

Introduction

IN 1938, the Nazi women's journal *NS-Frauenwarte* published an editorial that severely criticized the representation of women in the popular media at the time (Fig. I.1). Illustrated with a number of images, the two-page spread provided examples of what kind of representations the authors wished to disappear and how they should be replaced. On the left, we find a collage of scantily clad women posing as chorus girls and glamorous dames, heavily made up and coiffed, drinking champagne; on the opposite side, we see young females in sports tricots and peasant costumes, with long blonde braids and no makeup, exercising and dancing folk dances in clearly separated images. In bold letters, readers are told on the first page "You think: Charming and fun? We think: dirty and convulsive!" whereas the second page reads "You think: boring? We think: healthy and beautiful!" The text in the middle reads:

Whoever has recently monitored a number of periodicals might have noticed with great surprise certain tendencies that seem Jewish, all too Jewish, to us. What is presented here, in films and in variety shows, as "woman" is precisely that demi-monde-type [*Halbwelttyp*] hostile to marriage and family, who is the living embodiment of the sterility that was a marker of the previous epoch of decay. The National Socialist idea is profoundly life affirming. Nothing could be further from us than prudery. Beauty and grace are the natural purpose of woman. The enjoyment of life and the pleasures of the senses are elements of the productive tensions of life. A beautiful girl certainly wasn't made to be a nun, but, and this is the difference between yesterday and today, she also wasn't made to be a coquette. The superficial and frivolous degradation of woman into an object of entertainment, the disgusting adulteration of a healthy, natural sense of the body into undisguised sexual greed, this whole distorted, unhealthy atmosphere exclusively belongs to the chapter of subversive Jewish propaganda! We will have a watchful eye to see that such tendencies do not reemerge under some kind of pretext. A look at what we have recently observed in publications, which are being presented to the German people in the millions, lets us realize unequivocally just how deeply the Jewish pollution has infiltrated this particular area.¹

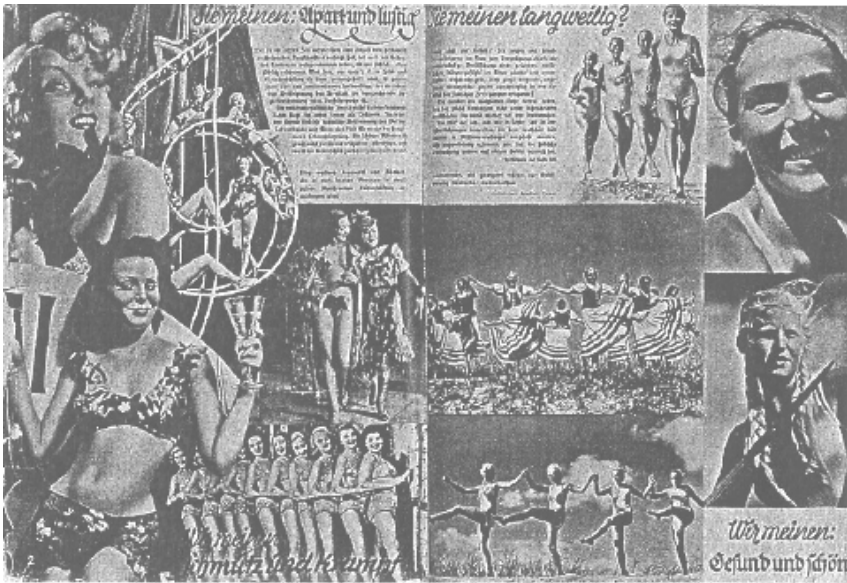


Figure I.1. Before and after? This magazine spread contrasts glamorous "Weimar" images still present in Nazi culture with depictions of "natural" femininity that conform to the National Socialist ideal.

In its extraordinary conflation of issues of gender, sexuality, and race, this passage raises a number of tensions, which are the subject of this work. The feature juxtaposes two stereotypes of female representation as antagonistic, while identifying one as essentially anti-"German." The text alludes to various Nazi discourses that permeated the debates surrounding the National Socialist ideal of womanhood and the often discordant representations of women in the popular media of the Nazi state: anti-Semitism, reactionary "feminism," gender essentialism, anti-religious tendencies, and a pronatalist discourse. The writer invites the reader to compare two sets of visual images. One, a modernist collage of half-naked beauties, offers images familiar from both German and American film productions; it is intended here to invoke a sense of Weimar and contemporary foreign cultures, suggesting degeneracy in general and women's objectification in particular. The other points to the *völkisch* imagery of Nazi folklore best illustrated by Leni Riefenstahl's aestheticized renderings of the fascist body.

The ideological gap between them is impossible to bridge. Looking at these two pages, it is difficult to favor the one on the right. In fact, the author of the text assumed an imaginary reader who *would* reject it and needed to readjust her preferences ("You think: boring? We think: healthy and beautiful!"). Along the same lines, the magazine also complained bitterly about the German film industry and its products, arguing that contemporary films did not pay enough attention to idealizing the family and primarily featured childless couples, which once again points to a privileging of desire over reproduction.² As many scholars have noted, the representation of women in the Nazi state was in fact fraught with inconsistency and dissonance. Bound up in various cultural continuities, economic dependencies, and ideological frictions, National Socialist culture frequently produced its own contradictions and thus gave voice to the very tensions that underlay the repressive axioms of Nazi ideologues. The discourses that circulated through public figures and popular texts spoke to a multiplicity of female images and desires, which in turn articulate femininity as the object of continuing antagonisms during the period.

In imagining German fascism, we are instantly overwhelmed with images. In fact, one of the most striking aspects of National Socialist culture is its positive embrace of modern technology, ranging from the fully developed use of emerging media to the efficient production of means of mass destruction. The orchestration of monumental spectacles and the programmatic use of film images for propaganda—overseen by Joseph Goebbels's newly founded Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda—were integral to National Socialist politics. Political rallies, Siegfried Kracauer observed, were aestheticized into "mass ornaments." Leni Riefenstahl's notorious documentary feature on the 1934 Nuremberg party congress, *Triumph of the Will* (1935), illustrates impressively how, in the words of Bertolt Brecht, the Nazis presented "political discourse as theater."³ Another contemporary observer, Walter Benjamin, proposed that Nazism attempted to break down the boundaries between aesthetics and real life, and mobilized technologies, such as the mass media, for that purpose.⁴

As one would expect, then, film under Nazi rule consisted of more than weekly newsreels and propaganda features. By and large, popular film culture supported a cinema intent on entertaining the public. This does not mean that it escaped the influence of National Socialist ideol-

ogy. The war films, or the so-called genius pictures, typically presented story lines that glorified the "masculine" struggle toward victory and encouraged the viewer to identify with the fascist project. This use of the genre was consistent with Nazi ideology, which primarily addressed the German male and was preoccupied with fantasies of masculine strength and heroic death. In National Socialist ideology, women's roles were limited to those of "wife" and "mother." In popular cinema, however, women usually played the central role. Remarkably, Nazi cinema is the cinema of the female star actress. Whereas the "exemplary females" of National Socialist ideology were oppressed in many areas of the National Socialist everyday life, women triumphed on the silver screen.

Although the representation of women in National Socialist films functioned within the ideological framework of German fascism, attempting to represent and address only those spectators who were included in their system of "desirable" subjects, it also consistently depicted women as "other."⁵ Fascist texts, such as the one cited earlier, associate femininity, sexuality, and race, directly revealing the difficulties Nazi culture experienced with respect to its female images. The conservative model of the virtuous maiden and self-sacrificing mother that National Socialist demagogues idealized generally failed to attract and titillate contemporary audiences, who preferred the "dangerous" images of Hollywood glamour and cosmopolitan allure.

Yet, the social significance of women in diverse cultural contexts has been largely neglected in studies that deal with women in the Nazi state. Historians have tended to reduce women to victims or coconspirators, contrasting "Frau Hitlers" or concentration camp guards with females who were subject to Nazi brutalities ranging from job sanctioning to forced sterilization and genocide. Further, in the past historians have explored "ordinary" women's everyday lives primarily in terms of the Nazis' prescriptive delineations. For reasons connected to dominant ideas of historical relevance, the explicitly political overshadowed the more complicated, politically ambiguous manifestations of conflicting discourses in the realm of popular culture. That said, even female images that dramatically contradicted Nazi models had no tangible subversive effect. On the contrary, they might very well have aided the fascist project by creating the illusion of "false normalcy."⁶

Stephen Greenblatt has argued that capitalist systems (and Nazi Germany, after all, remained one) often create "regimes in which the drive

toward differentiation and the drive toward monological organization operate simultaneously."⁷ In the same vein, Catherine Gallagher points out that "under certain historical circumstances, the display of ideological contradictions is completely consonant with the maintenance of oppressive social relations."⁸ Following these notions, I will argue that the National Socialist state *needed* to embrace its ideological "enemy" to accommodate its public's fantasies; that even a system as totalitarian as Hitler-Germany could neither dictate nor contain public discourse in an ideologically stable way. Women figure prominently in this frame. Goebbels and his acolytes allowed for diversity in cultural expression, because audiences persistently continued to express their predilection for residual cultural forms that did not correspond to Nazi doctrine. Rather than conceiving of National Socialist films and its stars as solely "mass culture," women (and, to a somewhat lesser degree, also men) must be seen as a "mass audience" whose consumer preferences shaped the very contradictions we will encounter in this work. That is, I will explore National Socialist film culture as dynamic, as a set of relations that worked in both directions, not simply from the top down.

Before Patrice Petro's revisionist feminist history of Weimar culture explored how Weimar cinema addressed female spectators and represented women's concerns, women had been figured chiefly as "modernism's other," reduced to symbols of "mass culture" lacking significance in the cultural production.⁹ The modernist trope that posited popular media as generating a culture of "feminization" regarded the public sphere that emerged in fascist Germany as popular and populist, as including all of mass culture's negative aspects. With fascist culture thus metaphorized as feminized (through women's identification with mass culture) and masculinized (in terms of its ideological celebration of male supremacy and its fascist modernism), the actual position of women in the everyday world seemed a minor element in a larger framework stretching from cultural coercion to physical persecution.

To locate women in the everyday, I wish to turn directly toward the relationship between women and popular culture itself, in particular the way in which female stars both represented and addressed women in popular films and the concomitant star discourse. National Socialist culture approached women in two radically separate ways: first, in an ideologically conformist manner along the lines of *Kinder, Küche, Führer*; second, an ideologically problematic one promoting consumer lifestyles,

professional or social advancement, and romantic fulfillment (which is ego-centered rather than community-oriented)—all of which were most prominently articulated through the movies and their female stars. As both Petro and Miriam Hansen have shown, the cinema had much to offer female audiences from its very beginnings.¹¹ In fact, women's mass consumption of popular culture led cultural critics to the sexist conflation of the two. The modernist binary that frequently identified women with "low" culture consumption and men with "high" modernism ultimately suggests the problematic conceptualization of fascist mass culture as "feminizing."¹² The factual basis for this argument, however—women's notable involvement with popular discourses—brings female audiences themselves and their relationship with the popular in National Socialist culture to the foreground.

This in turn points toward the significance of female star signs as signposts that informed women's sense of identity as much as they indicated women's fantasies and identificatory desires. In the past, the main focus of feminist film critics investigating Nazi cinema has been on the representation of women *through characters* in popular films. I have departed from this model of isolated textual analysis and turned toward a contextual investigation of *star images* circulating in various media environments. This enables me to expand the scope of reading contexts and theoretical approaches and allows for the inclusion of star theory and cultural studies approaches. As mentioned earlier, the typical Universum-Film Aktiengesellschaft (Ufa) hit film belonged to the female star performer, the Nazi film diva.¹³ And it is through her, through the paradigm of the female film star, that womanhood most clearly articulated itself as one of the central areas of contestation within German fascism. Although Nazi culture synthesized its politicians—in particular its cultic *Führer*-figure, Adolf Hitler—into its *male* stars, its only publicly visible *female* stars (rather than unrealized generic stereotypes) were Ufa film actresses, of whom a significantly high percentage were not even German.

Conceptually, Nazism embraced neither the *femmes fatales* nor the *femmes fragiles* of the fin-de-siècle, nor did it approve of the "new woman" of modernity. It foregrounded instead the absolute of the "German mother" as well as the image of the deerotized "female fighter and comrade." Accordingly, National Socialist media sometimes closely approximated its ideal in its representations of women

through stars, both in its films and in its manufacture of popular star texts. Yet more often than not Nazi films featured actresses whose star images and screen characters struggled to incorporate National Socialist doctrine. In contrast, they referred back to those discourses operative in international cinema and Weimar traditions. Although all the stars of Nazi culture, as well as their films, reveal some influence of National Socialist ideology, we must question whether their popularity depended on these influences. Not only did different filmmakers and Ufa's media machine approach various female stars in radically different ways, but whatever they did, the figure of woman invariably points to frictions inherent in the problematic position women assumed in relation to fascist patriarchy. In contrast to what the Nazis envisioned, it was impossible to streamline popular culture; instead a strange parallelism permeated the popular, allowing a number of nonsimultaneous discourses to coexist.

As other scholars have noted, a closer look at Nazi cinema reveals that cultural production always exists in a certain tension with ideological prescription: even if to a somewhat lesser degree, we find the same multidiscursive tendencies that have been shown to permeate Hollywood productions also in existence here. In place of Goebbels's grandiose fantasy of a fascist *Gesamtkunstwerk*—conceiving of "Germany" as a total work of art—then, we are once again left with a highly contradictory system that managed to contain its ideological tensions, but not resolve them.¹⁴

Rather than explore Nazism's modes of operation and cultural production to account for how it was possible that it came to exist at all—in other words, to explain German fascism through cultural analysis—I want to explore the instabilities of the culture that developed under National Socialist rule. Although it is useful to examine the uniquely programmatic character of the regime's propaganda work, such a focus risks producing an overly formulaic analysis that will reproduce identical results regardless of what cultural phenomenon is under investigation.

My analysis of the complexities surrounding womanhood during the period relates the various intersecting discourses that emerge to their diverse, and often discrete, histories. The very push and pull that transpired in National Socialist culture—the constant clash of ideological and cultural subjects—provides a fascinating account of the struggle

over systems of meaning in the Third Reich. Thus, I am interested not only in placing the representation of women into the context of Nazism, but also in looking at the cultural descriptions and inscriptions of "woman" that surfaced under National Socialist rule as related to larger cultural contexts in which these images circulated and operated. In other words, one part of my project is to elaborate on the Nazis' technologies of governing, in particular, to borrow Victoria de Grazia's phrase, on how fascism ruled women. The other is to develop the idea that women, and their relations to the social contemporary, represented a highly unstable element in National Socialist culture. By using the figure of the female star to point to a larger historical problematic and to reveal the underlying *instability* of National Socialism's homogeneous conception of femininity, I can offer a more complex feminist history of women in the Third Reich.

Chapter 1 surveys the three most prominent discursive fields that bear on my investigation of female star images in Nazi popular culture: film politics, the woman question, and star discourse. My aim is to use the historical information and theory debates introduced here to conceptualize the production and reception of singular instances of stardom, star signs, and the films. I consider the *dominant* discourses structuring National Socialist culture, along with the *nondominant* discourses that circulated at the margins of National Socialist Germany's repressive state apparatus to illustrate the tensions that informed the daily cultural operations functional during Nazi rule. This permits cultural production under National Socialism to be read within its political context but not exclusively *through* it.

Next I focus on three female film stars of the Third Reich—Kristina Söderbaum, Lilian Harvey, and Zarah Leander. I chose them for their prominence and popularity as well as for their varying generic characteristics, which reach across the wide spectrum of female images circulated through stars under the National Socialist regime. My analysis juxtaposes and compares their star signs, their roles in popular narratives, and other images of women that were disseminated and propagated during the Nazi era. My approach foregrounds the intersection of various discursive elements—communicated through the different media, such as films, magazines, political writings, and fan publications—and juxtaposes cinematic, literary, nonliterary, and social texts in synchronic and diachronic social analyses.

1 Nazi Culture? National Socialism, Stardom, and Female Representation

FILM CULTURE AND THE POPULAR IN THE NAZI STATE

The creation of small amusements, the production of daily doses against boredom and melancholy, we do not wish to suppress. One mustn't deal in ideology from dawn to dusk.

Joseph Goebbels in his "Kaiserhof" address to the film industry on March 28, 1933¹

Bertolt Brecht described fascist spectacle as a theatrical discourse, a never-ending series of fireworks aimed at dissolving or exchanging the public's critical perception of politics with the irrational sensations of emphatic entertainment.² Along the same lines, "fiat ars—pereat mundus," the slogan Walter Benjamin suggested to coin the fascist motif of aestheticizing political life, of displacing the reality of totalitarian oppression and military aggression into the sublime sphere of artistic expression, is often cited to point to the Nazi state's self-stylizations.³ Leni Riefenstahl's Hitler-documentary *Triumph of the Will* (1935) readily comes to mind when one thinks of Nazi film culture today (Fig. 1.1). Similarly, Nazi entertainment practices that went beyond the political rally or the propaganda newsreel, such as the Ufa pictures at the local cinema, are frequently analyzed as a "bread and circus" aesthetics aimed at streamlining and pacifying the populace by means of the mass media, not least by the National Socialist ideologues themselves.

The speed with which the Nazis quickly took control of virtually all public and cultural institutions (*Gleichschaltung*), simultaneously eliminating their political opposition through measures ranging from coercive intimidation to radical persecution, is well documented. Shortly after Hitler's *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP; National Socialist German Workers Party) emerged victorious in January 1933, the National Socialist culture machinery sprang into action. On



Figure 1.1. Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* premieres at a Berlin movie palace.

March 13, 1933, the Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (*Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda*)—in short, *Promi*—was founded under the control of *Reichsminister* Joseph Goebbels.⁴ Two weeks later Goebbels addressed the film community, liberally proclaiming that "art is free and art must remain free," an unconvincing announcement already qualified by Goebbels's earlier definition of what exactly would be considered "art": "...art is only possible if it is rooted in National Socialist soil.... We have no intention to tolerate, even in the slightest, that those ideas which will be eradicated in Germany from the roots up [*mit Stumpf und Stiel*], somehow, disguised or openly, reemerge in film."⁵

By this Goebbels did not rule out supposedly apolitical entertainment, but he followed the maxim that the best propaganda functioned unconsciously, "works invisibly so to speak."⁶

The years of Nazi rule saw the continuing production of popular *Spielfilme* (more than 1000 feature films were made between 1933 and

1945),⁷ gladly executed by the Ufa studios which, as Anton Kaes points out, had become increasingly proficient in imitating Hollywood's industry of "distraction and diversion" in the early 1930s.⁸ The conditions of production that informed Ufa's (and other German film companies') activities after the *Machtergreifung* (the Nazis' seizure of power), however, changed dramatically. No longer were capitalist interests—or even aesthetic concerns—the only measure that determined whether or not a film project was realized; rather, ideological monitoring and censorship influenced the film industry's commercial activities on all levels.

Various institutions under *Promi's* umbrella controlled the press, theater, radio, art and film.⁹ "Non-Aryans" could not receive membership in mandatory professional chambers and were thus quickly driven out of their careers.¹⁰ New legislation, such as the *Lichtspielgesetz* passed in February 1934,¹¹ introduced a system of precensorship that entailed the review of manuscripts and screenplays through a state official (*Reichsfilm dramaturg*) to "prevent in time that subjects which go against the spirit of the time are dealt with."¹² In addition, the so-called Reich's film dramatist also oversaw the actual execution of movie production and was in charge of supervising everything from casting practices to stylistic aesthetics.¹³ The rum press functioned under similar constrictions until, in 1936, Goebbels prohibited "art criticism in its present form" altogether.¹⁴ Film criticism was subsequently renamed "film contemplation" (*Filmbetrachtung*) and had to closely follow interpretive guidelines previously issued by *Promi*.¹⁵ Finally even audience behaviors became subject to the Nazis' relentless discipline. In 1941, for instance, a secret report informed *Promi* that the public increasingly avoided watching the mandatory propaganda newsreels that preceded feature film screenings by coming late or lingering in the theater lobby. Goebbels promptly stepped in to regulate such ideologically unwelcome habits by prohibiting spectators from entering the screening room after the newsreels had started.¹⁶ Moreover, from 1933 onward Ufa moved progressively toward becoming a state-owned business, a process that was effectively completed in 1942, when Ufa's new state-controlled mother company Ufi finally vertically integrated the entire film industry, incorporating not only production, distribution, and exhibition enterprises but even service industries, such as developing and printing houses.¹⁷

This degree of control virtually insured that very few films made under Nazi rule would be heavily censored or banned from release *after*

they had been completed.¹⁸ Goebbels trusted in his ideological state apparatus, to borrow Althusser's phrase, and was confident that what the Nazi state now produced was indeed Nazi culture. But was it? Questions concerning the ideological status of Germany's cultural productions in the Nazi era remained a continual source of political debate both during the Third Reich and afterward. In fact, numerous tensions emerged between Germany's culture industries and its ideological watchdogs, tensions that had less to do with political opposition than with the incongruence between certain National Socialist ideals and the requirements of the National Socialist state's commerce-based economies. In other words, products that were easily popularized and sold more often than not promised the fulfillment of those very ego-driven desires that the Nazis' idealized conception of fascist collectivity sought to counter; aside from the obvious propaganda picture, popular cinema still dealt in a currency of fantasy fulfillment that frequently concentrated on private scenarios of romance and individualized happiness. Other industries likewise addressed consumers' "private" interest in leisure activities, beauty products, and luxury goods.¹⁹ As many contemporary articles and reviews indicate, the frequent inconsistencies that surfaced in Nazi popular culture were in fact identified and criticized in Nazi party publications.²⁰ A Nazi youth journal, for instance, concluded in 1938: "Except for portions of the newsreels, cinema in a new politicized Germany amounts to an apolitical oasis. A really clever person might claim that even if there are no propaganda films, there still is propaganda tucked away beneath the film's surface details. . . . [But] 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."²¹

To be sure, Goebbels and his minions at the Ministry of Propaganda *intended* to infuse every aspect of the cultural public sphere with National Socialist thought and were particularly interested in using the popular appeal of entertainment cinema, the public's *Filmsucht* (film addiction), for their purposes. Yet whether they actually achieved what they set out to do through Ufa's filmic dream machine or simply claimed unqualified success (turning their strategy of manipulation into the performance of self-deception) is subject to debate.

In the postwar accounts of National Socialist film culture, this problem initially articulated itself in a dramatic split between, in Eric Rentschler's

words, "adversaries and apologists."²² Studies such as Gerd Albrecht's 1969 *Nationalsozialistische Filmpolitik* divided National Socialist films into various categories centered on genre and political content, which were further labeled "propagandistic" and "non-political."²³ This organization led him to foreground films with overt propagandistic content in his discussion of film and ideology—largely to the exclusion of the majority of films, classified as "non-political"—a practice which long dominated the study of Nazi pictures. Erwin Leiser's *Nazi Cinema* also investigated a number of exemplary film texts containing overt propaganda.²⁴ Hilmar Hoffmann's *The Triumph of Propaganda* and David Welch's *The Third Reich* proceeded in a similar manner.²⁵ Consequently, Karsten Witte critically summarized that "for decades, both German and international research concentrated on the exception rather than the rule. Again and again, about a dozen ostensibly propagandistic pictures were singled out and studied, while the rest of the films—sometimes banal material, sometimes genre films of above average quality—were ignored. The epistemological interest was focused on the reading of manifestations of propaganda. Totalizing ideas about system immanence dominated."²⁶

Many scholars of National Socialist entertainment thus looked at National Socialist discourse as a coherent system that managed to produce a unified, homogenous mass culture that maintained and confirmed National Socialist ideology. As Detlef Peukert points out, postwar critics concentrated on reading National Socialist entertainment as a "means of consolidating passive consensus, an affirmation of the newly achieved 'normal status quo.'"²⁷ As a result, many theorists proceeded to look at *all* of Nazi cinema as somehow aiding fascism, functioning as a kind of cultural indoctrination that was achieved through an all-encompassing system of escapism or propaganda. In this view, escapist fantasies containing subtle ideological content—often referred to as "fascist kitsch"—allowed the German public to use the cinema to take breaks that would prevent the over accumulation of their frustrations, whereas overt propaganda directly participated in the ideological manipulation of the German spectator.²⁸

Among the apologist and redemptive voices was that of director Arthur Maria Rabenalt, whose 1957 book *Film in the Twilight* argued for an understanding of "film as exile."²⁹ He suggested that the film community simply tolerated their rulers, biding time in the apolitical atmo-

sphere of Babelsberg's art world without actively supporting the system. One example in support of this view is the frequently mentioned fact that the new "German Greeting," *Heil Hitler*, was abhorred on the Ufa lot, as film people still welcomed each other with the traditional *Guten Tag*.³⁰ Most postwar fan books, star biographies, and autobiographies also adopt this position. Zarah Leander's *It Was So Wonderful*, Kristina Söderbaum's *Nothing Remains the Same Forever*, and Hans Borgelt's *The Sweetest Girl in the World: Lilian Harvey* all use anecdotes to suggest their stars' opposition to the Nazi regime and present their heroines as having lived and worked in the virtually isolated world of theatrical glamour.³¹

Of course, German fan publications and their nostalgic readers are not motivated by the desire for lucid historical analysis. Rather, they testify to the need to confirm what is a latent knowledge in German collective memory; in other words, they indicate that not *everything* that is remembered of the twelve years under Nazi rule is remembered as negative: "ordinary" people—that is people who were not specifically targeted by Nazi persecution—lived lives, went on vacations, played sports, fell in love, married, had children, and went to the movies . . . it couldn't have been *all* bad.

In the postwar years until the late 1970s two oppositional approaches toward National Socialist film culture divided cultural historians and film critics:

1. One viewpoint suggested that the Nazis were successful in their dissemination of fascist ideology through countless overt or covert propaganda vehicles, and that even seemingly apolitical entertainment was in fact spreading "invisible" ideological content. Goebbels's allowance for a certain cultural illusionism, his "daily doses against boredom and melancholy" aimed at creating the continuing "false" impression of normalcy and continuity, and thus constituted a deliberate strategy that was part of the overall political system.
2. The contrary position spoke to the Nazis' inadvertent admittance that certain areas of cultural production were never entirely cleansed of non-National Socialist influences ("certain tendencies that seem Jewish, all too Jewish, to us") and thus constituted free spaces in which a subdued form of alternative culture could survive in filmic "exile." Evidence for this perception" as mentioned earlier, can indeed be found in the National Socialist press itself.

Since the 1970s these two dominant, though contrasting, views have been incorporated into a more complicated understanding of the nature of film ideology and its contradictions. In more recent cultural studies approaches to National Socialist films, neither view predominates.

Linda Schulte-Sasse argues that Nazi cinema taught its ideological lesson not through "political content but in its generation of a subject effect of wholeness and mastery dependent on 'imaginary' experience."³² Schulte-Sasse's psychoanalytic investigation of National Socialist films—drawing on the work of Slavoj Žižek—suggests that the Nazis tapped into the public's collective desires for closure and completion by installing a sense of wholeness as the goal of the fascist fantasy, which was in turn produced through Nazi cinema. To do so, however, films didn't rely on National Socialist messages but instead reverted to artistic ideals of the eighteenth century with "its subject position of wholeness, of fusion with a cohesive social body."³³ Schulte-Sasse also points to the possibility of ineffectiveness, of the films' possible failure at being ideologically convincing:

If one dispenses with preconceived ideas and *looks* at these films, one finds that not only are they riddled with the same ruptures and internal subversions that beleaguer virtually all narrative texts, but that the popular success many enjoyed may be tied precisely to these ruptures, which compromise—if not necessarily contradict—the "Nazi message." The struggle to make the Jew Other ends up making him ambivalent if not appealing; films about genius/leader figures may overshoot their mark, rendering their hero so insufferably perfect as to make his adversary more sympathetic; many films thrive on a melodrama not necessarily accommodated to Nazi totalism, which ... involves an exorcism of the private sphere.³⁴

Schulte-Sasse is not alone in investigating the obvious discrepancies between doctrinal National Socialist ideology and cultural production. Hans Dieter Schäfer argues that the German public sphere displayed signs of a "split consciousness." On the one hand it was marked by the powerful images of Nazi propaganda—triumphal daytime parades and mystical nightly spectacles performed under the omnipresent symbol of the swastika—while on the other hand there were still international magazines at big city newsstands, swing concerts, Hollywood features, Disney cartoons, and Coca Cola.³⁵ Klaus Kreimeier's institutional history of Ufa similarly emphasizes the complex relations influencing Nazi

film production. Yet in contrast to the ideological move that Schulte-Sasse indicates through the invocation of eighteenth-century tropes—a rejection of overindulgence and excess in favor of a premodern ideal of bourgeois/communal morality—Kreimeier's account leads us to consider a move in the opposite direction. Like Schäfer, he describes a cultural environment that departed from National Socialist ideology through its privileged relationship with modern consumerism: "Advertisements addressed to the 'common man'—for the family home and an automobile of one's own, for the radio and the photo-camera, for modern kitchen appliances, 'chic' clothing and 'worldly' cosmetics—moved objects, which had previously only been connoted with lifestyles seen in society pictures, within close reach."³⁶

The very promise of the society feature, however, of the elegant dress and of the cosmopolitan refreshment ensured by a popular American soft drink, was to rise to a lifestyle of luxury and consumption previously reserved for the upper classes. *KdF* (Strength through Joy) cruises and affordable fashions, organized leisure time activities and subsidized theater visits—all imbricated with the signifiers and connotations of privilege—thus functioned as the inconsistent counterpoint to an ideology that denounced luxurious indulgence as decadent degeneracy, while simultaneously benefiting from the perceived upward "democratization" of social inequalities. Nazi films, likewise, displayed an array of features that were difficult, if not impossible, to contain within party parameters in the strictest sense. Consequently, Kreimeier contends that

it is one of the legends of film history that the National Socialists succeeded in infecting all genres of cinematography, each film, each material and every ever-so-far removed subject with insinuations from their ideological poison lab. Even if the minister's desires and the ambitions of his helpers aimed in this direction, frequently the material that was to be politically shaped ... slipped through the apparatus in spite of its multiform control instruments.... The very nature of the filmic with its incalculable, will-o'-the-wisp qualities and its affinity with micrological structures finally refused the "macro technique" of Goebbels' control machinery.³⁷

Hence we encounter in Nazi culture a technique of doubling. There was National Socialist ideology which, according to Georg Lukács, was in itself constructed as "an eclectic synthesis of all reactionary tenden-

cies" (racism, nationalism, communitarian populism, antimodern tendencies) already in circulation in German discourse.³⁸ That is to say, the Nazi "philosophy" propagated a mix of "residual ideologies,"³⁹ as Adorno put it, compiled into an overall Ersatz-ideology posing as a totalizing exegetic model, a quasi-religion.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, popular culture presented a similar mish-mash of influences on the level of entertainment patterns and everyday cultural practices, but in its manifestations not only drew on synthesizing "reactionary" tendencies, but mobilized other popular cultural trends and traditions as well.

This allowed Germans, suggests Peukert, to lead a "double life" that carefully separated the ideological imperatives that dominated the organization of work and political life in the Nazi state from a routine of leisure time activities that embraced a certain degree of cultural diversity.⁴¹ Although the Nazis attempted to disguise these frictions to appear as a totalizing whole, the dominant reality was one of fragmentation, both ideologically and culturally. The Nazis' ideological efforts to "cleanse" the public arena of the "foreign" or the "degenerate" through their revisionist rhetoric only thinly masked the multidiscursive and often contradictory continuities that flowed into the popular. *KdF* cruises, which perpetuated mass tourism, were justified as giving hardworking people a deserved break and thus furthering the *völkisch* health; attractive ladylike attire (as opposed to dressing in the National Socialist friendly "wholesome" manner, which emphasized "peasant" or "sporty" styles) was excused as a woman's duty toward her husband whose desire would in turn lead to a growing German family (and nation); movie stardom was rearticulated as ideological labor, and so on.⁴² The inconsistency of National Socialist rhetoric further revealed itself through its malleability vis-à-vis the changing demands of current political and economic situations, which were expressed in the frequent modification of previously propagated doctrines.

This understanding of Nazi film culture as including a variety of discursive fields and leaving many contradictory loose ends untied⁴³ leads us to ask why such a wide array of cultural means had to be mobilized, why National Socialist rhetoric alone did not suffice. Put differently, Schulte-Sasse's concept of multidiscursivity as instrumental to National Socialist film texts or Kreimeier's insistence on ideological slippage prompts us to investigate more closely how much of the culture the

Nazis enlisted to ensure public popularity, or at least contentment, genuinely belonged to Nazi discourse. In fact, it makes us wonder if any "germane" Nazi culture existed at all.

On the other hand, it also doesn't make sense to distinguish numerous cultural elements as somehow separate from the ideological sphere of fascism, "in" it but not "of" it, so to speak. Critics such as Eric Rentschler caution that the purpose behind a cultural analysis of National Socialist entertainment should be driven by wanting to understand the ideological mechanics of the Third Reich and not to rescue Nazi art. To address these concerns, Karsten Witte emphasizes political contexts, shifting away from attempts at aesthetic formalism (i.e., the question: what is a fascist film?) to turn to a historicized notion of National Socialist film culture.⁴⁴ Along the same lines, Rentschler acknowledges the systemic environment that enabled cultural production as vital, but not singularly determinative, for its historical assessment. I regard Rentschler's argument that seemingly apolitical films didn't exist in political isolation, that in the Nazi state "politics and entertainment were inextricably bound,"⁴⁵ as too limiting. Is it not possible that the inconsistencies we encounter in National Socialist film culture only appear as productive contradictions that ensured the public's acceptance of the fascist status quo? Recent studies by Sabine Hake and Markus Spieker underline this position. Hake's study of popular cinema in the Third Reich calls for a normalization of German film history by looking at Third Reich film culture as allowing audiences to continue to "partake in the ongoing transformation of mass culture and modernity, including in an international context."⁴⁶ Spieker's history of Hollywood cinema in the Third Reich further highlights the continuing presence of American film ideology within fascist everyday culture.⁴⁷

Of course, the mere maintenance and expansion of totalitarian power has never required ideological consistency; it requires hypocrisy and the will to dominate by any means necessary. No analysis of German fascism that I can imagine, cultural or otherwise, will ever find that the Nazis didn't attempt to bolster their power at all cost. Yet if all of National Socialist culture—in whatever manifestation (given that overt opposition was actively suppressed)—served as a "mass deception,"⁴⁸ then any examination of single elements of the period—films, directors, press publications, stars—would ultimately have the same result: that the Nazis used these films, directors, publications and stars to distract

people from the political reality of fascist totalitarianism. And what of overtly propagandistic materials? Are their masculine heroes and narratives of sacrifice in the end no different from their counterparts—sprightly comedies starring sexually ambiguous film divas—insofar as both helped to manipulate their viewers into political compliance, albeit by radically different means? Again, if one assumes that National Socialist culture in all its materializations participated in making the Nazi state a functional system (itself a questionable notion), one might convincingly argue that ultimately they are no different at all.

Rather than examining the rationale behind the fascists' cultural agenda and their apparent politics of (limited) toleration then, it may be more productive to make room for readings of National Socialist culture that problematize an airtight unidirectional model. If we not only acknowledge the range of cultural materials produced under National Socialist rule but also conceive of contemporary National Socialist spectators as a potentially diverse audience—whose contradictory preferences might speak to the continuing existence of extra fascist perspectives—we find interesting, different historical results from those produced by a tapered gaze at the period.⁴⁹ More interesting than the idea of Nazi culture including extrafascist elements as an "alternative" reality or a distraction that supported the overall functionality of the regime is the possibility that it was not ideologically consistent. Although the Nazis clearly *liked* the idea that their cultural tolerance of problematic discourses helped them to maintain a tight control over the public by making a the National Socialist everyday feel less oppressive, these results do not necessarily mean that National Socialist culture was part of a functional political system. In fact, National Socialist cultural phenomena might very well point *to* the Nazi state's ideological dysfunctionality, its uncertainty and inconsistency, made manifest in its continual need to rely on its "other."

What then do we call "Nazi ideology" *for* the purpose of this investigation into stars: what the Nazis officially believed in, or what they did to stay in power? The differentiation of these two concepts is the key to understanding the tensions that marked National Socialist culture, its fundamental hypocrisy and ideological confusion. Approaching "Nazi cinema"—or, to employ Axel Eggebrecht's qualified term, "film in the Nazi state"⁵⁰—as a totality reduces single film texts or star figures to parts of a mass cultural system of repression and exhausts our options

for interpreting these objects. If we shift the focus toward ideological structures of dominance that included the articulation of the nondominant, we can account for why the Nazi state permitted or produced its own ideological contradictions, and we can inquire into the vehicles that carried these contradictions.

If we accept the idea that German spectators harbored notions of the popular that did not correspond to those of National Socialist ideologues, we can account for much of the period's cultural phenomena, including many of its female film stars. My particular interest is not only the means by which the Nazis sought to control German film audiences through stars, but also how these stars addressed viewers in ways that departed from National Socialist ideological imperatives. As I inquire into the star discourse of female performers, I am able to trace the problematic articulation of gender issues in Nazi popular culture.

WOMEN IN THE THIRD REICH

If in earlier times the liberal intellectualized women's movements contained many, many points in their programs, . . . the program of our National Socialist women's movement essentially only contains one point, and that point is 'the child' . . . Women's emancipation is just a word invented by Jewish intellect.

Adolf Hitler, speech at the *Reichsparteitag*
September 8, 1934

The male figure engaged in heroic struggle was one of the most frequently invoked images throughout Nazi rhetoric. Hitler regularly presented himself as Germany's self-sacrificing servant and all-powerful leader figure—as the solitary suffering idol of the *Führerkult*, who led "a Spartan personal life" and was "a vegetarian, a teetotaler, a non-smoker, and a celibate."⁵¹ According to Klaus Theweleit, the central tenets of National Socialist masculinity included strictly maintained boundaries of self enabled through male collectivity. The idealized protofascist soldier preferred same-sex comradeship to romantic (heterosexual) eroticism and found his identity as a member of a racial/national/ideological male group. Women, associated with fluid ego boundaries and the threatening temptation of self-dissolution by way of sexual union, were excluded from the masculine sphere of fascist self-expression.⁵² Because of its preoccupation with fantasies of military conflict and sacrificial death, Nazi propaganda thus primarily ad-