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Battle for the minds: Use of propaganda films in Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany

David Rosenblum

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Battle for the Minds: Use of Propaganda Films in Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany

An Honors College Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Arts and Letters
James Madison University

by David Tenney Rosenblum

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Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Political Science, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

FACULTY COMMITTEE:

HONORS COLLEGE APPROVAL:

Project Advisor: Scott Hammond, Ph.D.
Professor, Political Science

Bradley R. Newcomer, Ph.D.,
Dean, Honors College

Reader: Robert Roberts, Ph.D.
Professor, Political Science

Reader: Dolores Flamiano, Ph.D.
Professor, School of Media Arts and Design

Reader: _____,

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Disclaimer.....	5
Literature Review.....	6
Soviet Union.....	16
Nazi Germany.....	33
Comparisons.....	49
Conclusion.....	64
Bibliography.....	68

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Abstract

Since the end of the Second World War, scholars and experts have examined the use of cinema in spreading totalitarian propaganda. Nazi Germany, in particular, has caught the most attention. However, most of these studies focus exclusively on one nation, and relatively few studies have tried to directly compare the cinematic propaganda of different countries. This study aims to directly compare cinematic propaganda of Stalinist-era Russia and Nazi Germany and find out who utilized the medium of film more effectively. To accomplish this, this study will examine and directly compare several critical components, such as industry structure and artistic merits, of each nation's film industry. This study finds that the Germans were more effective than the Soviets at producing films in terms of quality and quantity. However, there is a lack of available data about the psychological effectiveness of these propaganda pieces. Therefore, this study can't definitively state which nation more effectively used cinema as a propaganda tool.

Disclaimer

The author of this paper in no way seeks to endorse, justify or support the views expressed or actions committed by the Nazis or the Soviets during World War 2. This paper simply seeks to explore the history, themes, production, success and legacies of the films created by these two totalitarian nations from a historical and academic perspective.

Literature Review

Introduction

The scars of the Second World War have left a permanent mark on the world and helped shape the modern world. Because of this, experts and scholars have conducted countless studies on World War 2 and its combatants. From military strategy to the behind-the-scenes politics, historians have analyzed almost every aspect of the war. However, the role of propaganda is one critical area that people tend to overlook. Even before the war began, every belligerent nation saw propaganda as crucial tool for garnering popular support. Nations used nearly every available form of media, such as print and radio, to spread their message. Of all the different kinds of media, however, cinema was perhaps the most noteworthy. At that time, leaders saw the relatively new medium as having the most potential and an important instrument for spreading propaganda. This paper will investigate how the totalitarian nations of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union utilized cinematic propaganda and seek to determine whose endeavors were more successful. While propaganda films might seem like a rather minor aspect of the war to focus on, cinematic propaganda is still an important area of research. Understanding the effects propaganda has on its viewers and how nations have utilized it in the past is vital to further our understanding propaganda. This has taken on extra importance today, as the world is currently trying to figure out how to combat a new wave of new political propaganda.

This study aims to confirm or deny the hypothesis that the German better utilized cinema as a propaganda tool than the Soviet Union. In order to accomplish this, this paper will begin by carefully examining the historical background of Nazi and Soviet cinematic propaganda. This paper will then directly compare several key components of the two nations' propaganda and determine the superior model.

To begin, this literature review will seek to use previous scholarly analysis to better understand the current state of knowledge about the subject of cinematic propaganda. Additionally, this literature review will seek to better define several key terms relating to the topic.

What is cinematic propaganda?

To answer this question, this paper will need to clarify both the definition of propaganda and cinema. To begin, it is important to address a commonly-held misconception about political propaganda. In popular belief, something can only constitute a piece of propaganda if it involves the government knowingly pushing disinformation onto the public in order to sway opinion. However, while there are certainly many cases of this happening, this alone does not accurately reflect the complex nature of propaganda. As scholars like Jason Stanley point out, the false messages of the propaganda often reflect the true beliefs of those in power. Therefore, the government doesn't necessarily have to know that something is false or is perpetuating false beliefs in order for it to be propaganda. Additionally, it is not always the case that the propaganda is entirely false. There are often cases where the propaganda is true or contains truthful elements (Stanley 2015). Rather than seeing propaganda as purely evil, people should look at each case individual case of propaganda existing along a spectrum. The motivations behind it can range anywhere from benign attempts at persuasion to dangerous ideological indoctrination. As previously mentioned, propaganda also falls onto a spectrum in terms of truthfulness. On the more truthful side of the spectrum is "white" propaganda. White propaganda is generally mostly truthful and uses accurate information from identified sources. That doesn't mean that white propaganda is without bias. Groups will often carefully select the information and present it in a very specific way. On the other side of the spectrum is "black propaganda".

This form of propaganda uses inaccurate and deceptive information while obscuring or misrepresenting the source. Finally, “gray” propaganda uses both accurate and inaccurate information and falls in the middle of the spectrum (Jack 2017). For the purposes of this study, this paper will consider any German or Soviet film that falls into any one of these three categories as a political-propaganda film and eligible for study and analysis.

In the modern age, modern technology has made it difficult to provide an the exact definition for what constitutes a “cinematic” film. Any study that focus on modern-propaganda films will need to address that issue. However, by focusing exclusively on WW2-era Soviet and Nazi cinema, this paper will be able to more definitively state what constitutes a “cinematic” piece of propaganda. This paper will only look at films that were intended to be the feature film shown in a movie theater. Therefore, short films and newsreels will be excluded. This paper will still consider any film that was only partly completed or not given the chance to play in cinemas as eligible. Finally, each form of media has its own set of unique complexities that require their own separate studies and analysis. Therefore, this paper will exclude propaganda from all other forms of media, such as radio or newspapers.

Why did the Nazis and Soviets use cinematic propaganda?

Both countries, as well as other belligerent nations, had similar reasons for using cinematic propaganda. In both cases, the totalitarian governments sought to use propaganda films, as well as other forms of propaganda, as a means of gaining popular support and bolstering the war effort. For example, Joseph Goebbels, who was the propaganda mouthpiece of the Nazi party, saw cinema as a useful tool for “educating” the German populace of the proper path forward. Additionally, Goebbels was determined to use cinema to prove the cultural and artistic superiority of the Aryan race. All this, Goebbels hoped, would foster a sense of national unity, or

Volksgemeinschaft, and a sense of social responsibility among the German populace. A good German would place the needs of the community before any personal needs (Welch 2004). If that meant dying on the battlefield for the Fatherland, then so be it.

Meanwhile, Soviet leadership hoped to install similar sentiments into the Soviet people, and they too viewed cinema as the best tool to accomplish this. During the 1930s, Stalin became paranoid about spies and betrayals, so the government began to produce films that would reflect the dictator's paranoia. Themes of hidden enemies, whether foreign or domestic, and the importance of remaining vigilant reminded Soviet citizens that it was up to them to keep the Soviet Union safe (Kenez 2008). After the Second World War began for the USSR, Soviet films would encourage all Soviet citizens, regardless of race, age or gender, to do their part for the war effort (Gasiorowska 1968). The very existence of the Motherland rests in their hands.

Besides political gains and mobilization, there was also a significant amount of respect for cinema as a medium of art. While still concerned about mobilizing support, Joseph Goebbels was not keen into turning every German film in production into an overt piece of propaganda. Instead, Goebbels and the Nazis sought to build upon the successes of German films from the Weimar Republic of the 1920s. This meant continuing to use previously established actors and directors and continuing to produce entertainment-minded movies. As a result, many films of the late Weimar Republic and early-Nazi cinema seem strikingly similar to the naked eye. However, that is not to say that Nazi propaganda was absent from early-Nazi cinema. The film *Hilferjunge Quex* (Hitler Youth Quex, 1933) is a prime example of Nazi propaganda attempting to promote the party to the German people, in this case children. Even films meant for a standard audience often had undertones of pro-Nazi themes (Hales et al 2016).

Like the Germans, the Soviet Union held a great deal of respect for the medium of cinema. Stalin himself liked cinema so much that he would often insert himself into the affairs of cinema production. This would, unfortunately, usually yield disastrous results (Kenez 2001). However, despite this love of cinema and some truly innovative directors, the Soviet film industry lagged significantly behind other countries. Growing frustrated with this fact, many Soviet leaders began to demand improvements during the 1930s. Pretty soon, film-industry leaders began to draw up ambitious plans to modernize. Perhaps the most notable example was that of Boris Shumiatskii, head of the Soviet film industry. During the 1930s, Boris Shumiatskii drew up monumental plans to build a Hollywood-style city in the Soviet Union. Additionally, Shumiatskii hoped that the Soviet Union would move away from exclusively producing propaganda films. The Soviet leader envisioned the Soviet Union beginning to produce more mainstream films. Unfortunately, Stalin would eventually turn against Boris and his plans, and the dictator eventually had him killed (Belodubrovskaya 2014). It is likely that any hope of the Soviet film industry becoming modern died with Shumiatskii.

Who has studied cinematic propaganda?

Although it is discussed far less than other World War 2 topics, scholars and experts have given a good deal of attention to the subject of Nazi propaganda. *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* itself had an entire exhibit dedicated to the topic at one point (Luckert and Bachrach 2009). As such, there are a surprisingly-large amount of scholarly articles about the topic of Nazi cinema. Additionally, many of these scholarly articles go into great depth and detail. Learning more about Nazi propaganda is not at all a difficult task. One will have to narrow their search down a bit to learn more about cinematic Nazi propaganda in particular, but even this is not too strenuous.

Unfortunately, the World War 2-era Soviet film industry has received far-less scholarly attention than Nazi Germany. While there is an ample amount of resources for learning about German Nazi propaganda, the legacy of Soviet films under Stalin is generally a more niche topic for academic scholars. Luckily, there are a few experts who have written some truly-excellent books and articles that go into great amounts of detail about the subject. However, these are relatively rare and can be hard to find. Someone who wants to learn more about the subject of Stalinist-era Soviet propaganda should be able to, but it will require a good deal of effort.

Finally, there is a noticeable lack of studies that directly compare the two nations' film industries. Perhaps one shouldn't see this fact as entirely surprising. Academic studies of conflicts tend to focus on the military and historical aspects of the war. Meanwhile, wars' impact on the arts tend not to receive as much attention.

How do scholars view these propaganda films?

Despite being repeatedly, and rightfully, condemned for their hateful messages, Nazi films are still a subject of fascination for many. However, there is a debate on how one should approach the study of Nazi films. First, there are the scholars and experts who see these propaganda films exclusively as representations of the political ideology of a hateful and destructive regime. Regardless of any artistic merits these films might have, anyone viewing or studying these films must always remember who made these films and why. Therefore, these experts usually focus exclusively on the political content, such as messages or imagery, of these films. Additionally, they tend to focus more on politically-heavy movies, such as *The Eternal Jew* (Spector 2001).

On the flipside, there are those that tend to look at these films from more of cinematic and artistic point of view. Since the mid-90s, many cinematographers and film historians look at the cinematic methods and cultural aspects of many of the more popular, less-political genre of German films, such as 1942's *The Great Love* (Von Moltke 2016). These experts will say that any hateful political message or ideology must be condemned, obviously, but there is also an undeniable skill and craft that went into these films (Spector 2001). These two approaches to the study of Nazi propaganda both have their benefits, and both help contribute to creating a clearer picture of German society during World War II. However, this divide in scholarly opinion also reflects just how controversial and uncomfortable the topic of Nazism and bigotry has remained since the end of the Second World War.

On the flip side, those who study Soviet and Russian cinema tend to have more consensus on topic. The majority of scholars tend to reflect on the cinema of Stalinist-era Soviet Union with a sense of dismay. Experts tend to view the 1920s as a sort of Golden Age for Russian cinema. Soviet cinema often possessed a great amount of artistic innovation and political expression. However, historians then tend to see the 1930s as a sort of dark age. One that was largely regressive, restrictive, and artistically dead (Hagener 2007). The only films allowed to play in cinema at that time were propaganda films that promoted and celebrated the Communist Party and its leadership (Kenez 2008). Additionally, Soviet cinema would suffer not just artistically, but also in terms of production numbers. After producing more than a hundred films in 1930, the quantity of films produced rapidly declined. In 1951, the Soviet Union produced less than ten (Belodubrovskaya 2017).

Historians also tend to be agreement in placing the blame largely on the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. Stalin, they say, took a once vibrant film industry and reduced it to a shell of its

former self. To justify their position, many scholars point to Joseph Stalin's flawed plans for the film industry, his desire to shield his citizens from foreign influences, and the restrictions he placed on artists (Youngblood 1991). Other experts tend to point specifically to the Supreme Leader's paranoid purges, which caused the death of many artists and intellectuals, as the watershed moment in the film industry's downfall (Belodubrovskaya 2014). Either way, it would take the death of Joseph Stalin and decades of rebuilding for Soviet cinema to recover from this time of strife (Youngblood 1991).

What are the legacies of these films?

Despite the cinematic success Germany enjoyed prior to World War II, the conflict left Germany's film industry divided and in ruins. Most companies were left weakened or destroyed, and those that survived, such as the Ufa company, eventually went bankrupt or were subsumed by foreign companies. For those who worked in German cinema, the end of the war would yield mixed results. Although the Allies black-listed some film makers, though this was rarely consistent across the occupation zones, most could continue their work. Still, it was not easy to find work with the industry destroyed. Additionally, the political climate of the Cold War began to take its toll. Those who were working in the East began resenting those in the West and vice-versa. By and large, the German film industry was dead by the 1960s (Hull 1969).

Today, the average German will recognize and condemn Nazi films that were obvious in their propaganda. *Triumph of the Will*, for example, can only be shown in an educational setting (Witte 1998). However, many modern Germans have no qualms about viewing the less political, more popular-genre films produced during this time. Experts tend to see this as a reflection of the Nazis' ability to create films that seemingly lack any sort of overt political message and are purely for entertainment purposes (Petro 1998).

Unlike the Germans, the end of World War 2 would signal the start of a positive trend for the Soviet Union's film industry. The fall of Germany and the destruction of its film industry directly contributed to the development to the Soviet's film industry. As the Russians overran Germany, many advanced pieces of German-cinematic technology found its way back to the USSR. Cinematic technologies previously unavailable to the Soviets soon became available (Hull 1969). Slowly but surely, Soviet cinema would begin to rebound. In 1951, the Soviet Union produced less than ten films. Two years later, this number was nearly 100. However, one should note that many scholars see this as a time of "Quantity over Quality" for Soviet cinema (Belodubrovskaya 2017). Nevertheless, the transition of Soviet cinema from practically nonexistent to low quality is an improvement.

Unfortunately, early and late-Soviet cinema tend overshadow scholarly discussions about Stalinist cinema, although it is certainly still part of the discussion. Many simply view this time as a regressive period that offers little in the way of substance for scholarly discussion. Because of this, experts discussing Stalinist cinema often spend more time talking about the impacts Stalin and his purges had on the industry than talking about the films themselves. Essentially, Stalin's reign has become a sort of a gap period for Russian cinema, both from an artistic and production standpoint.

Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review was to foster a basic understanding of cinematic propaganda. To accomplish this, this review provided a brief background into the nature of propaganda films, as well as current popular and scholarly understanding of the topic. This review clarified that this study will only examine Stalinist-era Soviet or Nazi feature films that

aimed to sway public opinion. Additionally, this literature review sought to briefly compare the use of cinematic propaganda by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

Current analysis of the topic seems to point in favor of the Germans. Scholars and experts in the field of Nazi propaganda seem to agree that the Third Reich was able to craft well-put-together propaganda films and effectively run their film industry. Meanwhile, scholars of Russian and Soviet cinema tend to view Stalinist-era cinema very negatively. Notes about the regressions made by the industry, both in terms of creativity and production numbers, are exceedingly common. Because of this, scholars seem to focus more on Nazi cinema than Stalinist cinema. All this seems to support the hypothesis that the Germans better utilized cinema as propaganda tool. However, this topic requires more analysis and examination needed before one can make any sort of confirmation or denial.

Chapter 2: Soviet Union

Introduction

Early in the life of the Soviet Union, the Bolsheviks saw great potential in the medium of film as a tool to spread their message to all sectors of society and to rally support for the proletariat cause. Many spoke of film as the future of art and hoped that the Soviet Union could develop a Marxist-style film industry. However, this would eventually prove not to be the case. After a brief period of creative freedom and innovation, political, cultural, and economic tensions took their toll. By the end of the 1930s, the Soviet film industry was stagnant and creatively dead. Poor economic planning and Stalin's paranoia prevented any sort of development, and the outbreak of World War II proved to be the industry's death knell. Luckily for the Soviets, the destruction of their cinema proved to be inconsequential when the Red Army rolled into Berlin in May of 1945.

Early Soviet Films: Short-Lived Creative Freedom

With virtually no film industry in place before the 1919 Russian Revolution, early Soviet filmmakers understood that the newly formed United Soviet Socialist Republics would have to build Russian cinema from scratch. Initially, the Soviet Union had hoped to differentiate itself from capitalist cinema by building a Marxist-style industry. Instead of a capitalist system that focused on making money, the Soviet government would operate the industry and would instead focus on delivering cinematic works to educate the masses. However, reality would eventually impede this dream. Top Soviet leaders in charge of the film industry were either unwilling or unable to generate the necessary capital investments. Eventually, the Soviets were forced to turn to using private capital, both foreign and domestic, to revive their film industry (Kenez 2001).

Fortunately, these concessions proved to be beneficial, and Russian cinema did eventually reemerge from the ashes, or at least partially. During the 1920s, the USSR experienced somewhat of a cinematic Renaissance. Although they didn't have the economic means to effectively produce a large number of films, in fact the vast majority of films shown in cinemas were foreign made, Soviet filmmakers were mostly free of government interference. Without the creative and political restrictions that eventually would come under Stalin's leadership, innovative artists were able to experiment with the relatively new art form. This resulted in filmmakers developing numerous new styles and techniques, many of which would permanently change the face of cinema (Hagener 2007). Anyone with even a passing interest in cinema or Russian history will be able to recite how Sergei Eisenstein changed cinema forever with his innovative practices, such as the use of montages (Solomon 2016).

With that said, not every aspect of Russian cinema was unique and different during the 1920s. Despite artists experimenting with new styles and techniques, most of the stories they told were very similar to another in some way. For example, almost every Russian film during this time was political in nature. Often these political messages would revolve around Marxist themes such as the unity of the working class and the overthrow of the oppressive bourgeoisie. Lev Kuleshov's *The Death Ray* (1925) is a prime example as it tells the story of how workers must overcome the allure of money and the power of capitalists and fascists to create the worker's paradise that is the Soviet Union. The working class does this by maintaining their faith in social progress and the socialist machine. Meanwhile, Sergei Eisenstein's *Strike* (1925) tells the stories of factory workers rising up and demanding an end to their appalling conditions. The climax of the film occurs when the evil factory owners call upon the police to brutally break up the strike. By the end of the movie, dozens of workers lay dead, including women and children. The stories

might be different in these two films, but the political themes and messages are essentially the same. In these cases, the messages were about the importance of modern industry and defeating the enemies of communism. Political messages like these would remain constant throughout this period and onward. Nevertheless, one shouldn't call these propaganda films shallow or artistically dead. Behind each film was a passionate artist, seeking to better the medium through creative storytelling and experimentation.

Unfortunately, the period of innovation and creativity that followed the Russian Revolution and characterized 1920s Russian cinema was brief. Starting in the late 1920s, the Bolshevik government started enacting political and economic changes that would eventually severely weaken the Soviet film industry. In 1927, the Soviet government changed the economic and political structure of the Russian film industry. Starting in 1928, the Communist Party initiated the ill-fated Five-Year Plan. Reflecting a larger desire to make Russia more self-reliant, the government expected film industry to start increasing production to obtain self-sufficiency. Unfortunately, this quickly became problematic as Soviet filmmakers relied heavily on foreign imports for necessary equipment, and foreign films brought in significant amounts of revenue. Couple this with the need to retool theatres to accommodate the new sound technology, and the overall production of film crashed (Youngblood 1991). To make matters worse, artists soon found themselves creatively restricted and forced to follow strict guidelines as part of a cultural revolution. As time went on, the restrictions became tighter and tighter until there was virtually no creative or political freedom. These would eventually come to a head during Stalin's purges. Like political and military leaders, Stalin's regime often targeted members of Russia's "intelligentsia". Everyone from intellectual, scientists, to artists were at risk. For example, the Soviet Union repressed over 2,000 of its literary figures. Of these, over 1,500 would die in camps

or in prison (Conquest 1990). By the beginning of World War 2, most artists had either been killed during one of Stalin's purges or were without work (Hagener 2007). Only film directors had a greater odd of living than dying during these times. This was due in large part to Stalin's low view of directors, whose only job, according to Stalin, was to bring the script to the screen exactly as it was (Kenez 2001). Any hopes of Soviet cinema being able to continue to develop and innovate quickly vanished. This period of artistic repression severely stunted the growth of Soviet cinema, and it would take decades and the death of Stalin for the industry to rebound (Youngblood 1991).

One individual that exemplifies the rise and fall of the filmmaker during early-Soviet cinema was Dziga Vertov. An avid Marxist, Vertov saw film as the perfect tool for spreading the message of Communism and of the Bolsheviks. Starting out by editing Soviet-newsreel propaganda pieces, he eventually began to develop full length films. However, instead of telling stories, as was the norm at the time, the filmmaker was more interested in telling the "truth." For example, his film *Man with a Movie Camera* organized a series of short clips highlighting and celebrating the daily lives of the average Russian. Highlighting all the advancements and improvements in daily life since the time of the Tsar, the film argued that all of this was only possible through communism. The film caught attention throughout the world, and critics celebrated it for its innovation and daring. However, *Man with a Movie Camera* would soon come back to haunt its creator. Despite receiving a great amount of praise from foreign critics, Russian audiences were seemingly unimpressed by the film. Many complained that they were unable to follow the film's confusing meaning. Already a controversial figure, Vertov's reputation was permanently ruined. With a nation and government growing tired of his experimental style, Vertov soon found it near impossible to get work. By the end of his life, the

once-exalted filmmaker was only allowed to edit together newsreels and documentaries that praised Stalin (Aufderheide 2007). Vertov's work was revolutionary and helped inspire filmmakers for generations to come, especially in the field of documentaries. Had he and artists like him had the opportunity to continue to develop their craft, the Soviet film industry and cinema might have grown and developed into something special. Russia, already renowned throughout the world for its arts and culture, should have been fertile ground for cinema to blossom artistically. However, the political and economic repression stunted this growth, causing Soviet cinema to come to a standstill.

Films Under Stalin: The Fall of Soviet Cinema

There is no one simple reason for the demise of the Soviet film industry, rather it was more likely caused by a myriad of complex political and economic reasons. First, the death of Lenin in the early twenties caused a rift within the communist party. Various factions, each with their own vision of the future, began vying for power. This political struggle was further exacerbated by the fact that the stagnant economy of the Soviet Union was becoming poorer. In a desperate attempt to kick start the economy, the USSR began to allow small amounts of private enterprise. This alarmed many hardline Marxists, who thought this would eventually lead to the collapse of the socialist state. Eventually, Stalin would win over his rivals. Many directors soon found themselves at odds with Stalin over the economic, political, and cultural directions his policies would take. These issues ultimately led to a cultural revolution within the Soviet film industry and would quickly hasten the downfall of artists and directors. While many politicians and critics had long held criticisms of great directors, they were never so firmly in control that they could act on their threats. However, once Stalin cemented his power, artists found it was no longer possible to ignore the demands of politicians. The tension between politicians and artists

came to a head in March 1928, at the Central Committee. During this time, dozens of speakers, only one of whom was a film director, lambasted film makers for failing to live up to expectations. By the end, the Committee adopted a resolution that demanded directors create simple narrative stories with the “correct” message behind them. The goal of this resolution was to ensure that every film’s story would be simple enough for peasants and workers to be able to understand its meaning and lesson. This essentially saw the end of ideological and artistically complex films, which would often baffle audiences, such as *The Man with a Movie Camera*. Politicians also began to criticize the vast importation of foreign films and charged the industry with being too concerned about making money.

After this meeting, the film industry essentially became a tool for the government to “educate” people through propaganda about the necessary steps, such as industrialization and strengthening the military, to build a strong socialist state. In the following decade, critics and censors would use the guidelines set forth by the committee’s resolution against any filmmaker that dared deviate or experiment with the standard process of film making (Kenez 2001). Unfortunately, the Committee’s plans would end up backfiring on them. If the goal was to produce more films, the result was the exact opposite. The Soviet Union saw its output of films plummet. This is in large part thanks to a new mode of production adopted by Boris Shumiatskii, who was the head of the Soviet’s cinema administration from 1930-1937. Instead of the director-centered model, the industry became vertically integrated under the direct supervision of the state. The main issue with this soon became apparent. Much of the issue lay in the fact that the necessary film equipment produced in the Soviet Union, such as film stock and cameras, were vastly inferior to those elsewhere. Additionally, the halting of the importation of foreign films in 1931 led to a decline in the necessary supplies and revenue to produce films. In 1933, the Soviet

Union produced less than forty total films. Keep in mind that they had produced over a hundred in 1930 (Belodubrovskaya 2017). For a direct comparison, Nazi Germany released over one hundred thirty-five films in 1933 (Hull 1969).

However, despite all this, many in the film industry remained hopeful that they could turn the conditions of Soviet cinema around. Most notably was Boris Shumiatskii, who was essentially in charge of running the Soviet film industry. Shumiatskii had a grandiose plan to turn either the Soviet city of Odessa or Sukhum into a Soviet Hollywood. The city would be devoted to film and would modernize and revitalize the stagnant film industry. According to the plan, this new city would produce over six hundred films by 1945. Additionally, Shumiatskii hoped to see the Soviet Union moving away from *agit* films, which were films meant to inspire hatred of the enemy and love of the state, and towards more artistically-rich pieces of cinema. Whether or not any of this was realistic can be debated to no end, but the good intention behind it is undeniable. In 1935, he even funded a trip that sent film professionals to the US and Europe to study film production. Most importantly the project had the support and approval of Joseph Stalin. Unfortunately, the political situation in the Soviet Union, once again, proved to be the industry's downfall. Stalin was becoming more and more paranoid at the actions of the West, believing that they would team up with Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union. Anybody suspected of any actions or conspiracies against Stalin was systematically purged. Several important personnel associated with the Soviet Hollywood project fell victim to Stalin's paranoia. By mid-1937, the project, which Stalin began to lose faith in and was growing impatient with its leaders, was called off. Eventually, Shumiatskii himself became a target and was arrested in October of 1937. Executed in January of 1938, any hope of seeing the plan for a Soviet Hollywood died with him (Belodubrovskaya 2014).

Soviet Realism

Thematically speaking, Soviet films during this time underwent a change from experimentalism and “formalism” of the 1920s to “Soviet Realism” of the 1940s. This change was enacted mostly by force after the Congress of Soviet Writers demanded it in 1934. Although many scholars have difficulty finding an exact definition for the genre, experts tend to see Soviet Realism as having two key components that filmmakers tended to follow, mostly by force. Firstly, the Congress decreed that the artists must present a “truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development”. Essentially, this meant that the film makers must showcase how the country was beginning to show early signs of becoming a glorious, communist utopia. Additionally, films dealing with historical events must show them from a Marxist perspective. Historical accuracy soon became another victim of this cultural revolution. Essentially, this allowed the government to reshape the past and present into whatever mold they see fit. Secondly, instead of the experimental styles of the 1920s that many viewers found confusing, the Congress demanded that Soviet Realism be accessible to everyone. After all, if the goal of film was to educate the masses, the government reasoned, then the films must be simple enough for everyone to understand. This resulted in films becoming very formulaic in terms of setting, stories, and characters.

In terms of settings, Soviet Realism films can be split into three categories: historical spectacles, revolutionary stories and contemporary dramas. Historical spectacles were the rarest of films during this time and all had the exact same purpose of glorifying Russia’s past. Films like Vladimir Petrov’s *Peter the First* and Sergei Einstein’s *Alexander Nevsky* were meant to create a sense of new nationalism. Russia, the films argued, had always been a nation of beautiful and truthful people, and the enemy has always been ugly, cowardly, stupid, and cruel.

With international political tensions being incredibly high and sentiments of xenophobia and paranoia growing, these films sought to remind Soviet citizens that they must be ready to repel any invading force, just as their ancestors had done (Kenez 2001). For example, Sergei Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* (1937) told the story of medieval Russian knights defeating the invading Germans, who had since become a popular enemy in Soviet cinema, in a battle on a frozen lake (Goodwin 1993).

Revolutionary stories, meanwhile, would focus on stories set during the Russian Revolution or the Russian Civil War. However, these films would usually just use this setting as a sort of backdrop for an adventure story. An example of this was Georgii and Sergei Vasil'ev's *Chapaev* (1934) (Beumers 2011). The film tells the story of real-life figure Dmitry Furmanov, the political Commissar of the Chapaev Division that fought against the Whites in the Urals during the Russian Civil War. However, instead of trying to tell a story that accurately represents the story and situations, the filmmakers actively ignored many of the personal struggles and internal contradictions that Furmanov faced. Instead, the filmmakers chose to present the lead character as more of a swashbuckling hero (Geldern and Stites 1995).

Finally, contemporary dramas focused on telling the stories of simple individuals, living in contemporary USSR. By far the most diverse of the group, these films would feature a variety of topics. Films would focus anywhere from border guards to those working in the factories. However, despite the wide variety of settings in contemporary dramas, most of these films would see the return of similar stock characters and plots, which will be discussed below. The only real exception to this would be the rare film that took place on collective farms, which were generally comedies and musicals.

In terms of characters, Soviet Realism would typically consist of three reoccurring stock-characters: the simple person, the Party Leader, and the enemy. Most films would revolve around an average citizen who must fulfill some sort of task that will benefit both the person and the state. While doing so, the hero would learn more about himself, the world around him, the importance of vigilance, class struggle, and the necessary actions to build a communist society. The simple person would almost always be joined by a Party Official, who would almost always be male, martial, and disinterested in the issues of family or love. The Party Official would also occasionally act as a guardian of morals. If the main protagonist had any sort of romantic interest, which could never involve anything more than a kiss onscreen, the Party Official would first generally have to straighten it out and approve of it. Finally, there would be the enemy who would seek to undermine the state and the communist vision. Usually, the enemy would seek to do this through acts of sabotage. Of the eighty-five films produced between 1933-1939 that dealt with contemporary life, fifty-two showed a socialist hero uncovering a hidden enemy. The films would often warn the viewer that the enemy could be anyone, including a beloved friend or family member. For example, the secret enemy was the protagonist's best friend in Aleksandr Dovzhenko's *Aerograd* (1935), the protagonist's father in Sergi Einstein's unfinished *Bezhin Meadow* (1935-1937), and the heroine's husband in Ivan Pyryev's *Party Card* (1936). This was very much a reflection of the culture of fear and paranoia that Stalin had created. Just as Stalin believed himself to be under constant threat from a hidden, internal enemy, Soviet film heroes found themselves uncovering and thwarting the plans of a hidden enemy (Kenez 2001).

World War II: Operation Barbarossa and Beyond

Much like the United States, the German invasion of Poland in September of 1939 did not signal the start of the war with Germany for the Soviet Union. In fact, Stalin aided Hitler's

expansion by invading Poland from the East, as part of non-aggression pact signed a few years prior. As a result, the break out of the Second World War had very little impact on the Soviet film industry. The only real noticeable development during this time was the temporary removal of anti-German and anti-fascists films from circulation (Leyda 1960). Serious change would only come in the spring of 1941, when Hitler double crossed Stalin and invaded the Soviet Union.

The first year of the war fundamentally changed nearly all aspects of the Soviet Union. The film industry was no exception, and Soviet propaganda films in particular saw some noticeable changes. Soviet filmmakers became far less concerned about highlighting the glory of socialism and the struggle of the classes than before, although this didn't disappear completely. Instead, Soviet propaganda films sought to install a sense of Russian nationalism and act as a call to arms. To do this, many Soviet movies would highlight acts of patriotism from both past and present. For example, Ivan Pyryev's *Secretary of the District Committee* (1942), which was the first feature war film, depicted an ideal party member named Stepan Kochet. In the film, Stepan organizes a partisan movement in his district and ends up outsmarting a German Colonel. Meanwhile, Petrov's *Kutuzov* (1944) told the story of Mikhail Kutuzov, who was the commander of the Russian army during Napoleon's invasion of Russia. It isn't difficult to see the parallels that the film was trying to make. Just as the Russians had fought off Napoleon's invasion, so too, the film argued, would the Soviet people fight off the Nazis. In addition to glorifying past leaders and depicting acts of patriotism, Soviet filmmakers extensively used footage to highlight the true brutality of the German invader. In Ermler's *She Defends Her Country* (1943), heroine Pasha Lukianova sees her husband killed by the Nazis and her son crushed to death by a German tank. In an act of vengeance, Pasha picks up an axe and takes the lives of several Germans. While these propaganda pieces are certainly not subtle, they do accurately reflect a sense of sacred duty

and urgency to repel the German invaders that was pervasive across the Soviet people. Stalin himself felt that the work of the filmmakers was vital to the survival of the Soviet Union. The filmmakers agreed wholeheartedly, although they wouldn't have had much of choice, even if they did disagree (Dmitry Shlapentokh and Vladimir Shlapentokh 1993). For filmmakers, as well as the rest of Soviet society, this sense of duty would remain steadfast throughout the rest of the war.

Unfortunately, Russian filmmakers' sense of patriotism and duty could not stop the Soviet film industry from continuing to deteriorate. Even before the war, the Soviet Union was producing films at an ever-decreasing rate. In 1930, the USSR produced over one-hundred films. In 1941, this number fell to forty. By the end of the war in 1945, the Soviets were producing less than twenty (Belodubrovskaya 2017). The decline of production in Soviet cinema during the 1940 is much easier to explain than the decline of Soviet cinema experienced in the 1930s. One can largely attribute the further degradation of the Soviet film industry to the obvious fact that waging a defensive war against an enemy that is hell-bent on the destruction of an entire nation and its people makes film production difficult. Firstly, filmmakers and film workers found themselves too busy fighting for survival on the front lines to be worried about making films. Even those determined to keep production going would engage in battle. Lola Fyodorina joined a unit of nurses at the front line while continuing to play the role of a nurse in the film *The Girl from Leningrad*. Meanwhile, Mikhail Rosenberg, one of the film's writers, joined a detachment and was killed in battle.

The second major issue quickly became the loss of land that the Soviet Union was experiencing. As the Germans drew close to Moscow in the winter of 1941, Stalin and the Soviet government deemed it necessary to evacuate all government offices unrelated to the defense of

the city and move them eastward. Because the government controlled the film industry, this included all major film studios. The film industry soon found itself having to start from scratch again. This initially caused a clear majority of films to look poorly made in terms of quality. That being said, some filmmakers didn't seem to mind the move. Many took pride in their ability to make ends meet with their limited capacity, and many ended up rediscovering their love of film production (Leyda 1960). Nevertheless, the effects the war had on the Soviet film industry was overwhelmingly negative and far-reaching. It would take a decade after the war's conclusion for the Soviet cinema to even begin the process of rebuilding itself (Belodubrovskaya 2017).

It wouldn't be until the later portion of the war, when victory was all but assured, that any semblance of normalcy returned. During this time, a sense of complacency began to emerge among filmmakers. In Ivan Pyryev's 1944 musical, *At Six O'Clock in the Evening after the War*, the film makers presented the deadly conflict as more of a minor inconvenience for the main characters. Just as in *Casablanca*, the film tells the story of two lovers kept apart due to the war. Unlike *Casablanca*, however, *At Six O'Clock in the Evening after the War* had a much lighter feel to it. The film is littered with triumphant songs, soldiers reciting poetry during battle, and the two main characters are able to be together again by the end of the film. The film, and others like it, drastically down played the vast amount of suffering present on the front line and instead focused on the triumph of the Soviet Union. This became ever more increasingly prevalent (or as prevalent as a decimated film industry would allow) as the war drew closer and closer to a victorious conclusion (Gillespie 2003).

Women and Minorities: Empty Promises of Equality

The Soviet Union was a vast country populated by a large diversity of people. Everyone from ethnic Siberians in the East to Moldovans in the West found themselves under the control

of the communist regime. As such, the Party found it necessary to instill a sense of unity in all of its citizens. This became especially important during the Great Patriotic War, when all Soviets citizens were expected to do their patriotic duty. Indeed, the Russians did a good job of painting the Soviet Union as a harmonious place free from the shackles of discrimination and racism in their films. If one got all of their knowledge about ethnic politics from these propaganda pieces, then one would assume that there was never any sort of ethnic tension in the communist state. However, the representation of unity and peace among the different ethnicities within the Soviet Union did not accurately reflect the reality of the situation. Racism and patronizing attitudes towards ethnic minorities was, and still is very prevalent. No matter how much Soviet film makers would talk about a “new life” for these ethnic groups under the communist system, life was hardly better for these people than it had been in previous times. In fact, it was noticeably worse in many cases.

One piece that demonstrates the staggering difference between propaganda and reality for ethnic minorities is the film, *The Country of Four Rivers*. Supposedly an historical documentary, the film aims to depict the lives of the Tatar people of the Tatar Autonomous Republic. After a first half that demonstrates the historical background of the region, the final three of six parts of the film are dedicated to showing how cheerful the lives of the Tatar people are under the Soviet system. Throughout the film, the filmmakers showcase, many times in staged events, the Soviets helping propel the Tatars into the modern era. The importance of industrialization and modernizing is very clear in this film. For example, the film takes time to show how the Soviets have improved the lives of the “new Tatar woman.” Under the new communist system, the film argues, the Tatar women are now able to work with modern machinery in a modern factory. Other showcases include a Tatar academic theater, tractors, newspapers, and more. At one point,

the film even brags that the country now has over 3,672 Tatar students, as opposed to the meager twenty-seven it had before the revolution. However, the film also warns about a hidden enemy who has connections to the bourgeoisie. The people of Tatarstan must remain vigilant, lest the enemy destroys the “new life” of the Soviet Tatar people (Gradszkova 2001).

What this film and others like it failed to mention, however, was the continuous abuse ethnic groups like the Tatars would face under Stalin’s regime. After recapturing Crimea from the Germans in 1944, the Soviet government began a mass propaganda campaign that systematically labeled the Crimean Tatars as traitors, claiming that they had supported the Nazis and fought against the Red Army. Soon, the Red Government began a process of mass deportation of these people from the Crimean Peninsula. Over 180,000 Crimean Tatars, along with 9,620 Armenians, 12,420 Bulgarians, and 15,040 Greeks, found themselves exiled to various parts of the Soviet Union. Those who faced relocation quickly found their new living conditions to be horrendous. Nearly 20 percent of deportees ended up losing their lives. Additionally, the stigma of being “traitors” to the state would continue to haunt these groups for decades to come (Rothbart and Korostelina 2011).

Much like many ethnic minorities, women also saw a difference in what the Soviet Union was saying about their experiences on screen and their realities. During the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks promised a new world for women. Gone, they said, would be the old system of gender norms and unequal power dynamics. However, this would prove to be fanciful thinking (or perhaps an outright deceitful lie). Over the next few decades, Soviet women saw little to no change, and old gender norms remained (Galili 1990). Despite this, early Soviet films did try to paint women as something besides just eye candy for the male gaze. Pudovkin’s *Mother* (1926) is an excellent illustration of early Soviet films attitude towards women. In the film, Pelageia

Vlasova, the main heroine, joins the proletariat revolution of 1905 after her son is arrested. She ends up sacrificing her life to the cause and becomes a martyr. The film sought to emphasize that a woman could help carry forth the communist vision just as well as any man could. Again, though, one should remember that this is a far cry from the reality that most women faced at that time.

This attempt to keep women out of the male gaze was relatively short lived. The 1930s and the rise of Stalin saw regression and no real beneficial change for the women of the Soviet Union, either in real life or on screen. During this time, many Soviets returned to the attitude of women's role in domesticity. While women could work and be financially independent, Soviets still saw the caretaking of the children and the home to be a woman's main priority. Additionally, Soviet films in the 1930s once again started using attractive women to appeal to audiences. For example, Valentina Serova, a popular actress at that time, brought a youthful and attractive glamour that sought to rival that of a Hollywood actress. Russians began seeing her as the embodiment of virtue and innocence, which had been the ideal standard for women even before the revolution (Gillespie 2003). For all the talk of equality between the genders, which the party spoke often of, very little changed for women. The promised liberation from the Cult of Domesticity never arrived, and, even today, Russian attitudes towards gender norms appear somewhat similar to what they were decades before.

Despite the numerous injustices ethnic minorities and women endured, the Soviet Union would continue to espouse ethnic harmony and equality. Marxism, they argued, saw no gender or race. Instead, the inevitable worldwide revolution would be between the working-class people of the world and the bourgeoisie. As such, everyone was expected to do their part to further the

communist cause and defeat any enemy of the state, both at home and abroad (D. Shlapentokh and V. Shalpentokh 1993).

Conclusion

Whether it be literary masterpieces or world-renowned ballet dances, Russia has created some truly brilliant works of art throughout its history. Additionally, thanks to revolutionary Soviet directors were able to craft masterpieces that became world renowned during the 1920s, it appeared like Russia was going to produce more. Therefore, it is hard to look back at Soviet cinema during the reign of Stalin and not be dismayed. With such a strong foundation, Soviet cinema should've been poised to make great leap of progress during the following decade. Unfortunately, the rise of Stalin and his tyrannical regime caused the reverse to happen. While the Soviets were able to make improvements in some area, such as providing the Soviet people with greater access to cinemas, the overwhelming impact Stalin had on the Soviet film industry was negative. By stifling creativity and implementing regressive economic policies, the USSR squandered its potential to develop a functioning, well-run film industry. Unfortunately, the situation would only get worse for the Soviet Union once the Germans invaded. Even before the first shots of World War II were fired, the Soviet film industry was floundering, and the war's destruction would leave it at an all-time low. It should then come as no surprise that the Germans had the significant edge in the ability to produce more films of higher quality. While Soviet cinema would slowly begin to rebound after the death of Stalin in 1953 (Bruisch et al 2017), one can only imagine how many works of art and innovative techniques by filmmakers like Vertov and Pyryev the world will never get to see.

Chapter 3: Nazi Germany

Introduction

Nazi cinema is an interesting case study. Unlike other totalitarian nations, Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels and the Nazis intended for their cinema to be more than just agitation films. Most of the films made during this time had no overt political message. Even most of the films that could be considered more standard cases of propaganda were subtler about it and have real artistic intent behind it. As a result, Nazi propaganda films tend to be of higher quality than some of its competitors, especially the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the rise of Goebbels and the Nazi party would eventually lead to the downfall of German cinema. Slowly but surely, Goebbels took power away from the visionaries and gave it to himself. By the end of the war, he was in complete and total control over all aspects of the German film industry. However, the Propaganda Minister's lofty ambition of creating the world's second largest film industry never came to fruition as the war caused the total destruction of German cinema.

Propaganda as Art: The German Use of Covert Propaganda

Before one can begin to discuss Nazi cinema, one has to understand the differences between the political and the non-political segments of the German film industry. German cinematic propaganda was rather unique from most of the other authoritarian and totalitarian nations of the 20th century. In the Soviet Union, for example, propaganda was rather overt in its political message. However, Nazi filmmakers often tried to keep things a bit subtler. For the most part, even during the war, most films shown in German cinemas did not have any overt propaganda themes. Goebbels intended for most German films to be actual works of art (Petley 2002). Most Nazi films were traditional genre films (Brockmann 2010). During their time in

power, the Nazis produced 523 comedies and musicals, 295 melodrama and biographical picture, and 123 detective and adventure epics (Rentschler 1990). Most of these films were nearly free of any obvious political message. What Nazi presence one can find in these films was usually very subtle and placed in the background, usually dealing with the mundane parts of daily life (Bergfelder, Carter, and Gokturk 2002). In fact, many of the films produced during this time are seemingly so apolitical that they remain popular with German audiences to this day, often playing on television or at film festivals (Rentschler 1990).

This is not to say that overt propaganda was completely absent from Nazi cinema. *Triumph of the Will* and *The Eternal Jew* are both obvious examples of Nazi films that don't try to hide their political message. However, these in-your-face political films were rather rare. Although this number sometimes fluctuates due to subjective opinions, according to some experts, overt propaganda films only made up around 14 percent of the films that the Nazis produced (Brockmann 2010). Even films that one might consider to be one of the more typical political features varied in terms of the level of overt propaganda present on screen. Many propaganda films tried to stay subtle about the ideological message that the Nazis were trying to push with these films.

A prime example of a film that used subtlety to promote a propaganda message was Wolfgang Liebeneiner's *I Accuse* (1941). Trying to gather support for the nation's euthanasia program, *I Accuse* tells the story of a woman who suffers from multiple sclerosis. Despite her scientist husband's best efforts, doctors have no cure and are unable to treat her. Instead of suffering through the illness, the woman asks to the doctor to put her out of her misery and to euthanize her. Having exhausted all other options, the husband reluctantly agrees to his wife's wish (Luckert and Bachrach 2009). Although in retrospect *I Accuse* is obviously Nazi

propaganda meant to drum up popular support for one of its most despicable programs, it is still relatively tame compared to most other propaganda pieces. Goebbels and the Nazis still aimed to tell German audiences a compelling story with *I Accuse*. This does not mean that films like *I Accuse* are innocent pieces of cinema, or that audiences should see it as anything other than a piece of hateful propaganda used by the Nazis in an attempt to turn its population against the mentally and physically ill. Even for films that are seemingly without any political message, any potential viewer should always remember who was behind these movies. Nevertheless, one cannot deny just how seriously Goebbels and Nazis filmmakers took cinema as an art form, and the amount of effort they put into their craft.

Homefront Cinema: Nazi Cinema During the War

Despite the outbreak of war, Goebbels and Nazi filmmakers continued to emphasize the importance of cinema. Knowing that film had tremendous potential to sway public morale and opinion about the war, German propagandists were determined not to see attendance or production numbers drop. To keep audiences coming to theatres, the RMVP (Reich Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda) (Kallis 2008) assured German audiences that the film industry was as healthy as it had ever been. They claimed that the war had no negative effect on audience attendance whatsoever. Nothing from blackouts to aerial bombardments would stop the German citizen from enjoying the art of cinema. If anything, the war was greatly beneficial to the film industry, according to the Germans. To start, land acquisitions gave the German film industry more space to shoot films and greater opportunity to spread their films abroad. Additionally, with individual spending capped due to rationing, many assumed that people would choose to spend their extra money on entertainment. Despite the exaggerations in many of the Germans' claims, they did seem to convince audiences to continue to go to the theatres.

Audience attendance numbers continued to grow throughout the course of the war with only a slight drop in 1944 (Fox 2007).

Additionally, the war presented an opportunity for Goebbels to take complete control over all aspects of the industry. Beginning the process of nationalizing the film industry in 1937, Goebbels further extended his power by incorporating all studios into the government-owned studio named *Ufa-Film GmbH*. With all studios subsumed by January of 1942, German cinema essentially became a toy for Goebbels (Kallis 2008). If German audience members began to notice a pattern in cinema, they could be sure that Goebbels was personally behind it. The industry would bend to the whim of Goebbels without question. In one case, Goebbels, having just seen a film about the love between a doctor and a nurse, told his adjunct that he was sick of *artzeffilm* (doctor films) and that he wished for production of these to stop. However, the adjunct misheard and thought Goebbels had said *ernstefilms* (serious films). As a result, German writers began to produce light-hearted comedies (Rhodes et al 1976). While this was obviously a mistake, it does give an accurate picture to just how much power Goebbels wielded over the German film industry.

Of course, to say that the German film industry went through the war completely unscathed or that all of Goebbels desires came to fruition would be complete lie. In fact, the overall production of films suffered because of the war. Even before the war, financial troubles began to weaken the German film industry. The Great Depression caused a great amount of financial instability to numerous German film companies. Additionally, the German film industry also began to experience problems of increased government control, increasing production costs, and the vanishing of the foreign market. As a result, German cinema was already starting to see a decline in production (Hull 1969). The war would just further exacerbate

this issue. Due to the limits that war places on film production, such as the increased restrictions on film material, the overall number of films produced steadily fell over the course of the conflict. The Germans produced 172 total films in 1937, yet they were only able to produce around 77 in 1944. Additionally, despite attendance numbers remaining strong, many audience members found themselves dissatisfied; in large part due to a decrease in the amount of films available, as well as a decree that all German films must remain in theatres for at least a week, many complained that there were too few films and those that were there stayed in theatres for too long. As the war progressed, this problem became worse (Fox 2007). Allied bombing, for example, would often force film production to move to another city to continue shooting (Hull 1969). Nevertheless, for a good chunk of the war, the German film industry still fared better than most of the other war-torn nations, such as the Soviet Union. It wouldn't be until the latter portion of the war that the German film industry faced a complete collapse.

Despite the outbreak of war and the total absorption of the German film industry, the Nazis still didn't place political propaganda over popular entertainment. Most of the films shown in German cinemas remained purely as a form of escapism. If anything, the role of cinema as a distraction from real life became even more important to the German people due to the war (Ganeva 2018). For the most part, newsreels were a much larger source of propaganda for the German people than films ever were (Hull 1969). The only real visible change that one could observe would be in the relatively few films that were bona fide pieces of political propaganda. Under Goebbels vision, propaganda films would now aim to mobilize all of its citizens to the war effort and install a sense of determination to see the war to its victorious conclusion (Baird 1974). These themes would continue to show in Nazi propaganda films up until the end of the war.

One of the ways that the Nazis attempted to rally support for the war effort was to present the enemy in the worst light possible. The early years of the war saw the Germans releasing several anti-British propaganda pieces. One notable example was Hans Steinhoff's epic *Uncle Kruger* (1941). Extremely epic in scope, Goebbels intended for *Uncle Kruger* to be the German answer to *Gone With the Wind*. The movie tells the story of the Boer hero Ohm Kruger, who in the film is telling his life story on his deathbed via flashbacks. The movie then proceeds to show 132 minutes of vehement anti-British propaganda. In perhaps the greatest display of hypocrisy in propaganda, the Germans at one point portray British brutality against innocent Boer women and children that they locked up in a concentration camp in South Africa. The film even took time to inform the viewer that the British murdered 26,000 women and children. As the war progressed, the Germans found themselves with a new enemy in the Soviet Union. With the invasion of the USSR underway, Nazi propagandists began to produce a few anti-Soviet films such as Karl Ritter's *G.P.U* (1942). *G.P.U.* tells the story of a young girl joining the GPU, which was the Russian secret police, to betray them as revenge for her murdered family. Over the course of this film, the Germans portray Russians as decadent Jewish puppets, with one scene portraying a party at a Russian embassy where they are playing "negro" music. Surprisingly, the Nazis never really created many anti-American films. A few films negatively portrayed individual members of the American government, such as President Roosevelt, but the Nazis never portrayed America as a whole in a negative light. The reason for America's noticeable absence from Nazi propaganda films is up for debate.

Another genre that arose due to the war was the military epic (Hull 1969), such as Veit Harlan's *The Great King* (1942). The film tells the story of the Prussian king Frederick the Great as he fights in the Seven Years War. *The Great King* tries to draw parallels between German

military exploits from the past with the present. For example, the film proclaims, “Prussia will never be lost as long as the King lives”. It does not take much of an imagination to see parallels the film draws between Fredrick the Great and Adolf Hitler.

As the war progressed and the tide was beginning to turn against the Germans, an additional trend popped up in Nazi cinema: the need to resist the enemy and continue the fight. *Kolberg* (1945), another one of Veit Harlan’s film, which premiered near the war’s end, was a last-ditch effort to raise determination to see the war to its conclusion with a German victory (Hoffman and Maass 1965). Set during the Napoleonic period, *Kolberg* is a war-time epic drama that tells the story of a small Prussian town on the Baltic, whose local population helped repel the advances of Napoleon and keep the town in Prussian hands. The film was obviously meant to symbolize the Nazi struggle to hold back the advancing British and Americans in the West and the Russians from the East. In addition, Goebbels hoped that *Kolberg*, which was the most expensive film produced by the Nazis, would be so inspiring to the German people that it would instill a sense of national unity. This renewed sense of vigor would be so strong that it would turn the tide of the war. The films obviously did not meet Goebbels’ ludicrously high expectations, and Germany would go on to surrender unconditionally just four months after the movie’s premier.

Once the Allies began to push deeper and deeper into Hitler’s empire, the German film industry found itself becoming another victim of the war’s destruction, and audiences, who had once flocked to cinemas, found it nearly impossible to attend. By early March of 1945, many Germans found their homes destroyed. Additionally, a number of Germans in the Eastern part of the country frantically tried to make their way westward to escape the Soviet army’s wrath. Even if the German people did manage to find time to go to the cinema and not worry about the

approach of an army of vengeful Soviet troops, they might be hard pressed to find theatres that were still standing. By February of 1944, over 1,300 of Germany's 7,300 theatres were destroyed. Although no reliable data exists after this point, one can assume that this number sharply rose as time went on. For the premier of *Kolberg*, the Nazis were only able to use two theatres in Berlin as all others had been destroyed. By the end of the war, only a few thousand spectators in Germany's largest cities would ever get to see it. Finally, the war's destruction made film production itself difficult. Most of the raw materials needed to produce many of these films simply were no longer widely available at the wars conclusion, and the two printing labs in Berlin were destroyed (Culbert 2009).

Joseph Goebbels and his wife killed themselves and their children on May 1st, 1945 (Brockman 2010). The war would soon end with Nazi Germany's unconditional surrender. The German film industry laid in ruins, and many of those who helped create some of the Nazis most hateful pieces of cinema would find themselves permanently without work. It would take years for the German film industry to rebound, and it would be even longer for it to be unified as one.

Hateful Cinema: Anti-Semitism in Nazi Cinema

It is simply impossible to talk about Nazi propaganda without addressing the anti-Semitism that was ever present. The Nazis saw the Jews as the main enemy and threat to the German people, and they were quick to remind their people of this. Everything from posters to children's books told of the Jewish threat (Luckert and Bachrach 2009). However, despite anti-Semitism being ever present in most forms of Nazi propaganda, the Germans made surprisingly few major pictures with the central theme being anti-Semitic propaganda. Nevertheless, those that were made have infamously ingrained themselves in the history books for their hateful portrayal of the Jewish people. Of the anti-Semitic propaganda pieces released to theatres, there

were four of note: *Robert und Bertram* (July 7, 1939), *The Rothschilds' Shares in Waterloo* (August 17, 1940), *Jew Suss* (September 24, 1940), and finally *The Eternal Jew* (November 28, 1940) (Hull 1969). Despite the limited number of anti-Semitic films produced, each one reveals the deep-seated hatred of the Jewish people at the core of the nation's politics.

One of the first feature films addressing the subject of the Jewish people, *Robert und Bertram*, directed by Hans H. Zerlett, is unique as it was an anti-Semitic musical comedy. Portraying the Jews as cultural and economic outsiders, *Robert und Bertram* tells the story of two 19th century vagabonds named Robert and Bertram, who spend their time cheating Jews and giving to poor Aryans. While certainly hateful and deplorable, *Robert und Bertram* is a relatively unremarkable film whose only real mark on Nazi-cinema history is that it was one of the first notable anti-Semitic feature length films as well as its two main characters being vagabonds, which curiously went against the grain of the work and rule-oriented Nazi Germany (O'Brien 2004). However, despite its relatively small influence in the grand picture, *Robert und Bertram* signaled the beginning of the troubling trend of anti-Semitic films.

Released the following year, *The Rothschilds' Shares in Waterloo*, directed by Erich Waschneck, is only really notable for being another anti-Semitic film. Set right after the Battle of Waterloo during the Napoleonic War, the film tells the story of the Jewish Rothchild family, who are able to make millions at the bourse, a French stock market, by falsely reporting that Napoleon had won. The film ends with the Rothchild family fleeing to England, where British plutocrats help them continue their scheming ways. Perhaps only being memorable as a both an anti-Semitic and anti-British film, *The Rothschilds' Shares in Waterloo* was a commercial failure and had virtually no impact on audiences in Germany. Unfortunately, the following month would

introduce one of the most successful and infamous pieces of Nazi propaganda of all time (Hull 1969).

By far the most successful piece of anti-Semitic propaganda, *Jew Suss* is also probably the best known. Directed by Veit Harlan, *Jew Suss* tells the story of real-life 18th century Jewish figure Joseph Suss Oppenheimer. On a side note, one should note that the actual Oppenheimer and the one portrayed by the Nazis were very different from one another. Whereas the actual man was an obscure historical figure with the complexities one can expect from an actual human being, the Nazis portrayal was that of a monster whose main concern was that of money and power (Hull 1969). Throughout the course of the film, Oppenheimer schemes and cons his way into the court of Wurttemberg. Taking advantage of a weakened state, Oppenheimer implements decrees that give him unlimited power and oppresses the locals with his private police and militia (Rentschler 2009). Finally, the film ends with the people revolting and executing a cowering Oppenheimer (Hull 1969). This film was very much a reflection Nazi belief and paranoia of a Jewish conspiracy to take over Germany. Just as the Jews had tricked the people of Wurttemberg, warned the Nazis, so too will the Jews try to trick and take advantage of the German people. According to the Nazis, the tale of Jew Suss should serve as a warning about the Jewish threat to the German people. This same message would soon be used as justification for genocide.

Finally, *The Eternal Jew*, directed by Fritz Hippler (Rentschler 2009), is the perhaps the most notorious of the aforementioned films as it notably put on the façade of being a documentary. Made shortly after the Polish campaign, the Nazis used a visual-heavy documentary filmmaking style to help reinvigorate the German people's hatred of all things Jewish. The ultimate goal of *The Eternal Jew* was to portray Jews as sneaky, dirty, parasitic and

sinister. To do this, the Germans violated even the most basic levels of ethics in documentary filmmaking. Distorting or fabricating the story behind an image is a particularly egregious sin for documentary filmmakers, and the Germans did it multiple times. For example, the film used images and films shot in Jewish ghettos to demonstrate the squalor that the Jewish people called home. What the film fails to mention, however, was that the Jews were forced to live there by the Germans themselves. In another scene, the film shows a couple of Jewish people with beards in traditional religious garb. The film then shows the same people in western attire and clean-shaven, indicating the Jews ability to blend in with larger society. The film then claims that this ability allows Jews to infiltrate societies and act as parasites and that they have been doing this for centuries. Used as justifying The Final Solution to the German people, *The Eternal Jew* remains one of the most infamous examples of documentary propaganda of all time (Kracauer 1956).

While the styles and genres of these propaganda films may have varied, from a documentary to a musical drama, the politics and representation of the Jewish people was all the same. These films portrayed Jews as scheming, dirty, and money obsessed, whose main goal is to leech off the German people. It was vital for the Aryan people, argued the Nazis, to know the scheming history of the Jewish people and to remain ever vigilant of their current plans. It is no coincidence that these films were all released around a similar time frame and that The Final Solution would soon commence. Although anti-Semitism was a common part of daily life in Nazi Germany, these films helped act as one last push towards justifying and popularizing genocide.

Mothers in the Fatherland: Nazi Cinema Representation of Women and Motherhood

To construct the ideal Nazi heroine, one must always start with motherhood. As previously mentioned, the Nazis saw motherhood as the most important role for a woman. Germany needs soldiers to fight in its war, and women need to produce those soldiers. As such, the ideal woman in Nazi cinema was almost always a mother willing to place the needs of the greater good over any of her personal needs. Even as the war began to drag on and the need for women to work in factories or fields became apparent, the Nazis made sure to remind the women of Germany that this was purely a temporary development and that her first duty was still as a mother and wife (Rupp 1978). Additionally, the Nazis made sure to highlight and praise “pure” mothers of desirable racial backgrounds. Meanwhile, mothers of “undesirable” children were either excluded from film or looked down upon. Nazi cinema treated Aryan women who bore children with “inferior” races with extra contempt. In *The Golden City* (1942), for example, Anna, the main character, takes her own life after becoming pregnant by her Slavic cousin. Nazi cinema simply had no patience for those who stepped outside their own moral standards or those who tried to subvert traditional gender roles.

Although films whose central theme was motherhood were somewhat rare in Nazi Germany, those that did feature motherhood, either as a central theme or subtheme, typically followed similar patterns of highlighting a woman’s sacrifice to the greater good. Perhaps the film that best shows the archetypal Nazi mother are Gustav Ucicky’s *Mutterliebe* (1939). In *Mutterliebe*, the main heroine, named Marthe Pirlinger (played by Kathe Dorsch), is the mother of four and a widow. The film show portrays Marthe as a heroic figure who is willing to do whatever it takes to make sure that she provides for her family and raises them to be good Germans. As a young mother, Marthe opens up a laundry business to help support her family. She is able to continue her struggle and draws strength only from the joy of raising children, at

one point she even refuses state-sponsored support. As the film goes on, Marthe ages, and her role as a provider shifts to that of a guide. As an elder mother and grandmother, Marthe passes down her wisdom to her children and helps them become good members of German society (Fox 2009).

As the war escalated, a woman's sacrifice remained a central theme in films that featured topics of women and motherhood. However, the war somewhat shifted the type of sacrifice that woman and mothers could expect to face. Instead of sacrificing their personal interests and desires to the larger community, women and mothers could often expect to sacrifice their children and husbands to the war effort (Rupp 1978). For example, Von Bay's film *Annelie* (1941) tells the story of a woman named Annelie, who was born in 1871. The film shows her life from childhood to old age. Throughout that time, she sees her husband die fighting for Germany during the First World War and then her sending her children off to fight in the Second World War. In the final act of the film, Annelie expresses deep satisfaction in fulfilling her duty to Germany by sacrificing the life of her husband to war in 1914 and her sons in 1939. No matter the pain and the grief, a German woman must always remain stoic in the face of loss and adversity (Fox 2009).

In terms of the looks of the ideal German woman, one can look to actress Kristina Soderbaum as the best representative. One of the most popular actresses of her time, German audiences flocked to see her at cinema. Throughout her career, Kristina's films managed to rake in a box office of over 200 million Marks. One of her most successful films, *The Golden City*, managed to earn 45 million Marks. Despite essentially being black-listed after the war, Kristina remained popular. A 1953 poll of German audiences showed that Kristina remained the second most popular actress. Much of her success can largely be attributed to the Nazis' marketing her

as the ideal representative for the Aryan race. As a blonde-haired, blue-eyed young actress from Sweden, Kristina was everything that an ideal Aryan woman should be. Her Swedish origins also gave Kristina a foreign and exotic appeal. At the same time, the Nazis tried to portray her as down-to-Earth, modest and selfless. They would frequently have her characters make the ultimate sacrifice to save face. So frequently did her characters end up drowning themselves that she earned the nickname “The Reich’s Water Corpse”. With frequent themes of loss and sacrifice, Kristina Soderbaum served as the Nazis’ reminder to German women that even the most ideal Aryan woman must give herself to the greater good. While Kristina Soderbaum certainly wasn’t the actual representation of the average German woman, nor was she the only popular German actress at that time, she is noteworthy due to her role as what the Nazis *thought* the ideal woman should be (Ascheid 2003).

As is true with most ideals that the Nazis professed, there was a notable disconnect between what the Nazis showed on screen and the reality of the situation. Aesthetically, the Nazis had hopes that German women could be convinced to rely on a more natural look rather than the glitz and glamorous look of Hollywood and the Weimar Republic. However, German women remained unconvinced. Futile attempts, such as Goebbels ordering all beauty salons closed in 1943, did little, if any, to change the mind of the German woman. For the most part, women continued to subscribe to the prefascist beauty standard. Even Adolf Hitler’s mistress, Eva Braun, owned numerous dresses and frequently wore gowns modelled after movie stars’ outfits (Ascheid 2003).

Additionally, the prewar image of the housewife staying at home and looking after the children soon became quite impractical as the war waged on. Just as had happened elsewhere, Germany eventually started using women to make up for lost labor. To justify this ideologically,

the Nazis stated that this was an extension of their motherly duties. As mothers, according to the Nazis, these women were providing their sons with the necessary ammunition to fight the war. Nevertheless, despite the Nazis insistence that a woman's main responsibility was still as a mother, it still represented a female presence in a sphere that was supposed to be reserved for males.

Finally, not all women enthusiastically adopted the Nazis message about motherhood being the pinnacle, and essentially only, role for a woman. While women did vote in great numbers in favor of the Nazi party, a few female activists continued to advocate for an expanded role in the new German society. For example, Guida Diehl cautiously criticized the male-centric nature of the Nazi party and called for a greater role for women. While calls for greater equality, like those of Guide Diehl, were almost certainly ignored, it is a reflection that not all women were eager to conform to the Nazi's ideal for women (Rupp 1978).

While Soviet propagandists at least tried to present women as being equal under the eyes of communism, the Nazis made no illusions about their attitudes towards women and their place in German society. To Adolf Hitler and most other heads of the Nazi party, a woman's place is squarely in the home. Women simply had no place trying to insert themselves into the man's world of politics and the labor force. Instead, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party saw the raising of future generation of soldiers as a German woman's main responsibility. The representation and the role of women in German cinema was very much a reflection of the gender views and masculine-centric opinions of the Nazi Party (Ascheid 2003).

Conclusion

The subject of Nazi cinema and its legacy is not an easy one to approach. On the one hand, there is simply no denying that the Nazis were able to run their film industry with surprising efficiency. Even as the war dragged on, German theaters continued to show new feature-length picture. Additionally, unlike the low quality of most totalitarian cinema, including those of modern-day states, there is serious artistic merit in many of these films. To this day, many historians and film critics consider pieces of Nazi cinema like *Triumph of the Will*, which will be briefly discussed in the following chapter, to be the quintessential propaganda film. Meanwhile, many Germans, potentially unaware of the exact nature of the filmmakers, continue to enjoy many of the nonpolitical films to this day. However, this time also represents a dark era for German cinema. For all the impressive craftsmanship and care, it is simply impossible to deny the hatred and destruction associated with these films. While it remains up to the viewer how they approach the situation, the impact these films have had is a discussion that cinema historians and analysts need to have. Failure to do so leaves us ignorant and less able to deal with current issues of extremist propaganda.

Chapter 4: Comparisons

Introduction

To determine whether the Germans had more effective cinematic propaganda, one needs to approach the situation from several perspectives. Firstly, one needs to look at the situation from an industrial perspective. Which nations' industry was more efficient? Research indicates that this category heavily favors the Germans. The film industry under the Nazis was far more stable and experienced than those in the Soviet Union. Additionally, the defensive nature of the war ensured that Soviet cinema wouldn't have any chance to rebound. For this reason, the Germans were able to outproduce the Soviets in terms of film quantity and quality. Secondly, one needs to look at the situation from a political perspective. How did the political decisions of the nations' leaders affect film production? Once again, the Germans had the advantage as their leadership understood the medium of film far better than Soviet leader. Finally, one needs to look at the psychological and thematic components of these films. Which nations' style of propaganda films was better able to sway public opinion? Unfortunately, due to a lack of reliable evidence or data, this final question remains nearly impossible to answer. This leaves the overall picture unclear.

Industry Stability

Whether it be economic, physical, or bureaucratic, it is vital to the health and success of an industry that the infrastructure is set up in a sound manner. This immediately put the Soviet film industry in a precarious position, especially when compared to their German counter parts. Whereas the Soviets had a poor economic system for film, the German's film industry had the

facilities and a comparatively, well-run bureaucratic process. As a result, filmmaking in the Soviet Union became far bleaker than in Germany even before the war.

The fundamental problems in the structure of the Soviet film industry began in the early 1930s. During this time, the USSR shifted its entire economy from a market system to a centralized-bureaucratic system (D. Shlapentokh and V. Shlapentokh 1993). Known as Stalin's First Five-Year Plan, the state installed a command economy for agriculture and industry, which included cinema (Kepley 1996). This essentially meant that all aspects of cinema went through the government. For example, under the new cinema system, known as Soiuzkino (Our Cinema), the bureaucratic leader of Soviet Cinema, Boris Shumiatskii, had the authority to stop any film's production at any time for whatever reason. During this time, the new leadership had ambitious plans for the film industry. In the eyes of the new leadership, they could use films that had both artistic value and economic success to help craft the "new socialist man". Additionally, Soviet planners hoped to soon be able to rival Hollywood in terms of output (Kenez 2001). However, these dreams were doomed from the very beginning due to several key factors. Firstly, the Soviet film industry, much like most other industries in the USSR, was woefully behind the rest of the world technologically. As a result, the government had to divert significant amounts of funds from film production in order to pay for the modernization. Secondly, the increased bureaucracy, which the government hoped would increase efficiency, caused production to slow. Perhaps given enough time, production output would increase. However, this brings up the third issue that the Soviet film industry faced at the time. Unlike the Nazis, who were careful and diligent about industry reorganization, Soviet industry, not just film, had to deal with frequent and jarring reorganizations. Not satisfied by the industrial output, Stalin scrapped his first Five-Year Plan and introduced the second Five-Year Plan. Soiuzkino became known as the Main Administration

of the Cinema Industry, and the government further increased its power (Kepley 1996). Directors soon lost what little creative and bureaucratic freedoms they had left. For example, a director would not be allowed to change a single line of dialogue without explicit permission from the authorities. To make matters worse, the number of supervisory organizations would continuously grow. For example, one organization was created specifically for discussing scripts that dealt with themes of youth. Further bogged down by increased bureaucracy and censorship, production slowed even further. Ivan Pyryev's film *The Conveyer Belt of Death* is perhaps the best example to illustrate this as the film had to be remade 14 times (Kenez 2001). Simply making a single film became a bureaucratic nightmare, ensuring that the Soviets would never catch up to their foreign counterparts.

Viewed on its own, one would consider the German film industry to be in a state of decline. Increased government oversight, a shrinking foreign market, and increasing production cost were causing a steady drop in terms of film output. However, even with all these issues, the German film industry was still far more stable than the Soviet's. Unlike the Soviet film industry, whose numbers plummeted in a very short of time, German film output remained steadily above 120 movies per year throughout the 1930s (Hull 1969) and still managed to produce as many as 77 films in 1944 (Fox 2007). There are two potential reason that the Germans didn't experience an industry-wide collapse like the Soviets. Firstly, before the Nazis came to power, the Germans already had a well-run, functional film industry. German cinema was culturally renowned around the world and was economically very powerful. Able to efficiently produce films of high quality, Weimar cinema attracted some of Europe's greatest talent and became Hollywood's greatest competitor during the 1920s (Brockman 2010). However, this would change in the early 1930s as nation-wide economic instability allowed the Nazis to take over. Once the Nazis took over,

there was a great sense of anxiety and uncertainty among German filmmakers about which direction the Nazis would choose to take the industry (Hull 1969). Indeed, there were signs of trouble. After taking power, Goebbels and the Nazis set up The Ministry of People's Enlightenment and Propaganda (RMVP). Censorship laws and racial purity requirements soon followed (Balfour 1979). However, this brings up the second potential reason that the German film industry didn't collapse. Unlike the leaders in the Soviet Union, Goebbels used a great deal of discretion in his dealings with the film industry. Goebbels was keen to keep German filmmakers on his and the Nazis' side. Had he chosen to act aggressively, he knew he risked losing their support. Even though the financial instability of the film industry presented a great opportunity for more government control, Goebbels increased his power and the process of nationalization at a much slower pace than what was seen in the Soviet Union (Hull 1969). Additionally, rather than any aggressive seizure of assets, Goebbels would take control with more subtle methods. For example, Goebbels set up a credit bank for filmmakers, called the FKB, in June of 1933. Initially, it only helped fund small independent producers. By 1936, however, the FKB, and therefore Goebbels, was helping to finance over 73 percent of German feature films. In another example, Goebbels had his agent, Dr. Max Winkler, create a trust company and buy up large amounts of shares in two major film companies, Ufa and Tobis, which were experiencing severe financial troubles (Schoeps and Dell'Orto 2003). As a result, unlike the Soviets, who essentially completely changed the structure of the film industry in a very short amount of time, the shift towards a nationalized industry was much less jarring and burdensome for the German filmmakers that chose to stay in Germany. Additionally, while German filmmakers did have to deal with government censorship, they were given much more leeway during the production stage than filmmakers in the Soviet Union, making bureaucracy

less of an issue. Given the German film industry's advantages, it is doubtful that it would've ever fall to the low levels that Soviet cinema reached.

Nevertheless, had Goebbels sought to fundamentally change the structure of German film industry immediately, then it is entirely possible that the decline in production would've been even greater. Germany still had to struggle with financial problem and decreasing production output, but it was still comparatively much more stable than the Soviet film industry.

Personnel and Leadership

In a well-structured industry, it is vital that those running it are well-trained and knowledgeable about the craft. Unfortunately for the Soviets, the Germans held superiority in this area as well. Soviet filmmakers during the 1930s and 40s were far more amateurish than their German counterparts.

The reason for this is largely a reflection of each nations' approach to previously established personnel. During the 1920s, both nations had filmmakers that received recognition from around the world for their craft. However, once the 1930s arrived, the two nations split in terms of their treatment of these previously-established filmmakers. In Nazi Germany, most of those who contributed to the industry in the previous decade could continue their work. There were exceptions of course. Jews and other racially "unpure" filmmakers were blacklisted. As a result, over 2,000 directors, producers, actors and technicians found that they could no longer work in the industry. Many of those who could emigrate chose to do so, including the 500 that would end up in Hollywood (Horak et al 1996). While those who left represent a significant talent loss to the German industry, a good number of German filmmakers were able to continue

working under the new Nazi regime. As a result, Germany was able to continue to produce relatively high-quality films (Schoeps and Dell'Orto 2003).

On the flip side, policy makers under Stalin treated the artists of the 1920s with a great amount of disdain. Established artists like Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein were constantly criticized for their formalist and confusing styles. As a result, many found it either impossible or extremely difficult to find work. For instance, Pudovkin, a young and renowned Russian director, was unable to direct another film over a five-year period. When he finally did return, his new works paled in comparison to his previous films. Meanwhile, radical critics condemned another Russian director, named Lev Kuleshov, for his filmmaking abilities. His critics considered him especially dangerous as they could see the amount of talent and skill that went into crafting films they despised (Kenez 2001). With the most talented and established filmmakers unable to work, Soviet cinema was forced to make do with far less talented filmmakers. Most screenplays, for example, were either unsolicited works or crafted by freelancers and amateurs. Meanwhile, the lack of writing departments meant that it was essentially impossible to improve a script (Belodubrovskaya 2017). While certainly passionate, the new wave of personnel in Soviet Cinema was simply amateurish. Now, perhaps these amateurs would've been able to fine tune their skills had they enough time to do so. Unfortunately, the political situation made this impossible. Stalin's paranoia and ruthlessness meant that personnel would constantly change. While most directors were able to survive, mostly due to Stalin's apathy towards the position, others were not as lucky. Dozens of screenwriters and industry leaders were executed in Stalin's purges (Kenez 2001). Among the most notable victims was Boris Shumiatskii, who was nominally in charge of overseeing the entirety of the

Soviet film industry (Belodubrovskaya 2014). This also demonstrates the problems were not limited to the bottom of the industry, but problematic at the very top as well.

With these being totalitarian nations, it is also vital for the sake of the film industry that those in charge have the appropriate talent level. Once again, this was the case for the Germans, but not the Soviets. Unlike most other Nazi leaders, Goebbels had a great passion for film and had a great understanding of it as an art form. One scholar stated Goebbels's knowledge about film was as great as any industry executive, if not more so (Hull 1969). Goebbels was able to use this knowledge to make sure that German cinema was at least able to function. The Soviets were not as lucky. Like Goebbels, Stalin had a great love and passion for film. However, unlike Goebbels, Stalin did not have a background in cinema, nor did he understand how the medium worked. Many of the most basic tenets of filmmaking seemed to escape Stalin's understanding. Nevertheless, this didn't stop him from inserting himself into many aspects of the industry. For example, he viewed the visual aspects of filmmaking, such as scenery and camera work, as merely of secondary importance to the words spoken on screen. This led to the creation of absurd rules, such as the requirement that the camera always be at eye level (Kenez 2001).

From bottom to top, Soviet cinema couldn't compete with the Germans. While the Soviets had excellent talent who could create masterpieces, the Stalinist policies of the Soviet Union prevented them from utilizing their skill. Meanwhile, the purges prevented anyone from developing their craft. As a result, Germany had more talented and more experienced filmmakers.

Nature of the War

Ask anyone involved in film production, and they will say that one needs space, the right people, and materials to make it happen. Unfortunately for the Soviets, the defensive and brutal nature of the war rendered all of these in short supply. As a result, the already poor quality and production output suffered further. Russian cinema would reach the lowest point in the entirety of its history. The Germans, meanwhile, were far less encumbered and were able to continue to produce films at a much higher rate and higher quality. Already a one-sided battle, Operation Barbarossa furthered the gap between Soviet and Nazi propaganda films. It wouldn't be until the end of the war that the German film industry also collapsed.

When the Germans invaded the USSR on the 22nd of June 1941, they caught the Soviets completely off guard and ill-prepared. As a result, the Germans were able to drive deep into Soviet territory, and they had Moscow in sight by November (Pasher 2014). Besides the obvious problems that this presented to the very survival of the nation, this also proved very problematic for Soviet filmmakers. Before the war, the USSR had several major film studios in various cities across the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, many of these studios fell into German hands as the Wehrmacht drove into Soviet territory. For example, the Germans overran a major film studio in Kiev in the first few weeks of the war (Kenez 2001). Obviously, any attempts to film in those locations would've been suicide. Now, one might argue that even with all that land lost, space shouldn't have been an issue for the Soviets. Stretching from the Pacific to the Polish border, the USSR was an absolutely massive empire. Even with all that land lost, the Soviets should've had ample space to shoot feature length films. However, one should remember just how concentrated Russia was and still is. Despite the vast amounts of the land in the east, the Soviets remained focused on the Western European parts of Russia. Most of the economy, political power, and population was situated in the West (Hill et al 2003). While Alaska might be much larger than

southern California, one would wager that most filmmakers in the United States would decline the offer to move all facets of production to Anchorage overnight. When Soviet filmmakers moved from Moscow to Central Asia, as was mentioned in a previous chapter, they found that their new studios were woefully inadequate and provided them with few opportunities to succeed. Everything from cramped studios, to insufficient equipment, to unreliable electricity became hindrances to production. To make matters worse, the government also required the directors to be as frugal as possible. Budgets for things like props were extremely limited, and directors had to make sure to use as little raw film as possible. Finally, if all that hadn't been enough, the filmmakers had to have the final product ready in no more than six months (Kenez 2001). Regardless of quality, the fact that the Soviet Union was able to produce any films under these conditions is a testament to the filmmakers attached to the projects.

For the Germans, on the other hand, the nature of the war was far less problematic for its film industry, at least at first. Firstly, whereas the Soviets were on the defensive and losing vast amounts of valuable land, the Nazis and their allies were on the offensive and gaining territory. Goebbels and German propagandists saw much of its newly conquered land as an opportunity to spread German culture. In Paris for example, the Nazis attempted a German cultural invasion. In addition to various other areas of culture, the Nazis began to show German films in French cinemas. Ultimately, these films did poorly with French audiences, and German culture never secured its base among the French that it hoped for (Mitchell 2010). Nevertheless, this does highlight the different circumstances that German filmmakers dealt with. Instead of receding, as the Soviets were, the Germans were actively trying to expand abroad in ways that it couldn't before. Additionally, German filmmakers didn't need to worry about losing shooting space to enemy soldiers or worry about their survival as their Soviet counterparts did. While the

occasional Allied bombing that would cause problems and force film production to move to another city, this was far less severe than any problems Russian filmmakers had to face (Hull 1969). Even as the tides of war turned against the Axis, enemy soldiers were not yet a real concern. While rapidly advancing, Western Allies and Soviet troops were still a long way from entering Germany. It wouldn't be until March 1945 that the first Allied troops would successfully step on German soil (Goldberg et al 2012). Because of this, the German film industry could continue to operate at a relatively high rate. Although resource scarcity and war-time production cost did cause German output to fall from 172 films in 1937 to just 77 in 1944 (Fox 2007), this was still nearly four-times higher than the Soviets, who just produced around 20 in that same year (Belodubrovskaia 2017).

In terms of the race to produce more films, Germany dealt the knockout blow early. The loss of land and the dwindling resources available for film meant that Soviet filmmakers would never be able to keep up with the German counterparts in either quantity or quality. While Soviet cinema entered an all-time low, German cinema continued. However, this would prove to be of little importance. By the end of the war, Germany laid in ruins, including its film industry, and would be forced to surrender to Allied and Soviet troops.

Psychology and Thematic Styles

Despite being on opposite sides of the political spectrum, both the Soviets and the Nazis had many similar themes and messages in their propaganda films. Both nations' propaganda films often featured typical archetypal themes would one expect to find in a nationalistic, totalitarian nation. For instance, both German and Soviet propaganda films would often highlight their countries' military might and bravery. These films considered their military to be the greatest the world had ever seen, and that military service was among the most patriotic duties

for a civilian. One scene in *Triumph of the Will*, for example, showed a military parade that featured everything from miniature tanks driving in formation to horses drawing canons (Tomasulo 2014). Meanwhile, Alexei Pankratiev's *Fighter Planes* told the story of young fighter pilots who were courageous, professional, and morally proper (D. Shlapentokh and V. Shlapentokh 1993). Other themes that both nation's political films include, but are not limited to: nationalism, hatred of domestic and foreign enemies, a beloved patriarchal leader, ordinary patriots, glorifying the country's past, and the nation as a utopia.

The psychology employed and the method of delivering their ideological messages are where these two nations begin to split apart. As mentioned in the previous chapter, German propaganda tended to be subtler, aside from the occasional film like *The Eternal Jew* and *Triumph of the Will*. As Goebbels stated in a speech at the Chamber of Film in 1937, "I do not in the least want an art which proves its National Socialist character merely by the display of National Socialist emblems and symbols but, rather, an art which expresses its attitude through its National Socialist character and through raising National Socialist problems." The message was clear: Nazism should be shown as a part of everyday life. The presence of the Nazis and their ideology should always be present, but it also should always be unnoticed and without much fanfare. Goebbels reasoned that propaganda films stops being effective the second the audience member realizes that that is what they are watching (Petley 2002).

On the opposite side, Soviet propaganda was much more obvious. Although the Soviets also intended to tell stories, the storylines were obvious with the heroes and villains clearly being reflections of the ideological climate. For example, Ivan Pyryev's *Counterplan* told the story of spies seeking to destroy the Soviet Union's industry. Meanwhile, symbols, such as the red flag, would always be at the forefront of the screen. This simplistic style was completely by design.

Soviet filmmakers in the 1930s condemned the experimental and stylistic choices of 1920s Soviet filmmakers, such as Eisenstein (Gillespie 2003). Soviet leadership worried that these artistic and experimental films were too confusing for mainstream audiences to understand the messages behind them. Movies were to be for the masses. Therefore, movies must be simple enough for the masses to understand (Kenez 2008).

It is very difficult to answer the question of whose propaganda films were more psychologically effective. Given the Germans ability to outproduce the Soviet's, both in term of quantity and quality, one might be tempted to state that they were more successful in utilizing film as a propaganda tool. However, this would most likely be a baseless assertion. No reliable source of data exists that accurately reflect what kind of effects viewing these films had on audiences at the time. Freedom of the press virtually did not exist in either nation, meaning that modern scholars can't look towards critics for evaluation. Meanwhile, audiences were never accurately polled or asked for their honest opinions of a film. Of course, even if they did, it is doubtful that they would be of much use. There is a fairly good chance that respondents would only give praise over fear of government reprisal. While spies would provide high-level German officials with reports of audiences' opinions and reactions, these reports were mixed and anecdotal at best (Heins 2013). Additionally, many anecdotal stories paint conflicting pictures. The prime example of this was *Jew Suss*. This virulently anti-Semitic film was meant to instill a sense of hatred of the Jews. In many cases, the film had its desired effects on many audience members. The film was a great box office hit, and reports tell of teenagers assaulting Jews after watching it (Hull 1969). However, there were curious cases where the film seemed to affect some audience members in the exact opposite way that the filmmakers intended. Despite being portrayed as a monster, who at one point rapes and causes the suicide of a woman, Suss the Jew

was seen as sympathetic to many audience members. Some audience members even found themselves physically attracted to him. Ferdinand Marian, who played Suss the Jew, received fan mail from female viewers who were infatuated with the character (Brockman 2010). Meanwhile, research for this paper has failed to come up with even anecdotal reports about the impacts Soviet propaganda films had on its audiences. There just isn't enough evidence to definitively state if one side's style of propaganda was more effective than the other. In fact, there isn't even enough evidence to state if either nation's films were psychologically effective as propaganda tools at all.

Before continuing, one should make sure to note that this paper is not completely dismissing the notion these political films were useful for rallying support for the government. Indeed, it is entirely possible, if not likely, that many audience members, especially younger ones, took the political messages of these films to heart. Furthermore, both the Germans and the Soviets were successful at maintaining order among their populace. However, there simply isn't enough definitive evidence to confidently state that there was a direct relationship between these achievements and film. There is a range of potential correlative relationships, but nothing strong enough to state there was a definitive causal relationship. Additionally, there are many other potential factors that could've potentially played a role in the regime's relative stability. Stability refers to a lack of insurgencies in this case. For example, both governments had zero tolerance for any kind of political dissent. Both used draconian laws and punishments to quell any potential political turmoil. If an individual didn't share the ideology of the regime, fear of the government might've at least kept them in line. The fact that many non-Russians and others that suffered under Stalin initially welcomed and celebrated the arrival of the Germans lends credence to this theory. Additionally, if political films didn't convince one to support their

government, it is highly likely that the fear of the enemy did. After reports, rumors, and experiencing the Germans' brutality first hand, those who initially cheered on the German soldiers would eventually turn against the invading forces (Bell 2011). It is highly doubtful that any Russian political film could've caused this change of heart and a rise of nationalist sentiment as effectively as the fear of the enemy.

While it's easy to spot the different styles that each nation employed, neither has any concrete evidence to support its claim as the superior method. Therefore, it is all but impossible to state which of these two nations were able to use psychology in their political films more effectively. Perhaps instead it is best to view these political films as small, auxiliary pieces for gaining popular support, rather than the great mobilization machine that Soviet leaders and Goebbels hoped they would be.

Conclusion

Directly comparing Nazi to Soviet cinema paints a rather one-sided picture. Nearly every aspect of film production favored the Germans. Unlike the Soviets, German cinema was able to enjoy a well-structured industry, competent leadership, and a relatively stable economy. Additionally, the initial offensive nature of the war ensured that German cinema had the space and materials needed to continue. While initial phases of the war did cause some issues, none of them resulted in a total Soviet-like collapse. It wouldn't be until the tides of war turned that German cinema began to crumble. Therefore, one might be tempted to claim the Germans the outright victors in this comparison. However, any such proclamation would be premature. Unfortunately, there is a noticeable lack of reliable data about the impact these films had on their viewers. Therefore, there remains a bit of uncertainty whether the German films had a greater psychological impact, which is the most important component of a propaganda film, than Soviet

films. As no reliable evidence exists, scholars have no way of accurately measuring which nations' films had the greater impact on their audiences. This uncertainty prevents the Germans from being able to claim absolute victory in the field of propaganda films. Unfortunately, it is highly likely that these questions will never be answered, and this has great implications for the hypothesis.

Conclusion

Introduction

This study directly compared how Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia utilized film as a propaganda tool both prior to and during World War 2. The hope was to confirm or deny the hypothesis that the Germans were better able to utilize cinema as propaganda tool than the Soviets. To solve this question, I hoped that this study would help present a clear picture about the different styles and techniques of propaganda these two totalitarian nations employed, and which style was more effective. However, it soon became obvious that several critical elements of research were fundamentally lacking. While this research confirmed certain aspects of the hypothesis, it also revealed that there isn't any definitive answer. Because of this, many of the questions are fundamentally unanswerable, and it is doubtful that we will ever have the necessary information to change this. This, unfortunately, leaves the hypothesis in somewhat of a grey area.

Research Findings that Support the Hypothesis

If one were to look at the situation purely from a commercial perspective, it would be clear that the hypothesis was correct. The Germans were better filmmakers than their Soviet counterparts by far. Thanks to a more stable economic foundation and better bureaucratic structure, the Germans were able to outproduce the Soviets. In terms of artistic merit, the Germans also held a significant advantage. At first, one might hesitate to argue that the Germans were artistically superior, especially given the subject matter at hand, to the Soviets. After all, how much can one praise virulently hateful and nationalistic films like *The Eternal Jew* for its skill and craftsmanship? However, one must keep in mind that the morality, or immorality,

within these films is the not the subject of debate. It is vital that one looks past the repugnant political messages and compare these films only in other terms of aesthetic quality. With that in mind, the vast majority of scholars and filmmakers deemed the Germans' propaganda films to be far superior. Films like *Triumph of the Will*, for example, are often heralded as the pinnacle of propaganda filmmaking. For example, David Parkinson of *Empire Magazine* stated in his 2015 review, "making a supreme effort to put aside the socio-ethical considerations, [*Triumph of the Will*] is, in purely cinematic terms, incredible filmmaking" (Parkinson 2015).

Research Limitations that Hinder the Hypothesis

As previously mentioned, the psychological effectiveness is the most critical component of any propaganda piece. As such, the validity of the hypothesis hinges on the Germans' ability to achieve its desired psychological outcome, regardless of commercial and artistic superiority. Unfortunately, as stated in the previous chapter, it is essentially impossible to determine whether Soviet or German films were superior in terms of psychological persuasion. No accurate sets of data or studies about the ability of these films to politically persuade people exist. Additionally, scholars and experts who discuss the psychology of propaganda only talk about the psychological *attempts* by the creators, rather than any actual, definitive findings. As a result, there is neither adequate qualitative nor quantitative data to definitively state that the hypothesis was correct. One should note that this is not an outright rejection of the hypothesis. There is no reliable data to show that the German propaganda films were successful in persuading viewers, but there also isn't enough data to say they were unsuccessful. It is entirely possible that the Nazis were able to garner supporters through the political use of cinema; the same holds true for Stalin and the Soviet Union. We simply do not know the definitive answer, and we likely never will. Therefore, the hypothesis is neither confirmed nor rejected.

Recommendations

Unfortunately, there are very few, if any, recommendations that I can give that will help further this or similar studies in the future. Perhaps, a future researcher could look at more modern studies that reveal what the psychological effects of propaganda films are in general. This might help paint a clearer image and further strengthen or weaken the hypothesis. However, even this would have significant limitations and wouldn't be strong enough to fundamentally confirm or deny the hypothesis. Each propaganda film is aimed at people within a specific place, time, culture and situation. Because of this, propaganda films, regardless of quality, have different impacts on different people. A Ukrainian living in 2019 would look at a Stalinist propaganda film very differently than would a Muscovite living in 1938. Therefore, retroactively applying a modern study or situation, such as studying the psychological effectiveness of North Korean propaganda films, to past situations is not a viable solution. Barring some miraculous discovery of long-lost data about the psychological effects propaganda films had on Soviet and German audiences, the necessary quantitative data to answer the hypothesis will forever remain elusive.

Final Thoughts

Unfortunately, it is doubtful that we will ever be able to find a definitive answer to the hypothesis. Nevertheless, it is vital that scholars and researchers continue to examine how nations utilized film as a propaganda tool. While cinema might not have made the biggest impact on the war, after all wars are not won on the movie screen, it helps reflect the human condition. These films reflect the culture, politics, desires, fears, and the brutality of these totalitarian nations. Therefore, these films should play an important role in helping scholars and historians understand that period of history. Additionally, these films help provide us with a valuable

reference tool for modern-day propaganda films. Many totalitarian governments and extremist groups today continue to use film as propaganda tool to spread their political messages or disinformation. To make matters worse, the arrival of digital technology like the internet has only made it easier. Therefore, it is vital that we continue to better our understanding of the nature of propaganda films, both past and present. Only by doing this, can we hope to effectively combat them. Propaganda films might not play the biggest role, but they do play an important one.

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