
Was the Third Reich Movie-Made? Interdisciplinarity and the Reframing of “Ideology”

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FOR DECADES, historians of America and Europe have been attentive to some of the ways in which film history might offer access to general socio-historical questions. In both teaching and research, movies and other popular media have for some time been seen as barometers of changing social norms and values. More recently, they have been analyzed not merely as mirrors of society but as cultural products that themselves have had an active role in representing, but also enforcing or even constituting, visions of society and of history.¹ Implicit in this shift is an understanding that the place of film within our discipline is not only an important but a complex one: that the reciprocal relations among creators, financiers, regulators, and spectators of movies cannot be reduced to a simple formula. How can we use film, in research or in teaching, to engage historical questions? What sort of questions can be answered by such analysis, and what methods must be employed to answer them?

While the potential interdisciplinary engagement I will be exploring in this essay relates to film studies, and while the example I focus on concerns the National Socialist period in Germany, my concerns here are actually broader. And though I will refer to a variety of fairly recent (and not-so-recent) publications, this is not intended as a review essay or survey of the literature in a given field; rather, my goal is to demonstrate the possibilities that a deeper interdisciplinary engagement with film offers and also to draw attention to a pattern of resistance to such an engagement, in spite of the presumed consensus in favor of interdisciplinarity in principle. I am particularly interested in drawing out the ways in which a richer, if

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¹ See, for instance, the trajectory formed by the following works in American history: Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York, 1976); John E. O'Connor and Martin A. Jackson, eds., *American History/American Film: Interpreting the Hollywood Image* (New York, 1979); Ian C. Jarvie, *Movies as Social Criticism: Aspects of Their Social Psychology* (Metuchen, N.J., 1978); Robert A. Rosenstone, "Genres, History, and Hollywood: A Review Article," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27 (1985): 368–70; Daniel J. Walkowitz, "Visual History: The Craft of the Historian-Filmmaker," *Public Historian* 7 (Winter 1985); Robert Brent Toplin, "The Filmmaker as Historian," *AHR* 93 (December 1988): 121–27; and the volumes written and edited by Rosenstone in the 1980s cited below, n. 9.

also thornier, conception of “ideology” could be taken up by historians to a greater degree than it has been.² Like “consent” and “resistance,” ideology is a concept historians tend to feel most comfortable about when it is used in its narrowest and most concrete senses (in the case of ideology, when it refers to official doctrine or dogma, contrary to nature or objective truth). But the historical study of ideology needs to set out not only to identify what it was that a regime or age demanded be believed but how it did so, what it demanded that it did not necessarily say, and, perhaps above all, if also most elusive, how individuals’ understanding of themselves and their relations to the world around them interplayed with these demands. Film and media studies have been at the advance guard of inquiry into these different registers of “ideology.”

Why focus on Nazi film and the ways in which its study can enrich the historiography of Nazism? After all, wasn’t this period exceptional, rather than exemplary, in terms of the place of ideology in relation to everyday life? Of course, the answer is not that National Socialism “had” ideology while Weimar and postwar Germany—or contemporary European and American societies—did not, but rather that the extremity of the case may be precisely what exposes the difficult relationship between ideological superstructure and everyday living. This is a prime reason that the field of Nazi popular culture has become such a focus for scholars on both sides of the history/cultural studies divide.

THE COMPELLING LINKS between cinema in Germany’s Third Reich and National Socialist history were in place years before provocative formulations such as Anton Kaes’s title *The Return of History as Film* and Hans-Jürgen Syberberg’s *Hitler: A Film from Germany*.³ Historians and film scholars alike are aware of the special place the Nazi propaganda ministry reserved for the film industry, and that this interest was primarily focused on entertainment rather than propaganda film. Joseph Goebbels’s and Adolf Hitler’s personal interest in entertainment film is well documented. The conflation in the fantasies of these men between the making of history and the making of a heroic film is apparent in the remarkable investment of money and human resources for Veit Harlan’s 1945 epic *Kolberg*, as it is in Goebbels’s pronouncement of the same year that the Germans should stand fast for the sake of the prospect of “a fine color film of this historical moment to be made in 100 years . . . Hold out now, so that a hundred years hence the audience does not hoot and whistle when you appear on the screen.”⁴ These facts, in combination with

² The multiple and sometimes apparently contradictory meanings of the term play an important part in the discussions of the concept of ideology to arise since the late 1970s. See, for instance, Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976; rpt. edn., New York, 1983), 152–57; Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London, 1991), 1–31; Michèle Barrett, *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault* (Stanford, Calif., 1991), 3–34. I reserve a more extended discussion of the concept for the last section of this essay.

³ See Anton Kaes, *From “Hitler” to “Heimat”: The Return of History as Film* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989); and Hans-Jürgen Syberberg’s film and book, *Hitler, ein Film aus Deutschland* (Reinbek b. Hamburg, 1978), Joachim Neugroschel, trans., *Hitler, A Film from Germany* (New York, 1982).

⁴ Goebbels’s speech to the Propaganda Ministry staff on April 17, 1945, cited in Rudolf Semmler, *Goebbels: The Man Next to Hitler* (London, 1947). This fantasy of life-as-film/present-as-history was situated in the context of the troubled production of *Kolberg*, the epic of German resistance to the

deep and far-reaching analysis of Nazi film and society, led film historian Eric Rentschler to remark that "Hitler's regime can be seen as a sustained cinematic event," even that "the Third Reich was movie made."⁵

Certainly, historians of Germany between 1933 and 1945 may assess these statements to be, at best, partial truths, if not hyperbolic, overly metaphorical, or otherwise of relatively little use to the field of German history. Notwithstanding, Rentschler's book *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife* (1996) is historically grounded in ways historians traditionally recognize: Rentschler's readings of Nazi entertainment films are dependent on equally nuanced understandings of the contexts of Goebbels's Ministry of Propaganda, the complex relationship of the German film industry to the rivalry of Hollywood, and the question of public consent in relation to foreign and domestic policy. Another 1996 book on German entertainment film of the Nazi period, Linda Schulte-Sasse's *Entertaining the Third Reich: Illusions of Wholeness in Nazi Cinema*, while not at all insensitive to historical contexts, is more deeply invested in critical approaches informed by literary and psychoanalytic theory.⁶ These two excellent books differ substantially from one another, even where they offer readings of the same films, as in the cases of the well-known anti-Semitic feature *Jew Süss* (1940) and the early Nazi youth feature *Hitler Youth Quex* (1933), as well as the fantasy blockbuster *Münchhausen* (1943). Their striking agreement, however, is that the traditional, bifurcated view of German cinema between 1933 and 1945 as either a tightly controlled vehicle for state propaganda or else an escapist diversion from a hyperpoliticized everyday must be discarded. Rentschler and Schulte-Sasse are both occupied with the question of how these films were "entertainment"—embodying visual pleasure, "fantasy," and "desire"—at the same time that they were produced and received within ideological fields of meaning. They are also both convinced that these ideological fields, even in films with the most blatant propaganda messages, are fraught with contradictions and resistances that are fundamental to their structures. In the last analysis, for both these authors, the dichotomy of "propaganda" and "entertainment" must be a false one, because of the complex functions of the film medium on the one hand and the malleability of ideology on the other.⁷

Napoleonic onslaught, produced at great expense, including the deployment of thousands of troops as extras, during the last stretch of the war. This remarkable comment has been cited very often by film historians and others, and serves as the epigram of Saul Friedländer's *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*, Thomas Weyr, trans. (New York, 1984); on the film studies front, Kaes uses this quote as a point of departure for his argument about the conflation of the historical chronicle and the simulacrum of filmic representation; see *From "Hitler" to "Heimat."*

⁵ Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), 1.

⁶ Linda Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich: Illusions of Wholeness in Nazi Cinema* (Durham, N.C., 1996).

⁷ Critical reassessments of the entertainment/propaganda dichotomy in relation to film in this period can be found in German-language publications such as Stephen Lowry, *Pathos und Politik: Ideologie in Spielfilmen des Nationalsozialismus* (Tübingen, 1991); Leonardo Quaresima, "Der Film im Dritten Reich: Moderne, Amerikanismus, Unterhaltungsfilm," *montage/av* 3, no. 2 (1994): 5–22; and especially the work of Karsten Witte; but the reception of this work by historians of National Socialism in Germany is even more marginal than on this side of the Atlantic. Lowry's position, discussed at greater length below, is offered in English in the article "Fascist Film or Unpolitical Entertainment?" *New German Critique*, no. 74 (Spring–Summer 1998): 125–49, where he argues that the search for political content in these films "often stifles a complete and more differentiated assessment of the

So the story of Nazi film is not simply another example of the regime's control over everyday life in Germany; it does more than fill out our picture of the activity of the various Reich culture offices.⁸ What place might the recent spate of criticism of cinema by German studies and film specialists have in the historiography of National Socialism, or, obversely, what may have been missed in the historical study that has kept itself in relative isolation from this recent scholarship? There is much evidence—including, for instance, the comparatively recent establishment of a section of film reviews in this journal—that historians are more willing than ever to include film in their “archive.” Yet this inclusion has generally not entailed increased attention to film studies work produced in neighboring disciplines, much less any borrowing of interpretive method from film studies. Historians have been more apt to analyze the contemporary historical film in terms of its value as an alternative mode of historical representation. This venture is a worthy and important one, as long as it takes seriously the difficult questions of how such representations are cinematically produced and experienced, rather than identifying plot-line and selection of factual material as the principal or even total representational elements of a “historical” film. Robert A. Rosenstone stands out as someone outspokenly interested in avoiding a critique of facticity in favor of “exploring the visual media as a way of rendering the past” and showing how “the very nature of the visual media forces us to reconceptualize and/or broaden what we mean by the word, history.”⁹ It is not only the historical film that has something to say to historians, however. My argument in this essay is that a reading of recent scholarship on Nazi entertainment film and of the films themselves against questions posed by the historiography of National Socialism can help historians rethink several things. Such readings bear not merely on the ways in which we use film as evidence, as a primary source, or as a pedagogical device, they also provide new ways to engage the fraught but nonetheless central question of National Socialist ideology and its relationship to German history.

Both intellectual history and film studies have significantly complicated their conceptions of “ideology” generally, and Nazi ideology in particular, over the last decades. The chief structure of the earlier studies of Nazi film (the school Schulte-Sasse provocatively calls the “propaganda camp”) neatly corresponded to the master narratives of intellectual history from the same period: “ideology” was

peculiar normality at work in Nazi films and of the complex society in which they circulated . . . foreclos[ing] scrutiny of less direct effects, of continuities with earlier and later German cinema”; p. 127.

⁸ Compare Alan E. Steinweis, *Art, Ideology, and Economics in Nazi Germany: The Reich Chambers of Music, Theater, and the Visual Arts* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1993), which focuses on three of the Reich culture offices but not on the film office; and Jonathan Petropoulos, *Art as Politics in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill, 1996), which focuses on institutional politics of visual art and, most fascinating, collection practices. Yet another film studies book appearing in English in 1996 does fill this sort of role; see Klaus Kreimeier, *The Ufa Story: A History of Germany's Greatest Film Company, 1918–1945*, Robert and Rita Kimber, trans. (New York, 1996). Each of these works, in different ways, offers a more complex reading of the relationship of Reich cultural policy to cultural practice in the Third Reich, disturbing the commonsense assumption that ideological doctrine drove cultural policy, which in turn determined the form of aesthetic products.

⁹ Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), see esp. 6. See also the essays collected in Rosenstone, ed., *Revising History: Film and the Construction of a New Past* (Princeton, N.J., 1995).

conceived in a rather monolithic, stable, and unidirectional way, disseminated from the top down, indoctrinating audiences and publics. This way of looking at ideology and German film was prepared by Siegfried Kracauer's study of proto-fascist or authoritarian themes in the Weimar cinema, *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947), and led to Erwin Leiser's documentary film and book *Germany, Awake* in 1968.¹⁰ Leiser's work should be acknowledged as an important precursor to more recent film and ideology studies in that it set out to break down the boundary between propaganda and entertainment film, albeit only by dismissing the possibility of diversion from or resistance to Nazi propaganda within films produced under the regime. Hence Leiser claimed that although only about one-sixth of the over 1,000 feature films produced in the Third Reich were "straight political propaganda" (certainly an overestimate), nonetheless "every film had a political function."¹¹ These statements and the analyses they yielded depended on assumptions of an exact isomorphism of several spheres that were, in fact, each constantly shifting and elusive, so that their perfect coincidence would have been impossible. These supposedly coincident spheres were Nazi ideology *qua* doctrine, the Nazi propaganda apparatus (including the Propaganda Ministry [RMVP] as well as the co-opted film industry), and the representational space of the films produced between 1933 and 1945.

In contrast to Leiser's assumption of ubiquitous ideological messages, David Stewart Hull's *Film in the Third Reich: Art and Propaganda in Nazi Germany* (1969) divorced the aesthetic and entertainment value of movies from their ideological content, or even posited the subversive potential of entertainment films. This position, too, was enabled by a view of ideology that focused on directed propaganda. The elision between stated programs (especially those of Goebbels) and cinematic practice was most apparent of all in the work of David Welch, whose 1983 monograph *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933–1945* did much to explore the centrality of the film industry to Goebbels's ideological mission, without, however, acknowledging the complexity and internal contradictions of both that ideological project and its presumed execution.¹² Welch's edited anthology *Nazi Propaganda: The Power and the Limitations* (1983), as the title implies, did question the degree of ideological saturation effected by the Nazi cinema, but it still depended on the founding structural model of a coherent propaganda program disseminated to the masses through the vehicle of Nazi propaganda films and features. This reduction of ideological fields of meaning to indoctrination is already

¹⁰ See Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, N.J., 1947); Erwin Leiser, "Deutschland, erwache!" *Propaganda im Film des Dritten Reiches* (Reinbek b. Hamburg, 1968), trans. by Gertrud Mander and David Wilson as *Nazi Cinema* (London, 1974). Leiser's book was published in the wake of his documentary film *Deutschland, erwache!* which consisted of clips from German films from the Nazi period organized by propaganda theme, introduced by brief explications of the way they reflected Nazi political and ideological goals.

¹¹ Leiser, *Nazi Cinema*, 12.

¹² David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933–1945* (Oxford, 1983). See also Gerd Albrecht, *Nationalsozialistische Filmpolitik* (Munich, 1969); and Albrecht, ed., *Film im Dritten Reich: Eine Dokumentation* (Karlsruhe, 1978). That Welch's and Leiser's approach to reading propaganda themes in Nazi film still holds considerable power is evident in a recently translated study of Nazi documentary film; see Hilmar Hoffmann, *Und die Fahne führt uns in die Ewigkeit* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), J. Broadwin and V. R. Berghahn, trans., *The Triumph of Propaganda: Film and National Socialism, 1933–1945* (Providence, R.I., 1996).

suggested by the Hitler quotation that serves as the epigram to Welch's introduction: "Propaganda, propaganda, propaganda. All that matters is propaganda."¹³

In intellectual history, the landmark 1960s studies of George Mosse and Fritz Stern provided genealogies of "Volkish" thought.¹⁴ These immensely influential works offered readers doctrinal contexts that allowed National Socialist anti-Semitism to be seen as something other than the aberrant obsession of a psychologically unstable fringe. In retrospect, however, these works seem to have reinforced a rigid dichotomy of enlightened Western thought pitted against a reactive rebellion. Furthermore, they contributed to a view that tended to treat Volkish ideology as a consistent and self-contained body of thought. The same assumption of self-containment can be discerned in what came to be a governing dichotomy in Nazi historiography: the conflict between so-called "intentionalist" and "functionalist" explanations of Nazi policy, most importantly the state's approach to the "Jewish question."¹⁵ The ordering of such explanations according to a view of the centrality of Hitler and his radical anti-Semitic personal ideology, on the one hand, or of his relative weakness in a structurally decentered system, where ideological radicalization emerged as an effect of factional competition, on the other, is only possible with the reduction of the notion of ideology to an institutionally sponsored doctrinal program. The question itself betrays a programmatic definition of ideology—to posit an opposition between "intention" and "function" presupposes this very specific understanding of ideology as fully self-conscious and internally consistent.

Sophisticated approaches to this level of "ideology" have been anything but foreign to historians. Practitioners of our discipline have in fact been at the forefront of research into the complexities of official ideology, especially the racist foundations of Nazi society and its troubled relationship to the concept of modernity, as well as the modernist roots of the "final solution."¹⁶ The question of "consent" and "resistance"—the forms such activities could take beyond the categories of collaboration and sabotage—has entered the field with a vengeance, with extremely provocative effects.¹⁷ Among the insights to come out of such work

¹³ David Welch, *Nazi Propaganda: The Power and the Limitations* (Totowa, N.J., 1983), 1.

¹⁴ George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York, 1964); and Fritz R. Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley, Calif., 1961); see also Jost Hermand, *Der alte Traum vom neuen Reich: Völkische Utopien und Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988).

¹⁵ An excellent review of the controversy is in Thomas Childers and Jane Caplan, eds., *Reevaluating the Third Reich* (New York, 1993), see esp. 6–13, 86–113. See also Tim Mason, "Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism," in G. Hirschfeld and L. Kettenacker, eds., *Der "Führerstaat": Mythos und Realität; Studien zur Struktur und Politik des Dritten Reiches* (Stuttgart, 1981), 23–41.

¹⁶ In place of attempting to survey the entire literature, I offer the following works as examples of these successes: Omer Bartov, *Murder in Our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation* (New York, 1996); Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945* (Cambridge, 1991); Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: "Euthanasia" in Germany c. 1900–1945* (Cambridge, 1994); Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1984); Detlev Peukert, "The Genesis of the 'Final Solution' from the Spirit of Science," in Childers and Caplan, *Reevaluating the Third Reich*, 234–52, and other essays in that volume.

¹⁷ In the 1980s, this research moved from an earlier focus on organized political resistance to the realm of daily life. See among many others Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life*, Richard Deveson, trans. (New Haven, Conn., 1987); Alf

is the notion that collusion and resistance can coexist, or that certain forms of resistance are built into or are produced by the repressive ideology itself. At the same time, in film and media criticism, the compendium of approaches that has come to be identified as “cultural studies” has opened inquiry into popular culture as a locus of ideological imposition as well as subversion; various reading strategies bring out the holes in the textual fabric, the multiple valences of narrative and rhetoric in the filmic text, and produce a generally much more varied picture of the way ideological meanings are produced, mediated, and received than we had before.

Finally, in the wake of the extraordinary popular reception of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* and, most recently (if less dramatically), the English-language editions of German-Jewish academic Victor Klemperer’s diaries from the years of Nazi rule, the question of the degree of ideological saturation within German society has become central, with a particular focus on anti-Semitism.¹⁸ In Goldhagen’s book, “ideology” is a term that does not appear on its own in the index, and he employs it exclusively in the sense of a specific program moving toward the Holocaust: “genocidal ideology,” or “eliminationist ideology.” He introduces the term “eliminationist antisemitism” to cover a set of notions about Jews explicitly linked to the goal of their eradication from German society, and he makes the claim that this “eliminationist ideology” was in place long before Hitler came to power. This reductive account of anti-Semitism was a primary object of attack by scholars of Germany, and even Goldhagen himself later deemphasized this aspect of his book, which was obviously never meant to serve as an intellectual history of anti-Jewish thought.¹⁹ Ironically, the question of the role of ideology in the violent history of the Third Reich would thus be raised in force through the lens of a view of German anti-Semitism less differentiated than the intellectual histories of the 1960s.

In the wake of scholarly attacks on Goldhagen’s thesis, methods, and analysis, the most extreme functionalists acted as though the book conclusively discredited causal accounts of Nazi policy focused on anti-Semitic ideology. It was perhaps in reaction to this turn of the Goldhagen reception that several highly regarded intellectuals came to his defense, stressing the merits of a view that acknowledged the inescapable question of the place of the Jew in modern German cultural fantasy (as opposed to the function of anti-Semitism within National Socialist rhetoric,

Lüdtke, ed., *Alltagsgeschichte: Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen* (Frankfurt, 1989); Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933–1945* (Oxford, 1983); Michael Balfour, *Withstanding Hitler in Germany: 1933–1945* (London, 1988). The sophisticated turn such research has taken in the 1990s is demonstrated in Michael Geyer and John W. Boyer, eds., *Resistance against the Third Reich, 1933–1990* (Chicago, 1994).

¹⁸ Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York, 1996); Victor Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness: A Diary of the Nazi Years, 1933–1941*, Martin Chalmers, trans. (New York, 1998); and *To the Bitter End: The Diaries of Victor Klemperer, 1942–1945*, Chalmers, trans. (London, 1999).

¹⁹ See the review of the Goldhagen reception by István Deák, “Holocaust Views: The Goldhagen Controversy in Retrospect,” *Central European History* 30, no. 2 (1997): 295–307. Compare Jeremiah M. Riemer and Andrei S. Markovits, “The Goldhagen Controversy,” *Tikkun* 13 (May/June 1998): 48–49; Manfred B. Steger, “Genocide, Resistance and Willing Executioners: Reflections on the Goldhagen Controversy,” *Southern Humanities Review* 32 (Fall 1998).

program, or policy).²⁰ This defense thus represented more of a desire to further, rather than to abandon, ideological questions associated with German (as opposed to Nazi) anti-Semitism, even if Goldhagen's own account of German anti-Semitism was, at best, perfunctory and reductive. The notion of a generalized "eliminationist antisemitism" has indeed not persuaded the great majority of historians of Germany any more than the somewhat more moderated but no less teleological version of Paul Lawrence Rose, "revolutionary antisemitism."²¹ The most persuasive alternative is offered by Saul Friedländer in the thoughtful first volume of his work *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, where the term "redemptive antisemitism" is introduced to capture the insoluble fusion of utopian and violent fantasy that characterized the most radical variant of modern German anti-Jewish sentiment.²² Friedländer is careful about claims of the degree to which large numbers of Germans shared this worldview, and also about the degree to which ideology drove the course of events leading to the Holocaust. He thus successfully navigates his cautious history beyond the treacherous terrain of the intentionalist-functionalist debate as well as of the more recent Goldhagen debate, but he does not do so by attending to the ways in which ideology actually operated on the level of individual subjects in Germany in the 1930s. "Redemptive antisemitism" remains a provocative formulation, but it does not yet begin to explain the phenomena of complicity and consent.

How do film studies approach the slippery target of ideology in ways that might be relevant to these historical questions? The early studies of Nazi film, while forging the field in important ways, as I have indicated, tended to focus on the question of the explicit propaganda function of films, drawn mainly from straightforward plot analysis. The current film scholarship, diverse as it is, has the virtue of adding to the equation of meaning-production in film a host of extra-narrative aspects: the semiotic complexity of images and of sound, the sequencing of images and the establishment of visual tropes, and, not least important, the referentiality of aspects of the film to things

²⁰ Notably, Andrei S. Markovits, "Störfall im Endlager der Geschichte," in Julius H. Schoeps, ed., *Ein Volk von Mördern? Die Dokumentation zur Goldhagen Kontroverse und die Rolle der Deutschen im Holocaust* (Hamburg, 1996), 228–40; and Elie Wiesel, "Little Hitlers," *The Observer*, March 31, 1996; but also the sharply critical Omer Bartov, who attacked the author for his lack of moderation and inexplicable claims to originality, while asserting that he was not wrong to "stress once more the importance of anti-Semitism . . . as an arguably crucial and (in recent mainstream scholarship) somewhat underemphasized condition of the Holocaust." In summarizing the dispute between Christopher Browning and Goldhagen over Police Battalion 101, Bartov mentions the possibility of a third position, "which stresses a crucial factor neglected both by Browning's circumstantial interpretation and by Goldhagen's essentialist view, namely the powerful impact of ideology . . . on the perpetrators." Bartov, "Ordinary Monsters," *New Republic* 214 (April 29, 1996): 32–38, see 34 and 35.

²¹ See Paul Lawrence Rose, *Revolutionary Antisemitism in Germany from Kant to Wagner* (Princeton, N.J., 1990), where two distinct *Sonderweg* arguments—the one about a German revolutionary spirit transcending left and right orientations, the other about an anti-Semitism essentially different from other European anti-Semitisms—are interwoven into a single teleological fantasy spinning for centuries toward the Holocaust. In fact, the remarkable attention given to Goldhagen's 1996 book notwithstanding, it has been more the rule than the exception that intellectual historical studies of German anti-Semitism resort to sweeping exceptionalist diagnoses about a unified anti-Jewish mindset running from Reformation to Holocaust. See, for example, John Weiss, *Ideology of Death: Why the Holocaust Happened in Germany* (Chicago, 1996). Compare the enlightening critical review by Geoff Eley, "What Are the Contexts for German Antisemitism? Some Thoughts on the Origins of Nazism," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 14 (1997).

²² See Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (New York, 1997), 73–112.

outside the frame. This involves historical contextualization as well as the analysis of the cultural meanings associated with particular movie stars, and, finally, self-referential gestures toward the film medium or the mass media society itself. This matrix of potential meanings unsettles earlier readings of Nazi films as “propagandistic” or “subversive,” replacing this opposition with a mode of analysis that leaves room (often uncomfortably) for the cohabitation of contradictions. The shape of “ideology” itself, I will argue, is altered by such readings.

ONE RESULT OF THE NEW METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES to the ideological content of Nazi films has been a shift of research objects from films with explicitly anti-Semitic or nationalist content to the Hollywood-style light features or “heitere Filme” (musicals, comedies, and romances) that made up as much as 90 percent of the German film industry’s production between 1933 and 1945. It is here, in the sphere normally associated with *diversion* from the politicized everyday, that both absorption of and resistance to ideology has been charted in a fascinating way. And yet to illustrate the point I am making, it is worth looking at recent discussions of the most obviously “ideological” and infamous of the Universum-Film-Aktiengesellschaft (UFA) productions, the anti-Semitic “hate film” of 1940, *Jud Süß (Jew Süss)*. Here was a tale easy for anyone to decipher: a fable (announced from the start of the film as “based on historical events”) of a sinister and greedy Jew, Joseph Süß Oppenheimer, insinuating himself into a high position in eighteenth-century Württemberg, despoiling the duchy and bringing it to near ruin, opening the city’s gates to an infestation of Jews, lusting after and raping the heroine, Dorothea, and driving her to suicide, before order is restored with his trial and execution. Historians of Nazi Germany know this film and understand it in much the same way earlier film historians did. The studies of the film from the 1960s and 1970s chart its tremendous popularity alongside its status as a propaganda vehicle (since the state played an uncharacteristically interventionist role in the sponsorship and production of the picture) and its representation of the Jewish “threat.” The film certainly delivers the overt message of the age-old danger of admitting the Jew into Aryan society, and it illustrates the chief features of the Nazi anti-Semitic stereotype (Jewish greed, sneakiness, lust for Aryan women, Jews’ desire to pass as something they are not, and so on). What use to the historian could more nuanced readings of this manifestly unsubtle work be?

Rentschler’s analysis in *The Ministry of Illusion* does much to turn the discussion from how the film produced a stereotypical image of Jews to how it operated in the social fields of Germany in 1940 and its postwar revaluations. A chief contribution of his multi-layered reading is the degree to which the construction of the Jew is “a means of self-support,” in his words, the sign for an “existential necessity” of Nazi ideology to define an ideal self and project a contemporary critique of self onto a constructed Other.²³ A quote from Hitler serves as the epigram of the essay: “Has it not struck you how the Jew is the exact opposite of the German in every single respect, and yet is as closely akin to him as a blood brother?” Rentschler tracks a

²³ See Eric Rentschler, “The Elective Other: *Jew Süss* (1940),” in *Ministry of Illusion*, 149–69, 355–63.

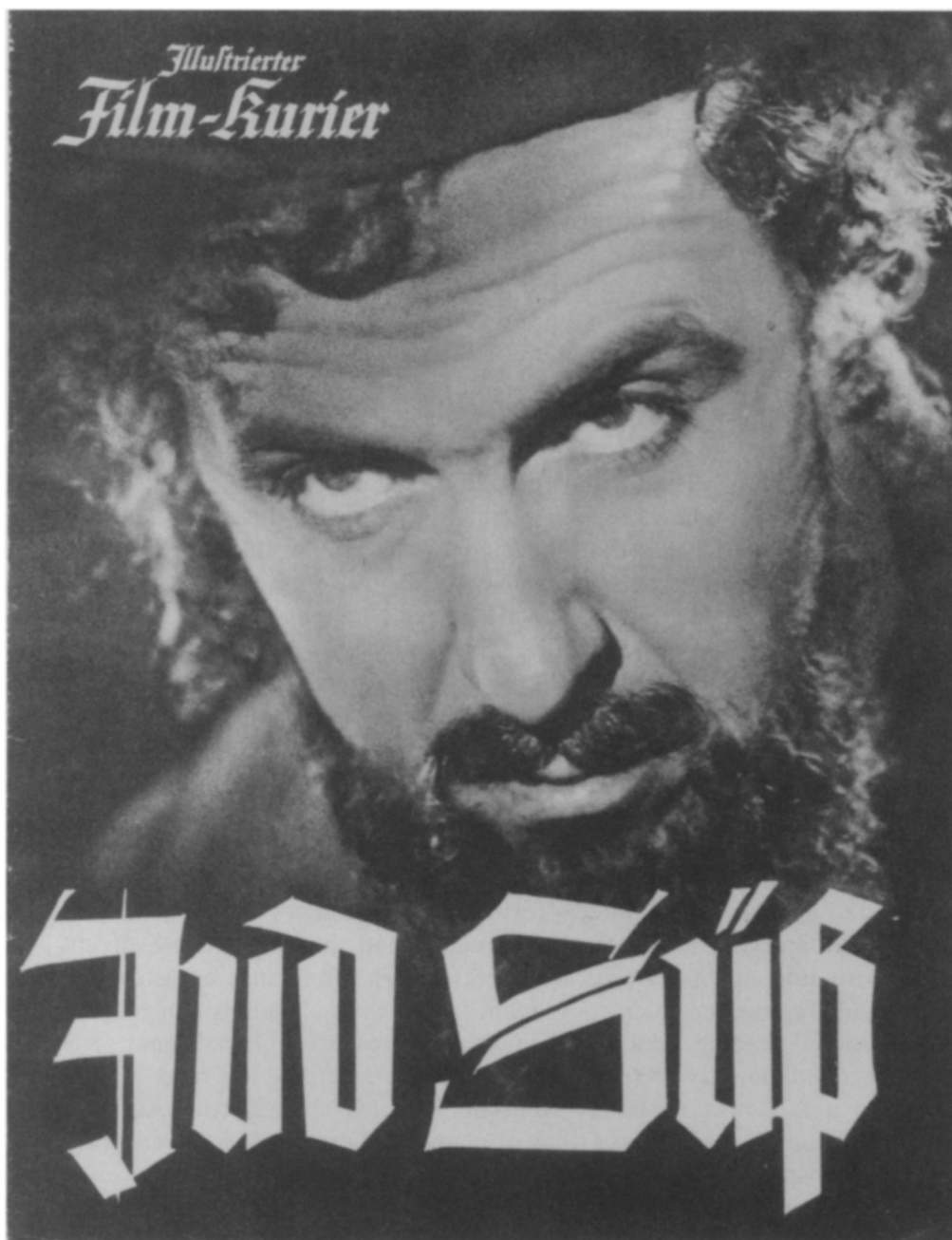


Figure 1: Demonic Other? Ferdinand Marian as Joseph Süss Oppenheimer on the cover of the *Illustrierter Film-Kurier* 3130 (1940). Courtesy of the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin. Copyright Verlag für Filmschriften, Hebertshausen.

series of signs of identity and otherness throughout the film in ways that reveal a semiotic complexity that is only obscured by the reduction of the film's effects to reinforcements of anti-Semitic stereotypes. The cinematic dissolves from the state escutcheon to the illegible Hebrew letters at the entrance to the Frankfurt ghetto, from "Jewish" to "Aryan" faces, and others, suggest for Rentschler an equivalence

at the same time as they assert difference. The very liberal use of this filmic technique, the “strange territory of the Nazi dissolve,” is inseparable from a message not only of juxtaposition or difference but of dissolving boundaries, negative doubles, or mirrored selves, of an interior monologue. Rentschler reads the film’s musical theme “All Thoughts I Have, They Are with You” (the theme of the star-crossed Aryan lovers destroyed by Süß) as a potential “motto for National Socialism’s privileged and obsessive relation to the Jew.” One of the film’s many effective dissolves moves from the chaotic wails of an exoticized synagogue service to Dorothea’s saccharine rendition of the theme. If we are persuaded by the thesis that the figure of the Jew in this film serves more as a critique of a German self than of a “foreign” community on German soil, then the historical place of anti-Semitism in the Nazi imagination, and of real and violent anti-Semitic policy in German society, needs careful reevaluation.

Schulte-Sasse’s book on Nazi entertainment film takes a more explicitly psychoanalytic approach to ideology informed by the work of Slavoj Žižek and Jacques Lacan. She, too, notes of these figures that “they are each other’s Other and cannot exist independently.”²⁴ As “dialectical opposites,” they cannot exist without one another. Her essay on *Jew Süß* does several things at once, but in reference to this issue of anti-Semitic ideology it provides specific textual evidence for an abstract operation Žižek has described in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. This operation is the so-called “identification with the symptom,” whereby the racist subject recognizes the Jew as the necessary product of the world he or she makes, or creates a “Jew” replete with “excesses” that reflect a truth about the subject. It is a fascinating argument and one that depends on dense and close readings of film sequences. The point that historians of National Socialism can take away from these readings is that it is *not enough* to say this film from 1940 and/or this society from 1940 were “anti-Semitic.” It behooves us to explore how anti-Semitism was constructed and how it operated—textually and socially—what functions it might have served, and how its peculiar construction had similarly specific effects.

The core moment of *Jew Süß* is a rape scene in the finance minister’s bedroom suite, and here, too, recent critiques identify a remarkable ambivalence obscured by the traditional reading, which held that this represents a crucial tenet of Nazism, the *Blutschande* fantasy of Jewish sexual predators defiling the race. Marcia Klotz points to a fact also raised by Rentschler in his chapter: the Austrian actor Ferdinand Marian, dangerous Other of many Nazi-era films, received in the wake of *Jew Süß* a spate of fan mail from smitten female spectators. Klotz focuses on the ways in which desire for the Other is semiotically produced in this infamous rape scene, and in two other Nazi films, to demonstrate a complexity of the relationship between the anti-Semitic ideology and the figure of the Jew that goes beyond demonization.²⁵ Schulte-Sasse interprets data in ways that would support this view:

²⁴ See Linda Schulte-Sasse, “Courtier, Vampire, or Vermin? *Jew Süß*’s Contradictory Effort to Render the ‘Jew’ Other,” in *Entertaining the Third Reich*, 47–91, see 90.

²⁵ Marcia Klotz, “Epistemological Ambiguity and the Fascist Text: *Jew Süß*, *Carl Peters*, and *Ohm Krüger*,” in *New German Critique*, no. 74 (Spring–Summer 1998): 91–124, see 96–102. Klotz’s larger project in this essay is the question of “epistemological ambiguity,” or the “gray area that lies between the realms of ‘knowing’ and ‘not knowing,’ a realm generated within the field of Nazi ideology that was absolutely crucial to the smooth functioning of the German fascist regime” (p. 91). Such a project



Figure 2: Collage of stills from *Jew Süss* in the *Illustrierter Film-Kurier* 3130. Below, Süss and Dorothea seem destined for one another, while Dorothea's betrothed (upper left) is fixated on an ideal. Courtesy of the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin. Copyright Verlag für Filmschriften, Hebertshausen.

would appear to be indispensable for historians of “everyday Germans.” The problem historians might find with Klotz’s essay is one she acknowledges, and that I will address below: the necessarily

“Desire, narrative contingency, and editing destine Dorothea and the Jew for each other,” just as treatments of the Dracula story (including German director F. W. Murnau’s) destine Mina/Nina for the vampire rather than for her beloved, Jonathan Harker. Dorothea is delivered to Süß’s arms, according to Schulte-Sasse, in ways “readable as a sublimated desire to be raped.” This position is supported by the film’s promotion stills, which consistently set Dorothea and Süß together, with her heroic Aryan husband either cut out of the frame or else looking on in the background as if an intruder.

The production of desire for the demonic Other runs like a red thread through a host of Nazi entertainment features, where, in nearly all cases, no figures of Jews are present. Rentschler’s reading of Luis Trenker’s *The Prodigal Son* (1934) turns on precisely this axis, where the Bavarian mountain youth needs to satisfy his desire for the big city with a disastrous venture to New York (which in some ways resembles Weimar Berlin as much as it does 1930s America) before he can really be one with his native homeland. But these narrative conventions, again, are not the clumsy allegories they appear. A fine example of this is Detlef Sierk’s (Douglas Sirk) *La Habanera* (1937), where Zarah Leander plays a Swede, Astrée, who is seduced by the romance and adventure of the passionate South and stays behind in Puerto Rico to marry the matador and tyrannical demagogue, Don Pedro, played by none other than Ferdinand Marian. Here, too, on the level of narrative, it is easy to identify this as a morality tale, where the overt seductive excitement of the passionate Other masks a tyrannical perversion and immorality, while the quieter, icy veneer of Sweden holds hidden goodness and magic to which Astrée longs to return. The subplot of a devastating fever ravaging the island, covered up by the greedy Don Pedro, who eventually succumbs to the illness and in his death frees Astrée, seems to reinforce this schema, as it also seems to resonate with the Nazi medicalization of otherness and fetishization of hygiene.

Rentschler skews this grid of allegorical associations. On the extratextual level, various factors confuse the apparent allegory: the film’s production during German intervention in the Spanish Civil War, Zarah Leander’s multivalent position as Nordic Nazi film star and symbol of foreign exoticism and erotic challenge to official German prudery, Douglas Sirk’s status as soon-to-be-exile anti-Nazi, even Brechtian, director.²⁶ The threat of international “quarantine” of Germany (President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “quarantine speech” three months before the film’s release) complicates the allegory, as do other correspondences to Nazi Germany: Puerto Rico’s isolation/insularity, its enslavement to a charismatic tyrant (Don Pedro) with absolute control via a secret police force and total control of dissemination of information, Don Pedro’s desire to maintain the island’s insularity from the influence of other nations while remaining in their favor (for the sake of

speculative nature of an inquiry into how complex ideological messages were (and not just “could be”) processed by actual moviegoers. See Klotz, “Epistemological Ambiguity,” 124.

²⁶ Indeed, the interpretation of *La Habanera* as Nordic/fascist allegory was not dominant, according to Rentschler, due in part to the pieties surrounding Sierck’s presumed subversive filmmaking (characterized by an exaggerated and therefore ironized *mise en scène*) and Leander’s oppositional associations. Rentschler thus displaces these “myths” with a more complex reading of ideological signifiers and their potential receptions. See *Ministry of Illusion*, 126–29.

tourism). Thus Rentschler can claim that “this German film about Puerto Rico embodies what it depicts: the ‘primitive’ island becomes both the Aryan state’s structured opposite and its displaced double.”²⁷ Seen within multiple fields of signification structured by Germany of late 1937, the allegorical grid becomes a sophisticated and entangled matrix of contradictory meanings. Here, again, an elaborate interpretation of ideological figuration emerges, whereby resistance, subversion, and desire for the villainized are built into the ideological frame, and where constructions of ideological others are inseparable from fantasy projections of a persecuted self.²⁸ “Aesthetic resistance,” Rentschler ventures, “was part of the system; it provided a crucial function in a larger gestalt . . . While transporting overt political contents, the film seemed to step off track—all the better to maintain a clear ideological course . . . Films like *La Habanera* demonstrated that excess, irony, and distanciation could reaffirm rather than destabilize the status quo.”²⁹

As I suggested earlier, this shift to the study of popular feature films, and with it a more subtle understanding of ideological identification, is not only usable for historians of National Socialism. Parallel moves can be noted in the work of historians and film studies scholars on, for example, the Soviet culture industry. Earlier work in this field focused on the communist avant-garde films of masters like S. M. Eisenstein. More recently, what Denise Youngblood has called the “forgotten Soviet cinema”—films more popular with Soviet audiences than the high-brow work—has come under study.³⁰ Youngblood’s work on film, like German film studies of the 1990s, successfully argues for a shift of perspective from the elite to the popular, or from high-brow to middle-brow culture, and she contributes to a growing awareness of the role interdisciplinarity has come to play in this field.³¹ Focusing on movies made during the New Economic Policy period (which, some might argue, may skew her argument), Youngblood’s Soviet cinema is remarkably bourgeois, with audiences demonstrating familiar desires for “conformity to conventional visual styles and narrative structures,” for romantic escape, and for recognizable movie stars. This is also the weakness of her study, which seems to flatten out and dehistoricize viewers’ desires.

In Richard Stites’s sweeping survey of mass culture from prerevolutionary Russia through every stage of Soviet history, *Russian Popular Culture*, the author demonstrates the changing pulse of nation and state through film. As is the case with the leading historians of German everyday life, Stites does not work with a model of

²⁷ Rentschler, *Ministry of Illusion*, 134.

²⁸ This complex reciprocal relationship has been discussed by Omer Bartov in the provocative article “Defining Enemies, Making Victims: Germans, Jews, and the Holocaust,” *AHR* 103 (June 1998): 771–816, now in his book *Mirrors of Destruction: War, Genocide, and Modern Identity* (Oxford, 2000). Bartov’s discussion dwells on the intersubjective level of collective identity and memory constructions but in a very complex way, since it links these constructions across time and space (the definitions of fantasy “elusive enemies” and victimized selves from Jews in pre-Nazi and Nazi Germany to Germans and Israelis after the Holocaust). Bartov’s goal is to use the exemplary case of German anti-Semitism to expose the structure of an ideological complex that he suggests is anything but unique to National Socialism.

²⁹ Rentschler, *Ministry of Illusion*, 144.

³⁰ Denise Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge, 1992), 3.

³¹ Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses*, xiv–xv. See also Denise Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era, 1918–1935* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1985).

ideology and culture such as that offered by Rentschler. He is more attuned to the deliberate ways in which ideologues with control over film production were able to communicate messages, and concerned with how Soviet history can therefore be reread through film history: how films “influenced the feelings of the lower classes in the revolution,” mobilizing resentments and other politically charged emotions; how enemies were dehumanized and workers heroicized; that the postwar films demonstrated what he provocatively calls a “demonumentalization.” He does maintain a distinction of politically charged historical films from what he calls “purely entertainment” features such as melodramas, but his ideological read on this distinction is subtle: the melodramas increase proportionally during the war as the need for escapism increases, and yet even these features can be examined for ideological content. Nonetheless, he confines his discussions to the ways in which the regime “used the medium consciously for political-ideological purposes,” as a tool of the “Stalinist spectacle state,” which appears to maintain control over the interplay of filmic text and audience in ways that escape Rentschler’s ministry of illusion.³²

Nazi cinema seems to be a boom field in German Studies departments. Rentschler’s and Schulte-Sasse’s books are in the company of other substantial work on Nazi entertainment cinema, including a special issue of the flagship theory journal of German studies, *New German Critique*.³³ Many further articles and book chapters fit into this picture of a broader approach to cinematic effects and to ideological inscription, focusing, to varying degrees, on complicated production histories, on the relationship to a reviled and an envied Hollywood (the double and “negative double” of UFA’s studio city, Babelsberg), the implications of the star system, and the way differences of gender and class, among other differences, inflected reception.³⁴ Simultaneously, German historians have come to take the category of the everyday, popular culture and a differentiated image of ideological dissemination more seriously than they used to. These bodies of work may be seen as signs of the growing openness to interdisciplinarity, but they may also be markers of an increasing specialization. Nazi film analysis in the generation of Erwin Leiser and David Stewart Hull was in dialogue with the genealogies of anti-Semitism drawn by their contemporary intellectual historians, which does not seem to be the case for today’s historians and German film scholars. For those historians of

³² Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (Cambridge, 1992), see esp. 33–36, 94, 115, and 139.

³³ *New German Critique*, no. 74 (Spring–Summer 1998), Special Issue on Nazi Cinema. In her contribution to the special issue, “Nazi Cinema at the Intersection of the Classical and the Popular,” Patrice Petro also notes the explosion of interest in Nazi films (heralded by, among other things, two symposia in 1997) and its relationship to trends in histories of National Socialist Germany, which “chart continuities as well as discrepancies between National Socialist policy and everyday culture in the Third Reich.” Petro also notes that it is “curious (or perhaps not curious at all) that historians of ‘everyday fascism’ have rarely looked to cinema for evidence they seek of the mundane, everyday aspects of life within which Nazism and its crimes unfolded. Indeed, what better place than the cinema to find traces of the choices, emotions, and coping mechanisms of ordinary Germans?”; pp. 41–43.

³⁴ See, for instance, Marc Silberman, *German Cinema: Texts in Context* (Detroit, Mich., 1995), 49–96; Sabine Hake, “The Melodramatic Imagination of Detlef Sierck: *Final Chord* and Its Resonances,” *Screen* 38 (Summer 1997): 129–48; Thomas Elsaesser, “Hollywood and Berlin,” *Sight and Sound* 7 (November 1997): 14–17; the contributions by Anke Gleber and Janet Lungstrum in Katharina von Ankum, ed., *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997); the collection *Der Star: Geschichte—Rezeption—Bedeutung* (Munich, 1997).

National Socialist Germany who wish to give central consideration to the issue of ideology—that is, those who do not take anti-Semitism to be ornamental or of secondary importance to the shape of events between 1933 and 1945—there remain difficult questions about the nature of ideological formations. In this sense, a look at entertainment film of this period does more than fill out a picture of daily lives in the Third Reich, it explores the formations that framed them.

HOW FAR ARE WE, AS HISTORIANS, willing to take the lessons of film studies—and the lessons of films themselves—in rethinking the encounter of ideologies and publics? Do the horizons of the discipline as it has been defined, or does historical methodology itself, limit the ways in which we are able to integrate a more complex, and at the same time often self-contradictory and fuzzier, version of ideology? These questions are not really about the concept of ideology at all but rather about the problem of interdisciplinarity. This term has enjoyed such a level of approbation in recent years as to deflect consideration of what it may actually entail in relation to the less touted companion concept of what we might call “disciplinarity.” Yet we constantly (and justifiably) discriminate between the useful importation of methods from other fields of knowledge and incursions that draw us away from what we identify as historical thinking.³⁵

In teaching, of course, the questions have been posed differently. Since the 1940s, the dominant, even commonsense notion of the place of film in the history classroom has been that it is a more attractive medium for students than textbooks, but one must be vigilant that it represents past events in an accurate and responsible way.³⁶ Discussions of the pedagogical use of film have continued to assume that movies draw students in more effectively than books but that historical accuracy may be compromised by the medium. In the twenty-first century, these dual assumptions remain familiar, and yet seem already dated, even quaint.

There are several reasons to think of this model as obsolete. First of all, the “culture wars” of the last fifteen years or so have brought not only professional historians and teachers but the general public as well to a heightened consciousness of the ways in which purportedly “neutral” or even “objective” representations necessarily serve some sort of agenda. This is not to say that filmmakers, audiences, or historians have abandoned a notion like “historical truth”; quite to the contrary: there is simply a general awareness of the status of all presentations of history as representations, as mediated entities with sources in and effects on present political perspectives. With its origins in education within the armed services during World War II, the first uses of film in the classroom were hardly less rooted in ideology

³⁵ As a marker of the shifting ground of interdisciplinary innovation and resistance, see Peter C. Rollins’s introduction to a special issue of *American Quarterly* on film and American studies, where historians are to provide the interdisciplinarity and traditional film studies the resistance. Rollins is optimistic that the contextual work begun in that issue indicated the greater promise of interdisciplinary and historical work than the “myopic” concerns of film scholars. See Rollins, “Film and American Studies: Introduction,” *American Quarterly* 31 (Winter 1979): 595.

³⁶ In this sense, this 1943 article from the Teacher’s Section of a historical journal covers very familiar territory: Philip D. Jordan, “Social Studies and the Sound Film,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 30 (December 1943): 408–11.

than contemporary ones, but the relationship is no longer muted. As for the advantages of movies over books in capturing student interest, the age of “cyberconsciousness” has come to tax many young people’s patience with full-length films—especially black-and-white or subtitled ones but also independent American releases or even Hollywood features in genres they would not choose to watch on their own—no less than reading. Both of these developments, however, have a compounded result when the projector (unfortunately, it is more often a VCR) is switched on in the classroom: students identify their own role as that of critical spectators.

Yet the channeling of this self-consciously critical position is just where historians using film in the classroom have met the need for lessons from other disciplines. For at least a generation, educators have entertained the notion that students need training in how messages are constructed and transmitted in a film text, the goal being a sort of “visual literacy,” or, as one author has put it, “students need not only to ‘get the point’ of a film; they also need to understand how it is ‘gotten across.’”³⁷ In spite of calls for sensitivity on these issues, it is safe to say that much, if not most, of the use of film by historians in class and in print (witness the balance of film reviews in this journal) has fallen back on the notion of the accuracy of portrayal in films representing the past.³⁸ The reasons for this must ultimately have to do with how historians define the terrain of the discipline: matters of historical context are more at home in our analysis than matters and modes of reception. When Rentschler subtitles his book “Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife,” for example, he implicitly refuses to station these representations in a single frame of ideological transmission and predetermined reception but rather stakes a claim on the fluid filmic territory that includes movies’ pre-histories as well as post-histories. Schulte-Sasse also troubles more static “historical” readings of Nazi films by situating them within eighteenth-century narrative contexts of melodrama at the same time as she extrapolates from them to transhistorical psychic epiphenomena. In sum, historians have known for a long time that our use of film should be informed by those who have been thinking about how messages are produced by, transmitted through, and

³⁷ John E. O’Connor, “Teaching Film and American Culture: A Survey of Texts,” *American Quarterly* 31, Special Issue: Film and American Studies (Winter 1979): 718–23. An excellent article from 1952 suggested a shift in focus to the interplay of spectator and film; see David and Evelyn T. Riesman, “Movies and Audiences,” *American Quarterly* 4 (Autumn 1952): 195–202.

³⁸ I have already cited some exceptions to this focus, including within the pages of this journal. One further example is the excellent article in the last issue, Charles Ambler, “Popular Film and Colonial Audiences: The Movies in Northern Rhodesia,” *AHR* 106 (February 2001): 81–105, where the author reconstructs the ways in which colonial audiences’ experience of Hollywood films was not engineered by the movies’ overt messages or the censoring arm of the colonial state. Historians may be better equipped than their cultural studies counterparts to engage in such reconstruction, but evidence such as that with which Ambler was able to work is not always available, as I discuss further below. The question of accuracy has been somewhat retooled within the explorations of historical representation in film as a viable competitor to narrative history in the works of Robert A. Rosenstone cited above, and in an *AHR Forum* on the subject: Rosenstone, “History in Images/History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film,” *AHR* 93 (December 1988): 1173–85; David Herlihy, “Am I a Camera? Other Reflections on Films and History,” 1186–92; Hayden White, “Historiography and Historiophoty,” 1193–99; and John E. O’Connor, “History in Images/Images in History: Reflections on the Importance of Film and Television Study for an Understanding of the Past,” 1200–09.

received from movies. But the most sophisticated developments of that thinking have been hard for historians to reconcile with their own projects.

Indeed, Schulte-Sasse's work on film from this period has been largely ignored by historians, as have most of the articles on Nazi film and ideology mentioned so far. *The Ministry of Illusion*, on the other hand, has been able to cross the disciplinary divide more successfully. Rentschler's book, unlike Schulte-Sasse's, is deeply historical in the conventional senses: it is first of all sensitive throughout to institutional contexts, historical agency, and change over time. Furthermore, Rentschler's close readings of individual films are nested in a dense contextual matrix derived from serious and wide-ranging archival work. Thus, in spite of the fact that Rentschler has been trained as a specialist in German literature and made a career in film studies, even conservative practitioners of our profession have no trouble identifying him as a "film historian," even one of the foremost historians of German film. But we will have to look further to see which aspects of Rentschler's analysis have been found useful for historians, or *how* he has been appropriated as a historian and how he has not.

An extraordinary sympathy for this work is detectable in Geoffrey Cocks's review of two books on German cinema for *Central European History*.³⁹ Cocks's own intimacy with discourses of psychoanalysis allows him to avoid segregating the terrains of historical matter and theory of fantasy, a dichotomy that, as I have been asserting, only does damage to the insights of this book and others. Cocks is thus able to attend to "the corporatist mix of public and private authority and taste" that informed Goebbels's position as, in Cocks's words, a "Minister of Amusements."⁴⁰ As the deft shift from Rentschler's word "illusion" to Cocks's "amusements" implies, the reviewer is sensitive to the ways in which the distraction of cinema was seen as an integral part of an ideological program. But if what was at stake was not merely the question of "distracting" the masses but of captivating the realm of distraction itself, of coordinating a state program with the explicitly private sphere of spectators' desires (as so many of these researchers assert in their different ways), will this lead historians to the murky ground of "fantasy"?

Cocks may find such ground firmer than others would. A less sanguine but more exemplary case of the degree to which a film history such as Rentschler's is seen as compatible with the historiography of Nazism is available in Jay Baird's review of *The Ministry of Illusion* in the *American Historical Review*.⁴¹ Needless to say, no single book reviewer ever represents the historical profession as a whole. I want to treat this particular review as a symptomatic response to Rentschler's book, to speculate on how it works to set out boundaries for what sorts of analysis lie within the terrain of the historical profession and what arguments lie, and should remain, beyond it.⁴² A reading of Baird's review can shed light on the possibilities as well as

³⁹ Geoffrey Cocks, "The Ministry of Amusements: Film, Commerce, and Politics in Germany, 1917–1945," *Central European History* 30, no. 1 (1997): 77–88.

⁴⁰ Cocks, "Ministry of Amusements," 82.

⁴¹ Jay W. Baird, book review, *AHR* 103 (April 1998): 545–46.

⁴² By "symptomatic," I mean that this review is a particularly clear manifestation of a particular condition of historiography, and exemplary in this sense only. That is not to say that Baird's response is exemplary or typical for all historians or all German historians, as Cocks's very different position demonstrates. There is a great deal of receptivity to the lessons of cultural analysis from other disciplines in the German history field, to be sure (as several of my own footnotes will attest). The

the current limits of interdisciplinary dialogue in the subfield of the history of National Socialist ideology. For his own part, Baird may be seen as an ideal reader of Rentschler's book from the perspective of historians of National Socialism, with a respected set of publications on Nazi history to his credit and with a particular expertise on the subject of propaganda and the figure of Joseph Goebbels, whose central role in the film office of the Propaganda Ministry is well known.⁴³

It is, therefore, not surprising that Baird's initial praise of Rentschler's book in what is a generally positive review focuses on identifiably historical issues, such as the continuities among Weimar cinema, Nazi film, and contemporary culture pointed up by the book. He is impressed by Rentschler's balance of respect for some of the artistry of cinema of the period with attention to sinister effects: "a message of unspeakable criminality was often bathed in ethereal light. The result was what Rentschler calls 'psychotechnology.'" ⁴⁴ It is worth noting that this level of analytical subtlety, where ideological horror is coupled with—and indeed inseparable from—a high level of aesthetic idealization, was already present in the earlier generations of research on culture and ideology in the Third Reich.⁴⁵ The reviewer praises as pathbreaking Rentschler's reading of Leni Riefenstahl's film *The Blue Light* (1932) in terms of the mountain-film genre and the ideological legacy to National Socialism, extols his commentary on the way the notion of homeland is worked through the social and existential context of the Great Depression in *The Prodigal Son*, and makes reference to the book's encyclopedic appendices. This array of compliments, however, mainly serves to circumscribe the terrain of the historically useful *Ministry of Illusion*, which, in Baird's view, is "seriously deficient" precisely at the level of ideology critique, or of historically situating art in relationship to politics. Yet, as my review of some of Rentschler's readings should make clear, this is exactly what his book does most forcefully.⁴⁶

One particular paragraph of Baird's review is key to an understanding of the limits of interdisciplinary dialogue in the field of Nazi ideology and culture. The prominent place of a list of evocative phrases ripped from the context of Rentschler's deft arguments, rendering them utterly oblique, reads at first like a

question I am hoping to get at in this essay has to do with what the necessary limits of these lessons might be, from the disciplinary perspective of History. Hence this *AHR* book review helps me map out this ground.

⁴³ See esp. Jay W. Baird, *The Mythical World of Nazi War Propaganda, 1939–1945* (Minneapolis, 1974). Rentschler, for his part, is somewhat critical of Baird's scholarship; see *Ministry of Illusion*, 320 n. 11.

⁴⁴ Baird, book review, 545.

⁴⁵ See, for example, George L. Mosse, "Beauty without Sensuality/The Exhibition *Entartete Kunst*," in Stephanie Barron, ed., *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles, 1991), 25–32. The continuity of Weimar filmic modernism and Volkish, authoritarian, or otherwise proto-Nazi ideology was already established by Kracauer in *From Caligari to Hitler*.

⁴⁶ It is noteworthy that a review essay written for a more popular audience displays some of the symptoms I am identifying in Baird's treatment: J. S. Marcus stresses the centrality of film to the Third Reich, the luster of its blockbusters, and hence "German history's distraction from itself," ignoring the links Rentschler makes between distraction and ideological message, and recoiling from what he calls "Rentschler's modish academic style"; Marcus also agrees with Baird that Rentschler has valuably "assembled much sound historical detail, especially in his appendixes." See Marcus, "Screentime for Hitler," in *New York Review of Books* (March 4, 1999): 39–42. Schulte-Sasse's work, with its principal focus on the play of ideology within a structure of viewer fantasy-formation, seems to be out of the view of historians and general public alike.

traditionalist scholar's attack on "jargon." Yet the gulf separating Rentschler's work and Baird's reading of it is deeper than a cleft between disciplinary discourses. I quote the paragraph in full:

Flamboyant prose and jargon, joined with a relentlessly self-congratulatory introduction (the author uses the pronoun "I" some thirty-eight times in this section alone) will trouble some readers. Patience is called for as one is informed that in the Third Reich a state apparatus "colonises fantasy production," while "Fascist aesthetics . . . represent a function of formal surfaces" (p. 14). Nazi films are said to "dialecticize reality," most notably *Hitlerjunge Quex* (1933), where "a movement occupied an individual in the hope of overcoming masses" (p. 59). The historic Paracelsus is rendered "the servant of an ideological elsewhere" (p. 180). The film *La Habanera* (1937) is said to deliver "a synthesis of noble kitsch and nuanced *Kammerspiel*, a regressive scenario outsmarted by an ironic *mise en scene* (p. 129)."⁴⁷

Baird is willing to accept Rentschler's interpretive placement of Nazi films, with all their propagandistic baggage, within a context of film history spanning several ideological regimes. Furthermore, he does not seem uncomfortable with obscure coinages that fall within these acceptable limits of interpretation, as his complimentary citation of Rentschler's concept of "psychotechnology" proves. If it is not the non-traditional language in which Rentschler's analysis is sometimes couched that sets much of its most adventurous claims outside the purview of historical interest, what is it?

The cited remark on the colonization of fantasy production and the formal function of fascist aesthetics is drawn from Rentschler's condensed summary of the pathbreaking work of German film specialist Karsten Witte.⁴⁸ Even without turning to Rentschler's original (and unfortunately misquoted) text, many readers may identify in it a reference to the difficult, but utterly crucial, question of fascist aesthetics. Apart from recognizable iconography, can one speak of a fascist style, aesthetic, or image? Susan Sontag's seminal 1975 essay, "Fascinating Fascism," provocatively articulated the need to think through, if not to historicize, the relationship of formal aesthetic elements to ideological content.⁴⁹ Such a project, whether it is historicized or not, is necessarily semiotic in approach and has been shunned by historians of National Socialism since the tentative suggestions by George Mosse roughly contemporary with Sontag's essay, its republication, and the ensuing discussions.⁵⁰

More puzzling is Baird's objection to the claim that Nazi films "dialecticize reality," in part because of an apparent error in the review. Rentschler does make the point that one film "dedialecticizes reality," or oversimplifies a knotty social

⁴⁷ Baird, book review, 129.

⁴⁸ Karsten Witte's work on entertainment film in the Third Reich has been of singular importance as a source for all of the work presently under discussion. See, for example, Witte, *Lachende Erben, toller Tag: Filmkomödie im Dritten Reich* (Berlin, 1995); and "Visual Pleasure Inhibited: Aspects of the German Revue Film," J. D. Steakley and Gabriel Hoover, trans., *New German Critique*, nos. 24–25 (Fall–Winter 1981–82): 238–63. The previously discussed special issue of *New German Critique* is an homage to Witte.

⁴⁹ Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," *New York Review of Books* (February 6, 1975), rpt. in Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York, 1981), 71–105.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Mosse, "Beauty without Sensuality."

conflict for audiences.⁵¹ Again, one could ask whether the trendy transformation of “dialectics” into “dialecticize” is what is at issue, or whether the introduction of dialectics as such is the problem for Baird. For while, on the one hand, dialectics not only belong to the province of History but constitute the historical concept that has been the most crucial to critiques of ideology across the disciplines, Baird’s review, by contrast, completely avoids any discussion of this aspect of Rentschler’s work. The 1933 youth propaganda feature about a boy nicknamed “Quicksilver,” or “Quex,” *Hitler Youth Quex*, for instance, is shown in Rentschler’s analysis to enact the embodiment of an abstract collective ideal in one individual, Heini Völker by name, the martyr who will represent the surrender of one’s person for the ideal Reich. The dying body of the boy who has struggled against the Communist milieu of his family and neighborhood for self-realization in the Hitler Youth dissolves into the image of the wavering flag, representing something greater than death, as the Hitler Youth anthem reminds the viewer in the last frame of the film.⁵² The Third Reich’s first sponsored film thus works as a spectacle, like the spectacle of Nazi pageantry, “intensifying life to the point of devivification,” “focus[ing] on a human subject and transform[ing] him into a political property.”⁵³ This play between individuation, collective constitution, and self-destruction is shown by Rentschler to be rehearsed with precision through the specific parameters of a cinematic medium ideally suited to meld these oppositions within the frame of fantasy.

The conspicuous absence of any treatment of these insights in the *AHR* review, or their reduction to parodically reduced and decontextualized phrases, implies at least one historian’s view that they lie outside the terrain of historical analysis. They may inform Baird’s assessment that this is “the most important book of Third Reich film criticism, technique, and semiotics to date,” that the book is “[a] major contribution to the history of an art form” but not to Nazi history as such. Interestingly, though, after declining to engage with a sophisticated treatment of ideology that seems to him to belong to the non-historical disciplines—or else to represent incomprehensible “flamboyance”—Baird ends his review with the specific criticism that Rentschler’s book ignores ideology in its focus on entertainment films: “By diminishing the importance of ideology in film, it distorts rather than illuminates historical reality. David Welch’s *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933–1945* (1983) remains the standard work on the historic Goebbels and Nazi cinema.”⁵⁴

So we are back at the “propaganda thesis,” the top-down model of ideology as univocal state program that Rentschler’s work, along with others in German film studies, has left behind. The question that remains—and it is a genuinely open and difficult question—is, what are the alternatives to the paradigm of ideology and culture shared by an earlier generation of film scholars and historians? And will an entertainment of these alternatives within the subdiscipline of German history enhance historical work or draw it away from the specificity and materiality that we continue to think of as central to historical analysis?

⁵¹ See Rentschler, *Ministry of Illusion*, 68.

⁵² Rentschler, *Ministry of Illusion*, 69.

⁵³ Rentschler, *Ministry of Illusion*, 55.

⁵⁴ Baird, book review, 546.

UNTIL NOW, I HAVE IDENTIFIED historians' reticence to absorb the potential implications of recent film criticism with an apparent preference for a relatively limited and contained definition of "ideology." Slavoj Žižek has recently edited a volume called *Mapping Ideology* that explores the changing views of the historical and intellectual-historical place of ideology, which he breaks down, in Hegelian fashion, into three discrete "moments."⁵⁵ Following Hegel's three components of religion—doctrine, belief, and ritual—Žižek posits that ideology can be and has been discussed in terms of three separate, if intricately linked, levels: ideology as a "doctrine" or complex of ideas (consider the best work of George Mosse and Fritz Stern but also Hannah Arendt and Theodor Adorno); "ideology in its externality, that is, the materiality of ideology" (think of the specific ways in which historians have fleshed out the social and institutional forms shaped by racist doctrine, such as the work of Michael Burleigh and his collaborator Wolfgang Wippermann, Timothy Mason, Jane Caplan, Omer Bartov, and Saul Friedländer, among many others); and a third level: "the most elusive domain, the 'spontaneous' ideology at work at the heart of social 'reality' itself."⁵⁶

This final domain is the most "elusive," and yet critical, as third terms of Hegelian triads tend to be. To clarify what is entailed in this third moment of ideology, Žižek offers the example of liberalism. On the first level, we find the evolution of liberal doctrine in European thought; on the second, its concrete materialization in the development of institutions and environments such as the free press, the electoral system, and the market; finally, a discussion of liberalism is somehow partial if it does not consider the ways in which the ideology becomes internalized or active in its subjects—it must tackle the question of *how subjects experience themselves* as "free individuals."

The trained ear recognizes in this description a revision of Louis Althusser's famous excursus "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," where three levels are created out of the infrastructure or economic base, two levels of superstructure, including institutional apparatuses of state ideology, and finally, the level of sets of political, religious, ethical, and other ideas.⁵⁷ That essay remains one of the most subtle treatments of the interrelations of devices of power and the self-consciousness (even constitution, Althusser argues) of individual subjects. Ideology "interpellates individuals as subjects," it "hails" them and causes them to recognize themselves in its call. Ideology, in this sense, is not a set of (false) ideas that are believed to a greater or lesser degree by historical subjects. Rather, it is the field in which those subjects are given identity; it is inseparable from their sense of where they stand in relation to others in society, as well as in relation to state and family.

While this last is clearly the terrain less charted by historians, it is the ground, as I have been suggesting, of the most innovative recent work in Nazi film studies.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ See Slavoj Žižek, "Introduction: The Spectre of Ideology," in Žižek, ed., *Mapping Ideology* (London, 1994), 1–33.

⁵⁶ Žižek, "Introduction," 9. Žižek even suggests that the contributions within the volume can be seen as organized along the tripartite axis of doctrine-belief-ritual, which in turn parallels the Hegelian In-itself—For-itself—In-and-For-itself. See pp. 9–10 and n. 9.

⁵⁷ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Ben Brewster, trans. (New York, 1971), 127–86.

⁵⁸ This difficult question is a privileged one in literature departments at the moment, constituting the central axis of approaches to popular culture under the broad rubric of "cultural studies." It may be too

Again, this interest is not limited to the field of German film. Another instructive example is offered by recent studies of Italian film from the fascist era, where historical studies dovetail in interesting ways with the work of literary scholars who are deeply involved in theory of ideology. Historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat takes interdisciplinary inquiry a long way in her close textual readings of films of the fascist era, contextualized within a field she defines as an emerging “new public sphere” of fascism, accommodating “limitations and paradoxes.”⁵⁹ For Marcia Landy, in turn, ideology is not a “mere cloak for reality,” a sort of “false consciousness” that (mis)represents a material substructure, but a force that authorizes certain social organizations and exercises of power by positing itself as simply the way things are.⁶⁰ What is interesting in the comparison of the Italian fascist to the German Nazi case is the way in which “ideology” is understood differently as a result of fascism’s presumed non-systematic, eclectic, and inconsistent character. As is also noted by Angela Dalle Vacche, the Italian view has traditionally been that Nazi ideology drove its politics, whereas the fascist imaginary was more focused on imagery than doctrine (in her language, on the “body” rather than the spirit or mind, or letter of the law of ideology).⁶¹ For both Landy and Dalle Vacche, the study of film offers unprecedented access to what has always been a difficult question in the historiography of fascism, that is, the question of the place of ideology in Italian life in the 1920s and 1930s.

Yet, as we have seen, the relationships among ideology, popular movies, and viewing publics are also far messier to chart than one would think from rereading Sontag’s “Fascinating Fascism” or any of a number of other works focusing on the allure of Nazi mass spectacle. Lutz Koepnick reevaluates the problem of Nazi popular culture in his essay “Fascist Aesthetics Revisited,” where he employs Walter Benjamin’s uncompleted work on the emergence of modern commodity culture (the Arcades project) to undo the assumption, drawn in part from Benjamin’s own well-known and pithy phrase about the Nazi “aestheticization of politics,” that Nazi culture was epitomized by the deindividuating, conformist, and unifying spectacles of Leni Riefenstahl’s films and Albert Speer’s monumental

early to tell, but my own experience suggests that the youngest generation of cultural historians, namely our graduate students, have already overcome the disciplinary resistance I have been describing, and that future work in history is likely to incorporate more complex models of ideology than we have had at our disposal in the past.

⁵⁹ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, “Envisioning Modernity: Desire and Discipline in the Italian Fascist Film,” *Critical Inquiry* 23 (Autumn 1996): 109–44, esp. 142–43; see also Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley, Calif., 2001). Film had already been seriously considered by as prominent a historian of Italian fascism as Victoria de Grazia, but she focused more on institutional frameworks and the film industry as a cultural field, rather than engaging in the language of film as Ben-Ghiat does. See de Grazia, “Mass Culture and Sovereignty: The American Challenge to European Cinemas, 1920–1960,” *Journal of Modern History* 61 (March 1989): 53–87.

⁶⁰ Marcia Landy, *Fascism in Film: The Italian Commercial Cinema, 1931–1943* (Princeton, N.J., 1986), 18–19. This view of ideology is drawn from Antonio Gramsci’s prison notebooks (see 260–61 of Hoare/Nowell-Smith edition), as well as Raymond Williams’s *Marxism and Literature* (1977) and Frederic Jameson’s work. Consistent with the German film work I have been exploring, and particularly close to Schulte-Sasse, Landy points out how “escapist” genre films, in spite/because of their conventions, reveal “how desire is managed.” This involves a complex reading of their escapist dimensions not unlike those of Rentschler described above.

⁶¹ Angela Dalle Vacche, *The Body in the Mirror: Shapes of History in Italian Cinema* (Princeton, N.J., 1992).

architecture.⁶² Such spectacular embodiments of ideological orthodoxy represented only half of the Nazi aesthetic program, which simultaneously followed a track of producing “seemingly unpolitical spaces of private commodity consumption” and “American-style consumerism,” which posited itself as a realm of individuation and private desire, even as it co-opted these “to arrest and rechannel” them.⁶³ This, of course, is an elaboration of the thesis shared by both Rentschler and Schulte-Sasse, namely that a concentration on Nazi cinema as either ideological indoctrination or as escapist diversion misses the power of a cultural apparatus that relied on both functions. Further, Koepnick shows, critics and historians who stress fascist spectacle over commodity culture obscure the continuities running from Benjamin’s nineteenth-century Paris over National Socialist Germany to the postwar European and American present.

For his own part, Žižek’s Lacanian focus on questions of visual pleasure, enjoyment, and fantasy in relation to ideology led him to film criticism from the start, in a series of explorations of political paradigms where he moved seamlessly among historical examples and sequences from Alfred Hitchcock thrillers.⁶⁴ In Schulte-Sasse’s *Entertaining the Third Reich*, a deep grounding in German literary history and in what literary critics know as genre theory is filtered through a Žižekian model of subjective experience (arguably a transhistorical, mechanical model). Thus, in an important way, Schulte-Sasse’s book is indeed sensitive to historical context, but at the same time, one could argue, her conclusions about the specific ways in which actual subjects “experienced” individual films in relation to their lived reality are unverifiable.

It is precisely this problem that was addressed in Miriam Hansen’s 1991 work, *Babel and Babylon*, which attended to the problem of spectatorship in the context of American silent film, focusing on ideological questions associated with gender rather than with race.⁶⁵ Hansen turns to a complex conceptualization of the “public sphere” in order to breach the gap she identifies between two different kinds of “spectators” appearing in film scholarship: the first, an ideal subject, “somewhat abstract and ultimately passive,” whose positioning is inscribed textually within the film work itself; and the second, the empirical moviegoer or “social viewer” who is assumed to be manipulated into certain positions. Addressing a problem of interdisciplinarity closely linked to the issues discussed here, Hansen writes of the “blind spots resulting from the increased specialization of both film theory and film history” and suggests that “the concept of the public sphere offers a theoretical matrix that encompasses different levels of inquiry and methodology.”⁶⁶

⁶² Lutz P. Koepnick, “Fascist Aesthetics Revisited,” *Modernism/modernity* 6 (January 1999): 51–73.

⁶³ Koepnick, “Fascist Aesthetics,” 52–54.

⁶⁴ See esp. Slavoj Žižek, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Lacan, But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock* (London, 1991); *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991); and *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan In Hollywood and Out* (New York, 1992).

⁶⁵ Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991).

⁶⁶ Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, see 5–7.

Apart from the fact that a significant book on American silent film might not be expected to fall within the frame of vision of historians of Nazi Germany, Hansen's solution is not likely to impress them. While the concept of the "public sphere" has certainly been engaged by historians, this has been at the level of actually existing social networks (free associations, professional affiliations, institutions), not as a "theoretical matrix," even one that is meant to mediate between empirical and semiotically constituted subjects. And yet it is precisely this mediation that has begun in the film scholarship discussed above, and the same work seems to constitute a call for interdisciplinarity, or to offer an invitation to historians to work toward such mediation from our own side of a formidable methodological barrier. The work Hansen and others have begun to do in terms of recovering the apparently lost but crucial experiences of past film publics is, after all, historical work—historians may be particularly adept at locating and interpreting the scant evidence necessary for this reconstruction.⁶⁷

It is conceivable that the sort of interdisciplinary rapport called for here is beyond our reach in an age where scholars consider themselves more open to work done in neighboring fields than ever before but where disciplinary practices are at the same time segregated from one another in more elusive and nefarious ways. In the face of the sheer volume of new work and its sophistication, a film scholar's new work on National Socialist mass media may seem remote even to a historian of everyday life in National Socialist Germany. It may, on the other hand, even be the case that these different disciplinary practices lead to incompatible conclusions about the relationship of state programs to mass consent and resistance, or about the nature of ideological formations as such. In other words, disciplines might well interfere with no less than they assist one another. Even if that is so, attentiveness to these precise tensions could be fruitful in unexpected ways in providing access to alternative conceptualizations of the relationship between film and history.

⁶⁷ As I noted above, for instance, Marcia Klotz is conscious of the dearth of empirical evidence to support her own and Schulte-Sasse's assumption of female viewer identification. Stephen Lowry works on Nazi film within Frederic Jameson's influential model of ideology, stressing the tensions between ideological program—"closure," or "containment"—and the viewers' desires, which are not directly produced by that program but are immediately in a sort of "horse-trade" with it. See Lowry, "Ideology and Excess," 129–33; compare Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1981), 24–58; and Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text* 1 (Winter 1979): 94–109. Lowry, in turn, confesses the problem of reconstructing effects of these films on actual viewers of the 1930s and 1940s, acknowledging the lack of reliable empirical data, and laments the necessity to engage a text-oriented analysis to speculate on extratextual effects. He sees this as a problem for the historian and an opportunity for interdisciplinary dialogue.

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