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Ideology and Culture: the Case of the National Socialists

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Ideology and Culture: the Case of the National Socialists

by

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I dedicate this undergraduate thesis to my mother, Thrista Holly, who, beyond all her love and nurturing care, taught me the value of beauty.

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Abstract

Beauty, is not only a terrible thing, it is also a mysterious thing. There God and the Devil strive for mastery, and the battleground is the heart of men.

– *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky

Culture played a central role in National Socialist ideology and politics.

Many Nazi leaders, while pragmatic about culture's propagandist purposes, also believed in the Third Reich's cultural mission. National Socialist ideology pronounced the values of German-ness, Aryanism, and anti-Semitism which were tied to the mythical doctrine of "the blood and the soil" and the Nordic-Aryan ideal. The National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) attempted to produce ideological culture by controlling the cultural sphere. The artistic results varied for several reasons. First, beyond the fundamentals of loyalty to the Führer, nationalism and racism, and anti-Semitism, National Socialist ideology was never defined clearly or coherently by any Nazi leader, text, or code. Second, Nazi leaders disagreed among themselves over what National Socialism meant both politically and culturally. Third, some Nazi leaders were more pragmatic than ideological in their cultural practice and thus some culture was less ideologically inspired.

While the regime failed to achieve its lofty cultural ambitions, there was nevertheless an ideologically driven cultural policy. First, the policy sought to purge the state of "Cultural Bolshevism," "un-German," and Jewish culture. Second, the regime would patron the arts directly, only allowing the production of art that they deemed in agreement with "German-ness" and National Socialism.

Chapter I: The Concept of Ideological Culture

1. National Socialist Ideology

Ideology can be defined as a body of beliefs or a belief system concerning the individual, society, the economy, and/or the government. While an ideology can be concerned with only a narrow range or particular type of activity, this paper is concerned with the type of ideology that is all encompassing, in particular, the ideology of National Socialism. As a political movement, the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers Party) sought to control every aspect of German life, from the individual to the entire Third Reich.

It has been said that the twentieth century saw the first wars prosecuted on a basis of ideology rather than religion or conquest. From 1933-45, the vast majority of Germans were led to believe in and fight for the National Socialist ideology, which sought to recreate a unified Germany with a platform pursuing a defined culture, nationalist feelings, and Aryanism.

Adolf Hitler often argued that “[to] be German is to be clear,’ and that means to be German is to be logical and true” (Mosse 1968, 13). Hitler appealed to a sense of “German-ness” in a German culture where intellectual and creative talents would produce absolute results that support the regime. Dictators do not like the mysteries or paradoxes of life which at best can only be resigned to. Thoughts that can never be perfectly clear only challenge the totalitarian regime with questions it will not consider. Accordingly, it follows that the National Socialist ideology, and particularly as articulated by Hitler, denounced “unclear” thought or art that could be a source of hindrance to NSDAP control of the state.

The clearness of German-ness would also legitimate Nazi censorship, confiscation, and terror tactics used against thinkers and artists whose works would encourage individuality, free thought, or ideas that differed from those of the regime. Among those under attack for “un-German art” were the modernists, expressionists, and cubists. In fact, the regime meant to completely purge Germany of un-German, and particularly Jewish, influences on culture. Hitler and Nazi propaganda would continuously attack un-German art for not being logical or true to nature. The regime’s cultural ideology wanted art that was representational and romantic; a simple culture without nuance, gray area, or questions. They wanted art that would prop up the regime in Machiavellian fashion, yet would still be “true”.

Following the Treaty of Versailles, Germans experienced widespread political humiliation attributed to a “stab in the back” and an economic depression exacerbated by the Treaty’s demand for extensive reparations. In this atmosphere of despair the National Socialists’ appeal to a nationalist spirit that would restore German pride and international respect received unceasing support. The NSDAP slowly gained a popular following in the Weimar Republic. The Nazis presented a simple platform that they claimed was the distinct German way. It appealed to many Germans who felt resentment and bitterness at the international system that they suffered under. The National Socialists hoped to shape a strong and united Germany that would not suffer from class warfare and their key to unity was racism. “Everyone” had a respected and celebrated part in the New Germany. Even manual laborers of the Labor Service could declare

themselves “soldiers” of the Reich. They would be one people with one Führer leading one Reich (“Ein Volk. Ein Führer. Ein Reich.” Riefenstahl). Everybody belonged, but with one caveat: so long as they were racially pure as conceived by the doctrine of Aryanism.

Aryanism was a staple of the National Socialist ideology and agenda. The NSDAP held to beliefs in pseudo-scientific research into racial purity and linked it to a mythic relationship between “the blood and the soil.” Linking myth and science, the NSDAP gained a following, united in a common belief that the Aryan German race was superior to others, but was threatened with biological impurities. There existed inferior subhumans (Untermenschen) who were stealing and spoiling the nation’s riches and culture. These “bacilli” were the Jews and the solution to the *Judenfragen* would eventually lead to genocide. The National Socialists believed they could reshape Germany into a country worthy of European, if not world, hegemony. The creation of the Nordic-Aryan master race was their goal and to do so would require weeding out the impurities of Germany: particularly the Jews, but also the Gypsies, the handicapped, homosexuals and whoever else in their judgment was not worthy of living. They justified exile and eventually mass murder on the grounds of protecting the German race according to a social Darwinist worldview.

The National Socialist ideology was strong and unyielding. It gave every “true” German a place but also required obedience. Naturally, cultural and artistic professionals were also required to conform. Yet, in spite of being a comprehensive ideology, demanding total obedience, exactly what National

Socialism meant cannot be stated coherently. "While the ideology gradually acquired greater consistency, it was never intended to mean the same thing to everyone, whatever his rank and degree of initiation" (Cecil 64).

[E]ven within the leadership, acceptance of the ideology was never uniform. Himmler, Bormann and Rosenberg, all of whom cordially disliked one another, nevertheless all took the ideology seriously. Others, like Goering and Speer, only paid lip service if it was necessary....[But] there were, of course, certain fundamentals which were accepted without question by all the leaders. The first was allegiance to the Führer around whom they revolved.... Secondly, they were all nationalists and racialists in the sense that they believed in the dominant racial community of the German people. Thirdly—as a corollary, as they had come to believe—they were all anti-Semitic (Cecil 65).

Hitler's goals were more than power and dominance. He would also work to create a "new world culture such as the Nazis conceive it....Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is the work of a politically endowed visionary; it is not that of a politician" (Staudinger 14-5). Nazi ideology and culture were linked to accomplish the twin goals of political power and aesthetic beauty. There was a great "cultural mission to make the world safe for the creative genius of the Aryan" (123). It was not enough for Hitler and the National Socialists to aspire to greatness in temporal power, but also in culture and art. This cultural influence would outlast even the thousand year reign of the Third Reich as a political force.

2. Culture and Ideology

In the case of the National Socialists, ideology informed culture, not only in the usual sense of "intellectual and artistic activity and the works produced by it" (American Heritage Dictionary), but more broadly to include community activities and festivals, and public celebrations.

A society's culture and way of life inform each other. In architecture, people may prefer a utilitarian, cost-effective building, in other situations, an ostentatious and monumental style may prevail because it suits their artistic preferences and social values. Normally, such preferences are guided by a multiplicity of taste and valuational concerns. In the case of a strongly held belief system, like that of an ascetic monastery or the National Socialists on either extreme, one's way of life is synonymous with one's religion or ideology. Consequently, theology or ideology informs culture and dictates aesthetic values.

Metaphorically, if ideology were the mind of the state, culture would be its heart. Ideology would determine ideas and decisions on how to live while culture would shape the sympathies of what to live for.

The National Socialists, then, having redefined Germany ideologically had to redefine it culturally. Accordingly, "the arts [and culture] occupied a central position in the ideology and propaganda of National Socialism" (Steinweis 1996, 3). The arts and culture had to be mobilized to reflect the New German culture and artistic production purged of "un-German" and Jewish artists. Moreover, Hitler "defined and legitimized his rule in cultural terms. Because his interest in the arts was also personal and genuine, and because—for all his railing against art for art's sake—he saw culture as the supreme value itself" (Spotts 399). In cultural glory, National Socialist ideology finds its ultimate expression. Sometimes called a secular religion, National Socialism allowed for no salvation outside the party; living life in preparation for the afterlife was not important. The only eternity would be leaving a glorious Reich for future ages to remember. So

“on coming to power, Hitler lost no time in working towards his Aryan culture state” (Spotts 30). At his inaugural address as Chancellor, March 23, 1933 he formulated his cultural goals:

Simultaneously with the political purification of our public life, the government of the Reich will undertake a thorough moral purging of the collective body of the nation. The entire educational system, the theater, cinema, literature, press and radio—all these will be used to this end....Blood and race will once again become the source of artistic intuition (Spotts 30).

Hitler promised to deliver on every secular front: the economy, the academy, the military, and the arts. However, a New Germany required more than prosperity and power. It required a cultural renaissance.

3. Hitler as Artist

“Hitler ist Deutschland, Deutschland ist Hitler!” (“Hitler is Germany, Germany is Hitler!”) shouted Rudolf Hess at the 1934 Nuremberg Party Rally (Riefenstahl). Hitler’s willpower, which brought him to triumph, and his love of culture would inform his vision for Germany: a nation driven by a world-historical vision and celebrating culture as its end. In the pursuit of his ideal Aryan society, it was not enough for Hitler to reign politically. He also had to rule over Germany’s culture. He had to be the Master Builder and the Culture Führer of the state.

Hitler’s background as an amateur architect since his youth led him to plan grand, colossal buildings for the Reich. “Architecture was to be the crown of Hitler’s new Germany” as it united and strengthened the people’s understanding of what it meant to be German (Hochman 191). Hitler, fluent with the architect’s

pencil, on occasion sketched with his artistic soulmate, Albert Speer (195). Hitler believed himself an artist at heart who was forced into politics. With culture at the heart, Hitler's political aim was to create a Third Reich that was ultimately a culture state, like Ancient Greece. In this spirit he "conceived [many state buildings throughout Germany], determined their style and drew them in rude outline. He chose the sites, the architects, the building materials and date of completion. He approved the final plans, arranged the financing and directed the work as it progressed" (Spotts 312). These plans included the "five favored 'Führer cities' – Berlin, Hamburg, Nuremberg, Munich and Linz" (Spotts 332). He planned to rebuild much of these cities in the National Socialist image with large, rectilinear and uniform structures without variety or individuality. Hitler "had both the minimal ability and maximal power to construct the buildings he wanted. And what he wanted was monumental state structures—put another way, structures that were monuments—in neoclassical style....[producing] a result that was brutal and cold" (Spotts 335).

Aside from building, as Culture Führer "Hitler was always presented as the great patron of the arts." He had to be seen as a serious culture connoisseur so he would open exhibitions and purchase many paintings for state buildings. Following his lead, many NSDAP party officials would purchase art pieces as well (Adam 115). And as "master builder and artistic connoisseur" Hitler would apply "his roles as [both] political visionary...[and] racial purifier" (Hochman 295). In art and culture, Hitler's criteria for being German—clear, logical and true—set the standard for culture and art as well as ideology.

National Socialist Cultural Ideals

The cultural ideals of the National Socialists were threefold. First, culture and art were to legitimize the regime. Second, it was to be a dominant culture that brought out the greatness of Germany and National Socialism. Third, a pure German culture needed to be purged of “un-German” and Jewish elements that tainted it.

The cultural mission of National Socialism gave legitimacy to the regime. Culture went beyond propaganda as it attempted to become part of the German ethos. This “kulturpolitik” would be the middle ground between simple propaganda lies on the pragmatic end of the spectrum and the occult practices of Himmler’s SS on the metaphysical end (Petropoulos 1996,19).

Hitler believed that Germany would reassert its position in world history through cultural dominance. His “architectural theology” held that “great architecture is the outward sign of inward political greatness” (Spotts 315). Germany’s cultural dominance would come from practicing two key principles:

The first was the pursuit of Germany’s cultural hegemony over the continent in a material sense...[possessing] the bulk of Europe’s artistic heritage....Second, Linz represented Hitler’s attempt to recast the hierarchy of artistic accomplishment, to induce the world to recognize the supreme accomplishment of Aryan culture (Petropoulos, 1996 253).

The ideal of becoming the dominant cultural state reflected the National Socialists ambitions for a glorious Third Reich that would overcome by willpower and aesthetics the humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles.

The cultural ideology demanded artistic works that exalted “German-ness,” nationalism, and Aryanism. National Socialist architecture would be Neo-classical and its paintings and sculptures representational. Again, what was German was “clear, logical, and true”. Abstractions or references to the other-worldly were not welcome. Like Marxism, the National Socialist wanted to ground people in the temporal world. Culture would also be national: celebrating the Third Reich as transcending class lines and elevating the state over the individual. National Socialist culture would also propagate the myth of the Nordic-Aryan ideal. This was especially vivid in sculpture where men were depicted as athletic warriors, reflecting patriotic service in the military, and women were either depicted as idealized nudes typifying Aryan beauty or as mothers reinforcing a marriage role in the home. The elimination of the “un-German” and Jewish cancer from culture also fit into the Aryan ideal for Germany.

The aspirations and ambitions of the National Socialists were larger than life. To whatever degree the Nazis actually had created a secular religion with party members truly devoted to the cult of the Führer, there was an inspired faith behind the mass meetings and widespread depiction of Hitler in heroic forms (Spotts xii-xiii; Adam 82). Whether seen as a Teutonic knight or a father figure surround by children, Hitler was the embodiment of the German soul. The aesthetic created a National Socialist ideal of a new world order. Nazi aesthetics were more than a tool of the regime; it was the tangible representation of the intangible German “Geist.” Aesthetics represented their belief and faith in themselves and served to create a sense of self that was deeper than the

calculations of political propaganda. National Socialists were masters of the art of propaganda, but they also believed in their own art. Artistic works were pursued as the fulfillment of their prophecy. Art reassured the faithful and made the ideological tangible.

Chapter II: National Socialist Cultural Policy

1. Centrality of Culture in Nazi Ideology

Culture then was central to National Socialist ideology. Resolving to restore and unite all German peoples, the Nazis would rebuild German pride with a New Germany based on racial purity. They would strive for the greatest cultural achievements as fits a “master race.” And they would bring about a German renaissance in all its glory and greatness.

[T]he art of this racially pure culture was to overcome differences of class and forge the nation into an organic community of people following the same ideas....It removed the individual's desire to prove, to experiment, to search. Instead it prescribed answers and ideologies dictated from above (Adam 16).

By emphasizing racial unity and greatness as paramount, National Socialism brought a single and focused vision to the people. Germany and German culture would be great and glorious, as the manifestations of a racially pure society. In fact, writes Spotts, the “much vaunted ‘National Socialist revolution’ was therefore far less a social than a cultural revolution.” (Spotts 400)

Striving for “the triumph of German Aryan culture” was an ideological goal for Hitler who believed in “an ineradicable link between the racially conceived nation and its cultural manifestations (Petroopoulos 1996, 243). Hitler and his

fellow National Socialists had faith in Aryanism and the bonds of the “blood and soil” (Lane 155). If seen a matter of pride or faith, the ambition for greatness in the cultural sphere was also a way for the New Germany to become the cultural hegemon of Europe.

While some National Socialists were more politically pragmatic than culturally idealistic, it was still the case that “the political aims and artistic expression became one” (Adam 9).

The fusion of the political and the aesthetic reflected the totalitarian nature of National Socialism. The Party’s ideology would seek to control all things as means of serving its historical mission. Ideology would lead to the creation of art that glorified its principles. Mulcahy sees a parallel with the Soviet Union “about the relationship between culture and politics in an ideological system,” (Mulcahy 80) “[The] importance of ideology in the production, maintenance, and disseminations of culture....is too important to be left to the creative energies of artists or the aesthetic preferences of audiences” (Mulcahy 78). If culture was not guided by the totalitarian state, it would become either subversive or useless. On the other hand, art informed by National Socialist ideology, while useful to the state, would also have to be a true aesthetic.

2. “Geist” – the German Spirit

National Socialist ideology was rooted in the ideas of “Gemeinschaftsgeist,” the spirit of the community as a whole and “Volksgemeinschaft,” the community of the people (Cecil 56). The Nazis were not

merely opportunistic in their racist doctrines and social Darwinism. Indeed, some Nazi leaders, such as Himmler and Rosenberg, believed in a mythical connection between race, biology, and the soil. The exact mechanism is never explained, but the unity of all Germans was claimed nonetheless. The doctrine of the “blood and soil” is a mythical, narrative explanation to support a claim that is at once both political and spiritual. Perhaps the spiritual component of the doctrine was to help reassure those with religious beliefs about the ideology. German unity based on race, biology, and soil would create a social order that brought people together, whatever their social or geographic origins.

The myth gives birth to another: that the German race-based society was being corrupted by Jews and the Jewish blood that contaminated parts of the German race. A biological and cultural purge would be necessary to restore the “true” German society. The biological was called the Final Solution and the cultural purge was about eliminating “Cultural Bolshevism” and the Jewish “cultural bacilli”.

3. Cultural Bolshevism and the purging of the Jewish Bacilli

Promoting German Geist was the principle means of controlling Cultural Bolshevism and the Jewish “Cultural Bacilli”. The National Socialists treated any un-German or anti-National Socialist ideas that arose out of culture as if they arose out of politics. Just as they were opposed to Bolshevism in politics, they were opposed to anything deemed “radical” in the culture world. Effectively, any aesthetic expressions contrary or offensive to National Socialist ideology were

slandered in “political terms [such as] ‘cultural Bolshevism,’ ‘art Bolshevism,’ and ‘music Bolshevism’” (Spotts 24). In his 1935 cultural address at Nuremberg, Hitler characterized “the perpetrators of modernism” as “criminals of world culture,” “destroyer’s of our art,” “facile smearers of paint,” “fools or knaves,” “imbecile degenerates” deserving the “prison or the madhouse” (Spotts 25). Perhaps from psychological projection or simply from smart propaganda, the National Socialist attacked the art of “the other” as if it necessarily carried the same political messages and overtones as did their own.

From Hitler “emerged a set of ideas that amounted to a philosophy of culture” (16). This “philosophy” was really a defensive reaction against any art deemed to be an attack on the German spirit. One of the standards for German art was Aryanism, against which the Jews were the worst violators. “[Hitler] realized that Jews were responsible for ‘nine-tenths of all literary filth, artistic trash, and theatrical idiocy.’ Through their control of the press, they promoted international, modernist, Bolshevik, and cosmopolitan rather than German works of art” (19).

4. Anti-Modernism

In understanding National Socialist cultural policy there is confusion over how the party wanted a New Germany, which would involve building a new society, while choosing neoclassical and traditional artistic styles rather than modernism. In fact, Hitler did not seem to mind modernist buildings in the industrial sector where utility was needed over aesthetics. Cultural Bolshevism

purported to oppose any art that “did not arise out of racial or biological connection with ‘German-ness,’” but exactly what he meant by this is unclear (Hochman 81). If it were not for Hitler’s personal interest in architecture, the National Socialist might well have embraced modernism instead of Neoclassicism as their style for official structures.

Was National Socialist Germany to be new or traditional? The National Socialists projected an image of a technologically advanced society while holding on to classical styles in culture. Hitler was anti-modernist “because [modernism] was thought-provoking, unconventional, uncomfortable, shocking, abstract, pessimistic, distorted, cynical, enigmatic, disorderly, and freakish” (Hochman 311). In short, modernism was complex and would not fit well with the clear cut (or simplistic) Nazi ideology of race, blood, and soil. It was also objectionable because it challenged and questioned Nazi ideals. Also, as Petropoulos writes

the connection between modern art and the press also tied in with their anti-Semitism, as they believed that the Jews controlled the media prior to the Third Reich and that Jews had intentionally duped the German people into embracing nontraditional aesthetic styles....Anti-modernism in the Third Reich had a racial anti-Semitism as a key component (Petropoulos 1996, 54).

Opposition to modernism and other “cultural Bolshevik” arts was tied to the identity of the creator. Anti-modernism was directed as much against those who created the style as against its aesthetics. Rosenberg’s cultural propaganda from the KDK (Kampfbund für Deutsche Kultur) stated that:

the new architecture [was] a symbol of a disintegrating culture which had lost contact with the traditions of German art and [was] a symbol of a mass society whose members had lost their identity through urbanization and their economic security through proletarianization and unemployment (Lane 148).

Part of the National Socialist identity is determined by who they are not. The NSDAP rose to power partly by criticizing the prevailing trends in culture and promising a different directions. What would they bring?

5. *Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Führer. Ein Kultur.*

“Ein Volk! Ein Führer! Ein Reich!” shouted the members of the Labor Service at the 1934 Nuremberg party rally captured in the film *Triumph of the Will* (Riefenstahl). The line would also appear in propaganda posters emphasizing Hitler’s pose as leader of the state and the German people. The National Socialists strived to create the reality of one people, forming one nation, led by one leader. At the party rallies, the individual was lost in the masses, but despite this loss of individuality, he was a part of a community. Of course, the “oneness” of the Volk was more professed than real. Germany was one of the last nations in the West to nationalize from feudalism. Into the Twentieth century, it was marked by regional divisions with their own distinct cultures. If there was a oneness of the people, it could only be realized in ideology and race. Whatever true national cultural unity that might exist would have been a result of what was created by the National Socialists.

Chapter III: NSDAP Administration of Culture

1. *The concept of Gleichschaltung, or coordination*

At the center of NSDAP administration of culture was the concept of *Gleichschaltung*, or “coordination.” Gleichschaltung was the process of taking

party ideals and integrating them into state practice. The process stemmed from the totalitarian tendency to “bring all realms of life under party control” (Hochman 302). Nazi control would only be totally complete when all realms of life—military, religious, government, academy, education, and culture—came under ideological control.

The overarching idea of Gleichschaltung was eventually to coordinate the lives of all Germans in accordance to National Socialist purposes. In the culture world, Gleichschaltung began in September of 1933 when

the Reichskulturkammer (RKK; Reich Culture Chamber) was founded. It was the central organization responsible for the control of German arts, a powerful organization that embraced almost the entire artistic life of the country....The Gleichschaltung of artists was relatively easy. For a long time the arts in Germany had been institutionalized....The organization of all professionals spelled the political and personal streamlining of the arts and the total control of all artistic life. It guaranteed that the arts would follow and express the philosophy of the Party, and harnessed all artists to serve the ideology of the state” (Spotts 30).

The Reich Chamber of Culture, as we shall see, was the logical result of the process of Gleichschaltung in culture. But why Gleichschaltung?

The process of implementing Party ideals into State practice in the form of agencies such as the RKK was a process by which the State would be reconstructed according to the Party's ideological vision. Over time the Party and the State would become synonymous: a Party-State. The Party, the producer of ideas and platforms, and the State, the implementer of those ideas and platforms, would become integrated and indistinguishable. In effect, NSDAP ideology would become pervasive throughout Germany. Through Gleichschaltung the state was made into the physical manifestation of National

Socialist ideology. Defined by National Socialist leaders, the ideology would direct the Party, the Party would direct the State, and the State would direct the people. The exultant claim that "Hitler is Germany, Germany is Hitler" sums up the purpose of Gleichschaltung as the means of bringing Germans under the total rule of National Socialist ideology: that is, to be remade in the image of Hitler.

The process of Gleichschaltung was necessary to bring about the National Socialist vision for Germany. Because National Socialism defined life in nationalist and racist terms, it became its own means and end. National Socialism posited the myth of the German as Master Race as the end of their political goals and the totalitarian path would take them there by infiltrating and then controlling every sector and niche of German life. Of particular importance to the National Socialist was German culture. By coordinating the cultural world the National Socialists would legitimize their regime and also fulfill the Party's ideological vision of cultural dominance by the Nordic-Aryan Germany.

The plan of cultural policy at least from a realist point of view was to lay forth an undercurrent of subconscious support for the National Socialist regime. It would allow the Party-State to be present in the minds of Germans in the absence of a political or governmental manifestation of National Socialism. Put simply, wherever the regime itself could not be, culture would be.

However, all of the plans for unity and oneness were doomed from the start as the disagreement among of the Party's leaders over what was and was not National Socialist cultural policy shows.

The ideology, with its logical fallacies and unfounded claims, was undefined by any text or “holy book.” There was no code or text from which to divine National Socialist culture. So the culture had to be decided by someone.

Petropoulos argues that:

In addition to Hitler, three ministers clearly had legitimate claims to the supervision of culture: Joseph Goebbels, in his capacity as Reich minister for propaganda and public enlightenment; Bernhard Rust, the Reich minister for science, education, and public instruction, who occupied the position that traditionally oversaw museums, art schools, and other cultural institutions; and Alfred Rosenberg, who held the Party post supervising ideology, the Führer’s delegate for the entire intellectual and philosophical education and instruction of the National Socialist Party. (1996, 8)

A look at the differences between Rosenberg and the KDK (Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur) and Goebbels and the RKK will show the failures of the National Socialist to fully coordinate culture.

2. Rosenberg and the Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur or Combat League for German Culture (KDK)

Alfred Rosenberg, an early member of the NSDAP, was the “high priest” and chief cultural ideologue of the Party. Though a weak leader who was seen as cowardly in the face of opposition, he still enjoyed a large say in determining what it meant to be a National Socialist. As editor of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, he was able to readily voice his opinions on art and culture as well as his anti-Semitism. However, with the ascension of Joseph Goebbels as Minister of Propaganda and Enlightenment, Rosenberg’s influence was eventually eclipsed. He would continue to be unofficial as head of the KDK, the Party’s cultural

section. He believed in the New Germany as a political and social revolution but also as a cultural revolution reflected in great works of art. He also believed that a purge of the Jew from culture would be necessary.

Today, [1925] a cinema industry has been spawned from the movie art and overwhelmingly this industry is found to be in the hands of the Jews. For this reason, the film has become a means of infecting the Volk—through lascivious images; and, just as clearly as in the Jewish press, there are revealed here plans for the glorification of crime (Cecil 55).

Rosenberg's anti-Semitism was a part of his agenda to prioritize the birth of the New Germany. He believed that the Jew was the cause of the cultural degeneracy that he perceived. With the KDK he helped propagandize the myth of the Jew stealing and spoiling German culture.

However, for all the power of its words and ideas, the KDK was only an unofficial organization within the Party. Beginning in 1933 Rosenberg campaigned for the KDK to become a state agency and hoped to gain administrative control over culture in Germany. Hitler liked the idea of a National Socialist cultural agency and in March of 1933 established the Reich Chamber of Culture (Reichskulturkammer). However, Joseph Goebbels was at its head, not Rosenberg.

3. Goebbels and the Reichskulturkammer (RKK), Reich Chamber of Culture

Joseph Goebbels, a politically savvy NSDAP leader with few fixed convictions other than loyalty to Hitler, was already the Minister of Propaganda and Enlightenment. He came to the head of the Reich Chamber of Culture as it was established within the Ministry of Propaganda and Enlightenment.

Goebbels was a powerful force in persuading the masses to accept National Socialism but was considered to be much more interested in power than ideological purity. His appointment reflects Hitler's preference to protect his supremacy by placing two leaders against each other; in this case, Rosenberg and Goebbels. Hitler respected Rosenberg's ideological fervor, but he chose the propagandist Goebbels to oversee Nazi culture. For Goebbels, art was another form of propaganda. He was not intellectually bound to National Socialist thoughts on culture except as it could be used to further Party control.

Through the Reich Press Chamber, Goebbels had the power to censor the press: "On 26 November 1936 he prohibited non-ideological art criticism, which in his eyes constituted a 'cancer on public life'" (Reuth 221). Goebbels did not want any criticism of art that was not coming from a National Socialist point of view. He attempted to frame all cultural thought in terms of National Socialism. By mandating a National Socialist vocabulary, he could more easily shut down any challenges or questions.

The Reich Chamber of Culture (RKK) was divided into seven chambers: for art, music, literature, film, the press, radio, and theater. All professionals in the fields were required to join and submit their political, ideological leanings and their racial background. The RKK's greatest power was the professional ban for anyone they found disagreeable on ideological or racial grounds. However, the RKK, under Goebbels flexible leadership, did not commence with a stringent demand for ideological conformity or an anti-Semitic purge. In fact, the RKK

originated as [Goebbels'] attempt to reconcile the totalitarian impulse of the national Socialist movement with the neocorporatist

aspirations of Germany's professional artists. In 1933 the tactically flexible Joseph Goebbels recognized the utility of pursuing a strategy for artistic and cultural Gleichschaltung that would lure the existing professional art associations into cooperation with the nascent National Socialist regime....Between 1933 and 1935, Goebbels's seeming toleration of modernism, his readiness to cooperate with non-Nazis, his temporary (and unavoidable) toleration of membership by Jews, and his support of professionalization measures all reinforced the impression that the Reichskulturkammer represented the fulfillment of the neocorporatist aspirations of German artists" (Steinweiss 174).

Others groups were receptive to the RKK's cultural Gleichschaltung. The Berlin Philharmonic orchestra, long suffering from a lack of patronage, had repeatedly tried to gain state support from the Weimar Republic. When the RKK gained oversight of the orchestra through the Reich Chamber of Music the orchestra did not find the "unprecedented degree of outside interference" too invasive as it "offered a guarantee for the Philharmonic's survival" (Potter 41). But the Reich Chamber of Music did purge the ranks of Jewish musicians. It also set a repertoire of traditional German composers while banning music by Jewish composers: Mahler and Mendelssohn were out; Bruckner and Wagner were very much in.

The creation of the RKK is a good example for how the National Socialist used Gleichschaltung to implement the party's ideas onto the state. The RKK "allowed the Propaganda Ministry to exert its control over almost all aspects of German cultural life." And "the law that established the RKK conferred on Goebbels the power to exclude all those who were considered racially or politically objectionable" (Welch 97). Because the party's cultural ideals had manifested as a state organ, National Socialist ideology gained ground in the

culture world. On the other hand, the Party was left behind. Rosenberg's vision was for the KDK to become the RKK, but Hitler would not allow it. By 1935 the KDK was obsolete and an ineffective professional organization. The establishment and dominance of the RKK "represented, in part, the natural evolution of Nazi government, for it incorporated into the new state the machinery of cultural control first sought by the party through the KDK" (Lane 175-6).

4. Party vs. State

While Gleichschaltung through the RKK gave the NSDAP power over culture in Germany, it was "imperfect" in that National Socialist ideology ended up taking a back seat to National Socialist politics. For a true National Socialist culture to be achieved, Goebbels was the wrong man for the job. First, he did not believe in an ideological culture; and, second, he was a political pragmatist. However, Nazi ideology being as confused as it was, it should come as no surprise that a thoroughgoing Gleichschaltung of culture was neither realized nor seriously attempted. The National Socialists' Kunstpolitik remained unresolved not only because of the network of conflicting offices but also because individual Nazi leaders failed to make up their own minds about the subject" (Petropoulos 1996, 20).

Chapter IV: NSDAP Cultural Programs and Projects

Hitler often gave cultural addresses and gave one at each Nuremberg Party Rally. In his addresses Hitler would demonize cultural styles that were

objectionable, such as modernism, cubism, and Dadaism. However, his particular ire was against modernism because of it was “cultural bolshevism.” His addresses were aimed not only at the masses, but also at Nazi leaders. “The scathing indictment of modern art in Hitler’s cultural address at the Nuremberg Party congress in September 1935 was not lost upon the propaganda minister. Goebbels’s shift toward more conservative policies can therefore be dated to this year” (Petropoulos 1996, 47). At the Nuremberg Party rally in 1937 Hitler declared that “It is precisely these buildings which will help to unify our people politically more closely than ever and strengthen them; these buildings will inspire German society with a pour consciousness that each and all belong together” (Spotts 99). His mission was political and cultural. Through his speeches he set the tone for why Germany was pursuing cultural programs and projects. He made culture a matter of national pride and destiny.

The National Socialists’ cultural programs and projects sought first to purge the culture of “un-German” and especially Jewish elements and second to rebuild the culture world in compliance with the Aryan ideal.

1. Purging of Jewish Artists

The National Socialists’ anti-Semitism as its central ideological principle cannot be underestimated as it eventually led to the genocidal horror of industrialized murder. Such hatred does not lend itself only to the victims’ lives but also to their tracks and vestiges. It follows that it was not enough for the Nazis to enact a physical Final Solution, but they also had to scrub away all

influences the Jew had on everyday life, which includes art and culture.

The Nazis used the propaganda myth that the Jews engaged in conspiratorial manipulations that despoiled German culture. This myth was based on the fact that although Jews in a 1925 Weimar Republic census represented 0.9 percent of the German population, they had disproportionately high participation in the artistic and intellectual professions: Jews accounted for 3 percent of those engaged in the combined theater and music trades, 4 percent [of] the film industry, and 7 percent of a general category consisting of visual artists, 'private scholars,' and writers.' Similar statistics account for the Jews in Prussia who accounted for "12.3 percent of writers, 5.5 percent of editors, 4.5 percent of painters and sculptors, 6.9 percent of actors, 10.9 percent of directors, and 2.2 percent of musicians" (Steinweis 37).

Hitler's speeches assumed a malignant Jewish infiltration of German Culture. The Führer's reasoning was despite the Jewish people's "apparent intellectual qualities....the sham culture which the Jew possesses today is the property of other peoples and is mostly spoiled in his hands....there never has been and...there is no Jewish art" (Mosse 1968, 7). Hitler's accusations depicted the Jew as a clever subhuman (Untermensch) who possessed intellect, but neither a heart nor soul. In Hitler's eyes, a people lacking heart and soul and a homeland of their own could only be a plague in the cultural sphere. They would pollute it with inferior art that could only threaten his Aryan goals.

While Nazi policy toward Jews in culture did "vacillate" in the severity of assault, the intimidation that began in 1933 led to dismissals from employment

and expulsion from the cultural professions by the Reich Chamber of Culture (RKK), to confiscations of works of art (Steinweis 64). Along with the artists exiled, Jewish artists such as Felix Nussbaum, Charlotte Salomon, and Otto Freundlich were murdered on racial grounds in the death camps (Petropoulos 2000, 217).

2 Degenerate Art Exhibit

Another project for purifying German culture was the Degenerate Art Exhibit (*Entarte Kunst Ausstellung*) which opened in July 1937. A result of a more radicalized policy begun in 1936, the Degenerate Art Exhibit set out to display the works of art that the Nazis believed represented the gravest offense to German culture and justify their efforts at purification (Petropoulos 1996, 51). Select works confiscated over the previous year were displayed in crowded rooms, with poor lighting and arrangement, along with captions explaining why such art was, in fact, degenerate. Degenerate Art had a record turnout: over 2 million in Munich for its four month run and a total of 3 million with the traveling version of the exhibit that went to Berlin, Leipzig, Dusseldorf, Salzburg, Weimar, Vienna, and Halle. Opening the day before the Degenerate Art Exhibit was the House of German Art which displayed “the supposedly inspiring NS culture...attract[ing] just over 400,000 visitors in its four-month run” (Petropoulos 1996, 57). The actual success of the Degenerate Art Exhibit as Nazi propaganda is debatable. However, the intentions of the Nazis were clear: only German art and culture, as defined by the National Socialists, was acceptable.

Hitler used the Degenerate Art Exhibit to ridicule any artist who took aesthetic experimentation with color, saying in a speech at the opening of the House of German Art, "it is clear that the eyes of some men show them things otherwise than as they are—that there really are men who on principle feel meadows to be blue, the heavens green, clouds sulfur-yellow—or as they perhaps prefer to say 'experience' them thus" (Hochman 298-9). Hitler connects artistic freedom and expression with a failure to see or understand clearly. Hitler could not, for reasons of either artistic purity or political correctness, allow anyone to see the world in a way other than how he defined it. Hitler said, "Many attempts have been made through the centuries to define what 'to be German' really means. I would not seek to give an explanation in the first instance. I would rather state a law--a law previously expressed by a great German: 'To be German is to be clear,' and that means to be German is to be logical and true" (Mosse 1968, 13). For Hitler, a clear seeing, logical and true people would create art that is clear, logical, and true. In effect, such an art is romantic and representational art rather than expressionistic or cubist.

Though the National Socialists' cultural ambitions were great, their own efforts were undermined by the "greatest migration of creative figures in history" caused by their cultural programs aimed at purifying German culture (Spotts 32).

3. Nuremberg Party Rallies

Part of building a new national culture based on National Socialist and Aryan ideals was uniting Germany on racial grounds. The National Socialists

held party rallies at Nuremberg in 1927, 1929 and from 1933 to 1938. These rallies were perhaps the most successful form of political propaganda utilized by the Nazis (Adam 82). In the last series of years the attendance reached 250,000 where the attendants would either sit in the Zeppelin Field Stadium or stand in formation in the vast field. Of this number groups from all major sectors of life were summoned to partake in the “communion.” The rallies were extended from four days (in 1927 and 1929) to eight days (from 1933 to 1938). Nuremberg was chosen as the site of the rallies because of its archetypical German-ness. It was also an ancient site connected with Charlemagne’s First Reich, so it connected the National Socialism to the past, lending it some legitimacy and gravitas.

The first day saw the arrival ceremony of the Führer who would come by airplane and end with an evening opera for honored dignitaries. The second was a day of secular “religious liturgy” with Hitler’s annual cultural address. The third day was for the Labor Service, the fourth a Day of Community, the fifth in honor of party leaders, the sixth for the Hitler Youth, the seventh a day for the SA and SS and the eighth day for the armed forces (Spotts 57 & 62-7). The eight days offered a broad appeal to all “true” Germans uniting them across class barriers.

The rallies returned to Germany its pride and made everyone feel like they belonged and had purpose. The seductive power of the rallies came from the great pageantry, stage production, lighting effects from torches to flak search lights, and abundant nationalistic German music. Uniting all these parts was the architecture of the site. Spotts writes “that Hitler made the dramatic arts a technique of mental manipulation and mind control. By merging into the mass the

individual felt he had gained his sense of identity....a people reduced to unthinking automatons subject to the control not of the state, not even of the party but of him personally" (69).

Walter Benjamin said that fascism authenticated politics. Spotts argues that, because the fascist aesthetics were so ordered as a form of manipulation, they were as useful as they were beautiful. Overall, the intent of the Nazis was clear: to utilize culture and art as a method of control while establishing a true art and culture.

4. Bayreuth, Wagner, and Hitler

Hitler's Nuremberg Rallies were not cultural artistic precedent. Much of the stagecraft at the rallies can be described as Wagnerian and it has often been noted that Richard Wagner was one of Hitler's personal heroes. Spotts writes that for Hitler, "Wagner was...a symbol, or better, a model of someone who believed in his destiny and let nothing deter him from it" (244). As Wagner's Festival Hall at Bayreuth became a pilgrimage destination for his operas, so did Hitler's Nuremberg become a pilgrimage destination for his party rallies. Wagner did not simply put on an opera, but a festival in which the attendees partook by their pilgrimage to Bayreuth and by only seeing Wagner's operas in the specially built theater. In the same way, Hitler did not only host a party convention with speeches. He established a rite of secular religion at the stadium that Albert Speer constructed for the party rallies (Mosse 1975, 101 & 106).

Hitler also emulated Wagner's objective of transferring "the myth of the

unchanging Volk" which would "be recalled through the activation of historical memories" (Mosse 1975, 102). The myth would be transformed by illusion, according to Wagner's theories, which would lead "to a higher reality springing from the inspiration of myth and symbol" (193). From the example of Wagner's Bayreuth, Hitler's Nuremberg Party Rallies would draw the everyday German citizen into communion with each other, with Hitler, and with the Third Reich. Oneness was to be achieved--"Ein Volk, Ein Führer, Ein Reich" (Riefenstahl). Leni Riefenstahl's epic documentary of the 1934 Nuremberg Party Rally is one of the great works of art as propaganda and represents an overwhelming photographic spectacle of a political liturgy.

5. *The Visual Arts*

Because the ideology of National Socialism required a total and complete presence the visual arts of painting, film, and theater were used to repeat endlessly the iconography of the National Socialist regime (Adam 129). Petropoulos writes that "the Nazi elite concerned themselves with the visual arts for three main reasons: First, their ideology aimed to be totalistic....Second, Hitler viewed himself a visionary in this realm....[And] third, propaganda proved to be an enterprise where the Nazi regime attained considerable success" (1996, 175). To provide for a regular presence of Nazi visual art, in May 1934, the Propaganda Ministry requested that a small percentage of construction expenses for new buildings be set aside for artistic decoration by painters, sculptors, and craftsmen in the Visual Arts Chamber (Steinweis 75). Such support for the visual

arts allowed the National Socialists to place party symbols such as the swastika over a vast array of public places.

Sculpture played a key role in expressing the National Socialist ideals on race and biology (Adam 175). Arno Breker's sculptures were made to be sculptural equivalent to Hitler's building projects (Petropoulos 2000, 226). They express through body language and masculinity the Nazi ideology of nationalism, race, and dominance. Breker's nude sculptures such as *The Party* and *The Army* carry an imposing arrogance and confidence with their exaggerated and over flexed physiques. In fact, National Socialist sculpture, Breker's *Readiness*, Georg Kolbe's *Commemorative Sculpture* and Adolf Wamper's *Genius of Victory*, often depicted naked masculine men holding swords as the "prototypical Nordic Aryan" (Spotts 111).

6. Architecture

Architecture in Nazi Germany provides the best and clearest example of culture inspired by National Socialist ideology. Because Hitler was personally interested in the Third Reich's architectural projects, he saw to it that grand and expensive "projects were conceived not only to elicit a sense of pride in the population but also to demonstrate the Führer's vision and his ability to transform such dreams into reality" (Petropoulos 1996, 241). Hitler was long ready to implement new architectural plans for Germany. While in prison in the early twenties, aside from writing *Mein Kampf*, he would sketch his architectural plans for Germany. In 1929 he promised that when the NSDAP came to power, "Out of

our new ideology and our political will to power we will create stone documents” (Lane 147).

Hitler had faith in architecture. It was a “discipline above mean, transient criticism” (Adam 209). Architecture was permanent. With its permanence Hitler could shape the Third Reich for a thousand years and beyond. With the power of architecture Hitler would build his imposing, impressive, and intimidating public edifices. But did Hitler, with his taste for buildings, actually seek to build German buildings rather than just “Hitlerian” buildings?

Hitler, along with all the National Socialists, was self-referential. He seems to have defined German-ness as whatever suited him. He wanted German architecture to be great in the literal sense because he believed that “great art is the product of national and political greatness” (Lane 187).

Hitler explained, “that to be German means to be logical, and above all, truthful.” He became so fond of this euphemism that he used it again and again, not only to describe the “German-ness” of Nazi art and architecture, but also the character and structure of the Nazi State (189).

But there is a circularity to Hitler’s logic for determining German architecture. He believed in the intrinsic greatness of German architecture—that Germans created great architecture. He also believed greatness preceded great art. To prove that Germany’s art was truly great, he had to show that Germans were in fact great, by erecting great buildings.

While Hitler oversaw his building projects as they were executed first by Paul Troost and then by Albert Speer, the National Socialists conformed to Hitler’s ideas as Nazi leaders repeatedly expressed that “Nazi culture and society

must find a reflection in a specifically 'National Socialist' architecture." (185)

However, there were practical tensions in the implementation of any official architectural style. For example, modernist architecture was acceptable to Hitler and Goebbels in the industrial sector but not as any public buildings or residence. Moreover, despite the ideological importance placed on architecture after 1933, the program was inconsistent with the party's earlier propaganda.

This diversity in Nazi architecture reflected the widely differing views of the party's leaders, who....assumed initiative, individually, in deciding questions of architectural style....Feder, Schirach, Ley, Goering, and other officials who became the regime's principal architectural patrons never agreed upon a consistent theory of what Nazi architecture should be" (Lane 185).

Overall there were competing National Socialists images of who the German individual was in Germany. While there was a "oneness" extolled at the mass meetings, one trend in Nazi art was the rural, folk farmer, similar to the image of the "rugged individualist" in American thought. This imagery in the visual arts is represented in architecture with a rustic style, but often poorly done as rustic style buildings, expressing the connection of the German to the soil, were built in places that were simply not rustic. The monumental Ordensburg of the neo-Romanesque style were used for the NSDAP schools for Hitler Youth. However, the most prevalent style of architecture was the neoclassicism seen in Hitler's state buildings such as the Reich Chancellery.

Chapter V: Is There a National Socialist Aesthetic?

The National Socialist style was often inconsistent and politically pragmatic, even as both Führer and Party pronounced grand statements on

cultural ideology. "Nazism never claimed to be a rational system of thought; it was the faith of men who prided themselves, like their Führer, on being intuitive men of action" (Cecil 65). If their thought was not rational why would their art be? In culture the National Socialists were full of intentions and ambitions, but very low on effectiveness as a truly valuable culture. Regardless, there can be little doubt of the centrality of cultural concerns in the National Socialist state.

The central role of art in German politics made [National Socialism] attractive to many people. It gave it a false human face. People closed their eyes to the more horrendous side of the regime and wallowed in the artistic window dressing: a bloodless takeover of a nation's entire culture....[and yet] the cultural infiltration of every sphere of life never ceased. Sometimes subtle, working on the subconscious, sometimes crude, working on fear (Adam 21).

Culture was important to the regime because of the legitimacy that was provided. It was important to the citizenry because it gave them a reason to accept and believe in National Socialism in spite of its totalitarian nature.

Moreover, given the regimes frequent pronouncements on a true National Socialist style, culture must have been important to the Nazi leaders for its own sake. Indeed, the Nazis were very conscious of cultural symbolism. They displayed the symbols of the Party—the swastika and eagle—often and everywhere they could. Sculpture and paintings represented the biological perfection of the Nordic Aryan and architecture was a vehicle for ideological self-assertion.

This was a National Socialist style, but is it correct to call it an aesthetic? For example, the Reich Chancellery had all the signatures of a National Socialist building.

There were the stripped-down porticos, the stark rectilinear look emphasized by the heavy horizontals of cornices and rows of windows with deep frames. A monumental symmetry dominated their facades, thanks to ranks of windows set in walls of roughhewn stone (Adam 253).

There were certainly some aesthetic elements within the Third Reich. Some of their works can (very carefully) be called beautiful. However, “most of the architecture was blank and orderly, standing like obedient soldiers whose role was to impress and to intimidate. It expressed the permanence of power over people” (Adam 251). Had the National Socialist remained in power for longer than a dozen years, say fifty to a hundred years, would a clear Nazi aesthetic have appeared? I doubt it. Culture and ideology are difficult to reconcile. Culture is too organic to be forced to produce beautiful objects by a pseudo-scientifically and pseudo-mythically based racial belief system. The Devil may compete for man’s heart with beauty, but not by an incompetent artist, and certainly not by incompetent cultural ideologues. In terms of producing a true aesthetic, the fatal flaw of National Socialist cultural policy was that they believed they could totally redefine and direct German culture by simply enforcing ideological instructions on artists, whether the artists believed or not. Such commands do not drive creative inspiration, and thus Nazi art was substandard.

Nazi Germany’s approach to culture would fit under a category called “the Engineer.” In the Engineer mode of support the state “supports only art that meets political standards of excellence; it does not support the process of creativity” (Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey 51). The Engineer mode is common to “totalist” regimes because “it focuses the creative energies of artists

toward attainment of official political goals" (52). The weaknesses of the Engineer in Nazi Germany was that artists who were subservient to the regime sacrificed their creativity, the purges against cultural Bolshevism and Jewish art sapped much of the creative energy available, and the production that came forth was an official philistinism.

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