

Breaking the Rules: Hollywood and the Limits of Propaganda in Nazi
Germany, 1933-1939.

by

William Gregory

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Supervisor: _____

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ABSTRACT

The emulation of Hollywood by German films studios in the 1930s caused significant problems from an ideological perspective. “Germanized” Hollywood productions incorporated the exciting elements that made American films so popular in the Third Reich in an effort to displace them. However, a glorification of consumer capitalism and political individualism accompanied Californian style assembly-line filmmaking, even in Nazi Germany. In particular, Hollywood style stardom, western films and remakes introduced potentially dissonant ideas and messages into Germany’s public sphere. These films broke the rules and depicted worlds that subtly questioned Nazi ideology in their depiction of non-Nazi modes of identity. “Germanized” Hollywood deviated from Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels’s attempts to reconstruct the cinema as a location of indoctrination. The presence of American social values in German films resulted in a mixed articulation of “Germanness” in the regime’s preferred medium of propagandistic persuasion.

List of Abbreviations Used

| | |
|-------|--|
| BFI | British Film Institute |
| MGM | Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer |
| RKO | Radio-Keith-Orpheum |
| RM | <i>Reichsmark</i> |
| SA | <i>Sturmabteilung</i> |
| SPD | <i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i> – Social Democratic Party of Germany |
| SPIO | <i>Spitzenorganisation</i> |
| SS | <i>Schutzstaffel</i> |
| Tobis | <i>Tobis Tonbild-Syndikat AG</i> |
| UFA | <i>Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft</i> |
| UFI | <i>Ufa-Film-GmbH</i> |

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

“We must give film a task and a mission in order that we may use it to conquer the world. Only then will we also overcome American film” declared German Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels in 1940.¹ Goebbels’s interest in the cinema was considerable; it presented the regime with a powerful medium to influence and articulate the Nazi vision of “Germanness.” Ideally, the cinema became the site of collective experience, a microcosm of the people’s community. However, this pedagogical superstructure never came to fruition and a completely Nazified cinema was never realized. Nor could Goebbels fully displace Hollywood despite generous government funding and preferential legislation. Hollywood entertainment continued to dominate the tastes of the masses; its slick, sophisticated imports routinely crushed German features at the box office. The struggle to “overcome” American film lasted until Goebbels resorted to force. In 1940, he banned the further importation and exhibition of American films. The superficial erasure of Hollywood from the German film world obfuscates the immense impact Hollywood studios had on German film in the 1930s. Before Goebbels erected a cultural embargo, German studios actively emulated aspects of Hollywood films in an effort to translate Hollywood’s popularity into domestic and international successes for German films during the 1930s. Instead of a constant barrage of propaganda in feature films, audiences received mixed and often conflicting messages. Hollywood films glorified individualism as the basis of social and political interactions defined through consumerist consumption. Emulation not only defied strict interpretations of

¹ Eric Rentschler, “The Testament of Dr. Goebbels,” *Film History* 8 no.3 (1996), 318.

Nazi ideology, but also caused fractures in the pedestal of the state's propaganda monument. Americanized entertainment allowed the presentation of non-Nazi values and lifestyles in the very medium designed to articulate a uniform political identity. The individualist and consumerist themes underwriting Hollywood entertainment became subversive when introduced to the closed ideological conditions of the Nazi regime.

Evaluations of German culture under the Nazi regime must take propaganda into account. Any cultural artifact that promoted a specific political worldview in a clear manner can be considered propaganda; the audience could not be confused about the intended message. Nazi propaganda was often explicit, framing the narrative of a novel, play or film around a central, politically defined theme such as anti-Semitism or xenophobic nationalism. Political directors and authors worked to manipulate emotional involvement and identification to score the highest possible resonance with the audience. There was a wide diversity of propaganda produced in the Third Reich ranging from blunt, repetitive sloganeering to sophisticated political-entertainment epics. The former, however, were far more common, with simple slogans such as "Jews are our Misfortune" appearing across Germany. Even with the commitment of the Propaganda Ministry and the studios, an effective fusion of politics and entertainment remained elusive.

The leaders of the Third Reich viewed political propaganda as indispensable in the creation of the Nazi regime. Hitler treated propaganda extensively in *Mein Kampf* and advocated a simplistic, repetitive campaigning style to convince the gullible masses:

the receptivity of the great masses is very limited, their intelligence is small, and their power of forgetting is enormous. In consequence of all these facts, all effective propaganda must be limited to a very few points and must harp on these in slogans until the last member of the public understands what you want him to understand by your slogan.²

² Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), 165.

In Hitler's view, propaganda was primarily a tool of an opposition party, which would decline in importance once a movement took power. Once in power, however, the Nazis augmented the role of propaganda and political campaigning in daily life under the auspices of Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels. Unlike Hitler, Goebbels saw propaganda, communicated through all cultural expression, as an integral component of the regime because of its ability to sustain a state of constant emotional mobilization and to psychologically undermine individual resistance to the regime. He articulated the goal of the Propaganda Ministry early, declaring in his first speech as Minister in March 1933,

It is not enough for people to be more or less reconciled to our regime, to be persuaded to adopt a neutral attitude towards us, rather we want to work on people until they have capitulated to us, until they grasp ideologically that what is happening in Germany today not only *must* be accepted but also *can* be accepted.³

To achieve this goal, Goebbels realigned and subordinated the entirety of German cultural life to his propaganda ministry, assuming sweeping powers over the dissemination of propaganda.⁴

Film was the most essential medium in the battle for Germans' hearts and minds. Under Goebbels's watch, the consumption of (political) spectacle was a key part of membership in the "People's Community."⁵ Weekly newsreels as well as documentary shorts that preceded all features ensured that even the most routine visit to the cinema

³J. Noakes and G. Pridham, eds., *Nazism 1919-1945: A Documentary Reader* (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1983), 381. Emphasis in original.

⁴The regimentation of cultural life took the form of "culture chambers" in 1933. Under the umbrella of the Reich Culture Chamber lay chambers for literature, theatre, music, visual arts, film, radio and press. Membership in the relevant chamber was required to continue to work in a cultural field. In the cinema, state awards for artistic and political merit earned studios preferential distribution rights as well as tax credits. Funding agencies like the Reich Film Bank funnelled exorbitant sums of money into the industry, and by 1936 funded in whole or in part 76% of German features. See David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933-1945* (New York: Oxford UP, 1983.; Julian Petley, *Capital and Culture: German Cinema 1933-45* (London: BFI, 1979).

⁵Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008), 66.

contained a healthy dose of political grandstanding. Furthermore, cinemas barricaded the doors once the pre-show began to prevent film-goers from skipping explicit political content. The conditions inside the cinema were carefully regulated to mirror the Nazi ideal community; uniformed men received discounted tickets and enforced scaled admission prices to ensure a diverse socioeconomic audience with a strong military presence.⁶ In September 1944, cinemas remained open to entertain audiences even as theatres, cabarets and variety houses were shuttered to redirect resources towards the war effort.⁷

Entertainment cinema was essential in this programme; audiences flocked to the latest Ufa (*Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft*) comedy, but tended to shun explicit propaganda content. Unlike Hitler and Goebbels's chief Nazi rival Alfred Rosenberg, Goebbels desired the fusion of entertainment and propaganda, to create movies that audiences sincerely wanted to see but that contained ideological messages. Goebbels best summarized his thoughts on film in seven theses, presented at the 1935 International Film Congress in Berlin.⁸ He criticized pure entertainment in film and declared, "film must free itself from vulgar platitudes which limit it to nothing more than simple amusement for the masses..." Through official engagement with film, Goebbels contended, the public's pedestrian obsession with crass entertainment could be ameliorated. In his estimation, "the public's taste is not an unalterable given to which one must submit. One

⁶ Sabine Hake, *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 67-71.

⁷ Mary-Elizabeth O'Brien, *Nazi Entertainment as Enchantment: The Politics of Entertainment in the Third Reich* (Rochester: Camden House, 2004), 149.

⁸ I. Film has its own Laws; II. Film must rid itself of vulgar platitudes; III. It must avoid aestheticism; IV. Governments must make sacrifices for film; V. Film must remain in contact with its time; VI. Film acts as a unifying liaison between nations; VII. Natural and true film will conquer the world. Reprinted in *Licht Bild Bühne's* coverage of the 1937 International Film Festival in Paris. "Les sept thèses du film," *Licht Bild Bühne*, 3 July 1937, 4-5.

can develop it ... It is through the desire to concretely contribute to this education, and, if necessary, bear material burdens, that will reveal film's true artistic nature."⁹ The sum result of following Goebbels's theses would be a "...new artistic form that will conquer the world."¹⁰ His emphasis on new film art enticed studios to produce "culture films" (*Kulturfilme*). They explicitly championed propagandistic themes and earned awards from the regime.

For the most part, propaganda appeared in the documentary format: weekly newsreels, Leni Riefenstahl's films, and later feature length depictions of German wartime *Blitzkrieg* victories. It was primarily in this genre that "[t]echnicians learned how to subtly use composition and a variety of camera angles to arouse collective hatred or enthusiasm."¹¹ The numbers of feature narrative films with explicit propaganda were few. The *Kampfzeit* films of 1933 – *Hitler Youth Quex* (*Hitlerjunge Quex*, dir. Hans Steinhoff, 1933), *Hans Westmar* (dir. Franz Wenzler, 1933), *Stormtrooper Brand* (*SA-Mann Brand*, dir. Franz Seitz, 1933) – glorified the struggles of Nazi ancillary organizations like the Hitler Youth and SA. Moreover, these films, which championed sacrifice and violence in working towards the Nazi revolution, were unsolicited by Goebbels; opportunistic studios made them to clearly signal their support for the regime.¹² The other cluster of propaganda features came during the war years, with major epics like *I Accuse* (*Ich klage an*, dir. Wolfgang Liebeneiner, 1940), *Jew Süß* (*Jude Süß*, dir. Veit Harlan, 1940),

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹ Pierre Aycoberry, *The Social History of the Third Reich* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 70.

¹² *Hans Westmar* began as a biopic of Nazi martyr Horst Wessel. Goebbels intervened, and forced the producers to remove any explicit reference to Wessel's life at the risk of banning the film. Despite the changes, the film was nearly banned and caused a controversy in the film press. As a result, Goebbels shelved any further explicit depictions of the Nazi movement. "Das Verbot des Horst Wessel-Films," *Film Kurier*, 9 October 1933, 1.; "Zum Verbot des Horst Wessel-Films," *Film Kurier*, 11 October 1933, 1.; "Why Dr. Goebbels banned Horst Wessel film/ Pourquoi Dr. Goebbels a interdit 'Horst Wessel,'" *Film Kurier*, 14 October 1933, 8.

Request Concert (Wünschkonzert, dir. Eduard von Borsody, 1940) *The Great Love (Die Grosse Liebe*, dir. Rolf Hansen, 1942) and *Kolberg* (dir. Veit Harlan, 1945). These films certainly represent Goebbels's ideal form of film making. However, they are not representative of cinema during the Third Reich.

The Nazis defined the “new German culture,” in part, in relation to American culture. Where German culture was good, pure, and noble, American culture was diseased, corrupted and kitsch. Nevertheless, Hollywood remained the single most prominent foreign film source.¹³ Indeed, it has become a truism that Hollywood exerted a tremendous influence over German audiences and studios alike. Germany's major cinematic rival continued to export large numbers of films to the Reich throughout the 1930s with economic success.¹⁴ The foothold MGM and Paramount established in the German market during the Weimar era did not evaporate despite concerted Nazi opposition.¹⁵ Hitler's ascension to the Chancellorship did not alter the trans-Atlantic relationship as much as the advent of sound in 1927. Sound offered European industries a “sound barrier”; the arduous task of translating English language films made the bulk importation of Hollywood films more difficult and costly. However, better industrial

¹³ Between 1935 and 1939, 162 new American features played in German cinemas. Rentschler, *Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1996), 111. The Quota Film Decree of 1928 tied the number of foreign imports permitted to the numbers of German features, pegged at a ratio of one import per two German films. Cinzia Romani, *Tainted Goddesses: Female Stars of the Third Reich* (Rome: Gremese, 2001), 6.

¹⁴ For more on Hollywood's cultural dominance in Germany and Europe generally, see Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2005) and John Trumbour, *Selling Hollywood to the World: U.S. and European Struggles for Mastery of the Global Film Industry, 1920-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002).

¹⁵ MGM and Paramount bailed out Ufa in 1927 when the company stood on the brink of insolvency. The Parufamet agreement dedicated screens for MGM, Paramount and Universal films in Ufa's massive cinema holdings. Although Ufa obtained limited access to the coveted American market, the deal definitely favoured the American studios. During the Third Reich, MGM and Paramount led all Hollywood studios in annual exports to Germany. For more on Weimar era German-American film history see Thomas J. Saunders, *Hollywood in Berlin: American Cinema and Weimar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

organization and technological innovation gave Hollywood sound films a distinct advantage and Ufa struggled to keep pace with technologically stunning Hollywood “talkies.” Film was, according to the conventional logic in the late 1920s, a visual medium. Rudolf Arnheim argued in 1933 that film’s artistry arose from the medium’s limitations and that technological developments in heightened realism – sound, colour, three-dimensions– would destroy film.¹⁶ The national film industry was keen to avoid another technological setback and it is little surprise that after the unpreparedness with which the German “film world” met synchronized sound the Nazi film press was obsessed with the development of new colour technology in the late 1930s.¹⁷

Reactions to Hollywood were extreme, ranging from vicious invectives against “Hollywood kitsch” to fawning reviews of recent imports. Film journals frequently dealt with Hollywood film, issuing statistical studies comparing the influence of German and American films in foreign markets, covering extensively news from Hollywood, and reviewing new films playing in Germany. The Reich Press Chamber exerted tremendous influence over journalists and, through government directives and editorial control, framed the content and slant of their articles. Goebbels banned critical film reviews in 1936, replacing “Jewish criticism” with descriptive reviews. Moreover, the timing of reviews of new films was managed: they appeared almost a week after a film’s premiere to minimize the deleterious effects a negative review would have on attendance.¹⁸

¹⁶ Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 26.

¹⁷ “Künstlerische Probleme des Farbfilms,” *Licht Bild Bühne*, 23 January 1936, 3; Carl Froelich, “Der Farbfilm kommt!,” *Film Kurier*, 7 July 1936, 3; “Der Deutsche Farbfilm,” *Licht Bild Bühne*, 2 September 1936, 2; “Bringt der Farbfilm eine Revolution?,” *Licht Bild Bühne*, 13 March 1937, 1; “30 Prozent der USA.-Produktion in Farben?,” *Licht Bild Bühne*, 28 June 1937, 1; “1937-38 bisher 28 Farbfilme in USA.,” *Licht Bild Bühne*, 22 September 1937, 2.

¹⁸ “Verbot der Nachtkritik: Eine Anordnung des Reichministers Dr. Goebbels,” *Licht Bild Bühne*, 13 May 1936, 1.

However, the uniformly positive reviews of Hollywood imports featured in the pages of German film trade papers escaped the ideological regimentation of the regime. There was no political need at any time in the Nazi regime for reviewers to contrive praise for Hollywood films, so the ecstatic reviews can be taken as genuine reactions, not politically managed.

In part, the widely inconsistent reactions to Hollywood in the 1930s grew from earlier fractious debates during the 1920s on “Americanism,” in which America represented the embodiment of modernity. The Nazis took the traditional right-wing line, demonizing the social phenomena that accompanied modernity – the “New Woman,” popular music, more liberated attitudes towards sexuality – while admiring the technological advancements.¹⁹ Hitler especially admired Henry Ford’s ability to unlock the productive powers of industry, in addition to Ford’s anti-Semitism and anti-union activities.²⁰ The repudiation of aspects of social and cultural modernity resulted in a measured move away from American culture after the Nazi seizure of power. Certainly, official ambiguity did not aid matters; despite denunciations of Wall Street and “Jewish capitalism” there was no coherent position towards America. Britain and France were largely admired despite the ills they supposedly imposed upon Germans with the Treaty of Versailles. The Soviet Union was uniformly demonized as Germany’s antithesis, except during the years 1939-41, when the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact was in force.

Broad studies of European film often ignore German film between 1933 and 1945, or relegate it to a chapter on political cinema along with Soviet Russia and Fascist

¹⁹ Michael Kater, “The Impact of American Popular Culture,” in *The Arts in Nazi Germany: Continuity, Conformity, Change*, ed. Jonathan N Huener et al. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 35.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

Italy.²¹ Dedicated studies of Nazi cinema have done little to counter the perception that German cinema was political. Siegfried Kracauer concludes, "...all Nazi films were more or less propaganda films – even the mere entertainment pictures which seem to be remote from politics."²² Kracauer's discussion focuses exclusively on three films: *Triumph of the Will* (*Triumph des Willen*, dir. Leni Riefenstahl, 1935), *Baptism of Fire* (*Feuertaufe*, dir. Hans Bertram, 1940), and *Victory in the West* (*Sieg im Westen*, 1941), so his detection of propagandistic content definitely applies, at least, to these three documentary films. Gerd Albrecht considers entertainment cinema in his highly influential 1969 study *National Socialist Film Politics*. His division of H-films, cheerful films with "latent political content" and P-films, films with explicit propaganda themes, set the tone of subsequent evaluations of entertainment cinema.²³ Erwin Leiser and David Hull both agree with Kracauer's assessment and follow Albrecht's division, in their claims that every film had a political function.²⁴ They contend that Goebbels overwhelmed the industry early on and subordinated it to his personal control, creating an efficient and coherent network of intentional political manipulation.

David Welch's *Propaganda in the Third Reich, 1933-1945*²⁵ is the best attempt to categorize the era's propaganda into discrete themes, such as anti-Semitism, the Führer cult, and blood and soil ideology. His analysis focuses almost exclusively on "tendency

²¹ Richard Taylor treats Soviet and German film as adopting similar propagandistic techniques, in which entertainment cinema was banal escapism or infused with insidious ideological messages. Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998). Similarly, a textbook simply lumps Germany with Fascist Italy and Soviet Russia as propaganda. Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, "Cinema and the State: the USSR, Germany, and Italy, 1930-1945," in *Film History: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2003), 261-282.

²² Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004), 275. First published 1947.

²³ Gerd Albrecht, *Nationalsozialistische Filmpolitik* (Stuttgart: Enke, 1969).

²⁴ David Stewart Hull, *Film in the Third Reich: A Study of the German Cinema, 1933-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Erwin Leiser, *Nazi Cinema* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1974), 12.

²⁵ David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

films,” that exhibited strong National Socialist leanings. Welch’s book is instructive and broadens the horizons of what can be considered propaganda and how narratives were shaped to transmit political messages. Susan Tegel’s 2007 work, *Nazis and the Cinema*,²⁶ on the other hand, slavishly imitates the earlier narrow approach to propaganda film, chronicling the 1933 “time of struggle” (*Kampfzeit*) films, Leni Riefenstahl’s documentaries, and anti-Semitic comedies in the context of the state’s takeover in a formulaic treatise on Nazi cinema.

Propaganda studies tend to treat German cinema’s trends and practices in isolation from broader international currents. Scholars have only recently begun to treat entertainment cinema in the Third Reich as a viable field of inquiry. Political films were undoubtedly German; entertainment cinema, on the other hand, incorporated a much wider source of influences. Both pre-Nazi and international cinemas represented a major aspect of entertainment cinema in the Third Reich, and significantly influenced German cinema under the Nazis; no national cinema came close to matching Hollywood’s pull on German film making. Although scholars have frequently observed the imitative quality of German cinema in the Nazi era, few have considered in detail the aesthetic, political and cultural complications it presented. Analysis of the specific ramifications of a trans-Atlantic cultural exchange has only recently attracted attention. Moreover, in the course of increased sensitivity to international influences, the propaganda-escapist dichotomy has been dropped. Instead, entertainment films have been re-evaluated as a genuine field of inquiry and considered on their own merits. Instead of a summary of thematic propaganda, scholars argue over the presence or absence of propaganda in entertainment

²⁶ Susan Tegel, *Nazis and the Cinema* (New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2007).

features. Several excellent studies have emerged over the past fifteen years that probe new approaches, new fields or new ideas about Nazi cinema.

No summary of work on the Third Reich would be complete without Eric Rentschler's seminal study, *The Ministry of Illusion*.²⁷ In his examination of Nazi cinema's post-1945 appeal, he concludes that Goebbels was more successful in concealing propaganda in entertainment than previously thought. In Rentschler's estimation, the "apolitical" entertainment films previous scholars passed over as insignificant were indispensable parts of Goebbels's concerted indoctrination of the German population. Goebbels did not helm a Ministry of Fear, but rather a Ministry of Illusion, from which "ideology came sugar coated."²⁸

Linda Schulte-Sasse's *Entertaining the Third Reich*²⁹ studies Nazi era presentations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Instead of restating the propaganda line, she reinvents and complicates the study of propaganda film. She approaches the era from a novel direction, the eighteenth century. In her estimation, the encounter with a historical and cultural other did not succumb easily to Nazi propaganda. She argues that Nazi ideology had difficulty appropriating the cultural artefacts of another time. Her analysis takes movies as starting points and examines how they harboured, transmitted, exceeded and undermined political ideology.³⁰ Interestingly, her investigative strategy is to "...look at Nazi propaganda movies, only not as propaganda movies."³¹ Instead, she roots her inquiry in the aesthetic and cultural mores from which a

²⁷ Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 217.

²⁹ Linda Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich: Illusions of Wholeness in Nazi Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1996).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, xiii.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

feature film drew its inspiration. For instance, she roots the notorious anti-Semitic hate film *Jew Süß*³² simultaneously in Nazi anti-Semitism, eighteenth-century literary and aesthetic practices, and Hollywood and Weimar horror films.

Sabine Hake also downgrades the role of ideology to a supporting player in an ensemble cast.³³ Tension and compromise dominate Hake's analysis; the tension between market-driven industry and an ideological dictatorship shaped the era's films. During the 1930s, this tension was clearly far more pronounced than in the war years, as the regime and the film industry competed on a more equal footing. Audience reception of course was not uniform, due to the conflicting values involved. For the emergent consumerist class in Nazi Germany, "[p]articipating in the public culture of accommodation and pretence, the cinema provided both a refuge *from* the pressures of modernization in the workplace and the organization of social life, and a refuge *for* the progressive tendencies associated with Weimar modernism and its dreams of a democratic society."³⁴ Popular cinema's nature, beholden to the tastes of the masses, ensured that patently un-National Socialist values found expression. In addition, Hake stresses the role of director in crafting a diegetic world. In her estimation, the Jewish directors of *The Ugly Girl* (*Das hässliche Mädchen*, dir. Henry Koster, 1933) and *Victor and Victoria* (*Viktor und Viktoria*, dir. Reinhold Schünzel, 1933) dealt with oppression and dissent in comic form.³⁵

³² Director Veit Harlan was twice charged with crimes against humanity, but acquitted both times. SS chief Heinrich Himmler ordered all SS men deployed to the eastern front to see this film in order to stoke anti-Semitic feelings among men involved in the Final Solution. The film remains banned in Germany.

³³ Sabine Hake, *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 10. Italics in original.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 33 - 49.

Perhaps the most comprehensive monograph on 1930s American-German cultural relationship is Lutz Koepnick's *The Dark Mirror*.³⁶ Instead of limiting himself to one shore of the Atlantic, Koepnick approaches the topic from both: the full colour emulation of Hollywood in the 1930s in Germany and the impact of German émigrés in Hollywood until the 1950s. In doing so, he complicates static understandings of both national cinemas. In his view, Germany became more Americanized as skilled German personnel introduced German innovations from the Weimar era to Hollywood studios. Moreover, he presents the relationship between creative auteur and studio as similar in both cases. Ideology and profit limited the extent to which ambitious film makers could express their unique vision. Koepnick heavily employs theoretical frameworks which distances films from their socio-economic and historical conditions of production and consumption.

Mary-Elizabeth O'Brien follows Rentschler, focusing on popular films and how they acted as political vehicles, offering guidelines for proper behaviour and allowing a measured, safe release for audiences' pent up social frustrations.³⁷ She approaches her topic through genre cinema, examining how "...genre cinema contributes to this project of enchanting the world, suffusing it with meaning and developing and reinforcing a value system that harmonizes with the totalitarian state's political program."³⁸

Erica Carter addresses stardom and personality in film making in *Dietrich's Ghosts*.³⁹ She sees a concerted effort to realign the industry along the personality principle, which underwrote Hitler's charismatic authority. She evokes the cult of

³⁶ Lutz Koepnick, *The Dark Mirror: German Cinema between Hitler and Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

³⁷ Mary-Elizabeth O'Brien, *Nazi Cinema as Enchantment: The Politics of Entertainment in the Third Reich* (Rochester: Camden House, 2004), 1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁹ Erica Carter, *Dietrich's Ghosts: The Sublime and the Beautiful in Third Reich Film* (London: BFI Publishing, 2004).

personality in acting, institutions like the short lived German Film Academy and Goebbels's position as Minister of Propaganda. However, despite the Nazis' concerted effort to realize charismatic leadership in film, she remains unconvinced of its effectiveness. In her estimation, the Weimar traditions of film acting undermined the application of National Socialist ideology to film making. "Personality" film championing Nazism remained on the margins of popular cinema.

Although there is division in recent scholarship over the presence, absence or effectiveness of politics in entertainment cinema, the illusion of Goebbels's omnipotent propaganda machine has been broken. This thesis follows Schulte-Sasse's approach and uses Hollywood popular cinema as a point of departure for film in the Nazi regime. The goal is not to ascertain the presence or absence of propagandistic content in German features, but rather to examine the anxieties and fascinations about America that German emulative projects contained. Instead of analyzing depictions of American society, this thesis explores ways in which German studios emulated iconic Hollywood forms and attempted to Germanize them. Ideology cannot be removed entirely from the equation. Here it is treated as a significant influence among many in the cultivation of popular cinema. Certainly, no cultural project is free from the social, political or aesthetic conditions in which it was conceived. Hollywood films carried discrete cultural, social and political ideas. Even in German emulation, Americanized films smuggled in dissonant messages. Although emulative German films purported to work towards a homogeneous Nazified culture, they instead undermined the totalitarian ambitions of the regime in the very venue wherein the illusion was best disseminated. Hollywood and its German doppelgangers did not present an alternate political program, but rather depicted,

glorified and spread fantasies of liberty and consumerism impossible to realize under Nazism.

It is imperative to avoid easy classifications. German cinema under the Nazis was not entirely compromised by political content; by the same token, Hollywood was not apolitical entertainment.⁴⁰ Both national cinemas rooted their narrative fantasies in conservative values. Like the cinema of the Third Reich, Hollywood films moved away from the experimental permissiveness of the decadent jazz era. The sexually and politically charged films of the silent and early sound eras quickly disappeared under the auspices of the Production Code Administration. Hollywood studios endured protracted moral decency campaigns from conservative and religious groups during the 1920s and 1930s, and implemented the Code in 1934 in answer to the public outcry. The more salacious scenes that the Nazis decried disappeared from Hollywood scenarios; racial diversity was scrapped in favour of uniform whiteness; displays of sexuality, common in the early 1930s, were largely eliminated and only presented in clearly disapproving light; political strife quietly disappeared from narratives. In sum, Hollywood's far reaching sanitization of its productions eliminated much of the content criticisms of Nazi cultural theorists. Thomas Doherty suggests Hollywood studios went so far as to tailor films to appeal to the new conditions in Germany, and avoided any potentially problematic content in selecting films for the German market.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Movies as Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Philip Green, *Cracks in the Pedestal: Ideology and Gender in Hollywood* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998); Daniel Bernardi, ed., *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Nicole Matthews, *Comic Politics: Gender in Hollywood Comedy after the New Right* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000).

⁴¹ Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), 97.

Resistance in Nazi Germany was subterranean. The lack of overt or concerted efforts to unseat the Nazi regime, even in the later war years, seems to support the impression that all Germans' submitted loyally to Hitler. When active resistance did arise, it usually came from Jewish, leftist or youth groups.⁴² Youth revolt movements such as the Hamburg Swing Youth, the White Rose in Munich, and the Edelweiss Pirates dominate much of the historiography. Instances of conservative elite opposition to Hitler are largely centralized in Colonel Klaus von Stauffenberg's failed 1944 assassination plot. Religious resistance to the Nazi regime was mixed. In sum, the phenomenon of "inner emigration" has been described as the main reaction to the National Socialists' totalitarian ambitions. Reports by both the Gestapo and the Social Democrats in exile repeatedly point to the apathy that quickly gripped German society. The Upper Bavarian district president complained in his 11 November 1934 report:

A true assessment of the barometer of popular opinion is faced with difficulties at the present time. Because of denunciations, which are still regrettably numerous, and in view of the fanaticism of some subordinate offices, it can be observed that large sections of the population, and, in particular, those who are loyal to the State only give vent to their true opinions about public and especially local conditions in their most intimate circle. Otherwise, they simply keep their mouths shut because of completely unjustified fears.⁴³

An SPD report from southwest Germany in spring 1937 echoed the district president's sentiments:

⁴² See Shareen B. Brysac, *Resisting Hitler: Mildred Harnack and the Red Orchestra* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000); John J. Michalczyk, ed. *Confront!: Resistance in Nazi Germany* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004); John M. Cox, *Circles of Resistance: Jewish, Leftist, and Youth Dissidence in Nazi Germany* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

⁴³ Noakes, 569.

It becomes increasingly evident that the majority of people have two faces: one which they show to their good and reliable acquaintances; and the other for the authorities, the Party offices, keen Nazis, and for strangers. The private face shows the sharpest criticism of everything that is going on now; the official one beams with optimism and contentment.⁴⁴

In addition to lethargy, anti-government “grumbling” was present. Ian Kershaw notes the widespread dislike of the Nazi Party and despotic local bosses, even as Hitler’s personal popularity remained high.⁴⁵

Recent scholarship underscores the heterogeneous nature of the Nazi regime and the relatively tolerant relationship between the regime and the public. In addition to harsh repression, the regime allowed the expression of dissent and discontent as long as it did not amount to unified or organized opposition to the regime. Klaus-Michael Mallman and Gerhard Paul contend that even an organization as nefarious as the Gestapo operated in tandem with the German public’s use of denunciations to settle personal vendettas.⁴⁶ Peter Fritzsche underscores the ambivalence the vast majority of Germans felt towards the explicit “Nazification” of society. For instance, Germans did not displace traditional greetings and farewells with the mandatory “Heil Hitler” in 1933.⁴⁷ The SS, not normally a bastion of understanding and compassion, welcomed low level dissent in the pages of *Schwarze Korps*. Patrick Merziger examines the public discourse over satire and the public’s complaints about it despite enthusiastic endorsements from different factions of the regime. *Schwarze Korps*, along with Goebbels’s Berlin paper *Der Angriff*, promoted a relatively relaxed attitude towards whispered jokes, going so far as to publish cartoons in

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 581.

⁴⁵ See Ian Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth: Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987).

⁴⁶ Klaus-Michael Mallman and Gerhard Paul, “Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omnipresent?: Gestapo, Society and Resistance,” in *Nazism and German Society, 1933-1945*, ed. David F. Crew (New York: Routledge, 1994), 179-181.

⁴⁷ Fritzsche, 19-24.

which Hermann Goering demanded new jokes at his expense.⁴⁸ Moreover, Merziger finds that persecution for anti-Nazi jokes often occurred in cases where the accused had a history of opposition to the regime, usually an association with a leftist movement.⁴⁹ He concludes, "... the public's complaints about satire were not an expression of resistance; instead they showed the overwhelming desire of the greater part of the population to belong, to be part of the *Volksgemeinschaft*..." and he continues, "behind these complaints lay a deep trust in the National Socialist state."⁵⁰ Certainly, the regime grudgingly tolerated limited dissent, but only with the understanding that all Germans would eventually be won over to Nazism.

The dual nature of conformity in the Nazi state was replicated in the cinema. The low level grumblings and discontent that gripped Germans after 1933 found expression in the non-political films of the era. Equally, the bombastic glorifications of Nazism by Leni Riefenstahl or Veit Harlan mirrored the "public" attitude of most Germans. By accommodating divergent artistic and film making practices from Hollywood, Goebbels sought to incorporate them into the Nazi edifice. However, the accompanying social and cultural values implicit in Hollywood entertainment resisted Nazification and expressed disagreement with the totalitarian regime. Qualities that could be considered reactionary in a capitalist-democratic society became subversive and revolutionary in the regulated people's community. The cohesiveness of ideological message in the cinema struggled to incorporate Hollywood's dissonant values and often could not. Eleanor Powell's extraordinarily popular *Broadway Melody of 1936* and *Broadway Musical of 1938*

⁴⁸ Peter Merziger, "Humour in Nazi Germany: Resistance and Propaganda? The Popular Desire for an All-Embracing Laughter," *International Review of Social History* 52 (December 2007): 279.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 288.

flaunted Nazi ideology in the depiction of a young woman finding independence and success in the big city; “this double leitmotif of professional and social advancement, being American, democratic, and modern at the same time, was something with which intelligent and not yet completely indoctrinated young women in Nazi Germany could identify.”⁵¹ Even in adaptation, Americanized German entertainment kept potentially problematic themes in order to retain the desired Hollywood style. Instead of the glorification and promotion of a narrow vision of German identity, the era’s entertainment presented a confused depiction of the world and of Germany’s place in it. Like in music, German film makers copied foreign content and brought out its potential.⁵²

Drawing on three primary sources, *Film Kurier*, *Licht Bild Bühne*, and *Der Deutsche Film*, this project seeks to locate debates on Americanism in the Nazi regime. All three were mainstream publications with an affiliation with the regime. *Film Kurier* was the official publication for the Reich Association of German Exhibitors, *Licht Bild Bühne* was the mouthpiece for the industry, and the Propaganda Ministry launched *Der Deutsche Film* in 1936 to expand the reach of Nazi cultural theories. Certainly, these three publications did not dominate the discourse. The SS journal *Schwarze Korps*, the Party’s official newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* and Julius Streicher’s anti-Semitic polemical *Der Stürmer* regularly weighed in on cultural matters and reached a large swath of the German population. In contrast, *Film Kurier*, *Licht Bild Bühne*, and *Der Deutsche Film* represented moderate voices, focusing on the health of the export market and economic strength of the industry rather than ideological posturing. The explicit intrusion of politics occurred rarely in the journals, except for major occasions like

⁵¹ Kater, 40.

⁵² Pamela Potter, *Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler’s Reich* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998), 200.

Hitler's birthday or the plebiscite on the annexation of Austria in 1938. Otherwise, *Film Kurier's* and *Licht Bild Bühne's* political content consisted of reprints or articles explaining recent, high profile political opinions from the pages of political newspapers. For instance, *Licht Bild Bühne* ran a front page feature on a *Schwarze Korps* article, "Star or Ensemble Film?" in October 1935, contextualizing the argument and presenting the article's major points.⁵³ These papers addressed a general reading public involved with the movie industry, but not necessarily with the Nazi Party. They provide the perspective of apolitical, non-ideological interests in German cinema.

This thesis is divided into three substantive chapters that explore the disruptive aspects of Americanized German entertainment. In all cases, the emulation of Hollywood caused fissures in the communication of Nazi ideology and expressed individualist and consumerist desires. First, the German emulation of Hollywood stardom will be examined. In order to compete with the increasingly regulated star power of American studios, Ufa and the other German studios adopted a practice of "doubling" popular Hollywood stars, in which popular the attributes of popular Hollywood stars were copied in new German movie stars. The focus on individuals enjoying freedoms from political obligations in their personal and on-screen lives offered German audiences an alternate form of identity, presented in the public realm. The next two chapters engage with two sides of the "Americanism" debate. Luis Trenker's *The Emperor of California (Der Kaiser von Kalifornien, 1936)* presents a decidedly pessimistic vision of the United States. This was not unique, but his adaptation of the western genre to tell the story of failed German settler Johann August Suter/ John Sutter presented audiences with domestic fodder for Germany's obsession with the Wild West. Adapting the western

⁵³ "Star- oder Ensemblefilm?," *Licht Bild Bühne*, 23 October 1935, 1.

genre allowed Trenker space to craft a scathing critique of American society as well as Nazi Germany. Suter becomes a double for Hitler and Suter's failures are extended to Germany. Director Paul Martin captures the positive view of a magical America onscreen in *Lucky Kids* (*Glückskinder*, 1936), a remake of Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934) that tried to borrow the vitality of its American inspiration. The dynamic excitement screwball comedy of *It Happened One Night* created a world opposed to Nazism's austerity. The characters bounce around a world without care or worry. The tenets of Nazism's obsession with individuals' responsibility and work are cast aside in the ether of individualist exuberance.

CHAPTER 2 LIGHTS, GLAMOUR, FASCISM: HOLLYWOOD STARDOM AND NAZI "PERSONALITY"

Hollywood style stardom proliferated under the heel of the Nazi dictatorship. It existed uneasily at the intersection of the private, profit driven concerns of German movie studios, of the machinations of politicians and of popular tastes. The German film industry, the largest in Europe at the time, was reeling from the fallout of the Great Depression. Star power became a key device in finding a badly needed mass audience. It injected fantasy into films and stoked consumerist and erotic desires. However, competition from glamorous Hollywood stars often eclipsed the glow of German ones. To compensate, Ufa appropriated appealing attributes of popular Hollywood performers in the construction of new screen personas. "Doubled" personas arose independently of National Socialist ideology and did not adapt neatly to it. The generic persona of the diva, for instance, an erotic and sensual woman with a strong, independent personality, stood in direct confrontation with the Nazi ideal of the feminine: docile, chaste and subservient to patriarchal or marital authority. Yet the single most popular female star of the Nazi era, Zarah Leander - active from 1936-1943 - conformed remarkably well to the conventions of the *femme fatale*. Leander was not an isolated example either; the cadre of Weimar era performers as well as the numerous new film actors of the Nazi era embodied unmistakably non-Nazi, American traits. The problematic domestication of Hollywood stardom occurred in the public sphere; in no other field, except perhaps politics and the military, were individuals as admired as in the movie industry. The cinema of the Third Reich presented a space for non-conformity and visions of society other than those official dogmatists offered German public, through the roles and performances of

Germany's movie stars. The gaps between their personas and official rhetoric allowed German cinema patrons a space wherein they could escape the persistent demands of the Nazi state and find alternate modes of identification.

Hollywood was Germany's main cinematic rival during the 1930s and the images of glamorous Hollywood stars were at the vanguard of its presence in Nazi Germany. Nazi film criticism posed Hollywood stardom against a new revitalized German culture. The difference between stardom and personality was clear; Erik Krünes declared, "the star must die so that film can live!"¹ A 1936 *Film Kurier* article praised renewed government efforts "to compensate for the deleterious effects brought on by work stoppages and disruptions, which arise due to the disease of directors and prominent leading actors."² Articles routinely appeared in the pages of *Licht Bild Bühne* and *Film Kurier*, blaming the economic difficulties the Hollywood majors encountered during the 1930s – no worse than the downturn the German industry experienced – on stars and their lavish salaries.³ A high profile *Das Schwarze Korps* article, "Star or Ensemble Film?," blamed the exclusive right of stars to refuse scripts for costing the industry RM60,000 per script and concluded, "[t]his insane squandering of money on the costs of the 'substance of film capital' will eventually be reduced to nothing, when even the producers in their orthodox conservatism swear to go without stars."⁴ The industry had already answered the SS call to diminish star salaries in the 1932 SPIO Plan, which quickly became the

¹ Erik Krünes, "Das Star-Unwesen im Film" in *Rundfunk und Film im Dienste nationaler Kultur*, ed. Richard Kolb and Heinrich Siekmeier (Düsseldorf: Friedrich Floeder Verlag, 1933). Quoted in Antje Ascheid, *Hitler's Heroines: Stardom and Womanhood in Nazi Cinema* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2003), 33.

² "Der Star ist erkrankt!," *Film Kurier*, 5 December 1936, 1.

³ "Ist Gary Cooper 5 Millionen Dollar wert?," *Licht Bild Bühne*, 4 August 1936, 1.; "Herstellungskosten in USA steigen," *Licht Bild Bühne*, 18 August 1936, 2.; "In Hollywood bis 90% Kostensteigerung," *Licht Bild Bühne*, 25 August 1937, 1.; "U.S.A. Produktionskosten siegen um ein Drittel," *Film Kurier*, 1 September 1937, 1.; "Krise in Hollywood," *Licht Bild Bühne*, 10 June 1938, 1.; "Amerikanische Filmstars im Dienste der Besucherwerbung," *Licht Bild Bühne*, 29 August 1938, 2.

⁴ "Star- oder Ensemble Film?," *Licht Bild Bühne*, 23 October 1935, 1.

government's approach to rescuing it from financial insolvency. However, Nazi ideologues quickly formulated a novel conception of stardom more attuned to the Third Reich.

“German film should once again rise up in global prestige, but not by squinting at America or France and trying to imitate foreign models,” argued *Film Kurier* in 1938, “but rather through consistent perseverance in the development of the unique German style.”⁵ In film acting, Nazi film theorists proposed “personality” (*Persönlichkeit*) as the basis of a new German film art that would restore Germany's status as an elite national culture.⁶ Karen Doerr and Michael Robert define *Persönlichkeit* as: “Personality. Germans of the same blood; replacing Individuum (individual), a word deemed un-German and Jewish.”⁷ In film and theatre acting, a parallel to the Führer cult was not found, but rather an emphasis on the collective ensemble. Actors who embodied “personality” became representatives of the German *Volk*, and through their performance re-enacted fantasies about racial purity and nationality. In line with the hierarchical vision of the regime, German “personality” de-emphasized the centrality of the individual in favour of the collective. Although a lead character could “dominate... the central idea of a film,” when “...the individual actor steps into the background; then the ensemble cast steps forward and expresses the appropriate plot motif of work community in action.”⁸

⁵ “Der Film braucht Persönlichkeiten,” *Film Kurier*, 2 March 1938, 1.

⁶ The German word *Persönlichkeit* literally translates as personality or character, and was used as shorthand for the dense set of personal, professional and racial ideals Nazi cultural theorists desired in film actors and the body politic more generally. The term originated in the nineteenth century German Idealist philosophical tradition, with philosophers seeing it as “...the transcendent quality that allows individuals to overcome social fragmentation and ‘embrace the world’” and remained a core concept in conservative discourses on German culture and its necessary transformation in the 1920s and 1930s. Erica Carter, *Dietrich's Ghosts: The Sublime and the Beautiful in Third Reich Film* (London: BFI, 2004), 27.

⁷ Karin Doerr and Robert Michael, *Nazi-Deutsch/Nazi-German: An English Lexicon of the Language of the Third Reich*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 312.

⁸ “Star- oder Ensemble-Film?,” *Licht Bild Bühne*, 23 October 1935, 1.

Nazi cultural output was obsessed with wholeness, a cohesive social body, and the identification and vilification of the “Other,” most often the Jew, but also foreigners and Marxist, socialists, communists, and Bolsheviks.⁹ Ideally, the cinema became a public space for the display of a shared cultural identity with lead actors as the focal point for the collective experience since they were the objects of the audience’s emotional identification.¹⁰ Erica Carter contends that distinctly German film conventions, such as slow montage and ensemble lighting limited the role of *mise en scene* and sets in communicating meaning, making the actor’s body the principal resource upon which the “collective soul” could be enacted.¹¹

“Personality” as the basis of an acting philosophy, however, was not exclusive to Germany; discourses in American film magazines evoked “personality” as a central tenet. There was, however, a sharp distinction between the word’s individualist English and collectivist German etymologies. Samantha Barbas roots the American definition of “personality” in an emerging discourse on individual comportment in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Self-help and popular literature of the 1920s and 1930s, she contends, emphasized personality, outwardly manifested through charm, friendliness, sincerity and flawless self presentation, as the best way to mediate the vicissitudes of modernity.¹² Hollywood movie stars best exemplified these new values of “personality” due to the mass appeal of their charismatic screen presences. The democratic veneer of

⁹ Linda Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich: Illusions of Wholeness in Nazi Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1996), 43.

¹⁰ Carter, 87.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

¹² Samantha Barbas, *Movie Crazy: Fans, Stars, and the Cult of Celebrity* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 36.

the stardom institution further rooted “personality” as an effective tool in achieving individual success.¹³

Classic Hollywood’s domestic and international dominance rested on the personal magnetism of contracted stars. The technological shift to synchronized sound firmly established continuity plots, which focused on character driven story lines and subordinated all other aesthetic concerns, as the dominant mode of Hollywood films in the 1930s.¹⁴ Studios exercised exclusive power over contracted actors and shaped their personas with an eye towards maximizing their profitability. A handful of bankable stars could underwrite a studio’s financial success; for instance, the dancing team of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers helped RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum) thrive, despite its lack of other popular draws.¹⁵ MGM’s (Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer) dominance in the 1930s was in no small part thanks to its cadre of popular stars, which enticed audiences to its films with the slogan “more stars than there are in Heaven.” As the iconic ambassadors of every film, stars were carefully groomed to appeal to mass tastes, measured by box office receipts as well as public feedback through letters. So in reaction to fan demand, MGM created a tough talking hero in the 1930s. After an extensive search and publicity campaign, MGM transformed Clark Gable from unknown stage actor into one of the most popular male actors of his generation.¹⁶ Studios meticulously crafted screen personas to fit audiences’ expectations and desires, measured in part through mail

¹³ Richard Dyer contends that the democratic aspect of stardom aided the appeal of new and established stars while simultaneously alleviating mass envy and resentment. Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1998), 8-11. The German film press also recognized the humble origins of many top Hollywood stars: “Schauspieler-Karrieren in USA.,” *Licht Bild Bühne*, 25 May 1937, 3.

¹⁴ Daniel Bernardi, “Introduction: Race and the Hollywood Style” in *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness*, ed. Daniel Bernardi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 4.

¹⁵ Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System: A History* (London: BFI, 2005), 72.

¹⁶ Barbas, 4.

response and ticket sales, at times radically transforming actors' physical appearances, their names and even arranging relationships to maximize publicity.¹⁷ In effect, a performer's screen persona was the property of the contracted studio and the majors jealously guarded their prize investments.

Screen persona, broadly defined, was the identity or personality with which movie audiences identified an actor or actress, regardless of role. Although a screen persona informed the types of roles a performer took, a star image presented a coherent and codified arrangement of symbols, gestures and meanings which transcended individual film roles. Richard Dyer argues that while "'character' [refers] to the constructed personages of films[,] the word 'personality' [refers] to the set of traits and characteristics with which the film endows them."¹⁸ Star personas were constructed and communicated through a myriad of sources: fan magazines, publicity photographs, interviews and public appearances. Through careful media management, a coherent persona arose, with which audiences felt a sense of familiarity or kinship.¹⁹ This persona, however, was not uniform and often contained contradictions – innocent and lustful, for instance. The unpredictable ways in which these multiple factors overlapped created, according to Dyer, a "...gap between on the one hand promotional and filmic construction of the star image (which is further complicated by the highly ambivalent way publicity relates to a promotion and

¹⁷ One of the era's most popular stars, Joan Crawford (née Lucille LaSueur) underwent significant and painful dental work to reconstruct her face. She had her back teeth removed to accentuate her cheekbones and filled her spaced teeth with cement to give her an even smile. In addition, MGM's chief costumer designed everything she wore from 1929 to 1943 and moulded her into a living art deco figurine. Robert B. Ray, *The ABCs of Classic Hollywood* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 50-51.

¹⁸ Dyer, 89-90.

¹⁹ Greta Garbo, for instance, became forever associated with the line "I want to be alone," uttered as the ballerina Grusinskaya in *Grand Hotel* (dir. Edmund Goulding, 1932). The collision of actress and character blurred in Garbo's case: "By 1932, Garbo's aloofness – in part her natural disposition, but also a persona carefully nurtured by MGM – had become central to her performances. Merely by playing them, Garbo could now endow her characters with a world-weary remoteness requiring little narrative motivation." Ray, 42.

films) and on the other the role of criticism and commentaries in that construction is a real one, and accounts for both the complexity, contradictoriness and ‘polysemy’ of the star image...”²⁰ The creation of an easily recognizable but engaging persona was not easy and resulted from the unification of several different streams which together formed the public’s image of a star.

The managerial role studios took with their stars transformed individuals into valuable commodities used to sell entertainment and reflected the increasing commoditization of Hollywood cinema. The mode of identification that Hollywood of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s offered up for emulation was a conception of the self defined through consumerism.²¹ Stars were icons of the American dream come true, ordinary individuals whose talent and hard work guided them up the ladder of success to become members of the cultural elite. In spite of economic depression, studios awarded massive financial contracts to actors with a proven or a good potential of helming profitable films. Moreover, it was at this time that high fashion and Hollywood forged an alliance. A starlet’s appearance on red carpet or gala events was not complete without an expensive designer wardrobe. For them, association with designer labels with high price tags became an important element of maintaining a credible star persona.²² The relationship between Hollywood and emerging consumer capitalism flourished in the 1930s as studios began featuring companies’ products in films and allowing their stars to promote goods

²⁰ Dyer, 63.

²¹ Nicole Matthews, *Comic Politics: Gender in Hollywood Comedy after the New Right* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000), 77.

²² Dyer, 38. Charles Eckert makes the claim that top studio fashion designers became as famous as movie stars in the pages of fan magazines. Charles, Eckert, “The Carole Lombard in Macy’s Window,” in *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, ed. Christine Gledhill (New York: Routledge, 1991), 35.

in magazines and advertisements.²³ Hollywood movie stars became icons of consumerism, enjoying all the fruits of the American capitalist economy. They offered the downtrodden masses an outlet for increasing frustrations and were objects of consumption themselves. Stars tapped into the desires of audiences on a number of levels and proved formidable opponents for Europe's largest film industry. In short, Hollywood movie stars became the spokespeople of consumer capitalism, offering Americans (and by extension Germans) a model for the successful and charismatic navigation of industrial modernity.²⁴

Ufa had already established an Americanized production strategy, including stars, in the Weimar Republic. Goebbels immediately recognized that the central role of stars in the narrative and as the object of the audience's emotional identification made them one of the most effective propaganda characteristics of film.²⁵ As Felix Moeller claims, box office receipts "regularly showed [Goebbels] how valuable the screen stars were, and not just as advertisements, figures to identify with and idols of the public. With their help even average (political) material could be made into an enormous commercial success."²⁶ In this function, popular cinema could disseminate propaganda without alienating viewers with heavy handed preaching. Moreover, stars ensured both the economic viability of the industry and the political ideology of the regime.²⁷ Luminaries of the entertainment world had to make public displays of their support and belief in the

²³ Eckert, 36-38.

²⁴ Barbas, 36-37.

²⁵ Mary-Elizabeth O'Brien, *Nazi Cinema as Enchantment: The Politics of Enchantment in the Third Reich* (Rochester: Camden House, 2004), 9.

²⁶ Felix Moeller, *The Film Minister: Goebbels and the Cinema in the Third Reich* (London: Edition Axel Menges, 2000), 163.

²⁷ Carter, 60.

regime.²⁸ Goebbels became a fixture in the artistic community, entertaining the cultural elite at his private villa. The connection between the cultural and political elite theoretically politicized German culture. At the very least, the close connection between movie stars and political figures limited any extra-political avenues of association, meaning identification with star Hans Albers could be channelled immediately back to the all encompassing Nazi state. However, despite the rhetoric of racially defined “personality,” the polysemic nature of stardom made simplistic identification difficult.

There was considerable continuity between the Weimar and Nazi eras as German studios managed to hold on to many of their biggest stars. The “big four” actors of the Third Reich – Emil Jannings, Heinrich George, Hans Albers, Werner Kraus and Gustaf Gründgens – had all established themselves before the Nazi dictatorship.²⁹ Hans Albers emerged as the leading man of the Third Reich after a promising start in late-Weimar cinema. Willy Fritsch and actresses Lilian Harvey, known as Germany’s “dream couple,” continued to entertain German audiences, interrupted only by Harvey’s brief stint in Hollywood from 1933-1935. Comedic actor Heinz Rühmann enjoyed a successful film career spanning several decades, including the Third Reich, playing the ordinary man for laughs. René Deltgen melded strength, daring and self sacrifice into his roles in popular adventure films.³⁰ The grand dame of German cinema, Lil Dagover, continued her reign as the fashionable and respectable queen. However, beneath the marquee National Socialism introduced new ideological pressures to the industry to conform to its racial

²⁸ Actor Heinz Rühmann made the weekly newsreels in 1941 for volunteering to take flight training despite the fact he was exempt. Klaus Kreimeier, *The Ufa Story: A History of Germany's Greatest Film Company, 1918-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 292.

²⁹ David Stewart Hull, *Film in the Third Reich: A Study of the German Cinema, 1933-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 90.

³⁰ O'Brien, 66.

mores. The regimentation of German cinema through the professional association, the Reich Film Chamber, forced many performers out of the film industry, through coercion or through politically motivated emigration.³¹ Despite the departure of major names like Peter Lorre, many top stars remained after 1933, their careers prospering under the Nazi regime.

The major German studios utilized a combination of contracts and short term employment in their dealings with actors. However, the deficit of talented actors, let alone stars, gave established personalities the upper hand in negotiations. The tension between the despotism of studios and the dictates of the Propaganda Ministry prevented the implementation of a coherent approach to dealing with stars. Hans Albers maintained a high degree of independence under the terms of his contract. He had final say over his roles, directors and even editors and was limited to one historical epic – dependent upon his consent – per year due to his antipathy to the genre.³² Nevertheless, even the anti-Nazi Albers could not avoid appearing in propaganda roles, such as the titular chauvinistic and anti-Semitic colonial pioneer in *Carl Peters* (dir. Herbert Selpin, 1941).³³ Emil Jannings translated his popularity as an actor into a seat on Tobis's managerial board in 1936 and with it, complete control over his films.³⁴ At the other extreme, Ufa leading man Willy Fritsch ceded considerable control of his image to the studio. In Klaus Kreimeier's estimation, "the actor, his name, his image and his personal habits were literally Ufa's

³¹ Jan-Christopher Horak, "German Exile Cinema, 1933-1945," *Film History* 8 no.4 (1996): 373 and Alan E. Steinweis, *Art, Ideology, and Economics in Nazi Germany: The Reich Chambers of Music, Theatre, and the Visual Arts* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 35-40.

³² Kreimeier, 291.

³³ *Ibid.*, 291-292.

³⁴ No doubt his artistic control was granted due to his affinity to Nazism and his production of first rate propaganda features. *Ibid.*, 295.

property.”³⁵ Fritsch’s extreme commoditization was unusual for the time, but indicated the increasingly managerial role the studio was taking with its top stars. The control over Fritsch was more common for newly introduced stars lacking the bargaining position that Albers and Jannings enjoyed.

Actors leveraged their talents and popularity for lucrative contracts. Despite industry and government attempts to rein in salaries, they rose sharply throughout the decade.³⁶ Wolfgang Becker estimates that salaries rose 200 percent after 1933, with topmost stars earning in excess of RM200,000 annually.³⁷ An October 1939 actors’ poll survey of salaries revealed a correlation between high salaries and studio contracts. Of the 14 actors earning in excess of RM50,000 per film, 13 were under a studio contract and of the 10 earning between RM40,000 and RM50,000 per film, only 5 were under contract.³⁸ The number of studio contracts declined substantially with lower rates of pay, with studios’ engaging actors on a term basis instead. In addition to rewarding already established stars, generous compensation was integral to Ufa’s strategy of luring foreign talent to Germany. For instance, Ingrid Bergman earned RM40,000 for her only German film *The Four Companions* (*Die Vier Gesellen*, dir. Carl Froehlich, 1938).³⁹ Ufa also

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 290.

³⁶ Facing deteriorating economic prospects in the early 1930s, film industry leaders convened to set out a new course for the industry, culminating in the 1932 SPIO plan. Among its many recommendations, it called for a marked reduction in star salaries. In 1933, the newly established Propaganda Ministry adopted its plan as the basis of the government’s film policy, including lower salaries. David Welch, “Nazi Film Policy: Control, Ideology, and Propaganda,” in *National Socialist Cultural Policy*, ed. Glenn R. Cuomo (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 100-102.

³⁷ Wolfgang Becker, *Film und Herrschaft* (Berlin, Verlag Volker Spiess, 1973), 115-116. Cited in Julian Petley, *Capital and Culture: German Cinema, 1933-45* (London: BFI, 1979), 59.

³⁸ Carter, 57.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

offered lucrative contracts to bring Lilian Harvey and Zarah Leander to German screens, offering a portion of their contracts in foreign currency.⁴⁰

The wealth German movie stars enjoyed directly informed their function as icons of consumption. They led lavish lifestyles, far removed from the daily sacrifices National Socialism demanded of ordinary Germans. *Der Deutsche Film* commentator Hermann Gressieker satirized the opulent German stars' lifestyles in a 1937 feature on how one becomes a film star. He opined, "[w]hat will make me forever happy is fame, a glittering existence in my elegant home by the sea, an eight cylinder [car], interviews, gigantic headlines in magazines, and publicity photos in cigarette packages."⁴¹ Despite official denunciations of material comfort, "well-liked superstars could count on luxury and fame: 'Aryanized' villas and cars, [and] the status of a pampered darling of the people."⁴² Lilian Harvey cruised around Berlin in her custom Mercedes Benz convertible between her opulent art deco apartment and the airport where she headed to luxurious ski resorts.⁴³ Zarah Leander became famous (or infamous) for her lavish parties to which she only invited men and served only the finest champagnes, caviars and hors d'oeuvres. Journalist Kurt Reiss recalls in his memoirs that to attend one of her parties was "to know the amazing Leander in a completely new light. She is not only an exceptional hostess, but her own best guest. She eats enough for three. She drinks ... as only the Swedish can drink."⁴⁴ Even after 1939, the material burdens of war could not shake their opulent lifestyles; stars were exempt from military service as well as rationing.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴¹ Hermann Gressieker, "Muss ein Filmstar begabt sein?," *Der Deutsche Film*, August 1937, 43.

⁴² Moeller, 162.

⁴³ Ascheid, *Hitler's Heroines*, 110.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Romani, 27-28.

Fame and fortune alone did not make a star shine and Germany's film stars paled in comparison with Hollywood's. In Kreimeier's opinion, "Germany's top stars were always scaled-down versions of Hollywood's international stars."⁴⁵ Even in the pages of the Propaganda Ministry's *Der Deutsche Film*, Hollywood stars enticed readers with splashy advertisements and photospreads. Two studios in particular, MGM and Paramount, dominated the American content imported into Germany, owing to the studios' joint bailout of Ufa in 1927.⁴⁶ A decade later, their high-profile stars like Clark Gable, Claudette Colbert, Jean Harlow, Gary Cooper, and Greta Garbo were still fixtures in the German "film world." MGM especially embraced the star studded line-up as integral to its profitability and promised audiences beautiful people trapped in harrowing circumstances. It relied on "big-budget films with plenty of action, glamour, beauty and sex appeal"⁴⁷ to attract German audiences. According to Sabine Hake, Paramount's success came from its "sophisticated comedies" that "conjured up a world of luxury and refinement through spectacular sets and attractive actors..."⁴⁸ The other Hollywood firms were not shut out of German cinemas. The single most popular Hollywood star was Shirley Temple, contracted exclusively with Twentieth Century Fox.⁴⁹ The curly haired girl was a potent weapon in the American studios' battle for the German market. In Hake's words, "Twentieth Century Fox conquered the German market with a single

⁴⁵ Kreimeier, 289.

⁴⁶ MGM and Paramount gave ailing Ufa a much needed infusion of capital in 1927, in exchange for preferential access to Ufa's far reaching cinema network, which established the two as major players on the German film landscape. Thomas J. Saunders, *Hollywood in Berlin: American Cinema and Weimar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 70-71.

⁴⁷ Hake 132.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Licht Bild Bühne* conducted a poll to determine readers' favourite American star, which Shirley Temple topped. *Licht Bild Bühne*, 16 April 1935, 2.

product, the child star Shirley Temple.”⁵⁰ In addition, film reviews of Hollywood imports routinely praised the film’s big name star. In *Film Kurier*, the reviewer of *Broadway Melody of 1936* (dir. Roy del Ruth, 1936) enthused that “time and time again one marvels at the technical ability of American stars” and continued, with reference to Eleanor Powell, “Metro’s new discovery is once again proof of this.”⁵¹ Hollywood stars represented American consumerism within the borders of Hitler’s regime, against which Ufa tried vainly to compete. Unfortunately for German studios, two of the most popular “German” stars were now Hollywood international stars: Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich.⁵²

Dietrich and Garbo were inescapable figures in Third Reich cinema, ironically due to their conspicuous absence. They received vast amounts of coverage in the German press, even for the most mundane events, and remained very popular among German film audiences. Both actresses had brief German careers before leaving for Hollywood stardom.⁵³ The brevity of their German careers was symptomatic of the German industry’s difficulty in retaining high profile talent. Under Goebbels’s direction, Ufa made overtures to both Garbo and Dietrich to return to Germany in the hope they would countenance a homecoming like Lilian Harvey’s.⁵⁴ However, both refused and the

⁵⁰ Hake, 131.

⁵¹ “Broadway Melodie” *Film Kurier*, 26 February 1936, 2.

⁵² Dietrich was German, hailing from Berlin. Garbo, on the other hand, was Swedish. However, in the popular film press of the Third Reich, Garbo was often adopted as German. Nordic racial theories also accepted a biological affinity between German “Aryans” and Scandinavians.

⁵³ Garbo’s German debut in G.W. Pabst’s *Joyless Street* (*Die freudlose Gasse*, 1925) quickly earned her a lucrative contract with MGM. Dietrich established herself later, shooting to international stardom as cabaret performer Lola Lola in *The Blue Angel* (*Der Blaue Engel*, Josef v. Sternberg, 1930).

⁵⁴ Ufa contacted Garbo to star in a film adaptation of Knut Hamsun’s novel *Pan* in 1935. Kreimeier, 290. Later that year, Curt Oertel, one of Garbo’s first producers, sought her for an adaptation of *Tristan and Isolde*. “Curt Oertel sucht die Garbo auf,” *Film Kurier*, 5 July 1935, 2. Goebbels sent actress Mady Sokya to London in 1936 with 40,000 pounds and a blank contract in an attempt to lure the Blue Angel back to Germany. Romani, 3.

German industry never fully replaced either, prompting the German “filmworld” to have a “Garbo complex,” according to actress Zarah Leander, who came closest to replacing the departed starlets.⁵⁵ This “complex” was more than simple star worship; indeed, Leander claimed in her autobiography that commentators held Garbo as the epitome of the “eternal feminine” and all others as mere stand-ins.⁵⁶ Moreover, the “Garbo” type was routinely evoked in the German film press as a coveted acting style.⁵⁷ She defied traditional representations of femininity and adopted an androgynous persona that MGM tried to temper with high profile romances. Even rumours of lesbianism – which she suggested, according to Andrea Weiss, through coded gestures and poses to an emerging gay subculture in the 1930s – did not dampen public or the homophobic regime’s praise for Garbo.⁵⁸

Dietrich expanded Garbo’s challenge to conventional gender roles into a full blown assault. Where Garbo appeared in men’s slacks, Dietrich paraded up and down the red-carpet in a full tuxedo and top-hat.⁵⁹ Although Dietrich did not appear in the pages of *Licht Bild Bühne* and *Film Kurier* as regularly as Garbo, Erica Carter posits Dietrich represented the archetype of beauty in Nazi film theory. Her popularity, however, carried ideological complications similar to Garbo’s. Dietrich’s German nationality made her

⁵⁵ Zarah Leander, *Es war so wunderbar, mein Leben* (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1973), 128.

⁵⁶ Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996), 135.

⁵⁷ Waldemar Lydor, “Spricht die Garbo deutsch?,” *Film Kurier*, 12 December 1933, 2; “Greta Garbo gegen ‘Garbo’-Film,” *Film Kurier*, 11 July 1934, 1; “Greta Garbo als ‘Königin Christine,’” *Film Kurier*, 25 October 1934, 2; “Greta Garbo,” *Film Kurier*, 24 November 1934, 2; “Der neue Garbo-Film,” *Film Kurier*, 13 December 1934, 1; “Der neue Greta Garbo-Triumph,” *Film Kurier*, 5 April 1935, 4; “Garbo-Interview: Was ist Wahrheit?,” *Film Kurier*, 15 June 1935, 1-2; “Greta Garbo: Wie sie ihr ehemaliger Partner sieht,” *Licht Bild Bühne*, 11 September 1936, 2; “Goldmedaille für Greta Garbo,” *Licht Bild Bühne*, 4 January 1937, 3; “Dichtung und Unwahrheit um Greta Garbo,” *Licht Bild Bühne*, 25 June 1937, 2.

⁵⁸ Andrea Weiss, “A Queer Feeling when I Look at You: Hollywood Stars and Lesbian Spectatorship in the 1930s,” in *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, ed. Christine Gledhill (New York: Routledge, 1991), 287.

⁵⁹ Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), 123-124.

repudiation of the regime all the more stinging and her star persona fully embraced a dangerous female sexuality. She embodied the vamp like no other; French film magazine *Pour Vous* claimed Dietrich herself “is a secretion, a concretization of sexual attraction, and acts like a sweet poison, penetrating and drugging, which spreads throughout the body and overcomes all one’s resistance.”⁶⁰ Her 1930s collaborations with director Josef von Sternberg at Paramount created a lasting persona with strongly implied sexual promiscuity.⁶¹ Her sexuality exerted influence on both sexes, as rumours of lesbianism followed her throughout her career.⁶²

Dietrich’s role as Lola Lola entrenched her star persona as an individual who transgressed sexual and social boundaries.⁶³ Her early Sternberg films elicited censorship in the United States and Germany due to their frank and explicit depictions of sexuality and promiscuity. The Production Code Administration regulations suppressed both *Blue Angel* and *Blonde Venus* from future exhibition.⁶⁴ In Germany, her films frequently drew criticism and all Dietrich films were banned after the outbreak of war in 1939.⁶⁵ In

⁶⁰ *Pour Vous*, 27 August 1931. Cited in Colin Crisp, *Genre, Myth, and Convention in the French Cinema, 1929-1939* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002), 263.

⁶¹ Thomas Elsaesser argues that Dietrich’s Sternberg roles were themselves commentaries on sexuality and patriarchy. “The ironic and gratified smile of Dietrich” he writes in reference to *The Scarlet Empress*, “evokes pleasure (and a measure of self-deprecation) in the immense and absurd labor involved in displaying her image, her effortless entrance, presence, performance. She appears to know that she is watched, not so much by the imaginary or invisible male gazes of diegetically present or inferred audiences, but by the immense business of an elaborate machinery, which is itself a metaphor of (male) sexuality.” Tomas Elsaesser, “Lili Marleen: Fascism and the Film Industry,” *October* 21 (Summer, 1982), 124.

⁶² Weiss, 283.

⁶³ The power of her Sternberg films means that even in the 1950s, “the enigmatic-exotic-erotic complex which her image signifies and which is irresistibly read into her appearances is sustained primarily by vague memories of the Sternberg films, glamour photographs and her cabaret act, and not by the substance of her films or interviews. Her face, her name even, carries the ‘mystique’, no matter what films she makes or what she says.” Dyer, 126.

⁶⁴ Dawn B. Sova, *Forbidden Films: Censorship Histories of 125 Motion Pictures* (New York: Facts on File, 2001), 53 and 56, 57.

⁶⁵ Dietrich’s 1935 film *The Devil is a Woman* (dir. Josef v. Sternberg), for instance, came under fire for its negative depiction of Spain. It criticized Franco’s fascist forces in its romanticism of the democrats in the

addition, Dietrich personally and in her films defied the Nazis' closed conception of racial-nationality. "Dietrich's transnationalism, her status simultaneously as German and American star, Hollywood femme fatale and Weimar vamp," observes Erica Carter, "situated 'Marlene' herself as a source of ideological trouble (why *would* she not return?), and located her image as a source for Third Reich aesthetic debates on a specifically German mode of film stardom."⁶⁶ Dietrich transcended her German identity in her Hollywood roles, often playing any European nationality. While the Swedish Garbo seemed uncomfortable with stardom and remained aloof from the public eye, Dietrich was the Hollywood glamour star *par excellence* of the 1930s and 1940s. She directly challenged Nazism through public criticisms in addition to roles that rejected the regime's deterministic view of femininity, race and gender.⁶⁷ Neither Goebbels nor Ufa could ignore the fact that two of Germany's top female stars plied their talents in California and compensated by replacing them with a "doubled star."

Ten years after Garbo's immigration to the United States, "people were still searching for a Garbo. A new Garbo. A German Garbo. A Garbo who could laugh. A Garbo who sang. A masculine Garbo. A feminine Garbo (if one could imagine that). A red headed Garbo..."⁶⁸ In 1936 Ufa found a Garbo for the Nazi public, in Zarah Leander. Leander transformed the immensely popular personas of both actresses for the Nazi dictatorship, combining Garbo's melodrama with Dietrich's vamp into her star image. The "doubled" star quickly emerged as the era's biggest star, dominating both German

fog of the impending Spanish Civil War. "Dietrich-Film soll verbrannt werden" *Film Kurier*, 11 November 1935, 1.

⁶⁶ Carter, 15.

⁶⁷ Comments attributed to Dietrich that criticized the regime in 1936 elicited a feature interview with *Film Kurier* in which she claimed "I have never hounded Germany." "Unterredung mit Marlene Dietrich," *Film Kurier*, 7 December 1936, 1-2.

⁶⁸ Leander, 128.

cinema and radio during her six year Ufa career. The affinities between Leander's screen image and those of Garbo and Dietrich were unmistakable; Erica Carter describes her as a Dietrich copy and a Garbo facsimile.⁶⁹ She looked and spoke with a slight Swedish accent and acted exclusively in melodramas like fellow Swede Greta Garbo, but sang with the same throaty baritone and embraced the vampish aura of Marlene Dietrich. Her persona was meticulously constructed and public appearances carefully choreographed. To ensure their prized star was always at her best, "when she went on extended publicity trips abroad, not she but the costume department at Ufa decided what she would wear when, where and how. To make sure she made no mistakes, the costumers gave her long lists that prescribed in ... detail the composition of her outfits and the accessories appropriate for each occasion."⁷⁰

The Leander star persona consciously modeled on Garbo and Dietrich was symptomatic, and the most successful, of the mid to late 1930s "doublings" of Hollywood stars for German films. Already established German stars did not undergo a renovation of their star personas, except for a superficial adherence to Nazi ideology.⁷¹ The longevity of many of the Third Reich's top male actors' film careers ensured that few new male stars debuted during the Third Reich. "Doubling," which was reserved for the introduction of new stars mostly after 1936, amounted to a combination of shameless imitation as well as inventive reimagining of stardom for Nazi ideology. As Karsten

⁶⁹ Carter, 181.

⁷⁰ Elisabeth Läfer, *Skeptiker des Lichts: Douglas Sirk und seine Filme* (Frankfurt, 1987). Quoted in Kreimeier, 299.

⁷¹ Changes did occur in the roles played by well established actors. In reference to Fritsch, Albers and Rühmann, Kreimeier contends, "In the roles they played, the 'man in the street' became the hero of grotesquely complex plots and sentimental dramas in which the emotions were no more than quotations – reflections from a now defunct culture with richer, deeper feelings than this one. Most of the plots revolved around money and love, and in most cases money – or the social order regulated by financial arrangements – prevailed." Kreimeier, 293.

Witte observes, American stars provided the base for new star personas that studio producers then shaped for the distinct political and cultural environment of Nazi Germany.⁷² Not surprisingly, the exact duplication of a Hollywood movie star in German productions did not translate well. For instance, child star Carmen Lohmann's "doubling" of mega-star Shirley Temple was a dismal failure.⁷³ The most successful "doubled stars" – Zarah Leander, Marika Rökk and Marianne Hoppe – all approximated the attractive attributes of their American counterparts, but tailored them to be more ideologically palatable for the Nazi regime. Rökk explicitly emulated the dance moves of Eleanor Powell throughout her career.⁷⁴ Moreover, her films gave ambitious choreographers a space in which to pay homage to Busby Berkeley's famous dance sequences. Her resemblance to the American dancing star Powell was so strong that a reporter mused, "Why do we need Powell? Now we have La Rökk."⁷⁵ Marianne Hoppe for her part made a career of parodying Katherine Hepburn in German imitation "screwball" comedies.

The "doubling" effect was most pronounced in musicals and with new female stars for several reasons. First, the National Socialist feminine ideal, confined to motherhood and dutiful wife, was not conducive to gripping female characters or interesting star personas.⁷⁶ The stock German Gretchen did not offer the romantic and

⁷² Erica Carter, "Marlene Dietrich – The Prodigal Daughter," in *The German Cinema Book*, ed. Tim Bergfelder et al. (London: BFI, 2002), 74.

⁷³ Michael Kater, "The Impact of American Popular Culture on German Youth," in *The Arts in Nazi Germany: Continuity, Conformity, Change*, eds. Jonathan N. Huener et al. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 40.

⁷⁴ Romani, 163-165.

⁷⁵ Marika Rökk *Herz mit Paprika* Berlin, 1974. Quoted in Romani, 163.

⁷⁶ Hitler himself articulated the regime's prescribed role for women. In a September 1934 *Reichsparteitag* speech, he declared, "If in earlier times the liberal intellectualized women's movement contained many, many points in their programs, ... our National Socialist women's movement essentially contains one point, and that point is the 'the child.'" Ascheid, 22.

erotic possibilities that motivated the romantic subplots of almost all narrative films. David Welch has speculated that the majority of cinema audiences were female, meaning that films needed to appeal directly to women to be successful.⁷⁷ Although Welch's assertion has been criticized,⁷⁸ he rightly points out that studios had to respect the opinions and tastes of German women and offer legitimately engaging female characters. On the other hand, the allure of vampish or modern women like Dietrich and Garbo was undeniable, and translated into high cinema attendance. Secondly, the gender difference in "cultural Americanization" reflected politics and longer term cultural trends in Germany. German male performers' debt to American cinema was less profound, as their personas adapted better to Nazi roles like the authoritarian genius.⁷⁹ Men's politicized characters did not deviate substantially from socio-political roles.

The misogynistic nature of Nazism severely limited women's access to in the public sphere, relegating them to the subordinate roles of wife and mother. Female stardom was a marker of international cosmopolitan sophistication and conspicuous consumerism and became the antithesis of the Nazi German maiden. The unity of a star's on and off-screen persona meant that the potentially unruly tendencies of her characters transferred into public perceptions of her private lives. Although press features emphasized actresses' traditional femininity, especially maternity,⁸⁰ press coverage offered another identity altogether. The female stars of the Third Reich were glamorous, independent women who pursued their desires – usually sexual or material – with conviction. Zarah Leander especially defied National Socialist morality in her movie

⁷⁷ Welch, 217.

⁷⁸ Mary-Elizabeth O'Brien dismisses his assertion and claims wartime melodramas and home-front films were intended for male audiences as well. O'Brien, 167.

⁷⁹ Ascheid, 37. Kreimeier, 296-297.

⁸⁰ Ascheid, 52-55, 166-171.

roles as lounge singers or diva actresses. Moreover, stars articulated individualist, American desires instead of a commitment to the collective whole. The visibility of movie stars presented a representation of consumerist desires outside of the official contours of Nazi discourse. As in Hollywood features, German film scenarios unfolded in luxurious penthouse and lavish mansions, filled with well-dressed stars. As movie stars, women enjoyed one of the few possibilities for participation in a public life otherwise defined as the exclusive domain of men. Female stars were the only group of women able to publicly pursue their own interests and adhere to pre-Nazi ideals of beauty.

In addition to leading glamorous lives with none of the material sacrifices demanded of ordinary Germans, movie stars exemplified foreignness. The top actresses' exotic looks, foreign accents and worldly flair distinguished them from ordinary Germans.⁸¹ Many of the new stars of the Third Reich were foreign born: Zarah Leander and Kristiana Söderbaum were Swedish; Marika Röck was Hungarian; Lida Baarovna was Czech; Lilian Harvey, British; grand dames Lil Dagover and Ilse Werner grew up overseas. To some extent, the arrival of prominent foreign actors signalled the vitality and attractiveness of the German film industry. In November 1937, *Film Kurier* announced in a lengthy two page feature Ingrid Bergman's contract with Ufa: "Just now we have learned: the great Swedish actress Ingrid Bergman has been signed by Ufa."⁸² Although attracting foreign born talent from other cinemas bolstered national pride, it belied the theoretical racial link between performers and audiences. Foreign born performers could not reasonably embody the esoteric *Volk*. Ideologues clumsily tried to square the circle by broadening the definition of German identity. For instance, a 1935

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸² "Ufa verpflichtete Ingrid Bergman," *Film Kurier*, 30 November 1937, 1.

NSK Folge article questioned the prevalence of foreign-born actors in Germany. Despite the author's criticism of foreigners in German studios, he makes an allowance for Lilian Harvey, who had recently returned from America to resume her German film career at Ufa. The status of a British woman as the leading lady of Ufa became less ideologically objectionable if one could remember, "Lilian Harvey, who, despite being English by birth, has become our half compatriot due to her German film career and as well as the fact she enjoys popularity in Anglo-Saxon countries as well as with Germans."⁸³

Leander recalled in her autobiography that "Goebbels was absolutely not enthused about Ufa hiring a foreigner as *leading lady* of the entire industry at a time when the possibility of a total German film was desired."⁸⁴ While Leander's post-war claims must be weighed with scepticism, the gap between rhetoric and practice no doubt irked Goebbels. The foreign roots of Germany's top actresses usually translated into non-German characters as well. In the case of Zarah Leander, her foreignness was frequently emphasized: she played a Brit in *To New Shores* (*Zu neuen Ufern*, dir. Detlef Sierk, 1936), a Swede in *La Habanera* (dir. Detlef Sierk, 1936), a Hungarian in *The Arctic Fox* (*Blaufuchs*, dir. Viktor Tourjansky, 1938), an American in *Heimat* (dir. Carl Fröhlich, 1938), an African in *Song of the Desert* (*Das Lied der Wüste*, dir. Paul Martin, 1939) and a South American in *Back Then* (*Damals*, dir. Rolf Hansen, 1943).⁸⁵ In the context of Nazi Germany's obsession with race and nationality, her designation as German was problematic. Her non-German nationality placed her outside the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft* and its socially acceptable behaviours.

⁸³ Curt Belling, "Ausländer in deutschen Film: Braucht der deutsche Film ausländische Mitarbeiter?," *Film Kurier*, 6 September 1935, 2.

⁸⁴ Leander, 170. Emphasis in original.

⁸⁵ Romani, 74.

Leander's transnationalism undermined the pedagogical intent scholars assert existed in most Nazi propaganda. Leander did, however, play German characters in her two major wartime propaganda films: *Request Concert* (*Wünschkonzert*, dir. Eduard v. Borsody, 1940) and *The Great Love* (*Die Grosse Liebe*, dir. Rolf Hansen, 1943). Her roles in two of the era's biggest and most profitable films underscore the fact her diva act was not inherently opposed to politics and ideology. The films, produced with sizeable input from the Propaganda Ministry and Goebbels, instructed German citizens on the proper way to comport themselves during a time of war, such as setting aside personal desires for the good of the nation. Even her apolitical entertainment films contained narrative conventions designed to "domesticate" potentially unruly behaviour and to realize the triumph of Nazi mores. They created the semblance of ideological fidelity, but were flimsy constructions designed to pen in potentially dangerous representations and ideas. Beginning with the Sierk productions, Leander films developed a consistent story arc that capitalized on the appeal of her diva characters while simultaneously pushing them into more socially acceptable gender roles.⁸⁶ Most of her divas adopt a normalized marriage by film's end, abandoning her former salacious lifestyle. A Rökk film convention developed wherein her characters go from unknown singers or dancers to become big stars, but not before enduring some frustrations on the way to a happy ending.⁸⁷ For example, her character in *And You, My Darling, Come Along with Me* (*Und Du, mein Schatz, fährst mit mir*, dir. Franz Doelle, 1937) turns down a theatrical career

⁸⁶ Director Detlef Sierk emigrated from Germany in 1937. He settled in Hollywood and enjoyed a successful film career during the 1950s under his anglicized name Douglas Sirk.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

for matrimonial bliss, unlike Eleanor Powell in *Broadway Musical 1936* who becomes a big Broadway star.⁸⁸

Leander presented a far greater threat to the established order than Röck in her films. The Garbo facsimile recalled Dietrich's erotic cabaret entertainer Lola Lola in *The Blue Angel*; the sexuality of Leander's star persona often threatened the social order in her films. Moreover, her erotic appeal was androgynous and transgressed the strict Nazi delineation of sexual desire as heterosexual and designed for procreation. Like Dietrich and Garbo, Leander enjoyed a strong following among homosexual men, especially in post-war Germany. Although the active persecution of homosexuals during the Third Reich makes an evaluation of her 1930s gay following difficult, the androgynous qualities that made Leander a post-war gay icon arguably would also have appealed to the atomized gay community during the Third Reich.⁸⁹ Sirk remembered Leander as a diva whose appeal transcended gender. In a 1967 interview with *Cahiers du Cinéma*, he recalled, "She had a very husky, very sexy voice, which had a tremendous effect on certain people, and I must say affected women as well..."⁹⁰ To contain this potentially explosive persona, films reined in her characters and eliminated potential discord caused by her provocations. Her eroticized diva characters either disappear by film's end or submit to a "normalized" domestic life.⁹¹

Often, Leander's cabaret performers adopt a facade of sexuality that conceals a moral woman underneath. Eric Rentschler sees this dual aspect of her persona as a *femme*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸⁹ Ascheid, 39.

⁹⁰ Serge Daney and Jean-Louis Noanes, "Entretien avec Douglas Sirk," *Cahiers du Cinéma*, April 1967, 20.

⁹¹ Carter, 137.

fragile who lurks beneath her *femme fatale* exterior.⁹² The promotion of sexuality as falsified performance allowed Leander film plots to capitalize on a familiar Dietrich role without actually glorifying sexual promiscuity or social transgression. So while Jana Bruns sees the Sierk-Leander collaborations as upholding the sexually conservative values of the Nazi regime, Marc Silberman more perceptively suggests that Leander's divas offered an ideological "safety valve" that could release cinema-goers' pent up frustrations.⁹³ In *To New Shores*, for instance, where Leander plays lounge singer Gloria Vane, her aura of sexual permissiveness is undercut through its representation as a stage act and not as a manifestation of her true nature. Bruns sees this tendency as symptomatic of Leander's star persona: "this method of displaying and, at the same time, distancing Leander's erotic energy, of containing the visual pleasure her sensuality offers by exhibiting it as a stage act performed by a fundamentally ethical woman, became a leitmotif of the delineation of Leander's star persona."⁹⁴ In essence, Bruns sees Leander's star persona as a union of a superficially immoral woman who secretly longs for domestic bliss. This sentiment, however, was not unique to Nazi Germany.

Despite Dietrich's star status in the United States, her roles frequently challenged the country's conservative morals. A similar containment scenario appears in the 1932 Dietrich film *Blonde Venus* (dir. Josef v. Sternberg). In the film, Dietrich's Helen turns to cabaret performances and prostitution to raise the funds necessary to pay for her husband Ned's expensive treatment for radium poisoning. Sternberg's initial screenplay called for the reunification of Ned and Helen after her brief affair with millionaire Nick Townsend

⁹² Rentschler, 140.

⁹³ Jana F. Bruns, *Nazi Cinema's New Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 111-120; Marc Silberman, *German Cinema: Texts in Context* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1995), 65.

⁹⁴ Bruns, 117.

as well as a sojourn as popular Parisian dancehall entertainer “Blonde Venus.” The reassertion of familial bliss and norms after the audience’s titillation by Helen’s liaisons ruffled the feathers of Paramount’s studio heads, who ordered a revised script. A new version, largely penned by studio’s production chief B.P. Schulberg, retained the film’s spicy content but left Helen alone at the end. Studio heads struck a compromise between the two previous iterations.⁹⁵ The studio’s hesitancy to justify the socially deviant sexual behaviour of Dietrich’s Helen reveals the dangers of attempting to contain potentially controversial themes within a narrative framework. Dietrich’s nightclub act in *Blonde Venus* strongly suggests racial miscegenation: in front of a chorus line of dancers in blackface and bushy wigs, “Blonde Venus” sings,

Hot voodoo –black as mud
Hot voodoo – in my blood
That African tempo has made me a slave
Hot voodoo –dance of sin
Hot voodoo – worse than gin
I’d follow a cave man right into his cave.⁹⁶

Although Leander’s sexuality was always less pronounced, her debt to Dietrich’s highly eroticized image strongly suggests similar reasons for audiences’ preference for Leander films. The threat Dietrich’s characters explicitly pose to patriarchal and social cohesiveness was implied in Leander’s late 1930s oeuvre.

The overt prominence of sexuality and prostitution in *Blonde Venus* was unusual for Hollywood films after 1934. From that point, the evocation of sexuality in both Hollywood and Germany came more often through songs and body language than in, narratives that censors carefully vetted. Dietrich, however, moved away from cabaret performers later in the 1930s, appearing in a diverse array of androgynous character

⁹⁵ Sova, 53-55.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

roles; the Dietrich Leander continued to echo was Lola Lola. The centrality of Leander's voice to her persona ensured her frequent roles as cabaret singers, and dance-hall performers with the accompanying implications, however arguably false in Leander's case, of open feminine sexuality.⁹⁷ Film narratives almost always gave her a chance to sing and her songs were key elements of Ufa's publicity campaigns, appearing in print advertisements and on the radio preceding a film's premiere.⁹⁸ Cinti Romani claims that audiences went to see her sing rather than to see her act.⁹⁹ Although she never sang songs as racy and controversial as those covered by Dietrich, Leander's songs routinely incorporated musical elements the regime officially deemed racially unacceptable.¹⁰⁰ The musical leitmotif in *La Habanera*, for instance, was a loose melange of Caribbean and Latino instruments and compositions. Leander provides a similar fascination with the racialized "other" in *La Habanera*. The film explores the allure of foreign, allegedly inferior races for Leander's character, Astree. Indeed, Ufa's brazen encounters with unusual and suppressed musical arrangements was not without success; Leander's film songs became massive hits in their own right and dominated radio broadcasts well after a film's theatrical run.

⁹⁷ In *To New Shores* Leander appears as an entertainer at the London Adelphi Theatre, at which Gloria Vane's songs are interrupted by fist fights over their propriety, her revealing wardrobe and her moral character. Thomas R. Nadar, "The Director and the Diva: The Film Musicals of Detlef Sierk and Zarah Leander: *Zu Neuen Ufern* and *La Habanera*," in *Cultural History through a National Socialist Lens*, ed. Robert C. Reimer, 66-67.

⁹⁸ Early coverage of *Heimat* (dir. Carl Froehlich, 1938) stressed that she would sing. "Zarah Leander singt in 'Heimat'," *Film Kurier*, 10 February 1938, 3.

⁹⁹ Romani, 73.

¹⁰⁰ Unlike the film industry, the music world was radically reorganized after 1933. The "Germanization" of orchestras and popular bands created a climate where the limits of experimentation, permissible chord structure, instrument choice and rhythms were strictly defined. A concerted campaign against music deemed "degenerate," like "Nigger-Jazz," ensured that German radios and orchestra halls heard only culturally sanctioned sounds. See Michael H. Kater, *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992).

The differences between German cinema's top two Nazi era Swedish imports, Leander and Kristina Söderbaum, are the most indicative of the difficulty of creating a coherent message in popular cinema, the possibility of films presenting an alternate mode of identification, and the schism between ideology and practice. Leander's Americanized star image fit poorly with official discourse, although it was immensely popular with German audiences. Söderbaum, on the other hand, represented German "personality" more than any other star. Goebbels and her director husband Veit Harlan were more influential than the studios in the creation of her persona.¹⁰¹ Harlan exhibited a powerful control over his wife, allowing her to appear exclusively in his films. As a result, Söderbaum starred in some of the most notorious films of the era, including the virulent anti-Semitic film *Jew Süss* (*Jud Süß*, 1941) and *Kolberg* (1945).¹⁰² Like Leander, however, she also appeared in numerous melodramas, albeit often with heavy political content. Her films made a ready moral distinction between urban and rural life and enforced racial ideals of separateness. Her characters reflected the ideals of Romantic literature: "sentimental, traditional, self-sacrificing, as well as disciplined, upright and proper."¹⁰³ She also looked the part of the ideal Aryan maiden championed in racial propaganda. A key aspect of her star image was the vulnerable maiden who is sacrificed for the salvation of the community or family.

Söderbaum did not play peaceful characters enjoying an agrarian existence. In order to evoke drama from her, scenarios depict her torture and destruction. For instance, in *Jew Süss*, Ferdinand Marian's Süß rapes her character, Dorthea Strum. She commits

¹⁰¹ Ascheid, 46.

¹⁰² *Jew Süss* and *Kolberg* are among the most infamous films of the Nazi era and remain banned in Germany.

¹⁰³ Romani, 84.

suicide, which gives the community cause to remove Süß from power and end his corrosive effect on the kingdom. The prevalence of death in Söderbaum's films represents, for Antje Ascheid, self-destructive tendencies embedded in her character's psyche.¹⁰⁴ The suicide, frequently by drowning, of Söderbaum's characters was so common in her films that she earned the unofficial nickname with German audiences of "the water corpse" of the German cinema. Yet Söderbaum was an exception among major film stars of the Third Reich in that she most closely exemplified the communal value of "personality." The routine destruction of her folkish characters obviously attempted to reconcile the chasm between theory and practice.¹⁰⁵ Her films clearly present the difficult coexistence of traditional and modern constructions of femininity in idealized depictions of Nazi utopias.

Leander's glamour queen, on the other hand, asserted her independence and endured tragedy better than her naive, virtuous counterpart. The destructive tendencies in Leander's star persona manifested themselves in the transformation of her characters to adhere to social conventions. Her sexuality presents a challenge to patriarchal authority; her submission to her husband or her disappearance from the film removes the threat. Söderbaum, on the other hand, was passive, subject to events and the desires of other characters. The Nazi vision of femininity stripped women of their agency and rendered them submissive. Leander's characters, at least initially, deviated from the aggressive assertion of patriarchal authority and expressed an independent voice. Her appropriation of Garbo's and Dietrich's star personas created characters whose desires were impossible to suppress. Moreover, implicit in the Hollywood starlets' personas was a challenge to

¹⁰⁴ Ascheid, 96.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

conservative mores and conceptions, which Leander retained. If the dual poles of femininity offered between Leander's and Söderbaum's films presented the choice between death and acquiescing to social norms or disappearing, Leander's model was undoubtedly more appealing to the majority of German spectators as a model to emulate or as an erotic conquest.

The popular appeal of Hollywood stars lay in their ability to embody multiple, sometimes contradictory, attributes. The homoerotic appeal of major movie stars Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich transgressed social conventions and moral legislation. In the context of a totalitarian cinema, stardom's polysemic nature proved a major obstacle to coherent political messages. The very nature of stardom inherently opposed the Nazi version of femininity. By their simple presence and participation in the public sphere, female movie stars challenged the masculine political and social order the Nazis espoused. Leander took on the subversive aspects of Garbo's and Dietrich's personas, although within a system of narrative containment.

Narrative conventions created the illusion of ideological uniformity in the Third Reich. The studio's judicious avoidance of potentially controversial subjects, as well as Goebbels's exclusive ability to reedit or ban any film, ensured the semblance of conformity. The importance of public support of the industry, which competed against foreign cinemas domestically and internationally, created a situation in which Ufa had to respond to non-political pressures. Stardom was essential to a film industry concerned with profitability, while party ideologues and the Propaganda Ministry simultaneously endorsed and denigrated it. The coexistence of a foreign star cult that embraced consumerism and individualism with an emulative domestic one revealed the continuing

influence of American popular culture as well as the heterogeneous nature of culture in the Nazi state. However, the implications of Hollywood stardom escaped the limitations film scenarios and ideological fidelity imposed. Leander's stardom challenged the Nazi feminine ideal in a public forum. The consumerist impulses implicit in the new conception of stardom could not be removed for propaganda purposes. The stars of the Third Reich represented differing views of life that appealed to Germans but were repressed in other cultural media and social interaction. German stars' subordination to National Socialism was limited. The conservative timidity of many narratives had more in common with the social mores constraining Hollywood than with Nazi political ideology. The propagandistic traits scholars have detected in popular films were present, but were flimsy additions to a much more robust star persona. As icons of emulation stars rebelled against ideology and offered Germans an alternative to the totalitarian state during the 1930s.

CHAPTER 3 SADDLING UP FOR NATIONAL SOCIALISM: LUIS

TRENKER'S *THE EMPEROR OF CALIFORNIA* AND GERMAN WESTERNS

“The Germanic inhabitant of the American continent, who has remained racially pure and unmixed,” wrote Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, “rose to be master of the continent.”¹ Popular German western films attempted to mirror the Fuhrer’s reinterpretation of American history, while retaining the aesthetic and narrative elements of the Hollywood western. Balancing the demands of ideological historical interpretations and Hollywood form presented German studios with a quandary. The Hollywood western film is the archetypal American genre, in which dominant myths of national identity, history and culture are explored and articulated; yet the German film industry appropriated the Hollywood western for German audiences. Certainly, themes of racial superiority and the allure of virgin lands resonated with Nazi ideological obsessions with racial purity and territorial expansion,² but these themes were also present in 1930s Hollywood fare. The first German film western, Luis Trenker’s *The Emperor of California* (*Der Kaiser von Kalifornien*, 1936), won official plaudits, foreign film awards and made a sizeable profit in German cinemas.³ Its success inspired a slew of German imitation films, set in the nineteenth century American frontier. Trenker’s epic is of particular interest due to scholars’ frequent designation as propaganda. Trenker’s film in fact defies simplistic

¹ Hitler, 287. Quoted from Franz Birgel, “Luis Trenker: A Rebel in the Third Reich?,” in *Cultural History through a National Socialist Lens: Essays on the Cinema of the Third Reich*, ed. Robert C. Reimer (Rochester NY: Camden House, 2000), 44.

² Woodruff D. Smith, “Friedrich Ratzel and the Origins of Lebensraum,” *German Studies Review* 3 no.1 (Feb. 1980), 51-68; Shelley Baranowski, “Against ‘Human Diversity as Such’: *Lebensraum* and Genocide in the Third Reich,” in *German Colonialism: Race, the Holocaust, and Postwar Germany*, ed. Volker Langbehn et al. (New York: Columbia UP, 2011), 53-57.

³ It was earned the highest state awards: politically and artistically especially valuable. It also racked up profits at the box-office, selling out cinemas in successive nights in many German cities. “Starker Erfolg der Trenker-Film,” *Film Kurier*, 10 September 1936, 3.

readings as propaganda and in fact questions the very ideological themes it seems to champion. *The Emperor of California* is a strange instance of “doubled” entertainment. Trenker uses the well-worn techniques of the Hollywood western as a starting point for his own romanticized vision of society. Nazi ideology finds an awkward position in Trenker’s film. *Emperor*’s tragic tone undermines any ideological or political message the film might contain: in particular, Trenker’s depiction of German pioneer Johann August Suter’s failure to successfully subjugate the California wild lands belies Hitler’s confidence in Aryan superiority as the madness of the gold rush sweeps away his farming empire, Suterland.⁴ Trenker’s surface contempt for Anglo-American social, economic and political systems rings hollow as these same forces utterly humiliate Suter. Moreover, Trenker’s *mise-en-scene* suggests Suter as a double for Hitler – approximating his iconic Hitler salute for instance – making Suter’s failure all the more subversive. In the final evaluation, Trenker’s film implicitly criticizes the entire Nazi project through its depiction of the complete failure of a doubled *Volksgemeinschaft* in the California mountains.

The western was the first uniquely American genre and rooted “Americanness” in film more than any other.⁵ It depicted the forging of America by a lone hero engaged in a struggle to pacify the untamed lands of the American frontier. The cowboy hero appeared consistently across the western subgenres as a strong, white, Protestant male battling

⁴ Johann August Suter quickly changed his name to John A Sutter upon his arrival in the United States in 1840. However, Trenker uses Suter’s original German name throughout the film. As such, “Suter” will refer to Trenker’s depiction of the Californian frontiersman, while “Sutter” will refer to the man as a historical individual.

⁵ Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance through Twentieth Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2005), 297. Hollywood’s early silent westerns attempted to differentiate themselves from European as well as eastern American competition by setting films in natural milieus found exclusively in the rugged American southwest. In the process, Hollywood studios created the first uniquely American film genre. Scott Simmon, *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre’s First Half-Century* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2003), 9.

against savagery as represented by nature, American natives or another “coloured” group. Historian Stephen Neale describes him as a “figure who possesses the violent skills necessary to defeat the forces of savagery, and a code of values, the Code of the West, which ensures that these skills are ultimately used to advance civilized causes, and which hence help to establish civilization in the very wilderness in which these self-same skills had been honed.”⁶ He abhors “soft” society yet cannot help but establish it in the frontier land. While the western hero varied according to the actor playing him, the general “rules” of the western hero and genre were established by the early 1930s, available for foreign film makers to emulate. Of course the western genre did not present a uniform portrait of American identity and the expression of the “real” America differed. John Wayne, for instance, used his frequent starring roles in westerns to present *his* idealized version of American identity and to comment on contemporary America.⁷

Film scholars often evoke Frederick Jackson Turner’s 1890s frontier thesis as the guiding spirit of the classic westerns of the 1930s-1950s. Turner famously argued that harsh conditions of the late nineteenth century frontier created a meeting point of “civilization and savagery,” in which unique American characteristics – restless energy, ingenuity and individualism – were forged.⁸ In addition, these conditions served as a means of assimilation; the frontier stripped recent immigrants of their “foreignness” and rebuilt them as model Anglo-American citizens. Certainly, Turner’s process of Americanization carried racial criteria and applied exclusively to northern-European immigrants. For Turner, Mexicans and American Aboriginals could not become

⁶ Stephen Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 140.

⁷ Emanuel Levy, *John Wayne: Prophet of the American Way of Life* (Metuchen NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1998), xvii.

⁸ John Saunders, *The Western Genre: From Lordsbury to Big Whiskey* (London: Wallflower, 2001), 6.

Americans.⁹ Turner upheld the aggressive and expansionist American nationalism of the late nineteenth century, especially in his views towards aboriginals' land claims. The validity of Turner's thesis notwithstanding, it greatly informed the western genre's myths and archetypes in the first half of the twentieth century. The necessity of territorial expansion and the racial conception of "Americanness" defined the central themes of 1930s Hollywood westerns and by extension, their German doppelgangers.

1930s western film had developed a codified set of practices, especially in its visual aesthetic and its representations of American history and culture.¹⁰ The sheer number of westerns produced annually in the United States created a basic form for the genre even though it was in a state of flux following the adoption of synchronized sound. Scholars have identified three discrete types of western during the 1930s: the big budget studio "A" westerns, the cheaply and quickly produced "B" or series westerns, and the musical westerns populated by singing cowboys. "B" westerns dominated the 1930s with over one thousand short films produced, in comparison to only about 50 "A" westerns.¹¹ "B" westerns were cheaply produced entertainment pieces that generally ran under one hour and played in cheaper theatres as part of a multi-session entertainment show.¹² Their main demographic was rural and working class audiences, relegating the genre to the margins of respectability as cheap serials destined for low rent cinemas.¹³ However, Scott Simmon insists that the popularity of "B" westerns stemmed from their ability to address problems facing those hardest hit by the Great Depression, and their implicit appeal to the

⁹ Mark Cronlund Anderson, *Cowboy Imperialism and Hollywood Film* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 24.

¹⁰ Neale, 133.

¹¹ Simmon, 100.

¹² Newsreels, cartoons, a main long feature and some shorter "B" reel movies comprised a typical "B" western's presentation. *Ibid.*

¹³ Neale, 138.

era's populist politics.¹⁴ Musical westerns occupied a space similar to "B" westerns and appealed primarily to the same audiences.¹⁵ Interestingly, "B" westerns did not purport to represent history accurately and often mixed time periods, depicting an amorphous "old west" without reference to a specific geographical location or time. The cost effective practice of reusing stock footage created a wild west outside of history, in which Turner's frontier values reigned. "A" westerns, on the other hand, had big studio budgets and often centered on an historical person or event and had "high art" pretensions, attempting to initiate dialogue about American culture and history.¹⁶ John Ford revitalized the moribund genre in 1939 with *Stagecoach*, which ignited a renaissance for the western that continued unabated for the next several decades.

Hollywood western films were early on top imports to the European film markets, helping to establish the nascent American film industry.¹⁷ The high appeal of westerns for German movie audiences did not rest in their thematic ruminations, but rather in their visceral, exciting elements. French film critic Andre Bazin famously wrote that "the western is cinema *par excellence*"¹⁸ due to its emphasis on movement, action and its disregard for dialogue. Westerns were especially popular in Germany and had long exerted a strong hold over the national imagination before the Third Reich. One of the first major Hollywood sound "A" westerns, *The Big Trail* (dir. Raoul Walsh, 1930) failed to make a significant impact on American critics and audiences, but scored well in

¹⁴ Simmon, 164-167.

¹⁵ Peter Stanfield sees in the singing cowboy "a character that represented the fantasies, desires and ambitions of those who felt keenly the economic hardships and the threat (and fact) of dispossession and dislocation." Peter Stanfield, *Horse Opera: The Strange History of the 1930s Singing Cowboy* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2002), 3.

¹⁶ Simmon, 103.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁸ André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* Vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967-1971), 141.

German translation.¹⁹ In addition to western films, other forms of popular entertainment, such as Axel Iver's stage comedy *Wild West Adventure (Wildwest Lustspiel)* and the Wild West bar at the decadent Berlin pleasure palace *Haus Vaterland*, catered to the German public's western appetite.²⁰ Touring exhibitions like Buffalo Bill thrilled German provincial audiences with displays of heroism and adventure from the "Wild West," while Karl May's popular novels formed the imaginative framework for a generation of German adolescents, including a young Albert Einstein and an impressionable Adolf Hitler.²¹

Before Trenker's western epic, German audiences relied upon Hollywood to sate their appetite for cinematic tales of the Wild West. During the genre's big budget nadir prior to 1939, however, few new westerns made their way to German screens, leaving German studios with the opportunity to meet the public's demand for westerns. The era of the "Nazi" western was short lived, ending with the onset of war in 1939. Unlike other instances of "Americanization," it was Tobis, not Ufa, who engaged in westerns. In addition to Trenker's *The Emperor of California*, several high profile westerns were released in Germany at the time: *Sergeant Barry* (dir. Herbet Selpin, 1938), *Gold in New Frisco* (dir. Paul Verhoeven, 1939) and *Water for Canitoga (Wasser für Canitoga*, dir. Selpin, 1939). They have, however, largely escaped scholarly attention.²² Nazi era westerns were an amalgamation of Hollywood western practices, derived from the

¹⁹Simmon, 106.

²⁰ Mary-Elizabeth O'Brien, *Nazi Cinema as Enchantment: The Politics of Entertainment in the Third Reich* (Rochester NY: Camden House, 2004), 99.

²¹ Albert Einstein admitted his "...whole adolescence stood under [May's] sign." Heribert Frhr. v. Feilitzsch, "Karl May: The 'Wild West' as seen in Germany," *Journal of Popular Culture* 27 no.3 (1993), 173.

²² See: Lutz Koepnick, *The Dark Mirror: German Cinema between Hitler and Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and Koepnick, "Siegfried Rides Again: Westerns, Technology, and the Third Reich," *Cultural Studies* 11 no.3 (1997), 418-442.

numerous generic “B” serials and high profile “A” westerns, as well as German perceptions of America. They capitalized on audiences’ familiarity with the genre and copied the diegetic setting of the Wild West and the clichés associated with the genre – six guns, cowboys, “Indians,” and lawlessness. However, studios shied away from shameless imitation and altered the western formula to address German issues and concerns.

The numerous affinities between Hollywood western practices and Nazi ideology eased the process of “Germanizing” westerns. Mary-Elizabeth O’Brien states the similarities between them, claiming,

The western’s philosophy of honor may have appealed to German audiences (and the propaganda ministry) in the late 1930s because it so closely resembled the value system espoused by National Socialism. The lone cowboy is endowed with a simple moral compass of polarized good and evil, believing in adherence to a higher law, gallantry among equals, the need to secure boundaries against a common enemy, and the white man’s right to territorial expansion without respect to the interests of native inhabitants.²³

The lawlessness of the “Wild West” provided a diegetic space wherein filmmakers and ideologues could project German values; through the depiction of culturally and geographically isolated “German” settlements, westerns enabled the Nazi obsession with the racial-national community to come to life. The prevalence of the lone Aryan-German cowboy hero served to differentiate Germans from Anglo-Americans and assert the former’s superiority.²⁴ For instance, Herbert Selpin’s *Water for Canitoga* centers on

²³ Mary-Elizabeth O’Brien, *Nazi Cinema as Enchantment: The Politics of Entertainment in the Third Reich* (Rochester: Camden House, 2004), 100.

²⁴ Herbert Selpin’s later film *Titanic* (1943) also employed this tactic. In the film, the German first officer (and only German on-board) repeatedly warns the Captain and company President about the dangers of navigating through the North Atlantic ice fields. The contrasting world views of the capitalist British and the honourable German, who is only concerned with honour and moral responsibility, highlight the theme of German moral superiority and separateness at work in German westerns.

engineer Oliver Monstuart's (Hans Albers) attempts bring water to a remote mining community in the Canadian west despite opposition and sabotage from American gold interests. His heroic innovations that save the dam, at the cost of his own life, result in the technological progress necessary for Canitoga to overcome divisive effects of alcohol and realize the civilizing effects of male camaraderie.²⁵ Despite the anti-Anglo slant of the film, it nonetheless approximates the era's Hollywood output. French film scholars Pierre Cadars and Francis Courtade praise the film as "a prime example of the best Nazi commercial cinema"²⁶ and further emphasize its similarities with Hollywood "B" westerns, claiming that "the plot could be that of a B series Hollywood film..."²⁷

Luis Trenker's *The Emperor of California* is a more ambiguous case. The film earned the designation of "especially politically" and "especially artistically" valuable, the highest state film awards, in addition to winning the prestigious Mussolini Cup at the 1936 Venice Film Festival. This suggests an ideological affinity with National Socialism (and Italian Fascism). The film's strong current of anti-Americanism ensured its approval by ideologically regulated critics and censors in Nazi Germany. John Sutter had been the subject of several recent works: Soviet film pioneer Sergei Eisenstein penned an aborted script for Paramount in 1931; Sutter found his way to the silver screen in the high budget American western flop *Sutter's Gold* (dir. James Cruze, 1936); and most prominently, Blaise Cendrars's widely read 1925 novel *Gold* introduced a generation of Europeans to Sutter's story.²⁸ Although *Emperor's* first act seems to celebrate the success of the

²⁵ Koepnick, *Siegfried Rides Again*, 432.

²⁶ Pierre Cadars and Francis Courtade, *Le cinéma nazi* (Paris: E. Losfeld, 1972), 162.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ In his autobiography, however, Trenker only names Eisenstein's aborted screenplay in the genesis of the film. Luis Trenker, *Alles gut gegangen: Geschichten aus meinem Leben* (Munich: Wilhelm Heyne, 1975), 325.

American dream, in the second the encroachment of gold hungry Anglo-Americans undoes Suter's accomplishments. Instead of triumphant nation building occurring on the American frontier, Trenker's film depicts the opposite: the destruction of an idealized Germanic *Heimat* through Americans' laziness, sloth and greed. Indeed, it is precisely the expansion of American borders to include California that precipitates the destruction of Suter's agrarian utopia.

With *The Emperor of California*, Trenker largely escaped the hegemony of the archetypal western because the heyday of the American obsession with cowboys, frontier life and the gold rush lagged behind the period of American-German cinematic competition during the 1930s. The film does, however, fit Scott Simmon's criteria for 1930s Hollywood "A" westerns, with its claims of historical accuracy, its focus on a legendary individual, and its sizeable budget.²⁹

German settler Suter (John Sutter) immigrated to the United States in the 1840s and established the successful farming empire of New Helvetia in California before its annexation to the United States in 1848. Sutter was well known at the time as the man who unwittingly sparked the California gold rush. In *Emperor*, Suter flees Switzerland after publishing anti-government treatises, an imaginative flourish by Trenker; the real Suter fled extensive debts. Trenker follows Suter's departure from Switzerland and his travels through Death Valley to California. Trenker fast forwards through the painstaking construction of Suterland, employing a montage of falling trees and the removal of cacti

²⁹ Trenker and a small crew actually traveled to the southwest United States to film scenes on location in Arizona, Colorado and California. Budgetary restrictions limited the time he spent in the United States, but the fact he was permitted to go was remarkable in itself. Director Detlef Sierk (Douglas Sirk) recalls difficulty in acquiring international permits. For *La Habanera*, (1937), he had to settle for the nearer islands of Tenerife to substitute for Puerto Rico. Douglas Sirk, *Sirk on Sirk: Interviews with Jon Halliday* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1971), 53.

in the construction of Suter's prosperous agricultural settlement spanning the length of the Sacramento River. However, Suter's fortunes turn for the worse when gold is discovered on his claim, prompting the California gold rush and the destruction of his farming empire. The historical Sutter never recovered from this massive setback and was never fully compensated by either the American or California governments, despite numerous petitions, for his losses. Trenker's depiction is dark and depressing, especially the film's second act wherein Suter unsuccessfully fights against the gold panners swarming his property. His defeat is total: his sons are murdered, his claim is immolated. Suter dies on the steps of the Capitol Building in Washington D.C. as a pauper, crushed by the might of American greed.

Ironically, Trenker followed a professional trajectory in Nazi Germany similar to Suter's in California. As both director and star of his well-received films, he transcended the star-director divide and was treated, at the apex of his career, as a cultural luminary. Tensions in his relationship with Goebbels, however, sidelined Trenker to the margins of German culture in the 1940s. He began making films, along with Leni Riefenstahl, during the late Weimar era in the "mountain film" genre. It had distinctly National Socialist elements most notably those of a nationalist revival based in nature and the importance of sacrifice. Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels named Trenker's film *The Rebel* (*Der Rebell*, 1932) as a film the German industry should emulate in a 1933 speech to film industry representatives.³⁰ Trenker's stock in Nazi Germany continued to rise through the 1930s, following *The Rebel* with the officially and critically acclaimed film *The Prodigal*

³⁰ In addition to *The Rebel*, Goebbels lauded Fritz Lang's *Die Nibelungen* (1925), Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1927), and the Greta Garbo film *Love* (aka *Anna Karenina*, dir. Edmund Goulding, 1927). David Stewart Hull, *Film in the Third Reich: A Study of the German Cinema, 1933-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 23.

Son (Der verlorene Sohn, 1934). As one of the few skilled directors remaining in Germany after 1933, his ideological affinity with National Socialism (though he did not join the party until 1940) made him one of the cultural elite of the Third Reich. Actively wooed by Hollywood studios in 1934, he spurned their advances and chose to remain in Germany.³¹ He profited greatly from his association with the Nazi state, regularly appearing as a mandarin of the new German film art.³² With *The Emperor of California*, Trenker was at the height of his Nazi era film career and had big budgets, travel grants and film executives and Propaganda Ministry officials at his beck and call.³³ “When one sees how in his roles” wrote *Der Deutsche Film* in 1936, “he conquers all resistance and overcomes the public with tough energy and robust humour, it is not hard to envisage that he masters the technical and disciplinary difficulties of film making with the same authority, the same style and, above all, the same humour.”³⁴

Trenker followed *The Emperor of California* with *Condottieri* (1938) a German-Italian co-production with pro-Catholic and pro-Italian tenets that courted Mussolini.³⁵ The increasingly fractious relationship between Trenker and Goebbels broke under the strain of the Tyrolean question in 1940. Trenker was an ethnic German from South Tyrol, a disputed territory between Austria and Italy.³⁶ German Austria dropped all claims to the Tyrol in 1940, and the region’s residents were given the choice of adopting either Italian

³¹ “Für wen arbeitet Trenker?,” *Film Kurier*, 18 October 1934, 1; “Rota und Trenker,” *Film Kurier*, 19 October 1934, 1. Trenker recalls he was immediately summoned to an audience with Goebbels, Reich Music chamber president Richard Strauss and Max Reinhardt when news of his negotiations with Universal broke. Trenker, 323.

³² “Leipziger Filmkolleg mit Luis Trenker” *Licht Bild Bühne*, 6 July 1938, 2.

³³ In his autobiography, Trenker claims Nazi officials considered him to direct *Olympia*, which eventually fell to Riefenstahl. Trenker, 325.

³⁴ “Trenker führt Regie,” *Der Deutsche Film*, August 1936, 47.

³⁵ One scene in which SS extras dressed as Italian knights kneeling to the Pope particularly incensed Goebbels. Birgel, 48-49.

³⁶ After Italy claimed the territory in 1919 under the Treaty of Versailles, it enforced a strict policy of “Italianization” of the German population.

or German citizenship, a choice upon which Goebbels felt Trenker took too long to decide.³⁷ Amid rumours Trenker had opted to become Italian, Goebbels raged in his diary, “The option of the South Tyroleans has now been fortunately wrapped up. Luis Trenker, spineless creature, has decided in favour of Italy. We shall fix him. The Führer never thought much of him, and I have warned people about him.”³⁸ Despite Trenker’s frantic efforts to save his film career, which included joining the Nazi Party and desperate entreaties to Goebbels and Hitler, he was marginalized for the remainder of the Third Reich’s history.

Trenker’s association with National Socialism in the 1930s and his subsequent estrangement from it complicates evaluations of his filmography. Film scholars have been divided on Trenker’s status as a propagandist or cultural resister. Many scholars have simply castigated *Emperor* as propaganda par excellence. Christopher Frayling, for instance, rejects *Emperor* out of hand as a propaganda film.³⁹ He continues to assert that while Trenker was never subjected to direct political pressure, he was able and willing to manipulate history to serve ideological ends.⁴⁰ Eric Rentschler also sees Trenker as a conformist to National Socialism, upholding its central values in his film oeuvre. For Rentschler, Trenker’s films promote central tenets of National Socialism, especially the “home in Reich” motif, which depicts the triumphant homecoming of Germans unable to find material and spiritual fulfillment abroad. He claims that *The Prodigal Son*

³⁷ Not only did Trenker delay his decision to become a German citizen, he actively encouraged South Tyroleans to choose Italy. Birgel, 50. However, despite Trenker’s indecision, an overwhelming 86 percent of Tyroleans chose to adopt German citizenship, Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996), 334-335.

³⁸ Goebbels diary entry 17 April, 1940. Quoted in Birgel, 50-51.

³⁹ Christopher Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone* (London: Routledge, 1981), 5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

confronted urban modernity in a fashion similar to the explicit propaganda film *Hitler Youth Quex* (*Hitlerjunge Quex*, dir. Hans Steinhoff, 1933).⁴¹ However, others see the film as a prime example of cultural resistance under the stifling conditions of National Socialist censorship. David Stewart Hull includes *Emperor* in a list of apolitical movies of 1936 and emphasizes the tense relationship between Trenker and Goebbels in his evaluation of its subversive qualities.⁴² Franz Birgel likens Trenker's Third Reich films to a *gestaltpic* wherein many different interpretations are possible.⁴³ He reads *The Prodigal Son* and *The Emperor of California* as personal films for Trenker that both represented and criticized National Socialist ideology; they were thematically in tune with Nazism, but contained ambiguous elements that problematize reading them as propaganda.⁴⁴ *Emperor* was rereleased in October 1944 as part of a bill of films that displayed strong national and soldierly importance.⁴⁵ After the Second World War, *Emperor* was banned in the occupation zones: In the American zone, it was deemed anti-American, while the Soviets banned it for being pro-American.⁴⁶

Trenker has prompted the view that his standing in the Third Reich was tenuous and presented himself as a victim of political persecution. In his autobiography, he recalls criticisms of *Emperor* from Goebbels and Hitler at the Viennese Film Festival: "Hitler praised the film, but criticized the ending. 'There you have made a far too deep bow to American capitalism,' he said. Shortly after that Goebbels told me that he thought the ending should have been: Johann August Sutter delivers, before he dies, an enthralling

⁴¹ Rentschler, 74.

⁴² Hull, 105-106.

⁴³ Birgel, 38.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴⁵ Julian Petley, *Capital and Culture: German Cinema, 1933-1945* (London: BFI, 1979), 99.

⁴⁶ Birgel, 48.

denouncement of American capitalism.”⁴⁷ In addition, he claims that Goebbels and Walther Funk cancelled his travel visa to film in the U.S. and it was only through his entreaties to Reich Bank President Hjalmar Schacht that he was able to secure funding.⁴⁸ Trenker’s comments must be taken with scepticism. Koepnick has decried Trenker’s autobiography as “notoriously unreliable,” especially his claims about Goebbels’s dislike of *Emperor*’s conclusion.⁴⁹ Trenker is a prime example of a fellow traveller, an individual who came from a conservative background with political affinities, but not complete identification, with the Nazi regime. His films championed themes that resonated with the regime’s official doctrine but were not motivated by a dogmatic reading of *Mein Kampf*. *Emperor*’s ambiguity stems from Trenker’s personal imprint as star, director and writer and his expression of personal opinions through his films. His propensity to produce tragic dramas with bombastic visuals – often similar to fellow “mountain genre” pioneer Riefenstahl – created a superficial celebration of National Socialism. Franz Birgel contends that Trenker dealt extensively with personal issues in his films, especially the plight of Tyrol.⁵⁰ In *The Rebel*, Tyrolean nationalist rebels fight against Napoleonic occupation; the film received praise from Goebbels for its German nationalist spirit. Trenker’s personal themes and predilections operated in tense concert with Nazi ideology and produced the ambiguous results in *The Emperor of California*.

Although *Emperor* distinguishes between different national-races, its loose racial hierarchy has more in common with Karl May’s novels than with Nazi ideology or American manifest destiny imperialism. Nazi racialism contended that different races,

⁴⁷ Trenker, 345.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 326.

⁴⁹ Koepnick, *Dark Mirror*, 120.

⁵⁰ Birgel, 47.

with firm biological differences between them, existed. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler drew superficial evidence from the animal world's different species to assert, "[t]he consequence of this racial purity, universally valid in Nature, is not only the sharp outward delimitation of the various races, but their uniform character in themselves. The fox is always a fox, the goose a goose, the tiger a tiger etc., and the difference can lie at most in the varying measure of forces, strength, intelligence, dexterity, endurance, etc., of the individual specimens."⁵¹ The Nazi obsession with safeguarding the genetic purity of the German Aryan race stemmed from the hierarchical competition between strictly delineated races and the belief a nation-race's full potential could only be reached through a strict prevention of racial miscegenation. In the estimation of Gerhard Wagner, head of the Reich Association of Physicians, "history teaches us that in the long run peoples are not destroyed by economics or politics, by natural catastrophes, wars, or inner struggles, but rather the last and ultimate cause behind every people's decline throughout history has a biological cause that broke their strength and health."⁵² The castigation and exclusion of racial enemies (*Volksfeinde*) was part and parcel of the National Socialist racial theory.

Hollywood westerns had also developed a coherent racialized structure in film. The battle for civilization lionized by Hollywood films and thinkers like Turner included the subjugation of the native peoples hostile to American expansion, as well as the defeat of Spanish speaking peoples in the American Southwest. "B" westerns frequently featured pitched battles between white Anglo-Americans and aboriginals, depicting the latter as savages. One of the 1930s' first sound "A" westerns, *The Big Trail* (1930)

⁵¹ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), 259.

⁵² Gerhard Wagner, "Race and Population Policy" in *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, ed. Randall L. Bytwek (College Station: Texas A&M UP, 2008), 74.

starring John Wayne in his first major film role, also foregrounds white, Anglo-Saxon supremacy. In Scott Simmon's estimation, Wayne's Breck Coleman embodies American manifest destiny.⁵³ Coleman uses racial identity to define the pioneering project in 1840s Oregon, rallying his dispirited followers with the cry: "We're blazing a trail that began in England." The pioneers of American expansion in the Pacific Northwest can trace their lineage directly back to England. The meaning behind Coleman's declaration is clear: American racial identity is Anglo-Saxon; Mexicans and Aborigines need not apply. Michael Yellow Bird argues that western iconography, including western films, constitutes a "cultural canon asserting white supremacy and Indigenous inferiority."⁵⁴ "Indianness" in most Hollywood westerns was a marker of irrationality, chaos and corruption.⁵⁵ The dichotomy between empowered and moral settlers and savage natives justified after the fact the violent subjugation of the West in the series of Indian Wars on the American frontier.

The strict adherence to Hollywood or Nazi racialized identities does not occur in *Emperor*. Suter's racial-national identity is fluid and amorphous; he straddles the line between European and American identities. At times, Trenker emphasizes "Germanness" in the film. Trenker retains Suter's German name, instead of the anglicized John A. Sutter the pioneer adopted once in America.⁵⁶ Other characters frequently refer to Suter as "the German." The Mexican Governor of California awards Suter his claims due to his

⁵³ Simmon, 141.

⁵⁴ Michael Yellow Bird, "Cowboys and Indians: Toys of Genocide, Icons of American Colonialism," *Wicazo Sa Review* 19 no. 2 (Autumn 2004), 33.

⁵⁵ Karen Wallace, "The Redskin and *The Paleface*," in *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness*, ed. Daniel Bernardi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 119.

⁵⁶ In the words of Suter's 1930s biographer Julian Dana, "as soon as he could trace his name in English, he became John A. Sutter – no longer Johann August Suter." Julian Dana, *Sutter of California: A Biography* (1934; reprint Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1974), 9-10.

exceptional results. When his subordinate questions the decision, the Governor retorts, “Do you want to see a man work? Then look at this German!”

Despite allusions to Suter’s essential “Germanness,” a loyalty to a trans-national European identity is also visible. The ethnicity of Suterland is mixed. In one scene, Suter surveys riverside farming operations and asks workers where they are from. They answer with a myriad of central European locations, creating a multiethnic community headed by the German Suter. Trenker chose the name “Suterland” for the film. For his empire, the historical John Sutter chose the name “New Helvetia,” the Latin name for Switzerland. The change to Suterland reinforces the central importance of Suter; its destruction becomes his sole responsibility. Moreover, Trenker could not and did not remove all references to Sutter’s assimilation to American society. Suter appears in American cavalry uniform and accepts high ranking positions of US General and state Senator. As a result, Suter mirrors Trenker’s own trans-national German identity, split between Italian, German and independent Tyrolean self-identification.

The treatment of Anglo-Americans, the film’s nominal “racial enemies,” also belies a concrete racialist ideal. The demonization of Anglo-Americans operates on a level beyond a simplistic social-Darwinist racial struggle. Suter’s main Anglo ally, Marshall, is instrumental in the construction of Suterland but quickly betrays him for the allure of easy money. Gold corrupts Marshall, and he spreads word of the gold discovery, precipitating the onslaught of prospectors onto Suter’s claim. The moral hierarchy at work in the film suggests the alliance of Germans and other races can be mutually beneficial in the short term but will break down eventually. Gold-panners appear as lazy opportunists, while Suter’s main antagonist Harper seems to exist solely to frustrate

Suter's ambitions. When Suter sets out for California, Harper stalks Suter in order to rob him of his goods and horses. He later appears as Suter's opposite in gold rush Suterland, overseeing the gold operations in a manner similar to Suter. Trenker displays Harper's and Suter's opposition through reverse tracking shots showing how Harper mirrors Suter's leadership over the same land. The hordes of gold diggers that overrun Suterland are Asians and blacks, who are included in Harper's degenerate brood of allies continually plotting against Suter.

Mexicans are orientalist as exotic entertainment. Trenker depicts Mexicans as dancing and singing minstrels; the male musicians provide unusual music while the female singer presents an exotic and erotic spectacle for Suter's companion. Trenker was not unique in this presentation of Hispanic culture. Detlef Sierk's *La Habanera* also presented Puerto Ricans in a similar manner, using the foreign setting as a stage for utilizing musical elements and compositions deemed "un-German" in the film's central musical number.⁵⁷

Trenker moves into May's moral universe with his portrayal of natives. Instead of adopting the racist rhetoric of the Hollywood westerns or Nazi ideology, American aboriginals are depicted sympathetically, if in a romanticized light. Like May's famous hero Old Shatterhand, Suter finds more in common with Aborigines than with Coleman's Anglo-Saxon trail blazers. Suter's sole interaction with natives is cordial and friendly. After Harper attacks Suter, an Apache brave also runs afoul of Harper and his gang. Suter saves the brave and he and his companions join the tribe for a peace pipe. Suter and the chief appear as equals, unified in their respect for human life and the land.

⁵⁷ Lutz Koepnick, "En-Gendering Mass Culture: The Case of Zarah Leander," in *Gender and Germanness: Cultural Productions of Nation*, ed. Patricia Herminghouse and Magda Mueller (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1997), 166.

In California, natives are absent, and Suter takes on their symbolic role in the American civilizing project. The legacy of Karl May's "noble savage" asserts itself forcefully in *Emperor*. It is Suter himself who represents the "noble savage": he is one with nature, he rejects the material comforts of urban modernity and his "Code of the West" is eminently peaceful. Moreover, Sutter's fate seems to mirror that of the American Natives; greedy American settlers dispossess Suter of his lands and livelihood with no regard for his claims. As such, Suter becomes part of the savage background of the American frontier against which enterprising heroes seek to establish American civilization.

The Nazi demonization of Jews appears analogous to Hollywood's dominant depiction of "Indianness." However, Jews are conspicuously absent from the film's racial typology. Although Nazi ideologues frequently posited an intimate link between world Jewry and plutocratic American politics, *Emperor* lacks anti-Semitic themes or caricatures. Surprisingly, no Jewish stereotypes – bankers or capitalists, for example – appear as part of the hordes destroying Suter's empire. Trenker criticizes laziness and violence instead of hard, valuable work. Lutz Koepnick argues that Trenker's treatment of gold suggests anti-Semitism, similar to Richard Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung*.⁵⁸ Gold appears as the destroyer, undoing any good Suter had hitherto accomplished. Similar to the Nazis' view of Jewry "... as the incarnation of evil, as the plastic demon of decay, and as the bearer of international culture-destroying chaos,"⁵⁹ gold fever conquers the minds and hearts of otherwise good (Anglo-American) men and drives them to

⁵⁸ Koepnick, *Dark Mirror*, 121.

⁵⁹ Joseph Goebbels, "People, Rise Up and Storm, Break Loose," in *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, 121.

violence and debauchery.⁶⁰ Gold becomes a destructive force only when its accumulation eclipses the pursuit of agriculture. Gold can be read as an anti-Semitic metaphor for the deleterious effects of Jewry on Suter's racialized utopia. Only Suter and his two German allies resist gold as it drives Anglo-Americans delirious with greed. However, Suter's struggle against gold reveals his hubris; the previously proud and strong pioneer becomes helpless against the forces arrayed against him. The fall in Suter's power coincides with an increasingly "Hitlerized" portrait of him that parodies the Nazi leader's assertions that he could defeat the powerful forces of world Jewry.

Agriculture appears as the centerpiece of the film's spiritual struggle. Suter frequently defends his livelihood as the only legitimate means of creating wealth and happiness, especially in comparison to panning for gold. At the apex of Suterland's prosperity, Suter oversees his empire; sheep run in geometric order and workers thresh wheat in regimented lines. Agricultural livelihood is inextricably linked to Nazified romantic conceptions of the world. Contemporary articles on the film and the "Wild West" generally extolled the virtues of agrarian livelihood and criticized gold for its interruption. The review of *Emperor* in *Licht Bild Bühne* upheld the distinction: "California's sea of wheat and Texas's cattle herds were the purest origins of American history: gold is only productive when it serves the natural environment; where it becomes an end in and of itself, it becomes destructive."⁶¹ The Propaganda Ministry's monthly journal *Der Deutsche Film* also railed against gold. In the reviewer's estimation, the discovery of gold in the film precipitates a crisis wherein "gold hunger and a work shy

⁶⁰ Harper and his collaborators, the ringleaders of the gold rush, establish themselves in a seedy cabaret club, where liquor flows freely to a racially mixed crowd entertained by erotic dancing girls.

⁶¹ "Der Kaiser von Kalifornien," *Licht Bild Bühne*, 22 July 1936, 2.

existence floods the country,” against which “Suter battles for his lost Reich.”⁶² “The western [American] empire comes from agriculture and livestock breeding,” declared *Licht Bild Bühne* in an article about the real “Wild West.”⁶³

The frequent evocation of land both in the film and in its media coverage suggests a strong affinity with the Nazi obsession with *Lebensraum* (“living space”). Nazi leaders equated territory with food production; small agricultural territory limited the growth and racial strength of the German people. Hitler drew an intimate connection between the military and political power of a state and its land mass: “the foreign policy of the folkish state must safeguard the existence on this planet of the race embodied in the state, by creating a healthy, viable natural relation between the nation’s population and growth on the one hand and quantity and quality of its soil on the other.”⁶⁴ The foreign policy to which Hitler referred was German expansion eastward into Poland and the Soviet Union.⁶⁵ Walther Darré, Minister of Agriculture until 1942, also frequently underscored the intimate relationship between a racially defined people and its land. Celebrating the German peasantry, the Reich Peasant Leader declared, “One can say that the blood of a people digs its roots deep into the homeland earth through its peasant landholdings, from which it continuously receives that life-endowing strength which constitutes its special character.”⁶⁶ *Emperor’s* release coincided with the beginning of German militaristic

⁶² “Der Kaiser von Kalifornien,” *Der Deutsche Film*, August 1936, 466.

⁶³ “Wild-West: geträumt und wirklich,” *Licht Bild Bühne*, 25 March 1936, 2.

⁶⁴ Hitler, 587.

⁶⁵ “If we speak of soil in Europe today, we can primarily have in mind only *Russia* and her vassal border states.” *Ibid.*, 598.

⁶⁶ R.W. Darré, *Rede des Reichsbauernführers und Reichsministers* (Altenesch, 1934). Quoted in George L. Mosse, *Nazi Culture: Intellectual, Cultural, and Social Life in the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1966), 148-150.

expansion with the creation of the Four Year Plan in 1936 and the remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936.

Contemporary treatments of Suter emphasized the inexorable pull of virgin lands and valuable agricultural possibilities. Julian Dana, Sutter's 1930s biographer, illuminates the allure of farmland in the 1830s as well as in the 1930s:

Johann Suter had a great regard for rich black soil, the mother of so much beauty and wealth. All greatness came out of it, all that a man could wisely wish. To him the possession of land was a symbol of contest, the assurance of permanence to the tribe of Suter. He saw fields of grain growing golden in the sun, long rows of trees heavy with ripening fruit, sleek-coated herds grazing on emerald hillsides, a home set in a pleasant valley by a singing river ... and Anna and the children in that home.⁶⁷

Dana's preoccupation with Suter's supposed obsession with land underscores the prominent role of land in the American western tradition. The importance of land and geographical expansion is equally present in Hollywood westerns, often in a racist-cultural guise. Westerns usually portrayed an era of aggressive American expansion, either during the 1840s into the American southwest or the incursions into Native American populated regions in the 1880s and 1890s. Most studies of American westerns remark on undertones of Anglo-Saxon imperialism and the impulse for territorial expansion and the concomitant conquest of "inferior peoples." Simmon argues that Hollywood "A" westerns contain a social Darwinist vision of society in which peoples compete to survive and thrive in an unforgiving geography.⁶⁸

Trenker echoes Dana's and Hitler's obsession with rich black soil and limitless agricultural riches through Suter's ghostly guide. Scholars as well as contemporary commentators have identified him as Ernst Moritz Arndt, although Trenker later claimed

⁶⁷ Dana, 6.

⁶⁸ Simmon, 116-117.

he was supposed to be Goethe.⁶⁹ Arndt was the symbol of Germanic resistance to Napoleonic rule during the early nineteenth century as well as a nationalist and anti-Semitic poet. He appears as Suter's alter ego in the film and inspires his emigration to America as well as the material for Suter's European political manifestos. The audience's first encounter with Suter is his printing of Arndt's text and his reading of it aloud to his wife: "Whoever fights tyrants is a holy man, and whoever controls arrogance performs God's service. Because God dwells only in a proud heart, and heaven is too high for the base mind."⁷⁰ When the authorities come to arrest Suter for political subversion, he eludes them and flees to the town's towering cathedral. As he contemplates suicide, Arndt appears and offers him a new mission. Arndt presents wide open vistas, promising the German Suter a *tabula rasa* for expansion. The sequence gave Trenker a chance to use footage he had shot while on location in the United States and assert *Emperor's* claim to be a genuine western film. Arndt gives Suter a new mission: "everywhere you can serve your people. Everywhere you can fight!"

Hollywood westerns tended to present the frontier as unoccupied, but the choice of Arndt as Suter's spirit guide taps into a specifically German tradition of anti-Semitic and anti-American constructions of German nationalism. As Koepnick observes, "in selecting Arndt as a spokesman of westward expansion, *The Emperor of California* employs an ideological trope characteristic of right-wing anti-Americanism ever since the Weimar period: the image of the German as the good American immigrant resisting Jewish American greed, functional abstraction, cultural hybridization, and racial

⁶⁹ Birgel, 44. *Der Deutsche Film* identified Suter's unnamed confidant as Arndt. "Der Kaiser von Kalifornien," *Der Deutsche Film*, August 1936, 46.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

miscegenation.”⁷¹ Christopher Frayling goes further, claiming that the political implications of Arndt’s presence “might as well have been *Mein Kampf*.”⁷² While the Nazis frequently used Arndt’s writings in their propaganda, this should not immediately be read as simple “Nazification.” Franz Birgel sees the evocation of Arndt’s writings as an “anachronistic attack against Nazi tyrants.”⁷³ The role of Arndt in the film affirms pacifism and destiny more than it articulates anti-Semitic German nationalism.

Suter fights both foreign occupation in Europe and challenges to his American claim with words, not violence. Removing violence from the western hero’s lexicon was Trenker’s major renovation of Hollywood genre conventions. It also distances Suter’s California utopia from the National Socialist people’s community. Johann August Suter is an icon of peaceful German heroism in the Wild West unlike the martial General John A. Sutter who, upon seeing New York for the first time, “raised his arm in military salute”⁷⁴ and then conquered the savage wilderness of California. The dichotomy underscores the racial theories of “Germanness” popular with the Nazis and lionizes an otherwise American settler. The German moral western hero abhors violence, in stark contrast to the typical American western hero. In lieu of gunplay, Suter uses rhetoric to exert his masculine authority and convince others to follow him. Although this theme followed the well worn footsteps of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German adventure writers and philosophers, its application to the western film genre transformed the good western hero into a non-violent moralist and opened Trenker’s interpretation of Suter to a parody of Hitler.

⁷¹ Koepnick, *Dark Mirror*, 115.

⁷² Frayling, 19.

⁷³ Birgel, 46.

⁷⁴ Dana, 8.

opened Trenker's interpretation of Suter to a parody of Hitler.

Lutz Koepnick has commented extensively on the predilection of German westerns to eschew violence as a legitimate constructive force. He contextualizes the peculiar position towards guns as part of a totalitarian impulse to tear down the distinctions between the public and private sphere, but also as a political conflict between capitalism and the German individual:

because Nazi westerns tend to shift our attention away from the classical showdown between different conceptions of legality and morality and because Trenker and others omit the classical authorization of legality through violence in order to pit capitalist modernization against individual virtue, shoot-outs – *the* generic mechanisms of solving conflicts – are moved from the main street, the public domain of law, to the interior, the private realm of economic activity and moral propriety.⁷⁵

Trenker's atypical treatment of the old west shoot-out elicited a reaction from American press; the New York Times reviewer praised *Emperor* for its production values but lamented its "historical slips and anachronisms," likely a reference to its reluctance to embrace gun-play.⁷⁶ Suter rules through his skills at oration. Although he wears the iconic pistols on his hips he rarely resorts to using them in confrontations. For instance, on his trip west, his American employees, led by the devious Harper, attempt to rob him and his German companions of their goods and horses. Suter, with the help of local Apaches, stops Harper and prevails. In victory, Suter is magnanimous; he punishes Harper with slaps on the face and lets him go instead of exacting violent retribution. Even when he is fighting for his claim he shies away from violence. When Marshall confronts Suter with the discovery of gold in New Helvetia, he cannot contain the confrontation to his house and even after drawing his pistols cannot convince his foe. In Koepnick's

⁷⁵ Koepnick, *Dark Mirror*, 111.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

estimation, language replaced bullets as the marker of masculine authority in all the era's westerns.⁷⁷ In the final showdown between Harper and Suter, amidst the burning buildings of Suterland, Suter prevails only through the sacrificial intervention of his longtime ally Ermatinger. Suter fatally shoots Harper, but Harper is able to fire a bullet that hits Ermatinger as he throws himself in front of Suter. After all of Harper's provocations, it takes the destruction of Suterland to goad Suter to react with force.

Emperor's renunciation of violence simultaneously upholds and departs from the principles of Nazi rule. The Nazi state, after all, embraced the use of force both rhetorically and in practice. Hitler did not shy away from the violent exclusion of social and political others, or the utilization of violence in dealing with internal problems in the Nazi Party.⁷⁸ Even Goebbels proclaimed the importance of violence and persuasion working in tandem. In his speech at the Nuremberg Rally in September 1934, he claimed "[i]t may be good to have power based on weapons. It is better and longer lasting, however, to win and hold the heart of the people."⁷⁹ Kaiser Suter is a pacifist. He fights foreign occupation with political pamphlets and is ill at ease when wielding a weapon. On the other hand, authority based upon words and verbal dexterity can be seen as a subtle affirmation of Hitler's charismatic leadership style. Hitler, after all, was first and foremost a demagogue. Coupled with Hitler's oratory skills, the radio was at the foundation of quotidian propaganda campaigns in the Third Reich. The cheap, mass produced "people's receivers" enabled the majority of German families to own a radio by

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁷⁸ Concentration camps were established early on in the regime to punish political opponents of the regime and even the blood-letting of the Röhm Putsch did little to dampen Hitler's public image. See Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth: Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987).

⁷⁹ Joseph Goebbels, "Propaganda and Public Enlightenment as Prerequisites for Practical Work in many Areas" in *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, 51.

the end of the 1930s.⁸⁰ Major speeches by Hitler and other high ranking Nazis stopped daily life, as the German population were enjoined to listen to their political leaders: “Attention! The Führer is speaking on the radio ... According to regulation of the Gau headquarters, the district Party headquarters has ordered all factory owners, department stores, offices, shops, pubs and blocks of flats put up loudspeakers an hour before broadcast of the Führer’s speech so that the whole workforce and all national comrades can fully participate in the broadcast.”⁸¹ Leni Riefenstahl’s messianic portrait of Hitler in *Triumph of the Will* emphasized his oratory skills.

The affinities between Suter and Hitler grow as the film progresses. They are most marked not when Suter is successful, but rather as he begins his decline. Suter falls back on increasingly angry tirades that prove more and more ineffectual as the stakes become greater and greater. In the film’s final act, the charismatic leader cannot save his Reich; words cannot stem the tide of gold hungry prospectors onto his property. While his oratory skills initially serve him well as he recruits workers to build Suterland, he is utterly unable later to convince gold-panners, tempted workers, or Mexican and American government officials of his claims. It seems his Germanic charisma has no effect on gold obsessed Anglo-Americans. The discovery of gold marks the setting of the sun on Suter’s empire as well as the failure of his oratory skills. When faced with increasing opposition from former workers, creditors and rivals he blusters with bombastic zeal against the evils of easy money and the value of hard work. He cries,

⁸⁰ Quickly after the seizure of power, the Nazi Party partnered with industrialists to produce sets costing 75RM and 35RM to be paid in installments. By 1939, 70 percent of German homes owned a radio set, three times as many as in 1933, representing the highest percentage of radio owners in the world. J. Noakes and G. Pridham, eds., *Nazism 1919-1945: State, Economy and Society, 1933-39* (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1983), 386.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

“work is better still than gold!” to the backs of the uninterested gold panners. Harper, his only active listener by the end of his tirade, coolly asks Suter, “Are you finished yet?,” leaving Suter to sadly observe the wrecked banks of the Sacramento River.

By the time Suter’s charisma fails him completely at the film’s end, Trenker’s presentation of the frontiersman has come to most closely approximate Hitler. The Mexican-American war ends in two camera shots and the triumphant military leader Suter arrives in San Francisco in full military uniform to cheering crowds awaiting the government’s ruling on his dispute. In a scene that mirrors Riefenstahl’s portrayal of Hitler in *Triumph of the Will*, Suter arrives on horseback, riding through the main street decked out with American flags and jubilant revellers. Suter greets the mad crowd with a wave, remarkably close to the Hitler salute with which the Fuhrer greeted his own supporters. Trenker drives the parallels further when Suter enters the packed townhall; cries of “Suter” issue from supporters who with outreached arms greet his entrance. Trenker then employs a tracking shot of Suter moving through the crowd of straight arms, receiving their support with the Hitler salute. At the meeting, Suter receives the title of US Army General and Senator, before learning his claims have been formally recognized. Here the crowd turns on him. The politicians lose control of the proceedings and beseech Suter to restore order. He cannot and rages about the incomparable contribution he has made to the development of California, further inciting the crowd, which now moves menacingly towards the stage with many pistols drawn. At this point, Suter leaps onto the stage and madly, stamps his feet and waves his arms; his speech devolves into unintelligible screams. A riot breaks out with lynching, shoot-outs and the destruction of the remnants of Suter’s holdings. Trenker follows Suter’s failure as a

charismatic leader with his death scene, with the flames fading out to a shot of the American Capitol building.

Suter's pathetic end clinches the anti-totalitarian impulses in *Emperor*. Suter finally succumbs to death years after the gold rush robs him of his livelihood and home. He appears as a vagrant, dressed shabbily, sitting on the steps of the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. The dichotomy between the grandiose symbol of American political power and the dwarfed Suter presents the viewers with the complete victory of American values over the Germanic superman. Suter still wears his military uniform, now adorned with a German cross on his left breast. Arndt reappears and impresses upon Suter the futility of his struggle against modernity and how the events were inevitable. He asks the now decrepit Suter, "Why do you still fight against the gold and about your rights?" Mirroring his first appearance, Arndt shows Suter scenes of industrial modernity, machines at work and massive cityscapes as visions of the nation's contemporary identity. His commentary glorifies modernist progress, just as he previously enticed Suter with the allure of unclaimed land. "Behold the cities' glory" and "the eternal pulsations of machines!" muses Arndt to his beleaguered interlocutor: "Wealth and blessing." He avoids a denunciation or affirmation of progress and merely ponders, "Right or wrong, who can know?" In doing so, he validates the course of American history, despite the negative experience of Trenker's German pioneer. Although he comforts Suter, "Your heart will forever beat in the forests and rivers of California," Suter keels over and dies, and the film pans up to the sky where a spectral Suter gallops across the desert. The pessimistic evaluation of Suter's legacy and the triumph of American forces no doubt

truthfully incurred the ire of Hitler and Goebbels, as Trenker claimed. The lack of a conclusive ending undermines the film's propagandistic elements.

Trenker as actor-director was a prime example of a conservative collaborator with the Nazi regime, finding enough ground to work within the strict confines of Nazi dominated cultural institutions without becoming a zealot for the Nazi cause. As writer, director and star of his films he had an unusually large impact on his films and could thusly present his own opinions through them. Trenker's unusual position of power over his films was unusual in both Germany and the United States at the time, which suggests a strong affinity for the regime. Yet the strains in the ideological alliance of Catholic-conservative Trenker and the Nazi regime that undermined the director in the 1940s were already visible in *The Emperor of California*. The numerous contradictions and ambiguities are reduced to Trenker himself. Does Trenker uphold "Germanness" and German superiority? Or does his predilection for tragedy undermine any political or social message? Trenker's unique aesthetic avoids easy ideological compartmentalization even as he engages with multiple ideological threads. Most films simply evaded depictions close to National Socialism. Trenker leapt in and produced a film that simultaneously affirmed and questioned tenets of the regime. The ambiguity that resulted from Trenker's German western project allowed audiences to glimpse alternate social constructions within official discourse.

The film reveals deep contradictions within Nazi ideology's articulation and takes advantage of the resulting space, however small, for alternative means of identification within officially approved media. Glorification of territorial expansion, criticism of Anglo-American society tinged with a grudging respect, and the rooting of meaningful

existence in the land all approximated tenets of Nazi ideology. However, Trenker operated from an individual perspective, questioning the Hitler regime through the destruction of a doubled pan-European community in nineteenth century California. Charismatic leadership is parodied and depicted as ushering in only destruction and chaos. Americans are criticized for squandering their natural resources for quick and easy profit.

Emperor's significant renovations to the western genre required to make it believable as a German story caused massive contradictions. The inclusion of German literary tradition, especially in its depiction of natives, distanced the film from most contemporary Hollywood fare. Trenker casts aside iconic shoot-outs in favour of a pacifist hero. Natives appear as kindred spirits, not obstacles, to the civilizing project. The accumulation of wealth is demonized, echoing a distinctly anti-capitalist sentiment, often linked to Jewish owned big business. In *Emperor*, the heterogeneous nature of Nazi ideology and its uncomfortable fit with the western created dissonance, instead of certainty. This officially sanctioned film offered audiences the opportunity to critique the regime within official channels and institutions.

CHAPTER 4 SCREWBALL COMEDY, NAZI STYLE: AMERICAN FANTASIES IN *LUCKY KIDS*.

Ufa's *Lucky Kids* (*Glückskinder*, dir. Paul Martin, 1936)¹ blatantly attempted to duplicate American entertainment for German audiences, while still retaining the designation "Made in Germany." It explicitly copied the Hollywood smash hit *It Happened One Night* (dir. Frank Capra, 1934), which received glowing reviews and had high attendance on both sides of the Atlantic. With *Lucky Kids*, Ufa attempted to challenge Hollywood on its own territory, combining popular stars Willy Fritsch and Lilian Harvey, a big budget and slick production values to tell an entertaining story replete with sexual tension and criminal intrigue. Its diegetic world of New York City was free of explicit German references. Instead, Martin's scenes burst with English advertisements for Coca-Cola and allusions to contemporary American politics and culture. The German vision of Hollywood reveals a deep yet ambiguous fascination with all things American still present under the Nazi dictatorship. Despite the vitriolic and xenophobic rhetoric that emanated daily from the regime, American popular culture – Hollywood, fashion, or all-American products like Coca-Cola – remained sincerely popular with a large segment of the German population;² *Lucky Kids* appealed directly to this positive Americanism. Although aping Hollywood productions was a common practice during the Third Reich, *Lucky Kids* took this to the next level. The film was a Hollywood comedy, made in Germany. Ufa offered an alternate version of reality and

¹ The film's title is sometimes translated as *Children of Fortune*.

² See Michael Kater, *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992) and Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2005). For more on the regime's efforts to match American levels of material comfort, see Shelley Baranowski, *Strength through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004)

fantasy far outside the auspices of National Socialism, showing Germans both the inconsistent cultural practices the regime imposed and the cultural freedoms still possible before the war. Any pedagogical intent is lost in the ether of the film's unbridled optimism. New York City does not serve as Germany's double; rather it represents Nazi Germany's opposite and celebrates all the possibilities denied under the Nazi regime.

Lucky Kids tells the story of a hapless journalist and aspiring poet, Gil Taylor (Willy Fritsch). His friends Frank and Stoddard (Paul Kemp and Oskar Sima) trick him into covering the night court beat when the assigned reporter is too drunk to do it. Thinking it will be his big break, Gil takes the assignment, but inadvertently creates a major story when his journalist instincts fail him. Ann Garden (Lilian Harvey) is brought up on charges of vagrancy, but is saved from a prison sentence by Gil's claims that he is her fiancé. The judge questions the "couple" and decides to marry them on the spot. Ann, however, is not thrilled with Gil's actions and the unexpected marriage becomes a battleground of verbal wit. On top of being saddled with an unruly new bride, Gil and his two friends lose their jobs because they fail to file the report on the impromptu marriage, leaving their newspaper scooped by every other paper in the city. To improve their fortunes, the quartet hatches a plan to extort money from a local millionaire, Mr. Jackson, who is searching for his kidnapped niece and offering a significant reward for her return. Ann's similarities to the missing niece of Mr. Jackson – also played by Harvey – allow them, along with Jackson, to present the niece as found to the media. The plan, however, threatens Ann's and Gil's improving relations. The similarity between Ann and the niece cause Gil to suspect that she really is the niece and is playing him for the fool. Ann accompanies Mr. Jackson on a highly publicized trip to the opera, in an effort to ferret out

the real kidnapers. Complications arise when Ann herself is kidnapped at the opera, prompting Gil, Frank and Stoddard to give chase across New York City to rescue her. As it turns out, the niece masterminded the entire fake kidnapping plot to convince her uncle to let her marry her boxer boyfriend. All misunderstandings are resolved as Martin delivers a Hollywood happy ending: Gil and Ann are reunited and accept a normalized marriage together; Gil, Frank and Stoddard score the exclusive scoop on the niece's story and regain their jobs at the newspaper; Gil finally has his poetry published in the newspaper, on the front page no less.

The film's inspiration was undoubtedly *It Happened One Night*, as many scholars have argued. *It Happened* tells the story of rich heiress Ellie Anderson (Claudette Colbert), who attempts to reunite with her aviator fiancé King Westley in New York City over the objections of her wealthy father. Her trip from Miami to New York is beset with private investigators employed by her father intent on preventing the young lovers' reunion. Ellie crosses paths with the smooth talking and down on his luck newspaper reporter Peter Warne (Clark Gable) on the bus. In exchange for his help, she promises Warne the exclusive rights to her story. However, despite their mutually beneficial arrangement, the two fight and trade verbal barbs constantly as they share hotel rooms and elude opportunistic fellow travellers. In the process of their journey up the American seaboard, the two opposites fall for each other. They overcome mistaken assumptions and end up happily together.

The similarities between *Lucky Kids* and *It Happened One Night* are striking. Both films center on the battle of wits between a New York newspaper man and a

rebellious independent female lead, as well as the disappearance of a rich man's ward.³ However, the German adaptation exaggerated important features of *It Happened One Night*'s scenario in an attempt to match the force of Gable's and Colbert's odd couple pairing. For instance, Peter and Ellie masquerade as husband and wife for much of the film to elude authorities searching for her and to stretch their meagre budgets as far as possible. *Lucky Kids* takes the chaos resulting from the unlikely union of two opposites to the next level in concocting a scenario in which two strangers are actually married and forced to cohabitate. The alteration of the main female protagonist from heiress to vagrant significantly changes the plot of *Lucky Kids*. It is the fractious dynamic of the two would-be love-birds that *Lucky Kids* tries to take from *It Happened One Night*, but with enough plot alteration to avoid the label of remake. *It Happened One Night* is a road comedy with the duo passing through much of the southern United States. Although the action takes place in the stock interiors of buses, bus stations and cheap auto camps, the couple traverse a great deal of territory in the film. *Lucky Kids*, in comparison, takes place solely in New York City, where the characters exclusively inhabit apartments and offices. The shift from Ellie's and Peter's tour of "everyman's America" to the comfortable, middle class New York of *Lucky Kids* significantly changes the tone of *It Happened One Night* from a Depression-era fantasy for Americans to that of an optimistic ode to the world-class lifestyles of Americans living in a fantasy version of America.

³ Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1996), 101.

It Happened One Night overwhelmed German and American critics and audiences during its highly successful run in 1935.⁴ Indeed Cary Nathenson contends its popularity shocked Ufa into a strategy of emulation.⁵ *Film Kurier* concluded that the film was simply “a triumph of American comedy technique.”⁶ For the *Licht Bild Bühne* reviewer, it “demonstrates what plot and dialogue can really mean, what an effortless, expert, and deliberate director can achieve, what an artist of cinematography and a master of sound engineering are capable of creating, and not least, what real actors are directly and effectively capable of doing.”⁷ Even after the initial impact of its release, the film continued to be a reference point in the German film press. In a 1936 review of *Desire*, the reviewer likened the “perfect chemistry between stars Marlene Dietrich and Gary Cooper” to that of Gable and Colbert in *It Happened One Night*.⁸ The key to the film’s domestic and international success lay principally in the strength of its screenplay. Even in translation, the film’s stellar wordplay dazzled audiences and critics alike. *Film Kurier*’s review gushed, “Hopkin Adams’s script is a genuine masterpiece of ideas!” and continued with: “this dialogue, this wordplay! Authors see this film! It is an inimitable story!”⁹ Hopkin Adams’s inimitable story transformation into *Lucky Kids* found a match in Curt Goetz’s script, Paul Martin’s direction and Willy Fritsch’s and Lilian Harvey’s starring performances.

⁴ At the 1935 Oscars, *It Happened One Night* won for best director, best actor, best actress and best film.

⁵ Cary Nathenson, “Fear of Flying,” in *Cultural History through a National Socialist Lens: Essays on the Cinema of the Third Reich*, ed. Robert Reimer (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000), 87.

⁶ “Es geschah in einer Nacht,” *Film Kurier*, 16 October 1935, 2.

⁷ “Es geschah in einer Nacht,” *Licht Bild Bühne* 16 October 1935, 2.

⁸ “Sehnsucht,” *Film Kurier*, 3 April 1936, 2.

⁹ “Es geschah in einer Nacht,” *Film Kurier* 16 October 1935, 2.

“Bravo! Bravo! What Americans can do, we can too!” enthused *Film Kurier*’s review of *Lucky Kids*.¹⁰ “Perhaps people believed the German language combined with American dry wit was not wanted ... *Lucky Kids* demonstrates the opposite.”¹¹ *Lucky Kids* charmed the majority of German film critics, including the reviewer for the Nazi Party’s official newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter*, who wrote, “one has not been as entertained nor laughed so heartily in the Gloria Palace in recent times.”¹² Critical reception must be taken with some scepticism, however. The film’s release coincided with Goebbels’s crackdown on critical reviews.¹³ *Lucky Kids*, however, escaped the platitudes with which writers described mediocre films. As with *It Happened One Night*, *Lucky Kids*’s rapid dialogue and banter impressed viewers. The dearth of talented screenwriters in Germany had created an abundance of poor scripts, for which actors and directors tried desperately to compensate. However, *Lucky Kids* featured a screenplay that rivalled top American productions and lent the German doppelgänger its signature quality. Ufa hired talented screenwriter Curt Götz to pen the script despite both his designation as “politically unreliable” and Goebbels’s personal enmity towards him.¹⁴ *Film Kurier*’s advance coverage described his selection as “a surprise.”¹⁵ The final product justified Ufa’s faith

¹⁰ “Glückskinder,” *Film Kurier*, 19 September 1936, 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Rentschler, 103. *Völkischer Beobachter* quote drawn from publicity advertisement, “Glückskinder” *Licht Bild Bühne*, 6 October 1936, 2.

¹³ In 1936, Goebbels issued new press directives that further limited critics’ freedom to give bad reviews. In May, reviews of newly released films were delayed until the middle of the following week to minimize the deleterious effects of bad reviews on a film’s premiere. “Verbot der Nachtkritik: Eine Anordnung des Reichsministers Dr. Goebbels,” *Licht Bild Bühne*, 13 May 1936, 1. In November, Goebbels banned all negative commentary, permitting only constructive criticism on an artistic level. The underlying assumption held that German films had reached a standard level of quality, eliminating the production of bad films. “Dr. Goebbels anerkennt: Wahrhafte Meisterleistungen des deutschen Films,” *Licht Bild Bühne*, 28 November 1936, 1.

¹⁴ Klaus Kreimeier, *The Ufa Story: A History of Germany’s Greatest Film Company, 1918-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 286.

¹⁵ “Ufa verpflichtet Lilian Harvey,” *Film Kurier*, 25 January 1936, 1.

in Götz; the *Licht Bild Bühne* review aggressively credited him with much of the film's success at its Berlin premiere: "Curt Götz has won a battle for dialogue film. The storm of laughter that roared through the Gloria-Palast [Cinema] came predominantly because of it."¹⁶

To bring Götz's script to life, Ufa chose capable director Paul Martin, freshly returned from a stint at Twentieth Century Fox.¹⁷ Martin, a celebrated and accomplished director in his own right, was not a member of the Nazi state's elite group of directors like Veit Harlan, Carl Froehlich and Luis Trenker. He was often billed as a "*Spielleiter*," or action leader rather than a "*Regie*," a title studios reserved for those the regime favoured. His return to Germany with Harvey in 1935 elicited little attention and the press treated him as an add-on to Harvey's return.¹⁸ He later married Harvey, and knew how to manage her on set and coax the best performance from the high maintenance star.¹⁹ In addition to the employment of top personnel on the project, Ufa sunk large sums of money into the production and set designs. Previews placed the film on the top rung of Ufa's 1936 entertainment programme.²⁰

Casting Harvey and Fritsch in the starring roles signalled the importance Ufa attributed to *Lucky Kids*. Their onscreen chemistry created Germany's single most successful and popular duo of the 1930s, and they are widely considered German

¹⁶ "Glückskinder," *Licht Bild-Bühne*, September 19 1936, 2.

¹⁷ *Orient Express* (1934) was Martin's major American project and gave him credibility as a director capable of helming high quality American entertainment.

¹⁸ *Film Kurier's* coverage of Harvey's reunion with Ufa reminded the German "film world" that Martin should not be confused with bit actor Karl Heinz: "Ufa verpflichtet Albers und Harvey," *Film Kurier*, 2 March 1935, 1.

¹⁹ Kreimeier rates Martin fairly high in his ability to direct Ufa's major star. In his estimation, Martin "evoked real dramatic emotion from [Harvey] in *Schwarze Rosen* ... and the giddiness of screwball comedy in *Children of Happiness*." Kreimeier, 291.

²⁰ "Ufa verpflichtet Lilian Harvey," *Film Kurier*, 25 January 1936, 1.

cinema's only star pairing of the time.²¹ They embodied the American star cult in Germany like no other individual or paired star while, at the same time, appealing to German sensibilities. In Klaus Kreimeier's view, "[t]his sometimes devil-may-care, sometimes sweetly sentimental alliance of souls was rooted partly in operetta and partly in the careworn everyday experience of a petit-bourgeois public."²² They first appeared together in the early 1930s, starring in popular successes like *The Congress Dance* (*Der Kongress tanzt*, dir. Erik Charell, 1930), *The Trio from the Gas Station* (*Die drei von der Tankstelle*, dir. Wilhelm Thiele, 1930), and *A Blonde's Dream* (*Ein blonder Traum*, dir. Paul Martin, 1932). The success of their collaborations is frequently attributed to the physical contrast between the hulking Fritsch and the spritely Harvey, which enhanced the juvenile nature of many of their on-screen romances.²³ Their collaboration halted briefly while Harvey pursued a Hollywood career between 1933 and 1935 with Twentieth Century Fox. Fritsch remained in Germany and starred in a string of successful, if relatively mundane, features. Contract disputes and grievances over low profile movie roles forced Harvey's return to Germany in 1935, to considerable fanfare.²⁴ Upon news of her impending return to Germany with Ufa, there was little doubt as to who her principal co-star would be: "of course, Harvey's partner will presumably be Willy Fritsch."²⁵ Ufa wasted no time in reuniting the duo and kept them together for the majority of their 1930s films. Fritsch-Harvey collaborations of the Nazi years banked on

²¹ Antje Ascheid, *Hitler's Heroines: Stardom and Womanhood in Nazi Cinema* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2003), 101.

²² Kreimeier, 291.

²³ Antje Ascheid, "Nazi Stardom and the 'Modern Girl': The Case of Lilian Harvey," *New German Critique* 74 (Spring-Summer, 1998): 64.

²⁴ *Film Kurier* and *Licht Bild Bühne* both covered extensively Harvey's American career, including potential co-actors, projects and contract negotiations between 1933 and 1935. Her return to Germany made front page news in June 1935. *Film Kurier* included minute detail about Harvey's flight back from London, its height and average airspeed in its report: "Harvey wieder da" *Film Kurier*, 19 June 1935, 1.

²⁵ "Ufa verpflichtet Albers und Harvey," *Film Kurier*, 2 March 1935, 1.

the couples' continuing popularity in pre-fascist movies and offered German audiences a familiar and nostalgic formula. Their pairing proved difficult to domesticate to the new conditions of Nazi "film art." Ufa hyped Fritsch-Harvey films through media blitzes and their films were the centerpiece of Ufa's annual entertainment programme. After *Lucky Kids*, Harvey's popularity began to fade as films deviated from her popular roles, undermining her carefree star persona. By the time of her 1939 retirement her relevance in the German "film world" had diminished and the press – under official orders – made no mention of it.²⁶

Harvey's 1936 popularity as a Hollywood style star lent credibility to the Americanized comedy. Harvey's star persona incorporated elements of Weimar social and cultural trends, as well as Hollywood stardom, which Nazi ideologues routinely demonized. For her part, Harvey topped a 1933 *Licht Bild Bühne* reader's poll of Germans' favourite actresses, beating out Hollywood heavyweights Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo.²⁷ She was a conspicuous consumer of decadent luxuries and the finer things that movie stardom allowed. A *Screen Play* magazine feature highlighted her rapid acclimatization to California: "Lilian Harvey, the prize package of Europe, arrived neatly wrapped in cellophane, and stamped with the official seal of Hollywood. A stranger in a strange land, Miss Harvey was more like Hollywood than any of the natives!" It concluded, "The other foreign stars 'went Hollywood' after they got here. She was Hollywood when she arrived."²⁸ Although her Hollywood career was brief and unremarkable, she embodied popular notions of cosmopolitan movie stardom. Even in

²⁶ Zarah Leander's 1943 defection, on the other hand, made a far greater impact and could not be kept under wraps.

²⁷ *Licht Bild Bühne*, 1 January 1933, 1. Cited in Ascheid, "Stardom and the 'Modern Girl'," 57.

²⁸ Virginia Sinclair, "Lilian Drives 'Em Wild!" *Screen Play*, May 1933, 33, 58.

the Third Reich she did not abandon her luxurious lifestyle; trade papers regularly reported on her numerous vacations to international hotspots. She did not become a National Socialist heroine upon her return to Germany. In the view of Kreimeier, “[Fritsch-Harvey] films showed that the ‘American’ star cult, which continued in some form in Ufa under National Socialism, was difficult to shape into an instrument of the regime; the two had nothing in common. To serve the goals of propaganda, the star had to be reshaped to fit the proper ideological patterns, but the German film industry under Hitler and Goebbels could not accomplish that.”²⁹ A 1938 *Deutsche Film* feature used her name as shorthand for popular appeal.³⁰ *Der Deutsche Film* columnist U. Konstantin wrote that Harvey had “a droll-dramatic humour that with ease, aided by a superior word play, singing, dancing and mimicry, can create an entire world filled with whimsy. This disposition infuses all of her film numbers, of which we still have fond memories, and why we regularly want to see her in new roles.”³¹ Her distance from both idealized and quotidian lifestyles lent Harvey an air of fantasy in her roles that *Lucky Kids* also had.

In the film, America appears as a land of unrivalled potential that lacks the gridlock of antiquated social structures and institutions. “New York City, in particular,” claims Mary-Elizabeth O’Brien, “with its massive skyscrapers and expansive urban landscape, represented the most positive and the most negative aspects of modernity.”³² Luis Trenker’s *The Prodigal Son* (*Der verlorene Sohn*, 1934) depicts New York City as hell, as seen by unsuccessful German immigrant Tonio, who renounces America in favour of his native German hamlet. *Lucky Kids*, on the other hand, replaces Trenker’s

²⁹ Kreimeier, 291.

³⁰ Wendelin, “Lieblingblume von Lilian Harvey!,” *Der Deutsche Film*, August 1938, 57.

³¹ U. Konstantin, “‘Lilian’ oder der Wunschtraum,” *Der Deutsche Film*, August 1937, 46.

³² Mary-Elizabeth O’Brien, *Nazi Cinema as Enchantment: The Politics of Entertainment in the Third Reich* (Rochester: Camden House, 2004), 87.

nightmare of modern anomie with a wonderland America of limitless happiness and excitement. Ann, Gil, Frank and Stoddard bounce about the city with an irrepressible *joie de vivre*. The film offers up a “compelling scenario of the modern American city as a place where dreams come true. New York City is a fast-paced, exciting metropolis open to all sorts of madcap adventures and ever-changing identities.”³³ The opening credits picture up-shoots of towering skyscrapers and wide pans of busy streets set to upbeat jazz music. The film’s irrepressible optimism lends it the air of a fairy tale.

The social commentary of *It Happened One Night* is conspicuously absent in *Lucky Kids*’s fantasy world. On their first night of marriage, Ann sings: “Miss Nobody loves Mr. So-and-So/She is happy when he is near;/They live in the air called Nowhere,/In the land of dreams near the golden pond;/One could be just as happy as this couple,/But unfortunately this only happens in fairy tales.”³⁴ However, *Lucky Kids* upholds the happy ending of a fairy tale: Ann and Gil fall in love, Gil’s poetry is published in the newspaper, and the three companions are reemployed. Although Martin’s rosy presentation of New York City features contemporary American social, political and cultural references, salient social issues like unemployment, vagrancy and sexual politics are reduced to mere distractions in Gil’s and Ann’s whirlwind romance. For instance, the trio blame Roosevelt for their unemployment because his lifting of prohibition led to their colleague’s drunkenness.³⁵ The evocation of contemporary icons of American popular culture attempts to lend credibility to Ufa’s depiction of New York City. Billboards and shop windows prominently display Coca-Cola advertisements and

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Ascheid contends that the displacement of responsibility to political leaders foreshadows postwar aspersions of guilt onto Hitler. Ascheid, *Hitler’s Heroines*, 126.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

slogans in English. As a result, *Lucky Kids*' New York City appears as a real location, which lingering popular perceptions and debates on "Americanism" exaggerated. The fusion of fantasy and reality gives the film its light and comedic tone. When Ann appears in front of the judge on charges of vagrancy, she asks the judge if it is a crime to have no money, to which he responds, "No, just forbidden."

The film's partiality to fantasy transgressed the presumptive doctrine of realism preferred by hardcore ideologues like Alfred Rosenberg and Propaganda Ministry officials alike. "Film is not free to escape the hardships of daily life and wander off into a dreamland, which exists only in the minds of fanciful directors and scriptwriters, but nowhere else in the world..." argued Goebbels in his seven film theses.³⁶ Instead of escapist flights into fantasy worlds, Goebbels advocated the creation of "honest and natural films" that "can become agents in the cultivation of a better, richer and more realistic artistic world."³⁷ Even films that unfolded in distant geographic locations or historical epochs were expected to adhere to a "natural" depiction of society in tune with National Socialist ideology. Films like *Münchhausen* (dir. Josef von Báky, 1943) were a rarity in the Third Reich, where Nazi ideologues shunned fantasy in film. "Nazi realism" usually criticized other nationalities or provided allegories of German nationalism in other periods.³⁸ Not surprisingly, Germany's major studios rarely made fantasy and science fiction films. The Propaganda Ministry did not censor the make believe world of

³⁶ "Die Sieben Filmthesen des Goebbels," *Licht Bild Bühne*, 31 December 1935, 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ "Nazi realism" should be taken as a counterpart to 1930s and 1940s socialist realism in the Soviet Union. The primarily literary practice under Stalin was enforced and writers actively adjusted novels to fit the changing contours of Soviet ideology. Socialist realism depicted the U.S.S.R. in its ideal form and contemporary events in an idealist light. "Nazi realism," on the other hand, consisted of extensive self censorship and largely avoided depictions of contemporary events, people or issues. For more on socialist realism, see Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2000).

Lucky Kids simply because it captured the vitality and entertainment values of Hollywood imports; it proudly bore the stamp, “Made in Germany.”³⁹ *Lucky Kids* matched the entertainment dimension of Goebbels’s ideal film, but its promotion of Goebbels’s “correct attitudes” is ambiguous.

The film’s main song, “I wish I were a chicken” (*Ich wollt’ ich wär’ ein Huhn*) celebrates youthful recklessness and freedom from responsibility. After the three men are fired from their jobs at the newspaper for failing to file their reports on time they, along with Ann, dance and sing around their apartment, revelling in the wonders of idleness and leisure. The main chorus goes: “I wish I were a chicken, I’d have nothing to do/ I’d lay an egg and take the afternoon off!” The song pushed the limits of acceptable musical practices, incorporating elements of American fox-trot, Viennese waltz, the habanera from George Bizet’s opera *Carmen*, as well as allusions to American, Russian and French folk traditions.⁴⁰ Moreover, the characters parody a myriad of dances as the numerous musical elements progress during the song. The song begins with all four in the kitchen preparing an omelette as part of a feast. Despite the three men losing their jobs, the quartet is upbeat. The prevalence of domestic chores could be read as the men’s “feminization” due to their unemployment. The sequence’s emphasis on eggs is striking. All four characters contribute to the preparation of the omelette as they sing about the easy life of chickens. The scene culminates with Ann flipping the omelette from the frying pan as the men crowd around her. At the highest flip, the men grab at the airborne

³⁹ Goebbels told the Controllers of German radio on 25 March 1933, “At all costs avoid being boring. I put that before *everything*...” with the qualification that “[t]he correct attitudes must be conveyed but that does not mean they must be boring.” J. Noakes and G. Pridham, eds., *Nazism 1919-1945: A Documentary Reader*, vol.2 (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1983), 385.

⁴⁰ Lutz Koepnick, *The Dark Mirror: German Cinema between Hitler and Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 43.

omelette and quickly devour it. The fruit of their domestic labour is a sumptuous banquet, whose enjoyment is interrupted by dancing and singing.

Lutz Koepnick and Eric Rentschler read the dance routine as an ideological construct designed to exorcize the film's fascination with America and replace it with disavowal. In a brief analysis, Koepnick contends, "'un-German' music helps stage affective outbursts that end up cementing given identities" and prevents the audience from identifying with "otherness."⁴¹ Koepnick and Rentschler both argue Martin distances the audience's identification with the frantic characters through static camera angles and compositions during the routine. Rentschler questions whether the song has any substantive value or merely functions as a smokescreen for propaganda: "The dancers bounce about in a narrow apartment and constantly threaten to crash into walls. The semblance of animated improvisation, upon repeated viewing, looks more like assembly-line production, one activity efficiently giving way to the next function, without a trace of spontaneity or excess. Even here, in this Ufa world of whimsy, the rhythm of machines imposes itself on the workings of bodies."⁴² Here, Rentschler joins in a common classification of Nazi cinema as being obsessed with regimented mechanization. Cinzia Romani, for instance, compares Leni Riefenstahl's documentary of the 1934 Nuremberg rally, *Triumph of the Will*, to all musical choreography in Nazi Germany: "Various stylistic elements transform this celebratory festival into a musical revue-type film: the bodies moving to the rhythm of the military bands, the S.S. ... filing by in perfect geometric order, the torchlight processions creating spectacular patterns of

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴² Rentschler, 117, 122.

light.”⁴³ Romani’s phrase is an updated form of Walter Benjamin’s famous dictum that “fascism aestheticizes politics.”

Rentschler’s and Koepnick’s criticisms of the dance routine employ post-modernist readings of films as texts divorced from social and economic realities of the Third Reich. Koepnick’s reading of “exorcism of alien sentiments” does not stand out in the song. When the characters finish prancing about, there is no repudiation of their “deviant behaviour.” At no point in the dance sequence, or in the film, is the audience alienated from the characters, and they are invited to participate in their desires and feelings. The prevalence of the song in advertisements and on German radio underscores the song’s popularity as well as the sentiments it conveys. Outside of the context of the film, the visual framing Rentschler and Koepnick both identify does not exist and even in the film, it is suspect. In *Lucky Kids*, when the camera is framed tightly on Ann, Gil, Frank, and Stoddard as they prance around Gil’s apartment, it is not appreciably different from Martin’s camerawork in the rest of the film. Martin frequently employed static compositions that required little or no movement on the part of the camera. In addition, cross-cuts are infrequent in the film, with dialogue scenes occurring with both characters facing the camera. While Martin’s camera work seems claustrophobic in comparison to Capra’s in *It Happened*, it stems from the disparate film making skills of Capra and Martin then from an ideological function.

The indulgence in a carefree life of leisure subtly mocks the centrality of work to Nazism. The revolution of the individual into the new Fascist Man would come primarily through a commitment to working for the collective community, not for one’s individual desires. The Nazis cruelly emblazoned the entrances of concentration camps with the

⁴³ Cinzia Romani, *Tainted Goddesses: Female Stars of the Third Reich* (Rome: Gremese, 2001), 11.

slogan “Work sets one free.” The leader of the Reich Labour Front, Robert Ley, declared in 1936 in honour of the Four Year Plan, “Life on this earth is hard and must be earned through struggle, and earned every day afresh.”⁴⁴ In *Lucky Kids*, however, even when the men regain their newspaper jobs at the end of the film, they do not define themselves in terms of profession. Gil’s principal ambition is to be a poet, which his job as a reporter complements but does not fulfill. The song displaces the Nazi obsession with work as integral to individual meaning in the context of the collective, racially pure community.

The move towards individualism occurs through the song’s preoccupation with American popular culture. Two of “I wish I were a chicken”’s most interesting lines make direct reference to it. Ann wishes she was Mickey Mouse because her face would look funny as she pantomimes smoothing whiskers. Karsten Witte savagely critiques Harvey’s contribution to the song. He sees Ann’s desire to be the singular Disney icon as representative of Harvey’s career as a whole; “Lilian Harvey, the eternal blond dream and lucky kid, was the perfect synthetic actress, whose human features mimicked the mechanical ones of cartoons.”⁴⁵ Not to be left out, Fritsch’s Gil muses, “I wish I was Clark Gable, with moustache and sword,” making direct reference to the Hollywood inspiration for his role. Moreover, he imitates Gable’s hitchhiking gestures, famous from *It Happened One Night*. In doing so, he alludes to the film’s “doubled” status, his own substitution for the Hollywood movie star, and draws attention to the audience’s expectation and desire for Hollywood entertainment and the difficulty of substituting German made films. The lead characters’ fantasies lay entirely in the American

⁴⁴ Robert Ley, “The Joy of the National Socialist Economy,” in *Fascism*, ed. Roger Griffin (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), 143.

⁴⁵ Karsten Witte, “Too Beautiful to be True: Lilian Harvey,” in *New German Critique* 74 (Spring-Summer 1998): 37.

entertainment industry and the horizons of their desires ended at the American border. Unlike in many 1930s German films, the exuberant wishes of the characters were not based on racial or national purity. The evocation of Hollywood matinee idol Clark Gable and the phenomenally popular Mickey Mouse aimed to buttress the film's pretention to be genuinely American and distance itself from contemporary German film productions.

But Willy Fritsch was not Clark Gable, nor could he effect the same roguish appeal that was the hallmark of Gable's career. As a result, the male reporter lead role was significantly altered for Fritsch. The two characters are polar opposites; Fritsch's Gil Taylor is a likeable, honest man, whose aspirations to greatness and nobility lead him into trouble, while Clark Gable's Peter Warne is a scoundrel who conceals a soft heart under a tough exterior. In his study of Capra's depiction of journalists, Joe Saltzman succinctly encapsulates the seedy attributes of Capra's most famous reporter character:

Peter Warne is a son of a bitch. There is absolutely no reason anyone should like Warne. He is a fast-talking cynic with no regard for the truth, a brash opportunist who will stop at nothing to get what he wants, an amoral, alcoholic rogue who will lie, cheat, do anything to get a scoop for his newspaper, a big-city, wisecracking shyster who talks fast, works fast, lives by his wits, and won't take crap from anyone.⁴⁶

Audiences and Ellie Andrews, however, did like Peter Warne. His battles with his editor stem from his belligerence, his rejection of authority and his desire to cheat the *New York Mail* newspaper out of money. Warne uses the escaped heiress to create an exclusive scoop with which he can leverage his job and money back from the newspaper. Taylor, on the other hand, is the victim of circumstance. He is manipulated by Frank and Stoddard into taking the night court beat and inadvertently creates a major story. Neither

⁴⁶ Joe Saltzman, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film* (Los Angeles: Norman Lear, 2002), 1.

can he capitalize on his own creation of a scoop, nor can he press his marital right to have sex with Ann Garden on their first night together. Gil Taylor is a considerably more conservative hero than the charming “son of a bitch” Warne. Although Gable’s reporter won the hearts of audiences worldwide, Ufa did not attempt to emulate Gable’s mischievous hero. Fritsch’s Gil Taylor lacked the charisma and hubris of Peter Warne. One cannot imagine Gil confronting his editor over the telephone, or pretending to tell him off for the benefit of an eager crowd. Although *Lucky Kids* borrows the drunken reporter telephone call, it is the setup for Gil’s manipulation at the hands of Frank and Stoddard to avoid the unpleasant task of covering night court. In interviews, Fritsch described the groundlessness he felt playing Gil Taylor. In a *Der Deutsche Film* feature, Fritsch commented, in reference to his role in *Boccaccio* (dir. Herbert Maisch, 1936), “in contrast to my current role in the journalist film *Lucky Kids*, I’m standing with both feet on the ground and I feel solid ground underneath me.”⁴⁷ The comic heroes Fritsch usually portrayed, especially opposite Lilian Harvey, had more assertiveness than the gullible reporter.⁴⁸

While Fritsch may have played against type, Harvey’s Ann Garden was particularly suited to her star persona, which Ascheid summarizes as a dreamy romantic sexuality without any direct links to physical sex.⁴⁹ Harvey’s physically youthful and girl-like features distanced her from more vampish and sexualized roles. Kreimeier’s

⁴⁷ “Dreimal Willy Fritsch,” *Der Deutsche Film*, August 1936, 59.

⁴⁸ In their final film together, *Woman at the Wheel* (*Frau am Steuer*, dir. Paul Martin, 1939), the two play newlyweds who undergo a personal separation but are then forced to work together, with Maria (Harvey) as Paul’s (Fritsch) supervisor. Paul actively attacks Maria, a careerist woman, as he chafes under her supervision and their struggles within their marriage become a microcosm of the reorientation of permissible gender roles in the Nazi regime. Sabine Hake, *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 201-205.

⁴⁹ Ascheid, *Hitler’s Heroines*, 109.

view of Harvey's persona is more nuanced: "Lilian Harvey could be coquettish, naive, libertine, and melancholic – in short, she was an adaptable and versatile figure for the late Weimar Republic."⁵⁰ A review of one of her early silent films, *Love and Trumpet Blasts* (*Liebe und Trompetblasen*, 1925) highlights the allure of her childish image, claiming, "the image of Lilian going to bed with her teddy bear is perhaps the best in the whole film."⁵¹ This continued into the Third Reich. A *Film Kurier* article covering Harvey's 1933 departure to Hollywood described her as a "small girl."⁵² Often, reporters referred to Harvey simply as "our Lilian." In her youth, Harvey's juvenile features proved to be an asset. Her numerous onscreen playful courtships with Willy Fritsch were in part based on impulsive, juvenile behaviour. Witte describes Harvey as a "child-woman" and counterpart to American child star Shirley Temple, in their conspicuous lack of sexuality. In her numerous liaisons with Fritsch, writes Witte, "she flirts and flaps her lashes, but when it's love at first sight, she modestly lowers her eyes."⁵³ Harvey's characters – including Ann Garden – fused a bizarre combination of assertiveness and immaturity, or a hybrid of modern and traditional conceptions of femininity.⁵⁴

Perhaps due to the specific conventions of the Fritsch-Harvey relationship, *Lucky Kids*'s romance is flat and uninspired. While the film does an admirable job emulating *It Happened One Night*'s verbal wit, exciting narrative, and intriguing characters, it does not match the sexuality in Capra's film.⁵⁵ In part this was a result of Harvey's ambiguous sexuality, but was also due to the prudish sexual politics of the Third Reich. Nazism

⁵⁰ Kreimeier, 291.

⁵¹ "Lilian Harvey," *Der Film*, 23 August 1925. Cited in Ascheid, *Hitler's Heroines*, 109.

⁵² "Abschied von Lilian," *Film Kurier*, 6 January 1933, 3.

⁵³ Witte, 38.

⁵⁴ Ascheid, *Hitler's Heroines*, 121.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

proposed an exaggerated version of male patriarchy rooted in nineteenth century bourgeois culture, which relegated women to the roles of mothers and homemakers.⁵⁶ Martin's version seems to constrain sexuality visually, pushing it into the dialogue.⁵⁷ The tension between Gil and Ann manifests in speech, with little sexual chemistry between them. On their first night together Gil and Ann do not consummate their legal union. Ann makes clear to Gil that she has no interest in him, while Gil salvages his pride by insisting that she say "please," which she finally does when they settle into a normalized marriage that delivers the film's happy ending.

In one often discussed scene, Gil and Ann share a bed on their first night of marriage. To remedy the situation, Gil wheels a mobile cactus plant over to the bed and places it between husband and wife. This visual cue annihilates any suggestion of sexual or physical attraction between Gil and Ann, as both Rentschler and Koepnick suggest. The visual gag is similar to the "Wall of Jericho" that separates Peter Warne and Ellie Andrews from one another when sharing hotel rooms in *It Happened One Night*. The differences between the two dividers speak volumes. The "Wall of Jericho" is a flimsy blanket suspended across the room and did little visually to alleviate the growing sexual tension between the two travellers. Moreover, Peter and Ellie destroy the wall at the end of the film when they elope; in the film's final scene the blanket crashes to the floor and their cabin's lights shut off. The cactus wall, on the other hand, is a far more formidable indication of Ann and Gill's physical and sexual estrangement and one that is never fully

⁵⁶ The role of women in the Nazi state was limited to childrearing and caring for husband and home. The head of the National Socialist Women's League, Gertrud Schlotz-Klink claimed in 1936, "we must ... make clear to mothers that children are the most valuable possession we have, second only to our honor." Gertrud Schlotz-Klink, "Duties and Tasks of the Woman in the National Socialist State," in *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, ed. Randall L. Bytwerk (College Station: Texas A&M UP, 2008), 60.

⁵⁷ Ascheid, *Hitler's Heroines*, 129.

visually conquered. The husband and wife finally consummate their marriage after Ann finally says, “please.” As the couple embrace, the camera’s gaze moves to the cactus plant and fades out. The absence of a visual destruction of the cactus wall’s barrier, similar to the falling of the “Wall of Jericho,” constrains the finale’s sexuality.

Cary Nathenson and Rentschler take the negation of sexuality to be the core of the film’s propagandistic content. Indeed, Nathenson claims all films made under the Nazi regime had a pedagogical intent and therefore all films produced were propaganda.⁵⁸ He sees *Lucky Kids* as a comedy about a crisis of masculinity; Gil’s inability to control his wife and the three unemployed reporters’ inability to support themselves financially emasculates them. The film’s screwball elements transform comedy into a rumination on ideologically defined norms of masculinity. Nathenson contends that the film depicts Gil’s transformation into a real man, one who can rule and assert his masculinity. Comedy stems from Gil’s fragile masculinity, a safe topic of ridicule in Nazi Germany. The subtle ostracization of asocial individuals plays out primarily in the dialogue. In Nathenson’s estimation, the banter between Gil and Ann trades on Gil’s crippled heterosexuality as well as latent homophobia in its depiction of the married couple’s male sidekicks.⁵⁹ Going further, Nathenson asserts an enduring pattern in the era’s comedies of the unruly woman being domesticated and thus rendered fit for marriage or, alternately being removed as a threat to masculine authority.⁶⁰

Rentschler also sees the film’s gender roles as promoting Nazi patriarchy. Nazi gender values extended to the evaluation of foreign films. Rentschler claims for German commentators *It Happened One Night* “... surely presented a victory of male initiative

⁵⁸ Nathenson, 84.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

over a liberated woman, a reassertion of patriarchal privilege” – a decidedly wilful reading, “given how Capra’s film transforms both the smug journalist and his spoiled companion, given that a great deal of its charm comes from the mutual metamorphosis that transpires during the three-day odyssey.”⁶¹ He contends the sexist reading of *It Happened One Night* translated into the gender relations of *Lucky Kids*; Gil simply cajoles Ann into accepting the new status quo of married life. In effect, the conflict in the film stems from Gil’s inability to assert his marital right to sex. In contrast to *It Happened One Night*, Rentschler sees no change accompanying their misadventures, save their acquiescence to social norms. In Rentschler’s estimation, Gil “cultivates” the previously prickly Ann Garden into a suitable, submissive, wife.⁶²

Cinzia Romani also reads an enforcement of gender norms throughout the film, including in “I wish I were a chicken.” In the song, Ann wishes she were a man because, as her three male companions remind her, only a man can be master of the universe. In Romani’s estimation, “even this popular song in a few words reminds us of the virtues of the socio-moral status of the *Hausfrau*, once the cute girl next door, or the brightest schoolmate.”⁶³ Marriage, in Romani’s reading, is the only logical outcome for the film’s female protagonist, and by extension, German women. Ann’s line, however, satirizes masculinity as she sings: “I wish I were a man, how great I’d have it then; I wouldn’t have a thing to do but to relax. It is a fact, we know, that women have more brains, But I would gladly pass this up, stupidity is no shame.”⁶⁴ She only backtracks when her male companions complain. In Romani’s opinion, the promotion of patriarchal authority comes

⁶¹ Rentschler, 119.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Romani, 30.

⁶⁴ Ascheid, *Hitler’s Heroines*, 130.

in the context of Ann's light attacks. The film's end reassembles the social world rocked by the quartet's adventures; Gil and Ann settle into a normalized marriage; the men rejoin the ranks of the gainfully employed and move up through the ranks of the newspaper; and Gil finds confident authority. The film's happy ending does not politically promote idealized social mores. Comedies almost always have a resolution that undoes the damage the characters cause and returns them to the real world. The confident depiction of marriage and gender relations was not as clear cut as a political paradigm.

In Nazi era films, social anxieties were exaggerated in gender categories. As a result, the National Socialist version of masculinity, officially buttressed by the state, was ripe for parody. Sabine Hake uses two early Third Reich films that play on traditional gender roles as instances of subversion. In *The Ugly Girl* (*Das hässliche Mädchen*, dir. Henry Koster, 1933) and *Victor and Victoria* (*Viktor und Viktoria*, dir. Reinhold Schnüzel, 1933), both Jewish directors presented gender roles as masquerades and fluid constructs.⁶⁵ In Schnüzel's film, the cross-dressing Viktoria quickly adapts to gender norms of masculinity in her public persona of Viktor. Allusions to "Jewishness" and homosexuality appear in Viktor's performance of the "hysterical male," modeled off of conceptions of femininity.⁶⁶ The presentation of fluid gender roles was not limited to dissident Jewish directors. Popular screen actor Heinz Rühmann made a long career of parodying masculinity. Beginning in the Weimar Republic, he found a successful niche in his ability to articulate the fears and hopes of the rising white collar class and the attendant erosion of traditional masculinity.⁶⁷ This continued in the Third Reich, where he played the "weak man" for laughs. His difference from dramatic actors in epics, like

⁶⁵ Hake, 33-45.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

Emil Jannings, ensured his status as the ordinary “everyman” of the German cinema.⁶⁸ Nathenson uses Rühmann’s 1941 film *Crash Pilot Quax* (*Quax, der Bruchpilot*, dir. Kurt Hoffman, 1941) as a counterpoint to *Lucky Kid*’s “man who cannot rule” comedy. He sees the two films as part of a coherent genre that found humour in male weakness and instructed the audience in proper gender roles. However, his comparative approach ignores the massive changes which accompanied Germany’s military adventures. Goebbels’s preferred fusion of entertainment and ideology reached its apex at this time with notorious films like *Jew Süss* (*Jud Süss*, dir. Veit Harlan, 1940), *Request Concert* (*Wunschkonzert*, dir. Eduard von Borsody, 1941) and *The Great Love* (*Die Grosse Liebe*, dir. Rolf Hansen, 1942) which all championed explicitly propagandistic Nazi themes without ambiguity.⁶⁹ In addition, Nathenson’s perceived pedagogical intent seems to assume Goebbels’s total control over the content of all German features of the Nazi era. While the Propaganda Minister exerted considerable influence over the film industry, his role in shaping subtle pedagogical content in *Lucky Kids* was less obtrusive.

Rentschler, Nathenson and Romani assume *Lucky Kids*’s compromise of social values upheld exclusively Nazi values, while *It Happened One Night* did not. The political content supposedly offered up in the film was not unique to Nazism; the assertion of patriarchy and the model vision of traditional, submissive, and chaste femininity existed in the cinemas of other western nations, including the United States, at the time. Moreover, the crisis of masculinity that Nathenson asserts dominates *Lucky*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁶⁹ *Jew Süss* articulated the Nazi’s anti-Semitic programme. *Request Concert*, the script allegedly written by Goebbels, dramatized the union of the home front and front-line soldiers through the power of the radio. *The Great Love* reflected the changing situation of the war, and taught audiences, through the trials of singer and pilot, to set aside personal desires for the benefit of the nation at war for the foreseeable future.

Kids, was in fact less pronounced in Germany than in other nations. Cinema of the French Third Republic in the 1930s frequently exhibited an intense preoccupation with a failing masculine culture and the impending social disaster this waning virility portended. Robin Bates's study of popular films in the late 1930s argues that audiences displayed agency in their acceptance of films that allayed mounting anxieties and their rejection of films that challenged and confronted them.⁷⁰ Moreover, she contends Vichy fascism after June 1940 alleviated the crisis of masculinity through the articulation of a strong, patriarchal state led by Marshal Pétain. Colin Crisp expands on Bates's characterization of late Third Republic film, seeing a broad tendency for films to present men through prisms of class and profession, which created a perception of socially determined "maleness."⁷¹ "Femaleness," on the other hand, appears in "...creatures of impulse, easily led; all body, with no more than a semblance of moral rigor, they are happy to abandon commitments if one of these mythic roles [as prostitutes or luxury icons] offers itself."⁷² The threat France's "creatures of impulse" posed to society, though equally prominent earlier in Weimar cinema, disappeared from the Third Reich's screens. Gender roles were ideologically and socially secure in Germany, buttressed by official policy. However, the importation of foreign models complicated tidy social relations.

The depiction of gender roles in Nazi era films had more in common with Hollywood than with other European cinemas. Hollywood films lacked a cultural gender crisis, but strictly upheld the conventions of patriarchy in film. The power of marriage as a suitable vehicle for ending romantic comedies in the 1930s (and beyond) is consistent

⁷⁰ Robin Bates, "Audiences on the Verge of a Fascist Breakdown: Male Anxieties and Late 1930s French Film," *Cinema Journal* 36 no.3 (Spring, 1997), 26.

⁷¹ Colin Crisp, *Genre, Myth and Convention in the French Cinema, 1929-1939* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002), 108.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 111.

in Hollywood fare; social, gender and cultural paradigms are never threatened in Capra's film. In screwball comedies, marriage at the film's conclusion largely reaffirmed the power of the institution that could triumph over even a couple consistently at loggerheads.⁷³ David Shumway contends that anxieties about the collapse of marriage, despite a decline in divorces in the 1930s, contributed to the rise of the genre.⁷⁴ For instance, Peter Warne and Ellie Andrews elope at the end of *It Happened*, with the elder Andrews's permission, and wait until the marriage license is approved before they tear down the "Wall of Jericho." Capra's faith in the American dream and class unity during the 1930s never wavered.⁷⁵ The battle of classes between everyman Peter Warne and rich heiress Ellie Andrews never countenances a redistribution of the economic world order. Although Capra may "want the audience to believe that the world will be won by the underdog ... [he] seems overwhelmed and enchanted by the world of wealth. Capra may prefer Warne's common man, but he and the audience can't seem to stop being attracted to high society and the lifestyle money can buy."⁷⁶ The support of prevailing socio-economic order went beyond Capra's personal beliefs.

Hollywood film underwent a seismic moral shift during the 1930s with the implementation of the Production Code Administration, popularly known as the Hays Code, in 1934. With the Code, the American film industry codified its long-standing practice of moral self regulation dating to the early 1920s.⁷⁷ In effect until the mid-1950s,

⁷³ David R. Shumway, *Modern Love: Romance, Intimacy, and the Marriage Crisis* (New York: New York UP, 2003), 87.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Henry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 172.

⁷⁶ Saltzman, 26.

⁷⁷ A 1915 Supreme Court ruling over censorship of D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (*Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio*) established a precedent for the superiority of government

it suppressed morally problematic issues, like explicit scenes of passion, murder, and socially deviant behaviour. The Code dealt extensively with the proper approach to the treatment of sexuality and emphatically advocated avoiding the subject unless essential to the plot. The explicit presentation of scenes of sex and passion to incite natural and spontaneous reactions from audiences “is always wrong, is subversive to the interest of society, and a peril to the human race.”⁷⁸ Although the Code lacked specific guidelines of proper gender roles, its censorship of erotically charged female characters effectively ended narrative challenges to masculine domination. For instance, the new moral censorship devastated Mae West’s career. In the words of Thomas Doherty, “West required rigid corseting because most anything she said oozed sexual desire, any line reading packed with double meaning.”⁷⁹ Without the libidinal impulses, West’s films were flops and she never regained her star status. Although the Hays provisions paled in comparison with the Nazi coordination of the German film industry, the stringent moral regulation they enforced created a similarly uniform depiction of idealized social interactions and patriarchy.

In comparison to French and American cinema, the gender relations in *Lucky Kids* appear relatively tame. Gender inequality was present in the film, but it reflected the prevailing mores of the western world. The similarities in the treatment of gender in democratic France, in America and in Nazi Germany underscore the continuation of international cultural and social exchange, even after the Nazis erected their cult of German culture. Scholars’ dogged pursuit of political content in the films of the Third

copyright that precluded a studio’s recourse to court. It was overturned only in 1952. Dawn B. Sova, *Forbidden Films: Censorship Histories of 125 Motion Pictures* (New York: Facts on File, 2001), x.

⁷⁸ “The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930,” printed in Thomas Patrick Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), 355.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 338.

Reich has created a myopic approach to film studies that often ignores international trends and practices. Goebbels did not seal off German culture in 1933 and *Lucky Kids* gleefully emulates Capra's *tour de force*. The socio-economic relations in the film reflect attitudes common in the 1930s, but present them in a humorous package. The adaptation to German sensibilities took the peculiarities of the Fritsch and Harvey star pair into account more than the intricacies of Nazi ideology. The film's inspiration did not rise from Wagner's bombastic operas or the pages of *Mein Kampf*; *Lucky Kids* was Ufa's imitation of Hollywood and as a result, the film pushed the boundaries of permissible entertainment in the Third Reich. The emphasis was on entertainment, not indoctrination and it reveals the multi-faceted nature of German culture in the Nazi regime. "I wish I were a chicken" expresses and glorifies a leisurely existence far removed from sober responsibility of any kind. Although the film's "Americanism" sometimes rings hollow, it appealed to an approximation of the American dream as perceived by German audiences in the 1930s. The ideological containment mechanisms that scholars have since identified do not convincingly repudiate the ideals and vision of the film, whose conservative gender dynamic seems to reflect Ufa's operational pragmatism as well as the preferences of Germany's bourgeois film audiences. The spectre of ideology is faint in *Lucky Kids*, overshadowed by the film's obsession with America.

In *Lucky Kids*, the continuing fascination with America and Hollywood is given free rein. Social fantasy drowns out the voices of ideology and realism. The film's presentation of a make-believe America as a land with limitless potential and possibilities, where the quotidian problems that beset the German people in 1936 did not exist, offered audiences an alternative version of reality. Although the fantasy in the film

did not propose an alternate political programme, its distance from Nazi ideology locates a fissure within the ideological facade of Goebbels's entertainment empire. *Lucky Kids's* euphoria triumphed over politics, unemployment, criminality and poverty and few German films approached its enthusiasm. The film's optimism echoed the upbeat and positive social messages that characterized many of Capra's films, in which the American spirit could triumph over all obstacles. However, the transportation of *Lucky Kids's* happiness to America, an economic, cultural and political rival of National Socialism, did not glorify Nazism. If *Lucky Kids* had taken place in Germany, the optimism would have brushed off onto the "new Germany."

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A MONO-CULTURAL IDENTITY

German cinema emulated Hollywood film in an effort to displace it. For National Socialist ideology, cultural coexistence was intolerable. Germany's post-1933 ideological framework demanded strict conformity to political "truths." As a result, some films quickly incorporated political messages into narratives. The film industry's rigorous self-coordination to the regime's pervasive influence ensured that explicit critiques of National Socialism never found expression. These "culture films," however, remained a distinct minority in Germany's overwhelmingly entertainment-oriented cinema industry. In apolitical productions, the industry retained relative freedom in its pursuit of box office profits. After 1936, Ufa and Tobis, with the blessing of the Propaganda Ministry, committed to emulating Hollywood style film making. Just as Nazi musicologists suggested German composers of previous centuries had worked with foreign music models and discovered their full potential, the German film industry would unlock the full artistic possibilities of Hollywood. Conquering the allure of Hollywood with German films theoretically proved the superiority of German cultural films over all others. The project of displacement, however, presented directors, actors, and producers with a new set of challenges.

The qualities that Hollywood films possessed – glorification of individualism, liberty, personal betterment through professional advancement, and consumerism – found their way into German copies. The ambiguities that arose in the trans-Atlantic exchange proved problematic for the regime's ideological edifice. The imagination and flexibility required to "Germanize" Hollywood allowed space for creative personnel to introduce,

intentionally or not, non-Nazi points of view into the public discourse. Goebbels's ambitions for a politicized cinema floundered against the infiltration of dissonant ideals. Although compliant producers, screenwriters and directors had developed narrative conventions to avoid or neutralize divergent messages in their films, potential "Americanized" subversion eluded the ideological fences German censors had erected. Most conflicting "American" ideas contained in Hollywood film resided at the level of assumption and core belief, not conscious indoctrination. German imitations could not successfully separate subversive individualist impulses from the high production values, scintillating stories and star power they copied.

The incomplete "Nazification" of German culture between 1933 and 1939 caused multiple messages to circulate in the public sphere. In part the discord came from the influence of Hollywood models of stardom and popular tastes that Hollywood simultaneously shaped and answered to. Stars could suggest taboo topics with subtle framing, poses or gestures. Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo especially took full advantage of the possibilities of their bodies in communicating lesbian, androgynous or gender bending ideas. Zarah Leander took on the sexual subversion of Dietrich and Garbo in her numerous roles. Her producers' and writers' heavy handed attempts to contain her sexuality in her films did not displace audiences' interest in Leander as a sexualized character. In addition, the female specific nature of "doubling" underscored the limits of Nazi gender types. The visibility of female stars resisted women's official relegation to households. Even as media coverage stressed the maternity and domesticity of stars like Leander and Kristina Söderbaum, they aped the self assured confidence and ambitions of Hollywood starlets.

The “people’s community” also found a public alternative in stars. The highly visible luxury that German movie stars continued to enjoy in the Third Reich suggested an identity defined by individualist consumerism and freedom from crushing collectivist nationalism. As theoretical representatives of the *Volk*, film performers occupied ideological terrain. As forces of “personality,” actors offered audiences templates for the new fascist man and woman the state desired. However, the cult of personality popular film stars enjoyed operated on a different level than political celebrity. Movie scripts and coverage retained a focus on the individual. More than any other profession, movie stars enjoyed luxury, fame, and renown and were largely removed from the state.

The translation of American cultural expression to Germany allowed considerable freedom, even in the cases of philosophical and political agreement. The western genre shared many common themes with National Socialism: a framework of masculine and racial superiority, a centrality of territorial expansion despite resistance from indigenous peoples, and a glorification of violence in nation building. Even if the rugged individualism of the stock cowboy hero did not conform to Nazism’s collective ideals, enough common thematic ground existed between it and the genre to facilitate a relatively smooth transition. Luis Trenker flouted central tenets of both the western genre and National Socialism in *The Emperor of California*. The film questions the direction of the Nazi movement and clings to an antiquated Romanticism that echoed pre-1933 incarnations of Nazism. In stark contrast to the decisive finale of propaganda epics that summarize the central political theme, *Emperor*’s ambiguous conclusion allowed audiences to judge Suter’s legacy for themselves.

Direct remakes did little better in presenting explicit political messages. *Lucky Kids* fared admirably in its pursuit of glittering Hollywood comedy. The gap, however, between *It Happened One Night* and *Lucky Kids* is telling of the divergent levels of skill, production funds and freedom between the two. The gritty realism in Frank Capra's film faces up to the realities of the Depression but also maintains a vision of social harmony. Ellie Andrews and Peter Warne become avatars of the American "can do" ethic, overcoming class barriers to find meaning and happiness together. The fantasy element in *It Happened One Night* contained a distinct social message of cross-class unity, communicated through rousing scenes of communal singing on buses and of Warne's and Andrews's romance. *Lucky Kids*'s "realism," on the other hand, is disconnected from reality. New York City appears as a magical fantasy world in which characters are separate from politics, society and economic life. Paul Martin's presentation views American society through rose-coloured glasses and seems enthralled with the resulting illusion.

American influence in Nazi Germany was a complex phenomenon. Analysis of the era's official film press sheds light onto Nazi "Americanism," but does not tell the entire story. A more fulsome account would include Reich Film Bank funding records, Ufa and Tobis studio memos and directives, and Propaganda Ministry files: unfortunately unavailable for the writing of this thesis. The Ministry's reactions to *Lucky Kids*, *The Emperor of California*, and Zarah Leander's sexual provocations can be reasonably inferred through careful readings of *Film Kurier*, *Licht Bild Bühne*, and *Der Deutsche Film*. The ideological problems Americanized film projects presented, in tandem with the

established Nazi film art position, strongly suggest Ufa's and Tobis's boards' independence in commissioning their emulative projects.

Culture was contested territory in Nazi Germany. Propaganda Ministry officials and Nazi Party zealots posited an inextricable link between culture, society, and politics. The gap between official designations of "German culture" and the German public's preference for American cultural imports led to a concerted effort to bridge it. Policy makers dealt with Hollywood with more timidity than with music; "Nigger jazz" blatantly defied racial theories of "Aryan" superiority as well as established European musical practices and quickly found its way onto proscribed lists. Even the flourishing field of German jazz emulators, left over from the Weimar Republic, faced serious state censorship. Yet genuine American jazz did not lose its wide fan base, but rather transformed into an underground phenomenon for clandestine groups of aficionados.

Compared to jazz's clandestine survival in private residences and clubs, Hollywood remained prominently in the public sphere. Although American film fare did not mock Nazism's racial and cultural tenets the same way jazz did, its popularity threatened to undermine the Nazi government's extensive propaganda efforts. Since the public nature of film exhibition allowed the regime to actively regulate access to American films, Goebbels's and the film industry's strategy to displace Hollywood focused on explicit emulation projects that would reduce Hollywood's presence in Germany. But displacement failed. "Germanized" Hollywood operated alongside Goebbels's attempts to legislate and then to strong-arm American films out of Germany. He officially banned all further exhibition and importation of Hollywood films in May 1940.

War presented Goebbels with the opportunity to clamp down forcefully on both pre-Nazi and international forms of cultural expression. Aggressive new policies of coordination and nationalization pierced the protective cocoon Ufa and Tobis had provided non-conformist artists in the 1930s. The Propaganda Ministry increased its presence in managing the film studios' affairs. Goebbels and Ministry apparatchiks drafted political scripts that openly reflected the regime's war efforts and central values.¹ The regime increased its financial control over the industry, nationalizing and consolidating Germany's remaining studios into Ufi in November 1942.² Wartime powers brought a second wave of purges to Germany's cultural institutions. Although not as drastic as the mass exodus of artists in 1933, those engaged in potentially subversive entertainment disappeared from the public sphere after 1939. Actresses Zarah Leander and Lilian Harvey, and directors Luis Trenker and Herbert Selpin all exited the German "film world" after 1939, either by individual choice or forced silence. Instead of ambiguous endorsements of National Socialist doctrine, a new generation of political-artists like director Veit Harlan capitalized on their ability – and willingness – to blend entertainment and politics and entered the highest ranks of the political-cultural elite.

After 1939, the deft touch necessary for German entertainment to pull in domestic audiences and appeal to suspicious foreign movie-goers was no longer required. Germany's military successes after 1939 provided its film industry with an advantageous position. In occupied areas, Ufa's foreign rival firms disappeared. German studios enjoyed literally captive markets across Europe. In Germany itself, the war-weary

¹ *Request Concert's* script came directly from the Propaganda Ministry. The film's narrative establishes idealized parameters of private and public relations in wartime conditions. Marc Silberman, *German Cinema: Texts in Context* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1995), 67-70.

² David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 38-42.

population turned to movies as the preferred medium of distraction, driving cinema attendance and revenues continually higher throughout the 1940s.³ Goebbels's prewar reticence to trumpet overt political messages faded. Explicit propaganda-entertainment epics dominated the German box office, benefitting from the structural advantages award-winning films enjoyed, such as preferential distribution rights, under official film policy implemented as early as 1933.⁴ The limited opportunities for artistic revolt rapidly evaporated under the wartime conditions of film making. Violence and war allowed Goebbels finally to purge German cultural life of explicit American influences. Although some tendencies, especially in musicals, persisted after 1939,⁵ the public display of fascination with America ceased.

³ Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1996), 13.

⁴ Films with state awards received tax exemptions, preferential screening and distribution rights, and could be included in school curriculums. Welch, 21.

⁵ Marika Röck's wartime films *Kora Terry* (dir. Georg Jacoby, 1940) and *The Woman of my Dreams* (*Die Frau meiner Träume*, dir. Georg Jacoby, 1944) were decadent and sexually charged with a strong debt to American musicals, unlike most post-1939 German fare. Jana Bruns, *Nazi Cinema's New Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 94, 105.

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