HOW DID THE NAZIS USE THE ARTS AND CULTURE AS A FORM OF PROPAGANDA?

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CONTENTS

• Painting
• Sculpture
• Architecture
• Literature
• Theatre
• Music

• Film
• How successful was Nazi Cultural Propaganda?
• Often was used as propaganda by the Nazi regime in Germany.

• A tool that the Nazi regime used to promote their beliefs or manipulate to fit their beliefs.

• All art was used as a form of propaganda.

• Key component of Nazi regime’s attempt to sell their ideology and beliefs
PAINTINGS

• 1936 Hitler’s view on art imposed
• Modern, reflective, abstract art replaced by clear visual images that could inspire Germans
• Nazi art had to be clear, direct and heroic
• New Nazi Art - people were drawn not as real individuals but as heroic idealizations
• Hitler portrayed as the wise, imperious leader
• Landscapes revealing the source of the Volk
PAINTINGS (CONTINUED)

• Curiously unmechanized rural life, predominated

• Nude women, displaying biological purity

• Hitler considered true art to be art of the masses

• Reflecting popular taste and to reach mass audiences

• Make the propaganda role effective

• All artist became members of the Reich Culture Chamber
PAINTINGS (CONTINUED)

• The state could withdraw licenses to members
• Paintings were reproduced
• Full scale or as postcards or stamps
• Hard to judge how widespread real diffusion was
• People were continuously exposed to forms of officially sponsored art activity
• From an artistic rather than a propagandist viewpoint
• German art degenerated under the Third Reich into a mass of stereotyped images

• The best artists left Germany, went into exile, or maintained their livelihood by joining the Culture Chamber and produced lifeless art to order
SCULPTURE

• More immediately accessible to people

• Through the vast statues that adorned many of the new buildings

• 1934, decreed that all new public buildings to be embellished by sculptures conveying the Nazi message

• Expressive individualist works now gave way to those portraying stereotyped Nazi virtues (perfect but lifeless body shapes)

• Reflected the biologically pure vigorous Aryan race

• Numerous reproductions made works more accessible
SCULPTURE (CONTINUED)

• The change in style is seen in the two sculptures of 1930 and 1938 by Georg Kolbe

1930 (left)
1938 (right)
• Hitler’s favorite sculptors Arno Breker and Josef Thorak were given vast studios to turn out masses of heroic German figures and dominant animals such as eagles to adorn public buildings.
ARCHITECTURE

• Seen as the most important artistic form of propaganda
• Hitler described it as ‘the word in stone’
• Buildings were experienced by large numbers of people
• Could be constructed in materials that would last
• Could represent the Thousand Year Reich the Nazis were building
• Hitler was fascinated by architecture
• He spent many hours drawing schemes for new buildings and restructured cities
3 main styles are evident in the buildings constructed during the Third Reich

Hitler favored a new classical, monumental style

The symmetric simplicity and order of the Greeks but on a vast scale

These buildings had a propaganda purpose

Hitler once said ‘Our enemies and our followers must realize that these buildings strengthen our authority’

The individual was dwarfed in front of the building, representing absolute authority
ARCHITECTURE (CONTINUED)

• Hitler drew up grandiose plans for a complete rebuilding of the centre of Berlin as a new world capital, Germania

• As well as plans for other German cities

• Most Nazis were critical of the experimental modernist styles of the mass housing schemes built under the Weimar Republic

• Favored a more traditional approach, with pitched roofs and shutters

• Reflected the backward looking, pro countryside aspect of Nazi ideology
ARCHITECTURE (CONTINUED)

Germania Plan

Dome of The People’s Hall
In 1933 there were book burnings at the universities of Berlin and Nuremberg.

10 May 1933 central square in Berlin the largest book burning event took place.

Raids on public and private libraries.

Goebbels wanted eradicate ‘overstated Jewish intellectualism’.

Books burned which were Jewish, socialist or pacifist by nature.
• 2,500 writers left Germany between 1933-45, including Thomas Mann and Bertolt Brecht

• Writers who sympathised with the regime or accepted its philosophy flourished

• Novelists were expected to promote Nazi ideas or be neutral

• The regime favored books about the comradeship of the trenches and ‘blood and soil’ novels

• Stressing traditional peasant rural values

• The best selling book was Hitler’s autobiography Mein Kampf which sold more than 6 million copies

• How widely read it was is another question
The Weimar experimentation in drama was abruptly ended in the Third Reich.

- Many playwrights and producers emigrated

- Including Brecht and Toller

- Others were banned

- Drama had to be approved by the Nazis

- There was historical drama, light entertainment and ‘blood and soil’ stories
THEATRE (CONTINUED)

• New form of drama was developed
• A combination of pageant and circus
• It glorified the pagan past
• Was performed in specially constructed outdoor amphitheaters
In the Nazi imagination, music had a unique significance and power to seduce and sway the masses.

The Party made widespread use of music in its publicity, and music featured prominently at rallies and other public events.

The Horst Wessellied (Horst Wessel song) was popular and widely sung.

Many propaganda songs were aimed at the youth, and the Hitlerjugend (Hitler Youth) developed an elaborate music program.
Films played a major part in propaganda in Nazi Germany.

The film industry was controlled by the Nazis and ranged from anti-Semitic films such as “The Eternal Jew”, to propaganda films.

To ‘enlighten’ youths about the Hitler Youth movement (“Hitlerjunge Quex”) to coverage of the 1936 Berlin Olympics by Leni Riefenstahl.

All of this was controlled by Joseph Goebbels’ Ministry of Propaganda.
• Nazi government bought up shares in 4 major film companies

• By 1942 film companies completely state controlled

• Unified under the UFI

• Film going quadrupled between 1933 and 1942

• Over 1000 films produced during the Third Reich

• Nazis often used newsreels shown before the start of feature films
HOW SUCCESSFUL WAS NAZI PROPAGANDA?
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• Mason, skeptical of effect of Nazi propaganda on all groups, for example the working classes

• Welch, argues Nazi propaganda was successful in strengthening support for Hitler, but not its policies e.g. anti-Semitism and some propaganda was arguably counter-productive, e.g. anti-Church propaganda

• Geary believes Nazi propaganda was most successful when it played on traditional German prejudices, e.g. nationalism, fear of Bolshevism etc.
PROBLEMS

• Quantifying people’s responses

• Impact of social, political, economic and religious context

• Effect of Nazi repression