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Images Behind the Curtain: Hitler's Private Film Viewings

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A Thesis in the Field of History

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

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Abstract

Adolf Hitler has been thought to be an enthusiastic admirer of Hollywood films in both public and private circles. Close associates have claimed that he spent his leisure time viewing films every evening, most often watching American films. This research seeks to uncover and analyze his film choices with the help of recent discoveries in primary source material on the topic. The information discovered contributes to the discussion of Hitler's private film preferences, as well as to the larger discussion of Nazi imagery, Hitler's images and the problem of a self-made legacy of the Third Reich.

Frontispiece



Hitler's Great Hall, The Berghof[1]

[1]Getty Images, "Germany, 'Berghof,' The Great Hall," accessed July 15, 2019, https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/germany-berghof-the-great-hall-inside-nazi-leader-adolf-news-photo/78955117.

Dedication

Dedicated to Kristoffer, for your support in this endeavor and all others.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Charlotte Szilagyi for her patience and support in reading multiple revisions and providing continued guidance.

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Introduction

Adolf Hitler: a name few would fail to recognize. A name, and a legacy that is larger than life. Yet, few would be able to recall much about Hitler that is not derived from the images the Third Reich and Hitler himself created. Most images shown in documentaries and historical accounts of Nazi Germany are the product of German filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl's carefully crafted film, *Triumph of the Will*,[2] among others. These images are particularly dangerous as they are saturated with meaning carefully crafted by the Propaganda Ministry and controlled by Hitler himself. *Triumph* exalted Hitler as a god among men: untouchable and divine. Riefenstahl's masterful work is a cornerstone in the formulation of Hitler's public persona. Similarly, *Olympia*,[3] another Riefenstahl masterpiece, introduces a Hitler that is more lighthearted and relatable. These two films in particular, establish a distinction between Hitler's public persona as the *Führer* and his private persona. Still, what is depicted in these films and others, are not Hitler himself, but an image. The images of Hitler have become his lasting legacy, difficult to separate from the person in order to determine what is natural and what is a mask.

The legacy of the Third Reich was intended to be monumental. However, in an effort to develop their own legacy, Hitler and the Third Reich also left behind questions of authenticity. What is genuine and what is fabricated? In other words, can the real Hitler be discovered when nearly every image that is able to be studied derives from his own policies of propaganda and self-stylization? Hitler's private persona may be most connected to the private spaces he held most

[2] *Triumph of the Will*, directed by Leni Riefenstahl, Germany: UFA, 1935.

[3] *Olympia*, directed by Leni Riefenstahl, Germany: UFA, 1938.

dear and the activities he chose to pursue in those spaces. The Berghof, Hitler's mountain home, was the place that Hitler visited in moments of great pressure, joy and loss. According to American writer and historian John Toland, he was an avid cinephile, and watched at least two films most evenings while in residence there (as well as the Reich Chancellery).[4] The films he watched in his leisure time have been mentioned in many sources, but most sources merely mention his preferences without proper analysis. Regardless of the difficulty of working with such sources, the information on viewings offer an unexplored gateway into a greater understanding of Hitler's private self. That's because Hitler's personas were heavily cultivated on screen, therefore it seems quite plausible that uncovering the secrets of his private persona may have connections to his private film viewings.

Biographers have filled thousands of pages in an effort to provide a greater understanding of the man who brought Germany and much of Europe to the brink of total destruction with his policies of racial superiority and extermination. Two historical accounts stand out in the field of Third Reich historiography due to their thorough treatment of Hitler the leader and man. In particular, German journalist Joachim Fest[5], writing in the second half of the 20th c., focuses extensively on the Third Reich's leader and devotes a great deal of time to trying to uncover the

[4]John Toland, *Adolf Hitler*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1976), 427. John Toland (1912-2004) was an American historian who is best known for his biography on Adolf Hitler. Unlike other historians, Toland preferred to write as a narrative, rather than provide a great deal of insight or judgment.

[5]Joachim Fest (1926-2006) was a German journalist and biographer best known for his writings on the Third Reich, in particular his biography of Hitler and his role in assisting Albert Speer in writing his memoirs. His interpretation that Hitler's rise to power was more a result of a large middle class fear of modernity and longing for the past in the wake of the First World War and the threat of Bolshevism was widely criticized by historians of his time who largely believed in an economic explanation for the rise of Hitler. He began writing in the 1960s and 1970s and continued to publish works throughout his lifetime into the early 2000s.

man behind the *Führer* and his inner personality. British historian Sir Ian Kershaw's two-volume biography (1998 & 2000) of Hitler (Chancellor of the Third Reich) seeks to understand the climate in which Hitler was able to come to power as well as to provide an analysis of Hitler himself.[6] Much of Fest and Sir Kershaw's analyses are based on what close associates of Hitler throughout his time as leader of the Third Reich have laid out in print describing what it was like to know the *Führer*. Close associates[7] such as Martin Bormann (Head of the Nazi Party Chancellery) and Joseph Goebbels (Reichsminister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda) recorded Hitler's thoughts, table talk, and monologues during his lifetime. Accounts provided by sources such as these are valuable in that they contain within them the immediacy of the moment. And still, every account of these close associates has provided for historians more and more information, but also an even greater concentration of speculations about the person and the propagandized image(s).

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[6]Sir Ian Kershaw (born 1945) is best known for his biographies of Hitler. His focus is primarily on the social history of the 20th c. and his writings span the greater part of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. He is regarded as one of the world's foremost experts on Hitler. Other biographers of Hitler include Alan Bullock (one of the earliest biographers of Hitler after his death), John Toland (first biographer to conduct extensive interviews of known associates of Hitler after their capture), Konrad Heiden (writing about Hitler in the 1930s) and August Kubizek (Hitler's friend from his time in Vienna). A great deal of others, such as Volker Ullrich, Thomas Fuchs, and David Nicholls, have written lesser known works on the dictator, but for the purpose of this paper were unnecessary, or provided a note or two on the topic.

[7]While the meaning of this phrase shifts from period to period, I will be referring primarily to his closest known associates from the late 1920s through 1940, as this is the point at which Hitler discontinued his nightly film viewings to concentrate on the war effort and avoid negative public opinion should he partake in something few had the luxury to do at the time. During this period, Hitler acquired his home on the Obersalzberg and had the Berghof built. His leisure time was spent with persons such as Joseph Goebbels, Hans Hoffman, Eva Braun, and Martin Bormann. Bormann was even so important as to be put in charge of Hitler's finances and "became the major-domo at the Berghof." Hermann Göring was excluded from this inner circle. Hitler's adjutants and household staff at the Berghof were part of their own, more personal, inner circle with him. This included members such as Albert Speer, Lieutenant General Hans Baur (Hitler's pilot), Navy Lieutenant von Puttkamer and Nikolaus von Below (representative to the *Luftwaffe*). Members of Hitler's inner circles would have been the most likely to witness the films he was watching in private, since they were often invited to view them all together.

Other members of Hitler's inner circle chose to record their memories later in life. Some that stand out here are Ernst Hanfstaengl (American-German businessman, early Head of Foreign Press Bureau), Albert Speer (Minister of Armaments and War Production, and Hitler's personal Architect), August Kubizek (Hitler's friend and roommate in Vienna), and Traudl Junge (Hitler's personal secretary). By their nature, these accounts could contain within them elaborations, inaccuracies, and fabrications due to the mere passage of time, or the conscious effort on the part of the author to absolve themselves of guilt and responsibility for the atrocities carried out by the Third Reich. Sources that elaborate on the personal attitudes and predilections of Hitler can be organized into three categories: personal accounts from the members of the inner circle (written during and after the Nazi regime), biographical accounts (such as Fest, Toland and Kershaw), and Hitler's adjutants' records at the Berghof concerning film viewings.

It would be ideal to reference sources in Hitler's own hand, however, Hitler himself never kept a diary that has been discovered. *Mein Kampf*[8] is, of course, the product of Hitler's dictation while imprisoned after the Beer Hall Putsch.[9] This work, first published in 1925, however, cannot be considered a personal diary. A diary is typically a log of daily activities. *Mein Kampf*, on the other hand, falls under the category of an autobiographical manifesto, which is more of a self-written biography. As such, *Mein Kampf* is Hitler's accounting of his own life written in hindsight, rather than a daily record. Motivation for writing this autobiographical manifesto was

[8]Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ludwig Low (New York: Stackpole Sons, 1939).

[9]The Beer Hall Putsch, or in German, the *Hitlerputsch*, was a failed attempt by Hitler and his followers to seize power in Munich, Germany on November 8-9, 1923. Nearly 2,000 soldiers marched to the *Feldherrnhalle*, in the center of the city. The result was a failed coup, along with 14 Nazi deaths. Hitler hoped to use Munich as a starting point to overthrow the Weimar government, but instead was forced to flee. He was later arrested and sentenced to prison, where he began writing *Mein Kampf*.

fueled by Hitler's necessity to establish his long-lasting control over the party, as well as his legacy while away from the public spotlight. This motivation makes Hitler's account even more of a story he is creating from his memory, in stark contrast to a standard diary format of recording the daily happenings in one's life.

The thirst for first-hand access to Hitler's mind led to an international sensation in the 1980s. Starting in 1978, a set of journals surfaced in Germany claiming to be Hitler's personal diaries. Totaling 61 volumes in all, these diaries were quickly deemed by the press to be Hitler's purported private musings. It was "as if 'Hitler had suddenly thrust an arm out of the grave.'"[10] At the time, these diaries were not considered an anomaly, due to a "new *Hitlerwelle*, a widespread renascence of interest in the leader, the Third Reich, period regalia, and Nazi images."[11] On the surface, the content and writing style seemed to legitimize them as authentic diaries. However, it was discovered to be an elaborate hoax and forgery by Konrad Kujau, a man with extensive experience in forging minor and major works prior to the diaries. A close look at the material of the diaries, their entries, as well as a forensic test, discounted them as fakes. The original cover even contained mistaken initials. Kujau hadn't realized that he used the gothic F, not A, when he added the insignia to the front. As film historian Eric Rentschler argues in the closing remarks of his article, "The Fascination of a Fake":

> This letter, the evidence of a bungled forgery, makes it apparent that the legacy that is the *Führer* is a fake [*Falschung*], a fake that people want and need to believe in. *Falschung* Hitler. *Faszination* Hitler. *Fantasie* Hitler. Fake Hitler. The scandal

[10]Eric Rentschler, "The Fascination of a Fake: The Hitler Diaries," *New German Critique*, no. 90 (2003): 178.

[11]Ibid., 180-181.

> around the Hitler diaries attests to the lasting power and continuing fascination of that fakery.[12]

In other words, even with the truth so glaringly obvious, people still wanted to believe the diaries could be real. Finally—or so it seemed—one could understand the inner workings of the mind of one of the most notorious leaders of the 20th c. No one wanted to embrace the reality of the forgery. Kujau was later convicted and spent 3 years in jail. Afterward, he became something of a celebrity, opening a gallery displaying his forgeries and his skills for tourists upon request.[13]

Without a record written by Hitler's own hand, it is almost inevitable that one resort to the personal accounts of those who spent the most time with him. The members of Hitler's inner circle were some of the first to record his opinions, actions and preferences. These accounts, naturally, must be interpreted based on the reliability of the source, and utilized in conjunction with other potentially corroborating information, as personal interpretations and biases are common in any written account. Arguably the most detailed account stems from Joseph Goebbels, who kept thorough diaries from 1923 until his final days with Hitler in the Berlin bunker. Entries range in topics from Propaganda Ministry business, to worries about the war or the state of the Third Reich, as well as Hitler's personal preferences. As one of Hitler's closest associates and a key contributor to the development of his public persona,[14] Goebbels bequeathed to us diaries that are integral to

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[12]Rentschler, "The Fascination of a Fake," 192.

[13]Adam Lusher, "The Hitler Diaries: How Hoax Documents Became the Most Infamous Fake News Ever," *Independent*, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/hitler-diaries-anniversary-sunday-times-extracts-hoax-fake-news-germany-a8337286.html.

[14]As Minister of Propaganda, Goebbels, along with Hitler himself, was in control of the dissemination of nearly all forms of image making in the Third Reich, including that of Hitler's images.

any discussion of Hitler. His diary entries provide corroboration of other sources that hadn't otherwise been considered genuine. Specifically, Goebbels mentions often the times in which he is present for film viewings with Hitler and frequently includes the *Führer*'s commentary on those films.

Ernst Hanfstaengl, Hitler's friend, benefactor and social connection provides a unique interpretation of the man during the Nazi rise to power. Hanfstaengel's work *Hitler: The Missing Years,*[15] speaks to his experiences with Hitler on a personal level. In later years, his efforts to curb Hitler's more extreme views led him to fall out of favor with Hitler in preference to associates that more closely aligned themselves with all of Hitler's beliefs. Eventually, he was forced to flee Germany or face a similar fate to that of Ernst Röhm, SA (*Sturmabteilung*, or Storm Detachment) Chief of Staff. Röhm was executed during the Night of the Long Knives[16] in 1934 as a pre-emptive strike against anyone that Hitler viewed as a potential rival to his leadership. During Hanfstaengl's period in Hitler's good graces, he and his family often provided a place of refuge for Hitler. Their home was his hiding place after the Beer Hall Putsch, and was one of the first places Hitler visited upon his release from prison on December 20, 1924. While Hanfstaengl speaks very little about films, he provides a key source to understanding Hitler in his early years and, most often, away from the public eye.

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[15]Hanfstaengel originally wrote his account in 1957, and it was entitled, *Unheard Witness.* Ernst Hanfstaengl, *Hitler: The Missing Years* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1994).

[16]The Night of the Long Knives, also known as Operation Hummingbird (later called the Röhm Purge, or *Röhm Putsch*) took place from June 30-July 2, 1934. Hitler ordered the executions of Röhm and other members of the Nazi party, in particular the SA, in order to preempt any possibilities of a coup led by a faction within the party against Hitler. It was presented to the German people by Nazi propaganda as a necessary move to prevent Hitler's authority as Chancellor being challenged from within the party.

A further close associate was Third Reich master architect Albert Speer (Minister of Armaments and War Production). While a close associate of Hitler for many years, Speer provides an account, entitled *Inside the Third Reich*[17] and written during his imprisonment in Spandau Prison from 1947-1966, of Hitler and his personal preferences that has dominated historical understanding since its first publication in 1969. One must be wary of Speer's accounting of the Third Reich from its inception because much of what he discloses is tainted by his desire to absolve himself of blame for the crimes committed during Hitler's years in power. However, Speer's account focuses almost exclusively on Hitler's personal life. He is one of the first to outline the day-to-day events of the Third Reich and explain in detail his interpretation of Hitler's character in a private setting.

In contrast, biographer John Toland, writing in 1976, also references Speer continually in his nearly 900-page biography, and includes valuable notes on Hitler's film showings. Toland's epic biography utilizes over 250 interviews of those who lived through the Third Reich, many who were close associates of Hitler. This work describes many facets of Hitler, his regime, his close associates and the inner workings of the Third Reich. Although he claims that there is no thesis, he asserts in the foreword that any conclusions were arrived at during the writing, including "the most meaningful being that Hitler was far more complex and contradictory than I had imagined."[18] Even though Hitler's film viewings are given attention, in the scheme of things, these musings seem quite

[17]Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, (New York: Macmillan, 1970). Speer's work was first published as *Erinnerungen*, or *Recollections*, in 1969. It was translated into English and published by Macmillan in 1970 as *Inside the Third Reich*. Then, in 1975, it was released again as *Spandauer Tagebücher*, or *Spandau Diaries*, which was translated into English and published by Macmillan in 1976 as *Spandau: The Secret Diaries*.

[18]John Toland, *Adolf Hitler*, xiv.

cursory, and without any substantive analytical follow-up. For whatever they are worth, the references will be given careful attention.

The biographical sources focus primarily on Hitler's public images. Although Hitler's film habits have been mentioned in the majority of biographies, no biographer devoted any time to analyzing his film preferences. Nearly 2 screenings took place daily for Hitler and his inner circle,[19] yet there has been little critical attention to the subject in the current historical record. Several of the biographers seem to circle back to the same habits of film viewings, but they do not follow up, pay close attention to or scrutinize Hitler's film habits. For instance, Fest spends only a total of three pages, out of over 750, discussing Hitler's film preferences. Kershaw's work is over 1,400 pages, and Hitler's daily routines, including film showings and preferences, account for less than 10 pages of analysis. Toland only devotes 2 paragraphs to the discussion of Hitler's private film screenings in his nearly 900-page work.

As Hitler's early biographer, Joachim Fest relies most on Speer's account of Hitler's personal preferences, including his account of Hitler's favorite films. Since Speer was one of the earliest accounts from a close confidant of Hitler, the account was regarded as a critical source for information about Hitler in a private setting. Fest writes: "Invited his guests to watch movies [...] For in the trivial emptiness of these hours he tried to compensate for the pressure of the day, when he was prisoner of his own image."[20] In other words, Fest regards Hitler's time spent watching films, according to Speer's accounting, as a time for him to release the pressure of maintaining his

[19]Toland, *Adolf Hitler*, 427.

[20]Joachim Fest, *Hitler*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 525-526.

public image throughout the day. However, Fest spends little time analyzing Hitler's film preferences or the impact of those films on himself or his political decisions.

Sir Ian Kershaw's two-part biography focuses on Hitler's charismatic leadership and the ways that allowed him to gain power. His extensive account of Hitler and his rise to power mentions his film habits as a mere footnote, ignoring any possible insight his film habits may provide about him.

Only one account thus far has sought to analyze or even identify in any real sense which films Hitler actually watched in his private viewings with the inner circle. German historian Dirk Alt recently published an article on this topic after doing extensive research in the adjutancy records that survived the fall of Berlin. His 2015 article, "The Dictator as Spectator,"[21] is the first to analyze Speer's account of Hitler's film preferences. Speer's explanation of Hitler's favorite films, according to Alt, prevents serious study of his preferences because he depicts Hitler's tastes as "shallow [...] and [of] little sophistication."[22] Alt also utilizes Goebbels' diaries, memoirs, Hitler's table talks (loosely) along with the adjutancy records to develop a comprehensive list of the films Hitler watched. In doing so, he has provided the first account of Hitler's film preferences in a conscious study. He concludes that Hitler's interest in film was primarily a means of distraction for Hitler and that his proclivities lacked depth.[23] However, his work ignores German writer Siegfried Kracauer's notion that distraction through film satisfied the need for cheap thrills, and an escape from reality. Distraction stimulates the senses in order to eradicate contemplation. The images flick

[21]Dirk Alt, "The Dictator as Spectator: Feature Film Screenings before Adolf Hitler, 1933-39." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 35, no. 3 (2015).

[22]Ibid., 421.

[23]Ibid., 432-433.

by too quickly for one to reflect in any serious manner on what they are being subjected to. Kracauer also argues that the place in which one views a film has an impact on the level of distraction as well. The Berlin picture palaces heighten distraction with their elaborate detail and homage to the live theaters of the 19th c. In such places, a viewer succumbs to the illusion of film and is distracted from reality, no matter how atrocious that reality may be.[24] Alt does not discuss Kracauer's 1927 work at all, and instead moves quickly on to the discussion of Hitler's role in the development of the newsreels depicting the war. Little time is spent on analyzing the specific films Hitler watched or film formal analysis.

The complexities of Hitler's public and private self have provided an abundant basis to pursue research and discussion. One could argue that more than half a century of interpretation have increased interest in the many facets of the *Führer*, both public and private. Contrarily, rather than allay interest and put the topic to rest, it seems that the many interpretations have only exacerbated the mystique and fueled the interest in the topic. Interest in the war often gets conflated with a fascination with Hitler himself to a point which drowns out the Holocaust. This is truly dangerous because it leads us to forget the atrocities of the Nazi regime.

The aim of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the private film preferences of Adolf Hitler through thematic analysis, film formal analysis, and historical contextualization. Did Hitler watch more domestic or foreign films? Are the early accounts that he was an avid follower of Hollywood films, including *King Kong*[25] and *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*,[26] accurate? Was he

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[24]Siegfried Kracauer and Thomas Y. Levin, "Cult of Distraction: On Berlin's Picture Palaces," *New German Critique*, no. 40 (1987): 94.

[25]*King Kong*, directed by Merian Cooper, USA: RKO, 1933.

[26]*The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, directed by Henry Hathaway, USA: Paramount, 1935.

really a fan of Mickey Mouse cartoons? What genres of film did he enjoy? Were his choices cerebral films or popular films? Was he watching films that the German public did not have access to? Which Hollywood films did he enjoy or reject? Specifically relating to Hollywood films, what were his reactions to those screenings and did any cause him to alter his political decisions, either foreign or domestic? Does this information shed light on the "real Hitler," or does it provide yet another image of the "reel Hitler?" I plan to utilize Alt's article and research in the adjutant's records, as well as memoirs of Hitler's close associates, to develop a more comprehensive list of Hitler's private film viewings. From that information, I plan to relate this to biographical accounts of Hitler in order to better determine how the *Führer* related to film, his views on the purpose of film, and his reactions to the films he viewed, especially Hollywood films. This work is essential in understanding Hitler's perspective on Hollywood films, his interpretation of American culture based on those films, and his reaction(s) to films in relation to his political decision making. It might even provide insight into Hitler's private persona.

The purpose of this thesis is not to argue Hitler's fundamental humanity, but to highlight the difficulty in understanding his human side due to the surviving source material. Images, documents and films that survive from this time are nearly all created by the Nazis themselves. Their reputation for recreating the world they lived in into the world they sought to leave behind makes it difficult to know what is real and what is merely another image the Nazis created to distract from and distort reality. Max Brod and Rudolf Thomas write in their article, "Love on Film," "Film places a false image before the masses and arouses desires."[27] In other words, the masses' desires

[27]Max Brod and Rudolf Thomas, "Love on Film," in *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory, 1907-1933*, edited by Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael Cowan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 340.

are reflected in the false images within the film. Hitler became that image for the masses in the Third Reich via the films he “starred” in. Naturally, it would then follow that in order to discover Hitler’s private self, one must seek him in the false images that aroused his own and his followers’ desires.

I.

Nazi Image Making and Its Illusions

To make sense of Hitler's private film viewings, there is no better place to start than Nazi image making. As Hitler was primarily known through the images that he carefully crafted (and which Riefenstahl masterfully staged on celluloid), a discussion of his persona(s) must include the foundations of the theories he used to create them. The Nazi Party was consumed by the notion of how the Reich and its leaders would be remembered by history. Every aspect of the Nazi regime was highly stylized, practiced and refined to fit the legacy it wished to project. Film historian Eric Rentschler argues the Nazis utilized the innovations of the previous century to create a substitution for life itself; "an illusionist world to get lost in;" "a substitute reality".[28] Through this project, the Nazis could become masters of time and space and "reorganize reality and reality in our heads."[29] They used modern media to create myths, legends and a new state. This new state was to be a grand work of art by implementing a grand project that emphasized a lasting legacy. American journalist William Shirer writes "A totalitarian dictatorship, by its very nature, works in great secrecy and knows how to preserve this secrecy from the prying eyes of outsiders."[30] Nazi imagery

[28]Eric Rentschler, "Nazi Film," Lecture, Harvard Extension School, Cambridge, MA, September 9, 2014.

[29]Eric Rentschler, "Nazi Film," Lecture, Harvard Extension School, Cambridge, MA, October 2, 2014.

[30]William Shirer wrote *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. He was an American journalist and war correspondent and his works have been utilized in scholarly literature for more than 50 years. William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich,* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960).

(e.g. through its foreign and domestic films) concealed its true self behind the images developed by its own ministries. Joseph Goebbels controlled every aspect of film production, according to Rentschler, "from a script treatment to a film's final shape, from its release and exhibition to its circulation in the public sphere."[31] With complete control over a film's production, Goebbels could create alternative spaces that viewers could escape to and where the political order could still dominate every moment of their lives. Rentschler argues that the spaces created by films gave the viewer a space to forget politics and civic responsibility, creating a utopian illusion. He states:

> Screen illusions cushioned people against grim realities, offering the solace of worlds that were in order and seemed to allow unencumbered movement, safe havens and playgrounds where one could dream freely. Nazi escapism, however, offered only the illusion of escape from the Nazi status quo.[32]

In other words, Nazi cinema gave people the dreams they craved, but at a terrible price. The uplifting fictions of the film world enabled Germans to ignore the atrocities taking place.

"Illusion superseded reality,"[33] Rentschler argues. Nazi films depict a carefully crafted memory of the Third Reich that suggests a "less oppressive everyday"[34] than reality. Images from Leni Riefenstahl's films *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia* dominate most media venues, including the History Channel's visual representations and interpretations of the Third Reich. Indeed, the Third Reich survives almost exclusively through the idealized images that they themselves created. The availability and masterful use of mass media allowed the Third Reich to manipulate their legacy so that all that is left to posterity is a legacy by their own design. What does it mean to have one's

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[31]Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 216.

[32]Ibid., 218.

[33]Ibid., 223.

[34]Ibid., 220.

images all over the place and yet be so elusive at its core? Can we really ever see through the Nazi regime, or are we only able to see the legacy that the Nazis themselves created?

For the Nazis, everything was subservient to the images they wished to project. The greatest weapon to project those images was cinema. Rentschler states: "the media enabled Germans to withstand awful truths and ignore hideous presentiments, serving as a shield and a blindfold, audiovisual instruments that ensured uplifting fictions no matter how bitter the realities."[35] Therefore, film became a weapon for the Nazis to distract the public while inflicting tragedies across the Reich. In fact, this decision was conscious. As Goebbels outlined the aims of the Propaganda Ministry in the *Völkischer Beobachter* on May 10, 1933: "The Ministry's task is to bring about a spiritual mobilization in Germany. It seeks to do for the German spirit what the Ministry of Defense does for German weaponry."[36] Here, he equates film (and other media) with weapons of war. Mass media is deployed strategically and with precision, and targeted at unsuspecting civilians. Therefore, mass media was the perfect tool to create mass distraction for the Nazis. Of all mass media, it is film that Siegfried Kracauer (writing in 1927 about Berlin's sumptuous picture palaces) argues is really powerful, because the nature of film replaces reality with the reality that it depicts. The act of watching a film is thought to be for pleasure, and people shut down their critical faculties in order to enjoy the film. However, the imagined reality of film stimulates the senses in order to erase contemplation.[37] As Kracauer writes, contemplation is lost in the distraction. For Kracauer, there are two meanings to distraction—first is the more beneficial one, where the viewer gets absorbed into a

[35]Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion*, 222.

[36]Ibid., 228.

[37]Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction," 94.

film, by virtue of its artistry—and secondly, the mindless distraction—the dispersion of attention from one attraction to another and then to another etc. so much so that it becomes overwhelming. Images flick by so quickly there is no time for thought or analysis in the second form of distraction. For the first type of distraction, Kracauer states: "As [films] summon to distraction, they immediately rob distraction of its meaning by amalgamating the wide range of effects."[38] The argument here is that the distraction of film and its picture palaces loses its beneficial meaning with the overwhelming nature of the multitude of effects inundating the viewer. Will Scheller states in his article, "The New Illusion," film suits people's needs to relax and distract them. Art, including film, "produce[s] an illusion for the person enjoying it [...] totally distracting man from himself."[39] In other words, the experience of film diverts the viewer's interest from the material world, providing the illusion they need for the time being. One's inner child takes over and the viewer is an object of manipulation. "In a society on the brink of chaos," according to Rentschler, "movies reassure us that everything is ok."[40] Film (and other entertainment) "responds to real needs created by society,"[41] according to Richard Dyer, writing in 1977. Dyer argues in his article, "Entertainment and Utopia," that especially in times of need, cinema offers "utopian solutions" to real life problems. He explains that societal inadequacies create the need for escape through entertainment and that entertainment offers the kinds of "utopian solutions" to, but that need is still present even after the film

[38]Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction," 96.

[39]Will Scheller, "The New Illusion," In *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory, 1907-1933,* ed. Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael Cowan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 196.

[40]Eric Rentschler, "Nazi Film," Lecture, Harvard Extension School, Cambridge, MA, October 14, 2014.

[41]Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," *Only Entertainment* (2002): 26.

ends—because the film does not change society structurally, including the underlying issues that drove viewers to the movies in the first place. These impermanent solutions assure that the status quo remains, which in turn allows more people to keep going back to the cinema.

If prior to WWII, Goebbels regarded German cinema's mission critical status to German success in terms that were analogous to that of a weapon in a war mission, by WWII it became such a weapon of war itself. Rentschler argues that the war gave rise to a new German film, centered on war. "Magnificence [was] used to sell death,"[42] throughout the Third Reich. The grandeur of each film produced seduced the viewer into embracing war fully while escaping into the fantasy of the film. According to Rentschler, "film, as a weapon, contains a spiritual dimension that can control our imaginations and manipulate our understanding of what is possible."[43] German cinema was now no longer a means of distraction, but a magnificent advertisement for the glorification of war and fallen heroes. As the war effort suffered great losses, such as the 775,000 German casualties caused by the failure of Operation Barbarossa in December 1941, the film industry responded with more spectacular films meant to bolster spirits and encourage greater sacrifice. The surprises and special effects of film allowed it to be utilized as a weapon. *Münchhausen*[44] premiered in March 1943 when the German army was all but defeated. The special effects and fantastical nature of the film provided the illusion of technological superiority and mastery in the film world. Baron Münchhausen is an illusionist in charge of his own destiny and, in particular, a master of his own death. The effects of the film encouraged the notion that

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[42]Fest, *Hitler*, 513.

[43]Eric Rentschler, "War and Cinema," Lecture, Harvard Extension School, Cambridge, MA, Spring 2018.

[44]*Münchhausen*, directed by Josef von Báky, Germany: UFA, 1943.

even in the midst of disaster in reality, one could still be in control, even if that control was only over one's own death.

The Third Reich's film industry was utilized more and more as a weapon for the government to execute its political aims. As German successes began to wane, Goebbels turned to the weapons of mass media to push forward the war effort. On February 18, 1943, Goebbels delivered his Total War Speech at the Berlin *Sportpalast.* The rhetoric of his speech encouraged a veneration of the dead and connected the living to those already gone. He urged the homeland that it was now their obligation to carry on where the soldiers had led the way and fallen. Uniting the homeland with the troops was a focal point of his argument and he encouraged the homeland to become a barrier against Bolshevism. According to him, it was Germany's job to protect the West from the threat of Bolshevism. The Third Reich was destined for this fight.[45] His words were spoken only days after the Battle of Stalingrad, which marked a turning point in the war. By the time the battle had ended, the German advance into the Soviet Union had come to a grinding halt. 250,000 Axis bodies were recovered by the Soviet army and it is estimated that there were more than 800,000 casualties during the fighting for Stalingrad. Hitler's personal involvement in the planning and execution of the battle further strained the troops and resources across the front, worsening conditions for the German war effort as a whole. Against Hitler's wishes, the remaining 91,000 troops at Stalingrad surrendered.[46] At the same time, the Allies carried out nightly bombings of German cities. On March 2, 1943, "British planes dropped 900 tons of bombs on

[45]"Goebbels 1943 Total War Speech," German Propaganda Archive, accessed July 10, 2019, https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/goeb36.htm.

[46]Raymond Limbach, "Battle of Stalingrad," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed January 16, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Stalingrad.

Berlin, damaging thousands of buildings and causing 600 large fires, leaving 711 dead and more than 35,000 homeless."[47] No one could deny the impending doom any longer. Certain defeat was at the front door of every German citizen, and the Nazi government needed a new way to rally support to continue the war. Goebbels himself felt a "paralyzing anxiety"[48] at the state of the war.

Within the next month, UFA discovered a remarkable way to rally the support the Germans needed. UFA stands for *Universum-Film Aktiengesellschaft*. It was a motion picture company in Germany that began in 1917 and continued through World War II. The company was created in the Weimar Republic at a time when Germany was consolidating its film operations and was encouraged to promote German culture. During that time, it was considered one of the most modern companies, and encouraged new styles, camera work and the like. Films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,*[49] *Nosferatu*[50] and *Metropolis*[51] were some of the greatest accomplishments of German Expressionism during the Weimar period of UFA. Under Weimar, UFA promoted new methods for camera work, emphasizing creativity. An early director for UFA, G.W. Pabst pioneered Expressionism in editing and camera positioning.[52] The camera work impressed

[47]Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion,* 193.

[48]Ibid.

[49]*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,* directed by Robert Wiene, Germany: UFA, 1920.

[50]*Nosferatu*, directed by F. W. Murnau, Germany: UFA, 1922.

[51]*Metropolis,* directed by Fritz Lang, Germany: UFA 1927.

[52]"UFA," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed January 16, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/topic/UFA-German-film-company.

Hollywood on a massive scale in these early years. Hollywood hired as many German filmmakers and actors as they possibly could.[53]

UFA was the company that would have produced and released most, if not all, films created by the Third Reich and its Propaganda Ministry once they came to power. Goebbels consolidated German film companies under UFA upon his appointment as Propaganda Minister in 1933 in order to better regulate the German film market. *Münchhausen,* discussed above, premiered in March 1943, as the war was destroying any notion of German victory. March 1, 1943 saw the largest air raid on Berlin, lasting 30 minutes. Initial reports claimed 89 dead and 213 injured. Later, the death toll rose to 486, with 377 injuries as well.[54] German General Erwin Rommel lost the battle in North Africa on March 6 as well. The Third Reich was looking for a weapon to shift the war in their favor and to divert attention from any feeling that they would not be victorious in the end. Cinema became that weapon—in particular, *Münchhausen*. As mentioned above, its purpose was to reassure German audiences and excite hope in technology, according to Rentschler. Fantasy films in the Third Reich were rare, and this film really brought to mind the heyday of Weimar cinema.[55] The film attempts to rewrite the past and highlights the wish to escape from reality. The main character, the baron, winks at the camera, as if to say we are all in on the

[53]As early as the 1920s, German filmmakers and actors emigrated to Hollywood. Some of the earliest were Ernst Lubitsch and William Wyler. Marlene Dietrich arrived in 1930 and went on to great success in the US. By 1932, the influx of German film workers increased dramatically. Hedy Lamarr, Fritz Lang, Wilhelm Thiele, and Peter Lorre were among some of the many who sought work in Hollywood.

[54]"Monster RAF Attack on Berlin Hailed as 'Prologue to Invasion," *Milwaukee Journal,* March 2, 1943, 1.

[55]Eric Rentschler, "*Münchhausen,*" Lecture, Harvard Extension School, Cambridge, MA, November 6, 2014.

joke together, breaking the distance from the audience. He has an opportunity to wish for eternal life. Throughout the film, there is no downside to his wish to control his own life. This wish allows him, at a time with no control over life, to have agency over one's death. He is a master of time. French writers Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy discuss the Nazi myth as a myth of agency, of creation—which is here pushed to its extreme meaning—controlling death.[56] When you cannot control your life, you do control how and when you exit—at least that is what *Münchhausen* is saying. For the Nazis, at this point, the film shows a wish for a spectacular, film-worthy death. On April 17, 1945, Goebbels commented to colleagues in the Ministry of Propaganda:

> Gentlemen, in a hundred years' time they will be showing a fine color film of the terrible days we are living through. Wouldn't you like to play a part in that film? Hold out now, so that a hundred years from now the audience will not hoot and whistle when you appear on the screen.[57]

Even in the last days of the Third Reich, as their world was disintegrating, image was all the Nazi regime was concerned with preserving. In other words, their only concern was how future generations would remember and respond to the images they left behind.

The image as a point of identification is something Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy have conceptualized in their essay "The Nazi Myth." Their work emphasized 'the construction, the formation, and the production of the German people in, through, and as a work of art.'"[58] The Third Reich was to be remade, looking to the examples of Rome and Greece. Their ancient

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[56]Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Nazi Myth," *Critical Inquiry*, no. 16 (1990): 291-312.

[57]"Goebbels 1943 Total War Speech," German Propaganda Archive: Calvin University.

[58]Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion*, 210.

structures stood as testaments to their respective legacies. The tragic heroism of Greek mythology and culture (in particular) was used as a tool to emphasize the repetition of tragedy and art. The Nazi myth, according to Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, became a way for Nazis to draw power from their own affirmations. Nicholas O'Shaughnessy explains in his article, "Selling Hitler," that "the myth is in the end a narrative, the story a nation tells itself about itself and a way of bequeathing its values to the cadet generations."[59] The myth is the legacy a nation crafts for future generations, according to O'Shaughnessy. Lacoue-Labathe and Nancy wrote: "mythical power is the power of the dream, of the projection of an image with which one identifies [...] a dream with which I can identify myself."[60] In other words, image is not just accidental, it is the Nazi self-conception ratified into national myth. The dream, or image, became all that the Nazis wished to uphold, through every aspect of their society. Cinema was again the perfect tool for the realization of that dream world.

Images, and the legacy of those images, was of paramount concern to Hitler. He was concerned with "images," not only in terms of the images of the Third Reich, but also his own personal images. Nothing could interfere with the images that Hitler projected to the German people, and later to the world. He was determined to control his images, both public and private. Although he wore reading glasses, he would quickly remove them in the presence of others, and gave strict orders never to be photographed wearing them.[61] Hours were spent rehearsing every publicly spoken word, many times in front of a mirror so he could correct his gestures and

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[59]Nicholas O'Shaughnessy, "Selling Hitler: Propaganda and the Nazi Brand," *Journal of Public Affairs* 9 (2009): 72.

[60]Philippe Lacoue-Labathe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Critical Inquiry*, 305.

[61]Toland, *Adolf Hitler,* 534.

expressions for maximum effect.[62] According to Hanfstaengl, Hitler paid maximum attention to his rhetoric—his diction, the patterns in his voice, in fact taking Wagner's operas as his inspiration: "The whole interweaving of leitmotifs, of embellishments, of counterpoint and musical contracts and argument, were exactly mirrored in the pattern of his speeches, which were symphonic in construction and ended in a great climax, like the blare of Wagner's trombones."[63] Hitler devoted himself to creating a grand spectacle for each of his speeches. His vision was to place himself at the center of his own theatrical production, layered with meaning in every movement, gesture and repetition, along with music to ensnare the senses and build emotional reactions. He created a stage in which he could make himself into a modern Wagnerian character himself. By the age of twelve, he had already become "captivated" by his first Wagnerian opera, *Lohengrin*.[64]

Hitler set up each state event as a sort of Wagnerian drama, "representing a higher reality which ... did not remain confined to the stage but perpetuated the everyday life of the people,"[65] according to US historian, Frederic Spotts. The ultimate goal was for Nazi ideology to reach every aspect of daily life. Hitler rooted each production of state events in the history of German tradition and brought the stage into every home. He chose places such as Nuremberg for the 1934 Nazi Party Congress, so as to root Nazism "in the oldest, most authentic German tradition going back to the First Reich of the Middle Ages."[66] O'Shaughnessy states that every event was produced on a

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[62]Rentschler, "Nazi Film," September 9, 2014.

[63]Hanfstaengel, *Hitler: The Missing Years*, 55.

[64]Toland, *Adolf Hitler*, 15.

[65]Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, (New York: Overlook Press, 2003), 281.

[66]Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, 62.

massive scale, and as a grand spectacle, edited and tailored to the specific audience.[67] This would allow individuals to enter the mass, and merging into the mass would give the individual a sense of identity. In these moments, "each individual rediscovers himself in the god-like hero [Hitler], and the once faceless crowd, welded into a homogeneous community by a power from without, receives in moments of celebration its sense of collective identity."[68] Each person's identity was tied to the mass, to the party, and ultimately to Hitler himself. The mass spectacle opened the door for psychological manipulation.[69]As O'Shaughnessy states, the individual was no longer alone, but was instead tied to the community, creating an interdependence and a fulfillment of immortality in the collective.[70]

This notion aligned perfectly with Hitler's aesthetic output. Hitler's interest in Wagnerian opera wasn't limited to imagining and positioning himself as a Wagnerian character. Rather, he sought to extend this to the entire state. His dream world was "music and painting combined in the grand pseudo-world of opera,"[71] the life of the artist and the freedom that came with that life. According to Spotts, Hitler's conviction was "that the ultimate objective of political effort should be artistic achievement."[72] Fascist aesthetics developed partially from this objective. Political events were staged and dramatized, drawing on mythical notions and historical connections (that were

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[67]O'Shaughnessy, "Selling Hitler."

[68]Joachim Köhler, *Wagner's Hitler: The Prophet and His Disciple*, trans. Ronald Taylor. (Cambridge: Polity. 2000), 242-243.

[69]Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, 69-72.

[70]O'Shaughnessy, "Selling Hitler," 59, 64.

[71]Fest, *Hitler,* 29.

[72]Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, xi.

often exaggerated or fabricated). Every aspect of daily life was hyper-stylized in order to develop spectacle on a mass scale.[73] Through this practice, political relations assume aesthetic shapes. Hitler used this to make the Third Reich over into a new society on a massive scale, a beautiful new society, massive, modern, collective and militarized. His ultimate goal was to create the greatest culture state, claiming that "military battles are eventually forgotten. Our buildings, however, will stand."[74] Hitler planned to make his legacy live on in the works he left behind, again preserving his memory exactly the way he wanted to be remembered. No better way to develop a monumental legacy that would be difficult to forget than through architectural development (that would later be utilized in filming as well).

Albert Speer's architectural legacy has come to define fascist architecture. The imposing and massive concrete structures he developed (although many never made it past the planning stage) are a testament to the Nazi ideal. Speer's most memorable work was the *Zeppelinfeld* stadium in Nuremberg. This massive field was used for Nazi rallies, in particular the 1934 Nazi party congress. It was also known as the cathedral of light, as it was such an overwhelming flood of light when used during nighttime rallies. This stadium is one of the most recognizable structures of the Third Reich, due to its role in *Triumph of the Will.* Speer modified the exterior of the Olympic stadium as well. Virtually every Speer creation that was actually built was later destroyed by the war. However, Speer's legacy lives on in Riefenstahl's works, *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia.* The legacy of the Third Reich's architecture survives in its carefully crafted visual representations masterfully recorded by Riefenstahl.

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[73]Eric Rentschler, "Fascism/Fascist Aesthetics," Lecture, Harvard Extension School, Cambridge, MA, Spring 2018.

[74]Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, xi.

Hitler looked to architecture as a "means of developing national pride [... an] ideology made manifest in buildings."[75] Along with his notion of permeating each person's every day life, redeveloping Germany's architecture based on his ideal would create an entire bastion that glorified Nazi ideology on every street, with every column, every window, every looming shadow of each magnificent building. The buildings of the Third Reich were to become living recreations of Nazi life and legacy. Architecture became yet another tool for "self-gratification, self-glorification, social indoctrination and nationalistic self-assertion."[76] Hitler's aspirations to become an artist, and later an architect, did eventually lend themselves to "the impulse [of every architect] to create an ideal society - to remake the world."[77] Hitler sought to remake Germany into his own world, a world that glorified and exalted Nazi ideals and ideology in its people, buildings, art, film and ultimately in the massive legacy that it left behind. Monumentalism alluded to the notion of a lasting Reich, a lasting government, a lasting prosperity. According to Albert Speer, the point "was to leave everyone 'overwhelmed or, rather, stunned at the power and majesty of the Reich.'"[78] German philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin argues in his 1936 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility," that fascist aesthetics seeks to numb, pulverize, and overwhelm the senses.[79] The structures left behind would be monumental, in other words, they would become monuments to the Third Reich. Catastrophe at Stalingrad on the part of his military drove Hitler

[75]Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, 316, 321.

[76]Ibid., 311.

[77]Ibid.

[78]Ibid., 357-358.

[79]Rentschler, "Fascism/Fascist Aesthetics."

further to his dream of "immortality through his monuments."[80] While Hitler couldn't live forever, he could live on in the monuments he created: the German people, architecture, and the Nazi visual legacy. Fest also argues that "Hitler saw disaster as his ultimate chance for survival."[81] Here, Fest claims that Hitler faced disaster, not as the end of the Third Reich, but as a greater chance to leave a lasting legacy and be survived by the images he and the Third Reich created. The only way to be remembered was to cultivate his own legacy. In fact, not only was Hitler interested in monuments, but also in ruins. He became increasingly obsessed with "a theory of ruin"[82] for the legacy of the Third Reich. Basically, the surviving architecture of the Third Reich would become part of its visual legacy, dreamed by Hitler, implemented by his followers and testament to the memory he carefully crafted.

The Nazis were masters of manipulation and experts at using modern media to cultivate their own images. Since all that is really known of them is through their own images, it is truly troubling that there seems to be no way of neutralizing their imagery, in order to use them to better understand the Third Reich. Is there a way to distance oneself from its imagery? Can we get past the images and discover the real Hitler? Rentschler argues that we can attempt "to seek him in his slippery, conniving falseness."[83] In other words, Rentschler thinks that rather than seek Hitler's real persona as something divorced from the images, we are to consider his "real" persona as yet another image. Where we find the reality is in Hitler's repeated resorting to falseness. Fest also

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[80]Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, 399.

[81]Fest, *Hitler*, 725.

[82]Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, 322.

[83]Rentschler, "Nazi Film," September 9, 2014.

writes: “The reports and recollections we have from members of his entourage do not make him tangibly vivid as a man; he moves with mask-like impersonality through a setting which he nevertheless dominated with uncontested sovereignty.”[84] In other words, Fest argues that Hitler is not a person, but instead imitates life to hide his impersonality. The question still remains if Hitler’s private persona was his true self, or another layer of the stylization he projected to the outside world. The Third Reich has been memorialized as the Nazis hoped, through their own carefully crafted images. Therefore, a study of Hitler’s persona(s) must consider how his images were received in both the public and private arenas of his life. Through these perceptions, one may be able to highlight the characteristics of Hitler’s private self.

[84]Fest, *Hitler*, 530-531.

II.

Perceptions of Persona Both Public and Private

In hopes of delving ever closer to the "real" Hitler, one must analyze public perceptions of Hitler, as well as those of his closest associates. In the 1970s, German writer Walter Kempowski compiled a work highlighting personal impressions of Hitler by Germans present during the Third Reich. Many still recalled the power of the mass spectacle. According to one person, "Hitler himself didn't interest me, only the people, how hypnotized they were." Another confided: "I don't know how much of it was stage effect and how much was my personal impression." Yet another opined, "It became impossible to make up your own mind."[85] The mass spectacle robbed its participants of their sense of self and hypnotized them into a mass that became swept up in the emotion of the moment. Fascist rallies and films were organized along the notion of the mass ornament. According to Siegfried Kracauer, the mass ornament is a group of people arranged into a geometrical pattern and moving in sync. Individuals become part of the mass, which creates a geometric pattern. The ornament is an end in itself and provides anonymity to the individuals within. It is a "rational, empty form."[86] This distracts the masses and prevents them from altering the status quo.[87] Kracauer first writes about the mass ornament in the 1920s, at a time where the mass ornament had no inherent meaning. It is, he says, just aesthetically pleasing. During the Nazi

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[85]Walter Kempowski, *Did You Ever See Hitler?* (New York: Equinox Books, 1973), 61.

[86]Ibid.

[87]Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," *New German Critique*, no. 5 (1975): 67-76.

era, the notion of the mass ornament takes on meaning. The anonymity and unified nature of the mass ornament lends itself to the interpretation of political consensus. In *Triumph of the Will*, Riefenstahl captures the essence of the mass ornament at the Nuremberg rally for all the world to see. In the sequence titled "Tribute to the War Dead," the viewer sees hundreds of thousands of servicemen arranged in perfect formation, moving in unison, seemingly subservient to the one giving orders. In this case, the leader is above all of the geometric masses, and therefore separate from the collective. Hitler is the commander of the crowds. One could also discuss mass ornament when analyzing the marching troops as they pass by Hitler's car in the motorcade sequence. He holds out his hand and seems to hold the sun in his hands. He is anointed, special, godlike. This suggests that he is the bearer of light for Germany. The film emphasizes Hitler's ability to give life to everything around him, e.g. by filming statues in ways that suggest they could move, as long as Hitler looks upon them. Hitler, as the leader, is the force who gives shape to the unformed masses. He forms the people out of the masses.[88] Through this film, Hitler is sanctified. He has an undeniable aura that separates him from the mass. The magic of his aura has a curious, lasting power over the masses.[89] Because the film introduced him in these terms, Hitler was superhuman to the public. Also, Hitler introduced himself always already as an image—i.e. mediated by film. *Triumph of the Will* premiered in Berlin, at the UFA Palast theater on March 28, 1935. Following the premiere, it was widely disseminated. It ran in 70 German cities and was shown in schools,

[88]Eric Rentschler, "Nazi Film," Lecture, Harvard Extension School, Cambridge, MA, September 16, 2014.

[89]Eric Rentschler, "Nazi Film," Lecture, Harvard Extension School, Cambridge, MA, September 11, 2014.

with mandatory attendance for showings.[90] People living in Germany who could not attend the rally in person experienced him as an image, based on this film. He was untouchable, separate and the messiah that would save Germany. The cultivation of this public persona set him apart from his people as a great leader, but Hitler also had a private life. He had to be seen as a relatable man on a personal level, as well as a benevolent leader of the masses.

Many have written on Hitler's rigid presence in more intimate social situations, including within the inner circle. Members of his inner circle claim (in their memoirs and biographies of Hitler) to have finally revealed key elements of the "real" Hitler. Can we separate "the real man" from his images? Could Hitler exist as more than just a person, but many personas? Is it possible that he exists as a "site of projection," "reflecting whatever you want it to reflect?"[91] Could it be possible that there exists no "real Hitler," but merely an array of images that others have placed on the empty silhouette where the man once was? Before we can answer, we must analyze the depths of his stylization and development of his images.

Hitler's private life was depicted in the images he left behind as the perfect example of the relatable guy next door. This image of Hitler as the "common man" coexists with his other, messianic one. The German public was provided with information that "emphasized a friendly and warm side of Hitler as a fatherly leader who loved children, dogs, and a quiet, domestic life."[92] Images such as this were meant to humanize Hitler in an effort to make him reachable to the

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[90]"Leni Riefenstahl's 'Triumph of the Will'" Nürnberg, accessed February 10, 2020, https://museums.nuernberg.de/documentation-center/national-socialism/the-nazi-party-rallies/leni-riefenstahl-s-triumph-of-the-will/.

[91]Eric Rentschler, "American Dreams: No Trespassing," Lecture 9, Harvard Extension School, Cambridge, MA.

[92]Kempowski, *Did You Ever See Hitler?*, 7.

German people, even if he wasn't reachable. A shining example of making Hitler reachable comes from the film, *Olympia*. During the events of the 1936 Berlin Olympics portrayed in the film, Hitler is shown many times cheering on the German athletes. He is depicted as just another German spectator, hoping that his countrymen have a great showing in the events. Efforts to relate Hitler to the common man within Germany went to extensive lengths. "His career depended not so much on his demonic traits as on his typical, 'normal characteristics,'" according to Fest.[93] In this conception, Hitler's success as a leader hinged on his ability to occasionally present himself as an average man, in stark contrast to his aforementioned godlike persona. Fest neglects to consider how the Third Reich was able to encourage the images of Hitler as the common man, namely through film. Riefenstahl's films, in particular, are the ideal catalyst for Hitler's images. When *Olympia* was published in 1938 (shot in 1936), Hitler had been known mostly from the film *Triumph of the Will* (shot in 1934). Prior to that, *Victory of Faith*,[94] also a Riefenstahl film from 1933, contained a sequence that had to be recast in *Triumph* because it still showed Ernst Röhm. He was later shot by Hitler's order for behavior that Hitler deemed traitorous, while also eradicating a potential rival to his authority. Therefore, *Triumph* had to "rectify" the images of Hitler being cozy with someone he later had murdered. It also glorified the death of Röhm and the other victims of the Night of the Long Knives, and memorialized them as honorable losses to the Nazi cause. *Triumph* glorified Hitler as a god among men, and the benevolent leader of the Nazi Party. Riefenstahl created and recreated Hitler's images through her first two films and helped to develop the "reel" Hitler, with the support of both Hitler and Goebbels. *Olympia* became her

[93]Fest, *Hitler*, 7.

[94]*Victory of Faith*, directed by Leni Riefenstahl, Germany: UFA, 1933.

contribution to Hitler as a relatable leader who enjoyed watching the excellence of German athletes competing on the world stage. Her films created some of the most powerful images of the "reel" Hitler both as leader and common man. Although these images contradict one another (*Triumph* displays Hitler as a god; *Olympia* shows him as a common man), Riefenstahl masterfully developed them both in her films.

Hitler's closest associates and staff throughout his lifetime have claimed to present a picture of the man himself, rather than the political leader. British journalist Angela Lambert (1940-2007) argues that: "To understand the origins and pathology of evil, it is more helpful to find out what the people who knew him as a human being said about him rather than portraying him as an incarnation of the Devil."[95] In other words, viewing Hitler as a demon among men will get us no closer to understanding who he was or how he was able to carry out the atrocities of the Holocaust and the Second World War. One must look to those close to him in order to gain a deeper understanding of his humanity and possibly discover the man behind the images, the "real" Hitler, if this is possible at all. Beginning with some of his earliest supporters, one can track commonalities in the perception of Hitler in a more intimate setting. Whether or not this reveals the man behind the images, we will have to wait and see.

Ernst Hanfstaengl's account of Hitler focused on the period where Hitler was working to attain power claims to show him as he developed into the Chancellor of Germany. Yet, he admits that the account still seems to be lacking an "account of the man [himself]."[96] He goes on to argue that Hitler was missing "a vital factor in [his] existence" and that he had an "extraordinary gift for

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[95]Angela Lambert, *The Lost Life of Eva Braun,* (London: Century, 2006), 246.

[96]Hanfstaengel, *Hitler: The Missing Years,* 15.

self-dramatization."[97] While Hanfstaengl argues that he has provided an account of the man in the making, he readily admits that he writes very little about the man himself. In other words, there is so little of Hitler as an average man, that Hanfstaengl is unable to actually write an account of the man. In fact, accounts from both Hanfstaengl and his wife testify that during their friendship, the Hanfstaengl home was a sort of refuge to Hitler. This was a place that he could visit without being paraded about for other guests as the savior of Germany. Here, he was able to be an average man.[98] Yet, Hanfstaengl seemed to believe that Hitler lacked a vital part of humanity, and instead was performing, even in intimate situations. He writes: "In his relations with women Hitler had to dramatize himself, as he had to dramatize himself in his relations with the world as a whole."[99] In other words, Hitler remained guarded, according to Hanfstaengl. There is little in this account that points to the private man behind the mammoth persona that was magnified all over the Third Reich.

German journalist Konrad Heiden also claims that Hitler's persona was continually shifting.[100] Hitler was a fantastic mimic, constantly shifting his persona based on the people around him, often copying behaviors he witnessed within his current company. This gift for mimicry provides "an example of the extraordinary *rapport* he could establish with the minds and emotions of others."[101] Heiden had little details to provide about Hitler as a private man, but his perception

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[97]Hanfstaengel, *Hitler: The Missing Years,* 51.

[98]Toland, *Adolf Hitler,* 136.

[99]Hanfstaengl, *Hitler: The Missing Years,* 124.

[100]Konrad Heiden, *Der Fuehrer: Hitler's Rise to Power,* trans. Ralph Mannheim, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1944), 360.

[101]Hanfstaengl, *Hitler: The Missing Years,* 66.

that Hitler was a remarkable performer sheds light on the notion of play acting above average human interaction. This gift gave him the power to make others believe nearly anything about him that he wished. With this talent, it is difficult, even for those close to him, to discern what is pretend and what is genuine.

Otto Wagener, an early Hitler supporter, stated in his 1946 memoir (published posthumously in 1978), *Hitler: Memoirs of a Confidant,* that "everything Hitler uttered was quickly leaked. [...It] was passed on with embellishments and misinterpreted. Hitler could therefore on no account confide his innermost intentions and goals."[102] Wagener raises yet another interesting element of Hitler's private self. Since it was often the case that information about Hitler circulated quickly, it is logical to believe that he would be reluctant to trust others. Still, Wagener seems to suggest that even among those close to him, he was secretive and withholding.

Early associates of Hitler had little to contribute to his private persona, yet Hitler's chauffeur, Erich Kempka (first published in 1951) claims to "show us Hitler as the members of his household saw him—not as a ranting political extremist, but as a man."[103] Although others believe that Hitler guarded himself from them for a variety of reasons, Kempka believed that his relationship with Hitler was genuine and gave him access to the private man that few others ever saw. He argues that despite everything else, "Hitler was nonetheless a man who could inspire

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[102]Otto Wagener, *Hitler: Memoirs of a Confidant,* ed. Henry Ashby Turner, trans. Ruth Hein, Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 175-176.

[103]Kempka's memoirs were first published in 1951, entitled *Ich habe Adolf Hitler verbrannt* (*I cremated Adolf Hitler*). It was re-published in 1975 as *Die letzten Tage mit Adolf Hitler* (*The Last Days with Adolf Hitler*), and finally published in English in 2010 as the following citation. Erich Kempka, *I Was Hitler's Chauffeur: The Memoirs of Erich Kempka*, trans. Geoffrey Brooks. (London: Frontline Books. 2010), 13.

loyalty, affection, even love."[104] Kempka highlights Hitler's humanity and does so by discussing Hitler's interest in Kempka as a person. He remembers Hitler as a fatherly figure who always encouraged him to divulge personal problems to him and rarely discussed politics with his close associates. Kempka even quotes Hitler as saying, "'My drivers and pilots are my best friends! I entrust my life to these men!'"[105] He also states that Hitler placed special emphasis on the comfort and happiness of his guests. Kempka's account leaves much to be desired. Although he does discuss Hitler's interactions with him, it is difficult to discern whether or not these interactions were performative or genuine.

Heinrich Hoffmann, Hitler's photographer, also believed that his relationship with Hitler gave him a special view of the private man. He argues that his relationship with Hitler was characteristic of a personal friendship that had nothing to do with politics. Hitler enjoyed simple pleasures and relished the café life in his free time.[106] Hoffmann claims that Hitler's relationship with Eva Braun (his most famous mistress, and eventual wife) seemed to be nothing out of the ordinary and that she was barred from all functions, including those of the inner circle. He states that their mannerisms toward one another went unchanged, even among the inner circle. She appeared as "one of the family," and the inner circle was shocked when their marriage was announced shortly before the end.[107] Much of Hoffmann's accounting is written in a way to absolve him of responsibility in Nazi crimes, and so he downplayed his relationship with Hitler

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[104]Kempka, *I Was Hitler's Chauffeur,* 13.

[105]Ibid., 21.

[106]Heinrich Hoffmann, *Hitler Was My Friend*, trans. Lt. Col. R.H. Stevens (London: Burke. 1955), 49, 70.

[107]Ibid., 161-163.

concerning politics, as well as his role in the inner circle. He emphasizes the simple desires of Hitler and a surface understanding of his relationship with Braun, even though he was the one to introduce the pair. Still, Hoffmann's account argues that Hitler's private self was hidden, even from the inner circle, at least in some instances. "Only at the Berghof [Eva] emerged, as it were as one of the family."[108] Hoffmann suggests that the Berghof was more of a safe, intimate space in which Hitler was less likely to remain guarded. He writes: "Life in Obersalzberg was of a much cozier and more intimate character [than the Chancellery]."[109]

Eva Braun's relationship with Hitler offers another curious picture of the *Führer*. As Angela Lambert states, "Their relationship is worth investigating because his treatment of this one young woman—first enthralling, then dominating and finally destroying her—reflects in microcosm the way he also seduced and destroyed the German people."[110] In other words, the nature of Hitler's relationship with Braun is reflected in his relationship to the Fatherland. Lambert suggests that Hitler was seductive and enthralling, which alludes to similar notions that he was manipulative. His dominating nature destroyed not only Braun, but all of Germany. Analyzing the relationship between Braun and Hitler may shed further light on who he was in private.

Hitler is quoted as having said, "'Eva keeps my mind off things I don't want to think about. She gives me a rest.'"[111] This suggests that his relationship with her was separate from his daily worries and activities. She was almost an escape from the public persona herself. He could be more

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[108]Hoffmann, *Hitler Was My Friend,* 163.

[109]Ibid., 185.

[110]Lambert, *The Lost Life of Eva Braun,* 10.

[111]Ibid., 192.

relaxed and more himself around her. Yet, how much did she know about his political life and decisions? "With Eva ... everything was secretive,"[112] according to American author Glenn Infield. This notion is interesting when one considers Hoffmann's statement that no one in the inner circle knew the true nature of their relationship. It seems that their relationship was just as secretive as Hitler's life outside of the relationship was to Braun. She was forbidden to read the news or listen to the radio.[113] The world for Braun and those living at the Berghof was very much outside of the events going on in the rest of Germany. If they thought about what was happening at all, "it was as prison camps, for criminals."[114] Proximity to Hitler gave her no more knowledge than an average person within the Third Reich. If anything, she may have been aware of less, being forcibly removed from access to mass media.

> Hitler would have imprisoned or even executed anyone who tried to tell Eva the unspeakable truth. The very fact that she was his mistress meant that she, of all people, had to know nothing. How could she be a warm and uncritical solace for him to come home to if she knew what he had done?[115]

It is perfectly sensible that Braun should know nothing of Hitler's dealings politically or the atrocities that he committed in order to be the solace he needed. However, if she knew nothing of Hitler's full picture, how could she ever truly know the man behind the monster?

Braun gave up herself and her life for Hitler.[116] And yet, just as with Hitler, any surviving words that she wrote do not provide an accurate picture of her inner life. While fragments of her

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[112]Glenn B. Infield, *Eva & Adolf,* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap. 1974), 44.

[113]Lambert, *The Lost Life of Eva Braun*, 289.

[114]Ibid., 335.

[115]Ibid., 339.

[116]Ibid., 25.

1935 diary do exist (and have been authenticated), little survives that sheds light on her relationship with Hitler in a meaningful way. The diary is from an early point in their relationship and from before her suicide attempts, after which Hitler changed her living situation and drew her closer to him. With little written record on the matter, we must rely on images, and for Braun, the images she herself took. She was always trying to get good shots of Hitler, as she was one of the few people who could photograph him.[117] "Hitler was always more accommodating toward [Eva and Gretl] than toward Hoffmann or other photographers and they obtained intimate photographs of the *Führer* in relaxed, smiling poses."[118] Lambert argues that Braun captured Hitler's private moments in these photos. She suggests that Hitler allowing Braun to photograph, and even film him, reveals an intimate connection between them and could therefore reveal the private man.

Braun made many short home films with a camera that Hitler bought for her. These films, most often including Hitler, depict many moments on the Berghof, mostly in 1936. These images display the "pictorial fantasy of her life,"[119] according to Lambert. Here, Lambert seems to shift gears to suggest that the images left behind, in fact, reveal very little of the true lives of these people. Instead, she seems to pick up on the notion that "these films show people performing life, not living it."[120] In other words, the films are staged moments showing joy, when the "actors" in the films are anything but joyful or real. By contrast, the documentary *Hitler's Private World* argues that Hitler discarded his public images at the Berghof, and therefore the films Braun shot

[117]Lambert, *The Lost Life of Eva Braun,* 162.

[118]Infield, *Eva & Adolf,* 117.

[119]Lambert, *The Lost Life of Eva Braun,* 174.

[120]Ibid.

depict “insignificant moments ... but [show] a glimpse of the man behind the images.”[121] It also divulges that Hitler and Braun edited the home movies that she made together, all the while emphasizing that the films show his human dimension.[122] This again raises the question of whether or not one can ever get to the root of Hitler’s private self, or if each image is just another layer of his persona; the ever acting man with no true self at the core.

These films do, however, highlight the notion that Hitler kept Braun close to him at the Berghof, and that it became a place where they could be more relaxed when they interacted with one another. Otherwise, even though Braun was almost always with him as their relationship developed, she remained out of sight or was labeled his secretary for trips. Toland records that Braun would enter Hitler’s private rooms through secret doors and hallways so no one would see her. From his sources, most of the inner circle believed their relationship was professional.[123] Hoffmann’s home was one of the few places that they could interact socially just after they were introduced in 1934.[124] By 1939, the Berghof became that safe space.

Private recollections by Hitler’s inner circle place doubt in the notion that anyone close to him knew the real man. Nearly every account mentions the performativity of his nature, or the way he shifted his persona based on the people around him or the situation he found himself in. The evidence suggests more so that he was performing another role, rather than divulging a part of his personal self. Even with Eva Braun, it seems unlikely that he was able to fully be himself. His

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[121]*Hitler’s Private World, Revealed,* Season 5 Episode 3, Directed by David Howard, November 28, 2016.

[122]Ibid.

[123]Toland, *Adolf Hitler*, 534.

[124]Infield, *Eva & Adolf*, 155.

persona was continually shifting, never static. Each person seemed to know only a part of him, a mask that fit the relationship Hitler held with them, nothing more. No person seems to have known all of him. Braun was a place of comfort and solace, away from his public dealings, but it seems she knew very little of his public self. The Berghof was a safe space to relax for Hitler, just as Braun was a person he could ease his soul with. Could understanding the allure of the Obersalzberg for Hitler help to disclose his private self, the "real" Hitler? Does Hitler's true self lie in the analysis of the space of the Berghof, as opposed to his interactions with others? Understanding Hitler's relationship to the Berghof and the Obersalzberg may at least shed light on Hitler's private persona, for it seems that the truth behind Hitler's self lies in his performativity. How did he perform when in his mountain retreat? Is this space where his performance was most like his private self?

III.

The Berghof as Haven of Privacy?

What is difficult about Hitler's connection with his home on the Obersalzberg is the ever changing nature of the home itself. From the time of his first visit in 1932 until 1935, Hitler seemed to be content with the modest trappings of the area. From 1935 on, the property underwent a series of renovations, each one more grand than the last.[125] Hitler drew up the plans for the Berghof himself,[126] suggesting a personal connection with its transformation. According to Konrad Heiden, "The need for size followed him everywhere like a magnified shadow dwarfing his personal stature."[127] Heiden argues that Hitler's preoccupation with monumental size took over in every aspect of his life to the extent that he was lost in the magnitude. Heiden's assessment highlights an interesting question. Can Hitler's person be discovered in the shifting nature of the property from its modest beginnings to the mammoth spectacle of the Berghof? Did Hitler's persona shift as well?

Hitler's first infatuation with the Obersalzberg occurred upon his first visit in 1923 with Dietrich Eckhart. He first stayed at a small hotel, *Pension Moritz*. He loved to wander the mountains and truly enjoyed the simple nature of the area. By 1932, he was renting a "simple country house in Upper Bavarian mountain style, surrounded by a wooden veranda"[128] from a

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[125]Blaine Taylor, *Hitler's Headquarters: From Beer Hall to Bunker, 1920-1945* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2007), 41.

[126]James Wilson, *Hitler's Alpine Retreat,* (Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Books, 2005), 76.

[127]Heiden, *Der Fuehrer,* 356.

[128]Toland, *Adolf Hitler,* 229.

party member, Toland writes. Before he purchased the house, named *Haus Wachenfeld*, in 1933, he rented it for 100 marks a month and put his half-sister, Angela Raubal, in the role of mistress of the house.[129] Guests to *Haus Wachenfeld* remember the villa as modest and Hitler's room as a simple space, with many Karl May[130] novels.[131] In the early days of his love affair with the Obersalzberg, Hitler maintained a modest existence, a place to recharge himself.

Irmgard Hunt, a young child living on the Obersalzberg during the Third Reich, remembers that "the mountain loomed large over every aspect of my childhood in this highly visible and public place."[132] The mountain itself seemed to have an allure all its own. As in *Das blaue Licht (The Blue Light),*[133] Leni Riefenstahl's debut film of 1932, the mountain, a mythical entity in the film, draws one to itself. In this film, young men are lured to the mountain to seek out the blue light created by the crystal cave of Junta, a woman living in the mountain. Each man that seeks out the light dies on his quest to find its source. Junta's lover, Vigo, finds the cave and creates a map, thinking it is best for everyone. When the cave is ravaged, Junta kills herself in despair. Her dreams have been destroyed and she can no longer continue to live. The film ascribes to nature the power to entice and attract. Rentschler argues that "Riefenstahl transforms exterior landscapes into emotional spaces."[134] Fantasy overtakes the physical world and one can project one's own feelings

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[129]Taylor, *Hitler's Headquarters*, 41.

[130]Karl May (1842-1912) was a German writer who was well known for his stories about the American Old West. He is one of the best-selling German authors of all time.

[131]Toland, *Adolf Hitler*, 317.

[132]Irmgard Hunt, *On Hitler's Mountain: Overcoming the Legacy of a Nazi Childhood* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 2.

[133]*Das blaue licht (The Blue Light)*, Directed by Leni Riefenstahl, Germany: UFA, 1932.

[134]Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion*, 32.

onto the physical landscape. For Hitler, the massive and natural landscape of the Obersalzberg mountains embodied everything that he believed was true German tradition. This tradition suggests an inherent notion of communion with the mountain, a place of solace and getting back to nature. One source is the Weimar mountain film (*Bergfilm*) tradition. It highlighted athletes tackling nature, "as souls in touch with a mightier destiny, the call of the mountains."[135] A prime visual example of this tradition is Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer (Wanderer above the Sea of Fog).* It depicts a man standing above the fog with his back turned to the viewer, as if contemplating the fog below. While there have been many interpretations of the painting's meaning, the imagery evokes feelings of sublime communion with the natural landscape, mastery over nature and admiration for the individual on the mountaintop. The mountain caused Hitler to fall for the grandeur of the landscape. He was content (for the time being) to dwell amongst its grandeur and enjoy the simple life it had to offer.

By 1935-6, Hitler's home on the Obersalzberg had become the official summer residence. *Haus Wachenfeld* underwent a total reconstruction at this time. It was enlarged to accommodate space for Braun (who was now mistress of the summer home), as well as diplomatic necessities. Once the reconstruction was complete, the home had become a show place, complete with a new, more dramatic name: the Berghof.[136] Angela Lambert, writing about Eva Braun, provides the following account of the grandiose nature of the Berghof's interior:

> As well as a new wing and basement garage on the east side of the house, in the main house a colossal reception area known as the Great Hall was created, looking like the hall of the Nibelungen and furnished like a commercial traveller's hotel. Huge upholstered sofas and giant armchairs covered in patterned moquette squatted with elephantine immobility. The hall was dominated by the largest window ever

[135]Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion*, 34.

[136]Toland, *Adolf Hitler,* 395.

> made from a single pane of glass, with a view of the Untersberg, Berchtesgaden down in the valley and, on good days, Salzburg. It was rendered yet more grandiose by a marble fireplace, Persian carpets and a Gobelin tapestry.[137]

Haus Wachenfeld was no longer recognizable as a small winter cottage in the mountains of Obersalzberg. These details described by Lambert suggest it had become a fortress, an ever more extravagant home. The need to expand was clear, since Braun was now in residence and more diplomatic meetings were taking place at the Berghof. However, the metamorphosis of the interior space seems to suggest a much greater change in Hitler's mountain retreat. No longer was he able to maintain a simple existence in the alluring world of the mountains. The feeling of the sublime that the lonely wanderer experiences in Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* mentioned above is exchanged here for a different experience. Monumental became the new theme for the Berghof even though it was not meant for public consumption, harkening back to Hitler's notion of leaving structures behind that were unforgettable and impressive. Now, the house was dominated by the Great Hall, which was filled with massive furniture and lavish decor. Behind the monumental interior, through the largest pane of glass made at the time, was the everlasting colossal mountain itself, looming over the monumental addition to its landscape. Hitler commented on the new construction during his table talk on January 16, 1942. He wanted the reconstruction to complement the landscape that surrounded it. According to Hitler's table talk records, Hitler may have even gone so far as to make the home even bigger, were he not worried that it would have stood out against the landscape too much.[138] Still, it is clear that the Berghof was no longer the simple *Haus Wachenfeld*.

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[137]Lambert, *The Lost Life of Eva Braun*, 185-186.

[138]H.R. Trevor-Roper, *Hitler's Table Talk: 1941-44*, (London: Enigma Books, 2000), 161.

Instead, it had become a grand spectacle in which Hitler could entertain guests and meet with dignitaries from other countries. He even installed his own film screen in the Great Hall, concealed behind a tapestry when not in use. The interior space became a shining example of Kracauer's "palaces of distraction."[139] Just as the Berlin theaters, the Berghof's interior design was meant to stimulate and distract from reality. Each element was part of a "total artwork of effects"[140] meant to assault the senses in every way possible. Reality sinks from the three dimensional landscape into the two dimensional illusions of the screen, and one is overtaken by the new reality depicted in the film. Interior design's purpose was to "rivet the audience's attention to the peripheral so that they will not sink into the abyss,"[141] based on Kracauer's analysis. As the quote above states, the space surrounding the film screenings helped the audience to transition into the film and return from its world of illusion more smoothly. The three dimensional landscape of the Berghof could then indeed blend perfectly into the two dimensional illusions of the films watched in Hitler's new retreat.[142]

His relationship to the Berghof, in many ways, was also a tool to provide images to the people of "Hitler, the ordinary man."[143] When Hitler was traveling to Obersalzberg, his arrivals were often announced. As he arrived, crowds followed his car up to the gates around the Berghof, hoping to catch a momentary glimpse of "Good Man Hitler, "[144] Hunt records. The public viewed

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[139]Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction," 91.

[140]Ibid., 92.

[141]Ibid., 94.

[142]Ibid., 92, 95.

[143]Wilson, *Hitler's Alpine Retreat,* 47.

[144]Hunt, *On Hitler's Mountain,* 63-64.

it as his weekend cottage, which were extremely popular at the time. Time spent on the Berghof contributed to the notion that Hitler had a "carefree lifestyle," and that he was "a man in tune with nature."[145] Public viewings of Hitler at the Berghof were encouraged by the government, however, access was restricted to the lower areas of the mountain, so no one could get too close. Hitler now had a space that "created a fictitious private life to fit his public images,"[146] according to historian Cris Whetton.

Again, the question returns to the notion of Hitler as a private man. Was he ever in a space that he could truly be free to seek human desires, or was he still the "reel" Hitler, even in such a private setting? In the quote above, Whetton seems to believe that Hitler carefully crafted his private self in a way that would complement his mammoth public persona. Still, there is something unique about Hitler's relationship to the Berghof that may reveal more about the private Hitler than any other private setting. The intimate nature of the Berghof seems to suggest that this may have been the place in which Hitler might be most likely to suspend or even shed his public persona, and perhaps even truly be himself—if such a thing does exist at all. Does the Berghof hold a connection to his private self, as this was his mountain retreat?

Whetton argues that the Berghof "became an extension of [Hitler's] personality."[147] It seems likely that Whetton has highlighted an important relationship between Hitler's private space and his images. In the early years, Hitler was content to inhabit a small room in a simple cottage and enjoy the natural splendor of the landscape around him. Here, "[Hitler] didn't make you

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[145]Wilson, *Hitler's Alpine Retreat*, 8, 43.

[146]Cris Whetton, *Hitler's Fortune* (Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Books, 2004), 242.

[147]Ibid., 239.

remember all the time that he was the *Führer*. ... [Here] in his *'Landhaus'* he appeared wholly in the becoming guise of an ordinary host, an average man."[148] It seemed that when Hitler was at *Haus Wachenfeld*, he didn't put on airs of the great leader, he could be more of an average man.

Once the Berghof was built, Hitler's mountain retreat truly became "a safe haven, a private world he had created exactly the way he wanted,"[149] according to David Howard's documentary *Hitler's Private World* (part of the British TV series, *Revealed*). Erich Kempka, the chauffeur, recalled that things were rural and peaceful at the Berghof. This place "for Hitler [was] a place where he could really find peace and recuperate without disturbance."[150] Again, even close associates of Hitler argued that the Berghof was a special place for Hitler, where he could be more relaxed, and perhaps truly be himself. Kempka continues by saying: "If Hitler had been asked at that time what spot on the Earth's surface he considered home, I expect he would have said 'the Obersalzberg'."[151] Erich Kempka's understanding of Hitler's relationship to the Berghof paints the picture that Hitler was the most himself on the Obersalzberg, even after the massive renovations of *Haus Wachenfeld* into the Berghof. Hoffmann spent a considerable amount of time at the Berghof and explained that it "was like living in a gilded cage. In contrast to the Chancellery, where everything had a very formal and official air, life in Obersalzberg had a much cozier and more intimate character."[152] Although the Berghof was changing, the space here was still more relaxed

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[148]Toland, *Adolf Hitler*, 317.

[149]*Hitler's Private World, Revealed*.

[150]Kempka, *I Was Hitler's Chauffeur*, 29, 38.

[151]Ibid., 28.

[152]Hoffmann, *Hitler was My Friend*, 185.

and a place that was more like home than the Chancellery, based on Hoffmann's recording of the atmosphere. The intimate nature seems tied to Hitler's relationship to the space as a comfortable solace from the formality and demands of his more public spaces.

Even though it was still a place for Hitler to relax and rejuvenate himself, the new accommodations reflected a shift in his private self. Sir Ian Kershaw highlights this shift most eloquently:

> The greater became the nimbus of the infallible leader, the less of the 'human' Hitler, capable of mistakes and misjudgments, could be allowed on view. The 'person' Hitler was disappearing more and more into the 'role' of the almighty and omniscient Leader.[153]

Maintaining the public persona began to disintegrate the private man, until Hitler seemed to become the role(s) he performed on a daily basis. As a private person, Hitler was becoming emptier the more he "camouflaged his true feelings even to those in his immediate company."[154] The simple, traditional man among the mountains was no longer a part of the modest nature of the Obersalzberg; instead, Hitler's persona, along with his mountain retreat, became more grandiose.

According to Ignatius Pharye, a writer for *Current History*, visiting the Berghof in 1936, "Here and here alone he could 'breathe and think—and live! ... I remember what I was, and what I have yet to do.'"[155] Simply stated, Hitler felt the weight of his public persona was lighter while at the Berghof. He felt light, inspiration and was able to pause for contemplation. A particularly interesting segment of this quote is where Hitler is quoted saying "I remember what I was."[156]

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[153]Sir Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: Hubris 1889-1936*, (London: Allen Lane, 1998), 344.

[154]Ibid., 67.

[155]Ibid., 394.

[156]Toland, *Adolf Hitler*, 435.

Here, it seems that Hitler himself acknowledged his shifting persona. He seems to be aware that the Obersalzberg was the place that allowed him to feel close to what he had been before the change occurred. Hitler himself seemed to believe in the restorative nature of the Obersalzberg for himself. Something about the mountain resonated with whatever existed as the private Hitler. It seems that this place, more than any other, could be key in uncovering the nature of the private Hitler.

It was in this space that Hitler spent his leisure time watching films of his choosing from a list his adjutants would provide for him. Before the Berghof, Hitler did view films at the Reich Chancellery, and sometimes in public theaters. Lieutenant General Hans Baur, Hitler's pilot, argues that Hitler's favorite recreation was watching films, stating: "naturally Hitler had to have some recreation, and film performances were amongst his favorite pleasures."[157] Any time he was at the Reich Chancellery, films were shown in his room. Baur claims that a large number of foreign films were brought in because the German film industry could not produce films quickly enough.[158] Watching nightly film screenings was a part of his routine from early on, however, the film screenings at the Berghof were significant. Howard's documentary states that the Berghof was "where the carefully controlled public image was discarded and he could indulge in some showing off. This, if anywhere, is where they were going to be indiscreet."[159] Here, Howard claims that the Berghof was the most likely place to witness Hitler without his public persona. The Great Hall, in all its splendor, was also its own private theater, as Lambert records: "Behind the dull but valuable tapestry was a hidden screen that could be rolled into place by pressing a button, creating a private

[157]Lieutenant General Hans Baur, *I Was Hitler's Pilot: The Memoirs of Hans Baur* (London: Frontline Books, 2013), 76-77.

[158]Ibid.

[159]*Hitler's Private World, Revealed.*

cinema. Here, Hitler would watch his favorite films."[160] If he is truly so much at home here, and being himself, the tapestry suggests—without resorting to psychoanalysis—that viewing films is something of a private pleasure of a higher order, perhaps a private sanctuary. While the changing space of the Berghof seems to reflect Hitler's shifting persona, camouflaging the film screen itself suggests that his film viewings disclose more intimate reflections of his "true" persona than other elements of his mountain retreat. Resi Langer writes about the experience of attending a film screening at the Berghof in her article, "From Berlin North and Thereabouts." She writes that when the curtain is pulled back, the "sensation created is 'air' ... something more dense, something that takes your breath away."[161] The sensation, according to Langer, overwhelms the viewer. She also refers to the space behind the curtain as "the inner sanctum."[162] The dictionary defines "sanctum" as "a sacred place; a private place from which most people are excluded."[163] Sanctum is equated with something holy; a divine experience. Hitler disguised his film screen behind a tapestry, and in doing so created a space that is set apart from the rest of the space in the room. The tapestry takes the place of the curtain in a picture palace and helps to create the atmosphere of a veritably holy experience. Just as the curtain in the theater, the tapestry is rolled away to display the screen. The atmosphere changes, consuming the viewer in an experience of a higher order. Viewers are exalted above the realities of the everyday and are elevated to the utopia that this space

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[160]Lambert, *The Lost Life of Eva Braun*, 185-186.

[161]Resi Langer, "From Berlin North and Thereabouts," in *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory, 1907-1933,* ed. Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael Cowan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 162.

[162]Ibid., 162.

[163]Oxford. "Sanctum," accessed January 21, 2020, https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/sanctum.

offers. Hitler recreated this space within his mountain retreat; a place where he could feel comfortable and allow himself to be given over to the experience of film. Giving himself over implies relinquishing control—this is a time when one is not really in charge. Could this be where his "true persona" rests—one who is "given over to the experience of film," i.e. to the sights and sounds of cinema? This place also exemplifies the definition of sanctum as a place where not many people were permitted to enter. It was an exclusive space, with only the most trusted companions to experience the moment with.

Do the films Hitler watched at the Berghof provide yet another image of "Hitler, the Man of the People," or do they reveal the man behind the images? Hitler watched films for leisure primarily at the Berghof, far from public view. This information has survived in the current research merely as a footnote, or a passing mention. Initial sources about his film viewings at the Berghof were limited to personal accounts by those who were intimates of Hitler, some of which were first recorded as part of interrogations after the fall of Berlin. As time wore on, various personal accounts of Hitler's entourage were published, although long after the actual events took place. Biographers highlighted a few mentions of Hitler's preferences in film from Goebbels' diaries, among other sources. With his "innermost circle of persons before whom he dropped the airs of the great man [Hitler was himself, and often] invited his guests to watch movies," according to Fest.[164] Among his closest associates, in the moments in front of the hidden screen, Hitler could share in the collective experience of film. Here, he could give himself over to the allure of the two dimensional fantasy world without concern for the persona he carefully upheld throughout the rest

[164]Fest, *Hitler*, 525.

of the day. Therefore, it is worth examining what some of his closest associates recall about Hitler in these most intimate moments, as well as their recollections of the films shown.

Prior to the ownership and construction of his Obersalzberg home, Hitler attended film viewings in various locations. Early records of Hitler's film viewings during the 1920s and 1930s often reveal conflicting accounts, and tend to accentuate his infatuation with Hollywood films. Hanfstaengl states that Hitler was known to go to the cinema for light relief when things were too overwhelming. He even claims that Hitler would put off important business to attend a film, even in the early days of the Nazi party. *Fredericus Rex* is the only film he mentions that Hitler saw in 1923, and he writes that Hitler was impressed by the film, admiring the message that "great deeds require harsh methods."[165] Hanisch claims that Hitler saw *Der Tunnel (The Tunnel)*, by Bernhard Kellermann, and was overwhelmed by it.[166] Luis Trenker's *Berge in Flammen (Mountain in Flames)* was another early film Hitler watched in 1931. At the time, he proclaimed that Trenker was the greatest director in Germany, although he later lost interest in his films.[167] He was also known to like Leni Riefenstahl's early films[168]—and she did indeed make some of the most foundational films of the Third Reich. Although Hitler's associates record varying experiences, the records claim that Hitler enjoyed light entertainment, and seemed to enjoy more German films early on. It also seems that he was content to view films in public theaters. In the 1920s and early 1930s, Hitler was only beginning to develop his mammoth public persona, and his home on the

[165]Hanfstaengl, *Hitler: The Missing Years*, 79.

[166]Fest, *Hitler*, 52.

[167]Infield, *Eva & Adolf*, 120-121.

[168]Ibid., 128.

Obersalzberg was brand new to him. It makes perfect sense that his behaviors would be more relaxed and open. As the years wore on, he became more withdrawn, and his private time more heavily guarded.

Both at the Reich Chancellery and the Berghof, there were nightly film screenings when Hitler was in residence. Everyone, including the staff, was invited to watch together. The inner circle at the Reich Chancellery (and later the Berghof) "were unquestioningly devoted to him and sufficiently familiar, hence enabling him to relax and behave rather casually."[169] Hitler was "captivated by the images on the screen."[170] Toland writes that Hitler watched the 1939 German film, *A Hopeless Case* at the Chancellery.[171] With so few accountings specific to film viewings at the Chancellery, one must conclude that the Berghof was the primary location for Hitler to view films.

The Berghof evenings would almost always include a nightly film, chosen from a list provided to Hitler by his adjutants. According to the early records, some of the films that Hitler watched at the Berghof weren't available in the public cinemas in Germany. Fest claims that Hitler preferred social comedies and foreign films.[172] Toland argues that he preferred French films, claiming that they were the best at showing the petit bourgeois in a faithful manner.[173] *King Kong* was a favorite Hollywood film, according to Hanfstaengl. He was fascinated by the film, watched

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[169]Alt, "The Dictator as Spectator," 422.

[170]Ben Urwand, *The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact with Hitler* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 10.

[171]Toland, *Adolf Hitler*, 515.

[172]Fest, *Hitler*, 525.

[173]Toland, *Adolf Hitler*, 391.

it two or three times, and talked about it for days afterward.[174] He also saw another Hollywood film, *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* three times, according to Toland. Lambert also agrees that Hitler saw *King Kong* and *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer.* Her account also records that he watched Hollywood's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,* as well as Weimar creation, *Metropolis.* She argues that he loved Marlene Dietrich's films.[175] Another one of his favorite actresses was Greta Garbo.[176]

Speer characterizes Hitler's film showings with the inner circle as harmless entertainment. He claims:

> Everything featuring [Emil] Jannings and [Heinz] Rühmann, Henny Porten, Lily Dagover, Olga Tschechowa, Zarah Leander and Jenny Jugo, had to be supplied immediately. Revue films with lots of bare legs could be assured of his applause. We often saw foreign pictures, also those that were withheld from the German public. Sports and mountaineering films were almost completely missing, and also animal or landscape documentaries or informative films of foreign countries were never shown. Also, he didn't have any appreciation of *Groteskfilme* which I loved then, e.g. starring Buster Keaton or even Charlie Chaplin. The German pictures did not suffice to supply the two films required each day. Therefore, many were shown twice or more often, conspicuously never those with tragic plots but mostly lavish productions and those featuring his favorite actors.[177]

As Speer states, Hitler seemed to focus on films with human figures, which could tell us that he was interested in how human acting could convey content on screen, maybe even as a way to better understand his own performances. Speer claims that revue films were among those watched most frequently. Also, Speer records that Hitler spent little time on sports, mountaineering, animal,

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[174]Fest, *Hitler*, 221. Kershaw also notes this. Kershaw, *Hitler: Hubris, 1889-1936*, 485.

[175]He particularly liked to see her legs, based on Lambert's account. Lambert, *The Lost Life of Eva Braun*, 186, 192.

[176]Toland, *Adolf Hitler*, 391.

[177]Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 49.

or documentary films. The primary source records support the notion that Hitler's private film viewings were typically whimsical and meant for pure entertainment. He spent almost no time watching any serious or educational films.

My hypothesis is that the films Hitler watched privately at the Berghof were times spent in a heightened state of intimacy that Hitler rarely participated in otherwise. As mentioned above, Hitler recreated the "inner sanctum" of the theater at the Berghof, disguising his film screen behind a tapestry. In doing so, he created a sanctuary for himself and a select group of associates. His sanctuary was the place he chose to watch films, seemingly relinquishing control while viewing. This thesis aims to take the films he watched in this space seriously for what they are in order to better understand Hitler's private persona and how he may have been impacted by them. As the Berghof was the space that Hitler considered his home and the location of his sanctuary, his chosen activities in this space could provide greater insight into the characteristics of his private persona. Again, could this be where his "true persona" lies, within the time in which he relinquishes control and gives himself over to the experience of film?

IV.

Hitler's Film Choices and Analysis

When at the Berghof, Hitler spent nearly every evening watching films. Early scholarship on the topic of Hitler's film preferences provides a small list of films he watched. While the majority of this information derives from members of the inner circle attending his film screenings, the accounts rarely agree on which films were shown, how often films were screened and which ones Hitler preferred. Most outline a few popular German films from the time, as well as main titles from Hollywood releases. Recent scholarship has illuminated the topic in a much more profound way. Now, one can assess primary source material that has survived to gain a deeper understanding of Hitler's personal reactions to film, both foreign and domestic.

From the adjutants' records and Goebbels' diaries, Dirk Alt compiled a list of 76 domestic and 19 foreign films that Hitler watched from 1933-1939. It is not a comprehensive list of every film he ever watched, as Goebbels was not present for every viewing and the adjutants' records are incomplete. However, the surviving adjutants' records and Goebbels' diaries provide a glimpse into Hitler's choices and reactions to films, both foreign and domestic. While we cannot completely discount earlier records from the members of the inner circle that claim he watched certain popular American films mentioned above, nothing in the adjutants' records exist to corroborate those particular viewings.

Despite the commonly held view that Hitler frequently enjoyed watching American films like *King Kong*, *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* and cartoons with Mickey Mouse, there is nothing

in the adjutants' records or Goebbels' diaries to suggest that Hitler did. Goebbels does mention giving Hitler a set of Mickey Mouse cartoons for his birthday; however, there is no record that he ever watched them. There is also no mention of the Hollywood film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*[178] or UFA's *Metropolis* in the adjutants' records. Although Toland records that Hitler enjoyed French films most, there are only a couple listed in the primary sources (one of which is *Confessions of a Cheat* [*Le roman d'un tricheur*][179]). He seems to have spent most of his time watching domestic films. When his choices did venture to foreign options, Hitler most often chose American films, according to Dirk Alt's research further discussed below. Films such as *Gabriel over the White House*[180] (US), *Camille*[181] (US), *Marie Antoinette*[182] (US), *Dubarry* (UK), as well as Laurel and Hardy films *Block-Heads*[183] (US) and *Way out West*[184] (US) are among the 19 foreign films in the adjutants' records.[185]

Hitler's domestic film choices primarily consisted of comedies and revue films, among other forms of light entertainment. The surviving records indicate that he also watched a few crime films, as well as a handful of period films, adventure films, and military films. The majority of the comedies and revue films he watched found favor with Hitler. He often commented that the acting

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[178]*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, directed by William Cottrell, USA: Walt Disney Productions, 1937.

[179]Alt, "The Dictator as Spectator," Appendix 2.

[180]*Gabriel Over the White House*, directed by Gregory La Cava, USA: MGM, 1933.

[181]*Camille*, directed by George Cukor, USA: MGM, 1936.

[182]*Marie Antoinette*, directed by W.S. Van Dyke, USA: MGM, 1938.

[183]*Block-Heads*, directed by John G. Blystone, USA: Hal Roach Studios, 1938.

[184]*Way Out West*, directed by James W. Horne, USA: Hal Roach Studios, 1937.

[185]Alt, "The Dictator as Spectator," Appendix 2.

was very fine. He seems to have favored Jenny Jugo and Heinz Rühmann as actors. A selection of these films sparked more intense reactions from the *Führer*. He did not seem to enjoy films such as *Abel mit der Mundharmonika (Abel with the Harmonica), Prinzessin Sissy (Princess Sissy),* and *Was tun Sybille? (What should we do, Sybille?),* in which women and young girls find themselves in distress. He showered praise about the 1937 release of *Der zerbrochene Krug (The Broken Jug),* starring Emil Jannings. Although he did enjoy most Rühmann films, he labeled *Nanu, Sie kennen Korff noch nicht? (What, you don't know Korff yet?)* the "worst Rühmann film ever." In the film, Rühmann plays a German artist, Korff, who becomes the target of two American criminals.[186] It is possible that Hitler thought this film was so terrible because two Americans have gotten the better of a German, although the adjutants' records record only his response without an explanation.

While Hitler did not watch as many, melodramas seemed to have a much deeper impact on him. Thirteen films are listed in the surviving records surveyed by Dirk Alt and out of those, nearly everyone gained a positive response from Hitler. Nearly half of them seemed to affect Hitler much more profoundly than basic responses of "fine" or "fine acting." *Der Schimmelreiter (The Rider on the White Horse)* is a 1933 film about a dykemaster who sacrifices himself to save a town during a storm. Goebbels recorded in his diary: "We are all delighted. Especially the *Führer* himself."[187] This is not surprising, considering the Nazi emphasis on sacrifice for the good of the Fatherland and the glorification of the hero and heroic death. Luis Trenker's 1934 film, *Der verlorene Sohn (The Prodigal Son)* was recorded by Goebbels as a film that Hitler was "enthusiastic"[188] about. In

[186]Alt, "The Dictator as Spectator," Appendix 1.

[187]Ibid.

[188]Ibid.

this film, a young lumberjack heads to America, leaving his homeland behind. He is met with destitution and returns to his homeland in the end. Hitler's enthusiastic reaction to the film makes perfect sense. His belief in uniting and purifying the Aryan race lends itself to the plot of *The Prodigal Son* perfectly. Beginning in 1938, Hitler instituted *Heim ins Reich*, "Home into the Reich," a policy that attempted to get "ethnic Germans" who, as a result of the Versailles treaty, lived outside the German Reich to join their "home" via annexation. This manifesto bears a striking resemblance to Trenker's storyline.

Besides Rühmann, Emil Jannings also appears to be a favored actor. He stars in *Traumulus* in 1935, and Hitler is "enraptured"[189] by the performance. Jannings plays Professor Niemeyer in this school drama. His students call him *Traumulus* (the dreamer) due to his unworldly character. Hitler's infatuation with the film may be purely due to his admiration of Emil Jannings; however, the definition of "unworldly" seems worth considering. Unworldly is defined as "not of this world; unearthly; spiritual; not swayed by mundane consideration."[190] In 1937, Jannings also stars in *Der Herrscher (The Patriarch)*, in which he is a tycoon whose life and career are in danger after a family conspiracy. Goebbels recorded that the "*Führer* is deeply moved. It leaves the deepest impression. Above all, its milieu description."[191] This film in particular brings to mind the various threats to Hitler's career from both family members and close associates of his throughout his rise to power. He may have been so moved by the film because the situation was all too familiar to him

[189]Alt, "The Dictator as Spectator," Appendix 1.

[190]Merriam Webster. "Unworldly," accessed January 14, 2020, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/unworldly.

[191]Alt, "The Dictator as Spectator," Appendix 1.

personally. The scandal involving Geli Raubal[192] and her death, associations with Ernst Röhm, among other conspiracies circulating around him, may have allowed Hitler to view himself as the tycoon in this film. Hitler also watched *Heimat (Homeland)* in 1938. This film shows Zarah Leander as a singer who left home after a family dispute, returning to her home and reuniting with her family. Hitler thought she gave a "very fine performance," and seemed to be pleased with the film.[193] As this film is about returning to one's homeland, it is easy to understand why Hitler's response would be so positive. The Nazis encouraged and often enforced the returning of Germans (and others) to their rightful "homeland" for the strength and greater livelihood of the nation through *Heim ins Reich*, as mentioned above. A film that exemplifies this policy would, of course, be a shining example of Nazi ideology on the matter.

Military films were another topic that Hitler enjoyed more frequently. The numbers of these films in the surviving records are much smaller compared to the other domestic films he watched. However, there were a few that left a deep impression on him. *Patrioten (Patriots)*, released in 1937, tells the story of a German pilot in WWI who is shot down and cared for by a traveling

[192]Angela Maria "Geli" Raubal was Hitler's niece, the daughter of his half-sister Angela Raubal. She was first in contact with her uncle when her mother became the housekeeper of *Haus Wachenfeld* (1928), and later the Berghof. Geli Raubal became very close to her uncle, moving into his Munich apartment in 1929 to pursue her education. Hitler maintained strict control over her movements, associations with others and decisions concerning her future. She accompanied him on many outings. On September 18, 1931, Hitler and Geli Raubal argued about her intent to leave for Vienna (for singing training and/or to marry a young man there, sources conflict on the reason) and Hitler refused to let her leave. He left for a meeting in Nuremberg; however, he returned the following day with the news that Raubal had a gunshot wound to the lung and had since died of her injuries. She had apparently shot herself with her uncle's pistol. Although the police ruled her death a suicide, rumors circulated about abuse, sexual relations between the two, and even murder. Otto Strasser was a political opponent of Hitler and became the greatest proponent of the rumors. Hitler was intensely depressed, went into seclusion, and left her room at the Berghof as a shrine to Raubal for the rest of his days.

[193]Alt, "The Dictator as Spectator," Appendix 1.

theater company in France. Goebbels writes: "The *Führer* liked the film '*Patrioten'*," and "*Führer* swoons over '*Patrioten*' and [Lida] Baarova's acting."[194] Of course, Hitler enjoyed the film because he enjoyed Lida Baarova, but the plot involving WWI may have been another factor. Hitler thought of his own service in the Great War fondly, so seeing it depicted on screen would have reinvigorated his nostalgia. Gustav Ucicky's 1933 film, *Flüchtlinge (Refugees),* is a war drama in which the character played by Hans Albers leads a group of German refugees to safety. It made a deep impression on Hitler, according to Goebbels. His impression could be connected to the notion of *Heim ins Reich* mentioned above. The visual representation of a main character leading Germans back to their homeland must have been thrilling to the future enactor of the *Heim ins Reich* manifesto. A similar film, *Der Rebell (The Rebel)* by Luis Trenker depicts the historical account of a South Tyrolean partisan fighting Napoleonic troops that have occupied his homeland. Although many of Trenker's films found favor with Hitler, this film was recorded by Goebbels: "We are all reeling from this film ... Hitler is hooked."[195] Again, the topic of this film is the defense of the homeland, which was a topic near and dear to Hitler. Another consideration is the final sequence of the film, showing the rebel and two fellow fighters executed by firing squad. The camera pauses over the bodies of the three men to drive home the fact that they have been killed defending their homeland. As reality sinks in, we see an ethereal image of the rebel rising, brandishing his flag. The camera closes in on the sweat covered brow of the rebel, and the screen widens to show his fellow fighters standing with him, continuing the march forward to a rousing patriotic song. Films like *Triumph of the Will* and *Hitler Youth Quex* also emphasize the Third

[194]Alt, "The Dictator as Spectator," Appendix 1.

[195]Ibid.

Reich's veneration of those who have sacrificed themselves for the Reich. *Hitler Youth Quex* ends with the image of a dead child dissolving into an image of a flag and of marching soldiers, essentially instrumentalizing his death for political purposes. These films, among others, glorify those who have died, and urges those that are still living to take up their cause and continue on. The dead, along with the living, continue the eternal struggle for all time.

Foreign films were very often mentioned by the members of Hitler's inner circle as the most frequent choice for his nightly film screenings. But the popular notion that Hitler devoured Hollywood films, especially those banned by the censors for the German public, doesn't seem to hold up in light of the primary sources now available. Only 19 foreign films were listed in the primary records. Of those 19, at least 13 were US films, so it does seem that Hollywood films were the favored choice of foreign options available. However, 11 of those 13 were either discontinued or were deemed unsatisfactory by Hitler for one reason or another.[196] It is curious that these records list such negative responses to Hollywood films when the popular notion has been that he greatly admired Hollywood films and often watched some of his favorites frequently.

As discussed earlier, most mentions of Hitler's film preferences in early source material (the inner circle) claim that he was most intrigued by Hollywood films, therefore I would like to test that notion against the primary source records now available. Dirk Alt compiled the list from the primary sources, but did little to confirm or refute, in any real sense, biographical records from their inner circle that served as the only record before the primary sources were made available to researchers. I intend to use the primary sources to establish the credibility of the biographical sources, if possible. My analysis will include a selection of US films Hitler watched from

[196]Alt, "The Dictator as Spectator," Appendix 2.

1933-1938. The scope of this thesis must be narrowed to a small subset of Hitler's film preferences in order to devote more time to in depth film analysis, as well as historical analysis. These chosen films can be viewed as case studies from which broader extrapolations can be made. I have chosen 4 films from those that survived in adjutants' records with notes on Hitler's reactions. These films span both serious topics and light, comedic entertainment, as well as provide content from an array of years up to 1939. Once the country was engulfed in war (1939), Hitler refused to return to the Berghof, claiming that "the people would not understand it, and indeed resent it."[197]

My research will be based on the following films that Hitler watched privately:

1933 *Gabriel over the White House (Zwischen heut und morgen)*, Gregory La Cava, MGM

1936 *Camille (Die Kameliendame)*, George Cukor, MGM

1937 *Way out West (Ritter ohne Furcht und Tadel)*, James W. Horne, Hal Roach, MGM

1938 *Block-Heads*, John G. Blystone, Hal Roach, MGM

Gabriel over the White House

On April 16, 1934, Hitler watched *Gabriel over the White House*. Goebbels recorded that the "*Führer* didn't really like it. To him, it is too theoretical and too modern." The film is a dystopia about a benevolent dictator. It premieres in 1933 when in Europe, Hitler has recently become Chancellor of Germany, the Reichstag burned,[198] and the Enabling Acts passed in March. In the

[197]H.R. Trevor-Roper, ed. *The Bormann Letters: The Private Correspondence between Martin Bormann and His Wife from January 1943 to April 1945 (*London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1954), 130.

[198]On February 27, 1933, the Reichstag was set on fire. Although it was blamed on communist sympathizers, it was most likely a scheme carried out by the Nazis themselves as a way to gain further power in the government. As a result, Hitler drew up the Reichstag Fire Decree

US, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt is at the helm of the US executive. At first glance, one may assume that the film—about the US—is responding to a purely German issue. This is particularly true when one considers that Hitler's Enabling Acts, providing him with the full power of the government, went into effect at virtually the same time as this film premiered. However, the argument could be made that this film sheds light on an international issue, as there were more than 20 countries (such as Belgium, Canada, Ireland, Hungary, United Kingdom, USA and of course, Germany and Italy) with fascist movements by the time the film was released. There is also a possibility that the film highlights fascism within the US itself. Fascist groups in America were highly influential at this time, including the very public group, the German American Bund. This group was established in 1936 and was a pro-Nazi organization with the goal to promote positive views about Nazi Germany. The GAB even followed the German policies of indoctrinating the young through social groups and youth camps. Another group, the Hollywood Hussars, was founded by Arthur Guy Empey[199] in 1935. It was a paramilitary group with fascist leanings that claimed members like Gary Cooper,[200] Ward Bond[201] and Victor McLangen.[202] The purpose of the group was to participate in civic affairs in order to advance American ideals. Empey made himself

(officially titled Decree for the Protection of the People and the State), which revoked freedom of speech, assembly, and press, among other constitutional liberties in Germany.

[199]Arthur Guy Empey (1883-1963) was an American soldier. He was also an actor and filmmaker, aside from his association with the Hollywood Hussars mentioned above.

[200]Gary Cooper (1901-1961) was an American actor from 1925 until his death. He starred in 84 films, including *A Farewell to Arms* (1932) and *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935).

[201]Ward Bond (1903-1960) was an American film and TV actor who appeared in more than 200 films. He is most known for his role in *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), as Bert, the cop.

[202]Victor McLangen (1886-1959) was a British-American film actor, most known for his roles in westerns. He played roles in films with John Wayne and John Ford.

Colonel of the militia unit, which was equipped with intelligence, police, and medical units as well as dispatch teams. The group had resources to support any emergency (including communist threats), although the official charter forbade their involvement in labor disputes. William Randolph Hearst[203] was never established as a contributor, however there were continual rumors that he was a financial source for the group.[204]

Gabriel over the White House is set in the 1930s, upon the election of Jud Hammond as the President of the United States. At first, Hammond seems to be in office in order to fulfill the party's wishes during his term in office. However, when he is gravely injured in a car accident, something changes. The film alludes to the notion that his failing body is inhabited by the Angel Gabriel while he is recovering. Henceforth, Hammond seeks to solve all of the nation's ills. In doing so, he forces the government to concede its authority to him, rather than utilize the government systems already in place. Once the domestic issues have been taken care of, Hammond turns his attention to foreign relations, arguing that the problems of the world derive from the perceived need for weapons and war to protect one's nation. As the film ends, Hammond has solved all of America's problems, including bank failures, racketeering, and unemployment.

Introductory Sequence

The introductory credits and opening sequence premiered in April 1934 are eerily prefigures of Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (shot in November 1934, premiered in 1935) intro.

[203]William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951) was an American businessman and politician. He also founded Hearst Communications, the largest newspaper chain in the US. His practices encouraged more sensationalist journalism.

[204]Donald T. Critchlow, *When Hollywood Was Right: How Movie Stars, Studio Moguls, and Big Business Remade American Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Gabriel begins with an image of the White House with angels sounding trumpets above. The title is immediately explained, and the film is given an ethereal quality. Triumphant music continues as there is a wipe from the White House to the image of the Capitol as Hammond is elected. The camera tilts down to the carriage that takes Hammond to the White House through the crowds. *Triumph* begins with patriotic music as the camera pauses on the Nazi eagle and swastika, before dissolving to the view out of the cockpit window, above the clouds. Then, the view from the cockpit descends through the barrier of the clouds to the sky above Nuremberg. History is on the side of the leaders in both films. In *Gabriel,* the camera pauses over the White House, invoking nostalgia for the greatness of America's past leadership. The camera in *Triumph* floats about the city of Nuremberg, taking in every inch of its historic buildings in order to infuse the Third Reich (and Hitler) with the blessings of the Germanic past.

Another parallel is the progression through the city in each film. Both leaders are proceeding through their historic city for the first time in the films. In the motorcade sequence of *Triumph*, Hitler's image is intercut with shots of the adulating crowd, essentially creating a visual back-and-forth. The crowds are overcome with joy and celebration upon seeing Hitler; he is animating the crowd. Here, the shots of Hammond in the carriage remain unanswered; no spontaneous happiness seems to burst forth from the crowds. The crowds shown (either in close-up or in long shots) are silent, barely visible under the sea of umbrellas as the rain comes down upon the entire spectacle. This suggests that Hammond has no control over the emotions of the people, regardless of the multitudes that have turned out to view the new President.

Meeting the Correspondents

In the scene at 0:09:46, the newly elected president, Hammond, first meets the White House correspondents. The way the sequence is shot film formally is powerful. The camera lines up behind the correspondents, taking up an analytical position—both partaking of the correspondents' outfit and yet somewhat removed from it, as if to maintain equidistance and a critical stance. When Mr. Thiessen is called upon to pose a question, the camera, which so far has been observing as a third party, suddenly takes up the president's viewpoint, making Thiessen effectively face the camera and look into it directly. The camera takes Thiessen (and his question/stance) most seriously. With Thiessen's breaking of the 4th wall, the viewers are directly addressed: the problem of the unemployed becomes their problem, too. In effect, the use of film form in this sequence makes social issues—such as bootlegging, racketeering, unemployment, etc., which the president has been relegating to problems that have to be dealt with on a local level—into paramount concerns. Unlike the president, the camera does not dismiss these concerns; it takes them seriously.

After most journalists leave the room, Thiessen stays on, dumbfounded, unable and unwilling to accept the president's explanation, according to which America has weathered past crises well and will do so again. The invocation of a nostalgia, of a return to a time prior to the crisis—rather than the focus on how the crisis might be resolved—does not convince Thiessen. The camera chooses to remain with Thiessen, rather than follow the rest of the journalists out. It is unsatisfied with the canned rhetoric the others accept so easily.

Early in its history, cinema as a new medium often felt the need to position itself vis-à-vis older media, such as the written medium of journalism or even radio. Here, two kinds of media—good journalism and cinema—are aligned in their interests. Cinema thus both gives voice

to, and amplifies, the scrutiny sound journalism brings to executive actions and discourse. And by the camera's lingering on incredulous Thiessen, cinema also takes sides; it steps out of neutrality to become partial, interested and invested. Highlighting Thiessen's disgust at Hammond's response draws the audience into the discussion and encourages them to support the film's focus on social concerns, such as unemployment and racketeering.

Radio Broadcast

0:12:40—A radio sounds in the background, discussing the deadly seriousness of a starving, unemployed, bitter populace hoping to find merciful ears, while the president and his nephew are in the foreground. There is an extremely long take where the radio and the chatter of the relatives goes on in parallel. Neither the radio, nor the president relinquishes, and the camera remains steadfast as well. The take is only interrupted once by an entering aide, with the cut to the aide seeming almost like a cry for help. When the aide enters, the camera moves in for a close-up, almost pleading with the aide to start paying attention to the open message to the president. Instead, the aide is quickly dismissed. Two different kinds of discourses battling for importance in the sequence continues until 0:18:20. Extreme discomfort derived from the two opposing discourses—the sweet banter with an innocent child versus the serious radio message—does not abate. The camera does not give in to a cut; doing so would release the tension that is building up. Instead, it holds its attention throughout, to take in the double action and to accentuate thus the discord between the need to have a responsible man in the White House and the stark reality of a man given to distractions with his nephew, away from the urgent needs of America. At this point in the film, a man that the camera has never shown speaks with greater concern for the needs of the

citizens than the man depicted, distracted from his role as leader of the population in order to participate in play-acting with his nephew. Without any explicit judgment or voiceover, the masterful use of film form here emphasizes the wrong priorities of the man entrusted with the utmost responsibility: to heed the ludic whims of a child, over the life-and-death needs of an entire population.

Ending Sequence

In the final minutes of the film, President Hammond gets all nations to sign the Washington Covenant, creating world peace. As he signs the Covenant himself, the camera pauses over his labored movements. Afterwards, he collapses. He is carried out of the room, as if by pallbearers at a funeral, and the camera captures an angelic light setting him apart from the people around him. It suggests that he is visited again by the divine. The camera shows next a bust of George Washington alongside Hammond as he is placed on a lounge couch in his office. It quickly tilts up to a bust of George Washington above him, and then back to Hammond, equating his actions with the ideals of the Founding Fathers. He has solved the problems that have plagued America since its inception, from his perspective at least. However, to the discerning camera, the reference to George Washington's bust is done with irony—that while Hammond seems to believe he is the equivalent of the modern Washington, the utopian ideals of Washington and the Founding Fathers about freedom are expressly denied in Jud Hammond. Although Hammond believes he has brought to fruition the dreams of the Founding Fathers, there is an incredible tension here. In the shot beginning at 1:20:53 and going on until 1:21:26, the film emphasizes identity and tension simultaneously by showing the bust of George Washington in the background and Hammond in

the foreground. Using film form, this shot creates a great deal of ambiguity, leaving the viewer unable to discern which view of Hammond is the correct one.

When his secretary comes to his side, the camera focuses on her face and there is a cut to Hammond himself. Images cut back and forth between them, emphasizing the renewed closeness between them. He seems to recognize her again and asks if he has met her approval. She responds by saying that he is one of the greatest men that has ever lived, which harkens back to the camera's suggestion of his place in history just moments before. Then, there is a cut to the window where the curtain flutters, soaked in light. After a cut back to the two characters, the music goes from dark to peaceful. After another cut, the camera takes up a perspective that includes all three—the curtain and the 2 characters. When the camera returns to Jud, it closes in on him as he turns his face and is gone. As he passes, the music plays "The Truth is Marching On." There is a cut to the exterior of the White House, showing the flags at half mast as the announcement is made that the president is dead. The use of light and other film formal elements such as the use of foreground and background make the departure of the divine all the more powerful. Film form also increases the emphasis on the tension that arises from the juxtaposition of Hammond to George Washington and the ideals he represents, which Hammond seems to defy.

Hitler's Judgment

In the context of the Berghof viewings, this type of main character could not resonate with Hitler, as he was much more than a figurehead for the party. Although the image of the *Führer* was more dominant than his true self, Hitler was equated with Germany itself. He was not just the party or a puppet of the party. At the Nuremberg Party Congress shown in *Triumph*, Hess says: "The

Party is Hitler's but Germany is Hitler's and Hitler is Germany's" ("Die Partei ist Hitler, aber Deutschland ist Hitler und Hitler ist Deutschland").[205] In other words, according to Hess, Hitler is not just a party leader, he is in control of every aspect of German life—Hitler is everything. And indeed, Hitler did control every aspect of his party, and his country. Initially, Hammond is just the person in office, he has no real power at the beginning of the film. Once inhabited by Gabriel, Hammond takes the power of the Presidency, and goes so far as to invoke emergency powers. Hitler did the same when he took control of Germany using the Enabling Acts in 1933.

One segment that Hitler may not have enjoyed is the carriage ride through the capitol after Hammond is elected. As mentioned above, Hitler's motorcade in *Triumph of the Will* is infused with his godlike authority over a joyful and thankful citizenry. He is celebrated by everyone depicted in the film. In contrast, Hammond parades through the capitol with no one to cheer for him. There is a single shot of the crowds at 0:01:54, but it rains, everyone has an umbrella, and there is no exaltation or cheer at all. In fact, people are facing away from the camera, which seems odd as it suggests that the motorcade has already passed. The camera's treatment of this sequence suggests that Hammond has no effect on his people, they are completely disconnected. Hitler's screening of the film took place in April 1934, and in September of the same year, the Nazi Party Congress takes place in Nuremberg. There, Riefenstahl's filming included the famous motorcade sequence discussed above where the mutuality of the gaze—Hitler to the people, they to Hitler—is so masterfully shown. Hitler's reaction to the film seems to show that ultimately, he could not identify with Hammond's character.

[205] *Triumph of the Will*, directed by Leni Riefenstahl.

There are many parallels to Hitler within the film. Hammond takes control by legal means, plans to repair all of America's problems and destroys the "enemies" of the state by firing squads without proper prosecution. Hammond does everything with the utmost transparency and does not apologize for it. Hitler could not relate to the main character in a way that allowed him to become enraptured and caught up in the spectacle of the film. The ambiguity of the film—i.e. the fact that the film seems to be both praising Gabriel and also concurrently morally judging him—made it unrelatable to Hitler.

Hitler believed the film was "too theoretical, too modern"[206] also. *Gabriel Over the White House* provides no simple answers or takeaways. Instead, it leaves too much ambiguity. There is no straightforward denouncement of Hammond's actions, only indirection. Contrary to Goebbels' views that meanings could be conveyed through subtlety and nuance, Hitler disliked subtle messages. According to Rentschler, Goebbels favored the orchestra principle; the notion that propaganda could speak in multiple voices that are in harmony with one another, rather than speaking through one clear voice.[207] Hitler, on the other hand, appreciated messages that were clear. His feeling that the film was more theoretical than he liked could derive from his proclivity for clear messages. *Gabriel* ends in a rather ambiguous way, leaving the audience to question whether the film celebrates or decries the benevolent fascist's takeover.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this film is the timing of Hitler's viewing. Hitler watched the film on April 16, 1934, as previously stated. Later that same year, from September 5-10, Hitler attended and filmed the 1934 Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg. More specifically,

[206]Alt, "The Dictator as Spectator," Appendix 2.

[207]Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion*, 20.

Riefenstahl films Hitler's motorcade sequence much more effectively and mesmerizingly than the similar sequence in *Gabriel*. This, of course, becomes the footage for *Triumph of the Will*, arguably the greatest and most widely disseminated example of Nazi imagery produced. Nearly six months prior to the Nuremberg rally, Hitler sat in front of a screen depicting a divinely inhabited dictator raising America from the Depression in a way that was never really thought possible. When *Triumph* is released, its opening sequences invoke the divine, making suggestions throughout the film that Hitler's rule is blessed by the divine, even that he is divine himself. Hitler may not have enjoyed that Gabriel ends without an explicit judgement on Hammond's actions; however, it seems that this film could have inspired a portion of the film that defines Nazi imagery, even into modern day.

Camille

MGM premiered *Camille* on December 12, 1936. This is also the year of the Berlin Olympics, in which Jesse Owens[208] dominates the competition, upsetting Hitler and the Nazis' claims of racial superiority. *Camille* is a romantic drama set in Paris and the French countryside. It was well received in the US and is cited as one of Greta Garbo's greatest performances. Hitler watched the film on January 24, 1937. Goebbels recorded the following: "We are stunned and moved in the deepest part. One is not ashamed of tears.... The *Führer* is enthusiastic. He thinks that an inaccurate male cast can ruin a great female lead. This film is completely flawless."[209]

[208]Jesse Owens (1913-1980) was an African American track and field athlete in the 1936 Olympics. He won four gold medals—100m, 200m, 100m relay and the long jump. He also broke nine Olympic records and set three world records.

[209]Alt, "The Dictator as Spectator," Appendix 2.

Camille depicts a young woman, Marguerite, who is financially dependent on the Baron de Varville. Her scandalous past does not keep her from falling in love with Armand, a handsome young man she meets at a vaudeville theater. Armand takes her to the country, away from the toxic temptations of city life. They are happy until Armand's father requests that she leave him in order to protect him from her spurious past. Marguerite acknowledges his wisdom and returns to Paris, and to the Baron. The lifestyle she leads takes a tremendous toll on her health and Marguerite eventually dies from a case of tuberculosis, but not before Armand returns to her side.

Vaudeville Scene

Camille is set in Paris, with the opening sequence focusing on the time just before Marguerite attends a vaudeville show. Beginning with a show at a theater sets up the idea of performance and playing a role which will be paramount to Marguerite's sense of self, despite her 'not being on stage herself.' In some way, what is on stage is truly secondary in this sequence, since the camera only shows the performers on stage for less than 30 seconds. Rather, it quickly turns its attention to Marguerite as she ascends the intricately decorated staircase. First, the camera views her from afar, then in front of her as she moves down the hallway through a crowd of men. Once she passes by, the men turn their heads to follow her movement, and the camera lingers for just a moment to capture their faces as they come to realize who has just passed by. Marguerite comes to the banister and the camera views her from below, as if to place Marguerite on a stage of the film's own design, complete with a barrier from the "crowd." This intricate banister of the theater sets her apart, and her presence fills the screen. The camera (and film form) displaces performance and redefines it in Marguerite's person. Here, there is a pause, as if to say, "This is

where the performance really begins." Then, the film cuts to a close-up of Marguerite's face, showing her lack of interest in all that is around her. Close-ups give away her true feelings throughout the film. Although it seems at first that Marguerite is content in the Parisian lifestyle, the moment of close-up urges the viewer to look closer; dig deeper.

The close-up provides the viewer with a way of seeing that is new and unique. Walter Benjamin states, in his work "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction:" "[the close-up] extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives."[210] In other words, the close-up allows the viewer to contemplate details that would otherwise be deemed trivial, or would never even be noticed. Benjamin goes on to explain that "With the close-up, space expands.... The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject."[211] The passage argues that enlarging the subject also abstracts what is seen; bringing forth the structural formations that are lost when one views the entire subject. Film theorist Jean Epstein describes the shift from the subject to its magnified abstraction so eloquently by saying:

> The orography of the face vacillates. Seismic shocks begin. Capillary wrinkles try to split the fault. A wave carries them away. Crescendo. A muscle bridles. The lip is laced with tics like a theatre curtain. Everything is movement, imbalance, crisis. Crack. The mouth gives way, like a ripe fruit splitting open. As if slit by a scalpel, a keyboard-like smile cuts laterally into the corner of the lips.[212]

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[210]Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," accessed February 16, 2020, https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm.

[211]Ibid.

[212]Jean Epstein, "Magnification and Other Writings," trans. Stuart Liebman. *October* 3 (1977): 9-25.

As the quote above exemplifies, the close-up magnifies the face to such a great intensity that its every crease, fold and detail become objects themselves. According to Epstein, movement becomes everything when a subject is magnified; it overtakes the screen and captivates the viewer. Close-ups allow one to see portions of reality that weren't accessible before, and in so doing, alter reality. Hungarian film critic Béla Balázs described the close-up in a similar way in an excerpt in *The Promise of Cinema.* The excerpt, entitled "The Close-Up," states: "through the camera's magnifying lens, we can approach the individual cells of life's tissue: this lens allows us once again to feel the material and substance of concrete life."[213] Balázs agrees that the close-up brings to the viewer's attention things that would be otherwise missed; as he says when referring to the details a close-up magnifies, "secret because unnoticed."[214] By showing these hidden details, Balázs argues that the close-up helps the viewer interpret the moment. The close-up guides the eye to what is meant to stand out and, in doing so, helps add emphasis to the film. For Balázs, "the close up is the most authentic domain of film."[215] These are the moments in which the true emotions and intentions of the film are revealed. In *Camille*, the use of close-up allows the viewer to pause in the moment, revealing the truth below the surface. The viewer, like Marguerite, should not to settle for easy answers in their search for truth.

When the camera moves on from the close-up, Marguerite reunites with Prudence. The camera shows a long take in which it is positioned in front of the two women as they make their

[213]Béla Balázs, "The Close-Up," in *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory, 1907-1933*, edited by Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael Cowan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 492.

[214]Ibid.

[215]Ibid., 492-493.

way down the hall. Marguerite holds her bouquet of camellias from the opening scene, symbolizing the extravagant nature of her life in Paris. Prudence explains in the opening moments that camellias are some of the most expensive flowers available. Using the camellia symbol also alludes to Marguerite's respiratory issues, as the camellia has no scent, so it would not affect her breathing. Before they continue down the hall, the women pause in front of a mirror. Marguerite contemplates her reflection, which allows the viewer to see two selves at once within the same frame. One self: Marguerite's status as a reflection, a hollow woman, someone who exists so people/men can project onto her. The other self, masterfully shown: Marguerite's competing needs—to be desired, but also to be loved. Again, the camera alludes to Marguerite's performance, and intensifies this notion as they proceed down the hall. Viewing the women from a distance in front of them, the audience is shown that they are proceeding down a hall with mirrors covering both sides. Attention is drawn to the duality of self yet again by the simple positioning of the camera. The hall literally becomes a hall of mirrors—where the "true self" becomes occluded, and instead a lot of reflections take over, suggesting that she is a projection, a hollow woman.

Next, vaudeville dancers return to the screen for a short time, but they remain out of focus. First, the camera takes up the perspective from Marguerite's box, and the view of the stage is from above, and obstructed by an ornament of the theater itself. Also, the view looks down on the performers from above, and the clarity of the image is hazy. There is a cut to a longer, moving shot to the side of the Baron de Varville, somewhat taking on his perspective of the show. The vaudeville stage is in the background but is only visible through a window. As the performers continue their show, the viewer and the Baron look on, but see only blurry images, completely out of focus of the camera. Film form accentuates the point that the performers on stage are not to be

paid close attention to. The real performance is removed from its typical place on the stage and is redirected to Marguerite.

The Baron is given a note, and the camera uses extreme close-up to allow the viewer to read it carefully. Instead of going to box A, like the note suggested, the Baron requests to go to his seat. The camera focuses on the Baron from in front of him, emphasizing the point that he is taking his seat; taking the position of spectator for the show. His eyes shift to the box, and there is a cut to Marguerite. Cutting to the box reiterates: the true performance lies with Marguerite. When the focus shifts back to the Baron, he is shown looking up at the box through his monocle, making the suggestion that what he is seeing is not Marguerite's true self. She is separated from him, not only through physical space, but through the view of the glass as well. Finally, the camera returns its attention to the stage; however, this is only to depict the closing moments of the show. As the curtain closes, the film cuts back to Marguerite, again redirecting the role of performer to her.

Marguerite, the Baron, Armand, and Prudence are the subject of back and forth cuts. The camera sees them looking at one another, framing the women's views through their lorgnettes, and the Baron's view through his monocle. Armand is the only one who sees without a lens. His gaze is uncritical. To the rest of the people in the sequence, Marguerite is "under the microscope" of their scrutiny, but Armand sees her without any judgment; he sees her as she is. Everyone participates in Marguerite's charade, except for Armand. He sees her true self—someone in need of love, genuine affection and care, even as she rejects it again and again.

The notion that Armand is the only one who sees her true self, returns at the end of the film. As Marguerite is gravely ill, Armand returns, stating that he finally realized what he knew all along. She may have been telling him she didn't love him, but that was just her performance, not

what she truly wanted to say. Marguerite acknowledges that he sees her truly as well by saying, “Perhaps it is better that I live in your heart, where the world can’t see me.” The world never accepts Marguerite as her true self, only as the performer. Armand is the only one who sees through the charade to the real woman. Marguerite’s public image convinces nearly everyone around her, even those who feel they are her closest confidants. The sequence suggests that this widely adulated character’s performativity occludes a self/interiority that can, if circumstances are right, come to light.

Mirror Scene

At Marguerite’s apartment, she leaves the group in the common areas when she begins coughing heavily. Here, film form intensifies the notion that Marguerite is different in this space than when she is in front of her entourage. In the following sequence, she is shown in the mirror, along with her reflection. The camera positions itself behind her, as if peering over her shoulder at her reflection. Her face is shown in the mirror alone. Light in this space is dramatic and dark. There are only two candles for light, one of which Marguerite brings to the mirror so she can see herself. While looking over her shoulder into the mirror, the camera reveals the weight of her public persona; her face is filled with exhaustion and frailty. Marguerite quickly brushes off the look, beginning to prepare to reenter the group. She takes another pill and adorns herself with camellias, as the camera shows Armand entering via his reflection in the mirror. Armand is the only one to enter this private space besides Marguerite. The camera lingers on this intimate moment, using close-up to do justice to the intensified feelings between the two of them; feelings that Marguerite tries so hard to reject, thinking herself unworthy of love. She continues to draw on her role as the

extravagant Parisian woman she has a reputation for, but Armand sees through her act. He positions himself closer to Marguerite, knowing in some way that she feels the same. Close-ups are again put to work to display the ever increasing emotion between them. Using close-up enhances the lighting, movements of the actors, the play of light across faces and bodies, and heightens the emotion. Everything is magnified in order to intensify the viewer's experience of the moment; to make everything more real. Epstein discusses the close-up and its power of magnification. He states:

> A head suddenly appears on screen and drama, now face to face, seems to address me personally and swells with an extraordinary intensity. I am hypnotized. Now the tragedy is anatomical.[216]

In other words, the intensity of this magnification personalizes the moment, captivating the viewer in a completely new way. Positioning faces in close-up draws the viewer into a more personal connection with the subject, making it possible for the viewer to establish a deeper connection with the characters and the emotions they are trying to convey on screen. As Béla Balázs argues in his aforementioned article, the greatest authenticity of a film is on display when using close-up. He writes: "[the close-up] awakens a feeling of tender affection toward things, a feeling however, that is never mentioned by name."[217] In other words, the image in close-up draws the viewer closer to the hidden details within the frame and, by doing so "allows us once again to feel the material and substance of concrete life."[218] Close-up drives home what the filmmaker wishes to emphasize, in particular the reality of life.

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[216]Epstein, "Magnification and Other Writings."

[217]Balázs, "The Close-Up," 493.

[218]Ibid., 492.

Although the scene in front of the mirror does not end with Armand and Marguerite together, it exemplifies a shift in Marguerite's performance. When the mirror comes into view again, his back is turned to it (instead of showing both of them looking into the mirror like before) and she is facing the camera and Armand instead. Film form and the focus on Marguerite's turn from her reflection (and by extension, the public role she plays) suggests that she is beginning to reject the public role in favor of her true identity. In Paris, she may only do this in secret, in the dark of an interior space, with Armand as the only viewer. Once she goes to the country with Armand, she is more free. The mirror scene is a stunning moment as it dramatizes the idea of Marguerite's own necessary theatricality, the fact that there are two irreconcilable selves to her. For her, public appearances constitute an act, a show, a performance, where she plays her own double.

Duality of Space

There is very little of Paris in the film—it seems to reside in public spaces such as the vaudeville theater, not the usual markers of the city such as Notre Dame, the Eiffel Tower or even the remnants of the Bastille. Nearly every scene depicted in Paris takes place in the interior of grandiose homes. These spaces are dripping with ornaments, detailed decorations, food and drink to last for days, and entertainment that never ends. The extreme lighting that's always present in the Paris scenes emphasizes artificiality. Life in the city is laden with fateful temptations and desires, but there is a suffocating quality to the way these scenes are depicted in the film. The interior spaces, while beautiful to look at, are always filled with far too many people to be comfortable. As a result, the noise and constant movement confined within the walls makes it difficult to pause and reflect on how the experience makes one feel. This, of course, is a prime example of Kracauer's

"Cult of Distraction" at work. He argues, as mentioned previously, that the space in which one is entertained has an equally powerful impact on one's response as the content of the entertainment. The overstimulation of the senses, as well as the speed at which the viewer is inundated with images and sense data make it difficult to contemplate any of the information being fed to the viewers. Therefore, they are unable to respond in any valuable sense, leaving them open to indoctrination and recreation into a new whole.[219]

By contrast, the countryside holds a true gravitational force. The simple pleasures of life are presented as idyllic and desirable. There is an organic and authentic quality to life here that is absent in the Paris scenes. More nuanced lighting in the countryside emphasizes naturalness. In the countryside, Armand and Marguerite are virtually always outside, and the camera emphasizes the space and freedom through sweeping views, panoramic and long shots depicting the magnitude of the space around them, as well as bright, cheery lighting. They seem blessed with a utopia all their own. In fact, the only instance in which the camera goes indoors in the countryside is when Armand's father comes to speak to Marguerite. The interior spaces of Paris, based on this sequence, trap Marguerite in her public role, while the countryside allows her to escape from this performance and become who she truly wishes to be all the time.

Break-Up Scene

When Armand's father comes to beg Marguerite to give him up, he argues that her reputation will hold him back from having a good career in the future, and that they are living in a fairy tale of sorts. Meanwhile, Marguerite moves from outside to inside the house, as if drawing

[219]Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction."

back into the interior spaces she was trapped in while still in Paris. As they talk, Marguerite goes to the window a couple of times, and the camera lingers over her position from behind her. Film form intensifies the idea that her heart is outside, in the freedom of the countryside. Here, she is free to love, free from her past, free to be her true self. However, with the realization that Armand's father is right about his concerns, the camera employs close-ups to show the anguish on Marguerite's face as she recommits herself to the confines of the interior. Epstein, quoted above, highlights the intensity of the close-up as a film formal element. Marguerite's anguish in close-up is an ideal example of Epstein's argument that the details of the face become abstracted to such intensity that they contain an element of fear or anxiety.[220] *Camille* exemplifies Epstein's idea that the screen personally addresses the viewer, creating greater intensity. Marguerite is "face to face" with the viewers, intensifying emotions and captivating the audience. French literary theorist Roland Barthes writes about Greta Garbo's face in his work, *Mythologies*. He explains that:

> Greta Garbo still belongs to that moment in cinema when the apprehension of the human countenance plunged crowds into the greatest perturbation, where people literally lost themselves in the human image as if in a philter, when the face constituted a sort of absolute state of the flesh which one could neither attain nor abandon.[221]

The quote above argues that Garbo's facial expressions held so much power over viewers that they lost themselves in her image. Waiting in anticipation for her expression would bring on anxiety to the extent that people were almost under a spell. Barthes uses the word "philter" in the quote above. Philter means "(1) a potion credited with magical power; (2) a potion, drug, or charm held

[220]Epstein, "Magnification and Other Writings."

[221]Roland Barthes, "Garbo's Face," In *Mythologies: The Complete Edition* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957), 73.

to have the power to arouse sexual passion,"[222] according to Merriam-Webster. The use of such a word suggests that viewers are magically captivated by Garbo's face. Therefore, when her face appears in close-up, the viewer is completely overtaken by the power it holds. Just as Balázs states, close-ups "awaken a feeling of tender affection" by bringing to light the details that would otherwise go unnoticed.[223] Garbo's face in close-up evokes emotions in viewers to such an extent that they feel spellbound—captivated, at least until the moment passes.

Upon Marguerite's reluctant agreement with Armand's father, she is imprisoned again to interior spaces; to the performer she was in Paris. Again, she must take on this role, and now she must be even more convincing as she must make Armand believe that she doesn't love him. It is not what she wants, but for the sake of their love, she must put herself away and become her image once again—in fact, for the third time.

Next, the camera holds a position across from Marguerite as she sits at her desk weeping. Nanine, her maid, enters from the back, slowly coming into focus. For the next few seconds, the camera lingers over Marguerite's anguish as she reveals to Nanine that she must make Armand hate her. The camera lingers here, for a moment, allowing the viewer to observe just what Marguerite's decision has cost her. Then, it fades to black.

The use of film form is particularly powerful when Marguerite breaks to Armand that she doesn't love him. In this sequence, there is also a lot of focus on Marguerite's face, which is such a focal point, especially here as performativity peaks. Armand's lover is hidden, in her place is the performer from Paris, trying desperately to hold together her new role of a woman in love who

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[222]Merriam Webster, "Philter," accessed February 25, 2020, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/philter.

[223]Balázs, "The Close-Up," 492.

must convince her lover that she is not. When Armand first arrives, the camera views Marguerite from across the room. There is a doorway behind her, and Armand is framed in it for a few moments, suggesting the divide that is now between them. As they greet one another, the camera uses close-up, but the intimacy of the close-up has changed. This close-up shows the shift in Marguerite's face, and the change in her attire (including the return of the camellias to her dress). Using long shots, the camera follows their movements as Marguerite continues to display her supposed unhappiness. She pauses in the doorway to recount her day, before heading outside for a short moment. The camera looks her in the face as she tells Armand what happened, leaving out the visit from his father. She quickly turns away from him and the camera, as her deception continues. There is no cut to close-up, as this might give away her true self. Without a close-up there is no window into her subjectivity. When she crosses the threshold, Armand says, "You've changed completely." He has commented on the change in her clothes right away, but now he is sensing the shift in her two selves as well. She crosses the room quickly, but shields her face from close-up as she goes to the other door to peer out the window again. The camera's treatment of her accentuates her change in demeanor. Armand tries to embrace her again, but the close-up on them gives away her stiffened posture, and the coy faces that she had previously reserved only for the Baron de Varville. An actress, Garbo, is playing the role of Marguerite, playing the role of a woman who no longer loves. What the audience knows and what her lover knows is not identical. Her performances are on multiple levels, and the camera takes that all in, often in long takes.

A close-up gives Marguerite away again as they embrace. Walter Benjamin argues that the close-up is utilized as a way to examine moments in greater depth and with new perspectives.[224]

[224]Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

The close-up encourages the viewer to pause over the magnified image and take in every detail in order to better understand what the film wants you to see. Moments in close-up reveal important points in the film that would be otherwise lost, if not for the detail magnified on screen. Balázs writes that the close-up reveals the details hidden in the small moments and movements that are taken for granted otherwise. The hidden details help the viewer to interpret the moment in the way that the filmmaker intends. He writes: "Not only does this allow us to see these tiny atoms of life more clearly than details on the stage, but it also allows the film director to guide our eye."[225] This is also why Marguerite keeps turning her back to the camera—to prevent the viewer from seeing the details of her face that will give her away. Balázs argues that the close-up is the most authentic moment.[226] Therefore, removing herself from it saves her. She is trying to prevent the camera from revealing the truth. She commands the camera, but still the camera is able to capture and also see through her exploits and performances. The camera shows only her face and the back of Armand's head. Here, Marguerite is safe to let the veil slip for just a moment. Her expression leaves no doubt about her true feelings, and she gives herself over to them for just a few seconds. When the camera moves outward, she is again playing her role. She crosses the room, and there are cuts back and forth between them, emphasizing the space between them. This new disconnect is intensified by the pause of the scene, as each of their faces linger on screen for what feels like a moment too long. Finally, the camera positions itself across the room, showing both of their faces together. Armand begins to believe her words, just as the camera gives away the emotion on her face. Her words are telling him that she could only love for a short time and that the Baron is expecting her. Yet, her

[225]Balázs, "The Close-Up," 492-3.

[226]Ibid., 493.

face displays her anguish. Lingering in the moment, the camera reveals a tear or two fall from her cheek before she turns and hurries from the room. Close-up not only intensifies the emotions of each character in these pivotal moments, but it highlights the greater truth. This illustrates Béla Balázs's view of the close-up as the moment in film that highlights details otherwise lost, in order to emphasize the filmmaker's intentions and evoke feelings viewers can relate to.[227]

Hitler's Judgment

Hitler has been noted to favor Greta Garbo films, so it is not surprising that he enjoyed this film. He could have become caught up by the notion that Marguerite seems to be torn between two worlds, two men vying for her affection. The camera continually points to the duality of Marguerite, a frivolous Parisian woman and a woman desperately searching for love and meaning. Hitler is a similar character, simultaneously maintaining his public and private self. He is "torn" between reality and the image he wishes to leave as his legacy for the world. In the end, both Marguerite and Hitler are remembered most by the images they want the rest of the world to see. As far as their true selves, there seems to remain only fleeting glimpses. About the screening and its effects, Goebbels' records about the film screening, provided earlier above, and according to which "We are stunned and moved in the deepest part. One is not ashamed of tears. [...] The *Führer* is enthusiastic. He thinks that an inaccurate male cast can ruin a great female lead. This film is completely flawless"[228]--sound indeed justified to the fullest. This quote exemplifies Hitler's emotional response to the film, and Garbo's performance, in particular. The question is, which of

[227]Balázs, "The Close-Up," 493.

[228]Alt, "The Dictator as Spectator," Appendix 2.

her performances did he admire? Was it Garbo's performance of Marguerite, or Marguerite's performance of her public image?

It seems extremely plausible that Hitler witnesses her layered performances executed so convincingly and was inspired and amazed. Garbo's multi-layered performance in *Camille,* and the character's performativity, may have resonated with Hitler—a person who indeed at the time this film premiered in 1936, had been circulating as a performed image since 1935 when *Triumph* premiered. Hitler himself takes on a multi-layered performance in *Triumph*. Riefenstahl captures Hitler playing the role of himself in the film, yet Hitler is performing that role as his public persona. He is himself, playing the role of his carefully crafted public persona, playing the divinely inspired savior of Germany in Riefenstahl's masterpiece.

Camille's ending reminds one of the glorification of death, a principle so integral to Nazi ideology. While the film does not glorify Marguerite's passing, it continually alludes to her failing health—building tension throughout and heightening the dramatic feeling, slowly rising the trajectory to tragedy. Her passing is also highly dramatized, using close-ups. Marguerite even remarks that it may be better that she lives on with Armand in spirit, rather than tarnish their love by living. For Marguerite, living in someone's memory is paramount. It is a place where their love can live on, without fear of attack from those that know Marguerite only as her public, frivolous image. Living on in memories may have resonated with Hitler, as he continued to look for ways to memorialize his own legacy for the nation. This fundamental concern of Hitler's with his legacy, visible in Albert Speer's monumental architecture, and memorialized in Riefenstahl's master works, stood as a testament to a lasting Reich, a lasting government, a lasting prosperity. Indeed, one might put into dialog Camille and its emphasis on memorializing the protagonist through and after

death with Goebbels' aforementioned comments at the Propaganda Ministry in April 1945 which express precisely the Nazi (and Hitler's) obsession with a lasting legacy:

> Gentlemen, in a hundred years' time they will be showing a fine color film of the terrible days we are living through. Wouldn't you like to play a part in that film? Hold out now, so that a hundred years from now the audience will not hoot and whistle when you appear on the screen.[229]

Goebbels' emphasis on the legacy of the Third Reich, expressed in this 1945 address, echoes the concern with immortality encapsulated so artfully in this 1936 film.

It is also interesting to note the treatment of the countryside in the film. The countryside is where Marguerite can truly be herself; she is free. This is depicted as a utopia for her. Hitler has been recorded many times saying that the Obersalzberg was the place he truly felt at home.[230] This was the place, even while his physical home was in transition, where he could set aside his public persona. The mountains, for Hitler, were synonymous with Marguerite's French countryside in *Camille*. This film highlights the freedom that nature provides to those trapped in a performed public image. *Camille*'s treatment of the French countryside harkens back to Irmgard Hunt's comment: "the mountain loomed large over every aspect of my childhood."[231] Certain aspects of nature have an allure for those it speaks to, just as in Riefenstahl's *Das blaue Licht (The Blue Light).*

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[229]"Goebbels 1943 Total War Speech," German Propaganda Archive: Calvin University.

[230]See earlier mentions from Kempka above.

[231]Hunt, *On Hitler's Mountain*, 2.

Way out West

Way out West premiered on April 16, 1937, produced by Hal Roach Studios. It is a slapstick western comedy. In 1937 and 1938, there was an economic downturn in the United States where unemployment went up while production and profits decreased to levels reminiscent of 1929. In this way, the Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy story about the goldmine and about striking it rich overnight takes on a new valence. The goldmine is a wishful, utopian fantasy in a time of great need—a fantasy that mass culture delivers to viewers without actually changing the status quo. This is precisely Richard Dyer's point, mentioned originally on pages 16-17. In fact, he refers to the Great Depression as an extreme national crisis that illustrates just how potent mass culture's power is in offering alternative, utopian fantasies. This was also a year of tragedy in the air, including the Hindenburg disaster[232] on May 6 and the disappearance of Amelia Earhart[233] on July 2. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* premiered this year as well. In Germany, on November 5, Hitler held secret meetings to begin the execution of his plan for *Lebensraum*, the Nazi policy of obtaining more land in order to expand the German population, for the Third Reich. Hitler's adjutants recorded that he thought the film was "fine" when he viewed it in June 1938.

In the film, Laurel and Hardy are tasked with delivering the deed to a gold mine to a young woman named Mary upon the death of her father. Along the way, hilarious mishaps befall them in typical slapstick fashion. When they arrive in a small western town, Laurel and Hardy are tricked

[232]LZ 129 Hindenburg was a German passenger airship that caught fire on May 6, 1937 while attempting to dock at the Naval Air Station in Lakehurst, New Jersey. 36 of the 98 passengers and crew were killed in the disaster.

[233]Amelia Earhart (b. 1896- disappeared 1937) was the first female pilot to fly solo across the Atlantic. Her plane disappeared while attempting to circumnavigate the world with her navigator Ed Noonan.

into giving up the deed to the infamous Lola (who pretends to be Mary), instead of the real young woman they are looking for. The owner of the saloon and Lola have conspired to steal the deed in order to make themselves rich. Laurel and Hardy learn of the trick, and make every effort to set things right, all the while being subject to various missteps for comedic purposes. They are able to retrieve the deed in the end and take the real Mary with them when they depart the town.

Lola's First Performance

The film opens on a darkened street in a faraway shot with depth of field, as a crowd walks away from the camera toward a saloon. The street view dissolves to a close-up of a poster advertising a singing nightingale, "Lola Marcel." She is represented by a caricature of a stereotypical saloon girl, and the poster hails her as a "serio-comic entertainer." The crowds begin to enter the saloon, but the camera lingers over the poster for an additional moment before slowly backing outward to show the entrance to the saloon; all the while keeping the poster of Lola in view by dint of framing, even though new elements enter the frame, such as the saloon door. Lingering over the poster drives home the idea that she will be playing an important role. This way, film form, in relation to the poster, introduces Lola as a performer before she is even depicted in the film herself.

As the shot of the exterior of the saloon dissolves to a shot of the interior, the camera takes the role of spectator, situated above the crowd toward the stage in the center—so both the crowd and the spectacle can be seen. This position evokes anticipation for the performance that the opening scene has promised. The camera moves around the room, as if in the hand of a patron trying to find the best place in which to view the spectacle (which includes the crowd). As the

camera moves, it shows the crowds enjoying libations, suggesting that Lola is best viewed when one's guard is down. After pausing on a close-up of the stage as the introductory performers finish their dance, there is a cut to the kitchen, where Mary and two others are working hard. Mickey, the saloon owner enters. Zooming in on Mickey and Lola, the camera focuses on Mickey questioning why Mary isn't helping Lola. When Mary tries to point out her reason, Mickey says "You know you have to help her [Lola] with her changes." Mickey's words, and framing, make the connection between Mary and Lola explicit for the first time in the film. Now, Lola's performances are dependent on Mary's involvement.

Next, there is a cut to the patrons in the saloon as they begin to chant "We want Lola!" Close-ups of Mickey as he states that he always provides the best entertainment money can buy brings the anticipation for Lola to a peak. The next shot shows backstage as Lola prepares, saying "I gotta look good, don't I?" From over her shoulder, the camera lingers on her looking in the mirror. Within the camera frame, the viewer sees both Lola's character, as well as her reflection in the mirror, lamenting the fact that they don't have enough money to get out of town.[234] Next, the camera takes up its position as patron, as Lola enters the stage to begin the role that she wishes to be free from. As she sings, the camera closes in on her face as she winks, as if inviting the crowd and the film viewer to be in on her secret. The close-up reveals her flirtatious nature, toying with the emotions of the patrons, as there are cuts back and forth between Lola and her audience. When the camera closes in on Lola again, she reveals a small mirror, reminding the viewer that she is a performer; this is not her true self. As she continues her song, the camera uses close-up to

[234]Here, the camera curiously shows both her and her reflection at the moment she says "we"—which could imply that she could be making her husband think she is talking about she and him, when, in fact, she is only referring to herself (and her image) as wanting to get away. The film raises the possibility, at least.

emphasize her flirtation with the men in the audience. Although both parties make themselves seem available, the camera reveals the truth. First, there is a close-up with Mickey as he converses with a patron about his relationship with Lola. Then, there is a cut from one of her most enthusiastic patrons to his wife as she enters the saloon, destroying the illusion of Lola and his fantasy relationship. Lola returns to the stage, dancing about until the song ends, and the scene fades out. For now, Lola's role is finished. The discrepancy between Lola's dressing room demeanor (of not wanting to be here) and her convincing nature on stage—suggest that Lola's performative talent is considerable.

Ollie and Stan's Performances

Lola is not the only performer in the film. Laurel and Hardy take on roles as performers in multiple scenes. When they arrive in town, Ollie and Stan come upon a group of musicians outside the saloon. The camera takes the viewpoint of the spectator first, showing all of the musicians. Then, the camera moves in on each face, contemplating their role in the performance, before panning out to show the arrival of Laurel and Hardy. As the music continues, the perspective shifts from behind Laurel and Hardy to their front. Film form suggests that the musicians are now spectators of Laurel and Hardy's performance. Lingering on the two men's faces as they stand looking at the musicians, Laurel and Hardy succumb to the scrutiny and begin their own performance by dancing in synchronized fashion. This continues from 0:13:40 to 0:15:00 when the camera takes up position behind them as they make their way to the saloon door, all the while continuing their performance until they enter the saloon. Again, film form accentuates the idea that the typical performers in the film are not the ones the viewer should be watching. The camera does

not linger over the obvious performers, but instead lingers over Laurel and Hardy as if urging them into the role or performers; perhaps even to warn them to be wary of performers in everyday life as they carry out their business.

Ollie and Stan become performers yet again, as they wait in the saloon downstairs. A musician begins singing and playing a guitar, and Stan and Ollie turn to watch him. As they watch him play, the camera watches them, completely ignoring the musician, as if to say that Ollie and Stan are the real performers. Its relentless focus on the pair encourages them to begin performing again as they sing along with the musician. The camera continues to focus on Laurel and Hardy, using film form to emphasize the roles of the unlikely performers. Laurel takes his performance even further as he first sings in a deep voice, then in a female voice after Hardy hits him on the head with a mallet. Again, the typical performer is passed over by the camera in favor of Laurel and Hardy. They are enticed into performance again by the camera's unceasing gaze on them.

Lola's Pivotal Role

When Mickey is told about the deed to the gold mine, he tells Stan and Ollie that he will go and get Mary, after confirming that they do not know what she looks like. Before he departs, Mickey looks directly at the camera, displaying a knowing glance directly at the viewer. The camera lingers here to emphasize that the viewer knows what is to come. Mickey is not going to get Mary, but a stand in for her. Through the camera, Mickey and the viewer enter a pact of complicity here. Mickey's breach of the fourth wall is an attempt to sway the viewers, to reach their attention and plead with them to play along and accept the duplicity. It's also an attempt on Mickey's behalf to convince viewers that as long as the ruse works, Mickey is to be commended,

rather than condemned, for his quick thinking, resourcefulness and street smarts. In the Wild West, you get ahead by any means--the film seems to say here--echoing a Darwinist social discourse that was at the heart of Hitler's own social rhetoric.

Next, there is a cut to Lola lounging, as the camera pans in to her and Mickey. The music turns ominous as Mickey explains his plan to make Lola into Mary to deceive Laurel and Hardy. Using close-up, the camera lingers on the change in Lola's face when she realizes that playing Mary will give her a way out of this town.

When there is a cut back to Lola, it is again in close-up as she says, "For a gold mine, I could be Cleopatra." She smirks and the camera follows her as she scurries across the room to prepare for her new role. There is a cutaway to Mary downstairs to momentarily show the real Mary, to further establish that Lola is playing a role that she does not belong in. Next, Mickey is shown in close-up telling Laurel and Hardy that Mary was very shocked by the news. Before moving on, the camera lingers on Mickey's face as he looks directly at the camera, breaking the invisible fourth wall and making the viewer into an accomplice. His expression gives away his lie, and invites the viewer to participate in the knowledge that he is attempting to fool Stan and Ollie. The next sequence shows Lola, staring at herself in a small mirror. Here, the viewer is reminded that she did the same before her first role in the film. Again, film form intensifies Lola's performativity and her duality. Before leaving the room, the camera shows Lola taking a bouquet of flowers and bowing her head, as if she is becoming the role; becoming Mary.

As Lola continues to play her role, the camera often uses close-up to show momentary glances between her and Mickey. Each close-up reveals knowing glances between them, and emphasizes the tense emotions they feel as they try to deceive. When Lola is told about the gold

mine, there is a cut to Mickey's face, revealing an expression that exemplifies his greedy and devious intentions. While the camera shows Lola's feigned happiness and surprise at the news, it lingers on their faces for a moment as it betrays their disingenuous feelings and trickery.

When Mary knocks on the door, the next shot shows Lola and Mickey in close-up to highlight the panic on their faces that their deception might be brought to light. She is allowed to enter and is ironically holding the deed herself. The camera lingers on Mickey and his panicked demeanor. Once Lola is handed the deed, there is a cut to Mickey's face, revealing his great relief that Lola has successfully performed her new role. Before following Laurel and Hardy downstairs, the camera stays with Lola who assures Mickey she will get Mary to sign over the deed, hugging it to herself as she goes. The camera depicts her pleasure at completing her new role. Again, the camera prolongs the view of Lola, emphasizing that the performances on stage are not the ones that are dangerous. The unlikely performance Lola plays off stage is what the viewer (and Laurel and Hardy) should be looking out for. If only Laurel and Hardy noticed the expressions that the camera reveals to the viewer, they may not have surrendered the deed to the wrong person.

Hitler's Judgment

Hitler thought this film was "fine."[235] Since he was an avid fan of Karl May novels, it is somewhat surprising that he did not seem to enjoy the film more. However, May's novels were more often about how noble "Indians" worked together with pioneers, and not about debauchery in the Wild West, as this film displays.

[235]Alt, "The Dictator as Spectator," Appendix 2.

Way out West highlights performativity in everyday life, rather than the staged performances (both on stage and street performances) one expects. Hitler rehearsed his public roles for hundreds of staged performances, feeding off of the crowd's emotions and acceptance of his role as the *Führer.* Although Lola is a performer in the film, this sequence seems to suggest that her true performance is not on stage, but is to come later, when it is least expected. This role is merely a ruse, it is not the one that matters most. What is truly interesting about this film is that it highlights the dangers of dropping one's guard around the performer in daily life. Truthiness[236]--the performance fo authenticity--can easily come across as authenticity. Hitler carefully guarded his private persona, performing his own role in everyday life as well.

Hitler watched very few slapstick comedies. He does not seem to have related to the characters or story line in any profound way. Since slapstick comedies are typically lighthearted, it is difficult to believe Hitler would have taken the films very seriously. He did, however, enjoy other Laurel and Hardy films, including the following film, *Block-Heads*.

Block-Heads

The final film to be analyzed in this study is *Block-Heads,* which premiered on August 19, 1938. In the global arena, new threats to world peace emerged in the same year. For instance, on March 12, Hitler's troops marched into Austria to annex the country, more commonly known as the *Anschluss*. The Non-Intervention Committee, a group of countries (mostly European)

[236]Although the word existed before 2005--and the Old English dictionary has a listing for it: "the derived form *truthiness* (meaning "truthfulness, faithfulness") follows, supported by this citation: 1824 J. J. GURNEY in Braithwaite *Mem.* (1854) I. 242 Everyone who knows her is aware of her truthiness." Nevertheless, it was Stephen Colbert who first used the term in this new meaning on the October 17, 2005 show.
http://www.cc.com/video-clips/63ite2/the-colbert-report-the-word---truthiness

following a policy of non-intervention, decided to withdraw all foreign troops from Spanish Civil War in July. While countries like England and the United States respected the agreement, Germany and Italy ignored the committee's decision. In August, Winston Churchill made a suggestion to Neville Chamberlain to set up a broad international alliance, including the United States and the Soviet Union, in order to thwart mounting concern over Nazi aggression. In the following weeks, tensions rose as it became unclear how the US would react to future aggressions, until President Franklin Delano Roosevelt clarified that the US would remain neutral via a press conference on September 9. On October 1, German troops annexed the Sudetenland, increasing Churchill's pleas for US/French support against Germany. Then, *Kristallnacht* occurs on November 9-10. *Kristallnacht*, also called the Night of Broken Glass, was a pogrom that the Nazis carried out against Jewish citizens by destroying schools, homes and shops, as well as other businesses. Nearly 100 Jews were killed and more than 30,000 Jewish men arrested and sent to concentration camps.[237] Escalating tensions at the time of the film's release raise some interesting questions about the purpose of the film. Was it to remind Americans about the destruction of the First World War and warn against potential war in the future? Or was it to plant new seeds of support for war, should the mounting tensions reach such an end?

Within the United States, tensions were also mounting. Roosevelt's second term saw a dip in the Great Depression, beginning in 1937, and lasting most of 1938. Unemployment rose nearly 5%, and profits took a sharp downward dive. Although the dip was likely due to normal fluctuations in the business market, Roosevelt took responsibility for prior economic improvement.

[237]Michael Barenbaum, "Kristallnacht," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed February 25, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/event/Kristallnacht.

When the recession hit, these claims backfired and increased political turmoil and opposition to the New Deal (along with other programs FDR supported). 1938 was the same year that Orson Welles' *The War of the Worlds* was broadcast on Halloween. It became famous for creating panic among its listeners who thought it was a live broadcast, claiming there were aliens that had landed on Earth. The widespread panic at the thought of an alien invasion taps into the increasing fears of the spread of Communism in the United States. This year saw the first efforts to investigate communism, with the House of Representatives creating the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Primary goals for the HUAC included searching the federal government and the Hollywood film industry for communists working within. Later on, as momentum for the project progressed after World War II, blacklists kept any suspected or confirmed radicals from working in their respective fields.[238]

Another intriguing event in 1938 was the November 10 radio show broadcast by Kate Smith, singing Irving Berlin's "God Bless America." An American patriotic song, it was written by Irving Berlin, but made famous by Smith's 1938 broadcast. Berlin wrote the song while serving in the US Army in 1918 but did nothing with the song until 1938. The song took on meaning when Berlin revised it. At first, it was publicized as a song of peace. Performed on Armistice Day (a day dedicated to world peace and made a legal holiday in May 1938), it seemed to be an anthem for remaining isolated from the European conflict arising. However, this date also coincides with *Kristallnacht*, after which American attitude toward Germany began to shift away from isolationism. According to Sheryl Kaskowitz's book about the song, after *Kristallnacht*, 61% of

[238]"Red Scare: Cold War, McCarthyism and Facts," History.com, accessed February 25, 2020, https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/red-scare.

Americans supported boycotts on German goods. Prior to these events, 62% were neutral toward Germany.[239] Berlin also altered the lyrics around the same time, the most telling example being the change from "let us all be grateful *that we're far from there*" to "Let us all be grateful *for a land so fair*."[240] The original lyric suggests the importance of remaining separate from the tumultuous atmosphere in Europe at the time, while the new words encourage patriotism without commentary on the current situation. Both Berlin and the American public at large were beginning to look at the European conflict in a different light, and the strong language was removed to reflect that shift, based on Kaskowitz's argument.[241]

Hitler viewed the film in mid-November 1938, very shortly after *Kristallnacht* took place. His adjutants recorded that the film "found a very positive response as a lot of very nice ideas and witty gags were presented."[242] The German censors banned the film, as they objected to key elements in the story. According to Ben Urwand's findings, "They objected to the idea that Stan Laurel ... could have been guarding a trench from 1918 to 1938, and they disapproved of the thick accented German aviator who told Laurel that he could go home."[243] While the censors didn't approve of the film,[244] Hitler enjoyed the comedy.

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[239]Sheryl Kaskowitz, *God Bless America: The Surprising History of an Iconic Song* (London: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[240]Ibid.

[241]Ibid.

[242]Alt, "The Dictator as Spectator," Appendix 2.

[243]Urwand, *The Collaboration*, 13.

[244]Ibid.

Block-Heads is the story of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, two comrades, during World War I and its aftermath. Oliver leaves the trench with the rest of the troops during an offensive, while Stan is told to remain in the trench until they come back. It is a slapstick comedy about a WWI veteran who remains in the trenches, not knowing that the war is over. Stan's loyalty to those orders keeps him there for 20 years, long after the war is over. Finally, he is discovered in the trench and brought to a veterans' home, where Ollie comes to retrieve him. Mishaps befall Ollie, as is the norm in Laurel and Hardy comedies, creating hilarious situations and nearly destroying Ollie's apartment. When Ollie's wife and a neighbor misunderstand a compromising situation with the neighbor's wife, Ollie and Stan are chased down the street with a shotgun by Ollie's neighbor as the film comes to an end.

Opening Scene

Block-Heads begins with a bomb exploding and quickly dissolves to images of men and tanks in a no man's land as a superimposed 1917 moves forward toward the camera's lens. There is no question: this is meant to be World War I. There is a dissolve from images of bombings to caravans full of soldiers and planes flying overhead, while trumpets sound in the background. Scenes split to simultaneously show planes flying and soldiers running highlight the chaos of war via special effects. By using varied film formal elements, the film quickly draws the audience into the chaos of war. It is interesting that a slapstick comedy begins on such a somber note. This is the first instance where the comedy is set aside to address the seriousness of the war. Beginning in this way also establishes Laurel and Hardy's camaraderie as one forged in a unique way. In fact, it also makes a more fundamental statement about the Laurel and Hardy comedy duo and especially about

their on-screen personas, reuniting for so many adventures, now that these personas apparently have their origin in common war experience. Namely, this illustrates the theory of male homosocial behavior so central to Eve Kosofski Sedgwick (*Between Men*)[245] and Klaus Theweleit (*Male Fantasies*),[246] in that men seek out the company of ment for non-sexual, good old camaraderie. This concept of the homosocial was at the heart of much Nazi cinema, especially in the war years, as the female populace was coming to terms with men being away at the front for lengthy periods of time, and soldiers were entied with filmic images of happy camaraderies being forged on the front (e.g. *Stukas*, 1941).

Next, the camera slows the momentum, lingering momentarily over a sign reading "Cootie Ave," then quickly follows in the direction of the arrow on the sign. As the view pans to the trench, the camera closes in on the commanders discussing the impending moment when the troops will be going "over the top," i.e. mounting an assault. There is a cut to a medium shot focusing on Stan and Ollie preparing themselves for the offensive. Film form encourages the viewer to pay close attention to the exchange between these men. Laurel is told that he is in charge of the trench until the commanders return, and he remarks to his friend as he dusts off Ollie's uniform, "Gee, I wish I was going with you. Take care of yourself, won't you?" Ollie replies, "Don't worry about me, Stan. I'll be back. We'll all be back." This exchange is highlighted by the close proximity of the camera to Stan and Ollie, urging the viewer to feel the camaraderie between the two men. The camera also draws attention to Ollie's words, "We'll all be back," when the camera has already shown us that this is WWI, where more than 8.5 million soldiers have perished, according to data

[245]Eve Kosofski Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and the Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

[246]Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

from Encyclopedia Britannica[247]—so it is somewhat likely that no one will be returning. Indeed, after the troops go over the top, and the camera lingers on Stan, we find out Private Laurel dutifully marches back and forth through the trench, maintaining his post not just through the armistice of 1918, but beyond it.

Images of war dissolve into triumphal marching and celebrations in the cities as the year 1938 moves toward the camera. As this inscription fades away, the viewer is again faced with the sign "Cootie Ave," pointing toward the trench. The camera, again, quickly follows its arrow over to the trench, but now, instead of scorched earth and bombing, there is overgrown vegetation and birds chirping. Still, the camera takes up the same position as before, and the viewer sees Stan coming toward the camera, continuing to march. When he reaches the section closest to the camera, there is a cut to a close-up of the feet, showing a circle he has worn into the ground by turning around in the same spot for over 20 years. It abruptly retakes its previous position and continues to display Stan as he goes through his daily routine; a bugle call, getting rations and setting up a table for breakfast. The camera dissolves to a close-up of Stan as he eats, panning upwards to follow the arc of the can of beans he throws. Lingering for a few seconds on the mountain of bean cans, the camera reminds the viewer just how much time has passed before there is a cut back to Stan having breakfast. These scenes accentuate the point that Stan is continuing to follow orders, even though it has been 20 years since he has last seen any of his former comrades or commanders. Stan is ever the loyal and dutiful soldier. The film points to the absurdity of following orders by showing these images, as well. Unquestioningly blind loyalty is perfectly

[247]James Thomson Shotwell, "World War I Killed, Wounded and Missing," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed February 18, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-I/Killed-wounded-and-missing.

exemplified in Laurel's character, as he remains in his post well after the war. The absurdity of such loyalty is highlighted in the moments when the camera lingers over the mountain of empty ration cans, as well as the close-up of Stan's feet as he turns about in the hole he has dug by pacing the same path for so long. These moments also highlight the lack of discernment and initiative on the part of Laurel and leaves a suggestion that blind loyalty is the reason for it. The seriousness of these issues are not addressed outright in the film, but instead finds levity for the viewer. Above all, the absurdity of war itself is highlighted in this film. War was the reason that Stan was in the trench to begin with, and blindly following the orders he was given during that war, robbed him of nearly 20 years of his life. Although there were services in the film that could rehabilitate him, there was nothing (nor could there be) that would return those lost years to him.

Comrades Reunited

Ollie heads out to make plans for his anniversary, and the camera follows him down the hall, pausing as he does to say hello to a friend. He asks what the news of the day is, and his friend replies that there was a man who stayed in the trenches for 20 years and didn't know that the war was over. Ollie states: "How in the world could anyone be so stupid?" He starts to go about his business, but the camera lingers, waiting for his friend to offer up the paper for Ollie to see. There is a cut to the photo, clearly showing his comrade. Ollie doesn't recognize him and makes to leave, but again the camera lingers. Finally, Ollie remembers and the camera shows him folding and unfolding the newspaper, staring at the image of his friend. The camera follows him as he rushes out, apparently to continue on his business for the day—namely, to buy flowers for his wife on the day of their first wedding anniversary. Once in his car, there is a dissolve to the sign for the

National Soldiers Home. Lingering on the image, the camera accentuates the change in Ollie's plans. Here, the film suggests that Ollie's relationship with his comrade, although dormant for nearly 20 years, has taken precedence over his relationship with his new bride. The mutual experience of war has bound Stan and Ollie in a way that nothing else can. This bond supersedes all others.

Next, the camera shows Stan sauntering across the yard toward an empty wheelchair next to a bench. He sits on the bench, looking around after noticing how comfortable the wheelchair looks and climbs in. The camera lingers over him, making sure the viewer takes in the image. All this suggests that as a veteran, Stan is well taken care of. The state authorities clearly provide well for the veterans, with housing, meals, and superb outdoor space for recreation. The Veterans Administration was established to provide for veterans in 1930; however, the state and federal governments provided similar services for war wounded going back to the Civil War.[248] With over 200,000 wounded after WWI, it is impressive that the film shows how well they were taken care of. Amid all the labels of "stupid" from Ollie, there is also a nod to how well the US took care of its veterans, even as another war was brewing elsewhere. On a personal level, it's a comedy, but as a commentary on the national scene, it's a huge compliment and sign of gratitude.

While in the wheelchair, Stan looks as though he is missing a leg, as he is sitting on one of his feet for better comfort. After a cut away to Ollie, the camera shows him in close-up, speaking to someone about where he may find his friend. Ollie salutes the man, and the camera remains in front of him, moving along as he looks around for his friend in anticipation and excitement. Close-ups of his face reveal the recognition and emphasize his happy emotions when he finally

[248]"VA History in Brief," Department of Veteran's Affairs, accessed on February 25, 2020, https://www.va.gov/opa/publications/archives/docs/history_in_brief.pdf.

sees Stan. There is a cut to Stan, and the camera takes on Ollie's viewpoint (as a point of view shot) as he looks his friend up and down, noticing his apparent battle scars and what he thinks is an amputated leg. When the image cuts back to Ollie, the camera closes in to show his face turn from happiness to sympathy for Stan. Film form draws attention to the camaraderie between these two men. After so much time spent apart, shown visually in the giant heap of cans near Stan's trench—and in the leap Ollie had finally taken in getting married—the film shows that the bond these two veterans share is unbreakable. Indeed, Ollie does come back, after all—as he promised 20 years prior—even if the circumstances have long changed. As Ollie approaches Stan, the camera takes the position of bystander, watching as it takes a minute for Stan to recognize Ollie. Once Ollie sits on the bench, the camera moves closer as they catch up, as old friends do. After a minute or so, there is a cut to a uniformed man, sounding the bugle call for mess, with the American flag fluttering in the background. Here, film form draws attention back to the beginning, reminding the viewer that this friendship began in the midst of the Great War. The nostalgia of their years spent together is invoked in the imagery of the flag. Here, the Great War becomes a structuring reference point in the way this story is organized. This puts an almost positive spin—at least in terms of the camaraderie—on what is surely seen as a tragic part of US history. Over 4,300,000 men were deployed in the US and around 120,000 were lost during the war.[249] Many of those that returned could relate to *Block-Heads*' treatment of loyalty, camaraderie and nostalgia. That their friendship and camaraderie is indissoluble even after 20 years is also a testament to the homosocial bond Sedgwick and Theweleit conceptualized.

[249]Shotwell, "World War I Killed, Wounded and Missing."

After a cut back to Stan and Ollie, Stan makes to say goodbye so he can go to eat. Ollie stops him and tells him that he is going to bring him home, stating, “My home is your home.” The camera focuses on them (giving them equal space in the frame) again evoking the deep connection between these two war comrades. The camera is equidistant to both—i.e. in this regard, the camera bypasses the comical angle to show an appreciation for the patriotic service of these two. This is one of the few moments in the film where comedy is suspended for creating a positive, nostalgic view of the war. It is an island of honest, serious nostalgia amidst an onslaught of slapstick comic situations. After this moment, the camera moves in front of them as they begin to move up the path as Stan says, “This feels just like old times.” Again, the film reminds the viewer of the foundations of their friendship, driving home the notion that the war is where they began—it is what binds them together.

Hitler’s Judgment

Hitler enjoyed this Laurel and Hardy film, unlike *Way out West.* One major factor could very well be the content of the First World War. It would have been relatively easy for Hitler to be caught up in the glorious images of the war, being that he was a soldier in the Great War himself. European and International History Professor Thomas Weber authored the most comprehensive study of Hitler’s years in the First World War. Although Hitler avoided the draft in Austria, he joined the nearly 2 million volunteers who flocked to join the war effort in August 1914 willingly; signing up in Germany. He was quickly assigned to the Sixth Recruit Depot of the 2nd Bavarian Infantry Regiment. By September, he was transferred to the List Regiment in the 1st Company,

which had been newly formed.[250] Hitler's first experience of war was at the first battle of Ypres in October 1914.[251] He served primarily as a dispatch runner, earning an Iron Cross, Second Class, one of the most prominent awards that could be bestowed upon him. His service continued until he was gassed upon return to the Ypres Salient shortly before the end of the war. After being exposed to gas, he was taken to a hospital tent, where he heard of the war's end while recovering. He left the war as a Lance Corporal, never leaving his regiment or advancing through the ranks any further.[252]

Hitler's service has been muddled by his own accounting of his time spent in the war, based on Weber's research. He writes: "Hitler treated his war experience as a palimpsest from which he erased, as he felt fit, his real war experience and replaced it with one that suited his political needs."[253] In other words, Hitler attempted to rewrite his past for his own edification, but was unable to fully erase reality. Nonetheless, the reality he invented about his World War I service was of "utmost importance"[254] to him, according to Weber. "It became the focal point of his self-identity and for the propagandistic staging of this life story."[255] In essence, Weber argues that Hitler's version of his World War I service was the basis for his public image. While one cannot presume to know Hitler's feelings, the reinvention of his time in the war for the benefit of his public image suggests that his service meant a great deal to him. The nostalgia and loyalty

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[250]Thomas Weber, *Hitler's First War: Adolf Hitler, The Men of the List Regiment, and the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 12-13.

[251]Ibid., 42.

[252]Weber, *Hitler's First War*.

[253]Ibid., 345.

[254]Ibid.

[255]Ibid.

displayed in *Block-Heads* would have reinvigorated his memories (and recreations) of a time that helped to establish his current image. His emphasis on the glory of the soldier and death would have been stirred up in the images of the war at the beginning of the film. The loyalty that Stan shows to uphold his orders would have been a trait Hitler could greatly admire. Even though the film is a comedy, it did not poke fun at the war itself, and could therefore be considered a good film to a perpetual soldier such as Hitler.

In addition, Hitler was complimentary of the "witty gags" in the film, and there are plenty. Hitler enjoyed the comedy of Laurel and Hardy quite a bit in this film, despite the censors' objections to the way it depicted the Great War. However, the gags in the film, while appealing to Hitler, didn't save the film from being banned by the German censors. The idea of Laurel in the trench for so long, or the aviator's accent,[256] which were cited as reason for the ban, may have been anticipated as casting a negative light on the experience of war; for Hitler, though, such caricatures may have functioned as exaggerations of an underlying loyalty that he appreciated above all.

Performativity, Space and Film

How might we make sense of the insights these films provide? In what ways, and under what circumstances, can films—works of mass culture—shed light on the leader that commanded masses? And how do these films illuminate a person so complex and hard to read as Hitler? After all, Hitler consciously created and fostered the image(s) he projected. His obsession with creating a legacy may have borne fruit in terms of Third Reich architecture or films—but perhaps the most

[256]Urwand, *The Collaboration*, 13.

durable and enigmatic of all seems to be the persona(s) he forged. He was keenly aware that anything he said or did would be easily disseminated throughout the Reich, and therefore maintained a tight hold on his personal secrecy. Even among the members of his inner circle, he developed a persona, in order to hide his true self from everyone. In other words, Hitler was conscious of what he said, and who he said it to. It seems that even those who shared his most private moments, such as Eva Braun, and those who participated in the nightly film screenings (in particular at the Berghof), knew very little about the private man. Hitler shifted the role he played based on which associates he was with at the time, or whether or not he was in a public or private setting.

Hitler's public persona is deeply rooted in the images of *Triumph of the Will*. The image of the *Führer*, adored by the masses, is easy to identify, because *Triumph* is the dominant resource for documentaries and other visual representations of the history of the Third Reich. These left a lasting impression of a godlike man, leading the German people to a greater future. Hitler continually rehearsed his public persona before every speech. Each gesture and inflection of his voice was carefully crafted to fit the image he wished to project. As noted earlier, historians have established this practice many times over. Yet, Hitler's private self has been lost to the magnitude of his public persona. The longer he found success in performing his public role, the more he resorted to performativity in his private interactions as well.

Nearly every record from his closest associates finds something lacking in the person of Hitler and references his unbelievable ability to mimic or perform life, rather than naturally living life. As we have seen above, his associates emphasize the inauthenticity of his interactions with those around him. As demonstrated in chapter II above, Ernst Hanfstaengl and Konrad Heiden

both believed that Hitler's interactions were always inauthentic and often mimicked those he was surrounded by. Also, Otto Wagener argued that Hitler's concern that information may be leaked forced him to keep everyone at arm's length. It seems the more effort he put into developing his public persona to conceal his true self, the more he began to disappear into the image(s) he was creating. While there were noted differences in the image of the *Führer* and the image(s) of Hitler, the private man, neither image reflected the true Hitler. Each image reflected back to the viewer that which he projected onto the image—e.g., to the masses looking for a strong leader, Hitler appeared decisive and unequivocal; to Eva Braun, he may have projected devotion and interest.

It is becoming clear that Hitler's private persona was closely tied to his relationship with the Berghof. At first, he found a place among the mountains that responded to his wish for the country life—for a place away from the demands of his public life. Yet, his obsession with the monumental followed him here, too. When Hitler transitioned his quiet mountain cottage to the Berghof—the massive and extravagant home—then the Berghof essentially became the physical monument to Hitler's private persona, just as his public buildings and films were for his public persona. At the Berghof, Hitler developed his own utopia where he could escape the demands of his reality. It became a place for him to develop his performativity in the private sphere, which changed based on those around him. When Hitler built a film screen that was concealed behind a large tapestry within the Great Hall, he built his own picture palace—an environment for escape within his mountain retreat. Since film screenings involved a sanctum, and an atmosphere around a hidden screen, with only a few privileged members of the inner circle allowed to take part, film screenings took up an altogether sacred character. It was here that Hitler could escape into the utopia of the film depicted on his hidden screen. Hitler's utopia became a multi-level escape from the public eye,

a safe space to be his private self. However, the utopia of the Berghof alone does not reveal his humanity—all one can find is another performance; a private persona, ever in flux.

Films draw viewers into an alternate reality in order to distract and sway the viewer into overt or covert messages its creators wish to disseminate. They also, by their very nature as simulacra—exalt performance. Based on the information previously given, *Gabriel over the White House* depicts a man, playing the part of president, when his true concerns lie with the whims of his nephew over a struggling and defeated population. Therefore, the film suggests that this is insufficient and thus replaces his spirit with that of the divine in order to carry out the needs of the masses. While the records state that the film did not find favor with Hitler, the notion of divine inspiration to appease the masses comes to light in his own starring role in *Triumph of the Will*. Watching *Gabriel* nearly six months before the Nuremberg rally may have inspired Hitler's treatment of his own role in *Triumph*. The film that was used most to introduce Hitler to his population and to cultivate his public image long after his death, may have found its beginnings as Hitler sat in front of the screen while *Gabriel over the White House* played. In other words, Hitler's exuding of divine inspiration in Riefenstahl's film may well have been a performance based on filmic inspiration itself.

Camille and *Way out West* both depict performance in unconventional ways. Each film has a character that performs, not on stage, as is to be expected in entertainment, but in their everyday lives. In *Camille,* film form emphasizes that Marguerite is playing a role from the film's inception—e.g the mise-en-scène (e.g. mirrors) and composition (showing her and her reflection at the same time). As we have seen, Marguerite acts in the way everyone around her expects her to, until she finds a safe place with Armand, and especially in the countryside. The film ends before

she can live as her true self, and instead she is memorialized in the heart of her lover, Armand. She spends the film performing, not just as Garbo performing the role of Marguerite, but as Marguerite playing the role of a rich, extravagant Parisian when she is really a poor country girl. Marguerite's performance peaks when she must pretend to be the rich Parisian who is no longer in love, even though her love for Armand is the only thing keeping her alive, as already stated. Marguerite's complex character explains why the film, and Garbo's performance in particular, resonated with Hitler in such a profound way. Indeed, when seen in dialog with this film, Hitler's true performances--which are often considered those when on the stages of the Third Reich--in fact, took place instead among those he considered close to himself. Just as Marguerite shut out everyone except for Armand, Hitler seems to have had no underlying, authentic selfhood, merely a private persona that he cultivated to shield himself from everyone. Unlike Marguerite, however, Hitler doesn't seem to have had an Armand--someone that knew him fully as he truly was.

While *Way out West,* a film that shows Lola, a professional performer, taking on a role in her real life, in order to deceive others for her own personal gain is a slapstick comedy—nevertheless, the notion that Lola performs both publicly and privately is interesting. Hitler, of course, developed his public persona, practicing this role and managing every detail. His private persona also deceived those around him into thinking they were able to see the real Hitler; someone that the average German could never know. Yet, Hitler was a different person depending on the people he was surrounded by at the time. The performativity in both *Camille* and *Way out West* may have resonated with him as someone who also cultivated public and private personas. Even the performances in *Block-Heads* may have resonated with Hitler in that the heart of the film is about the camaraderie between war veterans, even after being apart for more than 20 years.

Based on the research, there is little of Hitler's private self to be discovered in the surviving records. His proclivity for performance has left a lasting legacy, in both the public and private realms. In the public sphere, he became the *Führer*, a god among men that would lead Germany to its salvation. Privately, he assumed a new role, one that shifted over time and was based on the specific situation. Previous sources have argued that Hitler mimicked those around him in order to fit into whatever situation he was currently in. While this is quite possible, it seems that he also drew inspiration from many sources, including the films he watched in his leisure time. The four films analyzed in this study have revealed intriguing information that highlight connections to Hitler's decisions and private persona. Hitler's film viewings resonated with him as someone who developed multiple personas, both public and private.

Even though we may not know the personal Hitler, there is one crucial aspect that emerges from this research—namely, that Hitler was most honest and most in tune with his private, occluded self when watching and evaluating films. As mentioned above, the sanctum is an exclusive space where few get in. However, one could also define the sanctum as a privileged, dark space with a lit screen—a space of awe, one that British film theorist Laura Mulvey (in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," a 1975 essay) regards as primordial in the way it mimics the first sensations of pleasure associated with viewing, in a person's early life. She writes: "the cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking," essentially by reviving "the voyeuristic activities of children, their desire to see and make sure of the private and forbidden,"[257] within its viewers. Mulvey explains that "the extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (which

[257]Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings,* edited by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 835.

isolates the spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation."[258] In other words, the darkness of the viewing space, in contrast with the bright space of the film itself, allows the viewer to satisfy one's most basic desires. Within that dark space, the viewer could give oneself over to feelings of awe and pleasure. Indeed, in the safe space of the Berghof cinema, the real self underneath Hitler's private persona may well be found in the openness with which he gave in to the pleasure of viewing, and the honesty and vulnerability with which he evaluated and judged the films themselves. Ironically, if as a filmic representation—as an on-screen figure--Hitler was the most performative, then as a viewer himself, he will have been the authentic. While the *content* of the films may have worked to emphasize social presence and public performance, the very *act* of watching the films, by dint of the *mode* of their exhibition (in a *camera obscura* of sorts) will have worked in quite the opposite way—to speak to the unfiltered, unguided, unguarded human being that was Adolf Hitler. The dictator was most himself as spectator.

[258]Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 836.

Conclusion and Issues for Further Research

This study of Hitler's private film screenings brings to light new information about Hitler's performative nature and his changing persona(s) in both public and private arenas. Examining a subset of the films he chose to watch using film formal analysis illuminates connections between the messages of the films themselves and Hitler's own actions and predilections. Previous research on the topic has disregarded Hitler's film preferences as light entertainment, unworthy of further consideration. Taking the films Hitler watched seriously for what they are, one is able to see that this research offers viable information that contributes to a more informed discussion of Hitler's persona(s) and crystallizes the challenges, pitfalls, but also rewards of addressing this topic. It also highlights the value of focusing one's research on Hitler's status as spectator and regarding that, perhaps paradoxically, as a source of authenticity. For if the films he watched emphasized performativity and an almost always social, rather than private, identity—then the act of watching films in the Berghof sanctum, of willingly becoming a spectator over and over again, of seeking pleasure in the sights and sounds of film, and of responding to films so openly, without reservations, will have issued from Hitler's most authentic self. The dictator was most himself as spectator. Put differently, in those privileged moments, as a spectator, Hitler ceased to be a dictator.

Understanding Hitler's persona(s)—and, more broadly, understanding the process and problems in defining these—contributes to the larger context of the Third Reich as well. Comprehending that except for the privacy of an almost primordial, yet repeated, screening experience, Hitler's performativity was ubiquitous, highlights the greater notion of image making in the Third Reich. Using the films that Hitler watched and discovering the possible meanings they

generate, one can open a greater discourse about the methods used by the Third Reich to develop their own legacy through film. With virtually everything that survives from the Third Reich being carefully crafted by those it depicts, it is necessary to delve into those meanings and how they were created to get to the essence of the Third Reich itself. This study illuminates the idea that the films Hitler watched may shed some light on the theories developed and utilized by the Propaganda Ministry to create their own images.

Going forward, it could be worthwhile to spend a more significant amount of time and research on the domestic and foreign films Hitler enjoyed and how those titles, when juxtaposed to his actions, decisions and policies, illuminate the latter even more. Utilizing Dirk Alt's newly acquired information from the adjutants' records and Goebbels' diaries, one can further analyze other films Hitler watched for what they are, using film formal analysis to glean out meanings within the films themselves.

Finally, understanding how Hitler was impacted by the films he watched for leisure will reveal aspects of himself and of the filmic legacy of the Third Reich—but it has greater ramifications as well. It has been long established that cinema has the power to distract and heighten one's experience. Many have argued that film can manipulate the masses and reorganize them into a new whole. However, this study has raised questions about the power of cinema in new ways. What is the ultimate power of film to manipulate and influence the viewer? In today's world where we are bombarded by images by the nanosecond, from every angle and through every device, do we still believe we are media savvy? Do we truly understand the many ways in which film works? After all, the films discussed here allow us to trace the process through which Hitler has discovered the powerful, radical potential of the medium film: its ability to mesmerize,

sway, entertain, please, but also effect change—in other words, film's powerful address to the innermost self of a human being.

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