

PROPAGANDA FILMS DURING THE THIRD REICH

by

ASHLEY SCHRENK

(Under the Direction of Christine Haase)

ABSTRACT

Films produced during the Third Reich generally fall into two categories: blatant propaganda films, which this paper terms hard-core propaganda films, or subtler, soft-core propaganda films. The first category frequently features vilification of Jews, as well as glorification of the German *Volk*, *Heimat* and of Hitler. Third Reich hard-core propaganda films portray Aryan Germans in opposition to other races, resulting in the extreme exclusion of the Other. The soft-core propaganda films are a toned down version of the hard-core propaganda films. This thesis proposes an inverse relationship between the level of inherent inconsistencies and contradictions within Third Reich films and the categorization of a film as hard-core propaganda. The greater the inconsistencies in relation to Nazi ideology, the more a film becomes soft-core propaganda and vice versa. A variety of hard and soft-core propaganda films are analyzed, and the overall effectiveness of such propaganda is examined.

INDEX WORDS: Third Reich, Propaganda Ministry, Nazi film, Nazi cinema, Goebbels, Riefenstahl, Hitler, Nazi propaganda, Fascism, Fascist aesthetics, Nazi popular film, *Triumph des Willens*, *Jud Süß*, *Der ewige Jude*, *Zu neuen Ufern*, *Die große Liebe*, *Die goldene Stadt*

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to Zachary Nalley, who spent many hours formatting this paper and most importantly, who always knew just what to say to calm me down during my frequent ‘stress attacks’. Zack, you always believed in me, even when I doubted myself. Thank you for loving me and caring so much. Additionally, I would like to thank my parents, and especially my mother, for always having faith in me. Mom, thank you for all the late nights you stayed up, listening to my complaints and frustrations. You are more than a mother. You are a best friend. Dad, thank you for giving me so many opportunities to improve my German. You are the reason I became interested in the German language. Zack, Mom, and Dad, I love you all. Thank you so much for your incredible support and patience throughout the years.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	viii
 CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Propaganda or Entertainment: Indistinguishable in Nazi Germany?.....	3
2 <i>TRIUMPH DES WILLENS</i> : FASCIST AESTHETICS	10
Aesthetics of Face: Individual and Collective.....	15
Mass Manipulation through Film	16
Walter Benjamin: Forewarning Fascism.....	18
3 <i>JUD SÜß</i> AND <i>DER EWIGE JUDE</i> : THE JEWISH PROBLEM	23
Inherent Contradictions Among Head Nazi Officials	24
18 TH Century Bourgeois Tragedy/ <i>Jud Süß</i> Similarities	27
Anti-Semitism: The Wandering Jew	31
4 <i>GUISE</i> AND THE GENRE: ENTERTAINMENT FILMS	37
5 <i>ZU NEUEN UFFERN</i> AND <i>ZARAH LEANDER</i> : THE ULTIMATE	
CONTRADICTION	40
Counteracting Leander's Contradictions.....	42
6 <i>DIE GROßE LIEBE</i> : THE GREAT SACRIFICE.....	46
7 <i>DIE GOLDENE STADT</i> : HOME SWEET HOME	51

8	CONCLUSION.....	57
	WORKS CITED	59
	FILMOGRAPHY	61

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: CINEMAS AND ADMISSIONS IN THE THIRD REICH.....	8
Table 2: “JEWISH” CULTURE	28

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This thesis investigates how Nazi ideology influenced films during the Third Reich and defines propaganda through cinema as an ideological projection upon those films, which aim to influence the attitudes and beliefs of a target audience, in this case the German masses, for political purposes. The core points of Nazi ideology promote anti-Semitism and vilification of Jews, discrimination against non-Aryan foreigners, and glorification of the German *Volk*, *Heimat* and of Hitler. Furthermore, the Third Reich enforced definitive boundaries between Aryans and other races, resulting in the extreme exclusion of the Other. This paper introduces the notions of both hard and soft-core propaganda films and attempts to elucidate the difference between these two classifications through the study of various exemplary Nazi films. Historically, scholars of Nazi cinema initially displayed certain tendencies towards less rigid distinctions between political and non-political films. In the aftermath of the war, scholars, most notably David Hull and Joseph Wulf, took a narrow approach, creating rigorous opposition between propaganda and entertainment films. More recently, in the wake of a cultural studies turn in German film studies during the 1980s and 1990s, scholars such as Eric Rentschler, Antje Ascheid and Lutz Koepnick have re-evaluated earlier claims and now believe that a more differentiated view of the various forms of Nazi filmmaking is necessary. These recent scholars, with whose viewpoints this paper largely aligns itself, focus on the difference between obvious propaganda films, which I term hard-core, and other, more subtle propaganda films, which this paper labels soft-core. Nazi soft-core

propaganda films tended to relate to everyday life situations, such as women's roles while the men were absent fighting, or the ideal admiration one must experience for the German homeland. Falling under the general heading of popular or entertainment films, they exemplify how ideology suffuses these films, which is evident not in the main message but instead masked in the background. The soft-core films are toned down versions of the hard-core films. This thesis proposes an inverse relationship between the level of inherent inconsistencies and contradictions within Third Reich films and the categorization of a film as hard-core propaganda. The greater the amount of inconsistencies in relation to Nazi ideology, the more a film becomes soft-core propaganda and vice versa. Whereas earlier German film critics stated that pure Nazi entertainment films exist, this thesis argues that no film released in the Third Reich could completely avoid the influence of Nazi indoctrination; however, the directors could attempt to either promote, evade or impede such ideology, and their attitudes are perhaps most noticeable in the presence of inconsistencies in their productions.

This thesis commences with a typological reading of Leni Riefenstahl's film *Triumph des Willens* (1935). The film differs from the others discussed in that the Propaganda Ministry did not market it as a popular film but instead as a documentary depiction of the 1934 Nazi Party Rally. Therefore, the indisputable political nature of *Triumph des Willens* catalogues it as hard-core propaganda. An in depth analysis of the workings of fascist aesthetics in *Triumph des Willens*, as well as how fascist aesthetics relates to hard-core propaganda, draws on the theories of the philosopher and critical theorist Walter Benjamin. The paper then focuses on the most illustrious hard-core propaganda films, *Jud Süß* and *Der ewige Jude*, which expound on the elements of Nazi

ideology. These films exhibit very few inconsistencies concerning Third Reich indoctrination and dogma and have consistently been labeled as propaganda films. Whereas *Der ewige Jude* accentuates the necessity of annihilating the Jewish race, *Jud Süß* touches upon all cornerstones of Nazi belief. Revealing scarcely any ideological contradictions, *Jud Süß* epitomizes a cohesive ideological statement and therefore represents a popular film that is also hard-core propaganda, thus making it unique in relation to the other films examined. This thesis then turns to the overall less ideologically coherent body of popular Nazi films: *Zu neuen Ufern* (Sirk 1937), *Die große Liebe* (Hansen 1942) and *Die goldene Stadt* (Harlan 1942). Unlike *Jud Süß*, these entertainment films contain considerable contradictions and ideological inconsistencies and thus belong to the soft-core propaganda category.

Propaganda or Entertainment: Indistinguishable in Nazi Germany?

In his 1969 book entitled *Film in the Third Reich: A Study of the German Cinema 1933-1945*, David Stewart Hull asserts that the German film industry was innocent of any collaboration with the National Socialists. Hence, he insists that the directors, actors and producers, who did work for the Nazis, are not accountable for their work under Nazi power. This thesis, in contrast, recognizes that the German film industry was far from irreproachable, though the exact degree of guilt remains largely difficult to prove and in some respects a matter of personal opinion. Julian Petley, a scholar whose book *Capital and Culture* (1979) questions some of the earlier, traditional notions of propaganda, fascism and ideology, believes that

Hull's particular combination of special pleading, wishful thinking and political innocence can be explained partly by his naïve reliance on interviews with and statements by the likes of Veit Harlan, Leni Riefenstahl and Luis Trenker, who

have clearly taken this as a welcome opportunity to remove black (or brown) spots from their pasts (4).

Hull and other early cinema scholars tended to take statements of the Nazi film directors Riefenstahl and Harlan at face value. This paper, however, aligns itself with recent scholarship and disagrees with the methodology of these initial Third Reich film critics. One cannot look at subjective statements taken from interviews and regard them as facts.

In his book, Hull boldly states:

Only a small number of films made during the Third Reich contained propaganda. The percentage rarely, if ever, went over 25 for any given year. There are two reasons for this: First, people had to be lured into the cinema to spend money. From the start, the German public registered resistance to films which were too obviously propagandistic. Although the industry was later state-supported and state-owned, it was necessary to bring in money just as in any normal business venture. So the studios had to produce and release a large number of films that were certain to make a profit on the basis of past experience. Secondly, it was impossible to find enough writers, directors, and actors able to make explicit propagandistic films. These films with political content, as a rule, were made on larger budgets and had more elaborate shooting schedules. For these reasons, each company could turn out only a few each year. It was simpler to inject messages into newsreels and documentary films than into feature films. Audiences paid to see the feature but also saw the newsreels and shorts, so in the end it came out to the same thing. To make sure that the viewers remained captive, it was common practice after 1941 to have the doors of the cinema locked during the projection of newsreels (36).

This paper argues a counter to Hull's claim that the majority of Third Reich films were non-propagandistic. Hull's insistence that propaganda never infiltrated more than 25 films per year remains questionable, largely because he obtained this number from the "Allied postwar censorship bans" which included only the indisputable, hard-core anti-Semitic productions (Petley 7). According to Hull, Third Reich films were either propaganda or entertainment, with the majority classified as entertainment. This thesis considers Hull's identified propaganda films as hard-core propaganda films, yet in line

with many contemporary scholars, also examines the degree of ideology in previously identified entertainment films. As aforementioned, this paper attempts to validate the hypothesis that all Nazi films were to some extent influenced by ideology and thus tries to transcend the limited categorization of either propaganda or entertainment.

By examining a number of so-called entertainment films in detail, as well as the indisputable, hard-core Nazi indoctrination films, this thesis moves to re-analyze Third Reich film classifications as well as show that the Allied Control Commission's discoveries when citing "as few as 141 of a total of 700 suspect feature films" are far too constricted (Hake 3). In a public speech during the war, Goebbels, as noted by Hake, distinguishes "between the 20 percent big-budget films with clear propagandistic intentions and the 80 percent good, decent entertainment films on a high artistic level" (3). Ostensibly, such a statement was useful in manipulating opinion, because audiences were often unaware of the political undertones resonating throughout the so-called entertainment films. If understood as definitive, Goebbel's statement could aid claims of earlier scholars; however, he intentionally misled his *Volk*. Representing the contrary viewpoint, German-born filmmaker Erwin Leiser, as quoted in Rentschler, argues:

Under Hitler, there was no such thing as a 'non-political' film. Entertainment films functioned to distract the audience from reality and lull them to sleep, generally by means of the battery of clichés manufactured in the arsenal of Nazi propaganda. German films of the Third Reich thus represent the creations of a totalitarian government, modern fantasy wares implemented in the wider frameworks of public persuasion, state terror, and world war (*Ministry of Illusion* 8-9).

Furthermore, Wim Wenders writes, as recorded in Rentschler, "never before and in no other country have images and language been abused so unscrupulously as here, never before and nowhere else have they been debased so deeply as vehicles to transmit lies"

(*Ministry of Illusion* 2). Similarly, directly targeting Hull, Petley insists, “Hull completely misses the point that *all* films are of ideological significance and not simply those which he calls ‘propagandist’; distinctions between ‘propaganda’ and ‘entertainment’ or between ‘political’ and ‘non-political’ films simply cannot be sustained” (7). As the above quotes emphasize, strictly distinguishing between propaganda and entertainment films oversimplifies the complexities of cultural production in a totalitarian system.

Addressing Hull’s assertion that propaganda films were more expensive to make and thus few were produced on a yearly basis, I would like to re-emphasize the notions of hard-core and soft-core propaganda. Although relatively few hard-core propaganda films exist, most notably *Triumph des Willens*, *Jud Süß* and *Der ewige Jude*, an abundance of films produced under Goebbels’s censure were soft-core propaganda. The hard-core propaganda films, most especially *Triumph des Willens*, were significantly costlier to produce and involved hours of exhaustive drudgery and scores of people. However, soft-core entertainment films during the Third Reich were no more arduous to produce than any other entertainment films. One must question Hull’s claim, specifying that only hard-core propaganda films were typically more expensive to produce.

The difficult task, however, is where to draw the line between films that reflect Nazi ideology on some level and flagrantly propagandistic films such as *Der Ewige Jude*. To what extent must a film contain ideology before one classifies it as hard-core propaganda? As aforementioned, a dominant factor in labeling a Nazi film as hard-core propaganda is the amount of inconsistencies and contradictions discernible. A film with relatively few contradictions strongly supports the ideas and beliefs of the Third Reich. Likewise, films with considerable inconsistencies may undermine the overall

effectiveness of the indoctrination; however, the films arguably reflect enough Nazi values to qualify as soft-core propaganda, even if the ideology is so abstruse that only the trained eye could pinpoint it. Correspondingly, Rentschler quotes a leading member of the Nazi youth, who admitted in 1938:

One has to look a long time, before one finds a cinema program announcing a film with an obvious political slant. Even the most suspicious filmgoers cannot claim that German films seek to hit them over the head with politics or to impose a world view. Except for portions of the newsreels, cinema in a newly politicized Germany amounts to an unpolitical oasis. A really clever person might claim that even if there are no propaganda films, there still is propaganda tucked away beneath film's surface details. This person, though, will have a hard time finding examples to prove his point...The more we go to the movies, the more inescapable is the feeling that the world we see on the screen by and large has nothing to do with the National Socialist world we live in (*Ministry of Illusion* 19-20).

The Nazi youth member clearly believes that films produced during the Third Reich were not political, and that one must stretch the interpretation of propaganda to find any traces within Nazi cinema. The youth member's quote aides my argument that Nazi films were successful because the Propaganda Ministry, in regards to soft-core entertainment films, effectively managed to conceal the true agenda.

Hull's astounding claim that "people had to be lured into the cinema" implies a hesitancy and almost unwillingness or lack of desire to attend, yet recent studies show that visiting the cinema provided a welcome relief to the grim, dispiriting world of war-torn Germany. Petley notes moreover that "in general the war meant that people had more money to spend but less in the way of material goods on which to spend it" (76). Cinemas provided a perfect solution and a fun, social outlet. Rentschler provides a helpful table, which demonstrates the overwhelming increase of cinema admissions as well as of actual theaters each year the war continued.

Table I. Cinemas and admissions in the Third Reich (*Ministry of Illusion* 13)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of cinemas</u>	<u>Number of admissions (millions)</u>
1933	5,071	245
1934	4,889	259
1935	4,782	303
1936	5,259	362
1937	5,302	396
1938	5,446	442
1939	6,923	624
1940	7,018	834
1941	7,043	892
1942	7,042	1,062
1943	6,561	1,116
1944	6,484	1,101

The reason for the slight decrease in the number of cinemas towards the war's end can be explained by the intensification of Allied air raids and the subsequent destruction of numerous movie theaters.

Goebbels, as quoted in Petley, exercised everything in his power to manipulate public reception, censoring newspaper and journal movie reviews as well as film ads. According to the Propaganda Minister, art "is the most noble cultural expression of a nation... Above all, art is possible only when its roots are sunk in the soil of National Socialism" (103). The German cinema was a significant vehicle to convey Nazi ideology. Goebbels, who considered film as an art, adamantly felt that "judgment of the art work in the National Socialist State can be made only on the basis of the National Socialist viewpoint of culture. Only the Party and State are in a position to determine artistic values by appeal to the National Socialist artistic standpoint" (Hull 96). True to

Goebbels's statement, the Third Reich film industry was a vehicle to promote Nazi ideology, and no films escaped at least some degree of influence.

CHAPTER TWO

TRIUMPH DES WILLENS: FASCIST AESTHETICS

This chapter offers a typological reading of Leni Riefenstahl's prized film *Triumph des Willens* (1935) in order to contrast the differences between hard-core and soft-core propaganda films. The film, deeply imbedded in National Socialist ideology, portrays the Nazi Party's 1934 congress in Nuremberg, Germany and depicts a work of pure ingeniousness, producing the effects of both awe and horror. This propaganda film differs, however, from hard-core Nazi films such as *Jud Süß* and *Der ewige Jude* in that no explicit anti-Semitism is visible. Adolf Hitler, a friend of the film star and director, personally commissioned Riefenstahl to make a documentary of the Nazi Rally, where for the first time, German soldiers reported to the Führer for inspection. Although up until her death in 2003 Riefenstahl insisted that the film was strictly a documentary, a recording of an actual historical event, today's viewers look on with alarm at the film's godlike portrayal of Hitler. In a documentary by Ray Muller detailing her life, entitled *The Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl* (1993), Riefenstahl claims that she cried to Goebbels, begging him not to force her into making *Triumph des Willens*, but he smugly replied, "Wenn Sie ein Mann wären und nicht eine Frau, dann würde ich Sie jetzt die Treppe herunterschmeissen." She asserts that she finally agreed to make the film only if Hitler promised that she would never have to make another film for the party. Hitler assured Riefenstahl, "Fräulein Riefenstahl, schenken Sie mir nur sechs Tage Ihres Lebens, das sind nur sechs Tage. Ich möchte gern, daß der Film von einem Künstler

gemacht wird und nicht von einem Parteifilmregisseur” (*Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*, 1993). The film’s glaringly propagandist nature exemplifies the philosopher Walter Benjamin’s forewarnings of National Socialism and fascism as well as his remarks on mass culture, film, and the aesthetization of politics.

Hitler used film for various levels of propaganda. Interestingly, at the time of the Rally, a substantial percentage of the German people did not support Hitler. They were uncertain of his role in the Röhm incident, which occurred only a month prior to the Nuremberg Rally. Röhm fell victim to a conspiracy and was killed in a power struggle at Hitler’s orders on the night remembered as “Night of the Long Knives”. The Röhm event proves relevant, because the Nuremberg Rally was the first time Hitler faced members of the SA after the murder of their leader (McKale 61). *Triumph des Willens* demonstrates how Hitler capitalized on the film’s propagandist nature to manipulate mass opinions. Proclaiming that he had absolutely nothing to do with the bloody affair, Hitler declared, “only a lunatic or deliberate liar could think that I, or anybody, would ever intend to dissolve what we ourselves have built up over many long years” (*Triumph*). By the Rally’s conclusion, Hitler had, as far as can be discerned, successfully convinced the SA that he and the SS were innocent.

Hitler, a great admirer of Riefenstahl, personally urged her to document the upcoming Nuremberg Rally. In fact, the opening credits of *Triumph des Willens* mention the Führer’s exclusive request, thereby clarifying that Riefenstahl’s film was made under the direct order of Hitler, and not of Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s Minister of Propaganda and National Enlightenment. After World War II, when faced with charges of supporting Nazi ideology, Riefenstahl maintained her innocence, avidly claiming that she was never

a member of the Party. She cites problems and tensions with Goebbels, who advised against her project, as proof of her independence from the Party. However, no evidence supports “Riefenstahl’s persistent claim since the 1950s that Goebbels hated her, or even that he had the power to interfere with her work” (Sontag 4). Furthermore, although never an official party member, she did enjoy a close association with Hitler, and her depiction of the 1936 Olympic Games in *Olympia* (1938), was actually “commissioned and entirely financed by the Nazi government” (Sontag 4). The public remained unenlightened concerning this deception, due to a “dummy company” was founded in Riefenstahl’s name (4). Its purpose was to obscure the government’s level of involvement with the media and suggest a non-existent distance. When confronted with questions of guilt, Riefenstahl steadfastly asserted that she has no reason to feel apologetic for making *Triumph des Willens*. Stating that her film is not political and expresses “not a word of anti-Semitism”, she upheld that she knew nothing of the atrocities committed by Hitler and his regime. Among this count of unknown horrors, she included “Kristallnacht, book burnings, the concentration camps, preparations for war, and of course, the ‘Final Solution’” (Grenier 3). However absurd it may sound, Riefenstahl denies “any of her work was propaganda”. As Riefenstahl states in Muller’s documentary in 1993, “not a single scene is staged. Everything is genuine. And there is no tendentious commentary for the simple reason that there is no commentary at all. It is history — pure history”. However, Riefenstahl’s insistence on “pure history” is a lie, considering that many of the political speeches were re-filmed afterwards in a studio. She also stated that she constantly tried to change Hitler’s view of the Jews, but that he refused to talk about the subject with her. To today’s readers, the mental image of Riefenstahl attempting to talk

Hitler out of his hatred and prejudices seems like a futile effort; however, she might have believed her influence could change the opinions of such a hardheaded man (Grenier 5). In regards to her guilt, as well as the culpability of other directors, such as Veit Harlan, clearly the directors' relationship with Hitler is not the issue in question, but rather their role as prominent propagandists for the Third Reich. The Allies accused Riefenstahl of actual participation and arrested her in 1945 for possible involvement in Nazi crimes. After ongoing trials from 1948 until 1952, Riefenstahl was acquitted of all charges, and the Allies declared "no political activity in support of the Nazi regime which would warrant punishment" (Sontag 4). Nonetheless, in the eyes of many, her reputation was forever damaged, and despite her strenuous attempts to the contrary, her name will most likely always be associated with fascism.

Viewers of *Triumph des Willens* witness the Nuremberg Rally through the seemingly omniscient eye of the camera lens. With cameras strategically placed throughout the Rally grounds, Riefenstahl had full access to virtually everything that took place. From close-ups of children's enraptured expressions to the rarely captured smile on Hitler's face, the camera provides the very best panoramic viewpoints. Through use of cropping, editing, montage and various camera angles, Riefenstahl filmed and combined these images, exhibiting only the most powerful and moving shots. Even a Hitler supporter present at the Rally could in actuality watch the film afterwards and experience a quite different event. Whereas an individual is limited to his or her unique perspective, the camera lens captures a broad range of perspectives. With such power, film can potentially manipulate an event to the fullest. For instance, during one isolated shot of Hitler, Riefenstahl skillfully positions the camera underneath Hitler with clouds and blue

sky in the background, so that he appears enormous and god-like. The film starts out with Hitler in a plane, soaring through the clouds as he descends upon the people. Actually situated on a plane, the camera reveals the perspective of a god, mightier than life, looking down at his people as he magnificently lowers from the heavens. As Hitler greets the crowds, a woman excitedly rushes over to the Führer with her small child, in order to be touched by the exalted leader.

Triumph des Willens drastically alters relations of time and space, providing for a simultaneous, collective experience. Different spaces, such as the “individual, the mass, the nation, and different spaces of time are seamlessly mapped onto each other, closing and centering around the Führer” (Pold 26). In *Triumph des Willens*, Riefenstahl structures space by alternating shots of extreme close-ups with images of the masses. The multitude shares at least one aspect. Face upon face exudes pure, almost orgasmic bliss, as if witness to some incredible and exclusive religious awakening. Such was the powerful, mesmerizing effect of Hitler upon the masses. To an outsider, the experience appears decisively surreal. Riefenstahl herself encountered a stupefying feeling of wonderment her first time in Hitler’s presence. Grenier recounts her recollection of having

an almost apocalyptic vision [she] was never able to forget. It seemed as if the earth’s surface were spreading out in front of [her], like a hemisphere that suddenly splits apart in the middle, spewing out an enormous jet of water, so powerful that it touched the sky and shook the earth. [She] felt quite paralyzed. Although there was a great deal in his speech that [she] didn’t understand, [she] was still fascinated, and [she] sensed that the audience was in bondage to this man (2).

. After a few idyllic night scenes of the old city of Nuremberg, the film turns to the following morning, where thousands of tents are stretched out on a field. The camera

moves in on soldiers, young boys, washing and shaving, splashing and laughing. A play-wrestling match breaks out, much to the delight of the young onlookers. The mood is friendly and blithe, yet one senses an overbearing excitement and frenzy. The Führer is coming! The audience too has a strong intuition of something momentous forthcoming. Finally, after much suspense, Hitler arrives, intentionally late as usual, thereby increasing the anxiousness of the spectators. As Hitler addresses the crowd, they linger upon his every word.

Aesthetics of Face: Individual and Collective

Discussing fascist aspects of the face and how it oftentimes reveals a sense of collectivity, contemporary literary critic Gerhard Richter addresses Walter Benjamin's proposal that the

face, in which the masses can see themselves mimetically reflected as if in a hyper real simulation, is mediated by certain technological structures. This technical mediation of the fascist face creates for the masses the illusionary simulacrum of seeing themselves reflected and identified in everyone, and the public productions and aesthetic disseminations of Nazi ideology become the very locus of a Volk's essence or identity (4).

Accordingly, propaganda, especially through film, gave the masses an opportunity to find a sense of national identity and belonging. Indeed, though Nazi propaganda advertised Hitler as an extraordinary, god-like figure, it concurrently surrounded his appearance with typical German qualities, with which all Germans at that time could arguably identify to some extent. One propagandist mission of the Nazi regime, most consummately implemented by Riefenstahl, was to convey an exclusive collectiveness, a sense of oneness among the German people. Though their unequaled leader, Hitler too was a part of the German race, and thus a member of this privileged people. This sense of collectiveness is also visible in *Jud Süß*, when the entire people of Württemberg must

band together against the Jew Oppenheimer. However, the unity evident in *Jud Süß* differs from Riefenstahl's film, in that Germans in *Jud Süß* explicitly ban together against foreigners. As evident in *Triumph des Willens*, Riefenstahl possesses a brilliant filmic talent to bring all German people together visually, regardless of class, age or gender. In the propagandist documentary, in both close-up shots and long shots of the masses, the euphoric countenances of the Rally onlookers are strikingly alike. Regardless of political beliefs, the viewers become fascinated, serving as outsiders looking in on a seemingly privileged, undivided culture. Likewise, an impressive display of excitement, devotion and utter adoration is shown to their leader. The film, through use of these genuine-looking, mesmerized facial expressions, radiates happiness and laughter. The Hitler-loving masses could actually recognize these joyous countenances as their own. Hitler was well aware of the importance of the face, routinely practicing facial expressions in front of a mirror (Buck 39). *Triumph des Willens* entices Aryan viewers to support the Nazi Party and simultaneously enjoy a praiseworthy identity, and the film thus functions as fascist, or propagandist art, executed for the German masses.

Mass Manipulation through Film

Fascist art sought to glorify beauty rather than articulate defects. Intending to unify the masses, a race consisting of one pure, German blood, the Nazi Propaganda Ministry predetermined the acceptable reaction of the masses by using only footage that exemplified precisely the image of Aryan community. In the film, the Führer asks numerous individual soldiers to state their hometown. Although answers indicate places all over the country, from Bavaria and the Black Forest to Dresden, the intended, propagandist significance is unmistakable. The soldiers all share one crucial

characteristic: they are all German, pure and true. The Propaganda Ministry expected *Triumph's* viewers to behold the infatuated attitudes of the masses and likewise feel a stirring of German pride, a process similar to catching an infectious fever. To ensure capturing the best shots during filming, Riefenstahl enjoyed complete access to forty-nine camera operators, special camera positioning, and an airplane. Furthermore, she had the option of re-filming any speeches. Hence, Nazi leaders such as Streicher, Rosenberg and Hess re-pledged their oath to the Führer almost a month later, without Hitler's presence, on a studio set built by Speer (Sontag 4). Benjamin points out that "die Apparatur, die die Leistung des Filmdarstellers vor das Publikum bringt, ist nicht gehalten, diese Leistung als Totalität zu respektieren" (Benjamin 24). In other words, a film is by no means an uninterrupted whole but is composed of individual performances and ruptured moments in time and space.

By the end, Riefenstahl had in her possession over 60 hours of Rally material, which through much editing and re-filming she narrowed down to 107 minutes (Winston 4). The film portrays multiple "performances" of supposedly one, unaltered, historical event. Without question, Riefenstahl manipulated reality, portraying solely the most idolizing expressions of Hitler, editing out anything that did not serve the Nazi purpose of renewing the dedication of followers. Furthermore, due to the above mentioned film techniques as well as expert use of lighting, angles, zooming and other mechanisms external to the actual event, Riefenstahl's insistence on an authentic, unstirred reality proves untenable. A strong likelihood exists that Hitler, Speer, and Goebbels even staged the Rally's magnificent surroundings, aura and environment specifically for the filming (Richter 6).

Analyzing the potential brainwashing effects of cinema on the masses, Walter Benjamin stringently differentiates the method of viewing paintings or sculptures from the process of engagement and awareness of film. According to Benjamin, one sits in the cinema and absentmindedly watches as thousands of images float across the screen, each image capturing only a fraction of a second. Distracted, frenzied mass consumption, in the form of film, has taken the place of individual, intellectual artistic stimulation. Benjamin quotes Georges Duhamel, when he states about film, “I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving images” (Benjamin 238). Similarly, cinema in the Third Reich sought to indoctrinate the unsuspecting masses by consistently infiltrating films with Nazi ideology, subtly or otherwise. One can thus certainly describe *Triumph des Willens* as a hard-core propaganda film with few inconsistencies.

Walter Benjamin: Forewarning Fascism

In *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (1937) Benjamin envisions the potential dangers of using film as a medium for spreading fascism. His predictions are remarkably accurate in light of the Propaganda Ministry’s efforts at indoctrination. Benjamin foresees:

Alle Bemühungen um die Ästhetisierung der Politik gipfeln in einem Punkt. Dieser eine Punkt ist der Krieg. Der Krieg, und nur der Krieg, macht es möglich, Massenbewegungen größten Maßstabs unter Wahrung der überkommenen Eigentumsverhältnisse ein Ziel zu geben. So formuliert sich der Tatbestand von der Politik her. Von der Technik her formuliert er sich folgendermaßen: Nur der Krieg macht es möglich, die sämtlichen technischen Mittel der Gegenwart unter Wahrung der Eigentumsverhältnisse zu mobilisieren (Benjamin 42).

Indeed, Benjamin believes that fascism finds its ultimate solution in warfare, as an outlet of the tensions between “technological modernity and the denial of political emancipation” (Koepnick, *Walter Benjamin* 91). Elaborating on Benjamin’s views, Koepnick expands on Benjamin’s notion of fascist aesthetics, explaining how politics manipulates the cinema in order to control the masses. He asserts:

Fascist cinematography appeals to auratic experiences in order to truncate the democratic potential of film and the popular. Through its peculiar way of capturing monster rallies, fascist cinematography wants to freeze both its human referent and the spectator in the hopes of disempowering possible unrest and scrambling rational judgments. Like early photography, cinematic representation in fascism prompts model and spectator to grow into the picture rather than to appropriate it for the cause of political self-representation. In so doing, fascists hope at once to homogenize the masses and to prepare them for the next war, to utilize and exorcise castration anxiety, to administer death and masculine resurrection (*Walter Benjamin* 120-21).

Benjamin admonishes of the dangers of succumbing to any collective society, which represses the ideas and views of the individual. Such a society runs the severe risk of endangering any other non-member culture, which becomes clear in the mass extermination of the Jews during the Third Reich. Benjamin preaches against manipulating masses through the face and urges individuals to recoil. Elaborating on Benjamin’s urge to avoid a collective society, Richter relates the process to the termination of a drug addiction, where individuals must “withdraw from such addictive drugs as the concepts of mass community, the aestheticized political spectacle, and the desire to see oneself reflected in the production mechanisms of one’s culture” (5).

The main messages of the Rally consist of maintaining racial purity, building and uniting a stronger Germany, becoming the one and only party of Germany, and ironically, maintaining the peace. Hitler addresses his soldiers, ordering them “to be peace-loving

yet courageous” (*Triumph*). Incontestably, the latter’s false political front camouflages the true intentions of the power-hungry party and therefore illustrates Benjamin’s conception of the crowd’s “false face”. In his opinion, Richter notes, “the community is touched by an irreducible difference that prevents its members from achieving unity” (6). In other words, every culture will always have resisters and detractors, minority members, although *Triumph* fails to depict any such contention. Benjamin’s profound views against the new political functions of artwork signify his intentions to warn against fascism. Fascism, according to Benjamin, is the natural result of introducing aesthetics into the political arena.

What then, constitutes fascist aesthetics? Susan Sontag, an American essayist, novelist and activist, captures the essence of fascist aesthetics by characterizing it as a fascination with control, submissive behavior, and pain. Furthermore, she reveals that in fascism,

relations of domination and enslavement take the form of a characteristic pageantry, [evident in] the massing of groups of people, the turning of people into things, the multiplication or replication of things, and the grouping of people/things around an all-powerful, hypnotic leader-figure or force. Fascist art scorns realism in the name of idealism, and has a taste for the monumental and for mass obedience to the hero. Likewise, the rendering of movement in grandiose and rigid patterns is another element in common, for such choreography rehearses the very unity of the polity. The masses are made to take form, be design. Hence, mass athletic demonstrations, a choreographed display of bodies, are a valued activity (8).

In *Triumph des Willens*, the planned choreography of the overwhelming number of soldiers resembles a massive architectural structure. In one moment, Hitler, Himmler and Lutze, the new SA leader, walk down the long, wide pathway in the center of the Rally stadium. On both sides of the distinguished Nazi leaders, perfectly aligned soldiers form linear columns. When the soldiers march, they are all impeccably coordinated, moving

together as one unified body. They have memorized various phrases of praise to glorify their leaders, and together as a collective body, they determinedly shout out these rehearsed utterances. Not one soldier speaks out at the wrong moment. A large gap becomes clear between the Führer, their god-like leader, and the uniform masses. Both the soldiers and the crowd know nothing except to be faithful to Hitler, and they are mesmerized by his every word. One people, one leader, and one nation are the recurrent themes throughout the speeches. Hitler is portrayed as a god-like figure whom the masses worship and look up to for leadership and commands.

Goebbels and the Propaganda Ministry used communication technologies, such as film, to manipulate the masses. Ironically, “in well-choreographed public liturgies, [such as *Triumph des Willens*], individuals experience a joyful relativity of position and partake in delusive images of equality, yet fail to realize that in doing so they are pressed even harder into the patterns of actual subordination and coordination”, allowing themselves to become more controlled and hypnotized by the Führer (Koepnick, *Walter Benjamin* 70). Moreover, Goebbels produced a semiautobiographical book involving the protagonist Michael, in which he “maintains that political leadership is the most distinguished of all aesthetic practices”, and that “it is in the realm of political action that men’s formative energies accomplish their most impressive results”. Michael insists that “art expresses the will to form and control, and thus the will to power” (Koepnick, *Walter Benjamin* 84). Goebbels’ novel was yet another propagandist attempt to achieve a sense of collectiveness among the masses, as well as to veil political action through aesthetics. In an interesting moment in *Triumph des Willens*, Goebbels addresses the crowd, stating that it is better to win the hearts of the masses through propaganda than to use force through

guns. His statement strikes the viewer as bizarre, considering the Nazis consistently used force and violence from the beginning.

In conclusion, Walter Benjamin discusses implications and social consequences of the rise of mass media and reproduction technologies, as well as how one can manipulate mass-produced art for political purposes, most evident in Leni Riefenstahl's hard-core propagandist masterpiece, *Triumph des Willens*. As predicted by Benjamin, Third Reich propaganda envisioned film as a way for the masses to see themselves and share a simultaneous, collective experience. His warnings and fears of fascism become almost eerie in light of the unimaginable crimes committed shortly afterwards in the name of National Socialism. Containing few if any inconsistencies, *Triumph des Willens* performs and perpetuates Third Reich ideology and therefore serves as a model for a hard-core propaganda film.

CHAPTER THREE

JUD SÜß AND DER EWIGE JUDE: THE JEWISH PROBLEM

Although a popular entertainment film, Veit Harlan's Nazi film *Jud Süß* manifests a brutal portrayal of the horror and disgust supposedly instilled by the Jewish people, a concept also addressed in the most blatantly anti-Semitic film created, the state-commissioned *Der ewige Jude*. Relatively few contradictions regarding Nazi ideology exist in this film, and therefore, *Jud Süß* must be labeled hard-core propaganda. When the Allied Commission reviewed the Nazi films after the war, they declared that *Der ewige Jude* was "one of the most striking examples of direct Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda, probably the vilest and subtlest of its kind ever made for popular consumption by the masses" (Welch 252). Many themes addressed in the film, including but not limited to the wandering Jew and the kosher slaughter of animals, appeared in strikingly similar discourse in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. An alarming amount of *Der ewige Jude*'s abhorrent themes against Jews is brought to life onscreen in *Jud Süß*. The infamous film elicits nauseating feelings of repulsion and mistrust towards Jews. Furthermore, the film fights to preserve the sacred racial purity of the Aryan blood. Like all Nazi films, the target audience consists of purebred Aryan viewers. An anti-Semitic film, *Jud Süß* "brought disgrace and worse on almost everyone connected with it, and was in the public limelight when it became the central exhibit in Veit Harlan's postwar trial for crimes against humanity" (Hull 160).

Inherent Contradictions Among Head Nazi Officials

Distinct contradictions are visible at every level of Nazi ideology concerning film. The amount of inconsistencies serves as a guide to labeling a film as soft or hard-core propaganda in this thesis. Contrary to the stricter, more uniform censorship of 'higher' forms of art, such as paintings and books, inconsistencies within films concerning Nazi convictions appear throughout and commence with the highest of Nazi officials, Hitler and Goebbels. The two men held exorbitantly different opinions of the most effective way to produce propaganda films. Goebbels was steadfastly opposed to overtly hard-core propaganda films such as *Der ewige Jude* and *Triumph des Willens*. He felt that propaganda becomes most effective when the audience cannot automatically identify the film as such. Goebbels stated, as cited by Jochen Vogler:

Nicht das ist die beste Propaganda, bei der die eigentlichen Elemente der Propaganda immer sichtbar zutage treten, sondern das ist die beste Propaganda, die sozusagen unsichtbar wirkt, das ganze öffentliche Leben durchdringt, ohne daß das öffentliche Leben überhaupt von der Initiative der Propaganda irgend eine Kenntnis hat (*Arbeiterfotographie*).

Correspondingly, according to Petley, Goebbels believed that one must “educate without revealing the purpose of the education, so that one fulfils an educational function without the object of that education being in any way aware that it is being educated, which is also indeed the purpose of propaganda” (101). However, if propaganda simply “stay[s] in the background and appear[s] to people only as storyline, action or side-effect[s]”, then one has accomplished the intended effect and the propaganda has become effective (101).

Hitler, on the other hand, postulated the exact opposite throughout his reign of terror. In a conversation with the actress Tony van Eyck, Hitler reveals his belief that one should never attempt to deceive the public by “hiding [political propaganda] under the

guise of art” (Welch 37). Unlike Goebbels, Hitler argued that in order for propaganda to be effective, the public must be entirely aware of the propagandist nature, for the intelligence of the masses, in his opinion, is quite limited. Concealing propaganda films under the false genre of entertainment confuses the intellectually challenged masses. Hitler demands that films should be strictly separated into either art or politics. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler writes:

An wen hat sich die Propaganda zu wenden? An die wissenschaftliche Intelligenz oder an die weniger gebildete Masse? Sie hat sich ewig nur an die Masse zu richten!...Jede Propaganda hat volkstümlich zu sein und ihr geistiges Niveau einzustellen nach der Aufnahmefähigkeit des Beschränktesten unter denen, an die sie sich zu richten gedenkt. Damit wird ihre rein geistige Höhe um so tiefer zu stellen sein, je größer die zu erfassende Masse der Menschen sein soll. Handelt es sich aber, wie bei der Propaganda für die Durchhaltung eines Krieges, darum, ein ganzes Volk in ihren Wirkungsbereich zu ziehen, so kann die Vorsicht bei Vermeidung zu hoher geistiger Voraussetzungen gar nicht groß sein...Die Aufnahmefähigkeit der großen Masse ist nur sehr beschränkt, das Verständnis klein, dafür jedoch die Vergeßlichkeit groß. Aus diesen Tatsachen heraus hat sich jede wirkungsvolle Propaganda auf nur sehr wenige Punkte zu beschränken und diese schlagwortartig so lange zu verwerten, bis auch bestimmt der Letzte unter einem solchen Worte das Gewollte sich vorzustellen vermag. Sowie man diesen Grundsatz opfert und vielseitig werden will, wird man die Wirkung zum Zerflattern bringen, da die Menge den gebotenen Stoff weder zu verdauen noch zu behalten vermag. Damit aber wird das Ergebnis wieder abgeschwächt und endlich aufgehoben. Je größer so die Linie ihrer Darstellung zu sein hat, um so psychologisch richtiger muß die Feststellung ihrer Taktik sein (196-198).

Thus Hitler reiterates his belief that the greater the intended audience, the lower the intellectual level. During the Third Reich, when film propaganda was used as a tool to influence all Aryan Germans, the political messages needed to be spoken in clear terms. Therefore, the films I have labeled soft-core propaganda would not be Hitler’s ideal medium. Instead, he admired the abilities of hard-core propaganda films, which have uncomplicated messages and few inconsistencies.

The disagreements between Hitler and Goebbels are just the beginning of a long line of National Socialist inconsistencies concerning cinema. A remarkable contrast between *Jud Süß* and other hard-core propaganda films supervised and ultimately approved by Goebbels is that this film was a box office hit during the Third Reich and was hailed for its entertainment and historical value. Produced to prepare the public for the Final Solution, the film elaborates on the racial claims of Jewish hatred evident in *Der ewige Jude*. Furthermore, the film features German stars, most notably Ferdinand Marian, whom moviegoers idolized (Schulte-Sasse, “Courtier”184). Central to National Socialism’s weltanschauung is the proclamation of Aryans as the chosen race, critically defined by their exclusive relationship to outsiders, the so-called condemned members of society, first and foremost the Jews. The Aryan race can only be such defined when compared to the Other. Indeed, “the self-construction of any group is affected by the discourses and images by which others define it” (185). Without the easy target of the Jews as the necessary Other, Nazi doctrine could not have survived as such. The Third Reich required a supposedly inferior group to brand, in order to praise their own master race. Therefore, in a rather uncanny sense, the Nazis needed the Jews to form their own identity, and had the Nazis succeeded and wiped the entire population clean of their Jewish scapegoats, they “would have deprived itself of the necessary Other. Either that state would have totally reconstituted itself, or would have had the daunting task of generating an Other to replace the Jews” (213). The fact that the Nazis necessitated the very people they were murdering by the millions in order to form their own, pure, Aryan identity, remains a crucial irony.

18th Century Bourgeois Tragedy/ *Jud Süß* Similarities

Jud Süß utilizes particular bourgeois traditions of trying to elevate social standing in an oppressive society grounded in rigid structures. The 18th century bourgeoisie lacked what the aristocracy flaunted, namely wealth, land, and property. Hence, it could claim superiority only in categories of morality and virtue. Such tensions between two essentially differing groups survived throughout the 19th and 20th centuries and reemerged in the Third Reich. The Nazis appropriated this discourse, not originally meant to be anti-Semitic, but rather anti-nobility. The Nazis avowed a similitude of praiseworthy bourgeois virtues and ascribed to the Jews certain condemnable aristocratic characteristics.

Linda Schulte-Sasse articulates the notion of the 18th century revolving around “two competing value systems: one whose central signifier is (bourgeois) virtue and another centered around an aristocratic notion of power” (“Courtier” 187). Associated with such negative traits as materialism, personal glory, revenge and discourtesy towards women, the aristocracy is strikingly similar to the Jewish culture depicted in *Jud Süß*. Schulte-Sasse asserts that, by contrast, bourgeois society bears a strong resemblance to that of the supposed Aryan culture, namely virtues of humanity, kindness, forgiveness and honesty (188). Nazi Aryans consider the Jew the violator of social harmony, which is evident throughout *Jud Süß*, immediately following the protagonist’s arrival in Stuttgart. By acting as the sexual predator, physically abusing and raping the helpless Dorothea, a symbol for Aryan purity, Süß conducts himself more according to aristocratic/courtly principles of treating “women as sexual objects”, than to bourgeois notions of women as “domestic, virtuous” and worthy of utmost respect (188-89). The perpetrator of evil, Süß-

Oppenheimer embraces the common “aristocrat’s attempt to seduce a virtuous bourgeois woman” as well as the endeavor to victimize the entire people of Württemberg (188). The film parallels the binary forces of aristocracy versus bourgeoisie by replacing the aristocratic antagonist with the Jew and substituting Aryan for bourgeois. In fact, originating from the 18th century’s notion of bourgeois tragedy, a categorization of the film’s opposing forces materializes as follows:

Table II. Social Coding in *Jud Süß* (“Courtier” 193)

<u>“Jewish” Culture</u>		<u>Württemberg (“Aryan” Culture)</u>	
	<u>Court</u>		<u>Burger</u>
Süß	→ Duke Karl Alexander		Sturm
Secretary Levy	Duchess		Dorothea
Rabbi Loew	Süß’s mistress		Faber
Butcher Isaak	Ballerina		v. Röder (soldier)
Old man	v. Remchingen		Miller
Rebecca			Blacksmith Hans Bogner
Masses			Fiebelkorn family

However, unlike the consistent categorization evident in the bourgeois/aristocratic opposition, the conceptualization of the Jews according to National Socialism was intrinsically contradictory. The Third Reich classified the Jew as “both rich *and* dirty, intellectual *and* vermin, impotent *and* licentious, communist *and* capitalist, etc” (185). Secret police reports in Nuremberg revealed that Aryan audiences found Süß’s character along with the entire production “horrible *and* authentic, fantastic *yet* real” (Rentschler, *Ministry Illusion* 155). The Propaganda Ministry, fully aware of the inconsistencies concerning the ‘typical’ Jewish appearance, repeatedly admonished the public concerning

the contradictory nature of the Jews. Quoting Marc Ferro, Rentschler notes that “the Jew has two faces: his ghetto face (which does not lie about his subhuman nature) and his city face (which is no less harmful despite its deceptive appearance)” (159).

Jud Süß epitomizes the “two faces” of the Jew. Süß-Oppenheimer disguises his Jewish qualities upon arrival in Stuttgart, switching his Jewish accent to a more refined speech, complete with French vocabulary and dressing in fine clothing. As a result, Süß oftentimes looks more noble, cultured and “non-Jewish” than the Duke himself.

However, despite the extreme makeover, Faber manages to identify him as a Jew, and he scolds Dorothea for bringing a Jew into their home. Thus, no matter how relentless the Nazi endeavor to indoctrinate the public into envisioning the Jew as a specific, despicable, identifiable sub-human, the fact remains that one cannot simply stereotype the outward physical appearance into a consistent model. Taken out of the context of a Jewish ghetto, shaved clean and assimilated into society, a Jew can oftentimes ‘pass’ as a non-Jew, even to the most expertly trained eyes. This realization becomes a great paradox within National Socialist ideology. The narrator of *Der ewige Jude* explicitly warns of this danger of Jewish disguise by stating:

Es ist ein wesentliches Charaktermerkmal des Juden, dass er immer bestrebt ist, seine Abstammung zu verbergen, wenn er sich unter Nichtjuden bewegt... Peies und Bart, Kappe und Kaftan kennzeichnen den Ostjuden für jedermann. Legt er sie ab, so erkennen nur schärfer blickende Menschen seine rassische Herkunft.

“In wanting desperately to make the Jew an ‘Other,’ to make him fit the fantasy, [National Socialism] has few options outside its own narrative culture in which to do so. Consequently, it keeps making him act like a ‘bad’ Aryan, while finding ways to equate this behavior with something called ‘Jewishness’” (Schulte-Sasse, “Courtier” 192).

Incidentally, to retain a touch of authenticity in a heavily distorted historical film, Harlan

utilized 120 Jews from the Lublin ghetto in Poland as casting extras, although the press was strictly forbidden to mention his action (Welch 240). Nazi culture often ignores the irony that many Jews can effortlessly pass as Aryan, just as pure Aryans can be falsely stereotyped as Jewish. Take the German actor Ferdinand Marian and his remarkable ability to portray the notorious Jew Süß as a prime example. Baskets of love letters written to Marian prove that German women found him quite desirable in his representation of the dark, forbidden erotic. However, this representation “contradicts the normal coding of the Jewish man in Nazi films as ludicrous and repulsive” (Schulte-Sasse, “Courtier” 207). Of course, Harlan had no choice other than to cast an Aryan, such as Marian, as the leading Jew, since Nazi law forbade Jews from starring roles; however, in comparison to the other ghetto Jews the viewers get to see, Marian appears handsome and in stark contrast. Importantly, no Aryan protagonist serves as Marian’s direct counterpart, implying that “no individual is his equal and only as a group do the citizens of Stuttgart defeat him” (207). The National Socialist notion of a collective group reminds one of the ordered, unified masses depicted in *Triumph des Willens*.

Another fundamental opposition constructed between the Aryan and Jewish races concerns the traditional stereotypes of Jewish work ethics. The narrator of *Der ewige Jude* explains that around 1918 the Jews seized their chance to rise to international power. Furthermore, he continues:

Während Millionen des eingessessenen deutschen Volkes in Arbeitslosigkeit und Elend gerieten, gelangten zugewanderte Juden in wenigen Jahren zu phantastischen Reichtümern - nicht durch ehrliche Arbeit, sondern durch Wucher, Gaunerei und Betrug.

Labeling the Jews as a plague threatening the health of the German people, the narrator then assures the audience that the Jews have always behaved in such a manner.

Similarly, in *Jud Süß* Harlan juxtaposes a blacksmith and a miller, both of whom are hard-working Aryans producing useful necessities. Conversely, one glimpses Jews in the filthy ghettos that produce nothing worthwhile and are portrayed as lazy, swindling, fraudulent creatures. The film depicts Süß-Oppenheimer as a greedy, money-hoarding Jew, who also reveres and strives for the aristocratic notions of power and personal glory. He manipulates the Duke by flashing his vast assortment of jewels, all hidden in an enormous chest. As briefly mentioned above, aristocratic ideas of power and personal gain were fabricated as correlating with those of the Jews, and in *Jud Süß*, Harlan distinguishes between images of honest, moral-driven Aryans with those of stingy, crafty Jews.

Anti-Semitism: The Wandering Jew

Slowly moving across the screen during the initial scene of *Der ewige Jude*, German script imparts the main objective:

Die zivilisierten Juden, welche wir aus Deutschland kennen, geben uns nur ein unvollkommenes Bild ihrer rassischen Eigenart. Dieser Film zeigt Original-Aufnahmen aus den polnischen Ghettos, er zeigt uns die Juden, wie sie in Wirklichkeit aussehen, bevor sie sich hinter der Maske des zivilisierten Europäers verstecken.

Goebbels focused on the preconception of the wandering Jew as a direct contrast to the German people's extreme love and deep respect of their Heimat. The Jews, depicted by the Nazis as despicable, unrelenting parasites, were portrayed to the Aryan public as constantly on the move, causing trouble wherever they travel and without a genuine place to call their home. Welch explains that "the concept of the 'eternal or wandering Jew' is older than National Socialism; it derived from the Christian legend of Ahasver, a Jew who prevented Jesus from resting while he was carrying the cross. Since then, according

to the legend, as punishment he has had to travel the world without the release of death” (245). The two openly hostile anti-Semitic films, *Jud Süß* and *Der ewige Jude*, prey upon such prejudices and attempt to typecast all Jews as the same everywhere, whose “Heimatlosigkeit ist selbstgewählt und entspricht ihrer ganzen Geschichte (*Der ewige Jude*). Close-ups of the Jewish ghettos depict utter filth, unworthy as a German home. Furthermore, *Der ewige Jude* focuses on the history of the migratory traits of the Jews, who historically spread across the entire Mediterranean, making themselves unwelcome. The film then likens the Jews to rats and the earlier rat migration to the Jewish wandering, a comparison that persists in the Nazi Regime. The film recalls the mid-18th century migration of rats from Asia throughout Europe, and how in the 19th century, with growing ship traffic, these filthy rats took possession of America and the far East. *Der ewige Jude* warns that „Wo Ratten auch auftauchen, tragen sie Vernichtung ins Land, zerstören sie menschliche Güter und Nahrungsmittel. Auf diese Weise verbreiten sie (die Ratten) Krankheiten, Pest, Lepra, Typhus, Cholera, Ruhr u.s.w.” Jews equivalently introduce their own forms of disease, specifically those of gambling, as well as dealings in prostitution and international crime organizations. In fact, the film claims that Jews account for a striking 82% of international crime, and „die Fachausdrücke des internationalen Gauner- und Verbrecherjargons stammen nicht ohne Grund aus dem Hebräischen und Jiddischen“ (*Der ewige Jude*).

These Nazi accusations against the Jews are further elucidated in *Jud Süß*. This time they emerge in a historical depiction of Württemberg, where the theme of damages caused by the wandering Jew became semi-factual. Harlan’s production stays at best very loosely with the actual facts of the real-life Joseph Süß-Oppenheimer, even though the

director claims the script to be “based on an exact study of the trial protocol in the Württemberg State Archive” (Schulte-Sasse, “Courtier” 186). The leitmotiv of the wandering Jew, who intentionally conceals his appearance in order to fit into a certain society and intentionally wreaks havoc in an otherwise peaceful area, emerges quite successfully in Ferdinand Marian’s character. The film initially depicts Süß as a stereotypical, conspicuous Jew. However, the audience watches as he shaves his beard, cuts his hair and removes his revealing Jewish cap, in order to appear as non-Jewish as possible, with the goal of deceiving the German people and lifting the current ban in Stuttgart against Jews entering the city. Along his journey, his carriage overturns just as the lovely Dorothea, played by Swedish actress Kristina Söderbaum, comes along and offers him to accompany her on the one-hour ride to Stuttgart. When Dorothea asks him about his home, he replies that he is from all over the world, which she finds impossible and quite perplexing. She exclaims that he must come from somewhere. Directly in line with National Socialist claims, Jew Süß causes immeasurable pain and heartache, maliciously pitting the greedy Duke of Württemberg against his people. Tempting the Duke with jewels and other materialistic goods, Oppenheimer successfully achieves his goal. Appointed the Duke’s financial advisor, he soon afterwards convinces the Duke to lift the ban on Jews. The people are in an uproar as Süß heavily taxes all of the gates, bridges and roads, creating severe financial distress for Württemberg’s citizens.

During one scene, a kosher butcher clad in a bloody apron and holding a knife walks the streets of the Jewish ghetto, invoking gruesome slaughter images from *Der ewige Jude*. Before depicting such extreme violence and gore, the narrator states that “wichtiger als alle Einwände ist, daß unser Volk die Wahrheit über das Judentum

erkennt". He then warns the viewers in a text that appears onscreen: "Empfindlichen Volksgenossen wird empfohlen, die jetzt folgenden Bilder nicht anzusehen". Merciless slaughter scenes then reveal to Aryan audiences the "torturous form of slaughter" practiced by Jews, demonstrating "no love of animals in the Germanic sense" (Hull 173). Simultaneously, the narrator discloses that „die jüdischen Gesetzbücher haben für Überlegungen, die aus der germanischen Achtung und Liebe zum Tier stammen, keinen Sinn. Sie verbieten sogar, den Qualen des sterbenden Tieres vorzeitig ein Ende zu machen“. In a plea to forbid such forms of slaughter, the narrator proudly informs viewers that National Socialism moves to forbid such practices. He refers to a proclamation made by Hitler when he "assumed power in 1933 [and] prohibited this form of slaughter and directed that all warm-blooded animals should be given an anesthetic" (Welch 251). In reality, the butcher scene is a "particularly vile misrepresentation, since in fact Jewish slaughtering methods are no more inhumane than those used in nonritual establishments" and thus another blatant contortion of reality (Hull 173).

Eventually, the Jew Oppenheimer rapes the newly married Dorothea, the prominent Estate-Counselor Sturm's beloved and overprotected daughter, leading her to desperately jump into a lake and commit suicide, seeing how her pure Aryan blood has been infected with that of a Jew. This being the last straw in a series of insults, the people plan a revolt against the Jew he befriended, yet before contrivance is completed, the Duke dies of a presumed heart attack, and Süß loses his only protector. Although charged with blackmail, treason and immorality, his far greatest crime involves his forced intimacy with Dorothea, for if a Jew has sexual relations with a Christian woman, Aryan law states he will be publicly hanged and shown as an example for all. Süß-Oppenheimer dies

claiming he was only acting in loyalty to the Duke, and pleads that he must not be held responsible if the Duke was a traitor. Fully exposed once again as a ‘typical’ Jew by way of costume and hair, he screams up until his last breath that he is just a poor, falsely accused Jew. After his death, all Jews are ordered to leave within three days, so that the blood of future Aryan generations remains pure. The film makes explicit that Jews are entirely and solely responsible for the hostile discord that has arisen in Stuttgart. Goebbels goes to great length to ensure the intended reception, to the point of “instruct[ing] the press on how they were to interpret such scenes” (Welch 243). He determinedly advises the press, “It is the duty of all newspapers to point out this typically Jewish trait and to take the opportunity of the film’s premiere to impress on our people, with perhaps other examples as well, the message that every Jew has only his well-being and that of his racial brothers in mind, even when he pretends generous motives” (243).

Accordingly, Süß-Oppenheimer’s supposed good intentions regarding the Duke, complete with generosity of exquisite jewels and enormous sums of money to finance an opera and a ballet, soon show their true motivations. The Jew only ‘pretends’ to help the Duke, while in practice manipulating and misleading him. Süß-Oppenheimer has but one goal, which he declares in a beginning scene. He intends to sink to whatever level necessary, in order to finally open the city gates to his people. Regarding the film’s intended use as a means to further the elimination and total destruction of all Jews, “the last scene where Süß-Oppenheimer is hanged provides the justification for the evacuation of the Jews from Germany in 1940” (243).

Empirical research has shown the devastating effects of the film and its contributions to the level of racism in Nazi Germany (Rentschler, *Ministry of Illusion*

165). Spectators viewing *Jud Süß* and *Der ewige Jude* arguably took away a heightened sense of German pride and a growing dislike for Jews. Such effects were crucial in regards to Hitler's mission to dominate the world with a pure, German race. Goebbels and the propaganda ministry released *Jud Süß* in particular, as well as a few other hard-core anti-Semitic productions, as a means of preparing the masses for the pending Final Solution. Filled with stereotypical undertones, "it was shown to the non-Jewish population when the Jews were about to be deported. Concentration camp guards saw it. And at the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt former SS Rottenführer Stefan Baretzki admitted that the effect of showing the film was to instigate maltreatment of prisoners" (165). The impact of *Jud Süß* on German teenagers alone was enormous, exacerbating Jewish hatred. In Vienna, "an old Jewish man was trampled to death on a public street by a Hitler Youth band which had just seen the film" (Hull 169-170). Although hard-core propaganda films cannot indoctrinate an entire people, Goebbels was remarkably successful in influencing to some degree a great majority of the citizens of the Third Reich.

CHAPTER FOUR

GUISE AND THE GENRE: ENTERTAINMENT FILMS

As posited in the introduction, the relationship between inconsistencies and soft-core propaganda is proportional. Thus, the subsequent chapters probe three popular films for inconsistencies. A recurring contradiction involves the expectations, desires and restrictions of German women. One female Aryan survivor, who lived in Salzburg during World War II, shares her memories of how she worshipped the ultimate film diva, Zarah Leander, and how she constantly imitated Leander's style of dress and attitude. She maintains she was aware of the visible contradictions between the propagated 'ideal' German woman and some popular female stars. In fact, she recalls when she was required to undergo a medical examination, she removed her nail polish and lipstick and put on her mother's dress, almost five sizes too large. Wearing her hair in a braided ponytail, she assumed the role of the ideal German woman, which she assures was the safest way to arrive for her exam. As this personal anecdote illustrates, Nazi propaganda films, as well as Nazi society itself, were filled with inconsistencies and contradictions. For example, a central contradiction existed between the images of the ideal German woman and the idolized female cinema star, as many female stars represented the opposite of the Nazi ideal. Glamorous, independent and career-oriented, these women stood apart from Hitler's description of the natural-looking, family-oriented ideal woman, yet these film stars were highly visible for German women and fashioned to be idolized. Despite censorship, Third Reich films were inconsistent in their portrayal of the proclaimed ideals of National Socialist society. The following soft-core propaganda films, *Zu neuen Ufern*

(Sierck 1937), *Die große Liebe* (Hansen 1942), and *Die goldene Stadt* (Harlan 1942) represent women who defy in various ways the Nazi archetypal female traits. However, all of these women eventually either come to terms with their obligations in a fascist nation and succumb to a restrictive lifestyle in the midst of a patriarchal society, or they accept punishment for their deviation. Typically, female stars during the Third Reich portrayed two types of women's roles. The first type, as exemplified in *Die goldene Stadt*, involves a scenario where a young, inexperienced woman leaves her small town to embark on an exciting journey to the unknown, hoping to discover her identity; however, after a short period, she either adopts the role of wife and mother or is punished for her defiance. The second category involves career women, who must either sacrifice their work for the interest of family life, such as *Zu neuen Ufern*, or for the greater good of society, as in *Die große Liebe*. Considering the fact that 70 % of all moviegoers during the Third Reich were women, due to the obvious reason that men were fighting at the front, Goebbels recognized the need to provide an outlet for the understandable agitation and worry suffered by these women (Welch 183). Furthermore, although Hitler and his regime stated that the principle objectives of women are to marry and give birth to German babies, Hitler and his mistress of several years, Eva Braun, never married until the day before his death, and Hitler perpetually hid her from all but closest friends. Likening his image to that of a male movie star, Hitler believed that his followers, especially women, would stop seeing him as an idolized yet conceivably attainable, single icon and instead view him as taken and thereby less desirable. Besides, he maintained that he already was married to Germany, and that taking another bride would be unfair. He had time only for the *Heimat*. However, as briefly mentioned, for all other

women, with the exception of Eva, Hitler “upheld matrimony and motherhood as the singular goal of fascist maidenhood”, claiming that women’s “particular value was to be found solely in the ‘maintenance of [Aryan] blood and in the proliferation of race’” (Ascheid 23). Although limiting women’s rights in many ways, for instance by forcing all married women doctors and civil servants to give up their jobs, Hitler did publicly honor all women who presented Germany with Aryan children, even “pronounc[ing] that [women’s] suffering in childbirth equaled that of the soldier’s in battle, and for that she received her own holiday, *Muttertag*, and her own medal of honor, the *Mutterkreuz*, received for having four children or more” (Ascheid 25-6). Decidedly, women provided an important contribution to the war effort, yet Nazi cinema sought to contain these women through onscreen examples. Women’s roles represent a crucial inconsistency in Nazi ideology, and soft-core propaganda films serve as a valve for contradictory desires as well as a medium of entertainment. In reality, the Nazis condemned careers and a sense of independence among women. However, as an outlet and vehicle for female dreams, aspirations and longings, the following films provided German women with a fantasy world.

This paper examines the systemic antagonisms of women’s roles, namely how they were rooted in contradiction between women’s desires and the social and political spaces the Third Reich provided for them. Analyzing the films *Die große Liebe*, *Zu neuen Ufern* and *Die goldene Stadt*, this thesis will view them as examples of soft-core propaganda films and discuss the numerous inconsistencies and contradictions regarding Nazi ideology evident within these popular films.

CHAPTER FIVE

ZU NEUEN UFERN AND ZARAH LEANDER: THE ULTIMATE CONTRADICTION

Swedish actress Zarah Leander's *Zu neuen Ufern* emblemizes crucial and far-reaching principles underlying the core beliefs of the Nazi party. Although under the pretense of a harmless, non-ideological entertainment film, close analysis reveals the portrayal of core Nazi indoctrination, albeit in contradictory fashion. Concurrent with the aim of this thesis, the extensive level of inconsistencies apparent throughout the film leads one to classify *Zu neuen Ufern* as soft-core propaganda. Adolf Hitler greatly despised Leander, exclaiming that she symbolized everything a German woman must strive to avoid, and his "disapproval of Leander surfaced in his persistent refusal to sign her repeated application to be awarded the honorary title 'actress of the state'" (Ascheid 160). According to Rentschler, "Leander challenged Nazi prudery; her frank eroticism brought the German women a sexual self-understanding beyond that of domestic slave and deferent spouse. The Nazis could not prevent her success, but they never really welcomed it. They would have preferred a virtuous German woman to be their most celebrated heroine" (*Ministry of Illusion* 128). Vivacious, erotic and with paramount sex appeal, Zarah Leander openly contradicted the model German womanly virtues of innocence, purity, self-sacrifice, homeliness and above all, the role of perfect wife and mother to German children. The realization that the seductive actress enjoyed enormous star success in Nazi Germany signifies yet another unanticipated discrepancy in a supposedly strict, invariable society, where magazine ads featured young, healthy, athletic-looking, non-makeup wearing, blond haired, blue eyed ideal German beauties,

oftentimes observed cooking in the kitchen or mothering precious German babies.

Leander, on the contrary, emanated dark, mysterious, non-German features, which one could associate with forbidden Jewish characteristics. “Was Zarah in the cinema not also sensual, threatening, wealthy, lascivious, elegant, [and] exploitative, all that, which was said of the ‘Jewish world plague’ at the time?” (Ascheid 159). Incredibly, such a woman did enjoy startling success, starring in ten Nazi productions (Ascheid 158). She routinely performed concerts with sensuous song and provocative dance during the Third Reich. In an era when women’s role consisted solely of “the three big K’s of the good old days: *Küche*, *Kirche*, *Kinder*”, Leander stunned Nazi German society with her independence and style (Rentschler *Ministry of Illusion* 144).

Antje Ascheid, a contemporary Third Reich film scholar, argues for a differentiated view of the various forms of Nazi filmmaking and concentrates on popular cinematic entertainment as a site of cultural, social and political inconsistencies and contradictions between Nazi ideology and people’s realities. She addresses the perplexing paradigm of inconsistencies:

Hence, the very presence and immense popularity of a star like Leander exemplifies the ideological inconsistencies that existed in everyday life under Nazi rule. National Socialist doctrine discouraged, and even forbade, careers for women, yet Leander played a successful professional in almost every picture. Women were strongly directed toward marriage and motherhood, but Leander repeatedly experienced the failing of relationships and single motherhood onscreen. German women were encouraged to trade in their made-up and ladylike appearance for a wholesome ‘natural’ look, yet Leander was all glamorous, highly stylized surface. Finally, the role of the actor was to be integrated into the realm of working-class labor, but Leander consistently presented herself as a supreme object of adulation (171).

Indeed, Zarah Leander epitomized the antithesis of the National Socialist female, and in many cases, her diva image influenced teenage girls and women alike, in the precise ways Hitler feared.

Counteracting Leander's Contradictions

What actions could the German Propaganda Ministry pursue to offset Leander's undeniable incompatibility with the Nazi's archetypal vision? Goebbels continuously used Leander as an onscreen example of the catastrophic results of leading an unwholesome, impure existence. The 1937 Ufa production *Zu neuen Ufern* provides such a paradigm. Portraying the flashy, British singing diva Gloria Vane, Leander merely imitated the flamboyant lifestyle she viewed as her own, thus giving Goebbels the perfect opportunity to demonstrate to all women the detrimental results of behaving in such a profoundly un-German manner. Therefore, her character Gloria Vane must experience a drastic downfall, leading to an eventual conversion, a lesson wholeheartedly learned, and, finally, repentance and changing of habits. *Zu neuen Ufern* commences as Gloria Vane suggestively sings to a group of rowdy men in a crowded England nightclub. Sashaying across the stage in racy, scandalously revealing attire, Vane sexily bats her eyelashes as she performs a song consisting of entirely inappropriate lyrics, provoking fantasies of every male spectator. However, as the film progresses, one senses the "artificiality of the singer's frivolous stage persona" (Koepnick *Dark Mirror* 90). Clearly, Vane has eyes only for her handsome lover, Albert Finsbury. She proves unconditionally faithful by taking the fall when Albert commits check fraud and leaves for Australia to become an officer. Sentenced to seven years in the notorious Australian women's prison Paramatta, Vane shields the man she loves, sacrificing herself in the process. Albert soon learns of

his lover's plight and discovers that Vane can only leave the prison by marrying a local; however, Albert refuses, since marrying a convicted criminal would ruin his military career. Eventually, during a humiliating and degrading display of the women inmates, fashioned with intentions of enabling locals to choose a suitable bride, she catches the attention of a young local farmer, who wishes to marry her. He exclaims to the others that her face is not that of a criminal. On the journey homeward, Gloria runs away, hoping to find Albert; however, she discovers him just in time to overhear his future father-in-law announce the official engagement. Disheartened, she returns to stage life, attempting to reconnect with her old diva image, but dressed in poor, shabby clothing, the audience boos her off stage, and she comes dangerously close to becoming a whore. Hence, her life has tragically crossed over "zu neuen Ufern". When Albert apologetically approaches her, Vane resolves that she cannot go back to him. She realizes she no longer loves him. After all, she has suffered in Paramatta solely for his sake. Eventually, faced with nowhere else to go, Gloria returns to the prison, where after another chance encounter the young farmer once again welcomes her. This time, she agrees to the modest life of a farmer's wife, yet she appears remarkably dissatisfied with her new life, thus leading to a compromise and a rather disappointing ending.

This film in particular demonstrates the inconsistencies continuously circulating throughout Nazi cinema. The film's director, Detlef Sierck a.k.a. Douglas Sirk, emigrated before the start of World War II, no longer wishing to comply with National Socialism's rigid censorship and extreme politics. During Hitler's rule, filmmakers had to bow to certain Nazi ideological conventions or risk sacrificing their careers. *Zu neuen Ufern* provided a means to satisfy the censors but still maintain a degree of integrity. A true

Nazi film would never envision such an unsatisfying ending. Had Sirk conceived of the film's ending strictly in line with Nazi ideology, Gloria would have happily submitted to life on the farm, and she would have wholeheartedly realized her mistakes and repented. Therefore, although the film exhibits several Nazi principles, Sirk's film contains enough contradictions to eschew being labeled as consistent with Third Reich doctrine.

Zu neuen Ufern alludes to the blight awaiting unrefined, unchaste German women. The ending implies Vane's newfound, righteous role as wife to the hard working farmer as well as the distinct probability of an approaching motherhood, both highly valued ideals in the Nazi system. Customarily in Nazi cinema, the wrongful woman sees the error of her ways and vows to change for the greater good of society. However, Leander's facial expressions in the final scene, connoting feelings of defeat and discomfiture, suggest otherwise and therefore the film at best "leaves room to hope for a mature happiness, full of mild renunciation, that might grow later" (Ascheid 182). Confirming the contradictory nature of Third Reich cinema, *Zu neuen Ufern* does not exhibit the expected remorsefulness or willing acceptance of the sacrifices that Nazi ideology requires.

Finally, the idealization of the farmer in *Zu neuen Ufern* contradicts the Third Reich reality. By the late 1930's, a large percentage of Germany was urban rather than farmland. Hitler and Goebbels spent much of their time in the main cities and enjoyed a fine city life complete with shows, restaurants and modern technology. Head Nazi party figures encouraged farm life on the one hand, yet they themselves lived in urban areas. The Nazi party consistently promoted ideas that they themselves neglected. Hitler idealized marriage for all German women, yet he was not married until shortly before his

suicide. He claimed prophets are unceasingly lonely, yet for years, he enjoyed a mistress, concealed from the public. In conclusion, in reflecting both principles that reflect and those that contradict Nazi ideology, *Zu neuen Ufern* serves as a perplexity.

CHAPTER SIX

DIE GROßE LIEBE: THE GREAT SACRIFICE

Zarah Leander also stars as Hanna Holberg in the ostensible entertainment film *Die große Liebe*, one of the most acclaimed soft-core propaganda film productions of the Nazi reign, which “by the end of 1944 ranked fourth on a list of 280 most successful Ufa films and had been seen by 27.8 million people” (Ascheid 194). Ascheid uses the film to support her argument that World War II Germany was a “highly contradictory system that managed to contain its ideological tensions, but not resolve them” (7). Indicative of Leander’s roles, her character, usually from the onset a singing, sexual diva, must experience a conversion serving as a model for all German women. A lesson must be learned, the error of her ways realized and behavior and attitudes modified. Beyond a doubt, *Die große Liebe* serves Goebbels’ propagandist purposes to the fullest, and simply casting away the film as an innocent love story is most certainly naïve and erroneous. Hull argues that the film is unique and relates to the masses in that “director Rolf Hansen managed to infuse the rather banal story with a convincing aura of the hysteria of war and its effects on the civilian population” (248).

As the film begins, one witnesses Leander as the anticipated prima donna, singing a rather risqué song, “Ein Herz wie mein Herz ist nicht gern allein”, all the while playfully winking at her male worshipers. However, this coquettish teaser soon transforms herself into a refined, model German woman, who unconditionally supports her man at the front and consciously, full of sacrifice, contributes to the overall war effort. After falling in love with a handsome fighter pilot, Paul Wendlandt, Hanna

experiences the first signs of the difficulties and heartaches involved in dating an absent lover. Frustratingly, each attempt at marriage is interrupted by an unforeseen order to rejoin his men. Suffering from lonely nights and unbearable periods without news, Hanna's impatience as well as heedlessness of the extreme importance and benefits of her support outweighs her love, and their romance temporarily ends when Paul suddenly leaves directly after his arrival. Before he departs, she inquires as to whether he received a direct order, yet he replies in the negative, curtly explaining that his men *may* need him. At this stage, Hanna is concerned about herself, her career and her ability to enjoy a satisfying love relationship. Paul, on the other hand, dedicates himself to the war cause, at the risk of jeopardizing his relationship with Hanna. Shortly afterwards, Hanna watches a war film with a friend and proudly confesses that her lover is also a fighter pilot. However, only when she learns of the war with the Soviet Union and understands why Paul's leave was cut short, does she slowly emerge into the ideal woman he and the rest of the military necessitate. Willingness to sacrifice her career and diva image is a crucial first step. When the audience next sees Hanna perform in Paris, she appears as a wholesome, natural woman and has shed her sensual image. Instead of provoking lust and tempting the forbidden, Hanna appears as a soothing comforter, boosting morale and providing hope. Visible through her last performance in Rome, her famous song *Ich weiß, es wird einmal ein Wunder geschehn*, Hanna's metamorphosis is complete. The song's lyrics in particular reveal a new woman, faithful to the German cause:

Ich weiß, es wird einmal ein Wunder geschehn
Und dann werden tausend Märchen wahr.
Ich weiß, so schnell kann keine Liebe vergehn,
Die so groß ist und so wunderbar.

Wir haben beide denselben Stern

Und dein Schicksal ist auch meins.
Du bist mir fern und doch nicht fern,
Denn unsere Seelen sind eins.

Und darum wird einmal ein Wunder geschehn
Und ich weiß, daß wir uns wiedersehn!

Wenn ich ohne Hoffnung leben müßte,
Wenn ich glauben müßte, daß mich niemand liebt,
Daß es nie für mich ein Glück mehr gibt
Ach, das wär' schwer.
Wenn ich nicht in meinem Herzen wüßte,
Daß du einmal zu mir sagst: Ich liebe dich,
Wär' das Leben ohne Sinn für mich,
Doch ich weiß mehr:

Ich weiß, es wird einmal ein Wunder geschehn...

Keinem ist mein Herz so gut gewesen
Wie dem Einen, der mich jetzt verlassen hat,
Der für mich nicht einen Gruß mehr hat,
Der mich vergaß.
Könnt' er jetzt in meinen Augen lesen,
Was ich fühle, dann würd' alles anders sein.
Ewig kann doch nicht verloren sein,
Was ich besaß.

Ich weiß, es wird einmal ein Wunder geschehn ...

As Hanna performs, the male audience sways back and forth, deeply influenced by her uplifting voice, believing in final victory. As Ascheid observes, finally, “eroticism has given way to transfiguration, prayer is substituted for desire” (201). Soon her lover enjoys three weeks leave, in which to recuperate from a flying injury. As planes fill the sky, Hanna and her fighter pilot cuddle and gaze into each other’s eyes. She smiles. At last, she comprehends the task of loving a soldier, and she devotes herself to such a lifestyle.

Die große Liebe reflects the harsh realities existing in World War II German society. By acknowledging such hardships, the film provided a means of reassurance of a

final triumph and promoted patience and perseverance among those at home, unable or prohibited from fighting. However, as the war progressed, the urgency and necessity of German women's assistance became inescapable. In 1941, with their men fighting on the front, Hitler commented on the increased need of women's help to achieve his final victory, stating, "Millions of German women are in the country on the fields, and need to replace men in the most laborious work. Millions of German women and girls are working in factories, workshops and offices, and measure up to men there, too (*stellen auch dort ihren Mann*)" (Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining Third Reich* 193). In her examination of *Die große Liebe*, Schulte-Sasse focuses less on the inherent contradictions and more on the role of Nazi women. Describing how the war affected women's responsibilities, especially as conditions worsened, she remarks on Goebbels's 1943 conviction that "the German woman [must] fill out not only partly, but totally the space left by the man who has gone to the front" (193).

By whatever means possible, whether through singing to increase morale, working the farm or running the family shop, women were vital to the overall war effort. The film demonstrates this dependence on women's help, yet ventures much deeper to imply the absolute importance of women's psychological support as well. Goebbels promoted the film on the pretense of entertainment, yet the unmistakable messages imbedded within clearly signify the propagandistic intent, more so than any other Leander film. However, in accordance with all her films, certain contradictions remain unresolved. Although in actual war-torn society Leander was promoted and adored as a singing diva, the underlying message of *Die große Liebe* renounces the legitimacy of such flashy, feminine charisma. Despite attempts, such as this film, "National Socialist

doctrine in general never could positively contain the image of woman” (Ascheid 203). Onscreen, risqué actresses were reprimanded and forced to modify their habits, yet off-screen, female movie stars were often glamorous and glorified. Finally, the film’s viewers must once again settle for a rather unsettling ending. Although Hanna experiences true love, she must sacrifice her career as well as her former self and instead focus on “patience and endurance at the home front”, an ideal promoted by Nazi ideology yet concurrently dissatisfying (202). The ending, much like in *Zu neuen Ufern*, feels forced to comply with Third Reich quintessential womanhood yet unsuccessfully disguises the aforementioned dilemma.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DIE GOLDENE STADT: HOME SWEET HOME

Die goldene Stadt tells the tale of a young Aryan woman straying from the ideal Nazi path yet finally coming back in full recognition of what counts in life as a German woman. Additionally, the film shows the consequences of defying one's homeland, and to a lesser extent, disobeying the father figure, and suggests to women that some decisions out of line with Nazi ideology can result in death. The film demonstrates to all women the expected behaviors and punishes those that are unacceptable. However, analogous to other aspects of Third Reich film indoctrination, *Die goldene Stadt* sends mixed ideological messages to its viewers that arguably undermine the intended effectiveness of the propaganda. For instance, analogous with the doctrines Nazism preaches, *Die goldene Stadt* reveres simple, country life and scorns facets of urban existence, such as corruption and loose morals, which are demonstrated mostly in Prague. As mentioned in *Zu neuen Ufern*, although Hitler and the elite Nazi party members in principle praised the benefits of rural life, the countryside and especially the hard-working, healthy German farmer, in reality they all lived predominately in the cities, fully enjoying modernity and consumer capitalism of an industrialized country. Of course, their presence in main cities was expected, considering their occupations and duties, yet their social life seemed in line with the extravagances cities offer. Nazi officials extolled rural living on the one hand, yet paradoxically, as exemplary figures, they spent much leisure time engaging in urban activities. Indeed, Nazi films repeatedly emitted crossed signals and "often wanted to be modern and *völkisch* at the same time" (77), an aspiration

resulting in an inescapable contradiction. Similarly, *Die goldene Stadt* is “torn between celebrating traditional country life and critiquing the antiquated morality of yesteryear”, and this discordance is apparent throughout the film (Ascheid 77).

Die goldene Stadt begins in the Bohemian countryside, where Anna (played by actress Kristina Söderbaum, the blond-haired, blue-eyed epitome of the female Nazi ideal) struggles with a yearning to experience freedom in the form of Prague city life, her mother’s *Heimat*. Although her father, the farmer Jobst, is visibly satisfied with his beautiful, peaceful country surroundings, Anna longs for adventure. Years earlier, her mother committed suicide, unable to find happiness in rural life, and curious Anna wishes to experience the excitement of urban life that her mother perpetually missed and whose absence resulted in fatal consequences. When an urban engineer, Leidwein, appears at her father’s farm, their invigorating conversation further stimulates her desire for the unknown. Aware that her restrictive father would never allow her to travel to Prague, Anna waits until Jobst and her intended betrothed, the farm-manager Thomas, go out of town for a few days. Then, at the personally motivated encouragement of the housekeeper, who secretly wishes Anna would leave so that she can seduce Jobst and secure a marriage for herself, Anna secretly travels to Prague, the “all-devouring Golden City”, where she stays with her late mother’s sister and the aunt’s illegitimate son, Toni (Hull 215). Anna experiences a complete culture shock from quiet farm life. Living with her aunt above a cigarette store, innocent Anna becomes exposed to lust, partying and sinful ways. At first, she retains her pure, country girl image, accompanying Leidwein to the opera in a traditional dirndl, causing her to stand out amongst elegant evening gowns and sparkling diamonds. However, soon Anna, uprooted, becomes shaken in her notions

of self, during which she transforms herself into a stylish city girl and loses touch with her wholesome identity. As Ascheid elaborates, Anna's "transformation virtually literalizes the kind of de-Germanization that Nazi ideologues condemned in their philosophy, where makeup and fashion functioned as signifiers of un-German degeneracy" (75).

The first sign of unrest occurs when Leidwein displays dissatisfaction with her new look, admitting that he prefers her simple dirndl. Anna no longer possesses the pure, country girl qualities that initially attracted Leidwein to her. Without her father's protection and influence, Anna becomes wooed by her sleazy cousin and soon finds herself pregnant and alone. City life hardly measures up to her expectations. With no place to turn, Anna comprehends the enormities of her unwise choices (according to Nazi ideology) and heads home, just in time to witness her father and housekeeper's engagement dinner party. Hopes of acceptance are crushed when her father fails to acknowledge her presence and continues eating as though she were not there. Distraught, Anna flees to the moor, the location of her mother's suicide, realizing that the time has inevitably come to join her mother. Weeping, she confesses to the marshes her mistakes and begs for her father's forgiveness, mournfully admitting that she did not cherish her home like her father. Then, with a peaceful expression on her face, she jumps into the moor, shortly before her father frantically comes running to find her. Ready to forgive, Jobst wishes to welcome his daughter back and once again take care of her, yet his arrival proves late. Searchers have already discovered Anna's angelic, peaceful-looking corpse. The tragic film ends as Jobst presents his land to Thomas and orders the moor drained. The final image depicts wheat blowing in the wind, which on the surface signifies a long-

awaited peace, yet actually holds greater meaning. In certain ways, when Jobst drains the moor, he breaks tradition and instead aids a progressive, modern movement, geared towards the future. On the one hand, *Die goldene Stadt* extols the peasant, chosen lifestyle; however, the film simultaneously urges people to believe in a modern society. Leidwein, although an engineer from a large city, is a positive figure, respectful and helpful towards Anna. Witnessing her wavering downfall, he tries to alleviate her suffering in various chivalrous ways. Leidwein represents a direct contradiction between the ideal German worker, the honest farmer, and the oftentimes stereotypically corrupt urban male. *Die goldene Stadt* marries traditions with the benefits of a modern, technical society, thereby negotiating contradiction. A clever propaganda film, *Die goldene Stadt* does not alienate city or country inhabitants, and the transformation of the moor into a wheat field signifies tradition turned into the betterment of modern society. The moor, previously beautiful yet unproductive, becomes a likewise attractive wheat field, but the wheat field can potentially feed the mouths of millions of German citizens.

The film appears straightforward according to Nazi ideology, where a woman strays from the rules of a patriarchy and is punished as an example; however, *Die goldene Stadt* proves more complicated. In addition to the aforementioned contradictions, Ascheid points out another crucial inconsistency that emerges through the stereotype of the ideal German woman, which is “subsequently problematized and taken apart by the narrative” (72). Similar to the moor, which outwardly appears peaceful but is the site of her mother’s suicide, Anna, amidst serene country life, seems externally complacent, but is in fact “restless and unhappy” (72). Although the Nazis promote images of the perfect German woman, *Die goldene Stadt* addresses imaginable predicaments, such as feelings

of loneliness, dissatisfaction and settling for less than perfect lives. While simultaneously encouraging the roles of Kinder, Kirche, Küche, the film admits to the frustrations of a limited existence, illustrating to women the possibility for a life outside of the restrictions implemented by the Third Reich. *Die goldene Stadt* contradicts the standard view of women and instead borders on letting women imagine an elsewhere. In Nazi society, women's rights were not an issue and their containment was considered customary and certainly not a widespread topic of discussion. Without the film, women could uncritically continue their confined existence. However, unforeseen in the Propaganda Ministry, studies reveal that the film's "spectators' sympathies are melodramatically aligned with [Anna's] character and further critical of the male actors in the narrative" (78). Therefore, women viewers were affected by Anna's spirited decision to defy her father and enlivened by an anticipation of realizing their own dreams. The harsh consequences of disobedience and stepping "outside their traditional role", symbolically threatened by the Third Reich in *Die goldene Stadt*, clash with the glimpse of a women's independence offered by the film (Ascheid 77). In order to coincide with Nazi ideology, *Die goldene Stadt* eventually condemns such disobedient actions, evident in the final scenes. In essence, *Die goldene Stadt* aides a women's independence movement, which opposes Nazi beliefs, by articulating the taboo idea of a woman deciding her own fate, independent of a man. Anna chooses to follow her dreams without approval from the men in her life. The inevitability of Anna's suicide, as a result of her unseemly actions, is not enough of a discouragement against the excitement of the forbidden and the underlying pull of independence. *Die goldene Stadt* acknowledges the restrictions implemented upon women in a patriarchal, fascist society, accentuating the confinement, thereby confirming

German women's plight. In conclusion, throughout the film, despite Nazi cinema endeavors to dissuade such in compliant actions, *Die goldene Stadt* paradoxically presents female viewers with an alternative, albeit precarious, independent lifestyle. Thus, the overall effectiveness of the soft-core propaganda film, in concurrence with Nazi doctrines concerning the role of women, remains in question.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

In the totalitarian police state known as the Third Reich, Goebbels, aware of the cinema's ability to mobilize emotions, faced the task of uniformly reorganizing the German film industry according to National Socialist principles. Furthermore, he sought to promote the Aryan culture and to suppress other forms of artistic production in an effort to 'purify' Germany. The Propaganda Minister realized that the public was more aware of the propaganda scheme when listening to the radio or reading newspapers. Cinema, contrastingly, was usually associated with relaxation and entertainment, and consequently, the chances of influencing the unwary German masses multiplied. Cinema provided the opportunity to shape thoughts and beliefs. While the ultimate effects of such indoctrination through film are difficult to ascertain, the fact that the rhetoric of Hitler and his officials influenced much of Nazi society suggests that Third Reich cinema was anything but innocent.

This paper has examined both hard and soft-core propaganda films and has explored the inconsistencies and contradictions evident in Nazi cinema. It has also shown how complications can arise if treating Nazi propaganda as a straightforward, consistent and uniform ideological construct. Nazi films maintained a pervasive influence on the popular culture, and female stars epitomized one stark contradiction, namely that between the Nazi ideal of the German woman and the celebrated on-screen diva personas. Although some earlier scholars, such as Hull, maintain that only a small percentage of Nazi-produced films contain propaganda, this paper aims to show that many so-called

entertainment films are indeed deeply embedded in Nazi ideology, if to varying degrees. Hence, one cannot maintain a seamless separation between entertainment and propaganda, without undue oversimplification. Instead, various levels of propaganda and the infiltration of Nazi ideology must be evaluated in the larger context of German society during the Third Reich. Through the examination of *Triumph des Willens*, *Jud Süß* and *Der ewige Jude*, this paper attempted to reveal how the fewer the inconsistencies a film contains regarding Nazi ideology, the more the film becomes an example of hard-core propaganda. Yet as this thesis also tried to demonstrate, a preponderance of Third Reich films, such as *Zu neuen Ufern*, *Die große Liebe* and *Die goldene Stadt* were marketed as entertainment, yet Nazi indoctrination pervaded many of these films as well. A small number of anti-fascist directors (who were not forced to flee Nazi Germany or who chose to remain) were able to successfully disclose just enough ideologically synchronized content to satisfy the Propaganda Ministry, but through differing means, such as casting, characterization of protagonists and un-happy endings, among others, subtly and perhaps unintentionally question the workings of the Nazi regime. Because their films contained frequent inconsistencies and contradictions, I have identified them as soft-core propaganda films. In conclusion, whether characteristic of hard or soft-core propaganda, all Nazi films must to some extent be understood as subject to the moral and political parameters set by the Third Reich regime.

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