Visual Pleasure Inhibited: Aspects of the German Revue Film

by Karsten Witte

"Since when does a revue have an idea?"
—*Der weisse Traum* (1943)

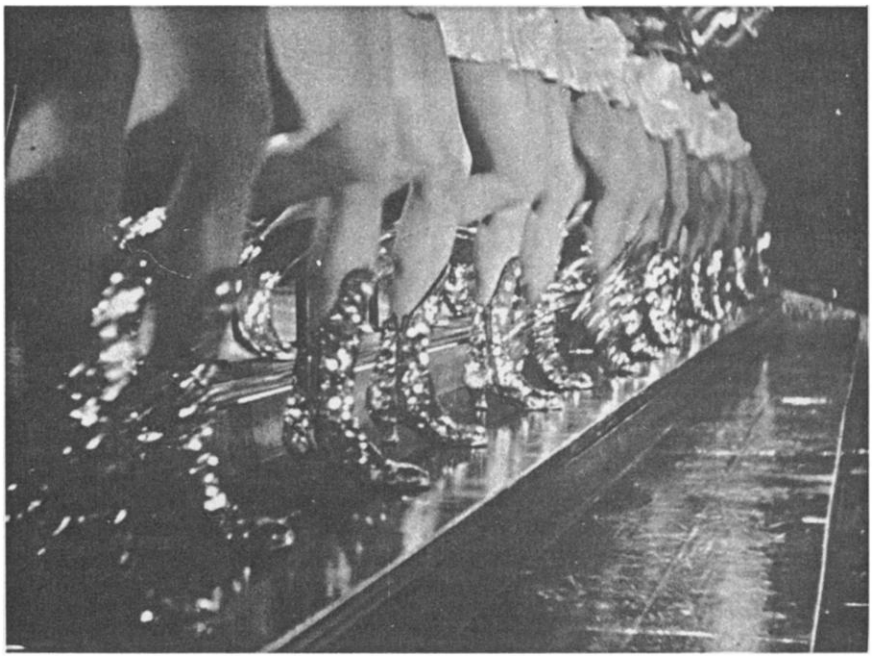
I

The word "revue," in a more general sense "review," very rapidly began to take on a specific connotation, that of a military troop inspection or parade, before such secondary meanings as "stage show" or journal title evolved. The revue film of the Third Reich — whose ideology fetishized the question of origins anyway — could claim the merit of having Germanicized this etymology in a radical way. The revue film shows the civilian troops on parade, often garbed in uniforms and usually choreographed as a costumed cadence march. The fact that "girls"* are on parade in these uniforms may heighten the erotic appeal, but actually degrades it through the very massive deindividualization of those girls. The director, or "play leader," as he was called at the time, inspects the revue girls as representatives of the female reserve army, who hold up the homefront even as the warfront of male armies is collapsing.

The revue films are the military parade of the Propaganda Ministry, its prime examples of peak productive capacity and at the same time peak receptive intensity, much more so than even the "Films of the Nation" series, from *Heimkehr* to *Kolberg,* which carry more overtly political intentions. Up to the year 1914, according to the entry under "Revue" in the encyclopedic *Meyers Lexikon,* non-commissioned officers were presented with one Mark for participating in parade reviews before supreme commanders, whereas the enlisted ranks received five Pfennigs; only then does *Meyers* go on to define revue as a type of presentation offered by the entertainment industry, specifically a "musical-dramatic theater piece derived loosely from sensational events (of the day) and staged with grandiose props and costumes."[1] For the revue gifts doled out by the supreme commander beginning in 1939, the Reich

* The word "girls" appears here and *passim* as an English loanword in the German text. Its adoption during the Weimar years is discussed below. (Translators' note)

1. *Meyers Lexikon,* vol. 10 (Leipzig, 1929), p. 255.



treasury frequently had to pay more than two million Marks — for *Der weisse Traum,* for example. This spectacle-value derived from accumulation of individually striking effects, whose most essential value and effectiveness lay in sheerly overwhelming the audience. The geometrically hierarchical ordering not only inculcates discipline but alleviates the fear of chaos. When the girls in *Wir tanzen um die Welt* strike a triumphant pose of victory by goosestepping down the ramp from Lisbon to Genoa, from London to Copenhagen, their patent leather boots also trample down the unseen potential for revolt. This is dance in a higher service; some ride for Germany,* others dance and thereby anticipate in the realm of entertainment a form that finds its expression in war.The reciprocal transference from the military to the theatrical sphere will be discussed further below when considering whether *Triumph des Willens* is a revue film.

The rise of ''girl culture'' at the time of ''New Objectivity,'' that stylistic tendency of so-called white socialism (which meant the deproletarization of blue-collar workers by their rising to the intermediate level of white-collar employees, advanced by the rationalization process of capital) is tied to the phenomenon of the depression, simultaneously present in the USA and Western Europe. The role of girl is the price that woman had to pay for her loss of magic, i.e. for her integration into the industrial work process of the Weimar Republic. The housewife donned overalls over her apron and became the

* An allusion to the fascist film *Sie reiten für Deutschland.* (Translators' note)

chum, the buddy of the man. That is one reason why the stage revues of Weimar and, by extension, the revue films of the Third Reich employed such overwhelmingly feminine performers, whose entertainment value derived precisely from partially concealing femininity by being forced to play masculine roles. And when a squad of men actually appears, as in *Kora Terry,* they are under the command of a woman general, endowed by Maria Koppenhöfer with the stern irascibility of Prussia's Frederick the Great. The Tiller Girls were the American dance troupe that set the style even in Berlin. Erik Charell, who made a name for himself as a top showman with his film operetta *Der Kongreß tanzt,* staged their revues in the Admiralspalast. Siegfried Kracauer, the critic of cultural intermediate zones, conceived of their performance as an allegory of the rationalized economic system:

> "They were not only American products, they simultaneously demonstrated American production. When they formed an undulating line, they illustrated radiantly the virtues of the conveyor belt; when they tap-danced in rapid tempo, it sounded like 'business, business'; when they kicked their legs high with mathematical precision, they joyously affirmed the advances of rationalization; and when they kept doing the same thing over and over again without ever breaking the line, one could see before the mind's eye an uninterrupted chain of cars gliding out of the factory yards into the world."[2]

Anyone unconvinced by this allegory should consider the opening sequence of *Gold Diggers of 1933,* this blatantly coy ballet of the depression, in which the girls carry out sinuous movements with oversized silver dollars, concealing at one moment their faces, at the next their genitals.

Kracauer claimed that the masses recognize themselves in the mass-like ornament as an ornament, one shaped not by an aesthetic will but by "the formative principle of offices and factories." In the mass ornament, be it in the movie theater or in the vaudeville house, the audience glimpses itself, squeezed into an equally hierarchical arrangement. In the revue film, the audience is shown watching the performance in countless countershots from the stage—even if those shots are drawn from unchanging, archival film stock.

> "One glance at the screen reveals that the ornaments consist of thousands of bodies, sexless bodies in bathing suits. The regularity of their pattern is cheered by the crowd, itself arranged in row upon ordered row."[3]

First-hand accounts of the reception of these revues prior to 1933 were recorded by authors who, with an eye schooled by the "New Objectivity," kept in close touch with reality. And from the audience's point of view this

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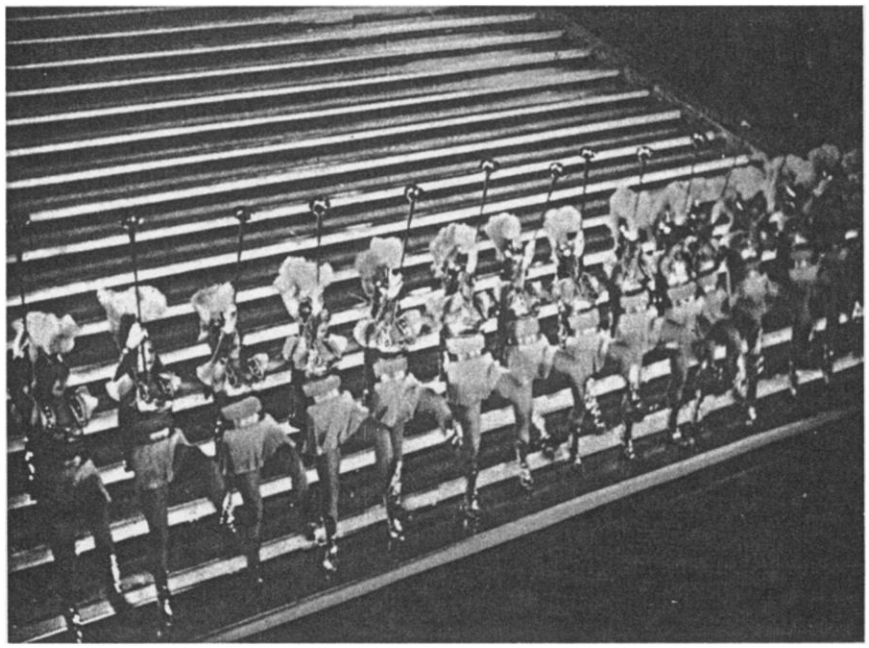
2. S. Kracauer, "Girls und Krise," *Frankfurter Zeitung* (27 April 1931). [This essay is also discussed by the author in "Introduction to Siegfried Kracauer's 'The Mass Ornament'," *NGC* 5 (Spring 1975), pp. 59–66.]

3. S. Kracauer, *Das Ornament der Masse* (Frankfurt a.M., 1977), p. 51 [This essay appeared as "The Mass Ornament" in *NGC* 5 (Spring 1975), pp. 67–76.]



reality did not always look as splendid as in films. Gabriele Tergit described a sad performance by a presumably German variant of the Tiller Girls in the Wintergarten:

> "First the famous girls on stage bent their torsos, kicked their legs into the air, no doubt a healthy exercise for five- to sixteen-year-olds. But some of the girls were pushing forty. Two times nine-hundred eyes, more than half male, stared out of the darkness. Naked legs as a mass phenomenon are extremely embarrassing. Smiling as a mass phenomenon evokes shame, because it is undisguised prostitution."[4]

The extent to which the art of entertainment was directly shaped by a compulsion towards rationalization, its drill by the assembly-line system, is demonstrated with blatant brutality by the depression musical *42nd Street:* anyone who succumbs to exhaustion during training is eliminated; anyone who wants to help is also endangered. The social misery that formed the material basis for the tinsel industry was captured by Heinrich Mann when he described the drab dance routine of a revue establishment near the Kurfürstendamm in 1932:

> "The employed chorus girls appeared before receptive guests, floating ethereally down the steps. Indeed, the management had found it possible to utilize a stairway of approximately fifteen steps for this purpose. To be sure, they led straight to the toilets, but adjoining was a cramped room where the corps de

4. G. Tergit, *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm* (Frankfurt a.M., 1978), p. 99.

> ballet changed costumes. Transformed from poor girls into nymphs, the long-legged ones stilted from step to step, while the smaller ones hopped before them; all of them held large feather fans behind their waved hairdos, and their limbs, which they displayed like conspicuous valuables, gleamed in the glare of the spotlight as if their skin came from the jeweler — or at least from the pawnshop."[5]

The National Socialists, never at a loss for the suffering gesture, decried as "soulless" the mechanization of show elements, which by 1933 had long since been tooled as prefabricated components of the entertainment industry. For their part, they did not abolish the Taylorization of the revue, despite their vehement verbal assaults, but instead padded it with melodramatic sentiment. They cut out only those show elements that threatened to become self-sustaining and forced the rest into the corset of dramaturgy.

While the American musicals always succeeded in maintaining the primacy of the spectacle over the plot, the German revue reversed this hierarchy: that is, Germanized it, compelled it to evince 'deeper meaning' in order to legitimate itself. This need for deeper meaning in the revue film unabashedly inveigles itself right into the production numbers, even when the show has already begun, solely to persuade the spectator that behind the expression of pure form stands something higher, the 'meaning.' This contradiction between heightened Taylorization of the show on the one hand and its supposed counterbalancing by means of spiritual values on the other, finds striking expression in the performance of a troupe called the Hiller Girls, who appeared in the late 1930s in the Wintergarten in Berlin. Maria Milde, one of those girls in 1938, recalled in 1978 that the Hiller Girls — whose very name intentionally appealed to the audience's Americanism, still not totally suppressed — danced "in an even more disciplined, balanced manner, and — with more heart." Where was the balance, given the increased discipline? The increase in emotionality appears always to have been bought at the price of a decrease in awareness, especially regarding the actual state of affairs. By 1939, the Girls had already joined the gigantic process of getting into uniform, which swept the entire civilian population and brought artists together in so-called production communities, turning troupes into troops from which the soldiers of art were supposed to sally forth.

> "The Hiller Ballet is a world of beauty and camaraderie. Every member of this family, which not only works together but lives together in shared quarters, spends the day according to a precisely fixed plan: performance, shared meal, rest, housekeeping, and over and over again rehearsal with the ballet teacher Mrs. Hiller."

It is all too evident that the troupe's performance could be transformed seamlessly into a manifestation of military spirit. An unidentified newspaper

5. H. Mann, *Ein ernstes Leben* (Frankfurt a.M., 1968), pp. 104–05.

wrote this about the gala presentation for the fiftieth anniversary of the Wintergarten in Berlin:

> "With incomparable flair, dressed in smart blue pre-war uniforms, the Hiller Ballet opened the show with a parade march before the backdrop of the Brandenburg Gate. Later on, the corps enchanted in delicate 'dreams' of dresses while performing an extraordinarily graceful waltz and a fabulous tapdance. But the parade march! The snappy kicking and precise ranks brought a surprised grin to the face of the Mayor and City President, Dr. Lippert, seated in front. This esprit was surpassed — transferred completely into the military realm — only by the band of the SS Honor Guard Adolf Hitler, which appeared on stage under its conductor, Müller-John, and played to benefit the Winter Relief, earning stormy applause."[6]

It is a truism in the history of entertainment media that the revue film is derived from the operetta; within the German tradition there is the additional burden that the revue continued in the vein of the silly Viennese operetta rather than the satirical Parisian operetta. It was the talkie which helped the sadly tarnished operetta regain some of its former luster, because the cinema itself — under the economic dictate to maximize the exploitation of the sound patents — stood on the precipice before a gaping void of musical material. A shopworn genre like the revue was just what was needed for the sound film, which could expand its technical parameters as aesthetic ones virtually unchecked, presenting music, dialog, song and dance as amassed wealth.

The final depravation of the revue film is today's television ballet, hopelessly anachronistic relative to the special event character of the medium. Television offers its dance presentations based on an aesthetic standard that was set in the mid-1940s. "Television ballet: pleasure of the masses in numerical increase, regressively turned into the military."[7]

II

To see German revue films in context today means to recognize their monotony despite the variety of their story lines. The reaction is a sort of boredom, whereas the American musical is more interesting. To begin with, psychic emotion prevails in the revue, rather than the musical's physical motion, which enters into the forms themselves. We encounter in the musical a variety of forms which dominate the relative monotony of story lines, and this means as well playful diversion from monotony. Yet the formal uniformity seems a far sharper restriction on perception than making the story lines uniform. For one of the functions of form is to enforce the quality of real time

6. All quotations on the Hiller Girls are from: M. Milde, *Berlin — Glienicker Brücke* (West Berlin, 1978), pp. 22–23 and p. 20.

7. Dieter Prokop, "Zeichenprodukton," *Literaturmagazin* 8 (1977), p. 42.

in the experience pattern of the audience as opposed to the film time occupied by the story line.

The formal monotony of a genre threatens to desubstantialize the film, to rob it of its concrete task: capturing physical reality. What was mobility in the musical freezes into a hierarchy in the revue film; what was in motion rigidifies. This entails firstly a reduction of aesthetic means, which the spectator senses much more strongly as a restriction of his sensuality. It hinders the viewing pleasure (*Schaulust*) which he enjoys developing in a film with high production values. Whatever had been a joy for the eyes and a delight for the ears was too great a promise of sensuality. From now on it is permissible to enjoy with only one ear and with eyes squinted. The extent of self-imposed restriction is justified in terms of aesthetic judgment as a reasonable expression of the taste of the masses, whose excesses are curtailed for the German revue film. This aesthetic is based first on a "fear of chaos"[8] and secondly on a "fear of decadence."[9]

A 1936 document concerning the self-concept of fascist aesthetics of the dance provides evidence for this point, which can be confirmed by a visual assessment of film production itself.

> "The tendency toward abstraction, the urge to an impersonal law speaks out of the composition of the dances [of the German] as well as out of the manner with which he has not only conquered his world, but also organized and ordered it. Coolness, clarity and economy of motion bespeak an aversion toward merely untamed ecstasy."[10]

The dramatist Hanns Johst describes first-hand this fear of decadence which leads to rigidity. On his "Journey of a National Socialist from Germany to Germany," he stopped over in Paris, a city whose appeal the German philistine could never resist, even if he had to condemn his own weakness in order to pronounce his verdict on the "Babylon on the Seine." Johst visits the Folies Bergères in 1935. The curtain opens to the sound of jazz music. The revue set shows a Christmas tree on which twenty stark naked virgins gleam as candles. A matron enters and says she wants to clothe the candles. But there is no money. The band shifts from jazz to sacred music: the matron sings a prayer, which is answered. A hasty couplet of thanks, a hectic English waltz and on to the next scene. Johst is outraged:

> "The entire world shuts both eyes! How impoverished Gallic humor must be, that it falls back on such cheap spiritual sadisms."

Johst's own eyes must have opened very wide, and once aware of his visual pleasure he had to kill it immediately. The spectacle of physical non-violence takes shape in his head as the theater of spiritual sadisms. He knows why, too.

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8. Joachim Schumacher, *Die Angst vor dem Chaos* (Frankfurt a.M., 1972).
9. Wilhelm Alff, *Der Begriff Faschismus* (Frankfurt a.M., 1971).
10. A. Müller-Hennig, 1936. Quoted by Joseph Wulf, *Musik im Dritten Reich: Eine Dokumentation* (Gütersloh, 1963), p. 268.

> "It's no longer eroticism when a director drives hundreds of naked babes across the stage. One is left only with an impression of slavetrade, which completely destroys the aspect of adventure."

There remains a trace of the explosiveness of those sensual beckonings, but it is vehemently denied before he truly senses its danger. This traveler on a mission for National Socialist aesthetics is allowed only to think of childlike innocence (naked babes) when viewing the naked girls. The not unjust reproach of slavetrade, which pretends to criticize the industrialized character of the spectacle, falls flat when it becomes evident that here a man is being cheated of his fantasy; he sees his imagined adventures destroyed by the physical representation. The visual pleasure he enjoyed frustrates him, tormentingly breaking off before he can give it free rein. The energy of visual pleasure thus inhibited has to turn inward as violence. Johst can express it only in the reproach of sadism.[11]

How, then, did the German musical stage look following the Nazification of the arts in 1933, when the clean-up campaign had taken its toll? Did the revue's Christmas tree support only gold-tinsel angels? As the medium subject to the most intense public scrutiny, cinema was submitted to the tightest restriction; but as far as the stage was concerned, censorship seems to have slept, surely in the interest of psychological warfare. That radical desexualization which Heinrich Himmler fancied did not prevail in the everyday life of the National Socialists.

> "Performances which accorded with the fascist ideal of strength and beauty were especially supported, and with the onset of war the musical's diversion function came increasingly to the fore, supporting psychological warfare as well as the 'steadfastness of the homefront.' Nude dances, for example, which had been scorned for years, once again dominated the stage, revue-like qualities emerged, especially on the basis of the hit song (Rosita Serrano, Lale Andersen, Zarah Leander and others)."

And there is no longer any doubt either about the intended audience:

> "The fascist employment for artists is connected with two terms which belong in the realm of the musical touring company: Strength-Through-Joy* tours and playing for the troops."[12]

The film industry can only regard this with derision. After all, its representatives take care of troop shows, too, only by means of its products rather than personal appearances. "What would the film industry be without telephones?" jokes the cagey film director in Zerlett's *Es leuchten die Sterne*. "A strength without joy."

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11. Hanns Johst, *Maske und Gesicht* (Munich, 1935), pp. 181–82. (This book bears the printed dedication: "For Heinrich Himmler in loyal friendship.")

* Strength through Joy (*Kraft durch Freude*) was the Nazi organization charged with the mission of regulating leisure-time activities. (Translators' note)

12. Ernst Günther, *Geschichte des Varietés* (East Berlin, 1978), p. 151.

The subordinate role which dance does indeed play in the German revue film is due to both technical shortcomings and inadequate training. This was pointed out by Arthur Maria Rabenalt, a director who specialized in musical and circus films:

> "In Germany — in contrast to Hollywood — there are only stage ballet ensembles, theater dance groups — if we disregard the very short-lived establishment of a National Socialist film ballet, which was more an economic- or union-oriented institution than an artistic one. So given the economic impossibility of founding a dance ensemble for a single film, training and educating it for this one task, the only thing left to do is to fall back on existing ballet groups."[13]

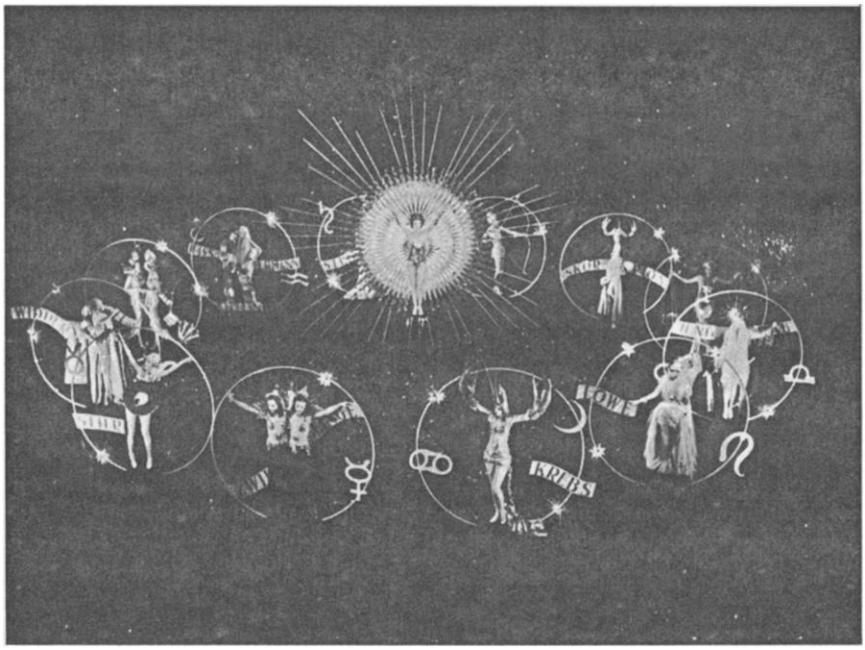
But adequate training entails more than professional dance training or the education of an ensemble geared specifically toward film, as was standard for the musicals of the 1950s, e.g. *An American in Paris*. The deficiencies that take shape in the revue film are aesthetic deficits. Although one speaks often about the dominant role of dance for the film, its promise is never fulfilled: the genre never went beyond either a background choreography of the girls or a high-level specialization of its stars. Granted, Marika Rökk can ride, shoot, swim, do gymnastics and sing; but mere addition of athletic disciplines scarcely amounts to mastery of the medium's metier, which requires nuancing or, to put it more bluntly: discrimination in the employment of means. The revue film developed all its components equally instead of advancing individual ones in a specialized way: just enough to achieve the perfection of mediocrity.

The aesthetics of the revue film could not be concerned solely with defense against decadence. That would have burst open the dams to visual pleasure, for the reprehensible must first acquire an image before it can be seen as reprehensible. The visual pleasure of the masses vis-à-vis the body, which received limited freedom of movement in the revue film, was dammed up by other media, such as music, song and dialog. They kept on going unrestrained over the dance numbers, even fragmented, dismembered them, creating a diversion in a different setting to compensate for the lack of attention to stage action.

In the written fragments on the aesthetics of the German revue film, there are attempts to establish hierarchies in the expression of corporeality. But their physical persuasiveness seems to have been so little trusted on the production side that body language, even before it could develop a syntax in the picture, was corrected in its grammar with the reproach of supposedly incorrect expression. What did the plan and its execution look like?

> "In the film, dance is again assigned the role of always appearing when what is supposed to be expressed can be so most effectively through dance, be it as

13. A. M. Rabenalt, *Tanz und Film* (West Berlin, 1960), p. 27.



pantomime or in the harmony of bodies beautifully in motion, as an urgent gesture or in the rhythmic of ballet as a spontaneous community feeling.''[14]

Anyone who dances is struck speechless; anyone who cannot dance, sings; and anyone who cannot do that either introduces his song with the spoken remark: ''. . . that reminds me of a tune.'' This is how Johannes Heesters hides his inabilities to express himself in *Gasparone*. In *Leichte Kavallerie,* Marka Rökk is supposed to be admitted to a circus troupe. The director benevolently inspects her biceps and concludes: ''She sure has talent!'' and hires her. Then comes the revue production which gives Hochbaum's film its title. Rökk — as a cavalry officer — leads a troop of women on horseback, riding into the ring and out again. Roaring applause of the audience, accompanied by the obligatory whispering of ''What talent!'' and ''She sures knows her stuff!'' What the artists are supposed to be able to do, they are rarely — all too rarely — required to show. As long as applause is offered by someone in the film audience, who turns directly to the movie audience, the actual proof of accomplishment is not necessary. Rökk has scarcely completed her first tryout in *Hallo Janine* when we hear, in a tellingly Germanized version of the notion of stardom: ''This cutie's going to be a bombshell!'' The credibility gap in the picture, if it cannot be eliminated, must at least be diverted. The German audience accepts everything in such good faith because it has never radically doubted the film's adequacy to capture reality. The popular realism

14. Otto Bergholz, *Gefilmter Tanz* (Berlin, n.d. [after 1938]), p. 6. (= *Filmschriften*, Heft 1)

makes it possible to believe in miracles which occur only in the fantasy of the audience. In Ritter's propaganda film *Stukas*, O. E. Hasse wants to transform French wine into water for a thirsty pilot, but the camera pans away before the stunt is carried out. In the ironic swansong on the German revue film, Staudte's *Akrobat schö-ö-ön*, on the other hand, Charlie Rivel can perform magic, letting the camera focus on his hands when an egg disappears.

When the new star, formerly an extra, fails in her screen test in *Es leuchten die Sterne*, the director drags his actress into the screening room to view rushes with the sole purpose of teaching her the maxim: "You can never cheat the camera, never!" Keeping up the ideology of a true-to-life depiction of reality in the middle of staged film revues without fearing the risk of preposterousness strengthens our surmise of the cruelly deceived illusion of the viewers. To be sure, they are allowed a look behind the scenes at the fantasy machine, but what they can glimpse resembles the illusory experience of seeing through illusion, like that offered today's audiences by commercials for a certain brand of ice cream.

III

Konstantin Irmen-Tschet, cameraman of the revue films *Viktor und Viktoria*, *Gasparone*, *Hallo Janine*, *Kora Terry* and *Die Frau meiner Träume*, who went further than anyone else in maximizing visual technique, was also unable to escape that ideology of the true-to-life camera, which is of no concern here. In his essay "Objectivity at the Lens," he provides information about the aesthetic criteria which guided his work:

> "The camera is the star among the equipment of the film studio; it stands at that pinnacle of perfection which also supports the art of great performers. . . . Being beautiful does not matter; what matters is being clear! He who sees clearly, sees most artistically!"[15]

Irmen-Tschet's camera work in *Hitlerjunge Quex* had proved the significance of aesthetic values for political propaganda, yet — contrary to the concept enunciated above — he produced not stark images but glamorous ones, whose melting sweetness was advantageous even for a martyr of the movement like Heini Völker, alias Quex. Irmen-Tschet was privileged to work in the production unit of Max Pfeiffer with the director Jacoby and the star Marika Rökk: how was his camera to assert itself there as a star in the studio? And when this camerman seeks to disqualify beauty in the name of clarity, it could be a vague critique of the Baroque American revue of a Busby Berkeley, who excelled precisely through his mannered overproduction of aesthetic signs. In terms of the revue film, clarity might be translated as: encompassing the total scene.

15. K. Irmen-Tschet, "Objektiv am Objektiv. Filmschaffende berichten von ihrer Arbeit," *Filmwelt* (Berlin) 43/44 (25 November 1942).

The image and the star as well as the girls performing on the sparse sets are filmed preferably from the perspective of the totality of the theater: occasionally a camera dollies after the dancers on stage with medium shot focus. But even when the camera captures continuous motion sequences, frequent cutting severs the flow of the dance movement. Instead of cutting from close-ups in such a way that the dancers' spatial movements can be followed from the right or the left, at the price of disorientation he cuts vertically. Instead of following the leg into its next leap, we cut from the completed leap to a

laughing mouth. Everything that goes beyond the dynamic of the dancing figure and moves into the surrounding space is cut away. The movement of a consciously National Socialist body, as cautioned, must not degenerate into unbridled ecstasy and, if it is to avoid a clumsily folksy gait, must issue in a subdued, courtly step. When a body bursts into accelerated gestures and energy races after the leap, the picture in the German revue film frequently may not dissolve this jump into fragments of motion; certainly from fear that corporeality, already unleashed in the dance, would yield to dissolution. Instead, by means of frames which accompany the dancers only by panning first to the knee and then to the chin, the editing pieces the figure together in a vertical order. The aesthetically produced fragmentation of these bodies is healed by the splicing technique. Leaps to the right and left which should have suspended the force of gravity for one precious artistic moment are instead weighted down with shoes of lead.

Extreme speeding up or slowing down of the tempo of motion can also be attained by alternating focal lengths. The following rule holds for filming the total set with a short focal length:

> "Since the performing dancer already moves into close-up after having covered a minimal distance . . ., the total set acquires an extraordinary tempo of motion, especially in the line of the camera axis which is cinematically extremely active," writes the director Rabenalt. "By contrast, filming the strict motion of the dancer moving from the background toward the camera with a long focal length has a slowing-down effect in a magical, unnatural but enchanting manner and almost induces a slow-motion quality."[16]

Irmen-Tschet was, to my knowledge, the only cameraman of the German revue film who was aware of these techniques, who untiringly sought ever higher refinements of his work. Even for his crane shots, which still had to be carried out without electricity, he found such acceptable solutions that not much could be spoiled by editing.

The camera in the German revue film often makes an elliptical jump within the scene (due more to technical incapacity than an aesthetic narrative principle), whereas the American musical creates the distance between two points, preferably by traveling shots. Travels are not lacking in the revue film either, but they begin moving at a different spot. The starting point in the revue film is the total set, from which the camera travels straight along the central axis, decreasing the frame from the stage surroundings to the revue set, e.g. the ballet of fire for the first appearance of Zarah Leander in *Die große Liebe*. The starting point of traveling shots in the musical is often the concrete detail, be it Ruby Keeler's fluttering eyelids or Fred Astaire's walking stick; an inanimate object from the stage set will serve as well. What counts is the direction taken: namely traveling back from the detail along the central axis until the total set opens into a supertotality and the spectator has a vertiginous

16. A. M. Rabenalt, *op. cit.*, pp. 23–24.

view of the gigantic scene capable of even further increase. This is by no means said to denigrate the pathetic revue film in comparison to the higher visual quality of the musical but rather to point out the method of handling space. The German film, proceeding from abstraction to concretion, tends toward the deductive method of presenting space, while the American film pushes from concretion to abstraction, giving preference to the inductive method.

IV

If we absolutely want to stick to a comparison of movie story lines, we can state in the crudest simplification that musicals deal with fantasies of social climbing while the revue film takes up wedding fantasies. Both forms of fantasy are based on the crisis, on that deep shock for the national self-image which the experience of the great depression signaled simultaneously for the masses in the USA and Europe. The fear which lurks behind the fantasy of upward social mobility is unemployment, whereas the anxiety at the root of the wedding fantasy is the fear of liberty. The dissolution into which those desires tend to sink, mostly in the realm of promiscuity, must be firmly secured in the corset of the ideology of production. In *Gasparone,* Leo Slezak as the Governor von Olivia delivers the slogan in song rather than giving a speech at the wedding banquet: "Happiness can exist only under the yoke of marriage!" As is so often the case, however, the apparently happy end is only an "emergency exit," to pick up here the term aptly coined by Douglas Sirk. When, at the finale, the three couples that have been paired (or, more accurately, procured by dramaturgy) sing in chorus: "Marriage, marriage is beautiful!", they are the first who have to be convinced of the credibility of this phrase. For however beautiful the emotive effusion and the mechanical transfer of love from one partner to another may be, the film characters experience it as quotidian destiny. I.e., while the film has spent eighty minutes showing the path to doubt, to enticing affairs and forbidden desires, a sign suddenly appears ten minutes before the end of the film which reads: no entrance! The energy already mobilized in the work of desire is braked and delayed, if not immobilized.

In the revue film's marriage fantasy, the male viewer — identifying with the stars — not only secures a sexual monopoly over the desired woman but also seeks to eliminate via marriage vows the artistic competition which she evokes in him. The Freudian notion according to which art draws primarily on sublimation and postponement of gratification, is derived from the patriarchy. It is evident that the male fantasy of the German revue film is even more heavily indebted to this origin when the blocked eroticism of the actress is not only to be desublimated by her switch to the role of housewife, thus constraining her promiscuous libido, but is even to be desexualized to the point of complete self-sacrifice. The men — whether Heesters or Söhnker — seem so certain of victory that they never have to display their cavalier qualities. What

should be dashing, audacious and clever in their symbolic conquests deteriorates into lameness, nonchalance and whimsicality. If one grants the image more persuasiveness than the dialog, which hastily patches up the contradictions, one discerns that the revue film has a certain predeliction for showing men with deficient ego-strength, who consequently need to develop their identity all the more aggressively against women. These singers are obligated less to art than to the patriarchy, which scarcely allows them a soft, emotional tone even in the irreal revues. If these men could act the way they obviously feel, they would rather be milktoasts than cavaliers, but this loss of honor is permissible only for men typecast — like Lingen and Moser — in comic roles.

Were the American musicals a model for the German revue films? They were in any case shown until 1939 in metropolitan cinemas and thereby contributed to determining the structure of the revue film audience's experience, both as contrast and competition. It was not until the Propaganda Ministry used the antifascist film *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* as an occasion to halt the import of American films that a programming monopoly was assured for the German revue film, as indeed for the total production of the Reich, whereas earlier competition for programming had dominated both financially and in the estimation of the public. A rare document concerning this complex of programming competition between the musical and the revue film is to be found in a novel which describes the experience of a German soldier in occupied Paris:

> "His notions of the 'American way of life' were drawn from Frank Capra's films, from the musical comedies with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. They could still be seen up to 1938 in Germany. He hadn't missed any of them; some he'd seen several times, like *It Happened One Night*. He was intrigued not by the comic plot but by the unimaginable personal freedom and the American sense of humor which these films conveyed."[17]

I read this document as evidence that, in a reversal of its central thesis, the type of reception accorded the American musical in Germany was determined by unimpeded viewing pleasure (other factors apply to the reception in the USA). At the same time, the author's explicit disinterest in the plot of the film supports my thesis that the formal variety of the musical conceals the uniformity of its plot and structures the viewer's cinematic experience more strongly than the story. For an essential function of form, as I argued above, is to enforce the quality of real time in the viewer's experience pattern as opposed to the film time taken up by the story line.

These desires, which were propagated in the midst of tightest restriction by constraints on eroticism in order to rechannel their energies into the battle machines of the war, were not just the desires of a common soldier. His supreme commander also enjoyed the personal freedom expressed in the musicals, assuming that we can trust the simulated documentarism which

17. Karl Münch, *Im Krieg und in der Liebe* (Düsseldorf, 1978), p. 60.

Hans-Jürgen Syberberg provided for the figure of Hitler. History from the valet's perspective, which tracks down world history in the projection booth of the Führer's headquarters:

> "I, SS-man Ellerkamp, Hitler's motion-picture projectionist, I am the man who knew Hitler's most secret desires. His dreams, what he wanted beyond the real world. Every day two or three films, *Broadway Melody* with Fred Astaire, Disney's *Snowwhite, Der Mustergatte* with Heinz Rühmann. . . ."[18]

Which musicals, for example, could been seen by the public in the German Reich? *Dancing Lady* (1933) ran under the German distribution title *Ich tanze nur für dich, Broadway Melody of 1936* as *Broadway-Melodie, Born to Dance* (1936) as *Zum Tanzen geboren* (with a Berlin run of just four weeks), *On the Avenue* (1937) as *Gehen wir bummeln, Broadway Melody of 1938* ran as *Broadway-Melodie 1938* in the Marmorhaus cinema for forty days, *Rosalie* (1937) as *Hoheit tanzt incognito* and *Honolulu* (1938) as *Südsee-Nächte*. According to a memo from the files of the Ufa board of directors dated the 17th of January 1939, the order then came that American films should no longer be played on a first-release or premiere basis.[19] *Top Hat* and *Gold Diggers of 1933* were expressly banned from public screening in the Reich. The film industry itself was not affected by this ruling. In a letter to the Minister of Propaganda dated the 12th of December 1944 (and this is not the first such document), the Reich Director of Cinema, Hinkel, advocated the release of foreign films even though earlier screenings had been tantamount to "enjoying forbidden fruit." He argued that filmmakers should nonetheless be kept "up to date on the level of enemy production, and it should be assured that they can study all the artistic and technical advances of our enemies."[20]

Marika Rökk, who blithely admits to having dared the tapdance in *Gasparone* only after having the seen the model of Eleanor Powell in *Broadway Melody of 1936*, reports about the stage designer Kettelhut of her production unit: "He thought up the craziest, most magnificent things and learned untiringly from the exemplary American revue films, which we could still see at the beginning."[21]

V

In the following I shall undertake the superficial attempt to compare four films in order to study the relationship of model and derivate, of congruency and deviation. Two elements will be discussed in this comparison: the show

18. H.-J. Syberberg, *Hitler: Ein Film aus Deutschland* (Reinbek, 1978), p. 145.

19. Minutes of the Ufa Board of Directors meeting on 17 January 1939, Nr. 1350/7, Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Bestand R 109 I/1033 b, f. 76.

20. Hinkel to the Reich Director, letter dated 12 December 1944, Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Bestand R 109 II/vorl. 20, o. p.

21. M. Rökk, *Herz mit Paprika* (West Berlin, 1974), p. 112.

and the propaganda. The discrepancy between analysis of form and of content runs momentarily counter to the method which assumes an indissoluble unity of these two elements. This risk is not free of contradictions.

Broadway Melody of 1936 (MGM, 1935) is to be contrasted with *Und Du, mein Schatz, fährst mit* (Ufa, 1937) with special attention paid to show elements. Propaganda elements are then to be worked out by contrasting Busby Berkeley's film *Me and My Gal* (MGM, 1942) and *Die große Liebe* (Ufa, 1942).

Broadway Melody of 1936, directed by Roy Del Ruth: The dancer Irene Foster (Eleanor Powell) comes from provincial Albany to New York in order to persuade a former schoolmate, now a successful Broadway producer, to give her a chance in his new show because of their old school romance. Two obstacles stand in her way. First, the millionaire heiress and angel of the show, who wants to use her money to make herself a star and who becomes the erotic rival of the dancer in relation to the producer. Secondly, the powerful newspaper columnist, on the lookout for society gossip as well as any spats between the producer and the angel, threatens the show and consequently both the professional and personal happiness of the protagonist. The producer comes literally to blows with the power of the press. With the help of the erotically resigned secretary who becomes an ally of the dancer, the two women succeed in tricking both men, producer and columnist, by introducing the unknown young talent as a French guest star on Broadway where she dances, sings and conquers.

The first production numbers on a terrace in Manhattan are already so arranged that they burst through the ornamental formations of Warner Brothers musicals with an explosive mixture of jazz dancing and ballet. The leaps of the dancers become more strenuous and acrobatic. The variety of step configurations is heightened by frequent transformations of decor. The girls change costumes continuously, so quickly that the tempo can only achieved through superimpositions. The choreographic climaxes aim at magic gestures: as if by a wave of the hand, tables disappear or pianos rise out of nowhere.

The camera carries out daring crane shots, climbing effortlessly over walls, strolling from one set into the next scene, dropping and falling without ever stumbling. While Warner musicals tend to film their show numbers in continuous shots, there is a hectic, often sharply accelerated cutting in MGM that moves in abruptly on phases of motion, heightens the tempo of the scene by shots becoming shorter, and then follows up an abruptly interrupted phase with more of a leap than a flowing motion. A production number is dissected into smaller numbers without the large one disintegrating. Only the perception of non-stop effects is controlled more strictly: through a dramaturgy of calculated steps.

Und Du, mein Schatz, fährst mit, directed by Georg Jacoby, already has this film in its baggage on its tour through American showbusiness.

The singer Maria Seydlitz (Marika Rökk) is tired of the provinces and goes to New York to accept the offer of a financial tycoon who wants to see her in a

show he has underwritten. What obstacles does she encounter? First, the tycoon's unscrupulous young relatives, who fear for their inheritances should the oldster be interested in the foreign singer. Secondly, she has to hold her own against the rude director and the offended star. With the help of an experienced German who looks out for her, the breakthrough succeeds. This, however, is of short duration, because the German actress gives up the stage and America for the German man.

The critique of show business competition is expressed only as carping; above all, everybody joins in — that is, apart from the Germans, who programmatically dissociate themselves from the circulation sphere of both entertainment and capital at the close of the film. What began as a departure into the wide world ends as a return to the hometown, sweetheart on arm. Talent, which in the case of Powell is visually evident, is apparent for Rökk only as an option for talent, as taking two steps back after one step forward. German talent, as is well known, takes shape in quiet seclusion; naturally, it may erupt in the disreputable metropolis, but there it could never receive the constant control and heightening it needs for continued development.

In the character of the merciless revue director, who is merely a taskmaster and not an artist, the film criticizes the Taylorization which has been trained into the dancers, which indeed they need to succeed in show business. But the director more closely resembles the stage director in *42nd Street:* i.e., here the German film consciously reaches back to the early phase of the musical, to the time of the great depression. The lies of these early musicals had been triumphantly exposed by such musicals of the Roosevelt era as *Broadway Melody of 1936*. The imitation is anachronistic but makes sense in terms of the propagandistic interest in disparaging with prejudices the very models it exploits.

The sensationalistic yellow press, physically assaulted by the producer of the show in *Broadway Melody of 1936,* is assailed in the Germanized example of the revue solely conceptually. "Sure, it's all a swindle, but that's what the people here want!" — this is the way the press boss explains the uproar about the star to Rökk. Influenced by the model of the Western, the American musical's handling of the show and the press may be sportive in nature and anachronistic, but in comparison with the German film one difference can be clearly defined: the musical relies on physical action while the revue film (in this instance) relies on verbal action to further stifle the audience's already limited expectation of seeing a show. The potential for conflict is in any case driven out of the word-picture relationship, with the word disrupting the predominance of the picture whenever viewing pleasure threatens to hold sway.

Both characters, Irene Foster and Maria Seydlitz, follow the path to fame: but where one enters, the other exits. "A Star Is Born" could be the theme of both careers, yet it seems to be the typical fate of the German artist that her talent, scarcely born, is immediately suffocated. The German marriage fantasy not only prevails over the American social-climbing fantasy but also

deadens excess female energies. The element of rigidity which is central to the revue film also serves not least of all to substantiate Theweleit's findings, according to which the fascist form of production feeds on life-destroying energies.[22]

Comparing production values of the two films reveals the fairly immobile camerawork in Jacoby's film, which does not actively reach into the spaces but limits itself to recording them. As lavish as the decorations in the scene set in the Netherlands may be, and as frequently as the cameras may change to other scenes of action, these spatial shifts are rarely effected by means of the camera but instead by traditional theater techniques: the studio is rebuilt. Rökk's attempt at tapdancing in wooden shoes — on an oversized cigar — evidences once again that any sort of spatial development of dance was weighted down. The musical is dominated by horizontal order, which the revue film tilts to the vertical: because its view must not wander. The prominence of sets as a fixed frame around the dancers characterizes the visual impression in the revue film, while in the musical the camera itself shapes a space with the lines suggested by its travels.

Any impression that the German revue film stole show elements from the musical in order to ram subtle propaganda into them as a genuinely German show is deceptive. The antinomy of show and propaganda can only be falsely translated as form and content. Both genres, revue film and musical, exist only as impure hybrids whose components are variously weighted in varying political settings. Whenever production values decline, propaganda values gain in visibility. Rather than being lamented as a degrading of the beautiful *to* the political — which is what is ultimately meant by the talk about the aestheticization of politics — this process should be criticized as decadence of the political, which conquers dreamlike territories of utopia in the musical and the revue film.

Busby Berkeley, whose choreography in the musicals aimed at transforming the mass ornament back into an ornament of nature, did not himself regard this process as irreversible, as his films document. For what was nature-like in his mass ornaments for Warner Brothers musicals is translated in his later films for MGM back into the form of social dances whose steps, now made by couples instead of masses, maintain an appearance of naturalness vis-à-vis the ornament.

Tired of constantly viewing the rationalization it experienced in factories and huge offices, which was expressed in the allegorizing ornaments of the early musicals, the audience — accustomed to more leisure time and aware of its increased mobility — now rebelled against those allegories. This transformation of perceptual interests is implemented in the stylistic transformation from ornamentalization to the appearance of naturalness. For the history of the viewer, this transformation documents an increase of reality and the hunger to see oneself portrayed as an individual in cinematic society.

22. Cf. Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien* (Frankfurt a.M., 1977), vol. 1, p. 276.

This stylistic transformation is also a functional transformation which protests against the reification of the viewer confronted with that ornamentation. The 1940s look back with astonishment at the 1930s, which are regarded as exotic since the era depicted seems so preoccupied with contemporary concerns. The depression having apparently been overcome by the New Deal, the ornament of nature is now dismissed as exoticism. The viewer no longer wanted to satisfy his need for viewing pleasure with girls, whose bodies were so arranged by Berkeley that they merged into an alien corpus that appeared more beautiful than the human body. The girls embody a piece of feminine nature when disrobed but a piece of wilderness when costumed, a fact which often pulled viewing pleasure into deeper entanglements, into the jungle of sensual hints. This danger is usually averted by forced cuteness, although not until long after the desire to view has already been awakened. The show which Berkeley arranges as a framework story for the film *Dames* (Warner Brothers, 1934) is called "Sweet and Hot," i.e., it has two titles, one of which states what the show is supposed to be — sweet — and the other indicates what it is — hot. On penalty of inhibition, voyeurism should not go beyond visual petting, so it is led into exotic regions.

The relationship between visual pleasure, wilderness and girl culture was recognized by Claude Lévi-Strauss, the ethnologist gifted with a sense of allegory, who explored the natural spatial images surrounding him in the jungle of Brazil and saw them generated by the wish production of exoticism:

> ". . . this tropical vegetation was . . . a vegetable company like a troop of accomplished dancers, each of whom had remained poised in the most telling posture, as if to express an intention which was all the clearer through having nothing more to fear from life; a motionless ballet disturbed only by the mineral unrest of the bubbling springs."[23]

Rigidity, an immobile ballet ordered vertically rather than movement organized horizontally — the differences between musicals and German revue films crystallized in these findings. The inhibition of visual pleasure must lie at a deeper level than in the fear of decadence which pervaded the consciously National Socialist body. This fear of decay was a physical fear of flowing into dissipation. That is why the fragmented dancers are so hastily reassembled by the cutting technique, as if it had to be ashamed of every jump, every excursion into daydreaming, in short: of the dancing conquest of erotic fantasy. Modesty forced these bodies into rigidity. Freedom of motion in the musical did not mean erotic fulfillment, as is shown by Berkeley's "Sweet and Hot," where sexual desires are ultimately choked by infantilization, their heat cooled by sticky sweetness. But certainly these desires are stirred and cannot be stifled into rigidity as fast as they arise. Lévi-Strauss pointed out the

23. C. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, transl. by J. and D. Weightman (London, 1973), p. 92.

way in which a sense of modesty is expressed through the degree of agitation by (indeed, exotic) people:

> "Even people who live in a state of complete nudity are conscious of what we call modesty: they simply define it differently. Among the Indians of Brazil, as in certain regions of Melanesia, the distinction between modesty and immodesty does not depend on different degrees of bodily exposure but on the difference between quiesence and excitement."[24]

When Busby Berkeley staged *Me and My Gal* for MGM in 1942, the era of backstage musicals had come to an end. "Ars gratia artis" was no longer the password of the day, which instead issued the slogan "Artists for the war." Produced in the same year as *Die große Liebe, Me and My Gal* is a mobilization melodrama. A vaudeville troupe is on tour through the USA shortly before the outbreak of World War I. Judy Garland plays the ingenue who develops remarkably quickly and is involved in a lighthearted romance with her dance instructor (Gene Kelly in his first film role), but profession takes priority over passion. The *Lusitania* sinks, and North America enters the war. Judy takes her brother, already in uniform, to the station. After his departure, Gene talks her into having a coffee in the empty station restaurant. At the piano, he casually picks out a dance number with song which the two, playing together, go on to develop with virtuosity. In the title song, "Me and My Gal," they dream the dream of peace, of having a house and four kids.

Their manager has already received the duo's consent to book them into the New York Palace when Gene is called up for service. Should he fight or dance? He dodges the draft by a self-inflicted wound of his hand, saving his talent for the show. Judy, whose brother has fallen in the trenches, punishes Gene's act of troop demoralization by withdrawing her love. Gene volunteers to serve the troops in France and courageously wipes out a machine-gun nest: clearing a path for wounded Americans, which he can then use as the highroad to Judy.

Documentary footage of President Wilson is cut in for the victory parade in New York. Judy appears on Broadway, recognizes Gene — decorated with the Medal of Honor — in the audience. When they improvise their title song on stage together, their art is illuminated by truth. Now, art is also allowed to enter their lives, which will fulfill the dream of a home and four kids. Happiness in the German film, on the other hand, is life as the highest form of art, which then issues the command to abandon the lower, expressive arts.

If *Me and My Gal* shows the beginning of a great career, even a shared career, giving up a career stands at the end of *Die große Liebe*. Guilt is assigned to different roles. If guilt for moral misjudgment is attributed to the woman in the German film, it is the man who is incriminated in Berkeley's musical. War, always good as a catalyst of conflicts, provides him with the chance for redemption, while Hanna Holberg, the German singer, has a long

24. *Ibid.*, p. 286.

wait before her civilian sweetheart is revealed to be an officer. Two levels of shame, two kinds of mobilization of the subjective factor for the big war.

Die große Liebe places the design of the 'revue' principle of war in the psyche of the sweethearts, who must suffer the permanent postponement as well as the permanent interruption of their love. *Me and My Gal* makes a much stricter division between revue numbers and the war, which — apart from the fast and furious episode of Gene Kelly's redemptive coup — does not take place in the film. It happens in faraway Europe, moreover in a simulated, distant time, during World War I. *Die große Liebe* is a contemporary melodrama; World War II is present as reality. The theaters of war between Berlin, Paris and Rome become the true revue pictures of the film. While *Die große Liebe* allegorizes space — the war as a marital revue —, *Me and My Gal* allegorizes time — the revue as a marital war. Both films are political in that they show the subjective factor growing into temporary courageousness, with war putting love to the hardest possible test. The way the aim of mobilization basically differs in the two films lies in the question as to the consequences. What will happen to the subjective factor in the event of a ceasefire?

At the end of *Die große Liebe,* the subjective factor seems to be sublimated in the overall objective situation, but it nonetheless breaks out as a severe neurotic disturbance in the woman. For in contrast to her song, Zarah Leander knows that *no* miracle is going to happen that would compensate her for her permanent postponement.* Her last glance is cast not to her future husband but to the skies, where a squadron of planes dips in formation. The promise of military victory seals only her erotic defeat, her ruin by war. At the end of *Me and My Gal,* on the other hand, Judy Garland is able to release her repressed energies due to Gene Kelly's display of heroism. The subjective factor, which soared to public courageousness for the sake of private interests, is not stylized into a permanent promise. Precisely because it only temporarily plunged into the public sphere, it cannot guarantee the heroic sense of life of *Die große Liebe*. The subjective factor, used by the film for political ends, is compressed back into its quotidian quality.

VI

In the revue film the civilian troops are on parade, often garbed in uniform and choreographed in a costumed cadence march. Does this make a revue film of *Triumph des Willens* (1935), which dropped these masks in the ecstasy of the event?

This theory, which begins with the transparency of the political in all genres, is less capricious than those theories which take cinematic contents as a basis to develop genre categories that contradict the findings of formal

* An allusion to the Leander hit song, "Ich weiß, es wird ein Wunder geschehn" ("I know a miracle is going to happen"). (Translators' note)

analysis. Historiography from Rabenalt to Hull and Cadars/Courtade has eagerly divided the cinematic output of the Third Reich into political and non-political films, and it has even enjoyed coverfire from the social sciences. It was Gerd Albrecht who decisively advanced this division into genres classified by content in his study, *Nationalsozialistische Filmpolitik:*[25] according to it, there were so-called P-films, films with a manifest political function (disregarding their other content and their basic outlook) as opposed to H-films, films with a "happy basic attitude and only a latent political function" — to say nothing of the other variants. I have shown elsewhere that the "heaven on earth" promised in the film comedies of the Third Reich was never as marvelous as claimed.[26]

According to Albrecht's assessment of National Socialist feature films, almost all revue films, including *Wir tanzen um die Welt,* are so-called H-films. This classification has the precise function of exoneration — if all those films were only happy, they could hardly be political. Since the comedic form supersedes intended ideologies, the films can be unquestioningly embraced today. Cinematic historiography of the products of the Third Reich focuses exclusively on the P-films or deals at most marginally with the main, representative productions of the revue film. It has not even taken notice of the H-films of the Third Reich and is fixated on the sociology of secondary communication forms (the most recent studies by Spiker and Becker, *Film und Kapital* as well as *Film und Herrschaft,* offer an example). Due to this studied ignorance toward material-aesthetic analyses, the attention focused on P-films, from *Triumph des Willens* all the way to *Kolberg,* is all the greater.

> "The Nazi meetings as we see them on films or pictures today have lost their force: the flames on the sides of the Nuremberg stadium, the huge overwhelming flags, the marches and speaking choruses, present a spectacle to modern audiences not unlike those American musicals of the 1920's and 1930's which Hitler himself was so fond of watching each evening. . . . For participants, it was the symbolic content which took priority, the ritual expression of a shared worship that was so crucial to their sense of belonging. A written description or even a view of these ceremonials cannot capture the uplift which came from actual participation."[27]

Triumph des Willens, then, is not unlike the American musicals, Mosse finds, which again documents the simultaneity of the ornamentalization of the masses in the capitalist rationalization process. Its formal expression is nonetheless different in the films of the Third Reich from that of the musicals, in the way described above. The document on the self-image of the German revue film cited at the outset which praised the "harmony of bodies beautifully in motion" and their "[revue] ballet as a spontaneous community feel-

25. G. Albrecht, *Nationalsozialistische Filmpolitik* (Stuttgart, 1969).

26. Cf. K. Witte, "Die Filmkomödie im Dritten Reich," in *Die Literatur im Dritten Reich,* ed. by H. Denkler and K. Prümm (Stuttgart, 1976).

27. G. L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses* (New York, 1975), p. 207.

ing"[28] is now to be read with the eyes of a participant at a Reich party convention in Nuremberg. The enormous closing tableaux of revue films from *Premiere* to *Die große Liebe* are a continuation of *Triumph des Willens,* translating its ritualized expression into popular film genres. The overwhelming experience of the German masses, who had encountered themselves on the terrain of Nuremberg, had to acquire continuity in everyday production. It is no coincidence that the expression "inner Reich party convention" was coined in everyday life to describe the sensation of being massively overwhelmed. The revue films endow that unique experience with duration, the masses of viewers assembling in the cinema to renew the celebration of their inner Reich party convention.

Triumph des Willens was intentionally staged as a gigantic show. In his memoirs, Albert Speer reveals the extent to which he was responsible for the structures of the set at the Reich party convention. Leni Riefenstahl's film is one single triumph of the director's will. Not one movement is run through from beginning to end; instead, each is undercut on cue by countermovements and carefully posed close-ups that fill empty spaces and empty full spaces. Every cut is a rollcall, whose object — whether a human being or a prop — answers "Here!" Even the famous "Man with Gooses," a statue at the Nuremberg well, is circled by the camera in a traveling shot in such a way that it appears to gaze after the Führer driving past. The dizzying traveling shots work with induced movement intended to set inanimate matter into waving motion and make human masses freeze into stone blocks. The masses are allowed to enter the picture, but only their leaders are allowed to speak. Hitler himself is the main actor, here celebrating his wedding fantasies with the masses.

The cut takes up the direction of eye movement but creates the line of sight only by the montage of very short, fragmenting shots: the children, framed in close-up, gaze at the masses of marchers, framed as a totality; meanwhile, the gleaming eyes of the women rest on the SS-troops filing past. Leni Riefenstahl cuts the juxtapositions according to the principle: struggle and pleasure (the tent camp sequence is exemplary) in order to build up in them a visual aggression which, although hypertrophied, is soon to be surpassed. Leni Riefenstahl said this about the principles informing her film:

> "The formative line requires that carried by the real experience of Nuremberg, one instinctively find the unified manner which shapes the film in such a way that it yanks listener and viewer along from act to act, from impression to impression ever more overwhelmingly."[29]

If there is fascist film aesthetic, its key is to be found in the intention stated here. First the audience's gaze is overwhelmed and then yanked up from the ground: how is this gaze, already immobilized, to free itself from the spell?

28. O. Bergholz, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
29. L. Riefenstahl, *Hinter den Kulissen des Reichsparteitag-Films* (Munich, 1935), p. 28.

The emotional crescendo which the masses experience during Hitler's address is produced by the camera's constantly circling traveling shots. Hitler himself is circled in a calculated ritardando, the camera making sweeps around him in semicircular motions without ever approaching him. For this purpose it is mounted in a lower position, elevating Hitler — who appears against the sky — away from the masses.

An overwhelming moment arises when the leaders split the ocean of the masses as they stride to the memorial for the dead. The camera lifts off from eye level on a traveling boom (mounted in an elevator on a flagpole) and draws the viewer's gaze upward along a vertical axis. While the movement's leaders move away along the central axis toward the background of the picture, the camera rises rapidly to its elevated perspective. The dynamic relationship of the two movements in the optic space results for the viewer in an almost palpable suction. It is as if the two-dimensional picture takes on the shape of a cube now sundered diagonally by the imaginary, guided line of sight. Along this dividing line resulting from the tension between moving object and moving camera, the viewer's gaze now slides down the central axis into the picture in order to fall at the feet of the moving object, i.e. the leaders of the fascist movement.

This staged event, termed "the most impressive display of the deployment of political power" by Hitler himself in the final address, is discernably produced by the maximization of means. *Triumph des Willens* is not unlike the revue film in that it creates extreme perspectives of extreme uniformity. The spatial organization clearly draws on revue arrangements, which here appear as a liturgy, as a secular act of consecration. The nonsimultaneity expressed in this principle of organizing the masses was described in these terms in 1937 by Joachim Schumacher, in exile in Paris:

> "[Hitler] has organized the masses spatially, organized them 'organically' according to completely nonsimultaneous, disparate classes, as if the finance capitalism of 1936 were the city market cooperative association of 1300."[30]

This fetishization of origins enacted in *Triumph des Willens* is translated in the revue film into paradisiacal yearning for the simpler world of yesteryear. *Triumph des Willens* is the most sweeping deployment of the wish for "heaven on earth," which the revues promised in every respect. This wish always produced hell, as Ernst Bloch pointed out emphatically at many points in his work, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*.

These wishes were deployed not just in the German revue film. The musical *Broadway Melody of 1936* devotes the song "Moments of Paradise" to this wish, and *Wonder Bar* (1934) even has Al Jolson enter paradise: a utopian territory that promises the unconstrained development of viewing pleasure. The German revue was illuminated by this idea more than it lets on. The revue ultimately manifests that "utopia of paradisiacal irresponsibility"

30. J. Schumacher, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

which, according to the findings worked out by Klaus Theweleit, was typical not just of fascism.[31] The utopia of paradisiacal irresponsibility feeds on the perceptual interests of those masses of viewers who would like to deploy their viewing pleasure uninhibitedly, both in the musical and in the revue film. Reproduced constantly, this wish is, however, presented in such a massively arranged way that the viewer loses himself in it.

Translated by J.D. Steakley and Gabriele Hoover

31. K. Theweleit, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 552. Cf. also the essay by Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," *Movie* 24 (Spring 1977), which provides the theoretical foundation for my assertion.