

The Screening of a Nation:

An Exploration of German Film's Influences on the Development of Germany

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of German & Slavic Studies

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

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Abstract

This thesis examines three distinct periods of national film production which occurred during the ongoing period of restructuring and development the nation of Germany underwent throughout the twenty-first century. The goals of such an examination are to discuss the impacts of these film production periods on the processes which helped to shape the modern concept of Germany as it is now understood.

Several films have been selected spanning an eight-decade long collection created by various governmental or private powers throughout Germany's growth. This range will represent a pattern of attempts both of ideological influence and societal reflection throughout key periods in German history, revealing how the medium of film has in Germany both inspired and precipitated actual events and change, as well as reflected cultural identities and societal events. The existence of this pattern, the explanation of which constitutes the focus of this thesis, speaks to a degree of power within the medium of film, that which is significant enough to contribute to the machinations behind the development of a nation in a significant enough way to warrant popular recognition and discussion. This thesis seeks to call attention to the importance of film in the development of national identity, societal progression, and cultural preservation, with Germany and its film history at its focus.

The pattern of influence and reflection present within the German films selected for review within this project will be shown to have been intimately connected with key moments of development and history within Germany. Film has established itself as a cultural phenomenon, capable of influencing and reflecting societies in ways unique to the medium. Germany is simply an early example of this medium's potential.

Acknowledgements

With this thesis I would like to thank the *Department of German and Slavic Studies* at the University of Manitoba for having been extremely helpful and accommodating as both an international student and throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic. Particular gratitude is extended to Dr. Alexandra Heberger, Dr. Stephan Jaeger, and Dr. Lars Richter for having provided the coursework and guidance necessary for this thesis to come to fruition, with the film course offered by Dr. Lars Richter acting as its primary inspiration.

Additional thanks are extended to the *thesis committee* for this project, consisting of my thesis advisor, Dr. Lars Richter, and committee members Dr. Kristin Lovrien-Meuwese, Dr. Alexandra Heberger, and Dr. Orysia Kulick.

The funding received through the University of Manitoba Graduate Scholarship thanks to a nomination on behalf of the *Department of German and Slavic Studies* provided a great deal of assistance throughout the timeline of this project, for which I am forever grateful.

Finally, this thesis would not have been possible without the advice and direction of my thesis advisor, Dr. Lars Richter. Your helpful and understanding nature made the creation of this project an enriching, memorable experience, one that has truly been a highlight of my entire academic journey.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Lisa Chadwick, and my close friend, Ally Gonzalo. Without the emotional support provided by these two individuals, this project would not have been possible.

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1. Introduction

Throughout the twentieth century, the ongoing restructuring of the German nation left a permanent mark in human history, leaving a legacy of suffering, loss, reparations, and growth in its wake. Having experienced two World Wars, multiple regime changes, genocide, and one of the most rapid periods of technological development known to man, this century of German history has defined the nation that exists in its current form and serves as a prime opportunity for the analysis of the nuances and powers present in the nation building process. Of the technological developments throughout the century in question, the medium of film, as is to be argued throughout the entirety of this research, demonstrates a clear and concise pattern of historical influence and reflection that proves through sequential analysis to have been intricately connected with the machinations responsible for the country's development.

Having experienced multiple, distinct periods of film production characterized by varying degrees of creative freedom, including periods of state-controlled propaganda, the films produced throughout this century function as historical documents, revealing both attempts to influence the course of historical development, and to reflect the myriad of identities and experiences contributing to the collective cultural identity of the German nation. It is the purpose of this thesis to argue that this pattern of influence and reflection, to be recognized within several iconic films produced throughout the century, places the medium of film in a position of particular significance, enough to warrant its inclusion in discussions concerning the powers at play that took part in the formation of German history. It is the position of the author that the ability of German film to influence and reflect aspects and identities from varying perspectives of German development categorizes the medium of film as one of the foundational guiding factors for this period of rapid change in Germany.

To deliver an argument capable of demonstrating the claims outlined above, the timeline and categorizations thereof must be explained to provide structure for the remainder of this research. Spanning most of the twentieth century, three distinct periods of film production have been selected to showcase the ongoing pattern of influence and reflection of German development, each lasting multiple years and consisting of differentiated and stylized messages and formats. Each of these periods will be explored in terms of their contextual and historical backgrounds, as well as their individual contributions and developments toward the modern understanding of Germany as it exists at the time of this writing. Such contextual considerations provide the historical padding necessary for the acknowledgment of both the degree of influence and reflection of historical processes present in the films selected for analysis.

Following World War One, the first film period of interest is that of the Weimar Republic (1918-1933). Considerations of the Weimar Republic's film industry will begin the discussion of the influences and reflections of film with the medium itself still in its relatively early stages. This was a time in which the limits and potential of this new medium were still being tested, lending itself to new genres being presented, ideological taboos being explored, and new ramifications enacted in response to the growing popularity of film as a means of entertainment. Setting the stage for all following eras of German film history, the period of the Weimar Republic acted as a societal litmus test for how various ideas, genres, beliefs, and fears would be received by the public at large, and for what sort of restrictions would then be introduced.

After the Weimar Republic, the next film period of note is the just over a decade long reign of the Third Reich (1933-1945). The film industry of the Third Reich represents a departure from that of the Weimar Republic, in that it was characterized by a centralized, state-controlled film production apparatus rather than a privatized market. This allowed for the potential of film

to be considered in an entirely new way, directly focused on the efforts of political dissemination, rather than artistic or commercial value alone. Many iconic films from this period were made with the expressed purpose of delivering propagandistic messages to its citizens, simultaneously demonstrating the politicians' promised potentials and unexpected limits of the medium, such as diminishing interest on behalf of audiences, even when backed by unquestioned governmental support and funding. This era of German film represented the ideological goals of the Nazi party, as well as the ramifications of forcing them unto the public through film.

The period of the Third Reich may have been the first period of German history in which film was seen as one of the key ideological tools with which to sculpt the political future of the nation, but it was also not the last. The final film period to be discussed in this research, similarly characterized by a centralized, state-run film production center, is that of the German Democratic Republic (1949-1990). Seeking to legitimize themselves through the medium of film, the leaders of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) placed an emphasis on the production of politically educational films to ease the transition of their citizens into their new socialist lifestyles and ensure the longevity of their society for decades to come. Featuring a renewed attempt by filmmakers and government officials to direct the narrative of Germany's social and cultural developments through the power of film, this stage of German film history sheds yet another light on the limitations of such a practice, while also highlighting the nuance that allows specific examples to be produced that indeed can be argued to have been to some extent effective.

The inclusion of the film culture of the GDR warrants explanation for the exclusion of its sister film production culture, the West German film industry. It is without question that films of the West German film industry could be analyzed in the same manner as the films of the film industries described in this research, and this likely would produce insightful contributions as

well. However, the considerations of such West German films would be best considered parallel to the film industry of the GDR to demonstrate optimally the contrast between strategies of implementation, subject matter, production cultures, and effects between the two corresponding film industries. For such a simultaneous analysis to take place, a significant portion of this research's attention would be required, causing an imbalance between the considerations for the film cultures of East and West Germany compared to those of the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. For this reason, it is the opinion of the author that a simultaneous analysis of both East and West German film industries would cover sufficient subject matter for a specialized research project of its own and is therefore beyond the scope of the research at hand. The film production culture of East Germany, already mirroring that of the Third Reich, will be sufficient for the purposes of this research in demonstrating the intricate link between the medium of film and the process of German development throughout the twentieth century.

The focus of this introduction will now shift to the methodology employed with which this research was performed, and films analyzed. To first provide context on the historical backgrounds and periods in which the films in question were produced and released, several sources will be referenced due to their coverage of relevant themes and topics in relation to the overall pattern of Germany's historical development. An analysis of the influences and reflections of German history present in the films at hand would be nonsensical when not combined with an explanation of the historical processes which produced such films in the first place. This historical context will extend to each chapter in this research, buttressing the film analyses which are sorted alongside the relevant timeline of their respective backgrounds.

Paired alongside and filtered within such contextual explorations of each period of German film will be a dual film analysis, representing two alternating examples first of filmic

influence and second of reflection positioned respectively near the beginning and end of each period. This intentional selection will serve to present an overview of the period itself, and its evolution, as it traversed one of the most meaningful centuries of German development to date, thereby constituting the pattern of influence and reflection adhered to by this research.

In each chapter, corresponding to the three periods of German film selected for consideration, the first film to be reviewed, following an exploration of that period's historical background and context, will feature an attempt, either governmental or private, to influence the ideological situation present in the nation during that time. Governmental attempts of filmic influence include instances of propaganda, state-controlled film production, and representations of ideological ideals in the hopes of swaying public opinion toward the designated mindset determined by the state, as to be seen in *Triumph des Willens* (1935). Private attempts of filmic influence take form in films that push ideological boundaries on behalf of individual filmmakers. These films commonly sought representation and validation of lifestyles and personalities that had been marginalized or even actively repressed by societal and governmental powers, such as in the film *Anders als die Andern* (1919). There are also films which present a combination both of governmental influence, and underlying private machinations designed to impact the public in ways perhaps unapproved by the then existing authorities, namely: *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* (1973). The examination of such influential films serves to initiate discussion of how German film influenced the nation.

Following the initial example of German film discussed in each chapter will be a short section of context to discuss the chain of events in the period leading up to the next film to be discussed. Once the contextual situation of the following film is clear, the second analysis will feature a film that either intentionally or unintentionally reflected the ongoing political and

cultural situation at hand at the time of its release. Intentional reflections of such situations consist of coded representations of repressed identities or realities, even of societal fears and anxieties depicted in films like *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931). These intentional reflections, like private influences, often sought to normalize and begin dialogue about facets of society that may otherwise have gone ignored. Opposingly, unintentional reflections can be characterized by unsatisfactory returns on big-budget films, inadvertently revealing disinterest in the ideological content being presented, or even by complete dismissal of the film's existence by audiences, as seen with the film *Kolberg* (1945), exposing a flaw in the ideological machine of the state which had set out with the goals of influencing the masses through the medium. In both cases, the reflections provided by the films analyzed in the chapters of this thesis will assist the examinations of influential films in their explanations of the developmental significance the medium of film has had on the formation of the German nation.

With this structure of analyzing first influential and second reflective films of German cinematic history repeated through each chapter of this research, the pattern of influence and reflection of German film history will be revealed. Demonstrating a systematic, repeated pattern both of historical influence and societal reflection will constitute the foundation of the argument that the medium of film was of such significance to the development of German history as to be included in discussions concerning the powers at play that took part in the formation of the nation itself. With repeated attempts of influencing societal understandings through film, films of this century are responsible for introducing topics and taboos that would grow to form entire revolutionary movements. Films that reflected the plurality of identities provided validation and hope for those who may have felt otherwise suffocatingly alone amidst a sea of ignorance and apathy. Such films also betrayed fundamental issues in the various governments that existed

within Germany, symbolizing and reflecting their coming ends. The author contends that this combination of the ability both to influence and reflect the course of German nation building throughout its most tumultuous century to date is sufficient to categorize the medium of film as one of the principle guiding factors of developing the cultural identity of Germany that exists through to the time of this writing.

The following paragraphs contain a brief overview of the films selected for analysis in this research. The films that have been selected, along with countless others of this century of German history, remain as a legacy to the passions, devotions, prejudices, and fears of the German people living through this period, and reflect their emotions, attitudes, agendas, and reactions as they lived through, and perhaps themselves also influenced, this period.

The first film to be discussed, produced in the Weimar Republic, is Richard Oswald's *Anders als die Andern* (1919). Both directed and produced by Oswald, *Anders als die Andern* is possibly the first film to ever paint homosexuality in a positive light. Early in the filmography of the Weimar Republic, this boundary-breaking film established its era of film as the comparatively free and expressive time it was. Analyzing this film will explore reactions, backlash, inspirations, ramifications, and influences of presenting a homosexual relationship to widespread, early twentieth century audiences. Discussing this film not only defines Weimar film as a relatively unrestricted, expressive phenomenon, but also sets the stage for a coming rapid decline in film expression and freedom.

The second film of the Weimar Republic selected for analysis is Leontine Sagan's *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931). Fittingly mirroring the homosexual beginning of Weimar film with *Anders als die Andern*, *Mädchen in Uniform* caps off this era with yet another depiction of homosexual romance. Featuring the love between two women instead of men, this film remains

an example of Weimar film's boundary-pushing narrative and presents a valuable point of comparison when considering ramifications between this film and *Anders als die Andern*. Reflecting a building acknowledgment of increasingly authoritarian might in Germany, *Mädchen in Uniform* serves as a final bastion of queer cinema against the swelling tide of fascist propaganda.

The next film to be analyzed, a film of the Third Reich, is Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* (1935). Presenting a drastically different film experience to what was explored from the Weimar Republic, this film is one of the most influential examples of National Socialist propaganda. Rather than presenting a scripted narrative, *Triumph des Willens* is a chronicle of speeches given at the 1934 Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg. Riefenstahl utilizes various techniques of film and propaganda to establish Hitler as the ultimate leader of Germany and return the country to a sense of former power. Analyzing this film will provide an understanding of successful techniques used to influence public opinion through film, as well as establish the era of Third Reich film as markedly different from its predecessor. No longer are private filmmakers able to push boundaries, the state and its agenda are in full control.

The second film of the Third Reich to be analyzed is Veit Harlan's *Kolberg* (1945). Continuing the theme of propaganda, *Kolberg* differs from *Triumph des Willens* in that it presents a scripted narrative in its attempts to sway its audience. Meant to improve morale of the German people in the final days of World War Two, *Kolberg* tells the story of the titular town defending itself against a western invasion of French troops during the Napoleonic Wars. Tone-deafly presenting a war movie near the end of World War Two, this film invokes the German spirit of Heimat to inspire defensive will. What can be seen as a desperate final attempt at turning the tide

of war reflected the dismal reality of the situation and served as a fitting cinematic conclusion to the era of Third Reich film.

The first film from the GDR to be discussed is Heiner Carow's *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* (1973). Presenting itself as a simple love story between two upstanding citizens of the GDR, this film served to inspire its audiences to emulate the unproblematic working behavior of its two protagonists, while also satisfying themselves with the operations of their new socialist life. While not as harmful as inspiring hatred against entire populations, this film still worked to influence its audiences' expectations and perceptions of their daily lives. This film demonstrates the GDR's desire of public re-education and assimilation into socialist society, while presenting it as a model for individuality and freedom in a Soviet socialist context.

The final film of interest, also produced in the GDR, is Heiner Carow's *Coming Out* (1989). Serving as the final entry of the DEFA film era, this film breaks the pattern of self-serving, governmental control by presenting a narrative reminiscent of the first period discussed: Weimar film. Exploring yet another story of homosexual love between men, *Coming Out* breaks the decades long hiatus of homosexual representation in state-controlled German film. This alone warrants its inclusion and consideration, especially given its placement along the DEFA timeline, directly at the tail end. This opens discussion as to intentions behind such a last-minute policy change, as well as to how differently this film was received compared to its Weimar counterparts. This film's reception can also be seen as a reflection of the end of an era, its discordant content and ultimate upstaging harbinger the fall of the GDR.

It is the intention of the author that this research will accurately demonstrate through these films a pattern of influence and reflection that will reveal a power within the medium of film to help define entire nations. That both the GDR and Third Reich recognized this power to

the degree of centralizing all film production, and with the founder of the Soviet Union, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin himself, proclaiming film as the “most important of all arts” due to its appeal to the broad masses (Brockmann 216), it cannot be argued that this power has been in any way a secret. The following chapters contain the full film analyses from the films mentioned previously, which guide the reader through a demonstration of this pattern of influence and reflection of German history throughout the films of the twentieth century.

2. Weimar Film Introduction

The first film period of note to this chronological examination of the German film industry is the period of Weimar film. This period begins with the close of World War One, the traumatic defeat of the German army, and the official proclamation of the Weimar Republic in 1918. It ends fifteen years later with the rise of fascism in the German government on behalf of the National Socialist regime, and Adolf Hitler's ascension to power. While this time certainly saw its fair share of political instability and crisis, it was also a time of increased attention to cultural productions, particularly in film. Considered as a golden era of film production, Weimar film has inspired countless scholars to contribute their interpretations, positive or negative, on the impacts and influences of film production on the path of history. The cinema of the Weimar era ended up competing successfully with the media giant of the United States and has been described as the period in which "German cinema was at its most influential internationally and historically" (Brockmann 43).

The following sections will explore both the context of the Weimar Republic in which its films came to be, and the films produced within this context themselves that end up constituting the first period of the greater pattern of influence and reflection of Germany's historical development that is being analyzed in this research. Presenting respectively two clear depictions of societal influence and political reflection will begin the discussion of the overall medium of film's influence on the countless machinations which together constituted German society, history, and progress throughout the twentieth century.

Following the end of World War One, the previous era of German history, the Kaiserreich, ceased to exist. The following creation of the Weimar Republic resulted in Germany's first democracy. Beginning with a national humiliation such as the defeat Germany

suffered following World War One, national pride was at an extreme low, and the political situation had difficulties stabilizing throughout the length of the Republic. This period of German history lasted from 1919 through 1933, and in this time, it saw “over 10 different governments and nine national elections” (Brockmann 46). This characterized the period as one rife with political instability and resulted in its end with the reluctant transfer of power from the previous German president, Paul von Hindenburg, to the popularly elected Adolf Hitler and his Nazi party.

While the political situation of the Weimar Republic was often quite unstable, the growth in popularity of film throughout this decade and a half was anything but. Reportedly, the numbers of cinemas in the Weimar period of Germany “increased from approximately 2,300 in 1918 to 3,700 in 1920” (Hake 51). This indicated a clear growing interest in the new medium as a mode of entertainment, and the number continued to grow throughout the entirety of the period: “By 1930, there were more than five thousand movie theatres in Germany” (51). While the political situation was constantly up in the air, the cultural industry of Germany during the period of the Weimar Republic flourished. The timeline of this political situation, as well as two of the films chosen to display the pattern of influence and reflection of Weimar film on German development, will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

2.1 Three Phases of Weimar Film

This period of film, as well as the timeline of the Weimar Republic in general, can be broken down into three main sections, each with distinguishable characteristics from each other. The following paragraphs will begin to explore these three sections and will feature film analyses according to the timeline of their respective production schedules and releases. To begin, the first period of Weimar film, spanning the years of 1919-1924, will be discussed. This timeline will

introduce the first film analysis of this research, Richard Oswald's *Anders als die Andern* (1919). This will be followed by contextual information from the second period of Weimar film, the years of 1924-1929. Lastly, the analysis of Weimar film's influence and reflection of German history and development will conclude with the final period of Weimar film, the years of 1929-1933. This period will introduce the second film analysis of this research, Leontine Sagan's *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931).

2.1.1 Phase One of Weimar Film

The years of 1919-1924 were heavily impacted by the defeat of the German forces in World War One. Part of the reason for the influence of Weimar's cultural productions was the desire to seek out artistic expression as a way for Germans to channel their grief of this national tragedy. This culmination of emotions following an international conflict of this degree translated to a new artistic movement that left its indelible mark on film: Expressionism. The rise of expressionist film, one of the cornerstones of Weimar film, was characterized by "a highly psychological kind of art that seeks not to record what is happening on the outside ... but to express what is happening on the inside, within the psyche of an individual human being" (Brockmann 49-50).

The focus on the representation of inner emotions was not limited only to ramifications following the war. Some filmmakers took the opportunity of the new medium of film to attempt to enact ideological change on the newly forming republic. One such attempt can be found in Richard Oswald's *Anders als die Andern* which released in the very early days of the republic in 1919. The following paragraphs contain the analysis of this film, which indicates an attempt to influence the ideological development of the forming German nation. Thus begins the pattern of influence and reflection of German film alluded to previously.

3. *Anders als die Andern*

The first film to be analyzed, *Anders als die Andern* (1919) was produced in the very early days of the Weimar Republic. *Anders als die Andern* presents a unique situation in terms of its controversial subject matter of homosexual men, and the consequences arising from such depictions, providing a sort of litmus test for the beginning of the new film era, and explaining certain measures and attitudes that would later become more prevalent. The existence of a film discussing homosexuality at a time in history where it was actively criminalized is noteworthy, and the treatment this film received both from governmental bodies and in the cinemas themselves, set the precedent for all films of similar subject matter to follow.

In answer to speculation as to what factors may have contributed to the existence of *Anders als die Andern* beyond the environment of Expressionist film, Lauren Pilcher provides insight: "Unlike other European nations, German sexological research was both popular and widely circulated during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, due in large part to a free press and the enduring debates surrounding anti-sodomy statute Paragraph 175" (Pilcher 40). This statute, Paragraph 175, effectively criminalized homosexuality and was actively enforced, causing many homosexuals throughout Germany to fall under persecution. The existence of this statute, Pilcher writes, "prompted open discussions of homosexuality" (40), thus contributing to the cultural understanding of homosexuality as a part of life, and the representation in film. Given these discussions, Weimar came to be associated with a relatively vibrant homosexual culture and community, "especially in larger cities like Berlin" (Mayer 347). Veronika Mayer writes that "the atmosphere of crisis and instability, as well as the artistic culture during the golden twenties, were conditions in which new ideas of sexuality could arise" (347). Thus, it can be said that the existence of a film such as *Anders als die Andern* was in no way unexpected. The

subculture it was depicting was already, as compared to previous periods in history, thriving without the attention provided by such a film.

As for the powers driving production of this film, the director of *Anders als die Andern*, Richard Oswald, had a co-author work with him on the script of the film whose significant contributions warrant his specific mentioning. This co-author was a homosexual German Jew, and the pioneer of the German field of sexology: Magnus Hirschfeld. Hirschfeld was no stranger to films about sexuality, as he was "known for his early sex education films" (Hake 39), and "In 1919 ... created the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft (Institute for Sexual Science) in Berlin" (Brockmann 48). Magnus Hirschfeld contributed greatly to the acknowledgment of homosexuality in society through his opening of discussions of alternate sexualities, and, of course, his contribution to *Anders als die Andern* in which he himself starred.

3.1 Film Details

Anders als die Andern, often characterized as the first film in the world to explicitly thematize homosexuality (Pilcher 35), released in cinemas on May 24, 1919. This early example of queer cinema remains as a legacy to the struggles faced by homosexuals in the early decades of the twentieth century. This film was created with Germany's anti-sodomy statute 175 in mind and was meant both "to inform audiences of the injustice that homosexual males faced" (Pilcher 35), and "to give strength and comfort to German homosexuals who still suffered from widespread discrimination" (Brockmann 49). Revolutionary in its subject matter, and far ahead of its time, *Anders als die Andern* pioneered the queer film industry, and provided the societal litmus test of queer film, heavily influencing the nature of similar films moving forward, the nature of the film industry in general, and the nature of German society itself.

The film centers around the lives of two men, both missing something from their lives. Paul Körner, a violin virtuoso, has achieved success in his trade, but has no one with whom to share this, and no one onto whom he can impart his talent and wisdom for it to be carried forward to the next generation. On the other hand, Kurt Sivers, an aspiring violinist, needs a teacher to lead him to greatness and is also caught up in an infatuation with Paul. The two situations fit as two pieces of a puzzle, and Paul takes Kurt on as his student.

Time passes as the two grow closer, and Paul eventually develops intimate feelings for his student. Given this film's relatively early production in terms of cinematic history, filmmakers had to rely on the limited techniques available to them to edit their films in ways that would convey such emotions as homosexual love. The medium's lack of audible dialogue during this time presented even more challenges in this regard. In Oswald's film the technique of framing was selected to effectively convey intimate and inner emotions. Wide framing was used to demonstrate the more negative end of the emotional spectrum: discomfort and fear. Some examples are demonstrated below:



Figure 1 “Paul and his Family” (0:07:47)



Figure 2 “Paul and his Blackmailer”
(0:11:17)

The moments of the film depicted in Figures 1 and 2 correspond respectively to a meeting with Paul's estranged family from whom he must hide his identity, and an encounter with an intruder

who means to do Paul and his loved ones harm. Both scenes represent highly stressful situations for Paul, reflected by the harsh, wide frame providing the audience with a full view of the vulnerable character. Being on such open display shows how exposed and powerless Paul feels in such moments, resonating with the plight of countless individuals across Germany in similar situations. Paul's avoidance of first his family's (1) and then his oppressors gaze (2) indicates his further discomfort and disagreement with them, while their harsh stares fixed directly on him contrastingly reveal their pointed scrutiny on one hand and vengeful villainy on the other.

In direct contrast to such moments come the instances in which Paul is allowed to be himself and pursue his desires which others wish to suppress. As can be seen throughout Figures 3, 4, and 5, the condensing framing shows how Paul's world becomes more personal as a potential partner enters the room and approaches him with interest. The narrowing frame is representative of the restricted representation of homosexuals, while also suggesting that the audience is now intruding on a scene that has become private and intimate. What began as a wide shot has now become a tightly framed medium shot featuring the two romantics center stage with all the outside world forgotten. Through such techniques, Oswald introduces these characters as a



Figure 3 "Paul Playing Piano Alone"
(0:04:54)



Figure 4 "Kurt and Paul Meet" (0:05:31)



Figure 5 “Frame Condenses on Couple”
(0:06:11)

love interest without either uttering a single word. This pattern continues throughout the film as the narrow, circular frame symbolizes the private, happy relationship shared between the two men. The depiction of two men fostering a loving relationship with one another was an attempt to influence the German people towards wider acceptance of such relationships.

The usage of this framing becomes even more intentionally romantic during the scene in which Paul first begins teaching Kurt to play the violin. An important aspect of his identity, Paul takes great pride in teaching Kurt his craft, and this scene is depicted in Figures 6 and 7 below:



Figure 6 “Paul Observes Kurt Play Violin”
(0:06:30)



Figure 7 “Close-up of Kurt from Paul’s
POV” (0:06:41)

Starting out with the same intimate framing used during their initial meet, the shot becomes even tighter around Kurt's face as the audience's perspective shifts from viewing the interaction from a stranger's eyes to viewing the interaction from Paul's eyes. Paul forgets everything around him when he looks at Kurt doing what they both love, and the audience is compelled to empathize with him, as they are witnessing the blossoming of his romance as if it were happening with them. These shot techniques make up a significant portion of the director's efforts to influence German society toward a more sympathetic stance on homosexual relationships.

As a result of this budding relationship, Kurt's parents are disapproving of the time he is spending with Paul and urge him to choose a more practical career than playing violin. However, Kurt's parents are not the only ones keeping tabs on his and Paul's relationship. A blackmailer has taken an interest in the couple for the purpose of securing funds from the two men in exchange for not revealing their homosexual relationship to the authorities, thus bringing them under persecution due to the notorious anti-sodomy article 175 prohibiting relations between men of the same sex. The attempts to appease nosy family members and avoid the danger of prosecution from the authorities in this manner of blackmail constitute much of the plotline of this film. Sadly, as was so often the reality due to article 175, the film ends with the prosecution of Paul, and his subsequent suicide.

The realistic and anticipated ending of this film is in no way an indication of the lack of attempts to push societal boundaries with its content. The previously introduced Magnus Hirschfeld himself starred in the film as the sexologist with whom several characters consult on the nature of homosexuality. From today's perspective, the arguments and explanations provided by Hirschfeld for the existence of homosexuality hardly seem out of place when stacked against contemporary philosophy. Hirschfeld provides a succinct and objective explanation of

homosexuality when questioned about it by Paul's parents: "You mustn't think poorly of your son because he is a homosexual. He is not at all to blame for his orientation. It is neither a vice nor a crime, indeed, not even an illness, but instead a variation, one of the borderline cases that occur frequently in nature" (00:09:27). Here, Hirschfeld concretely argues that homosexuality is an ordained fact of life, and that it is completely harmless. This is a progressive statement to come out of a film that precedes the 1920s. Hirschfeld does not restrict himself to commenting on the nature of homosexuality itself, but also of society's treatment of it: "Your son suffers not from his condition but rather from the false judgement of it. This is the legal and social condemnation of his feelings, along with widespread misconceptions about their expression" (00:09:43).

Hirschfeld is demonstrating here an understanding of homosexuality that outpaces his contemporaries, and rivals even understandings of it today. He confidently fought for the recognition of undue suffering at a time when hardly anyone else was. The fact that he was able to codify his philosophies in film for them to be debated for generations to follow is a true testament to the work Hirschfeld did to advance the acceptance of homosexuality both in Germany and beyond. Codifying these philosophies in film is one of the ways in which Hirschfeld and Oswald worked together to influence both the reception of homosexuals in German society, as well as the development of the German nation in a way that would provide relief for those suffering under the effects of homosexual persecution.

The film concludes with a warning, a message, and a request all bundled into one. Paul's suicide is a warning to society of the dangers caused by criminalizing identities. The message came from Hirschfeld, who attended Paul's funeral, and was relayed to Kurt, who sobbed over Paul's corpse. It read: "If you want to honor the memory of your friend, then you mustn't take your own life, but instead keep on living to change the prejudices whose victim – one of

countless many – this dead man has become” (00:48:17). Hirschfeld needs to let Kurt, and by extension the audience, know that Paul’s end is not the only outcome. One can persist in the memory of those who have been lost, and work to undo what caused others to be lost in the first place. With this notion, Hirschfeld reveals his request: “This is the life task I assign to you ... What matters now is to restore honor and justice to the many thousands before us, with us, and after us. Through knowledge to justice!” (00:48:17). Hirschfeld understood what it meant to stand for something larger than oneself and worked to arm people of his time, and for generations moving forward, with the knowledge needed to avoid needless suffering caused by the persecution of homosexuality. *Anders als die Andern*, regardless of how it was received after release, was an unprecedented achievement for the representation of queer identities, and an undeniable attempt at influencing public opinion toward a new mindset: one where homosexuality was less vilified as had been up to that point. Whether or not this was the outcome of this film will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

3.2 Audience Impacts

Aside from the elation and validation perhaps felt by the homosexual viewer of *Anders als die Andern*, the film opened to immediate controversy. Premiering in the year 1919 at the Apollo-Theater in Berlin (Pilcher 35), the initial screening was attended by co-author and star, Magnus Hirschfeld. The event was complete with an introductory speech from Hirschfeld to preface the audience for what they were about to witness (Pilcher 35). Contrary to Oswald and Hirschfeld’s efforts of placing homosexuality in the most sympathetic light possible, the audience reacted with hostility to the subject matter of the film. Contemporary reviewers wrote that the film “caused a storm of protest in the house. From all sides resounded boos—people jeered, screamed, and whistled. Nonetheless, the projection continued” (Friedmann 240-241).

Audiences were shocked to see the depiction of two men fostering an intimate relationship with one another and made their outrage clear for reviewers to recognize: “In the scene, which caused a riot in a Berlin cinema in 1919, Körner and Franz talk in the foreground while costumed men (some in drag) dance with other men in the background” (Pilcher 45). Viewings of *Anders als die Andern* proved to consistently spark uproars and controversy, which initiated debate as to what should be done about such films.

As the fitting opposite to Hirschfeld’s progressive and accepting nature, there were and are naturally also scholars whose views land on the opposite side of the ideological spectrum. Albert Hellwig, a German jurist, criminologist, and journalist, published in 1911 a book entitled *Schundfilms*. This was in response to what Hellwig recognized as “The rapid ascension of film as a source of mass entertainment [which] triggered vehement reactions on the part of the cultural and social establishment” (Hellwig 222). Hellwig was concerned that film could grow to exert a “brutalizing moral influence” (222), and that impressionable viewers, such as youth or the uneducated, could be disproportionately influenced and indoctrinated by the content of film. Hellwig describes what he identifies as *Schundfilms* as follows: “Moral trash films [Schundfilms]—which I always have in mind when I speak of the trash films as such—can be divided into three main groups: tasteless, criminal, and sexual trash films” (223). It is immediately apparent that Hellwig’s identification of films is highly subjective. What Hellwig might describe as tasteless is anyone’s guess, but *Anders als die Andern* certainly would fall under his category of ‘sexual trash film’.

Hellwig doubles down on his criticism of what he sees as morally deplorable filth, by detailing his concerns with how images of sexuality in film, and particularly in homosexual films, can influence the viewer: “Sexual trash films are apt to damage viewers sexually through

obscurities or strong eroticism” (223). Hellwig hones his argument in on how film itself is responsible for adverse behavior exhibited by its viewers, rather than the viewers themselves being responsible for their own actions: “the immoral influence of sexual trash films overpowers moral ideas that otherwise functioned as inhibitory blocks” (224). Hellwig clearly believed that with film out of the picture, homosexuality and other such immoral ‘trash’ depicted in film would cease to exist. He failed to consider the possibility of film as a form of representation, rather than pure causation. In any case, it was clear that there was a very real concern among powerful contributors to the contemporary discourse of such philosophy about the influential potential of films such as *Anders als die Andern* on German development, granting legitimacy to the efforts of Oswald and Hirschfeld to influence German society with their film. However, contrary to their efforts, and due to the negative reactions and mindsets such as Hellwig’s, the public reception of this film resulted in the ideological landscape of the Weimar Republic certainly being influenced, albeit in the opposite way as was intended by the filmmakers.

3.3 Interpretations

Akin to Hellwig’s reaction, there was widespread public outrage after the release of this film. Many were appalled by the explicit homosexual nature of the film and felt that there were hidden intentions behind the showcasing of alternate sexualities. To introduce these supposed hidden intentions, the reactions to the initial screenings of *Anders als die Andern* will be considered anew. The boos, jeering, whistling, and shouts of protest at the content being displayed did not come from the audience unanimously, there were in fact audience members who attempted to advocate for the film and its subject matter to allow the viewing to continue uninterrupted. Walther Friedmann, Doctor of Law, and attorney general of the Association of German Film Manufacturers (Vereinigung Deutscher Filmfabrikanten e.V.) reports that “when

the scene in the Puppencafé came, where people danced in the most repugnant way, boys dressed in part as girls, the tumult began again. All around one could hear: ‘Should we Germans let ourselves be contaminated by the Jews?’ ‘How can something like this be presented to us?’ ‘Where is the science here?’” (Friedmann 240-241). In response to this, Friedmann writes: “For a while, it looked foreboding, particularly as a ‘number of Jewish youths’ recovered from the initial shock and spoke with wild enthusiasm of enlightenment and science. They really managed to get part of the audience on their side, but the commotion in the theater went on until a large part of the audience left” (240-241).

From the night of its premiere, the film was being connected with Judaism. Anti-Semitic attitudes showed themselves in remarkably strong force in response to this film, perhaps due to the Jewish heritage of Hirschfeld himself, but it also appeared that audiences were very quick to recognize something as foreign, different, and to them ‘backwards’ as something that was also Jewish. For some reviewers, the connection was not even up to question, as they described the film and its characters as “a ‘true showpiece of the Jewish race,’” (Friedmann 240). Friedmann himself was perplexed by this connection: “What is significant about the whole affair is simply the almost unbelievable fact that the blame for homosexuality is now also placed on the Jews” (241). Further speculating, Friedmann points out how there is little logic to this connection: “Of course it should not be claimed that there are no homosexuals among the Jews. But, until now, it has really not come into anyone’s head to make the Jews appear as particular supporters and proponents of homosexuality” (241). Such a connection raises questions as to whether it is the homosexuality that is causing the strong negative reaction, or existing antisemitic attitudes being evoked. To this, Friedmann provides his input: “This is, to our knowledge, a new barrel on the barrel organ of anti-Semitism, which has already been heavily played” (241). It appears then, that

not only was *Anders als die Andern* the cinematic litmus test for homosexual films, but it was also inadvertently another test for the representation of perceived Jewish identities in film. It is apparent from the reaction to *Anders als die Andern* that Judaism is an aspect to society akin to, or likely more despicable than, homosexuality. With the fact that homosexuality was actively criminalized during this time, an audience being more scandalized by Jewish representation than homosexual is a testament to the severity of scorn against Judaism.

Due to these negative reactions, and the supposed connection of the film's subject matter to Judaism, antisemitic and homophobic critics began to question the artistically free nature which allowed the film to be produced in the first place. *Anders als die Andern* is a film that was produced in a very short window of time where films of this nature were not restricted. In fact, it was a time when there were no restrictions on media at all. From the beginning text crawl of the fragmented version of *Anders als die Andern* used in the process of documenting this research, the text reads: "Following the war, censorship was temporarily lifted in all German media, opening a window of opportunity for filmmakers" (00:01:19). Directors had unprecedented freedom to experiment with new genres and topics and to see how such experimentations were received. This permitted the creation of enlightenment films such as *Anders als die Andern*, and other such films dealing with sexuality and cultural taboos.

As seen by the initial reactions to *Anders als die Andern*, not everyone was enthused about the lack of regulations on artistic media. Conservative critics objected to the culture of openness and expression that gave birth to such films as *Anders als die Andern* that would specifically address intimate matters of sexuality. These critics also "explicitly connected forbidden expressions of sexuality with criminality" (Brockmann 49), thus keeping in line with

the nature of persecution under Paragraph 175. Albert Hellwig, whose thoughts on sexual trash films have already been discussed, is one such critic:

In recent years, many of us have drawn attention to the strong suggestive power of cinematographic projections. Our observations have led us to the conclusion that any and all available repressive measures must be employed to prevent the projection of trash films [Schundfilms] that threaten public safety (especially criminal trash films). (Hellwig 45-46)

Such comments would soon be taken seriously on behalf of the Weimar Republic, and in 1920 the time of total artistic freedom in the direction of film came to an end with the reinstatement of censorship laws:

The passing of the Reichslichtspielgesetz (Reich Film Law) in 1920 confirmed the continuing influence of prewar institutions and debates, including the early cinema reform initiatives against 'trash and smut'. Stricter censorship laws put an end to the wave of Sittenfilme or Aufklärungsfilme (sex education films) about brothel life, prostitution, venereal diseases, and back-alley abortions produced right after the war. (Hake 33)

Following this reinstatement of censorship law, *Anders als die Andern* was banned in all theaters across Germany. The only exceptions to this ban were: “select medical audiences, primarily at Hirschfeld’s Institute of Sexual Science in Berlin” (Pilcher 35). Thus, the efforts of Oswald and Hirschfeld to influence the German nation in a way that would make it more accepting to those who felt ‘different’ largely failed. Not only was the film almost completely shut down after release, but the discussions it sparked also contributed to the developments which would prevent

any such similar film from being produced any time soon after this. This film certainly ended up being influential, however in the opposite way as to what was intended.

3.4 Legacy

Over a decade following the initial censorship of *Anders als die Andern*, the film met its ultimate form of criticism as members of the Nazi party specifically sought to seek and destroy any and all copies of this film. Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexological Research was targeted and raided by the Nazis in early May of 1933, and tens of thousands of books, films and photographs were burned. "Though it is unknown exactly what happened to prints of *Different from the Others* under the Third Reich, the film faced a fate similar to Hirschfeld's archive. The Nazis removed the film, and the sexologist's other materials, from archives in order to efface the abject, representational threat that they posed to strict regulation of sexual deviance" (Pilcher 48-49). Connecting with the events precipitated by the release of the film in 1919, it became clear that the outrage at the supposed Jewish content of this film at its release was reflective of the coming tide of fascism over a decade before Hitler came to power. The revelation of antisemitic attitudes in response to this homosexual film comes full circle and in full force with the Nazi party's destruction of this film. It was no longer enough just to censor or criticize something that was Jewish, it now had to be destroyed. At present, the only remnant of *Anders als die Andern* is an abridged, re-edited version included in an exported print of Hirschfeld's later film *Gesetze der Liebe* (1927) (Pilcher 35).

Having been widely destroyed and banned both by the Weimar Republic and then by the Third Reich, it took until the 1970s for an extra twenty-four-minute clip of the film to resurface and circulate among gay right's activists (Pilcher 35). When considering the level of awareness and acceptance of homosexuality in the Weimar Republic, *Anders als die Andern* can indicate

two differing stories: "Though the content of *Different from the Others* is often read as affirming a historical narrative of increased LGBTQ visibility and acceptance, the absence of the film marks its failure to adhere to socially and politically respectable discourse on sexuality in modernizing Germany" (Pilcher 38) Thus, it appears that *Anders als die Andern* truly was a film decades ahead of its time. Its progressive content was far too inclusive for conservatives of the time, which is indicated by its deliberate erasure from the cinematic archive, and the complete lack of similarly themed films over the following decade.

3.5 Final Thoughts on *Anders als die Andern*

Revolutionary in its subject matter, and far ahead of its time, *Anders als die Andern* pioneered the queer film industry, and provided the societal litmus test of queer film, heavily influencing the nature of similar films moving forward, the nature of the film industry in general, and the nature of German society itself, albeit in the opposite direction of the intentions of the creators. Being one of the first explicitly homosexual film to have been produced, this film set the precedent for all films of a similar nature to follow. If this film had succeeded, others could expect to as well; if it met controversy, then others could change their plans. Not only did this film meet with controversy, but it was also saddled with widespread censorship just a year after release. The nature of censorship in Germany changed specifically in reaction to films such as *Anders als die Andern* and their supposed immoral influences. The attempts of influencing German society toward a more tolerant future were not to be, as conservative critics would dash these hopes to the ground. In this way, *Anders als die Andern* can be argued to be, however ironically compared to the intentions of the filmmakers, an extremely influential film, in that it spawned discussions that would result in the prevention of any such film from coming to fruition in the decade following its release.

As a hint of what was to come, antisemitic attitudes among the public revealed themselves when audiences immediately connected the supposed immoral content with Judaism. This hatred toward anything Jewish would later prove to be deadly and was also later acted upon when *Anders als die Andern* was forcefully eliminated from the public sphere entirely by the Nazi regime. Revealing societal hints of future tragedies to occur, spawning debates about censorship and the necessity of it for the sake of public safety, and itself falling victim to harsh restriction and destruction, *Anders als die Andern*, not only “reflects the cultural and social debates concerning sex and sexuality in the Weimar period,” (Pilcher 40) it also reveals concerning attitudes among the Weimar public that would later grow into a movement of mass genocide. The censorship thereof, in that case, could be argued to have been one of the first dominos to fall toward the rise of fascism. In this way, *Anders als die Andern* can already be seen to shift towards reflection of the German nation’s development, which will be expanded upon in the analysis of *Mädchen in Uniform*.

2.1.2 Weimar Context Continued; Phase Two of Weimar Film

What marks the end of this first period of Weimar Film (1919-1924), and the beginning of the next is the economic decline and rapid inflation suffered because of the economic difficulties placed on the young Republic attempting to gain its footing in the aftermath of the War. This situation worsened in the years following the release of *Anders als die Andern* and was unable to recover on its own before the enactment of the “American-assisted stabilization of the currency at the end of 1923” (Brockmann 44). Following this, the situation improved, and a period of comparative economic stability began.

The level of economic success the republic enjoyed is what marks the clearest difference between the first and second period of the Weimar Republic (1924-1929). This period became

known under a new name: “Known as the stabilisation period, the years from 1924 to 1929 brought greater economic and political stability for society as a whole” (Hake 34). This period provides the most peaceful instance of the Weimar Republic. The horrors of the War had been momentarily left behind, allowing for the recovery of the economy, and the fears of the future, as well as the eventual cracks in the political foundation that would result in the end of the Republic are yet to present themselves in full force. For the citizens of Germany who obviously were unaware of the coming horrors of the future, it seemed the Weimar Republic had finally begun to find its footing.

The cultural industry of Germany throughout the Weimar Republic had an antithetical relationship with the economic situation: “Paradoxically, the economic history of the German film industry more or less precisely mirrored the political and economic history of the Weimar Republic, but in a negative way” (Brockmann 44). Fittingly this analysis has chosen to examine films originating from the first and third phases of the Weimar Republic, but not the second. For the purposes of this analysis, films produced during controversial phases of German history provide the most insight into historical patterns, and films produced during this period of relative economic and political peace have been mostly set aside. Brockmann puts it succinctly: “When Germany as a whole was doing well economically and politically ... the German film industry suffered; when Germany as a whole descended into turmoil and crisis ... the German film industry tended to prosper” (44). The most influential films are understandably produced during periods of prosperity in the film industry.

2.1.3 Phase Three of Weimar Film

Unfortunately for those who had believed the Weimar Republic had begun to consolidate its power and position in its first decade of existence, the final period of the Weimar Republic's history is characterized by a rapid decline into political and economic chaos, ultimately resulting in a fascist takeover and regime formation. This was a multifaceted decline, which cannot be placed behind one sole event as a definitive cause. Perhaps the most devastating aspect of this decline, due to its far-reaching, non-discriminatory nature, is the beginning of the world economic crisis known as The Great Depression in 1929. This crisis brought about financial difficulties to the worldwide economy and caused "a massive rise in unemployment in Germany - over 6 million by 1932" (Brockmann 44). With unemployment and poverty on the rise, animosities between various political groups had time and reason to grow. This led to "increasingly violent and open street fights between the growing national socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP- the Nazi party's official name) and the Communist Party, which was dominated by the newly formed Soviet Union" (Brockmann 44). Such animosities and conflicts only deepened the rifts that had already been growing in the Republic's political structure. With the economy in shambles and the progress toward a more stabilized political center reversed, the second period of Weimar film came to an end, and the final period (1929-1933) had its beginning.

As initiated by the antisemitic reactions to *Anders als die Andern*, films of the Weimar Republic have shown themselves to not only be influential to the development of Germany as a nation, but also reflective of the existing attitudes among citizens of the developing nation which can serve to better understand the machinations behind such developments. While in the case of *Anders als die Andern*, the reflection of existing societal attitudes was mostly prevalent in the

audiences' reception of the film, the same cannot be said for certain films produced during this final period of Weimar film. When analyzing the film *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931), it becomes apparent how this film was a deliberate attempt at reflecting the growing fears and concerns existing among average German citizens about the radical measures the political leaders of their country were beginning to take. With the antisemitic attitudes acknowledged through the reception of *Anders als die Andern*, the growing reality of such attitudes faced by German citizens is represented in *Mädchen in Uniform* through the reflection of societal fears and animosities focused on the growing authoritarianism of the state. The following paragraphs contain the analysis of the film *Mädchen in Uniform*, which indicates a targeted attempt to reflect the current political developments and societal concerns thereof, to speak to everyday Germans who sought validation and representation of the tumultuous situation they found themselves in.

4. *Mädchen in Uniform*

Mirroring the previous film selection, the second film of the Weimar Film period to be analyzed lies in many ways opposite *Anders als die Andern*, in that it was released in 1931, during the final days of the Weimar Republic rather than directly in the beginning, and that it features two homosexual women instead of men. *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931), will serve as a fitting end cap to the discussion of Weimar film. Produced in a climate of political uncertainty and rising fascism, the themes uncovered when analyzing this film reveal hidden messages, much like the illicit notes exchanged between the girls in the film, that were placed in direct response to the ever-destabilizing government. Because of these messages, *Mädchen in Uniform* is much more than a love story between two women; it is also a reflection and warning of the growing animosity of the time within Germany.

As a result of the laws enacted after the release of *Anders als die Andern*, *Mädchen in Uniform* had to deal with the possibility of censorship. However, there were certain ideological loopholes that were jumped through by various supporters of *Mädchen in Uniform* that ensured it would escape censorship laws. In 1932 in order “to ensure the film’s commercial circulation and appease the censors’ suspicions of obscenity,” John Krimsky, the American distributor of the film, “[policed] the film’s meaning and [denied] its queer content to present it instead as a German classic” (Iurascu 89). The images featured of “militaristic statues, the Potsdam church and other neoclassical buildings, columns, and towers,” (Mayer 344) all Prussian architectural style, are shown frequently throughout the film (Figures 8-13). Such establishing shots with an upward angle impart a sense of authority and command of militaristic and architectural designs and



Figure 8 “Prussian Architecture 1” (0:00:53)



Figure 9 “Prussian Architecture 2” (0:00:55)



Figure 10 “Prussian Architecture 3” (0:00:59)

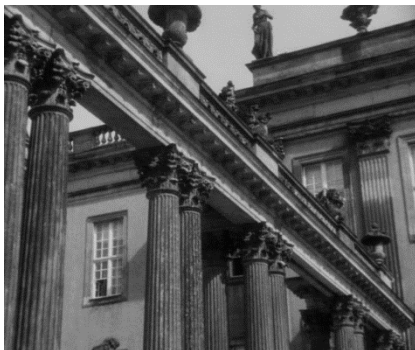


Figure 11 “Prussian Architecture 4” (0:01:06)

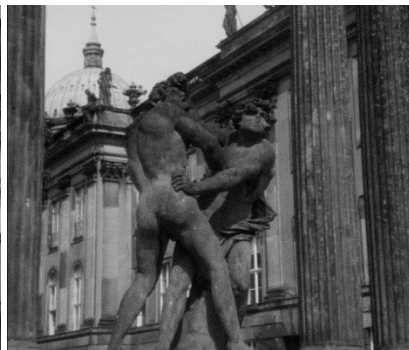


Figure 12 “Prussian Architecture 5” (0:01:07)



Figure 13 “Prussian Architecture 6” (0:01:11)

ideals. This combined with the repeated Prussian idioms and phrases spouted by the headmistress make this claim of *Mädchen in Uniform* serving as a classical German film reasonably plausible. By appealing to the nostalgic, militaristic ideals of the censorship board in this way, *Mädchen in Uniform* was able to escape censorship.

4.1 Film Details

Taking place entirely within the walls of a Prussian boarding school for girls, *Mädchen in Uniform* centers itself around the young Manuela and her admission into the militant, authoritative facility. The headmistress runs the school with an iron fist, and she and the faculty are constantly berating the children for playing, roughhousing, or misbehaving, simply to oppress them into the desired order. The girls frequently act-out specifically in rebellion of these strict rules, proving they likely achieve more harm than good. The only exception to this strait-laced environment is Frau von Bernburg. Frau von Bernburg serves as a maternal figure for the girls, as they lack any other such figure, and she is one with whom many of the students are infatuated. On her first day in the school, Manuela is told by the other girls of how wonderful Frau von Bernburg is, especially in comparison to the headmistress and other faculty. Bernburg is even so attentive as to kiss each girl goodnight on the forehead before sending them to sleep. This ritual of sending the girls off to bed with such an intimate gesture serves as the catalyst for the romance at the center of this film.

The ceremony of the nightly kiss is not the only aspect of this film that sets Bernburg apart from her fellow faculty members; cinematographic techniques are used throughout the film to emphasize her intimate, motherly nature. From the moment Bernburg enters the girl's dorm, it is already clear the mood is completely different from when another faculty member enters. This

is made apparent through the dynamic use of lighting between several of the scenes. As seen in Figure 15, Bernburg's time in the dorm is characterized by dimmer lighting than is seen when her coworkers are in the room (Figure 14), characterizing the atmospheric differences the various faculty members carry with them.



Figure 14 “Stern Faculty Member” (0:23:08)



Figure 15 “Bernburg’s Nightly Kiss”
(0:29:02)

In Figure 14, a faculty member marches through the dorms on her way to punish two girls, while Figure 15 shows how the girls eagerly line up for Bernburg’s nightly embrace and sink dreamily back into their beds. The dim lighting, while also indicating the time of day, differentiates the environment while Bernburg inhabits it. This is a calmer, more personal environment, where the girls are relaxed and comfortable rather than unruly and rebellious.

When it is time for Manuela to receive her kiss, the two embrace, and opt for a kiss on the lips, rather than the forehead (Figure 16-17) This interaction is decidedly more romantic than Manuela’s classmates’ experiences. By utilizing the already established dim lighting, as well as the zoom in on the kiss, arguably comparable to the zoomed in frames seen in *Anders als die Andern*, Sagan effectively establishes a private sphere occupied by only Manuela and Bernburg

in a room filled with other girls. This moment sparks an intimate relationship between the two, and later Manuela even visits Bernburg in her room. Bernburg gifts



Figure 16 “Manuela and Bernburg Embrace” (0:30:03)



Figure 17 “Manuela and Bernburg Kiss” (0:30:12)

a set of undergarments from herself to Manuela, providing fuel for the fire of the headmistress’s scorn.

This scandalous relationship is finally revealed to the rest of the school when Manuela, intoxicated from fermented punch, confesses to the heavens, as well as her all her classmates and school faculty, that she is in love with Bernburg. The remainder of the film deals with the fallout of this scandal, as well as the punishment, separation, and eventual suicide attempt of Manuela. Forbidden from ever seeing her love again, Manuela is just barely prevented from leaping from the staircase by her fellow students, who never once turned their backs on their friend.

The narrative of this film conveys the same message that was conveyed in *Anders als die Andern*. In *Anders als die Andern*, Magnus Hirschfeld requested the young Kurt, and by extension the audience members of the younger generation to “keep on living to change the prejudices” of society (00:48:17). Such progressive methods can also be recognized in *Mädchen in Uniform*. To begin with, Bernburg herself is obviously an exception to the rule of the older,

homophobic generation in the film and explains to the headmistress herself what she makes of the entire situation: “What you call sin, Headmistress, is what I call the spirit of love. It takes on a thousand forms. At this age especially, young girls need someone to lean on” (01:16:48).

Bernburg flips the perspective of the relationship on its head and offers a new, progressive view of the intimate relationship other than just a shameful scandal.

Furthermore, while there is no doctor or sexologist who enters the school to explain the relationship between Manuela and Bernburg, the girls in the school themselves treat homosexuality as normal. They themselves confess multiple times to having crushes on the motherly teacher and are all eagerly awaiting their moment of intimacy with her for their nightly kiss. Leontine Sagan, the director of *Mädchen in Uniform*, portrays a world in which homosexuality was already accepted and where for most of the film the older generation was unaware of its existence. This in itself is an aspect of progression. Depicting the headmistress and older faculty as strict authoritarians intolerant of intimacy between the girls, and the girls themselves as sexually free and exploratory beings, Sagan has subtly shown how the levels of acceptance can harshly differ between generations, and how the young will one day replace the old and new ideologies will overrun the previous ones.

Finally, to round out the progressive nature of this film, the girls in their uniforms, having never once doubted or questioned the moral quality of Manuela’s character, make their most decisive move yet and raise the alarm in search for Manuela in fear of her hurting herself after being forbidden from ever again seeing Bernburg. Manuela, seriously contemplating and nearly attempting suicide, is following the same tragic path followed by Paul Körner in *Anders als die Andern*. What makes the inclusion of a suicide attempt based on homosexual persecution even more progressive than the tragic depiction in *Anders als die Andern* is the fulfilment and

depiction of Hirschfeld's wish in *Mädchen in Uniform* which was expressed at the end of *Anders als die Andern*. As Kurt contemplated suicide himself in the presence of his beloved's corpse, Hirschfeld requested him to "keep on living to change the prejudices" (00:48:17). The narrative cannot be changed unless there is someone left to change it. As the girls prevent Manuela from leaping to her death, they are fulfilling Hirschfeld's request and preventing Manuela from eliminating yet another voice from the cries of the unheard and unrepresented. The headmistress' stunned reaction that her punishments have brought the girls to such lengths also hints that the older generation may not be so immune to change. *Mädchen in Uniform*'s ending is decidedly more hopeful than *Anders als die Andern* in that it both strives to prevent further suicides and reminds those in despair that help may be closer than they realize.

4.2 Audience Impacts

In contrast to the hostile reception of *Anders als die Andern*, *Mädchen in Uniform* opened to critical acclaim. "German film critic Siegfried Kracauer remarked that the German film *Mädchen in Uniform* (Girls in Uniform, Leontine Sagan, 1931) was enormously popular: 'In Germany it was said to be the best movie of the year and even the American critics were fascinated'" (Mayer 340). Whether this was due to the addition of audio that was lacking in *Anders als die Andern* or the narrative-based, feature-film format that differentiated *Mädchen in Uniform* from the more educationally focused *Anders als die Andern* is up for speculation. Perhaps even more influential, however, were the ideological interpretations behind the various themes and messages that were being transmitted through the scenery, dialogue, characterizations, and representations of ongoing political strife and turmoil. Discussed at length in the following paragraphs, the ability of *Mädchen in Uniform* to accurately and viscerally

reflect the cultural atmosphere of the final years of the Weimar Republic is very likely reason in itself for the critical success for this film.

4.3 Interpretations

What appears on a surface level to be a tale of a scandalous relationship between a teacher and student in an all-girls boarding school can be revealed to have much deeper implications than the betterment of society for homosexual individuals. This is nevertheless a viable interpretation of this film, as “the all-female cast of Leontine Sagan's *Mädchen in Uniform* (Girls in Uniform, 1931) gave rise to the first sympathetic depiction of lesbianism on the screen” (Hake 59), thus paving the way for growing public discourse and awareness of lesbianism. The deeper meaning in this film, however, is the “sharp critique of Prussian authoritarianism” (Hake 59) layered within the frames. With the increasing political instability of the Weimar Republic, and the ever-growing influence of the Nazi party, there were few aspects of life that were able to avoid the effects of the developing ideological situation, including film. “During the early thirties, a politicization of cinema took place in conjunction with national socialism. Since cinema was important for Weimar culture, political groups used film to transmit both fascistic and anti-fascistic ideologies” (Mayer 347). The latter of these two options is how *Mädchen in Uniform* is described: “The statement of *Mädchen* (1931) is clearly an ideology that opposes old Prussian authority as well as pre-fascist tendencies” (Mayer 347).

Prussian authority is clearly on display in this film. Both the faculty and the militaristic headmistress (Figures 18-19) are constantly on strict patrol to correct the girls' behavior. The headmistress in particular spouts off speeches about how soft the girls are, and what Prussianism truly means: “Hungry? Prussians are raised on hunger ... Poverty is not sin, poverty ennobles. This is the true meaning of Prussianism as it once was ... Through discipline and hunger. Hunger

and discipline. Or not at all!” (00:17:14). Such speeches are reminiscent of the droning speeches that came to be associated with the rise of fascism and the Third Reich.

The headmistress, however, is not the only authoritative figure of this film. Multiple instances feature the girls attempting to make the best out of their restrictive situations only to be



Figure 18 “The Stern Headmistress” (0:17:02)



Figure 19 “Authoritative Posture” (0:17:39)

interrupted and punished by staff members who do not allow such deviation from order. In a scene reminiscent of a prison warden amongst her prisoners, a faculty member enters the girls’ dressing room to interrupt their socialization. What begins as a lively scene with the girls gleefully chatting and gossiping during their nightly preparations is a rare instance of joy and happiness shared by the girls collectively (Figure 20). The film demonstrates that when separated into their private sphere, the girls can flourish and make meaningful connections with one



Figure 20 “Girls in Changing Room”
(0:24:20)



Figure 21 “Interrupted by Faculty”
(0:24:46)

another. This ends abruptly when one of the faculty members discovers the festivities and quickly puts an end to them (Figure 21). Left with no choice, the girls immediately obey and disperse themselves (Figure 22). Suppressing the girls in this way introduces the sense of animosity from them toward the faculty.



Figure 22 “Forced to Comply with Rule” (0:25:00)

The rigidity of the camera angle during these three sequential shots can be interpreted as representational of the rigidity of the environment these girls find themselves in. By suppressing the girls into such an oppressive format, they are themselves creating the generational divide which this film is trying to depict and critique.

On top of this, the film is filled with various instances of Prussian imagery, and it frequently makes use of the new technology of sound in film to transport viewers to a time of Prussian might. Throughout various transitional scenes in the film, “there are church bells ringing, then a bugle starts playing a militaristic tune. Shots of militaristic statues, the Potsdam church and other neoclassical buildings, columns, and towers run parallel to this tune” (Mayer

344). Combined with the characterization of the faculty, this audio and imagery connects the film with a time of rigid authoritarianism experienced by the waning Weimar Republic.

Opposite to this depiction of authoritarianism, the girls in attendance of this school are virtually unanimous in their distaste for the headmistress and her boot-licking faculty, with the only exception being the motherly Bernburg. They consistently misbehave and joke around as a direct response and retaliation for what they see as unfair and over-imposing restrictions forced onto them. Even when forbidden from contacting Manuela by any means, her fellow classmates are extremely concerned about her well-being, unquestioning in their support and care for her, and some of them even find ways to secretly assist her, such as bringing her extra food. Even after being caught in the act of providing Manuela with something to eat, Edelgard, a fellow student, insists to Miss von Kesten, that “Manuela is not a bad person!” (01:16:33). This, in light of the revelation that Manuela harbors deep feelings for Bernburg, is in direct contrast to the immediate hostile reaction to the relationship on behalf of the other faculty and especially the headmistress. In this way, “Sagan’s film (1931) demonstrates a strong contrast between the school’s traditional authoritarian order and the girls’ modern notions” (Mayer 350). This fosters the interpretation that *Mädchen in Uniform* is more than just a lesbian film, it is also an anti-fascistic, anti-authoritarian homosexual love story, created during the ongoing rise of the fascistic regime of the Third Reich.

With this depiction of such a stark generational divide between the authoritarian school faculty and the progressive and unified schoolgirls, it can be seen how *Mädchen in Uniform* was reflective of its time. The growing authoritarian nature of the state was reflected in the oppressive, Prussian architecture which dominates the landscape of the school, as well as in the restrictive and discriminatory demeanor of the headmistresses. Mirroring this, the opposite, less

often represented side of public discourse in the final days of the Weimar Republic, that of those secondary voices who opposed the rise of fascism and authoritarianism, was reflected in the girls' ongoing opposition to the faculty's rule. Examples of this consisted of instances of acting out and specifically mocking the faculty, and in acting directly against their orders of contacting or helping Manuela. In this way, *Mädchen in Uniform* was able not only to reflect the growing political rigidity of the German government, but also the scant resistance it faced that failed to prevent such rigidity and control from coming to fruition. This is the necessary foundation for the argument that this film was able to reflect the cultural atmosphere of the final years of the Weimar Republic which would set the stage for the coming fascistic regime.

4.4 Legacy

Whether or not the casual viewer of the Weimar Republic would have been able to easily recognize the reflections of their own society in *Mädchen in Uniform*, critics studying Weimar film after the fall of the Third Reich undoubtedly did: "Contemporary critics, like Kracauer or Lotte H. Eisner, do not handle the film action as an independent lesbian plot, but as a symbol for anti-authoritarian and anti-fascistic tendencies" (Mayer 340). This interpretation became the most accepted among film scholars of the age given its poignant commentary on the growing instability and authoritarianism of the time. The proximity of its release to the destruction of the Weimar Republic and creation of the Third Reich marks it as extremely timely as well.

In the decades following its heyday, Weimar Film has come to be associated with an overall air of pre-fascism and authoritarianism. Siegfried Kracauer recognized this when focusing on films produced in Germany following the end of World War One:

Focusing on recurring thematic preferences and narrative motifs, Kracauer sees the vacillation between anxiety and aggression, and revolt and submission, as a typical expression of German national character and its foundation in authoritarian social and political structures. According to his socio-psychological reading, Weimar films reveal hidden pre-fascist tendencies that make the rise of Hitler appear almost inevitable. (Hake 29)

Films such as *Mädchen in Uniform*, that directly challenged this growing sense of authoritarianism and fascism, fought to use the power and influence of film to turn the tide of what they clearly were able to see coming. Regardless of how successful these attempts were, they remain a reflection of and legacy to those who stood out in the face of overwhelming opposition to try enacting the change they felt needed to happen.

4.5 Final Thoughts on *Mädchen in Uniform*

Mädchen in Uniform is much more than a love story between two females; it is also a reflection and warning of the growing animosity of the time period within Germany. It serves as a final outcry against the rising fascistic and authoritarianist political views of the far right and shows how there are still those fighting to defy it. The young girls of the school never once abandon their friend who has been deemed problematic by those in authority, and the girls openly defy this authority in order to assist said friend in need. Just as the illicit messages from the girls were sent out to warn of the dismal conditions found inside, *Mädchen in Uniform* was a disguised message calling out to anyone who would listen, calling for them to join the tide of those who resisted fascism from its beginning. In this way, the film can be seen as a direct reflection of the fears, concerns, animosities, and changes that were existent in the final years of

the Weimar Republic. This renders this film an important historical document, invaluable when it comes to understanding the mindset of those who lived through this time.

5. Weimar Film Conclusion

The period of the Weimar Republic finally met its end as the NSDAP had been growing in strength and was now recognizing the power of film as a way to draw people to its cause. “Because of the cinema's central importance to Weimar culture, nationalistic groups during the early 1930s often used controversial films to bolster their arguments about the failure of modern democracies and the double threat of Bolshevism and Americanism” (Hake 54). Critique of the Weimar Republic’s ineffective democracy constituted a significant portion of the Nazi party’s initial attempts to convince people of the benefits of authoritative rule, and the actual government of the Republic failed to prove such arguments wrong. The struggles faced by the Republic in its dying days were exacerbated by such critiques and infighting, and the Republic finally met its end with the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor of the Reich on January 30, 1933.

Alongside the slow death and destruction of the Republic, the film industry during the final years of the Weimar Republic reflected the growing instability and chaos. The growing animosity between differing political groups vying for power caused an electric situation in the film industry. It became increasingly clear that a new voice of fascism was directing the public mind, and the boundary pushing, expressionist films of the past were quickly falling out of favor. The Weimar film industry struggled through the first years of the 30s, but “In 1933, the combined force of traditional conservative and right-wing parties and of a new political party held together by anti-communism and anti-Semitism brought an end to the first German republic” (Hake 27). The propagandistic machine of the Third Reich then came into full force.

6. Third Reich Film Introduction

The second film period of note in this chronological examination of the German film industry is the Third Reich. This period begins with the fascist turn of the German government spawned by the NSDAP, and the appointment of Adolf Hitler to the position of chancellor in 1933. It ended twelve years later with the unconditional surrender of the Third Reich to the Allied powers on May 8, 1945 (Taylor 206). This era of history is quite frequently debated and referenced regarding situations of human suffering or human rights violations, and for good reason: The Third Reich provides one of the most horrifying and recent examples of systematic, militarized mass genocide conducted on an international scale. Such an example provides an invaluable lesson to posterity as to how far those in power can manipulate the masses to their own will and serve as a harsh and shocking reminder of the horrors that can therefore result.

What makes this example of mass human suffering significant to the discussion of film is the fact that the regime responsible for one of the most wide-reaching and devastating genocides in human history actively created, supported, and propagated their own film industry to codify and normalize their ideology. This film industry, when viewed over the entire period of its existence, constitutes the second period of the greater pattern of influence and reflection of Germany's historical development that is being analyzed in this research. The resulting catalogue of films will be shown in the following sections to have, at least in attempt and questionably in effect, both influenced and reflected the realities and desires of the regime, its followers, and its opponents to the extent that the social and national development of Germany throughout the twentieth century can be argued to have been greatly impacted through the medium of film.

6.1 Third Reich Film Culture Between 1933-1937

The foundation of the Third Reich came at a time of crisis. The Great Depression continued to have devastating effects on the global economy, and unemployment was skyrocketing, with numbers reaching six million unemployed citizens by 1932 (Mayer 342). The onset of the 1930s also saw the Nazi Party's rise in parliamentary representation, winning over thirty percent of the seats in the German parliament by 1932 (Brockmann 131). With the economy in shambles, and animosities over the defeat of German forces at the end of World War One still in the backs of many Germans minds, the rise of the Nazi party, and their promises of "a spiritual renewal and a national awakening in all areas of German culture and society" (Hake 64), were welcome. It was then on January 30, 1933, that Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany by the president of the German Reich, Paul von Hindenburg. Following the passing of the *Ermächtigungsgesetz* (enabling law) in March of 1933, Hitler was granted dictatorial powers, consolidating his control over the period of the Third Reich.

After the passage of the *Ermächtigungsgesetz*, the Nazis wasted no time in their creation of a centralized film production industry. On March 13, 1933, the Reich Ministry for People's Enlightenment and Propaganda (*Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda*) was created, and Joseph Goebbels, a trusted lieutenant of Hitler's, was placed in charge. Goebbels' role was to control the cultural aspects of life such as radio, broadcasting, press, literature, arts, and importantly, film. In other words, Goebbels was tasked with and dedicated to coordinating "all areas of cultural production and consumption with the political goals of the new regime" (Hake 66). Goebbels saw immense ideological potential in film to influence the masses to accept and support the new wave of National Socialism. Goebbels went so far as to suggest "that German film might have the possibility of 'conquering the world'" (Brockmann 135).

The foundation of the Reich Ministry for People's Enlightenment and Propaganda precipitated many significant developments and changes within the industry over the next several years. A foundational tenet of the national socialist movement was antisemitism, however the discriminative tendencies of this regime extended to various other groups as well. It did not take long for this discrimination to become apparent in the film industry. To be able to restrict and control the people allowed to participate in the film production process, the Reich Ministry for People's Enlightenment and Propaganda created the Reichsfilmkammer (Reich Film Chamber) in which every person involved in the production of a film had to be registered before being able to work. According to Sabine Hake, many such 'chambers' were made to house the varying members and offerings of creative expression, but that "the Reichsfilmkammer was the first chamber to be created, an indication of the great importance given to filmmaking by the new regime" (66).

The restriction then came into play when membership of the Reichsfilmkammer was limited only to those who fit into the world view of the Third Reich. "Only Germans, as defined by the new citizenship and racial laws, were eligible for membership ... This rule allowed the Propaganda Ministry to exclude so-called non-Aryans and politically unreliable persons from working in the industry and, in so doing, to purge German cinema of all 'alien' influences" (Hake 66). The results from this targeted ban on multiple identities from participation in film caused many of those affected to flee to more accepting locations to work, such as Hollywood. Those individuals who felt compelled to leave the country included members from all ranks of film production such as directors Fritz Lang, and Henry Koster, as well as actors Hedy Lamarr, Peter Lorre, and Marlene Dietrich to name a few (King). The decisively discriminatory advent of the Reichsfilmkammer even alienated film industry workers who did not fall under scrutiny of

the NSDAP, creating an “echo effect” that “induced even some non-Jewish Germans working in the film industry to leave the country” (Brockmann 132-133). While successful in eliminating the presence of unwanted persons and identities from the silver screens of cinemas, the creation of the Reichsfilmkammer was also successful in driving away a significant portion of the country’s stars and film industry workers.

For those unaffected by the targeted removal of unwanted individuals from the film industry, the Reichsfilmkammer still exerted considerable control. Membership in the chamber was completely at the discretion of the Nazi party. One did not have to necessarily fall into a designated category to be denied membership; becoming a political opponent of the Third Reich, or opposing it in any way, was grounds for termination of membership in the Reichsfilmkammer. This would mark the definitive end of one’s film career. Because of this, among the available film artists, few were willing to openly oppose Nazi ideology, and censorship was used only as a backup to the self-censorship already taking place. The Nazis effectively killed two birds with one stone with the creation of this chamber; it simultaneously excluded unwanted individuals and prevented even those permitted to participate from criticizing the system in any way.

With the film industry centralized under one oppressive rule, it became a controlled environment in which the limits and potentials of mass manipulation using film could be tested. It is upon this stage where the first film of note to this period of German film made its debut. Released in the early years of the Third Reich, *Triumph des Willens* (1935) represents a blatant attempt to influence the forming ideological understanding of the newly fascist-led government of Germany, making it an undeniable instance of film as a method of mass manipulation, and continuing the overall pattern of influence and reflection of film in this research.

7. *Triumph des Willens*

Triumph des Willens, directed by Leni Riefenstahl, was produced to document the second annual victory rally of the Nazi party which took place in 1934 in Nuremberg. While touted by Riefenstahl as an “objective documentary” (Brockmann 161), this film is rife with political propaganda and attempts to instill in its viewers a sense of awe and admiration for the Nazi party and its depicted might. Such films were not entirely unique, as a multitude of films concerning the Nazis were being produced during this time. *Triumph des Willens*, however, stands unique to other films of similar subject matter, in that it was “The only film that was constructed around Hitler himself” (Taylor 154) and Riefenstahl’s depiction is outstanding among her field: “it is difficult to see how another filmmaker could have elaborated on the myth that Riefenstahl depicts” (154). This film is a testament to the ideological and influential potentials of film the Nazis believed in, and a remnant of the inaccuracy of those beliefs.

7.1 Powers Driving Production

After World War Two, and during denazification efforts, Riefenstahl expressed doubts about her confidence at the time to accept the monumental assignment Hitler was placing upon her. While impossible to prove either way how Riefenstahl initially reacted to such a task, long after the fall of the Third Reich, “in her wordy autobiography, Frau Riefenstahl suggests that she was forced, too; that Hitler pressurized her into making *Triumph of the Will*” (Giesen 19). Riefenstahl goes into further detail on such claims by describing her immediate reaction, and her journey to meet with Hitler to discuss his proposition: “I was determined to resist taking on this assignment.’ Speeding to Nuernberg in her car, she had only one thought in mind: ‘to free myself from this project’” (19). Riefenstahl seems to be quite invested in distancing herself from any responsibility for the creation of this film in her memoirs. This is convenient as after the

dissolution of the Third Reich, and during the ensuing denazification efforts, it would certainly have been within Riefenstahl's interest to make claims of innocence as to not be implicated in the horrors of the war. No matter how Riefenstahl wants to make it seem, "to speculate that Riefenstahl was lacking in self-consciousness is absolutely ridiculous" (20). Riefenstahl made a continuous, conscious contribution to the production of this film, and singlehandedly sought out the opportunity to work with Hitler herself. She is just as, and arguably more, responsible for this film as Hitler himself, or even the propaganda minister in charge of all film projects, Joseph Goebbels. The following paragraphs contain the analysis of this film, which reveal its propagandistic intentions.

7.2 Film Details

While being officially labeled as a documentary, this term fails to accurately describe *Triumph des Willens*. A documentary film is meant to inform the viewer of factual elements that exist outside of the film itself. *Triumph des Willens* feels much less like a factual, informative experience than it feels like a deliberate indoctrination attempt. Most of the film is divided between two emphases: leaders and their ideological speeches, and nationalistic imagery and symbolism. The film alternates between periods of flaunting the might of the newly founded German army intercut with shots of adoring spectators vehemently throwing their hands forth in the signature 'Sieg Heil' salute, and passionate speeches from various party leaders and military personnel detailing the specifics of German strength and Nazi ideology. The result is a long-winded attempt at ideological indoctrination through the glorification of the Nazi party. Unless one considers the ideological system and beliefs of the Third Reich to be inherently factual, and of worth to be disseminated through film, one cannot describe *Triumph des Willens* as anything other than a deliberate and obvious attempt at mass manipulation through the medium of film.

Furthermore, *Triumph des Willens* was not just meant to influence the people of Germany to support the Nazi party in the beginning of the decade, there was also an ulterior objective to this film that hinted at plans decades in the making. “The film’s singular objective: manipulation of public opinion and formation of a singular meaning which is morale building to influence attitudes to unify the masses in a singularity for a singular future action, Second World War” (Rizvi 85). Hitler was planning on using *Triumph des Willens* as part of a long-term strategy to garner support and inspire an attitude of militaristic prowess and might so that he could eventually put it to use with his aggressive expansionist tactics of World War Two. The film was meant to display the victory of the Nazi party, capturing the vast masses of people assembled for the occasion, the undying devotion of the uniformed men, the pomp and circumstance of military processions, and the droning messages from party leaders. The ideological intentions of the state took center stage in this dramatic, yet obvious spectacle.

As for the two emphases mentioned earlier, ideological speeches and nationalist imagery, the film cleanly alternates between the two. Beginning with nationalistic imagery, triumphant fanfare and patriotic images such as the iconic *Reichsadler* (Figure 23) start off the film with title cards declaring the direct order of Hitler himself to produce it.



Figure 23 “The Reichsadler” (0:00:07)



Figure 24 “Hitler’s Transport to Rally”
(0:03:08)

Further title cards set the scene of ‘German suffering’: “20 Jahre nach dem Ausbruch des Weltkrieges ... 16 Jahre nach dem Anfang deutschen Leidens ... 19 Monate nach dem Beginn der deutschen Wiedergeburt ... flog Adolf Hitler wiederum nach Nürnberg um Heerschau abzuhalten über seine Getreuen” (Riefenstahl 0:00:55-0:01:23). Sure enough, after this ideological exposition of this intended narrative of the Nazi party, we are shown the accompanying imagery: Hitler’s plane drifting through the clouds (Figure 24), flags hanging from passing buildings, both German and those featuring the swastika (Figures 25-26), and columns of people in the streets making their way in uniform rows to the rally (Figures 27-28).

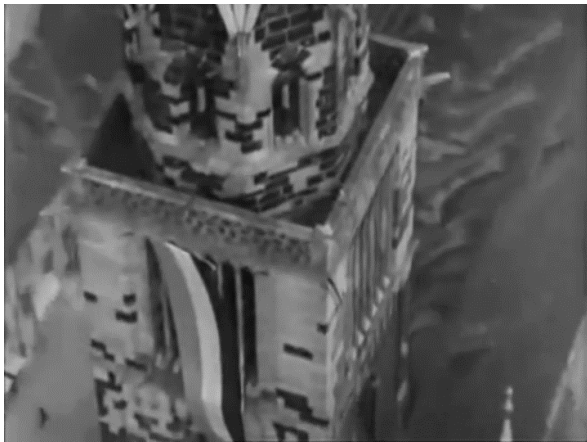


Figure 25 “German Flag on Building”
(0:03:01)



Figure 26 “Nazi Flag on Building” (0:03:05)



Figure 27 “Overhead of Attendees” (0:03:29)



Figure 28 “Long Columns of Supporters”
(0:03:44)

After a period of twenty minutes, in which Hitler is graciously received by the masses who have assembled for his arrival, night comes and goes, Nazi soldiers are shown dutifully preparing for the day's activities, and crowds of people in traditional German clothing assemble and are happily greeted by Hitler. The ideological goals of the Nazis have begun to develop simply through imagery alone. The adoration shown from the masses (Figures 29-30), as well as the physical distance constantly kept between themselves and Hitler (Figures 31-32), show quite clearly how this man is to be revered by society.



Figure 29 “Energetic Sieg Heil” (0:04:24)



Figure 30 “Wider Shot of Sieg Heil” (0:05:02)

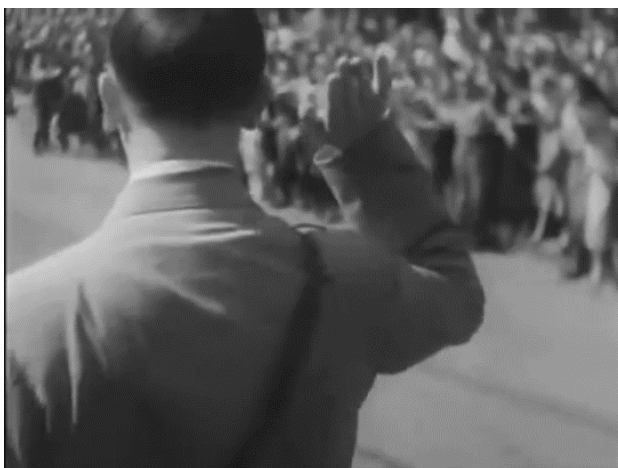


Figure 31 “Hitler Greeting Attendees” (0:06:35)



Figure 32 “Public Distance Kept from Hitler” (0:06:41)

“The crowd looking up to the skies and screaming ‘Heil Hitler’ and ‘Sieg Heil’ affirms commitment to the hope that lies in Hitler. This sequence, a tribute to his charismatic persona, is evidence of Hitler’s pristine appeal as he comes to stir up ancient Nuremberg with his dynamism to remodel Germany into an empire” (Rizvi 79). Arriving at his destination, Hitler disembarks the car on which he was being driven and enters a building to reemerge at a window several stories up. The low camera angle during this sequence (Figure 33) is yet another hint at Hitler’s status in comparison to the people:



Figure 33 “Hitler Waves from Above” (0:08:56)

Even in the eyes of the camera, Hitler is above them, looking down on them in admiration; admiration for being the loyal supporters he is wanting. The camera is lost among a forest of hands reaching out in salute to this man (Figure 34), indicating the blinding devotion that should be overwhelmingly felt. The ideological imagery in this film clearly makes a persuasive



Figure 34 “Forest of Hands” (0:09:02)

argument in favor of the Nazi party, making claims of it being purely objective and factual at best dubious.

What follows this lengthy display of nationalistic imagery are the ideological speeches of the various leaders of the Nazi party. This constitutes roughly another twenty minutes of the film. Members of the party such as Alfred Rosenberg, Sepp Dietrich, and Joseph Goebbels give speeches one after the other with nothing but a simple title card announcing their last name in between. The speeches shown appear to be only snippets, as none of them have a proper introduction or conclusion, so they go by quickly and are limited in the context provided. The general content of what was included can be summarized as touting the various successes of the

Nazi party while extensively virtue signaling through repeated claims about ‘strong youth’, ‘strong blood’, and ‘strong soil’.

This is followed with yet another series of speeches, this time from Hitler. Hitler conducts a roll call with a massive formation of soldiers, holds a speech about how the German Army is to set an example for all of society to follow, and directs another speech directly to the youth of the nation. A portion of this latter speech is as follows:

And we know that you German boys and girls ... are taking on everything we hope for from Germany. We want to be one people. And you, my youth, are to be this people. We want to see no more class divisions. You must not let this grow up amongst you. We want to see one Reich one day. And you must train for it. We want our people to be obedient. And you must practice obedience. We want our people to love peace, but also to be brave. And you must be peace-loving ... [Applause][Sieg heil] And so you must be peace-loving and courageous at the same time. [Applause][Sieg Heil]. We want our people to remain strong. (Riefenstahl 00:45:50)

Here, Hitler is impressing his desires for the German nation onto the youth of the nation en masse. He is rewriting the historical narrative so that the youngest generation will grow with the tenets of National Socialism already ingrained in their psyches. Far from being a simple objective documentary, this film blatantly depicts the indoctrination of the most vulnerable demographic to ideological influence: children.

With this depiction of Hitler commandingly delivering his ideological tirade, filmed in a medium, panning shot angled slightly upwards to convey the desired degree of control (Figures 35-36), Hitler’s indoctrination of the German people becomes even more widespread through

film, while also being exaggerated and emphasized through the chosen method of framing. During this passionate and emblazoned rant about the inherent strength and unwavering might of the German people, Hitler's constant yelling allows for no conflicting or outside voices to be

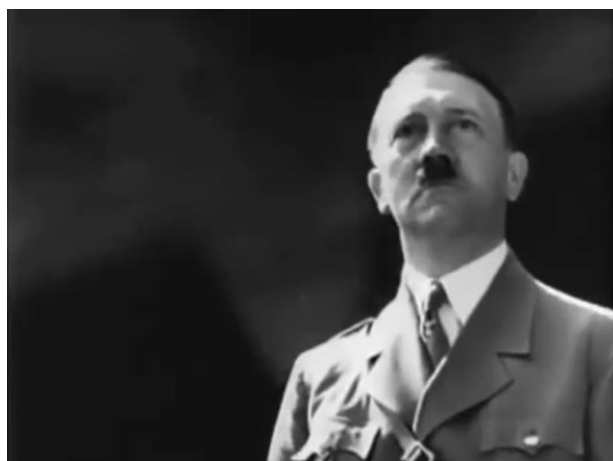


Figure 35 “Hitler During Speech” (0:48:32)



Figure 36 “Hitler Passionately Gesturing” (0:49:41)

represented, and there is at no point any sort of factual or contextual explanation for the events on screen. What remains is a deliberate attempt to influence the development of the fascist state from a very early point in its lifespan toward a future in which the discrimination, violence, and hate of the Nazi party was normalized, accepted, and militarized.

7.3 Audience Impacts

Triumph des Willens premiered on March 28, 1935. The premiere was held at the Ufa-Palast am-Zoo in Berlin, which was garbed in the flags and colors of the Nazi regime. Reportedly one of the most extravagant film premieres Germany had ever seen, all the government officials, including Hitler, and all of the foreign representatives were in the theater for the premiere (Giesen 29). The film was initially received well, with reviewers applauding Riefenstahl's selection and depiction of imagery as well as of Hitler. The film was also well liked amongst those who attended the rally personally, as the filmic representations provided an

efficient connection of events that no one spectator would have been able to experience otherwise. Indeed, Riefenstahl's film proved to be such a perfect representation of the party rally that it became recognized as a permanent record of the rally and had such an iconic ideological impact that it became representational of all Nazi rallies in Nuremberg, and by extension of the entire Nazi dictatorship (Brockmann 156). Riefenstahl, despite her supposed fears of responsibility for this task, achieved a significant level of notoriety because of this film.

The fulfilment of Hitler's request to create a lasting document of the 1934 Nazi party victory rally has left posterity with a fascinating historical record of the Nazi party through the eyes of a supporter. Audiences can experience what it was like to attend this rally, almost like, and perhaps even better than, being there themselves. The carefully planned and designed photography depicting the reality of the Nazi might during its beginning renders *Triumph des Willens* as "probably the most famous and successful political documentary of all time" (Brockmann 161). Furthermore, "In its time it won a number of major awards" rendering it "certainly the most famous German movie made during the Nazi dictatorship, and it is also the most famous movie ever filmed by a woman, anywhere. Some would argue that it is the greatest propaganda film of all time" (161). For these reasons and more, such as being an unimpeded and uninfluenced representation of Nazi ideology in its young state, *Triumph des Willens* remains to be one of the most influential films of the Third Reich period of film history.

7.4 Interpretations

The most obvious interpretation for this film is that of it representing the ideological foundation of the Nazi party as a universal rule, with no room for opposing or contradictory influences. What makes this significant, is that the film implies, through complete omission of any implication of their existences, that no other reality does, or should, exist than the one being

propagated by the Nazis. A film focusing solely on the ideological indoctrination of the audiences watching it is assuredly no ‘objective’ project, however Riefenstahl has since claimed quite differently. Riefenstahl is quoted in her memoirs published in the 1987: “‘I have so often been accused of having made propaganda films, but such charges are misguided. This film was a factual documentary, which is something very different. No one, not even the Party, gave me any instructions on what to do’” (Brockmann 161). It is convenient that after the Third Reich was no more, and during ensuing denazification efforts, Leni Riefenstahl would suddenly claim to have not been making propaganda, but a ‘factual documentary’.

Despite the ideological implication of the film that “renders determination to physically fight the psychological trauma of a nation” (Rizvi 84), and the interpretation that the film “reflects the powerful fanaticism of a cherished will as German men, women and children happily embrace the ideology of war” (Rizvi 84), Riefenstahl complains that “she had been pursued like a witch in medieval times although she always had been totally unpolitical, just interested in art for art’s sake” (Giesen 18). Regardless of the validity of Riefenstahl’s claims, she maintained her denial and claims of ignorance until her end.

7.5 Legacy

Triumph des Willens remains as one of the most referenced filmic representations of Nazi Germany in existence due in large part to the iconic imagery captured by Riefenstahl. What began as a document to record the events of the second Nazi party victory rally has endured into the modern era and still inspires debates as to the nature of documentary and propaganda today. By creating a film with a legacy on the scale of *Triumph des Willens*, Riefenstahl made a considerable contribution to the ideological goals of the Third Reich and cemented herself in history as one of the most prominent filmmakers of this period. Having denied her involvement

or awareness of the propagandistic intentions of the film up to her final days, Riefenstahl finalized her legacy in the field of film making, considering the revelations detailed in this research, as one who failed to recognize the true intentions of their actions, or deliberately misled posterity about them. Either way, Riefenstahl ended things on the wrong side of history, misrepresenting a film that is otherwise “a superb example of documentary cinema art, and a masterpiece of film propaganda” (Taylor 162).

7.6 Final Thoughts on *Triumph des Willens*

Triumph des Willens remains an example of the capabilities of a centralized film production center, such as was under control of the Nazis, in that it shows how an uncontested ideological system can be propagated through film, and since there is no opposition, it can be touted as factual and objective rather than targeted and propagandistic. This is the advantage of a closed political system such as the Third Reich: “propaganda can be seen relatively unproblematically as the expression of an official ideology” (Chapman 682). As is now known all too well worldwide, the Third Reich did not remain peaceful and isolated for long, marking this film as a sort of introduction to the concept of national socialism, and a dark premonition for the horrors that would precipitate in Europe soon after the foundation of the Nazi government.

Triumph des Willens represents a marked shift in German cinematic history away from entertainment and toward ideological representation. This marks a significant difference to the previous period of Weimar film, which was characterized by some of the most progressive films with a wide variety of boundary-pushing subject matters. *Triumph des Willens* makes clear that the medium of film was unable to escape the reaches of the Nazi party and flaunts the level of control the Nazi party had gained over not only the film industry, but over the entire nation of Germany itself. What remains decades later to be analyzed by posterity is a film that was a

clearly intentional attempt to influence the ideological situation of the newly fascistic German nation toward support for the Nazi party. This legacy of attempted mass manipulation through film is a testament to the influential power of the medium recognized by the NSDAP.

6.2 Third Reich Context Continued

Rounding out the first period of Third Reich film (1933-1937), Joseph Goebbels brought attention to yet another conflicting aspect of the film industry to the desired Nazi narrative. In 1936, Goebbels was determined to eliminate the people's final bastion of resistance against the centralization of the film industry and simultaneous annulment of differing ideologies: film critique. Goebbels was dissatisfied with any sort of criticism of the film industry as it would interrupt the adoption of the morals and ideals presented in them to audiences. It is because of this, that "[Goebbels] was banning 'criticism in its current form.' Henceforth it would be acceptable to publish positive reports and descriptions of films, but not to engage in extensive critical analysis, let alone negative judgement, of films" (Brockmann 136-137). Now the industry is operating off a system that excludes whomever it chooses, censors whatever films it decides to, and bans the critical discussion of the entire process. As Hake states, these first several years of the Third Reich, and especially its film industry, were a period of massive "institutional restructuring and consolidation" (66), resulting in the perfect ideological dissemination machine, directly controlled by the government itself.

6.3 Third Reich Film Culture Between 1937-1942

The next period of Third Reich Film, 1937-1942, was centralized around the efforts of "further economic concentration and expansion as part of the war effort" (Hake 66). After having created their strong, centralized film production industry, the Nazis were focused on eliminating

any remaining external forces to their monolithic ideals of a film production culture. Through varying interventions, both economic and political, “The years 1937 to 1942 saw the elimination of all remaining independent [film] companies” (70). Instead of seeing reduced returns in revenue generated by the film industry due to the reduction in variety of film production centers, the centralization efforts of the Nazis resulted in an increase in success for the industry as a whole: “Film attendance increased steadily and significantly; during the record year 1938, for instance, almost 440 million tickets were sold” (70). Clearly, far from damaging the film industry, the changes introduced in the first period of Third Reich Film were generating increased interest and popularity in the films being produced.

As the decade progressed, violence and antisemitism became more and more frequent, and the diplomatic relationships abroad worsened. With the 1938 Sudetenland invasion, and the following attack on Poland in 1939, World War Two had officially begun. It is not surprising that “the increasing militarisation of everyday life resulted in a sharper distinction between entertainment and propaganda, with the expensive prestige productions openly fueling anti-Semitic and anti-Slavic sentiments” (71). While Hake reports this era still had “conventional genre films” which offered “brief escapes from the problems of the home front” (71), many of the largest productions, commissioned by the highest-ranking members of government, were now specifically addressing the ideological goals of the state and attempting to both influence and reflect the war efforts simultaneously.

6.4 Third Reich Film Culture Between 1942-1945

The final period of Third Reich Film, 1942-1945, centralizes around “monopolisation and mobilisation of all filmic resources for the so-called final victory” (66). With, or perhaps despite, the developments of the two periods already discussed, German film during the early 1940s was

reaching levels of success that it had previously never seen and has seldom seen since. This may have been due in some part to the advent of color in film around 1940. In any case, it cannot be said that Goebbels was unsuccessful in using “the advent of the Second World War to expand the domination of German cinema throughout Europe” (Brockmann 147), but his larger goals of bringing such a cinema “ultimately [to] the entire world, and to compete successfully with the American film industry” (147) went unfulfilled.

Nevertheless, Goebbels did succeed in creating the most popular film culture in the history of German film:

In 1933, the year the Nazis came to power, there were 5,701 cinemas in all of Germany and 245 million cinema admissions. Six years later, at the start of the Second World War in 1939, the number of cinemas had grown considerably to 6,923 nationwide, while the number of admissions had more than doubled, to 624 million. In other words, not only were there a great many more cinemas, but the cinemas were also far more crowded with people. By 1943, the admissions figure had almost doubled again to 1,116 million admissions. In other words, German cinema reached its all-time peak of popularity in 1942 and 1943, just as the Second World War reached its turning point. During this period, the average German went to the movies about fourteen times a year, i.e., more than once a month. (Brockmann 144)

One can imagine the pride Goebbels must have felt at these statistics. From an outside perspective, it would seem as though the efforts to create a strong German national cinema had been successful, and Goebbels’ desires to use film as a tool to conquer the world still could have seemed plausible given this statistical support.

However, in contradiction to Goebbels' hopes, film proved to be an insufficient medium with which to win a war. Germany had begun to feel the beginnings of defeat, as the situation on the Homefront noticeably worsened. This was especially evident among the film industry: "By November 1943, 572 of the Reich's 7,300 cinemas had been destroyed; by February 1944, the last date for which there is reliable data, that figure had risen to 1,300. Attendance fell off sharply as air raids drove spectators to avoid dark, crowded public spaces" (Culbert 136). Of course, this damage was not limited to movie theaters. By the year 1945 most cities in Germany were already in ruins, with many of the movie theaters either closed or destroyed. It finally came to fruition that victory would not be achieved, and the dreams that Goebbels had of the potential of German cinema overtaking the entire world were never to be.

Despite this turn for the worse in the film industry, the Nazis would continue attempting to use film as a way of legitimizing themselves up until the end of the World War Two. In fact, it can be argued that efforts to create a meaningful film production to turn the tide of the coming defeat increased in the final years of the Third Reich rather than decreased. A reflection of this can be found in the film *Kolberg* (1945), where Nazi officials attempted not only to influence their citizens to imitate the behavior shown on screen but also inadvertently reflected the ongoing disintegration of the fascist German state. The analysis of this film, contained in the following paragraphs, will explore how the NSDAP produced a film that simultaneously reflected their ideological hopes for the medium and the state, as well as their society's resulting apathy and frustration towards it. This analysis will reveal the fallacy of the Nazi's hyper fixation on film production, as the medium itself proved to be insufficient in prolonging the lifespan of the Third Reich into the present day. With this cinematic reflection of both Nazi German government and

society, the ongoing pattern of influence and reflection of German film at question in this research continues.

8. *Kolberg*

Directed by Veit Harlan, *Kolberg* was released just months before the official ending of World War Two. The movie tells the story of the titular town being defended against an overwhelming, invading force. The subject matter of this film reflected quite closely the contemporary issues being dealt with by Germans of the time, and the film was meant to convince the people of Germany to emulate the behavior of the citizens in *Kolberg* who bravely formed a civilian militia to resist their own invasion and conquest from outside forces (Brockmann 148). This aspect likens this film to *Triumph des Willens* in that it is an example of a propagandistic feature film. However, *Kolberg* represents a fundamentally different type of propaganda film, one that Goebbels greatly preferred: indirect propaganda (Taylor 149). Whereas *Triumph des Willens* with its blatant political content and fixation on the Nazi party as glorious saviours possessing the “best blood” of Germany is an example of propaganda that is very up-front and direct in nature, *Kolberg* is relatively more subtle in its propagandistic efforts, albeit still quite obvious, presenting a complete narrative that, when read between the lines, reveals its ideological intentions, rather than presenting them directly as in *Triumph des Willens*.

8.1 Powers Driving Production

Unsurprisingly, Joseph Goebbels, “who from the beginning of his career mobilized German feature film to serve as propaganda” (Culbert 127), is arguably the main motivating factor behind the production of this film. As minister of propaganda, Goebbels was unusually interested with this film: “Goebbel's personal involvement with *Kolberg* was unprecedented in German film production under the Third Reich. Serving as unofficial executive producer, he

oversaw the film's script development, editing, and music, in addition to setting its final release date” (Culbert 127-128). It is typical for a director to be involved in so many aspects of the film making process; however, it is unusual for there to be a propaganda minister at all, much less one who dabbled in the process so intimately.

Furthermore, “Goebbels personally selected Harlan to direct, obliging him to abandon his partially finished adaptation of Knut Hamsun's Nobel prize-winning novel *Growth of the Soil* (1920)” (Culbert 129). That Harlan was led to abandon a project that was already in the middle of production speaks to the level of influence Goebbels had over the film industry. When he called, one was compelled to listen, or one may find one’s membership in the Reichsfilmkammer swiftly revoked. Harlan had very little choice when it came to this decision. The actual commission for the film was hardly even a request at all. The following was received by Harlan from Goebbels on June 1, 1943:

‘I hereby commission you to make a major film titled *Kolberg*. The purpose of this film will be to demonstrate through the example of the Prussian city that gives the film its title, that a policy supported both at home and on the front can overcome every opponent ... I authorize you to request whatever help and support you deem necessary from all agencies of the army, state and party and to point out that the film I have commissioned here is being made in the service of our intellectual war effort.’ (Giesen 165)

To add to the severity of this request, Goebbels also indicated that “the *Kolberg* project was backed by Hitler himself” (Giesen 165). Harlan would have been extremely bold to have denied such a request.

A little over two weeks is all it took for Goebbels to report that the materials and human resources necessary to make the film had been secured. The approval for the film, due to its subject matter and push from Goebbels, went very quickly and Harlan received unprecedented logistical support to ensure he was able to create a spectacle. Such resources included:

... releasing thousands of soldiers from their normal duties to serve as extras and carpenters on the film's elaborate sets, borrowing the actual crown and scepter of the Holy Roman Emperors to authenticate two short scenes featuring Frederick Wilhelm II, and fabricating several thousand meters of color film stock from nitrocellulose, a rationed ingredient crucial to weapons production. (Culbert 130)

However, just because the resources were gathered and approval received quickly does not mean the film was completed quickly as well. Goebbels was quite particular and interruptive during the production process of this film, and his diary entries show him “on numerous occasions obliging Harlan to rework the script, re-edit certain sequences, and revise the musical score” (Culbert 128). Goebbels extended his power so much that it slowed down the production process, preventing the film from releasing earlier than directly before Germany’s ultimate defeat.

Goebbels “conceived [*Kolberg*] as a psychological miracle weapon capable of preserving national unity in increasingly hopeless circumstances and turning the tide of the war” (Culbert 125). He hoped to achieve this through the parallels drawn between the contemporary situation in Germany with the struggle to defend Kolberg with a civilian militia during the Napoleonic wars. On top of this, Goebbels had made an exceptionally strong case to Hitler about the promise of *Kolberg* and Hitler’s reaction certainly added increased pressure to the entire production: “When Goebbels told Hitler about the new *Kolberg* film and described a few scenes from it, the Führer was moved almost to tears: ‘He asks me to bring the film out as quickly as possible,

calling it a battle won in the political conduct of war, on the basis of what I have told him” (Giesen 174). Large expectations were placed on Goebbels’ shoulders, making the cost of failure high. This pressure may have gotten to Goebbels in the end, causing consistent meddling on his part to ensure the film met his, and by extension Hitler’s, expectations. This proved to be detrimental to the film, since “close study of the film's production, distribution, and reception suggests that the film largely failed to achieve its propagandistic goals for a variety of factors, especially Goebbels' obsessive meddling with the script and editing process” (Culbert 125). To prevent the film from underperforming, Goebbels delayed its release in the vain attempt to increase the films chances for success.

8.2 Film Details

What resulted from Goebbels meddling with the production is a film that was clearly propagandistic, despite Goebbels self-declared desire for propaganda that ““remains in the background as a tendency, as a character, as an attitude, and only becomes apparent through plot, through development, through actions, and through contrasts among people”” (Brockmann 142). As mentioned previously, *Kolberg* tells the story of the town that gives the film its name, and the defense of this town by the inhabitants. They were defending against invading French forces during the Napoleonic wars, and successfully defended the town from conquest. Released at a time when Germany was under active threat of conquest on multiple fronts, and citizens of towns exactly like Kolberg were dealing with very real threats of violence just beyond their doorsteps, it would have been difficult to not recognize the reflection of the times in this film.

Harkening back to a more ‘traditional’ time, as was often a trend among Nazi art pieces, *Kolberg* acts as a period piece depicting a country town with simple comings and goings experiencing an incoming, invading force that threatens to subjugate them to their rule.

Specifically, this film takes place in 1806-1807, “when France overran the fragmented German states and forced upon them the humiliating Peace of Tilsit” (Taylor 197). This tale was significant in German history, as the town of Kolberg managed to hold out in defence by forming a civilian militia, while multiple other cities fell to the French, making the story of Kolberg’s defence somewhat of a legend throughout the German populace. This was the key with which Goebbels was hoping to inspire Germans of the twentieth century to do the same, never mind the additional help received from the British military (Taylor 197), a part of the story Goebbels specifically suppressed.

Attempting to create a relatively accurate period film in a state-controlled film production environment of a country that was actively at war was no small task. As mentioned above, it required extensive resources and manpower to proceed due to the difficulties caused by the ongoing war, such as shortages both of material goods and personnel available. *Kolberg* became so important and drew resources from so many different areas of this warring nation, that it became the most expensive film to be produced in the Third Reich. The actual total cost of the film was around 8,800,000 Reichsmarks (Giesen 171). Not only did this price make *Kolberg* the most expensive German film of all time, it was “a full third more than any other feature film produced by the Nazis and approximately six times the average” (Culbert 127). It was clear that Goebbels pooled as many resources as he possibly could into this film, which speaks volumes as to the ideological potential he believed it had.

The message being delivered through this military spectacle was to resist invasion by the Allied powers, even if this brought German towns and infrastructure to ruin. Clearly the war effort was not going well if this is the message that Goebbels felt necessary to spread to audiences. However, both Goebbels and Harlan stretched to believe that this film could serve as

a reminder for “the German people of what they always had been” (Giesen 165), and therefore call them to action to emulate the collaborative, innovative work ethic of the citizens of Kolberg as depicted in the film. Many strategies were deployed by the creators of this film to further produce this effect.

One such strategy that differentiated this film from many others, and indeed all films previously discussed in this research, was the use of the new technology of color film. The development of color film expanded after 1940, and it was used to help the German film industry to compete with and eventually defeat the cinema of the United States. Hence, several of the Third Reich’s major productions made after 1940, including *Kolberg*, were produced in color (Brockmann 147), with *Kolberg* being the ninth color film to have been released in Germany overall (Culbert 127). This allowed for a new degree of realism in the medium of film. Harlan, and Goebbels, meant to use this new advent of color film to their advantage. In an establishing shot showing the movie’s setting, the camera fades up on an idyllic view of the town with the church bell ringing, followed quickly by a packed town square filled with throngs of people in multicolored period clothing (Figures 37-40):



Figure 37 “Procession of Soldiers” (0:01:54)

Figure 38 “Townfolk Mixing In” (0:02:02)



Figure 39 “Observant Civilians” (0:02:30)

Figure 40 “Vibrant Town Square” (0:03:50)

This early scene takes advantage of the colors and celebrations to create a jovial scene, despite the fact that the people being depicted were also currently at war. Additionally, the unified marching scenes, particularly Figures 37 and 38, are strikingly similar to scenes from the beginning of *Triumph des Willens* (Figures 27-28). By staging a military parade at the beginning of his film, exactly as Riefenstahl did, Harlan was using film to glorify the earlier days of militaristic might and to try raising the spirits and morale of audiences in these times of war.

What was also meant to particularly sway the audience in favor of the civilian-led defense of Germany was the fact that this film was based on historical events. Goebbels and Harlan were attempting to manipulate the will of the German people through the retelling of a parallel moment in history, thus proving to them that such a defense of their towns is theoretically possible. This was particularly meaningful during this period, as the Nazis had an affinity for the historical periods of Germany. The Nazis did not only want to present past events as they occurred, but they also wanted to present them in a way that made them appear to favor national socialism and the Nazi party. An example of this can be found near the beginning of the film. When interrupted in the middle of a meeting to determine the best course of action against the invasion by a French commissioner asking for their answer to the terms delivered by his general, Nettelbeck, the leader of the civilian militia, responds in a speech reminiscent of the

ideological tirades shouted by Hitler, as seen in *Triumph des Willens*. Matching the medium, slight upward angled shots Hitler had used for his speeches in *Triumph des Willens*, Nettelbeck's yelling about the strength of his people's will draws striking similarities to the German dictator (Figures 41-42). In his passionate answer to the French commissioner (Figure 41), Nettelbeck is attempting to ignite the same nationalistic passion into the audience members in the theater as Hitler was during his 1934 Nuremburg rally (Figure 42). His rambling argument, delivered at a consistent



Figure 41 “Nettelbeck in Emblazoned Speech” (0:33:14)



Figure 42 “Hitler in Emblazoned Speech” (*Triumph des Willens* 0:49:41)

yell throughout, another feature of this discussion likening Nettelbeck to Hitler, continued as follows:

‘Tell the Governor of the Emperor of France that the German kings and the aristocracy have broken the oath that bound them to the German emperor. The German Emperor broke his oath with the Empire in this hour of distress. But the free citizens of Kolberg would rather be buried under the rubble, rather than break the oath with the King of Prussia’ (00:32:34)

It is clear that this speech is meant to inspire Germans to hold out even in the event of a total governmental collapse, but even clearer is the desire to emulate Hitler's influential demeanor in the imparted wisdom passionately delivered through this speech. The film *Kolberg* is rife with examples of such ideological dissemination and virtue signaling, which serve to reflect the events of the early 1800s as much as possible onto the situation being dealt with in the Third Reich, and therefore to inspire citizens of the Third Reich to emulate what they were seeing on screen.

8.3 Audience Impacts

According to his diary, Goebbels appeared to believe that the coincidence of the film's release with the simultaneous and fundamentally similar ongoing defeat in World War Two would be positive regarding the effects derived from the film's ideological content: "I expect an extraordinary amount from this Harlan film. It fits exactly the military and political landscape that we shall probably have to record by the time this film is shown" (Taylor 196). However, according to scholarship on similar films during wartime during World War One, the opposite effect is to be expected. Soldier and cinematograph Hermann Häfker wrote in a pamphlet in 1914 about the task of film in the time of a national crisis such as war. Häfker writes about films attempting to emulate such crises, heavily criticizing them: "At a time when real bullets are ripping open the bodies of men we know, when heroic and death-defying deeds have become a daily occurrence, it is extremely offensive to see actors caked in makeup 'playing' their roles with wooden swords" (Häfker 262-263). These comments from Häfker, if indeed proven to be representative of the larger public, would spell disaster for the reception of *Kolberg*.

Due in part to the massive scale of production, and also to Goebbels' constant meddling and delays, the film was unable to be released until January of 1945, by which point the majority

of German cinemas had already been destroyed (Giesen 174). The timing was simply too late, and the war simply too far gone when the film was completed for it to have anywhere to be shown. Furthermore, there were a very limited number of prints, “all in all ... about 40” (174). Goebbels’ previous excitement about the film releasing at a time that reflected the film’s contents proved to be counterintuitive, as it was very much to the detriment of this film’s reception. There was no possibility for the film to achieve its ideological potential if the stage on which it had been supposed to perform no longer existed.

Nevertheless, Goebbels was determined to secure a fitting premiere for *Kolberg*. To provide meaning for the date of release, January 30, 1945, was chosen, as it was the twelfth anniversary of Hitler’s ascension to power. This would ultimately end up being only a few months before the ending of the war. However, far from being a momentous occasion, this date was filled with anxiety and tragedy. Beyond the already grim situation in which Germany found itself being attacked from both Western and Eastern fronts, which Hitler himself acknowledged (Culbert 125), this day saw a mass exodus of German civilians from the East fleeing their homes due to the Soviet threat, and “marked the worst naval disaster in history, with almost 10,000 Germans, mostly women and children, losing their lives when a Soviet submarine torpedoed the *Wilhelm Gustloff* in the Baltic” (Culbert 126). Needless to say, it was not a time in which Germans were feeling particularly hopeful about their prospects of winning this war. Regardless the film went forward with its premiere.

The premiere was split between two cities, one in Berlin, and one in La Rochelle, a besieged Nazi outpost city in France that was surrounded by allied troops at the time of the premiere (Brockmann 148). The film had to be flown over La Rochelle and dropped in by parachute (Taylor 206). This is a testament to the degree of control the Nazis still had over their

territory, and to just how close the premiere of the film was to the ultimate defeat and surrender of the Germans to the Allied forces. The Berlin premiere was hardly any more glamorous. Most of Berlin's film theaters had burned to the ground by the point of release, including the flagship cinema, UFA Palast am Zoo (Giesen 176). Alternate venues had to be found. There were two larger cinemas still in service "one on Alexanderplatz and another on the Tauentzienstrasse" (Taylor 206). The film played in these two venues, as well as in La Rochelle, and attempted to accomplish the goals with which Goebbels set about the creation of the film in the first place.

Because the film was released in this atmosphere of clearly losing the war with the film struggling even to find a standing theater to play in, it proved that a filmic representation of a war would not be appreciated at this moment in time. "Individual testimony recorded both at the time and retrospectively indicates that average cinemagoers greeted the film with cynicism" (Culbert 137). Some viewers in particularly at-risk communities responded to the film bitterly with "'They want to make us happy that we will be burned to a crisp here'" (Culbert 136). Clearly, the desire to steel the will of the German people was having the opposite effect; they felt like they were being patronized before their own demise. *Kolberg* played for several weeks in Berlin, but as the reality experienced by filmgoers quickly caught up to the reality being depicted on screen, audience numbers steadily dwindled (206). Soon after the release of *Kolberg*, the actual city of Kolberg fell on March 18, 1945, to Soviet forces. Just a few weeks later, both Hitler and Goebbels were dead by suicide. It was proven once and for all with the situation of *Kolberg* that Goebbels' ideals of film being the definitive tool for spreading Nazi ideology, and using the medium to aid the Nazis in conquering the world were never to be. Ultimately, the film was a complete and utter failure.

8.4 Legacy

As described, the film was only seen by a small percentage of the target population, and the consequent fall of the Third Reich made a market to show this film nonexistent. There remained very few individuals who had seen the film during its theatrical run who would even be able to attest to any sort of legacy for this film. Because of this, if it were not for “that part of posterity fascinated by Nazi feature films” there would hardly be anyone left today who even heard mention of this film, as the majority of Germans at the time of release “had more pressing issues on their minds” (Culbert 138). Therefore, this film has very little presence or recognition beyond such studies of Nazi films leaving it as a remnant of the high ambitions of the Nazis, rather than of their overall effectiveness as a government. With this, the legacy of this film is confirmed; Goebbels ideology and plans to use film as a tool to conquer the world are shown to simply be a pipe dream.

8.5 Final Thoughts on *Kolberg*

Contrary to the infamy of *Triumph des Willens*, *Kolberg* has left a noticeably smaller mark on the world stage. By the time the film was cleared for release, the country was already beyond repair, and even those who had been able to see the film were unappreciative of its content, as it attempted to normalize the idea of hardship and suffering as something noble and to be strived for, instead of accomplishing anything meaningful in terms of the war effort. In their efforts to produce a film that reflected a supposed previous triumph of the German people, the powers driving the production of this film reflected in actuality the unwinnable situation they found themselves in. The lack of audience, the shortage of prints, and the hostile reaction all are indicative of the larger reflection of Nazi German society at play: The reflection of their failure and defeat. Despite all of its might, all of its showiness, and all of the fanciful speeches meant to

inspire loyalty in the devoted and fear in the opposed, ideology no matter how it is presented can only accomplish so much. Presenting *Kolberg* as a heroic war story while currently suffering a tragic military defeat is reflective of how the Nazis met their doom: refusing to accept a reality that was staring them in the face and defying it until their bitter destruction.

9. Third Reich Film Conclusion

Finally, after the most destructive global conflict of all time, the German army surrendered to the Soviet Red Army in Berlin on May 8, 1945 (Brockmann 131). The previous day, May 7, saw the German army's surrender to the American army in Reims, France, bringing an official end to this conflict on all sides (131). Both Hitler and Goebbels met with definitive ends: suicide by gunshot. Not even their wives or children were willing to accept life in a non-Nazi world and were all poisoned (Giesen 177). With these deaths, and the unconditional surrender of the Third Reich to the Allies, the period of the Third Reich, and its film, came to its bitter end. Hake writes that the combination of ideological control, nationalistic influences, and cinematic techniques make the period of Third Reich Film "a perfect historical case study for general reflections on cinema, nation, and ideology" (91). The period of Third Reich film was so popular in its time, in fact, that it is recorded as the height of popularity in German film, and that this height has never been reached before or since (Brockmann 144). The efforts of the Third Reich to create a popular national cinema were genuinely successful, however not as successful as the Nazis themselves hoped for it to be, in that it was unable to singlehandedly save the failing war effort.

10. GDR Film Introduction

The third film period of note to this chronological examination of the German film industry is the period of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The GDR was founded in a time where Germany was still reeling from the recent traumas of the war, Nazism, and the Holocaust. The official formation of the GDR did not occur until 1949, but its beginnings lie in the end of World War Two. Following the fall of the Third Reich, and the subsequent division of Germany into four separate sectors each controlled by one of the Allied Powers, the Soviet Union chose not to collaborate further with its previously allied, western nations and created a new nation out of the sector they controlled. This sector included the capital city, Berlin, which due to its influence was also divided into four sectors, putting the Soviet Union in a strategically advantageous position of disrupting the political dealings of western nations throughout the Cold War. The three remaining sectors of Berlin, controlled by the Americans, the French, and the British, functioned thus as a political island of the West in the Soviet-controlled sea of East Germany. This uniquely tense political situation was the subject of countless controversies, scandals, international incidents, and radical developments. It can be argued that East Germany, in particular the complicated situation in Berlin, served as one of the most meaningful ideological frontlines of the Cold War.

It is within this political situation that the film culture of the GDR was born. The newly formed socialist state of the GDR was quick to adopt film as a primary means of transitioning their population into the socialist citizens envisioned upon the state's conception, much like the film culture of the Third Reich. Because of this, a multitude of films were created with a specific GDR character that, when analyzed closely, reveal specific attempts and accidental ramifications that both influenced and reflected the development of East German society throughout this

period. This film industry constitutes the third and final period of the greater pattern of influence and reflection of Germany's historical development being analyzed in this thesis. The films examined in this chapter both show instances of influence and reflection of East German society, and provide foundation for the argument that the social and national development of Germany throughout the twentieth century has been greatly impacted through the medium of film.

10.1 Beginnings of the GDR Film Industry

During its inception, the GDR now had the responsibility of transitioning a society, that had up to this point considered itself a part of the larger nation of Germany, from a fascist nation into a socialist one. Attempting to transition a society from a fascist to socialist is understandably no simple task, and it required a significant effort to even begin addressing. However, the Soviet Union, overseeing the transformation of the GDR, had plenty of experience with ideological dissemination. In particular, the medium of film was a method of choice for leaders of the Soviet Union to educate the masses. Following the footsteps of the Soviet Union's founders, "Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet Union's party leader in the second half of the 1950s and the early 1960s, believed that film was a 'powerful ideological weapon and an easy-to-understand method of education'" (Brockmann 216). Film, with its stated educational importance to the Soviet Union, was to be one of the primary methods of driving the transition of East German society. This led to a film culture in the GDR that was primarily focused on ideological impact and the shaping of socialist society, rather than profit.

To ensure the uniformity of the ideological content being distributed to the public in theaters throughout the nation, a centralized film studio was developed in the Soviet controlled sector of Germany immediately following World War Two and years before the official formation of the GDR. The studio of the GDR, through which all films were produced, reviewed,

and conceptualized, was named DEFA, short for Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft, and was formed in 1946. The formation of this studio can be interpreted as revealing intentions of ideological control originating before an official formation of a new nation. This speaks to the ‘primary mission’ of DEFA studios: “DEFA saw its primary mission in developing film as a means of re-educating the German population, especially the youth, while also ameliorating an acute sense of crisis” (Pinkert 111), with such crises clearly referring to the recent tragedies of the war and the Holocaust. DEFA was prepared from the beginning to address challenging topics and provide Germans with a framework for how to move forward after the events of the mid twentieth century.

DEFA films displayed noticeably different styles than their international counterparts, with some characterizing it as “more cerebral” than previous film periods and claiming that it made “more intellectual demands on its viewers” (Brockmann 216). The cinema of the Third Reich, along with Western cinema contemporary to East Germany, displays an important difference to GDR cinema in that “qualitative film critique had actually been banned by the Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels in 1936,” but “in the GDR film criticism was encouraged and indeed practiced, not only by professional critics but also by party leaders themselves” (217). In fact, “Filmmakers and party leaders in the GDR often used the appearance of major films as an opportunity for entering into wide-ranging discussions about political and social developments more generally” (216). Through such techniques, DEFA was one of the GDR’s most effective tools for opening discussion and transitioning society from one system of government to the next.

Like the efforts of the censorship laws passed by the Nazi government in 1934, the GDR also had an organization dedicated to the prevention of conflicting ideological films from making

their way to East German theaters. This organization was called the Hauptverwaltung Film (HV-Film, or Central Film Administration), which was formed in 1954. It was the task of this administration to operate above DEFA, specifically to overview the ideological content being produced and reject and penalize films that did not fit into the desired mold. The government of East Germany was dedicated to the creation of a cohesive, influential film culture, the creation of DEFA and the HV-Film being main indicators of this.

While filmmakers of the GDR were certainly limited in the scope of the ideological content they were permitted to produce, they had less limitations in the resources department compared to West German cinema. Many of the insecurities that inflict themselves upon producers of films in capitalistic societies simply did not apply to a socialist one. “Filmmakers enjoyed optimal working conditions that included the luxury of time and money, vast studio resources and professional support, and, perhaps most problematically, the great relevance accorded to their work by the party leadership” (Hake 129). Furthermore, the filmmakers for DEFA had guaranteed salaries for their work, regardless of how successful their films were, or if they were released at all. However, this was not all glitz and glamour. The salaries received by everyone involved in film production “were modest in comparison with western film salaries, and even the GDR's filmmakers and movie stars lived a life that was much closer to the life of an ordinary citizen than the lives of Hollywood filmmakers and movie stars” (Brockmann 219). One can debate whether the potential for riches versus an assured steady income is preferable with which to produce films, but one thing is clear: The East German government was, from the beginning, fully prepared to endorse film as one of the leading ideological tools in forging its path as a new nation. The early creation of DEFA, the level of care put into the ideological content of the produced films, and the unwavering financial support of everyone involved set the

stage for a film era that proved to be, overwhelmingly in attempt, debatably so in effect, foundational to the development of a Soviet-inspired socialist German state.

10.2 Timeline of the GDR Film Industry

Having introduced the contextual background of East Germany, and the film production culture within, the focus of this chapter will now shift to an overview of political and ideological developments that were significant both to the formation of the East German national identity, as well as the occurrence of the feature films in question for the period of East German cinema. One detail to note is that the film history of the GDR rarely stayed consistent for long regarding how much freedom was permitted to filmmakers to explore and create films as they wished, but rather it rapidly fluctuated throughout the timeline of the GDR. Because of this, it was quite difficult for film makers to judge the environment for their various film releases since it could change so quickly.

Beginning with a period of restrictiveness after the intensification of the Cold War in the 1940s, there was a lack of boundary-pushing films until the next period of liberalization following Stalin's death in 1953. As welcome as this period of relative freedom was for many filmmakers who had been feeling restricted by the newly formed government, it did not last longer than a few years. The Hungarian revolution resulted in another ideological crackdown, effectively setting East German artistic culture back where it began. GDR officials doubled down on this crackdown by the Ministry of Culture in a film conference in 1958 (Brockmann 215). During this conference, "officials criticized the mid-1950s liberalization of film and urged a far stricter adherence to the principles of socialist realism" (224).

Socialist realism is the concept that governed art in the GDR throughout its lifespan and which “prescribed that art works should address the world in a realistic, readily comprehensible way” (Brockmann 220). This definition of ‘realistic’ however, was solely determined by the socialist government of East Germany. Thus, “extreme fantasy or modernism were frowned on” and films required that “all realism should be optimistic as opposed to pessimistic, i.e., present a world that was moving forward in a positive way toward a just and prosperous society” (220). It was not so much intended to depict actual reality as it was to depict the ideal reality the GDR was striving for. DEFA’s intended mission of reeducating the East German society into a functioning socialist one did not want to deal with the discussions that would be raised by allowing realistic and honest depictions of the various struggles faced by an emergent nation. “They warned that naturalism and critical realism are completely unsuited to depicting socialist reality” (224) therefore, “Films with overly cynical or negative protagonists were discouraged” (220). By denying the representation of critically realistic aspects of socialist society, naming the concept ‘socialist realism’ can be seen as either ironic, or a deception.

In any case, the result of the GDR’s Ministry of Culture’s film conference of 1958 was yet another period of ideological restrictions in filmmaking, now with a renewed focus on the concept of socialist realism. This period lasted for another three years and ended with a historically divisive event: the construction of the Berlin Wall. With DEFA now operating safely behind the Wall it had a more contained population, on which its intended goals of ideological dissemination could be more effective than ever. Paradoxically to the expectation of political upheaval following the definitive separation of East Germans from the West, the construction of the Berlin Wall brought about yet another period of liberalization. This was likely since “The

Wall enabled the German Democratic Republic to stabilize its political, economic, and cultural identity in relation to the Federal Republic and the threat of Western capitalism” (Hake 127).

However, as has been the pattern so far with East German cinema, this period of liberalization in filmmaking only lasted so many years. The year 1965 saw another meeting of the central committee of the governing party of the GDR to discuss the state of film. This meeting came to be known as the Eleventh Plenary and resulted in yet another crackdown on ideological freedom in East German filmmaking. In its harsh critique of the previous period of creative liberalization, the Eleventh Plenary resulted in the ban of an “entire year’s production of 12 films” the charges against which being: “‘scepticism’, ‘nihilism’, ‘relativism’, and ‘subjectivism’” (Hake 132). Furthermore, it was supposed that “The directors’ failure or unwillingness to develop a dialectical conception of reality ... had produced characters and stories that were irrelevant, if not detrimental, to the self-understanding of GDR society” (132-133). Of course, this ‘reality’ is the same ‘reality’ that was demanded to depict socialist realism. This reality actively rejected critical realism.

Regardless, since these films in question no longer met the standards of the GDR’s governing party, they were all banned, and the then current party leader, Walter Ulbricht, “proclaimed that since films were a key method of education for youth, the party must not allow ‘a few artists and writers’ to create whatever kind of art they wanted, thus negatively determining ‘the entire development of society’” (Brockmann 216). The educational goal of cinema in the GDR had once again been reinforced by party officials, and for many filmmakers, “the Eleventh Plenary destroyed any remaining illusions about the beneficial effects of the Wall and prompted many to retreat to uncontroversial topics and styles” (Hake 133). The pattern of cracking down

on the liberalized films of the previous period of film development continued unabated, and the possibility for realities to be depicted critically diminished severely.

The period of restrictiveness spawned by the devastating cultural impact of the Eleventh Plenum did not begin to abate until the early 1970s with the instatement of the new leader of the GDR in 1971, Erich Honecker. Upon his ascension to power, Honecker broke with the protocol of previous party leaders by declaring his promise for film production moving forward “that there were no longer ‘any taboos’ in content or style, as long as the point of departure was the fundamental agreement about socialist values” (Silberman/Wrage 6). This is quite the change in tone following the Eleventh Plenum and was due to Honecker’s understanding that “the GDR was already a fully developed socialist society” (Hake 140). With this change in leadership, directors began making films with more emphasis on sexual freedom and personal happiness as opposed to social issues.

Filmmakers during this time, as well as the general population, began looking forward to a brighter, less restrictive future, and from this new narrative of relative freedom of expression, it appeared they would be granted just that. Not only were things looking up from an internal perspective, “with the ascendancy of Erich Honecker as the new party leader came growing international recognition of the GDR through diplomatic relations with other countries and membership in the United Nations” (Hake 140). The time was right for East Germany to produce a hit film, as the market was more open than ever before, and international attention and opinion was at an unusual high. It is this environment that gave birth to the first film to be discussed in this chapter: *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* (1973). The analysis of this film will reveal how this film fits into the GDR’s prescribed film format of socialist education, making it a prime example of the influential nature of East German film.

11. *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*

Given the declaration from Honecker about the lack of taboos moving forward on artistic expression in the GDR, and the resulting loosening of cultural policy in the mass culture and film industries, it made sense for filmmakers to begin transitioning towards more personal and individual themes and topics. Indeed, “In the cultural and social developments of the 1970s, artists and younger East Germans professed a desire for greater possibilities of individual expression” (Frackman 456). Particularly before the rise of Honecker, “these affirmations were problematic to the state, because they could be seen most importantly as a rejection of vital socialist principles in favour of Western-style culture and capitalist tendencies” (456-457); however, now that Honecker had liberalized the film culture of the GDR once again, such films were able to be screened.

11.1 Film Details

Representing the pinnacle of such films is Heiner Carow’s 1973 film *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* (The Legend of Paul and Paula). This film is “perhaps the most successful film made in the GDR, [and] has acquired the status of a cult film” (Dölling 77). The main plotline of the film is primarily focused on the love between a woman and a man, Paul and Paula, and largely ignores other social issues. The main struggle of the film is the quest for happiness on behalf of the two prospective lovers and contains parallels between the battle to achieve personal happiness and the battle to achieve a better society. Pushing the boundaries of socialist realism, the film generated controversy among party officials who disagreed about whether the main characters were dedicated enough to the overall cause of socialism. However, director Carow, whose previous advocations “about the usefulness of socialist realism and which styles best facilitated a connection to the audience” (Frackman, *Coming Out* 4) proved his overall loyalty to

the socialist project beyond a doubt, succeeded in creating one of the most successful films of the entire GDR film period with *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*.

The film could be described as a “comedy and drama about ... personal problems, especially those related to love, marriage, family, and the workplace” (Hake 141). The depiction of two socialist citizens working to improve their own lives instead of working toward the project of socialism was revolutionary for its time in terms of inspiring public reaction and emotion. The discussions initiated about these personal problems depicted in the film “opened up a space for the exploration of individual desires, subjective perceptions, and personal beliefs - perspectives previously ignored in the insistence on typical situations and positive characters and the search for social consensus and collective solutions” (141). Fittingly, this new focus on the individual is one of the foundational tenets of Honecker’s rise to power:

Honecker promptly embarked on a political-economic course characterized by increasing attention to satisfying basic consumer demands. Whereas Ulbricht had emphasized the development of heavy industry (such as coal and steel), Honecker wanted to ingratiate himself to individual citizens by giving them the cars, homes, and groceries they wanted. (Brockmann 260)

This marks another instance of taboo abolishment, a distancing from the foundational, collective ideals of socialism committed by Honecker upon his ascension. Honecker was a proponent of what was called “*real existierender Sozialismus* (real existing socialism), i.e., the admittedly imperfect socialism that actually existed in the GDR” (Brockmann 260). It was clear from the beginning of his time in power, as well as from the existence of *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*, that a new era of liberalization of cultural policy had been ushered in, one where freedom

of expression was at an all time high point, and the focus on the individual, rather than the collective, came to be a popular, yet controversial new point of view.

This is not to say, however, that Honecker's policies were the sole inspiration and basis for the creation of this film. There were certainly moments in GDR history leading up to Honecker's reign that paved the way for such a film to finally premiere. To begin with, the GDR, as part of the end goals of its socialist ambitions, treated everyone equally under philosophical and economic considerations, causing them to codify protections for the equal rights of men and women in the same year as the founding of the GDR itself. Furthermore, "a year later single mothers and their children were granted the same status and rights as married couples and their offspring" (Pinkert 116). This certainly would have been in effect during the timeline of the film, as Paula raises her children on her own for quite some time without the assistance of a partner. The GDR was essentially a welcoming place for women in the situation of Paula, making the decision to explore such a situation in a feature-length film quite logical. Although the situation of women in the GDR was certainly more emancipated than it had been in the past, it did not necessarily mean that single mothers were living comfortable, affluent lives. Thus, in films such as *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*, "The truthful representation of the living conditions of an unskilled worker and single mother conveys the strain and burdens working mothers have to cope with despite all the talk of emancipation" (Dölling 87). Carow represents with his film a rift between the socialist ideal of the state, and the lived reality of its citizens. It is with such representations that he hopes to begin dialogues which will begin to address the strain and burdens felt not just by single, working mothers, but by anyone feeling restrained by the situation in the GDR.

The focus on the individual in *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* can be recognized due to the simple fact that much of the action of the film takes place in the private sphere as opposed to the public sphere. In some cases, the action even is proceeding within the main characters' own imaginations. The two protagonists do not seek first to improve their society, instead they seek to find personal fulfilment and contentment in romance. Early in the film, Paul and Paula both find themselves wandering around a colorful carnival, with shots crosscutting between various rides and attractions as well as the parties of both Paul and Paula.



Figure 43 “Paula’s Potential Love” (0:05:31)



Figure 44 “Paula and her Friends” (0:05:36)



Figure 45 “Paul’s Intense Stare” (0:07:28)



Figure 46 “Paul’s Potential Love” (0:07:29)

Both of them are shown pursuing personal desires here, even more so since they are both simultaneously searching for love: Paula, with a shaggy-haired ride operator (Figure 43), and Paul with the seductive Ines of the arcade stall (Figure 46). The mirrored positions of Paul and

Paula viewing their potential lovers indicate how Paula (Figure 44) is enraptured with this ride operator, and is excitedly sharing this with her friends, while the medium close-up shot of Paul (Figure 45) conveys his stunned reverence for Ines. The now outdated critique of the pursuit of individual happiness through romance above the betterment of socialist society is punctuated here with Ines' father's protests to her leaving her position to go on a date with Paul: "Business before pleasure, Ines! ... While we work our asses off? Go to hell, woman!" (Carow 00:08:54). Ines' complete ignorance of her father's comment is indicative of the departure of the GDR film culture from previously held socialist ideals and movement toward personal ones.

As the film progresses, the audience is guided through the triumphs and pitfalls of these personal relationships. Paula comes home one evening after a frightening stay in the hospital, where she almost died during childbirth, to find the shaggy-haired ride operator scantily clad with a woman in their apartment.



Figure 47 "Paula's Heartbreak" (0:17:21)



Figure 48 "Paul's Fury" (0:21:06)

Paula, betrayed and heartbroken, forces the ride operator out of her home (Figure 47).

Simultaneously, Paul, after returning home from a particularly long stint in the army, finds Ines in bed with another man. Paul becomes violent in an eerily calm manner, and the relationship between him and the mother of his child is ruined (Figure 48). The shots being parallel in

character positioning, the unfaithful partner in the extreme foreground with the enraged lover featured prominently, further link the emotional effect being experienced by the titular characters. It seems now, roughly twenty-five minutes into the runtime of the film, that the focus on individual happiness was in vain.

Left with only her socialist life and duties, Paula laments about the unfortunate situation she, and by extension many other women living in the GDR, then experienced in which personal fulfillment was an uphill battle:



Figure 49 “Paula’s Resolve” (0:31:45)

“Going to bed at nine... There must be something else. Something other than sleeping or working and sleeping and working again. I am only 23” (Figure 49). Framed in this dramatic close up, Paula strengthens her resolve to find something new, something fulfilling beyond the duties of socialist life. She decides that she will choose a man to settle down with to ease her

workload. First, however, Paula takes the opportunity to indulge in her youth and states “But before, I’m gonna party. I’m gonna bop til I drop!” (00:33:45). Paula proves her dedication to forge her path in her own private sphere and embraces her own freedom and agency to break from the socialist mold and focus on having fun for once. This can be seen as a message to all East Germans directly resultant from the relaxing of taboos with the rise of Erich Honecker.

What follows Paula’s decision is a montage of partiers at a nightclub where Paul is also in attendance. The two heartbroken socialists lock eyes across the dance floor and end the night hand in hand as they run off to find some privacy in which to get better acquainted. Paul and Paula spend a while getting to know each other, seemingly an entire evening, and upon leaving, Paula is visibly brighter than she had been up until this moment in the film:



Figure 50 “Paula’s Rejuvenation” (0:43:28)

She is laughing and playing with her children in the street, and even accompanying other children as well as she is overwhelmed with glee by this new romance she has just begun with Paul (Figure 50).

This dramatic shift in Paula’s mood accompanied with the innocent

imagery of laughing children carried gleefully through the streets by an even more ecstatic adult represents a marked shift in tone for the pursuit of personal happiness.

This effect is also not only limited to the private sphere. Paul and Paula’s romance leads to increased productivity in the workplace as well. Earlier in the film Paula had been frustratedly closing the window between herself and customers to give herself time to prepare at her job of

accepting or rejecting glass bottles (Figures 51-52). Now, so filled with awe from her time with Paul, she cannot wait to greet her customers with her flowery “Guten Morgen!” and does not even realize she is still in her undergarments upon presenting herself to them (Figure 53).



Figure 51 “Not Ready for Customers” (0:24:37)



Figure 52 “Window Closed” (0:24:38)



Figure 53 “Helping in Underwear” (0:44:05)

Paula is seen relishing this romantic euphoria throughout her workday, and it actively makes her a better worker. In a scene following Paula’s wardrobe mishap she can be seen directing chaotic lanes of rushed grocery store customers into orderly lines and simultaneously calming and

entertaining the customers with her melodic singing (Figure 56). Not only do the customers in turn join in on her singing, thereby turning a previously chaotic, disorderly situation (Figure 54) into a unified, cooperative one (Figure 55), but Paula's coworkers are shown to be grateful to her in this act as well (Figures 57-59).



Figure 54 “Chaotic Market” (0:45:02)

Figure 55 “Collective Enjoyment” (0:46:22)



Figure 56 “Paula Singing” (0:45:48)



Figure 57 “Grateful Coworker 1” (0:45:30)



Figure 58 “Grateful Coworker 2” (0:45:38)



Figure 59 “Grateful Coworker 3” (0:45:26)

In this scene, it can be recognized that having found outlets of expression and fulfilment in the private sphere actively improved Paula's performance and enjoyment of her work. Hence, it can be argued that the pursuit of fulfilment of personal goals was not counter to the concept of socialism at all, rather a prerequisite for it.

From this depiction of Paula in the workplace, the audience recognizes that fulfilment in the private sphere of life and success in a socialist society can go hand in hand. It also speaks to a demand on behalf of East German audiences for films of the GDR at the time to feature such issues of private life more openly and freely. This is shown quite literally in the film, during the famous axe scene (Carow 01:36:00), where Paul dramatically forces his way into Paula's apartment. Instead of running to assist the woman whose apartment had just been violently broken into, and who is currently screaming "Nein!" repeatedly at the advancing intruder, the neighboring tenants, an uncanny amount of which, pile behind Paul into the apartment in the voyeuristic attempt to witness the reunion between the two. Carow represents the voracious thirst for such intimate portrayals of private life drama through the intense gaze from the neighbors, one of them even with running camera in hand (Figure 61), as Paula is forcefully submitted against her will to Paul in her despair after losing her youngest child (Figure 60).



Figure 60 "Paul Embracing Paula" (1:36:47)



Figure 61 "Voyeuristic Neighbors" (1:37:19)

This close up of these voyeuristic neighbors is a representation of the audience's desire to see the intimate details of the relationship between Paul and Paula in the feature film format, indicative of their desires to see such depictions of domesticity on the big screen. In a contemporary review of the film, William Riggan calls attention to this aspect of individualism and the private sphere by writing that Carow and Ulrich Plenzdorf, the film's writer, had "at least again raised the question of individualism and ... thereby generated further debate on the topic in East Germany. Moreover, [they have] done so in entertaining style and with comparatively startling visual eroticism seemingly intended both to attract attention and to reinforce the theme of individualism by the explicit, sensitive depiction of human intimacy" (Riggan 316). Clearly Carow had succeeded in satisfying the desires of an audience that had long been starved of intimacy and personable aspects.

With the entire project of *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* in view, it can be compared with the genre of *Gegenwartsfilme* (Films of the Present). This genre, originating throughout "the 1950s to the early 1970s, when East German film was still centrally preoccupied with registering the social transformations underway in the GDR" (Bivens 25), intended to address the shortcomings of contemporary East German life in an approachable, nuanced way, and can easily be compared with the structure of *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*. This story certainly was a contemporary East German story, and it dealt fundamentally with the functioning of two East German citizens attempting to find the missing piece in their lives which would help them to be better functioning socialist citizens. Better yet, the dual nature of the protagonists in this film provides a figure for both men and women to relate to. All in all, on paper, *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* is the perfect *Gegenwartsfilm*, speaking to both ends of the gender spectrum, and inspiring the pursuit of personal fulfillment as a way to ensure societal success. Carow shows

through this film that by first coming to a place of contentment in one's personal and private sphere, one can improve one's quality of life, quality of work, and resultantly the quality of their society.

Another important aspect of *Gegenwartsfilme* that *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* featured was the risk of offending members of the socialist bureaucracy with the ideological content being presented for emulation by the public. *Gegenwartsfilme* were subject to frequent film bannings and interventions on behalf of said socialist bureaucrats. The situation with this film was no exception. In characterization alone, this film warranted being censored by the GDR government due to the cancelling of two films in 1965-1966 "for showing a party bureaucrat engaged in an adulterous love affair" (Brockmann 263). Paul, the East German party member, is engaging in the same adulterous behavior with Paula that is deemed unfit for his position and resulted in a ban on the two films from the previous decade. For this reason, among many others, the film was, indeed, set to be outlawed as it was initially rejected by party politicians. The advent of this film's initial censorship "revealed a contradiction in Honecker's politics" (Dölling 78). No matter how liberal or without taboo the state claimed to allow its art to be, there were still very real restrictions and limitations that would be enforced when party officials saw fit. It was Honecker himself who intervened in the matter of *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* by overriding his fellow politicians' concerns that the protagonists showed little concern about the progress and development of socialist society. He made a visit to the Cosmos Movie Theater in Berlin on April 29, 1973, the day of the film's scheduled premiere (Brockmann 264) and permitted the film to be screened to audiences across East Germany after personally approving the film. Honecker's personal involvement in the approval of this film truly marks his time in

office as a calculated effort of liberalization for the cultural sphere, regardless of how he had worked toward the opposite in the past.

11.2 Audience Impacts

Die Legende von Paul und Paula went on to be Carow's most famous film by far and has been recognized in multiple publications throughout the decades following its release as one of the most successful DEFA films to have ever been released. The depictions of two socialist citizens' pursuit of happiness in their own private spheres "were obviously the very images the audience wished to see" (Dölling 78), confirmed by them flocking to the cinemas in droves to see the film. This film was something the audience could identify with and relate to, as their own personal struggles for fulfilment and contentment could easily be reflected in the search for exactly that on behalf of both Paul and Paula. The popularity of this film successfully counteracted the steady decline of East German cinematic productions caused by the Eleventh Plenum during the mid-1960s. Not only were audiences revitalized by the fresh, revolutionary content, so was the entire film industry itself. *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* was an instant hit, and "acquired the status of a cult film, especially for young moviegoers in East and West Berlin in the 1990s" (77). The impact of this film can still be seen today, as many East German couples during this time named their children after the titular characters of this film.

11.3 Final Thoughts on *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*

Die Legende von Paul und Paula has stood the test of time as a classic film representing the Zeitgeist of its age and has become an extremely nostalgic film for those reminiscing of times in the GDR. This is despite the efforts of party officials to suppress this film. One cannot expect citizens to be happy, compliant slaves to a society when not allowed to pursue personal

happiness as well. The audience's response to such a sentiment, repeatedly packing theaters to the point of creating one of the biggest cinematic spectacles of the entire period of GDR film, certainly reinforces the public's desire for depictions of personal fulfillment. *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* was a film that both broke with societal norms of the time, and reinforced how society should function moving forward. It showed how East German citizens are not just socialist vectors to be molded, they are each individual persons with dreams, desires, goals, and passions.

By allowing society to acknowledge this aspect of themselves, while also keeping it in line with the greater goal of socialism overall, *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* successfully inspired the greater population to emulate its two relatable, working-class heroes to pursue their own goals of personal happiness, while also using the resultant contentment as fuel for the zeal of socialist development. Even though it came in an unexpected form, *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* is the perfect example of the ideologically influential film envisioned by the founders of the GDR, calling on East German citizens to no longer deny their personal interests and happiness, but instead to use them to improve the greater society.

10.3 GDR Context Continued

In 1976, only three years after the release of *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*, there was another period of ideological crackdown and restriction. Following this, the popularity of DEFA films diminished to an extreme low. Feature films had become generally disliked and unpopular in the 1980s, and moviegoers much preferred staying at home to watch the television, or to watch American movies rather than visit the theaters displaying DEFA films. Whatever films made it to the screen, regardless of subject matter, at this point went largely unseen by the majority of the population, as many had already written off the kind of cinema being presented to them by

DEFA. It was not until the fortieth anniversary of DEFA in 1986, and the following anticipation of the fortieth anniversary of the GDR in 1989, that meaningful films finally began to be produced by DEFA again. It was this short period of increased productivity that gave birth to the second film of note to be discussed at length in this chapter: *Coming Out* (1989), also directed by Heiner Carow. When analyzing this film, it becomes clear that the damage to the film industry dealt through such vacillations between liberalization and restrictiveness in the GDR had left its permanent mark. Combining this with the timeline of the film's release, simultaneous with the end of the GDR, renders this film an important reflection of the shortcomings of East German society. Reflecting such shortcomings in both theme and response, this film acts as the final example to conclude the overall pattern of influence and reflection of German film at play in this research.

12. *Coming Out*

As a result of declining interest of East Germans in DEFA movies in the 1980s, many films that would normally have been artistically impactful and ideologically persuasive failed to be seen by a public that had simply written off DEFA cinema in general. This continued through the final years of the republic, where the first feature length genre film to feature homosexuality as the main plot point was released to little fanfare. From the same director that dazzled audiences in the 1970s with the intimate love story of *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*, Heiner Carow, *Coming Out* (1989) follows the life of schoolteacher Philipp as he discovers his sexuality and the underground world of homosexuals that will both show him who he truly is and take everything he has from him. Premiering on November 9, 1989, the film had more to contend with than simply a declining interest in films with the DEFA logo stamped across the front: it

screened for the first time on the same day as the fall of the Berlin Wall. This rendered the film's effect miniscule in comparison to the other groundbreaking events of the day.

Having been filmed throughout 1988, first planned in 1987, and conceived several years previously, it is either fate or extremely unfortunate timing for this film to have been so dramatically upstaged by the unexpected events of 1989. However, this ended up being quite fitting as the pattern of disengagement from GDR film, and culture in general, would be reflected in the overall apathy towards this film. Ironically, the very message that may have spoken to such East Germans crossing the Wall on the night of November 9, that of *Coming Out*'s critique of an outdated East German society, was ignored by those who had already physically transitioned to the West. *Coming Out* contains a scathing critique of the socialist society's treatment of individuals who are different than the norm. This section will explore how *Coming Out*, both in audience reception and in narrative function, is representative of East Germans' dissatisfaction with their socialist lives. The fundamental lack of hope it reveals in the socialist project, both within and outside of the theater, mark this film as particularly reflective and revealing of the attitudes and animosities of East German citizens during the time of its production.

As one of the two films to have been produced in the GDR with an explicitly homosexual theme, *Coming Out* sets itself apart from all other DEFA films in the controversial nature of its subject matter alone. This warrants a brief discussion as to the history of the legality of homosexuality in the GDR in general. Following World War Two, where homosexuality in Germany was actively criminalized on a level akin to that of Judaism, East German officials saw little reasoning for updating the policy on criminalizing homosexuality. Thus, the infamous Paragraph 175, that which inspired the film *Anders als die Andern* (1919), remained in place throughout the first several years of the GDR. The East German state was continuing to uphold

the criminal prohibition of male same-sex activity that had been sending men to concentration camps during the time of the Third Reich. This was ironic, as, in theory, the tenets of socialism's goals of integration and acceptance of all citizens should override such biases, but the characterization of "the dourly socialist East German [regime] in which sex had a primarily reproductive function" (Griffiths 110) kept such bigotry alive.

Evidently this irony was realized, or at least called out, as the GDR could no longer justify the codification of such discriminatory laws once the year 1968 came around. This year finally saw the removal of Paragraph 175 from the criminal code of East Germany, and there was no longer legal precedent for the persecution of homosexual men (women were largely ignored by this law at the time). However, despite the positive news of this paragraph's overdue removal, it did not ensure that homosexuals would receive better treatment by society. The GDR was still very much a society that valued conformity rather than individuality, and the pattern-breaking nature of homosexual romance was still seen as a deviation from the norm that should be met with suspicion. This suspicion could manifest "in ways that, though usually not violent, resembled persecution and intimidation under the Nazis" (Frackman 455). The East German state security organisation, the Stasi, was frequently employed to keep tabs on homosexual individuals, and harassment was largely used as an intimidation tactic to keep them from flaunting their lifestyles too openly (Frackman, *Coming Out* 5). Despite the legal fiction of equal rights, homosexuals were still very much treated like criminals throughout the majority of the GDR's lifespan.

Following the end of the 1960s, cultural and social developments of the 1970s meant that East Germans from various age groups and professions called for greater possibilities and freedom when it came to the concept of individual expression, hence the existence of *Die*

Legende von Paul und Paula. This included gay activists and their own limited headway made toward making sure their existence in public continued to be asserted. It is because of this headway that films such as *Coming Out* were able to be produced in the 1980s, marking the time when queer East Germans asserted their existence in ways that had not yet been seen by the GDR.

Despite this progress made in the 1970s and going into the 1980s, taboos and prejudices against homosexuality persisted, and *Coming Out* was not the only, or even the first, film to address these. The year 1988 featured an informative documentary about the lives and struggles of queer East German citizens directed by Helmut Kißling and Axel Otten. Titled *Die andere Liebe*, this was the first ever GDR film to deal with homosexuality and the first attempt at sympathetically depicting the unique struggles faced by homosexuals in the GDR. The dialogue this film created and the vocabulary it provided can be argued to have been beneficial to the understanding of the film *Coming Out* as it provided a sort of introduction to the topics that would later be discussed in narrative form. Thus, *Coming Out* can be seen as continuing the conversations begun by *Die andere Liebe* by combining the educational aspects of the latter with the narrative aspects of the former.

12.1 Film Details

Coming Out centers mainly on the teacher Philipp, as he navigates his sexual awakening in the 1980s of the GDR. Philipp must constantly meet high expectations of performance by the faculty members of the school who preside over him. Becoming intimately involved with a woman he collides with in the hallway, Philipp moves in with her and is attempting to live a stereotypical ‘normal’ socialist life. However, Philipp’s continued dissatisfaction with his life, despite possessing all of society’s prescribed achievements for heteronormative success and

happiness (a girlfriend, a job, youth), drives him to seek out what he is still missing. This leads Philipp to a gay bar, also seen in *Anders als die Andern*, where he has his first encounter with homosexuality (Figure 62). Initially confused and resistant, Philipp eventually gives in and imbibes himself while bantering with those flirting with him. It is here where he meets the other protagonist of the film, Matthias. Matthias is a 19-year-old boy who is a regular of the club. When Philipp becomes too intoxicated to see himself home, Matthias, with the help of another bar member, assists him (Figure 63).



Figure 62 “Philipp’s First Gay Experience” (0:30:52) Figure 63 “Philipp’s Arrival at Home with Help” (0:47:31)

The packed frame in Figure 62 conveys Philipp’s overwhelming experience in the bar, which is then contrasted in Figure 63 with a wider, emptier shot as he is taken home. The sensory overload conveyed through camerawork led Philipp to begin the love affair with Matthias, which jeopardizes his career and relationships with his family and friends. This narrative, unprecedented in its open and blatant depiction of homosexual romance, can be said to have “a dual objective” (Frackman 452). In one sense, it reflected the current lives and living conditions of queer GDR citizens of the time, so that a sense of both awareness and sympathy could be built for the unique issues that were faced by them. In the other sense, it served to hint at the possibility of a future that is more enlightened, and where queer people, and other outsiders, do not suffer discrimination on the basis of their difference (452).

While the film is predominantly concerned with the issues caused by the main character discovering his homosexuality, other visceral instances illustrate the plight of East German homosexual men as well. At the beginning of the film, Matthias is rushed to the hospital following a suicide attempt that is directly related to his homosexuality (Figure 64).



Figure 64 “Matthias in the Hospital” (0:04:34)

The film thus leaves no doubt that the situation they find themselves in is so dire that suicide is considered a preferable alternative. The cold, harsh lighting of the bare hospital symbolizes the apathy society has for such individuals. Matthias is not even provided a room; he must stay in the hallway. This suicide attempt also provides a direct point of comparison between the status of homosexuals during the existence of East Germany with their status during the existence of the Weimar Republic. In both films centering around homosexual themes in the chapter on Weimar film, the main characters either carried through with or nearly committed suicide. Unfortunately, since Matthias feels similarly compelled as did Manuela in *Mädchen in Uniform* and as did Paul in *Anders als die Andern*, it can be argued that no significant progress had been made to solve this issue in the decades between the release of these films and *Coming Out*. This scene of

Matthias' suicide attempt indicates that the process of self-realization in queer individuals can be extremely painful and isolating and sets the stage for Philipp's same process.

The realization of one's sexuality (and the disastrous results that can occur following it), is mirrored in another revelation later in the film. Philipp leads his mother on a walk outside, and the subject of their conversation heavily implies an important change in Philipp. Up to this point Philipp had not made a verbal confirmation of his sexuality, however, the conversation with his mother implies that he did so off screen. Arm in arm, Philipp's mother asks "Why?...Why does it have to be this way? ... The way you are." (01:26:00). Philipp responds with a passionate monologue, sure to speak to the heart of queer East Germans, and by extension any East German who felt ostracized in any way. Philipp retorts:

There is no other way. And why should I have to justify being the way that I am? Why must that be? Is it better to pretend? Lie to yourself? Force yourself to be something you can never be? Make others unhappy because there's no alternative? Because nature made me this way and not another way? Who am I harming? Apart from my so-called reputation? Don't we have the right to live as we have to? (Carow 01:26:00)

This heartfelt monologue is the culmination of the years of frustrations felt by queer East Germans who had for so long been punished for trying to express themselves as they truly were. Philipp is speaking for an entire generation of disenfranchised individuals, and not just homosexuals; the ambiguous impetus of this conversation leads this exchange open to interpretation for a multitude of life situations, meaning anyone in the GDR who could relate to being an outsider could find validation and reflection in Philipp's words.

Opposingly, the harsh reality behind many such declarations is also included in the film. His mother responds to his speech by tearily declaring “I don’t know how I can help you” (01:26:48). She reflects the helpless situation many GDR citizens found themselves in, as they simply did not have the experience or vocabulary to assist or improve this situation. The situation takes a turn for the worst when Philipp mentions his mother and father’s relationship. When Philipp says he wanted his parents to be happy, his mother responds by screaming “Unhappy! I’m only unhappy because of you. Only because of you!” (01:27:22). She then runs away while sobbing. This rejection of a paternal nature is the exact fate that met many queer East Germans should their sexual identities be discovered by their families.

Another instance of indicating how society is unable or unwilling to keep up with the social progress of society can be found in Philipp’s treatment by the faculty members of his school. The lead faculty member would periodically interrupt Philipp’s class to see what sort of lessons were being conducted, and actively suppressed anything other than strict, studious behavior. Early in the film, Philipp is playfully teaching his students a dance together, but the faculty member enters the room, ends the party, and ensures they return to text study before departing (Figures 65-66). The officials in this school, and by extension society, do not tolerate deviation from the norm and will stamp it out if possible. The static camera angle held between the two shots below creating a direct contrast between Philipp’s presence, and this faculty



Figure 65 “Fun-Filled Lesson” (0:15:58)



Figure 66 “Crackdown by Faculty” (0:16:07)

member's. Philipp brings an energy that is upbeat and spontaneous, while the authoritative administration instantly commands order and discipline. Such camerawork helps to exaggerate this point throughout the film.

The divide between Philipp's spontaneity and the faculty's rigidness is made even more clear later in the film when Philipp's sexuality and behavior out of class become an object of suspicion for both the faculty and students alike. By this point in the film, the trust in the school's faculty members for Philipp's ability to properly teach is at an all time low, and they insist on sitting in on his further classes. They now need an additional level of surveillance above their random interruptions to ensure there is no deviation from desired lesson plans. It is clear from this scene, as well as the previous dancing scene, that this film is reflecting the oppressive nature of the GDR when it came to homosexuals, and deviations from the norm in general. These scenes represent how GDR society was "generally subjected to one ideal, one model of appropriate living. Everything else was deviation and not acceptable" (Griffiths 130). Such punitive measures against Philipp are indicative of the restrictions placed on queer people throughout East Germany as they attempted to forge new levels of agency for themselves.

As has been alluded to several times already, the interpretation of this film's critique against discrimination does not have to be limited to a homosexual context. In any one of the scenes described above individuals can find representation in the situation of being ignored, oppressed, or treated differently for the simple fact of being different. The film even includes scenes that assert this notion on its own terms. One of these scenes depicts a homophobic attack on a man waiting for his train. Philipp is shaken by this attack as it could have easily been directed towards himself, and he flees the scene without intervening (Carow 00:43:15).

Earlier in the film, however, Philipp is witness to another discriminatory attack in the underground transit system, this time of a racial nature. A Black man is riding the same subway as Philipp and his pupils, and the man is targeted by a group of ‘skinheads’ who physically assault and jostle the man. Philipp, emboldened by the fact that the aggressors would not have attacked him for his own skin color, intervenes and receives several blows himself. At this point, the rest of the car joins in to break up the altercation (00:19:35). Here it is shown that, by default, the GDR is an unwelcoming place for those who do not fit in. Even as this man was being publicly assaulted, no one dared to intervene, except for another individual who felt similarly ostracized by society. The fact that the other transit passengers step in to help after Philipp is involved is a reinforcement of the notion that outsiders do not belong. The herd intervened for Philipp, one who was visually their own, but not for the Black man, who they had collectively decided was the outsider. Therefore, as Philipp steps forward to help the man, the film alludes to a bond between those who feel ostracized by society and can thus be understood as a film that speaks to all walks of marginalized individuals, not just homosexuals exclusively.

Reinforcing this, the writers of the film themselves stated in interviews that this was an explicit intention of the film. The scriptwriter of the film, Wolfram Witt, is quoted in an interview saying, “We especially want to reach people who, in whatever way, encounter the problem of ‘being different.’ And that is nothing unique, because that affects us all” (Frackman, *Coming Out* 6). The film is alluding to a future in which these people no longer have to fear persecution for their differences and are instead celebrated for them. “This was a revolutionary concept in socialist East Germany, where individuality and identity politics could be highly controversial, if not contrary to the socialist project” (Frackman 463). To demonstrate and normalize such a future, Philipp’s counterpart, Matthias, represents a more hopeful version of

‘coming out’ compared to Philipp. While Philipp struggles throughout the majority of the film to accept his sexuality, Matthias does so easily. When questioned by Philipp as to whether Matthias would like to start a family and have kids one day, instead of displaying conflicted emotions, Matthias responds simply: “No. I don't want any of that. Because I can't have it” (Figures 67-68).



Figure 67 “Question from Philipp” (1:04:17) Figure 68 “Answer from Matthias” (1:04:23)

This response, and the casualness in which it was given, indicates a normalization of the homosexual lifestyle. The medium close-up shots featured above in a shot/reverse shot sequence depict a level of intimacy between men seldom seen on German screens before, surpassing that of *Anders als die Andern* through merits of cinematic technique alone. Through such imagery, the film is initiating this process of homosexual normalization, and Matthias represents the enlightened ideal to which Philipp, the audience, all of Germany, and the world should aim to achieve.

Another scene with Matthias later in the film reinforces the notion that homosexuality is not the negative entity so many claim it to be, and that the possibilities for romance and relationships are abundant. Following an upset in their relationship, a distraught Philipp, who is still reeling with his recently realized reality of homosexuality, tracks Matthias down at a bar to

reunite. In this depiction, Matthias, with his self-assured understanding of his homosexuality, has not had to wait long to find another romantic partner, and rebukes Philipp's attempts at



Figure 69 “Failed Reconciliation” (1:33:49)



Figure 70 “Matthias Has Moved On” (1:34:03) Figure 71 “Matthias’ Partner Glares at Philipp” (1:34:09)

reconciliation, as he has already made arrangements with another man (Figures 69-71). The warm lighting tones in Figure 69 being replaced by the cool blue overhead lighting in Figures 70-71 are indicative first of Philipp's final hope of capitulation, transitioning to the cold reality of rejection and despair. Clearly, this film is attempting to show two sides of the same situation, that of acceptance or reluctance of one's homosexuality, with the side of acceptance finding happiness and meaning, and the side of reluctance finding only confusion and anguish. With this

sentiment on display in the film, *Coming Out* can be seen as a “melancholic reflection” of the plight of ostracized Germans in the GDR and a “hopeful projection” as to how the society can move forward to resolve such ostracizations (Frackman 453). Whether or not this was successfully achieved or even noticed by the public will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

12.2 Audience Impacts

The release of the film occurred on November 9, 1989, after a lengthy ideological battle between Carow and party officials who were attempting to block the film from being screened due to its homosexual content. It is reported that “Hans Dieter Mäde, the penultimate general director of DEFA, gave his reluctant approval of the final cut on July 5, 1989” (Frackman, *Coming Out* 83). In his final approval of the film to the Ministry of Culture, Mäde wrote that he hoped the film would, “in a moving and rousing manner ... bring about tolerance, mutual understanding and integration, not only for homosexuals, but also for any minorities in our society” (83), further confirming the wide-reaching nature of this film’s message.

The premiere occurred at the Kino International on Karl-Marx-Allee (84), and this also happened to be this theater’s final East German movie premiere. Everything was set for the film to be a hit, having been advertised months in advance and already sold out for its first screening. However, “by the time the first screening had finished, news that the Wall had been breached and that the GDR’s borders were now open was already spreading” (84). The Berlin Wall ceased to restrict travel between the East and West, and the theater was located so near the center of activity that patrons were able to see the commotion in the streets through the large windows in the lobby, causing the film to be upstaged on the same night of its debut. This resulted in the ideological message of the film being completely ignored by large swaths of the population, as

something much more urgent and pressing was unfolding before their very eyes. Unluckily for everyone involved in the making of *Coming Out* it was a film about breaking taboos that came out when the ultimate societal taboo was being broken: that of criticizing and upending the government.

As it was, the reaction to *Coming Out* was much smaller and more insignificant than intended. It is very appropriate to say that “If it had not been released at a time when there is so much change going on in the GDR that the breaking of a taboo is hardly worth noting, if it had been released just a few weeks earlier, [it] would certainly be causing a greater sensation” (Zimmermann 232). One review of the film by Helmut Ullrich, a writer for the GDR’s Christian Democratic-aligned *Neue Zeit*, read: “it is a well-intentioned educational film intended to promote understanding of a sexual minority” (230). He adds: “This film, which breaks taboos and champions tolerance, is playing in cinemas at a time when many taboos and much intolerance are disappearing. It tells the story of people who are different from others and makes the clear case that these people should remain among us” (231). Even contemporary reviewers were unable to consider the film on its merits alone, rather than its context.

As far as audience reactions were concerned, for those who managed to see the film, most East Germans were unequipped to comprehend the extent of the issues that were being presented to them on screen. “The film, which is being shown throughout the GDR, leaves its predominantly young audiences silent and speechless. Sometimes groups form to try to discuss its content, but many audience members lack the life experience” (Zimmerman 233). This is yet another indication of the failure of socialist society to equip its citizens with the vocabulary necessary to have such discussions of exclusion and difference. Overall, however, reactions to the film were positive rather than negative, with most moviegoers raving about Carow’s direction

rather than the ideological content within. The film went on to receive several awards at the fortieth annual Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale) in February of 1990 (Frackman, *Coming Out* 86), and it has achieved a long-standing legacy in queer cinema as it is now and has been since its release “screened at queer film festivals around the world” (87). Despite the dramatic overshadowing of the film’s release caused by the breaching of the Berlin Wall, *Coming Out* remains an important film of the GDR due not just to its ideological content, but also due to the context and reaction surrounding its release.

12.3 Final Thoughts on *Coming Out*

In the end, *Coming Out* was a film that both intentionally and unintentionally reflected the flaws in GDR society that would ultimately result in the end of the nation. In its intentional portrayal of such flaws, the film draws attention to the reality of East German homosexuals who are actively oppressed, ridiculed, and attacked by society. In this portrayal, an ambiguous focal point of this oppression arises, allowing for interpretation of the message on behalf of multiple parties, not exclusively homosexuals. The film was made with the intention of speaking exactly to those people living in the GDR who felt that they were ‘different’ or did not fit into society. This film was meant to give a voice to such people, inspire empathy towards their situations, and dispel bigotry. In this way, the film intentionally reflects the struggles of East German citizens who find themselves on the margins, and reveals inherent flaws to socialist society, ones that show ordinary socialist citizens being mistreated and left behind to suffer.

Unintentionally, the film premiered the same night of the events that precipitated in the ultimate dissolution of the GDR. East Germans were understandably much more interested in the development of the falling of the Wall than they were at viewing a film that was intended to try to fix what they already perceived as their broken society. Thus, the population’s widespread

ignorance of *Coming Out's* release is evidence both of the declining interest in DEFA films in general, and of the population's declining interest in attempts at improving socialist society in ways that were much less significant than the dissolution of society completely. The unwillingness of East German citizens to see their nation's own films, reflected by the apathy towards *Coming Out*, had resulted in an ideological failure of the state contrary to the wishes of Soviet founders and their ambitions for film.

Overall, *Coming Out* itself critiques East German society, and its reception did so as well. The scathing critique of socialist society's treatment of marginal identities likely would have resonated with those who chose to cross the border into the West instead of seeing the newly premiered film, but their eagerness to escape the country in the first place is an even stronger critique of the society itself. *Coming Out* revealed dissatisfaction with the socialist society of East Germany on several fronts, both within and outside of the theater. This marks the film as particularly reflective and revealing of the attitudes and animosities of East German citizens during the time of its production.

13. GDR Film Conclusion

It was not long after the release of *Coming Out*, and the simultaneous breach of the Berlin Wall, that the GDR itself ceased to exist. As the construction of the Wall itself ushered in a new era of German cinema, so did its destruction usher out the period of GDR film in general. Less than a year following the premiere of the film, in October of 1990, the GDR officially was no more, and the GDR film industry would never add an additional film to its library again. However, this did not mean that the remaining films were forgotten. Preceding 1990, there was very little exposure of East German cinema to audiences in the West. This changed after the country was dissolved as there was now a huge demand for films that documented the realities of

a country that was no longer in existence. Furthermore, now that the East German state was no more, there was no longer any authority or precedent to impede any research into the state's handlings. On top of this, there were even many films that had been banned and kept from screening throughout the lifespan of the GDR, but now that there was no authority anymore, and with full access for anyone interested, these films came to light for the first time as well. The collapse of the GDR, hardly marking the end point of interest in East German cinema, led to a resurgence in popularity of East German cinema.

DEFA studios were disbanded following the end of the GDR. Its catalogue reached numbers higher than seven hundred feature films and has certainly become a meaningful aspect of German film history, despite and perhaps because of the often “stifling atmosphere of consensus building, forceful persuasion, and brutal silencing” (Hake 129) in which so many of its films had to contend, including both *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* and *Coming Out*. All things considered, the cinema of the GDR brought crucial questions to the table about the interconnection between film and politics in a film industry that was state controlled. It asked the questions of what type of person is the ideal socialist citizen and attempted to impart the answer onto its audiences. It also exposed critical revelations about inherent flaws in GDR culture and worked to resolve these while simultaneously contributing to the national identity of the socialist nation. GDR cinema remains as a legacy to its citizens, who experienced the birth and death of a country within less than half a century. The themes, influences, reflections, and interpretations to be found within clearly demonstrate the life cycle of this nation.

14. Conclusion

Beginning in the early days of the medium with the films of the Weimar Republic, the two films selected for review, *Anders als die Andern* and *Mädchen in Uniform*, displayed respective attempts first to influence and second to reflect the then contemporary German society. With *Anders als die Andern*, the efforts of both director Richard Oswald and writer Magnus Hirschfeld were clearly aimed at influencing German society to be more accepting of homosexual lifestyles. Ironically, such efforts influenced the nation in the opposite direction, toward the stricter censorship of artistic mediums to prevent such boundary pushing in the future. This censorship prevented any such similar film from coming to light, until more than a decade later when Leontine Sagan's *Mädchen in Uniform* made its cinematic debut. The constant critique of conservative authoritarianism present in the frames of this film depicts a chilling reflection of the growing tide of fascism experienced by Germany during this period. Such a reflection paired with the girls' constant resistance to it functions as an example of defiance in the face of overwhelming opposition.

Following this period of radical authoritarianism critiqued in *Mädchen in Uniform*, the pattern of influence and reflection of German film continues into the era of the Third Reich. Differentiating themselves from films of previous eras in both subject matter and scale, the two films selected for review in this section, *Triumph des Willens* and *Kolberg*, focus more on ideological dissemination and consolidation of resources to support the overall goals of the regime than on simple entertainment value. In *Triumph des Willens*, the efforts of societal influence constitute the entirety of the film. The desire to inspire the German people to lend their unquestioning support to what was depicted as a unified and powerful regime is on clear display from beginning to end, leaving no doubt as to the ideological intentions behind this film. The

film industry within which this film was created was specifically designed with such intentions in mind, allowing for films to exist that would present a conflicting point of view. Such attempts of inspirational messages in film can also be seen at the very end of the Third Reich in one of the final films to have been produced by this regime, *Kolberg*. The difference between the two films in this time period lies in the hidden reflection of the failing Nazi society revealed through the analysis of *Kolberg*. Pre-emptively depicting the coming reality of occupation by external forces, *Kolberg*'s heroic narrative of civilian resistance met little exposure and spiteful resentment due to the concurrent actuality of military defeat across the nation. Revealing such withered hope and meeting such little fanfare, in direct contrast to the depictions in and reactions to *Triumph des Willens*, reflected how the regime itself was at death's door.

After the fall of the Third Reich, and Germany's subsequent division, the pattern of influence and reflection of German film presents itself yet again in the two films selected for review: *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* and *Coming Out*. As stated in the introduction to this research, the considerations of both East and West German cinema would constitute sufficient amounts of research so as to constitute an entire project in and of itself. For this reason, and for the sake of brevity, only the cinema of East Germany has been considered, owing additionally to its similarities with the cinema of the Third Reich. Like the state-controlled narrative found in films of the Third Reich, the ideological content of films of the GDR followed strict rules, causing filmmakers to experiment with ways of delivering their intended ideological messages and to influence audiences in ways that would not be censored by the government. Under the mask of an innocent romance comedy, *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* effectively undermined the ideological machinations of the GDR in ways that could have been argued to be directly oppositional to the tenets of socialism itself. By inspiring individuals to pursue personal

happiness through intimate relationships, the film seemingly distracts from the collective goals of the socialist state. However, the level of personal contentment received from such relationships is depicted as beneficial to the socialist society overall. Through this characterization of Paul and Paula, audiences of the GDR could feel encouraged to and rewarded by pursuing their personal desires in their own relationships in the ultimate efforts of benefiting their society, constituting an underlying degree of influence on audiences in addition to that of the state-controlled film production center of the GDR. Finally, over a decade later, in *Coming Out*, we see the final reflection of German history to be discussed in this research. Premiering the same day of the fall of the Berlin Wall, this film was destined to coincide with and reflect the faith that had been lost in the GDR. Not only did the film's content, that of misunderstood and oppressed individuals who are spiteful of society, reflect the dying hope of the nation, so did the complete upstaging of the premiere by the initial breaching of the Wall. Audiences were stolen by the emerging events, reflecting a greater interest in the dismantlement of the nation rather than a film attempting to critique it.

It has been the primary objective of this thesis to clearly demonstrate this pattern of influence and reflection of German history through its catalogue of films. Throughout the three film periods that have been selected for examination, that of the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, and the GDR, a consistent pattern of influence and reflection of Germany's historical development has been found within the films that have been outlined. The analysis of this pattern aims to discuss the overall question of film's importance amongst the multitude of factors that went into Germany's process of nation building throughout the twentieth century, as well as to highlight the medium of film as a particularly effective and important medium with which to study such considerations. The unique position of film to provide a visual database for posterity

to examine and interpret with repeatedly renewing lenses as generations pass places the medium in a unique position of importance regarding historical significance, that which is both new and deserves an appropriate degree of scrutiny and respect in academia.

Throughout the decades of German film explored in the chapters of this thesis it has been shown consistently that the ongoing societal process of nation building for Germany has been intimately connected with and displayed by the medium of film. With just the three film periods selected, and with only two films analyzed in each, a pattern has been established that reveals first a multifaceted array of influences, both state mandated and privately endorsed, which worked to shape the cultural and governmental policies that would be adopted by the German people. Second, this pattern reveals a myriad of reflections, both intentionally suggestive and unintentionally revealing, which helped both to inspire contemporary idealists such as supporters of homosexual rights and resisters of fascism, who were still holding out against overwhelming opposition such as the restrictive nature of both the GDR and Third Reich film production cultures. Such idealists also worked to reveal for generations of posterity fatal flaws in particular regimes. With the films selected representing an infinitesimal fraction of films produced during the time periods in question, the advent of such a pattern being already apparent is a testament to its overwhelming prevalence among films produced within and by artists of the German nation.

This pattern of influence and reflection, consistently resulting in and being indicative of tangible and meaningful change and development in the nation building process of Germany, warrants the medium's inclusion in discussions concerning the powers at play during the formation of the German nation. It is the position of the author that this medium and its inherent ability to influence and reflect aspects and identities of German culture from varying perspectives and degrees of power, while simultaneously precipitating attitude and policy

changes, categorizes it as one of the foundational guiding factors for this entire century of rapid change in Germany, worthy of extensive study and review beyond this research at hand.

It is the intention of this research to have shown that German film perfectly encapsulates the influences and reflections that guided German nation building throughout the twenty first century. For this reason and in this context, film presents a unique opportunity to screen the development of a nation as it is occurring, providing a visual medium through which the history of a nation can be studied, enjoyed, and experienced in a way that has only been possible for the past two centuries. It is the position of the author that this medium is an invaluable tool when it comes to discussing the history of the German nation throughout the twentieth century, one which attracts universal attention, and provides layered and varied degrees of historical data. The medium of film has only continued to develop since its inception, and the widespread usage across the globe means that it is here to stay and will continue to assert itself as a uniquely effective way of preserving both the influences and reflections which contribute to the development of the entire world.

The many thousands of films that have been produced throughout the existence of the German nation provide ample opportunity to perform any number of similar research projects as this one which could prove to be just as insightful, and informative, rendering the possibilities for further study of the same nature virtually limitless. This effect is compounded when considering the existence of additional eras of West German cinema, post-unification cinema, films of the Kaiserreich, modern cinema, etc., as well as the presence of a vast multitude of national film cultures, and even the degrees of influence these cultures can have on one another, providing countless possible research projects based on the history of other nations and their

intermingling. Such possibilities are in effect endless and pose many exciting questions as to how best to understand and remember the world moving forward.

This thesis has shown that film can be used as a way to understand German history. Rather than limiting itself by accessibility to academic resources as traditional lectures and study materials do, films are an easily digestible way for all members of the public to participate in and develop perceptions of the process of history. In this research, the case of German cinema has shown that film constitutes an invaluable source of information when trying to understand a nation through a modern lens. With each time period's desires, worries, animosities, policies, and dramas on clear display, the nation could be understood in a way that is unique to the medium in which it is presented. For this reason, the medium of film must be seen as a uniquely valuable method through which to preserve and teach history, one that sparks universal attention and wonder.

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