack of respect for Hanna's surgical talents. The audience is furthermore encouraged to view Hanna's marriage as a mistake.

Indeed, *Die Frau am Scheidewege,* with the title's play on the word *Scheidung* (divorce), is in essence a melodrama of remarriage—or a romance of divorce. Its postmarital choice/competition narrative in effect argues that marital bonds that do not work should be dissolved. Modifying the standard romance film formula that educated the audience in premarital partner choice, the film's characterization elaborated all of the ways in which the heroine and her husband were an unsuitable match. While the usually unemployed Fred listens to jazz records, holds parties, and is sloppy in the house, Hanna works with utmost discipline. Hanna's sister, Elinor, a fashion designer by profession, soon moves in with the couple and begins to take over her sister's duties in the home by cleaning up after Fred and sleeping with him. But the film does not condemn this quasi-incestuous infidelity. Rather, the sister-in-law is shown as being a better match for Fred, since she has drafting skills and an attractive body that Fred can exploit to further his own career, as her figure helps to bring in business from advertising clients. On the other hand, the film rarely brings the legally married couple into the same frame together, indicating that Hanna is actually more qualified to stay at work under the authoritative eyes of her boss.

By aligning spectator identification with Hanna from the very first shot of the film through close-ups, and by provoking admiration for her dedication to the medical profession through dialogue, the film also offers an apparent argument against traditional gender roles. Hanna, it suggests, is not meant to be a domestic servant to her husband, but rather a more comradely subordinate. When Dr. Henrici reveals his love for Hanna, he does so through commanding, militaristic language. As he asks her to perform a risky experimental operation, he whispers to her passionately: "Shall we take up the battle [*den Kampf aufnehmen*]? Oh, Hanna, it's so great to work with you!" *Die Frau am Scheidewege* thus romanticizes militarily useful work, encouraging women's absolute, self-sacrificing commitment to professional duty. This level of work discipline takes on a particularly sinister note when Hanna carries out an untested and potentially lethal procedure on a human subject, foreshadowing similar practices conducted outside of the cinema.[69] After Hanna succeeds with the experiment, the professor praises her for her courage, calling her a true *Kameradin* (comrade), and in typically fas-

cist language, lays claim to her ethically questionable scientific advances: "Comrades fight together and are victorious together!" he says. The film thus engages female spectators' desires for recognition of professional successes and gender equality in order to create a new form of servitude. *Die Frau am Scheidewege* proposed, in advance of the war, that both men and women could be self-sacrificing working and fighting machines.

The film nears its melodramatic climax as Dr. Henrici invites Hanna to dinner and fires her because he is in love with her, demanding that she divorce and remarry him if she wants to keep her job. Hanna first resolves to give up her career as her husband demands, but the following sequences insinuate just how wrong such a choice is: as Hanna languishes unhappily at home in the apartment, Fred impregnates her sister. In the series of rapidly cut, phantasmagoric shots that follow, Elinor pushes through anonymous masses at a carnival and heaves melodramatically, hearing Hanna in a voice-over saying, "I want to try to become a good wife and housewife to Fred." Countershots of a woman circling manically on a carnival swing ride suggest that this attempt at marital fidelity is entirely wrongheaded. Finally, after it is revealed to Hanna that her sister is expecting a child, the marriage is happily dissolved. The legal but unnatural union between Fred and Hanna, *Die Frau am Scheidewege* suggests, stands in the way of productive (and reproductive) efficiency. The final shot of the film ends the romance melodrama where it started: with Hanna handing Dr. Henrici instruments in the operating room, this time accompanied by triumphant music, indicating that this medical work also has romantic significance. Thus, the couples who work best together are brought together in the end, and the narrative is resolved in a manner quite useful to a militarist state: one woman becomes a reproductive artist, while the other maintains her work productivity as a doctor even after coupling. The romance between Hanna and Dr. Henrici is curiously sterile, though, as there is barely any physical contact between the two. In the final shot of the film, the passing of instruments from one antiseptically gloved hand to another substitutes for the conventional kiss—not because the film is prudish, but because the romantic pairing is essentially a labor contract.

Notably, it is the childless woman of talent who is generally the central focus of Nazi romance melodramas. The heroine of another romance from the following year, *Irrtum des Herzens* (*Error of the Heart,* 1939), shows a similar aptitude for and absolute dedication to the medical profession and also falls in love with her supervisor, again a professor and chief surgeon of a hospital. At the beginning of the film the camera briefly explores the bright modern space of a clinic decorated with Christmas trees. Professor Dr. Reimers, a middle-age

divorcé, tells the adoring young nurse Angelika (Leny Marenbach) how much he appreciates her because she never loses her nerve despite being chronically overworked. The film's script is thus designed to evoke admiration for the (mostly female) hospital staff for ignoring holidays and sacrificing themselves to operate around the clock. It further dissolves any division between the private and the professional by having them reside at their workplaces. Angelika lives in a small room in the back of the hospital with another nurse, Therese, and both are constantly on call. These two are joined by the vigorously efficient and self-sacrificing chief nurse, a childless single woman who once had an affair with Reimers, the chief surgeon, and now shows a complete dedication to her work, where her maternal instincts can be applied to caring for the sick and injured. These working women are contrasted favorably to Reimer's non-employed ex-wife, whom he describes as a "dumb goose" and who enters the clinic overdressed in fur coats and makes the seemingly capricious and unreasonable demand that, for the sake of their child, he finally take a break from operating. Dr. Reimers then comes to realize his great mistake in having acquired a housewife instead of marrying one of the hardworking nurses and soon offers to marry his much younger employee Angelika. The engagement falls through when she decides in favor of a pilot who is also courting her (and is again played by the eternal winner Hans Söhnker). Finally the surgeon opts to sacrifice love altogether in favor of a total commitment to work, and the last shot of the film validates this rejection of marriage. Sitting behind an authoritative desk, the doctor hero proclaims, "Apparently, everything else besides my work was not strong enough . . . I should want to have nothing and to be nothing more than that which God intended me to be—a doctor!" A final track-in to a monumental close-up shot of his resolute face lends heroic value to this choice.

It is easy to recognize how *Irrtum des Herzens* and other work romances prepared viewers for a dissolution of the private sphere in war, even if war always remained only a subtext of the hospital or corporate setting. The nurse Angelika, we could assume, would soon be wedded to the war as a pilot's wife and caretaker of the wounded. The film thus exploits its spectators' desires for recognition of professional accomplishments to create a total identification with war-serving industries and a sentimental vision of its servants. The female workers of this romance film, as in *Die Frau am Scheidewege,* are essentially slaves to their jobs ("well-oiled machines," as the chief nurse calls them). Another similar film that concerned a hardworking professional woman unhappily in love with her supervisor, the 1940 melodrama *Das Mädchen im Vorzimmer* (*The Girl in the Front Office*), was described by the film journal *Der deutsche Film* as underscoring "such contemporary virtues

. . . as self-sacrifice for the company through renunciation of all private life, even of love."[70]

Interestingly, in a self-reflexive moment, *Irrtum des Herzens* imagined one sphere of feminine privacy: that of romance fiction. Early in the film, the other young nurse, Therese, is shown reading romance novels during her short breaks in her shared room at the hospital. Putting down her book to return to work, she excitedly relates to Angelika her romantic fantasies of owning hundreds of shoes and marrying an aristocrat who smells of English lavender instead of ether. At the end of the film, however, Therese receives a quick, businesslike marriage proposal from one of the hospital's doctors, which she promptly and dutifully accepts as though it were a job offer. The fantasy of escape from work through romance is obliquely cited by the romance film itself as just that—only a fantasy of private life.

Nazi Eroticism, Bourgeois Morality, and Excess

Romance melodramas, as we have seen so far in this chapter, designed gender roles to support the Third Reich's imperialist ambitions by inviting spectator identification and erotic investment in character types that were particularly serviceable to a militarist society. Although the main protagonists of these melodramas were usually female, romance was not considered a purely female sphere during the Third Reich. Nazi romance fiction was sold as the oil to grease the male—as well as female—libidinous machine. According to SD reports, romance novels were fashionable among adolescent boys, for whom such popular literature was an ersatz form of pornography. The Security Service reported in August 1940 that novels with titles like *Sie ward aus Liebe schuldig* (*She Was Guilty of Love*) or *Barbara im Liebesfeuer* (*Barbara in the Fire of Love*) were making the rounds among Hitler Youth troops and were avidly consumed by one group of boys before being passed on to others, and they commented that the mass influence of this form of entertainment could not be overestimated.[71] Similarly, Nazi propagandists could count on reaching a large male spectatorship with romance melodramas, another function of which was to portray Nazi Germany as the land of an alternative sexual modernity.

Explicitly pornographic literature had been banned soon after Hitler came to power, but this did not mean that all prurient art had disappeared from the Reich. Rather, the sale of sexuality became a state monopoly. The Third Reich's repression of Weimar's freer trade in sexual imagery and services was not an attempt to reinstate a more puritanical morality. Instead, this repression was an attempt to gain full control of the market in eroticism and to

deploy images of sexuality as weapons of the state. As Dagmar Herzog has emphasized, the official publication of the SS, *Das Schwarze Korps* (The Black Corps), consistently delivered pornographic representations, all the while using anti-Semitic rhetoric to disavow responsibility for its incitement of violent sexual fantasies. The journal claimed that Jews were to blame for all pornography, while the eroticism that the National Socialists advocated was a fundamentally healthy and natural expression of a revolutionary, youthful movement. *Das Schwarze Korps,* Herzog added, "aligned itself with young people's impatience with traditional bourgeois mores" by attacking what it termed "'the pathological tendency to Catholic virginalism.'"[72] As historian Annette Timm has further underlined, other Nazi media outlets made common use of rhetoric about middle-class narrow-mindedness in order to advocate a change in views about sexuality. As Timm states, there were frequent "public statements from top Nazis officials about the need to destroy notions of bourgeois sexual morality. Joseph Goebbels, for instance, viewed himself as the 'champion of progressive sexual morality' and from the first years of the regime he railed against *Bettschnüffelei* (snooping into the sexual practices of others) in the party's propaganda publications."[73]

According to the Nazi usage, "bourgeois morality" was virtually synonymous with Christian prohibitions against extramarital sexuality and the religiously motivated valuation of chastity and self-denial. Nazism, in its paradoxical rejection of the moral codes that supposedly typified the middle class, followed popular cultural trends of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the frequent denunciations of bourgeois hypocrisy in Nazi media were in themselves hypocritical, given that such attacks were directed toward the very same class that had most supported Hitler, the petty bourgeoisie. As sociologist Maria Ossowska pointed out in a study titled *Bourgeois Morality,* the term usually referred to stereotypical petit bourgeois attitudes rather than the practices of the upper middle classes, and it was a favorite epithet of turn-of-the century and early twentieth-century Marxists, bohemians, and (proto-)fascists alike.[74] All shared an overgeneralized portrait of bourgeois morality, defined by characteristics such as prosaicism, mediocrity, timidity, aversion to risk, and excessive concern with respectability—characteristics that overlapped with an equally generalized view of Christian or "Puritan morality," as defined by humility and, in Ossowska's words, the "hostility to every form of pleasure and pleasure-seeking."[75] It was on this latter element that the Nazis focused their critiques of bourgeois morality. Nazi propaganda appealed to members of the lower middle classes with the potential of overcoming previous social constraints through the collective experience of politics

on a grand scale; it further suggested that working for the goals of Nazis imperialism would entail not only sacrifices but also intensified forms of pleasure. In their emphasis on the pleasures of transgressing mainstream moral codes, Nazi critiques of bourgeois morality differed from Marxist critiques, which tended to emphasize the self-interested material motives hidden behind bourgeois notions of virtue. Theodor Adorno's statement that "wherever we speak of bourgeois morality we think in the first instance of bourgeois work discipline" did not hold true for Marxism's right-wing opponents,[76] as we have seen in the preceding discussion of Third Reich workplace romance films. Instead, many Nazis thought first of the Christian disciplining of the drives.

The Nazi critique of bourgeois sexual morality evidently found support in Nietzsche's condemnation of Judeo-Christian morality and his predictions about a coming post-bourgeois, post-democratic era of immoralism. As Nietzsche scholar Steven Aschheim has argued, the philosopher's writings were crucial to Nazism's self-definition as a tradition-challenging movement, and Nietzsche was portrayed by Nazi theorists as having defined the main goals of the regime, among them the revaluation of the sexual drive and the aggressive instinct. Even if Nietzsche's works were very selectively read by Third Reich commentators, the philosopher was celebrated in official Nazi cultural organs because, as Aschheim stated, he "radically rejected bourgeois society, liberalism, socialism, democracy, egalitarianism, and the Christian ethos." As a consequence, Nietzsche was treated by many Nazi theorists as a thinker who was "central to the construction of the movement's promise of a thoroughly transvalued world."[77] Quoting several Third Reich commentators who drew connections between the Nietzschean and the fascist view of the body, Aschheim added: "The decadent and feminized nineteenth century was to give way to a new masculine warrior age, one that regarded Nietzsche as a pioneer of the 'German rediscovery of the body' . . . The old bourgeois ethos of security was to be rendered anachronistic by the emergence of hard personalities animated by the joy of living dangerously."[78] Nazi ideologues sought to overcome the stereotypical petit bourgeois aversion to risk and its stress on moderation by subscribing to the Nietzschean "noble morality" of the powerful against the "slave morality" of Christianity, a transvaluation that appeared to support Nazi imperialism (regardless of the fact that Nietzsche himself had refused to endorse the domination of the German empire over the rest of Europe).[79]

While battling Christian/bourgeois sexual morality, the Nazis also opposed the more progressive and egalitarian forms of sexual emancipation of the Weimar era. Shortly after taking power in 1933, the Nazis passed a law

against nudism, but with this law they did not intend to force Germans to hide their bodies.[80] The main problem for the Nazis was not that Weimar-era nudists were naked, but that they formed a movement with antihierarchical tendencies. Nazism was to be the only cultural movement in Germany, and nudity became the exclusive property of the so-called *Volksgemeinschaft.* To be sure, some Nazi ideologues did advocate a more puritanical approach. While Goebbels argued in favor of more uninhibited sexual relations in his articles for official party publications, some comparatively prudish Nazis stood in opposition.[81] But social conservatives generally had less influence over the imagery disseminated to the masses in print and visual media than did the director of the Propaganda Ministry. As we have seen in *Der Postmeister,* the eroticized, exposed female body was designed by the leaders of Nazi cultural production to be the main pillar of film aesthetics and spectator pleasure.

Indeed, the exploitation of eroticism became a consciously articulated policy within the Reich Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda (Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda, or RMVP). Erotic thoughts were to replace critical thought, and fantasies of sexual liberation were to stifle expressions of discontent in the political realm. In 1939 Goebbels wrote in his diary that he was determined to eliminate all political humor in the cinema and cabaret. "The political joke will be eradicated. Absolutely and completely," he wrote with his characteristic fanatic emphasis.[82] Goebbels knew that something had to distract from the excising of political opposition, and he envisioned that nudity and sexual suggestion would fill that lack. He was determined to remain, as he wrote, "obstinate against political jokes, but even more generous with regard to eroticism . . . since playful instincts [*der Spieltrieb*] must have free rein somewhere."[83] Goebbels therefore campaigned to loosen the sexual morals of German entertainment. In 1935 he noted in his diary that film censorship had to be reworked. "We are restricting film too much," he wrote, and noted his plans to liberalize censorship codes and reduce personnel: "More freedom. Above all, the army of censors and examiners out."[84] Two days later he wrote in his diary that his instructions had been put into place, and that censors should be more forgiving when it came to the representation of sexuality: "I give the film censors guidelines. Loosen up! Don't be so moralistic. We are not from Potsdam and we don't wear any little collars."[85] The stiff collar (*Halsbörtchen*) of the old-fashioned bureaucrat signified for Goebbels a pedantic form of sexual morality that Nazism had supposedly made redundant.

Similarly, the word *Moralin* (hypocritical moralizing) was consistently evoked in the Nazi press to suggest that the Third Reich was a progressive and modern society, as opposed to some implied past in which sexuality

was repressed. As we have seen in the melodrama *Heimat,* this past was generally that of Second Reich puritanism, the same cultural environment in which Nietzsche launched his attack on Christian morality. But the memory of democratic Weimar was not located far from the image of hypocritical Wilhelmine (or "Potsdam") morality for Goebbels and other Nazis involved in film production. Weimar cinema has often been considered a cinema of sexual as well as gender liberation, and many Nazi writers denounced Weimar films as degenerate. Yet there was also a strongly conservative strain in much of the popular cinema of the Weimar period, particularly after 1927, when the directorship of the UFA (Universum-Film AG) film studios came under the influence of monarchists.[86] The progressive social agendas of the women's movement and the permissiveness of alternative gay culture in 1920s Berlin did not make a strong mark on the morals of the masses or on the majority of Weimar-era popular films. According to Hans Peter Bleuel, the famed permissiveness of the Weimar period was overall an illusion, and conventional morality reigned in all but the most isolated pockets of metropolitan culture. Elsewhere, repressiveness was the rule: "The appearance of a progressive emancipation of customs, of a loosening of ancient moral statutes, was illusory. It was, despite all the legal improvements and fashionable phenomena, only a very small circle of the population that had the desire and the power to free itself from the traditional moral code."[87] The liberated sexual and gender imagery visible in the Weimar-era press, Bleuel added, was not lived out in the vast majority of Weimar homes.[88]

Similarly, Weimar cinema's reputation for being sexually emancipated is not always warranted. In most Weimar films, expressions of desire are condemned by narrative conclusions, and female sexuality must necessarily have melodramatic consequences, leading to prostitution or death. In fact, the quasi-pornographic *Aufklärungsfilme* (sexual enlightenment films), for which the Weimar cinema is generally considered to be modern and liberal, belonged to a classic melodramatic narrative type in which feminine purity is threatened by male desire. As Friedemann Beyer comments, the *Aufklärungsfilme* were sensationalist melodramas that "rarely got by without villains who defiled tender young virgins after they had seduced them into taking drugs."[89] Such films, despite their pretense to scientific objectivity and liberal views, ultimately reinforced standards of bourgeois morality by titillating audiences with the myriad dangers of sexuality.

Nazi writers exploited this hypocritical Weimar morality by continually trying to present themselves as being more sexually enlightened than the culture producers of the so-called *Systemzeit.* They attempted to distinguish

themselves from the makers of Weimar-era *Aufklärungsfilme,* which they insisted were only cheap smut that revealed bourgeois prudery under their tales of prostitution. As Rudolf Oertel wrote in 1941: "We are not prudish these days. We can distinguish between morality [*Moral*] and hypocritical moralizing [*Moralin*]. Pornography under the cover of scientific enlightenment is unappetizing, and we have sharp eyes to determine whether artistic passion or greed is at work."[90] The hypocrisy of the Nazi position, with its claim to represent sexuality as a matter of "artistic passion" rather than economic desire, is clear. The Nazis, of course, did not view film purely as an art, but also as a profitable industry, despite their feigned protests to the contrary.

Eroticism in classical cinema's most concentrated form—that of woman-as-spectacle—was marketed most obviously by the revue film, which provided the most extended spectacles of exposed female bodies. The romance film's eroticism was embedded more subtly within narrative and included fetishistic close-ups of actresses and the suggestion of sexual relations. Nazi melodramas like *Der Postmeister* also effectively featured exposed extra-narrative bodies, of course. The spectacle of woman was often consciously built into the background of romance narratives in order to enhance the foregrounded relations of the main couple. The Nazi Party trade press *Der deutsche Film* specifically recommended the mise-en-scène of the nightclub or cabaret for love story scenes, since it allowed visual pleasure to coincide with the dramaturgically necessary delay of the final narrative resolution: "When 'He' flirts with another woman or 'She' flirts with another man at the bar table, then there is a dance number going on in the background . . . The happy-end dramaturgy combines here the pleasant with the practical in a perfect way: this method . . . offers the opportunity to please the ear with a hit song and please the eye with the sight of slender legs."[91] Thus, the half-naked dancers who connoted forbidden desire were exploited at the same time for the erotic effects they produced.

This was clearly a planned strategy, and often a successful one. It was this exploitation of eroticism that sold Nazi films to both domestic and foreign audiences. In comparison to Hays Code–restricted Hollywood and even the cinema of neighboring European countries, Nazi films appeared to many spectators to be risqué. The Security Service reported in April 1944 that the Catholic Church in Belgium had been agitating against Nazi films due to their thematization of premarital and extramarital sexuality:

> The strongest attacks by the clergy so far have been directed against the films *Die Goldene Stadt* [*The Golden City,* 1942], *Münchhausen* [1943] and *Das Bad auf der Tenne* [*The Bath on the Threshing Floor,* 1943] . . . Sermons have very

> often warned against going to these screenings. Even in larger cities, they announced from the pulpit that believers would be committing a *mortal sin* by going to see these films . . . In most cases, people in the cities do not take the clergy's warnings seriously, and the warnings have had the opposite effect of contributing to an *increased level of attendance* for these films. In Antwerp, for example, the popularity of the film *Das Bad auf der Tenne,* now in its third week, is still not letting up. Viewers have commented that in this case, as in others, the church unwittingly created the best propaganda for the film by trying to ban it.[92]

The "sinful" narratives of Nazi films brought Belgians to the box office, which underlined the propagandistic, as well as economic, advantage of flouting Christian sexual morality.[93]

In the films cited in the SD report above, sex is mainly suggested through situation, double entendre, and fetishistic displays of bodies. Sex acts themselves were never explicitly shown in Nazi feature films but usually happen—as in virtually all classical cinema—in ellipses. In *Die goldene Stadt* a seduction scene ends with a shot of a couple in bed—a shot, as Stephen Lowry has noted, that would not have been possible under classical Hollywood's censorship codes[94]—followed by a close-up of a clock, a cut, and another close-up of a clock, indicating the length of time that the coupling required. Although sex acts that are more explicit are not shown, what appeared newly threatening to contemporary representatives of bourgeois or Christian morality was how Nazi culture appeared to dissolve the boundaries between sexual purity and sin and encouraged the expression of elemental drives. Weimar film, in contrast, had generally maintained the dualistic morality of the virgin and the whore, as demonstrated by the fateful symbols used to describe acts of sexuality as tragic defloration. In G. W. Pabst's *Diary of a Lost Girl* (1929), for example, the melodramatic heroine's loss of virginity is indicated through ominous symbols like the knocked-over wine glass. In contrast, the loss of virginity is rarely even an implied topic in Nazi romance films, as melodramatic emphasis was generally shifted away from the issue of sexual purity. Shots in Nazi films indicating that sexual activity is taking place usually suggest that it is natural rather than fateful. There are thus many shots of the sky or sunny, placid bodies of water inserted after a couple's kiss in the bedroom (rather than the sort of violently rushing water in the manner of Griffith's melodrama, suggesting that the heroine will die as a result of her loss of purity).

Obviously the Nazis had little interest in making old-fashioned melodramas that championed virginity, since this would contradict their population policies. The Nazi attempts to increase birthrates by loosening taboos on premarital sexuality were met with church resistance not only in Belgium but in the Reich as well. Catholic clergymen were particularly active in agitating

against the sexualized imagery of Nazi media and attempted to fortify their parishioners against the apparent attack on Christian sexual morality, but the Nazi authorities responded harshly to such encroachments. In 1941 the SS was ordered to arrest members of the Catholic Church who had distributed pamphlets advocating virginity and celibacy.[95] The sexual morality of the Catholic Church appeared to many fervent Nazis as an intolerable form of foreign domination. Nazi film critic Peter von Werder claimed that the conventional cinematic images of women as either innocent virgins, dependent housewives, or prostitutes were all non-Aryan and anti-German in origin. Patriarchy and prostitution were Oriental inventions, he suggested, and he condemned both:

> the figure of the hetaera [is] from the ancient Orient and the deeply Eastern-influenced antique Mediterranean world, reappearing up until now in constantly altered form. On the other hand, along with the Eastern idea of the privileged position of the husband and family father, there comes a corresponding estimation of the woman as a dependent and ignorant creature, on the grounds of which a new, more uninhibited view of sensuality is not possible . . . for that reason, the reconstruction of love- and sex-life is a question of central national importance.[96]

In a Germanic soldierly state, and in a properly fascist cinema, von Werder suggested, sex would be unconstrained and men would not be considered primarily husbands and fathers. The Third Reich, he insisted, should work on liberating romantic relations from bourgeois family structures in the interests of racial and military dominance.

But the cinema of the Third Reich played with a double-edged sword here, since its project was simultaneously the provocation of desire and the attempt to make it work for the state. In order to carry out the project of liberalizing sexual relations, Nazi cinema had to encourage female spectators to participate, but it thereby risked provoking desires that could not be contained. The romance melodrama with a female main protagonist was by its very nature the most conflicted and potentially hazardous genre in this respect. By many accounts the Hollywood love story negotiated this risk by attempting to repress desire entirely. As Mary Ann Doane has stated, the main project of the Hollywood romance, and indeed all of love stories, is "the tautological demonstration of the necessity of the failure of female desire."[97] However, as she adds, there are always difficulties inherently built into this project, particularly in the case of the woman's film or romance melodrama. The love story "is one of the most vulnerable sites in a patriarchal discourse," Doane says, since "its flaw is to posit the very possibility of female desire."[98]

Even if Nazi culture attempted to reorganize patriarchy, the love story in the Third Reich was by its very generic nature a highly conflicted zone. The risks of Nazi romance were even greater than those of Hollywood, since it imagined the possibility of desire outside of the containing order of the nuclear family. Excess continually threatened romance melodrama's demonstrations of control.

Ideological ruptures, as many scholars argue, are indicated by the melodramatic mode through "hysterical" mise-en-scène or camera work. According to Pam Cook, stylistic excess is a symptom of the impossible task of balancing the representation of female desire with the containment of it; excess, in classical Hollywood cinema, is a "sign of the system threatening to break down."[99] In Nazi cinema as well the thematization of female desire sometimes coincides with signs that seem to exceed conventional signification and threaten to break apart stable narrative structures, and this melodramatic strain gives evidence of potential failures of the fascist management of desire. Indeed, one of the most stylistically excessive melodramas of the Third Reich, *Anna und Elisabeth* (*Anna and Elizabeth,* 1933) is one that reveals a problematized female desire in the form of strong homoerotic undercurrents and could be categorized as a same-sex-romance film.

Notably, *Anna und Elisabeth* starred the same pair of actresses who embodied lesbian attraction in the Weimar precursor *Mädchen in Uniform*. Dorothea Wieck plays Elisabeth, the aristocratic mistress of a rural estate, a hysteric who is bound to a wheelchair with an inexplicable paralysis until she meets Hertha Thiele's character, Anna, a boyish farmer's daughter. Superstitious locals tell Elisabeth that Anna has special powers and can heal the sick with her touch. When the pair meets, Elisabeth grabs Anna's hand and holds it on her own body until her expression turns ecstatic. Elisabeth later testifies to others, "She put her hand on me and gave me a jerk. *And what a jerk it was!*" Anna, however, does not believe that she possesses supernatural powers, and the film largely validates Anna's perspective. But Elisabeth's excessive desire for Anna is expressed in shots that also undermine narrative authority and produce a hysterical shifting of identificatory positions, leaving the spectator uncertain of the truth. Vertiginous point-of-view shots from Elisabeth's perspective allow the spectator to identify with her ecstasy and pathos while she whispers her passionate anticipation of Anna's touch. Later, when they are alone together, Elisabeth miraculously rises from her wheelchair and walks erect for the first time.

A central sequence, virtually a love scene, is so lengthy and erotically charged that the spectator is encouraged to desire the release of tension through a kiss. In one long, static close-up, Anna's head is positioned in

Female desire and excess: *Anna und Elisabeth* (1933). Source: Deutsche Kinemathek

profile above Elisabeth's as if to suggest her superior position in the relationship. When a cut follows, the next shot reverses this construction: Elisabeth's head is now positioned higher than Anna's, and the position is frozen into a tableau-like image of the two women on a white background, a space devoid of any social or historical context. No narrative justification is given for this rather unusual construction of shots; it appears to be merely excessive style. Covertly, these long takes with their balanced compositions do suggest some harmonious balance inherent in female homoerotic desire, and the image of the two women appears almost as a fantasy bursting forth from the uncontextualized unconscious. As we will see in the next chapter, however, such suggestions were not actually subversive of Nazi ideology. Yet the focus on Elisabeth's desire in these sequences halts the narrative progression in such a way that the scenes become strangely extended and fetishistic, temporarily violating classical cinema's codes of transparency.

At the end of the film, Elisabeth falls off a cliff into a lake and drowns. Narratively, the film thus provides the most conventional resolution to female desire and the most sadistic demonstration of its failure—death. But it also does not entirely contain the hysterical desire of its protagonist, and

instead freezes in moments of narrative stasis, resting on the iconic image of this desire. Ultimately, *Anna und Elisabeth* is a romance melodrama that attempts to purge excessive desire through narrative violence, but this desire still controls the film's center and ruptures its logic from the inside. Although such ruptured narratives could still pass censorship in 1933, melodramatic excesses and avant-garde experiments were subsequently subject to stricter aesthetic control.[100]

Beyond the purely textual evidence of the difficult negotiation of female desire that "hysterical" melodramas such as *Anna und Elisabeth* provide (the 1944 domestic melodrama *Opfergang* is another example to which we will return in the next chapter), the few remaining historical documents that address spectator response in the Third Reich also prove that Nazi cinema sometimes failed to manage desire as effectively as it intended. Many women in the Third Reich, it seems, desired another form of romance than what was offered in Nazi love stories. This seems to be particularly true of more fervent Nazi women who were highly displeased with the cinema's instrumentalization of eroticism. Although A. U. Sander's 1944 study of BDM and Hitler Youth members and their opinions regarding film did not produce reliable aggregate statistics about female and male viewing preferences, it did suggest, in its quotation of interviews with individual girls, that the film production of the Third Reich did not entirely satisfy the psychic or ideological needs of female viewers. Sander quotes one BDM member who responded at length to her survey and offered a particularly interesting critique of Nazi romance films. The girl wrote:

> Which one of us working girls does not long for sun, meadows, forests, and fields? What film expresses our great love for nature? And how few films are about a deep friendship between man and girl? What film represents the love between man and woman so tenderly, that it is still emotionally appealing? Along with many really good films, we have a massive amount of entertainment films that . . . show us people in all their wretchedness, with no secure ground to their souls. These types of films show us in a blatantly obvious way things that we could guess already, but no, they also present it in word and image and sound, as if it weren't already obvious enough. Do we Germans have to be shown something so dumb, so repetitive? Not only the casualness of men in film, also that of girls—their flirtatiousness, their constant changing of clothes, their frequent application of make-up, their fickleness—are bad examples and are (unfortunately still) all too happily copied.[101]

Although this girl was probably a partisan of a more conservative wing of Nazism, the Nazi version of romance was apparently too brutal for her. Ac-

cording to this respondent, romance films primarily showed commodified eroticism rather than true love, failing to imagine functioning male-female relationships. No convincing myth of romance as transcendence fully succeeded in replacing the Nazi dissolution of bourgeois morality. Nazi girls, it seems, had expected fascist culture to free them from objectification and instrumentalization, but this expectation was ultimately disappointed. Sexualized violence was instead the familiar product and instrument of Nazi power, the source of the suspicious "things that we could guess already."

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how Third Reich romance melodramas attempted to form spectator desires to the benefit of Nazi imperialist aims. Nazi romance films, as I have argued, positioned Third Reich culture as a liberation from nineteenth-century sexual morality while encouraging female participation in the public sphere in preparation for a war economy. The function of romance films was to design gender role models, but these did not obviously fit the regime's racialist policies or its supposed orientation toward a classless national community. Third Reich films most often celebrated cosmopolitan and upper-class lifestyles rather than ordinary middle-class and rural virtues. Contrary to the widespread assumption that Third Reich culture was traditionalist in the sexual realm, the heroines of Nazi romance films were often single mothers and professional women and were connoted through costuming as being willful and sexually aware. Androgyny was common for women in Third Reich film, but male images were less flexible, in accordance with the overemphasis on masculinity in fascist culture. The selection of actor and actress types was calculated to appeal to audiences beyond the Reich, supporting the colonial ambitions of both Nazi cinema and the broader Nazi state. The subgenre of Nazi melodramas that I have termed "work romances"—in which a woman is paired with her teacher, supervisor, or colleague—anticipated the labor needs of an expanding regime, even before the outbreak of war in 1939. These romance melodramas supported a turn away from domesticity, advocating careers for women and sometimes ridiculing housewives, but described work outside the home as yet another form of feminine sacrifice and subordination. Although gender inequity in education and the workplace was directly thematized by some Third Reich romance films, they ultimately maintained the hierarchical structures of fascism.

The love story also fulfilled the further political functions of distraction and disavowal. Historical documents show that Goebbels encouraged the

display of the female body, and erotic attractions were deliberately cultivated in order to suppress political critique. Nazi films distinguished themselves on the international market by offering sexual content that exceeded what was allowed under the Hollywood Production Code. Within the Reich, ideologues claimed that Nazi culture had overcome the repressive sexual morality of the past, including that of both the Wilhelmine and Weimar periods. Denunciations of bourgeois morality in Nazi media were partially influenced by Nietzsche's critique of petit bourgeois and Christian restraints on the aggressive sexual drive, and aided in profiling Nazism as a battle against prudery and hypocrisy. Yet the deployment of the erotic in Nazi cinema sometimes backfired, and female spectators in particular refused to embrace the Nazi version of romance. The generically determined acknowledgment of female desire occasionally led to eruptions of stylistic excess and even homoerotic undercurrents in a few Third Reich melodramas. The next chapter examines how domestic and family melodramas were used in a genre-contradictory manner to undermine nuclear family norms and to bolster an image of Nazism as cultural revolution, and also reveals further failures in the management of spectator pleasure.