

Art as Propaganda in Nazi Germany

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Brianna Louise Dinsmore

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Art as Propaganda in Nazi Germany

“How different it is in tyranny. When artists are made the slaves and tools of the state; when artists become the chief propagandists of a cause, progress is arrested and creation and genius are destroyed.”

-Dwight Eisenhower, 1954

Thomas Jefferson once said that “difference of opinion leads to inquiry and inquiry leads to truth.” Truth is found in the exploration of ideas. When a society’s information is limited, their perception of truth is misguided. Governments are responsible for the regulation of information given to the people. The control of information is often positioned to promote or negate specific ideas and opinions. When governments are in the depths of trying times, they’ll often suffocate ideas that are circulated within a society, especially when discussion conflicts with previously held notions or popular belief. “The urge to censor and sanitize public discourse and entertainment comes of fear—fear of youth, fear of new technology, fear of tastes and values that don’t match their own” (McMasters 22). People are inundated with differing opinions and claims, resulting in a more segregated society. The sharing and validation of ideas encourages freedom of choice and variation in beliefs. This freedom of opinion is extremely dangerous to a government that opposes democracy and the free flow of ideas.

Censorship is highly dependent on the constructs of the society in which it is exercised. Different cultures, governments and religions call for specific regulations. It is important to recognize that censorship is not just banning or

suppressing ideas considered intolerable or threatening, it is the regulation and control of those ideas. Censorship is also a type of distortion, Ideas and “truth” can be promoted in the interest of previously held beliefs of society and the government. This concept is readily seen in the use and dissemination of propaganda.

Throughout history, propaganda has been used by the powerful to persuade. It is exploited in times of fear and terror to unite people under a specific cause of action or belief. World War II is one of the most notorious times involving the development of propaganda and its power to persuade a society to accept a belief or rise to action. Germany’s government disseminated its messages of propaganda through a variety of different mediums. One extremely powerful form of propaganda used was art (Ellul 20-23).

Art is not just paint to a canvas; it plays an important role in human communication and is not only an expression of the artists themselves, but also a reflection of the period in which it was created. Because art is used as a tool for communication and expression, it is often censored or manipulated to coincide with political beliefs. Germany used art to promote its political agenda. “The society utilized rhetoric to politicize art and to exploit deep-rooted concerns shared by large segments of the populations, namely, that an erosion of traditional values threatens a familiar way of life” (Goggin 7).

Nazi Germany identifies how multifaceted and influential the power of art as propaganda can be. Hitler’s propaganda was effective because the state of Germany was undefined. People felt disconnected and lost and because of this

ideological weakness, Hitler was able to promote and shape his ideology that emphasized a “pure” Germany. Art was used as a component of communicating those beliefs. The following paper discusses the use of propaganda and censorship in art in Germany, specifically during the dictatorship of Adolph Hitler.

Defining the Agent of Blame

Many of the steps taken by Hitler and the Nazis to carry out Germany’s “cultural cleansing” are known. The Nazi Ideology, established on a deep-seeded hatred for the Jewish population, promoted the rise of the Aryan race. Racial inferiority, forced labor-camps, stripping of individual rights, segregation, and blame were imposed on anyone that the Nazis deemed inferior. Hitler and his associates preached “the belief that Jews were the root of all evil and that Germany could be saved from collapse only by total removal of Jews and the Jewish influence” (Bergen X).

This mentality provided the Nazis with grounds to murder approximately 6 million people, but not immediately. Hitler did not announce his convictions spontaneously and receive overwhelming acceptance from the people of Germany, while the rest of the world fell ignorant to his tyranny. The genocide did not spring from a mere hatred for the Jewish race and a cadre of loyal followers—it was a slow and deliberate process involving several factors. “Leadership, political will, and manipulation of popular sentiments are needed to fan hostility into organized killing” (Bergen 2). The Holocaust was the work of extremely skillful propagandists.

The preconditions for Hitler's Nazi regime provided a sturdy foundation for total control and propaganda to diffuse within a population. Prior to Hitler's rule, a government based on a democratic constitution was in place. The Weimar Republic (1919-1933) followed World War I and was the result of the German Revolution.¹ A constitution was enacted replacing the imperial form of government that existed prior to WW1, with a liberal democracy. This democracy was similar to Britain's, and embraced a free international commerce of ideas. "The Weimar ideal was both old and new. The striking mixture of cynicism and confidence, the search for novelty and for roots—the solemn irreverence—of the twenties, were a child of war, revolution, and democracy, but the elements that made it up came from both the distant and the recent past, recalled and revived by a new generation" (Gay 2).

During the Golden Era of the Republic, modern ideas flourished. The 1920s saw a cultural revival as artists fled from conventionality and explored an innovative artistic movement. Expressionism, Dada, and Cubism were highly prosperous during this period. "Everywhere young artists broke away from the pomposity of academic art and sought to rise above the bombast of their surroundings to cultivate their inner life, articulate their religious yearning, and satisfy their dim longing for human and cultural renewal" (Gay 4). Expressionist artists did not strive to portray objective images of reality, but rather subjective emotions. Unlike conventional art of the time, modernism did not represent the

¹ The German Revolution: The German Revolution in 1918 followed the First World War and was a politically driven civil conflict. As a result, the imperial form of government was replaced with the Weimar Republic. (Gay 15-20)

real, but an emotional experience. “The artist accomplishes this aim through distortion, exaggeration, primitivism, and fantasy and through the vivid, jarring, violent, or dynamic application of formal elements” (Britannica, Modernism). Expressionism could be found in paintings, film, music and dance, literature and architecture. Often, Expressionism was an outlet for artists to convey questionable and profane images and ideas. “Expressionist painters and poets made inflammatory statements, exhibited outrageous pictures, published *avant-garde* little magazines, and gathered, for collaboration and comfort, in informal groups” (Gay 4). Expressionism challenged many traditional views, and the art was most often unwelcomed and considered highly controversial by the German population.

Although culture seemed to be exploring new frontiers, the Weimar Republic faced numerous problems throughout its 14 years of existence including political extremists, hostility from the victors of World War I, and hyperinflation, especially during the last years of its life. “Between 1929 and 1933, the years of disastrously rising unemployment, government by decree, decay of middle-class parties, and resumption of violence, culture became less the critic than the mirror of events” (Gay 120). Because of the cultural freedoms granted in the Weimar Republic, citizens were skeptical of where their country was headed under its influence. While the Weimar Republic struggled to maintain authority, several dominating forces began to influence the public. One of the people’s favorites was Adolph Hitler. When he was appointed German Chancellor in 1933, his ascent to total control began.

A constant throughout the turbulence of Germany was the “hunger for wholeness” felt by the people. People yearned for unity and Hitler satisfied the appetite of Germany by exploiting the fear and uncertainty that consumed the lives of Germans. This hunger for wholeness was a “powerful influence on conservative cultural reactions against the alienation of modern life, finding its culmination in the rise of National Socialism” (Harrison 787). Modernism bred individual thought and promoted artists’ isolation. During a time of real crisis and confusion, this government did not give the people what they longed for. “This amalgam of fervent nationalism and rhetorical socialism, not to mention the charismatic spell of Hitler’s oratory and the hypnotic pomp of Nazi rallies, was psychologically more appealing than flaccid liberalism or divisive class struggle” (Britannica, Failure of the German Republic).

The widespread conflict and disorder within Germany fostered the growth of Hitler’s view, a military dictatorship that guided the end of the Weimar Republic. “The Republic was dead in all but name, the victim of structural flaws, reluctant defenders, unscrupulous aristocrats and industrialists, a historic legacy of authoritarianism, a disastrous world situation and deliberate murder” (Gay 163). Hitler used the failings of the Weimar Republic to propagandize his anti-Jew and anti-modernism agenda. His infectious thoughts and ideas inspired a country to blame their problems on a way of life. “The propagandist must first of all know as precisely as possible the terrain on which he is operating. He must know all the sentiments and opinions, the current tendencies and the stereotypes among the public his is trying to reach” (Ellul 34). According to Hitler, the Jews

were responsible for modernism and disturbing art, such as Expressionism. “He [Hitler] considered jazz, abstract art, and many other forms of modernism somehow degenerate and “Jewish,” because, in his view, this distorted reality and lured people away from racial purity” (Berger 37). Hitler’s agenda spawned unity within the country because it gave people structure and a scapegoat for their problems.

With the failures of the Weimar Republic, anti-Jew and anti-modernism were common sentiments of the people, and with Hitler’s influence, action was set in motion. Two things were essential to the Germans according to Hitler: racial identity and universal cultural attitudes. He relentlessly blamed the Jewish population for the growth of modernism and held a strong resentment for what modernism stood for. “[Hitler] was obsessed with the fear of cultural decline as he was with the threat of biological pollution, and he was the steady enemy of modern art, with what he saw as its incoherence, its rejection of historical purpose and historical will, its emphasis upon the isolated, even alienated, individual, its abandonment of objective time, its restlessness, and its distorted narrative” (Grosshans 10). Using Jews as the motivation of cultural decline in Germany pacified Hitler’s “essentials.” The cultural attitude was that Jews were responsible for all the mishaps of Germany, and that in order for Germany to create a racial identity, the country must be rid of the racially impure Jews.

By blaming Jews for cultural decline, the loss of the war, and racial impurity, Germans associated that word with many other negative aspects of German life. “Propaganda tries to create conditioned reflexes in the individual by training him

so that certain words, signs, or symbols even certain persons or facts provoke unfailing reactions” (Ellul 31). The most fluid and suggesting word in the Nazi vocabulary was “Jew.” This word not only defined a specific race, it was embedded into the German mind as loaded with symbolism. Jews represented impurity and anti-German behavior. “Nazi propagandists labeled all Jews as deformed and criminal and compared them to handicapped people and Gypsies, whom they also described as monstrous and dangerous. Nazi ideologues linked communists, capitalists, and liberals with purported Jewish conspiracy; they described homosexuals, eastern Europeans, the British, and the Americans as nothing but cover groups for alleged Jewish interests” (Bergen 4).

The “Jew” was, therefore, a compilation of stereotypes and falsities that the Nazis promoted as the problem in Germany and as the converse of the Aryan race. “Aryan is “constructive”; the Jew is “destructive”; and the “Aryan”, to continue his construction must destroy the Jewish destruction. The Aryan, as the vessel of love, must hate the Jewish hate” (The Rhetoric of Hitler’s Battle 105). The words Hitler used to describe the two races were in exact opposition of one another: love vs. hate, construction vs. destruction, good vs. evil, etc—Jews were the antithesis of the Aryan race. This set the foundation for leading the masses to use Jews as a scapegoat and unify Germans against this enemy. “As a whole and at all times, the efficiency of the truly national leader consists primarily in preventing the division of the attention of a people, and always in concentrating it on a single enemy” (The Rhetoric of Hitler’s Battle 97). By channeling all negativity and damnation towards one specific group, Hitler was able to deflect

the crisis in Germany onto a specific population.

Another important aspect of the successful propagandists is to understand the people and generally held beliefs and concerns. Hitler and the Nazi party were completely attuned to the struggles of Germany. After the loss of WWI, Germany was a breeding ground for prejudices and persecution. Germans did not want to accept defeat and needed a scapegoat to explain their failures. The Jewish population was an easy target because they were already victims of prejudice prior to the war. "Proponents of Nazi ideas focused their attacks on people who were already suspect in the eyes of many Germans. They then echoed and enlarged familiar hatreds and linked them to current anxieties and concerns" (Bergen 3). Propaganda responds to a need. The propagandist does not create the need, but feeds upon something already embedded into the culture of a society and builds upon it. "Propaganda then becomes this mixture of the actual satisfaction given to the people by the reforms and subsequent exploitation of that satisfaction" (Ellul 21). Nazis accused the Jewish race for the downfall of Germany and the loss of the war. The people were satisfied with this because the responsibility could be displaced.

"Refusal to accept the reality of defeat [in World War I] led many Germans to search for people to blame for what they perceived as a betrayal. That climate of scapegoating, in turn, created a kind of open season on many familiar outsiders. For example, old accusations that Jews had crucified Jesus dovetailed with the popular stab-in-the-back myth that blamed treacherous Jews for Germany's loss of the war" (Berger 27). The Germans began to relate old

prejudices to new ones that further justified their hatred. Hitler was then able to use the Jewish population as the agent of blame for failures in politics and culture. Hitler's ideology provided relief to Germans because now they could rationalize all of their problems; an external enemy was created and one could focus all of his energy and hate into one "being." He used the malleability of the masses to execute his agenda for a total cultural cleansing.

Adolph Hitler instilled a new future for Germany and defined the agent of blame. "In the polemics of politics, the use of the scapegoat to establish identification in terms of an enemy shared in common is also said to have the notable rhetorical advantage that the candidate who presents himself as a spokesman for "us" can prod his audience to consider local ills primarily in terms of alien figures viewed as the outstanding causes of those ills" (Dramatistic Theory of Rhetoric 243). Hitler, the "spokesman" for the Aryan race, raised moral and created unity against an "alien." The scapegoat was the Jewish population, and Hitler blamed them for the economic downturn and the other issues of the time. This shared enemy and feelings of unification caused a lot of brooding hatred to be displaced onto an undeserving victim.

Hitler's Culture Propaganda

"This cleansing of our culture must be extended to all fields. Theatre, art, literature, cinema, posters, and window displays must be cleansed of all manifestations of our rotting world and placed in the service of a moral, political, and cultural idea."

-Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf

The mediums used by successful propagandists, including Hitler, are varied and all encompassing. One of the crucial elements of propaganda is that it interjects itself into all aspects of life. "It is a matter of reaching and encircling the whole man and all men. Propaganda tries to surround man by all possible routes, in the realm of feelings as well as ideas, by playing on his will or on his needs, through his conscious and his unconscious, assailing him in both his private and public life. It furnishes him with a complete system for explaining the world, and it provides immediate incentives for action" (Ellul 11). The Nazi Party was now the governing body and foundation for anti-semantic ideology. To control the flow of information, the Nazis had to rid the country of conflicting ideas and other governing bodies. If the people are not united, propaganda fails to penetrate the lives of the individuals. "To make the organization of propaganda possible the media must be concentrated, the number of news agencies reduced, the press brought under single control, and radio and film monopolies established. The effect will be still greater if the various media are concentrated in the same hands" (Ellul 102). Conflicting ideas are a breeding ground for questions and resistance, and the Nazis would not tolerate objections to their ploy. Censoring the information available to Germany by controlling every aspect of the media greatly secured power for the Nazi Regime.

For propaganda to penetrate the lives of people, it must occur in a society that embraces the individualist and the mass society. The individual must break free from all other associations that may cause conflict from the ideology being

pushed. Organizations can lead individuals to adopt ideas different from the masses. "An individual can be influenced by forces such as propaganda only when he is cut off from membership in local groups. Because such groups are organic and have a well-structured material, spiritual, and emotional life, they are not easily penetrated by propaganda" (Ellul 91). In September 1933, the Reich Chamber of Culture was created to eliminate ideas inconsistent with the Nazi party. The chamber served as the exclusive, officially recognized corporation for the arts, entertainment, and the media. This single institution, created to eliminate interest groups and unions, imposed regulations on art aligned with a purified Germany. Membership was denied to Jews, Communists, homosexuals, Gypsies, and members of other racial, political or social groups deemed inferior to the Aryan race. "The chamber's stated mission was 'to promote German culture on behalf of the German Volk and Reich' and regulate the economic and social affairs of the culture professions" (Steinweis 24).

Leader of the Reich Chamber of Culture was Joseph Goebbels, Prime Minister of Propaganda. Goebbels shared with Hitler the notion that art is the most accurate reflection of racial groups and their political institutions. Although Goebbels was not immediately anti-modernist, Hitler soon persuaded the propaganda minister. Hitler did come outright with his hatred for modern art, although he had always felt that it was impure and distasteful. Most of his concerns regarding art were not brought to the forefront until a couple years after the Nazi Regime had been in control. One essential idea that governs Hitler's propaganda culture, a constant ideological obsession, was the idea of cohesion.

All other ideas were subheadings to the existence of a unified culture. To be cohesive, a group has to have an identity of purpose and an apparent commonality of origin. "...Whereby the "Aryan" is elevated above all others by the innate endowment of his blood, while other "races," in particular Jews and Negroes, are innately inferior. This sinister secularized revision of Christian theology thus puts the sense of dignity upon a fighting basis, requiring the conquest of "inferior races" (The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle 104). His tools for unification magnified one superior race and one superior culture. This cohesion was expressed in cultural propaganda, specifically the art that was regarded as appropriate and promoting German ideals (Gay 115-125).

In order for Goebbels to maintain good faith with Hitler, and his position of authority, he eventually conformed to Hitler's beliefs. "In explaining Goebbels's metamorphosis into an antimodernist, the influence exerted by Hitler needs to be stressed . . . By subordinating his views to Hitler's, Goebbels again found it possible to strengthen his bureaucratic position" (Petropoulos 48). Goebbels had strong desire for Hitler's approval in all aspects, and modified his beliefs to be congruent with his leader. The adoption of Hitler's opposition to modernism secured Goebbels's position of authority and signaled the start of the state's more decisive cultural involvement (Petropoulos 40-50).

Goebbels designed the chamber in contrast to the policies of the Weimar Republic, which housed numerous cultural unions and occupational associations. The chamber was widely accepted because the chaotic and liberal structure of the Weimar culture was so widely denounced. "Indeed, the professional,

economic, and social agenda of the chamber during most of its 11-year existence stemmed from a widely accepted diagnosis of the disastrous financial conditions prevailing in the German cultural establishment during the Weimar Republic” (Steinweis 25). Under the Republic, there was no centralized control or governing body to oversee artists and their work. Modernism flourished and nurtured the artist as an individual, directly contrasting Hitler’s new culture. Hitler intended to purify and unite Germany. “He was thus prepared to perform what we must call a cultural lobotomy, to erase part of the European memory, and to transform the rebellious artist into a community spokesman” (Grosshans 29). A large part of the purification involved uniting Germany under one art. Any art deemed as exhibiting unnatural things or distortion of the real was considered un-German. Laws were ratified in order to censor art. These laws included that 1) “All works of cosmopolitan or Bolshevist nature should be removed from German museums and collections, but first they should be exhibited to the public, who should be informed of the details of their acquisition, and then burned, 2) All museum directors who “wasted” public monies by purchasing “un-German” art should be fired immediately, 3) No artist with Marxist or Bolshevist connections should be mentioned henceforth,² and 4) All public sculptures not “approved” by the German public should be immediately removed” (Barron 18). In addition to these laws, art criticism was banned to constrain the development of new or contrary ideas. “By circumscribing the discourse about art, Goebbels both enhanced

² Bolshevist: a faction of the Marxist Russian Social Democratic Party that ultimately became the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Nazi’s saw Jews as the drive behind the Communist movement. (Bergen)

government's ability to monitor critics and helped monopolize the commerce of ideas" (Petropoulos 53). The censorship of criticism allowed the Nazis to maintain cultural dominance.

The Degenerate Art Exhibition

On July 19, 1937, the "Entartete Kunst," or Degenerate Art Exhibition, unveiled in Munich, Germany. Munich was fitting to house the most dramatic expression of Hitler's culture propaganda. Not only did Hitler consider Munich his home, but also the Nazi party had originated there. Hitler stated in *Mein Kampf*³ that Munich was the metropolis of German art. Goebbels unveiled the exhibition showcasing artwork considered un-German and degenerate. Degenerate is "essentially a biological term defining a plant or animal that has so changed that it no longer belongs to its species. By extension it refers to art that is unclassifiable or so far beyond the confines of what is accepted, it is in essence 'non-art'" (Barron 10). Hitler used modern art to promote his political objectives, mainly to rid the nation of the Jewish population and their culture. "Hitler saw an attack on modernism as an opportunity to use the average German's distrust of avant-garde art to further his political objectives against Jews, Communists, and

³ *Mein Kampf*: In English, "My Struggle," Hitler's autobiography outlining his ideology, emphasizing his anti-Semitic beliefs.

non-Aryans” (Barron 14). Modernism and movements such as Expressionism, Dada, and Cubism were identified with Jews and the cause of the economic and cultural downfall of Germany. The artists responsible for this art were considered threats to the German way of life and therefore, must be forbidden from practicing art of any sort. Subsequently, those who collected modern art and worked for the museums that housed modern art were also condemned for their practice.

The Degenerate Art Exhibition proclaimed the end of modern art. “Never before or since has a government made such an elaborate public effort to defame an art movement” (Baker 1). The main purpose of the exhibition was to criticize modern art and those who believed it to be praiseworthy. It also served as a learning tool for the public who were instructed on what was constituted as “degenerate” and warned about the dangers of accepting it. “Modern art was not treated with indifference or scorn. It was outlawed, and the instruments of political power were used to forward a particular aesthetic program throughout Germany” (Grosshans 8). Adolf Ziegler, president of the Reich Chamber of Visual Arts was responsible for the collection and formation of works in the Degenerate Art Exhibition under Goebbels and Hitler. He collected the most drastic and obscene paintings of modern art from all across Germany to furnish the exhibit. Two weeks was all it took to ready the exhibition, and although this may seem hastily orchestrated, that is exactly what the Nazis intended. Unlike most art exhibitions that are meticulously organized to showcase pieces thoughtfully, the Degenerate Art Exhibition was the other extreme.

Because the Nazis considered modern art “non-art”, there was no reason to waste time with particulars. Art in the exhibit was not only Jewish, but anything considered inferior to German art. This included portrayals of African Americans, figural distortions, and anything the Nazi’s deemed as derogatory. Art work was sporadically cluttered throughout the exhibition, organized to show the chaos and conflict that modernism brought to Germany. “Paintings and pieces of sculpture were placed as to make them appear crude and incomprehensible. Haphazard arrangements and derogatory letter upon the walls—running over, under and around pictures—were designed to stimulate ridicule” (Grosshans 107). The pieces of art in exhibition were categorized in different rooms as anti-religious, Jewish, and the defamation of women. Under the paintings were hand-written phrases detailing the amount of money “wasted” by museum owners who collected this art (Barron 10-24).

The role of the Degenerate Art exhibition was to juxtapose the House of German Art, the official center of Nazi-approved art. The skillful propagandists opened the two exhibitions a day apart from each other in Munich. This political move allowed Germans to see the distinction between Nazi-approved, racially pure art and inferior, degenerate art, reaffirming their dislike for modernism. Similar images were portrayed in both exhibitions, but with extreme dissimilarity. While the German House tastefully showcased works of art that promoted the Aryan race as visions of health, hard work, family and community, the Degenerate Art Exhibition did exactly the opposite. For example, women were commonly depicted in both art shows, but portrayed very differently. In the

German House, women were portrayed as the “ideal” woman. There were countless paintings of soft skinned, beautiful mothers and naked, healthy women. In contrast, the degenerate mocked the German ideal, portraying women as prostitutes. This played into his overarching ideology of Jews as the antithesis of the Aryan race. All aspects of the Jew were inferior and Hitler emphasizes this through defaming modernism and Jewish culture (Levi 4-11).

The Degenerate Art exhibition was very much reliant on the rhetoric used to captivate audiences and reveal messages within the art. The importance was not whether the message was accurate or not, but that it coincided with Hitler’s views. Nazi slogans and explanations were marked across the artwork on display in the Degenerate Art exhibition emphasizing the ugliness of expressionism. Phrases such as “insult to German womanhood,” “military sabotage,” “total insanity,” and “nigger art” were scribbled on the walls in large, daunting fonts (Levi 6, Grosshans 107). This form of propaganda emphasizes the use of distortion. Hitler did not want the people to find any good in modernism, and to drive that idea into the minds of his audiences’ powerful rhetoric was used.

After the success of the exhibition in Munich, the show hit the road, visiting important cities in Germany, including Berlin. “To the extent that a large number of individuals receive the same information, their reactions will be similar. As a result, identical “centers of interest” will be produced and then become the great questions of our time made public by press and radio, and group opinions will be formed which establish contact with each other—one of the essential processes in the formation of public opinion” (Ellul 54). By extending the exhibition’s life and

touring it throughout the country, the propagandists continued to influence the public.

To understand the purpose of the Degenerate Art exhibition, it is essential to consider the following questions: 1) Why did the Nazis spend so much time collecting, publicizing, and circulating this art, instead of confiscating and destroying it, and 2) why was art considered important enough to censor?

Fear was at the very core of Nazi propaganda. At the time, there were many uncertainties felt by the public, and fear of the unknown was especially widespread. "It [anxiety] is irrational, and any attempt to calm it with reason or facts must fail. To demonstrate factually in a climate of anxiety that the feared danger is much smaller than it is believed to be, only increases fear" (Ellul 155). This quotation underlies Hitler's propaganda because he depicted the Jews as a threat to German culture and sought out means to intensify this fear. For people to truly understand the horrors of modernity, the most offensive and shocking examples were put on display in the collection of Degenerate Art. The Nazis did not want to give the people a reason to explore their curiosity and wonder about the alleged "degeneracy," but rather put it on display to terrify the public and reaffirm prior held sentiments. If Hitler had downplayed the power of the Jewish race, he would not have received the same overwhelming acceptance. By eliciting this intense fear, his propaganda continued to motivate the public.

Essentially, Germans were given the opportunity to "judge for themselves" whether this art should be considered worthy of display. As mentioned previously, the works shown in the Degenerate Art Exhibition were meant to

contrast the works of in the German House Exhibition. "Whenever something "holy to every decent German" is displayed as besmirched or polluted in the Degenerate Art exhibition, "cleansed" versions of the same icons appear in the Great German Art exhibition" (Levi 41). The Nazis were confident that their portrayal of modern art in the exhibition was so grotesque and unfavorable that it would continue to drive anti-modernism. Anti-Semitism and modernism were associated with one another because Hitler saw them as embracing the same ideals: fragmented, irrational, morally decaying, and non-communal.

Concluding Remarks

Hitler considered art a depiction of culture. It served as a social function unifying the country under commonly held beliefs. Because Hitler wanted to racially purify Germany, art too must be subject to the same purification. "German art stood alone as a manifestation of healthy European culture, and every effort must be made to protect this heritage of blood and spirit from the deleterious influences that threaten it" (Grosshans 68). Art gave the Germans a window to escape the chaos of their lives and be a part of high culture. This distinction between real German art and degenerate art promoted the idea of a cultural hierarchy and an "us" vs. "them" attitude. This emphasized that it was normal and safe to participate and enjoy German art, which was of the elite and prestige conferring, but it was abnormal and therefore dangerous to enjoy modernism. "True German art provided direction for the driving German will, ended modern loneliness, chaos, and confusion, and protected the threatened

racial insights of heroism and courage” (Grosshans 67). Jews were positioned as the inferior “them” and degenerate art stressed that.

Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Minister of Propaganda, said, “We openly admit that we wish to influence our people. To admit this is the best method of attaining it.” This quote is testimony to the effects of the Degenerate Art Exhibition. The intentions of the Nazis were clearly written all over the walls of the exhibition. Modernism, specifically Expressionism, bred a new culture that was feared and unwelcomed by the public. Hitler was the spark that lit the fire within Germany and gave the people hope. Misguided hope, but nevertheless, he inspired the masses to blame the problems of the country on a movement and on a people. Art was used as propaganda to reassure attitudes felt by the public and to continued to drive a hatred for modernism and the Jewish race and eventually mobilize the killing of over 6 million people in the Holocaust. The tactics used during Hitler’s dictatorship are unsurpassed. The Nazi used all platforms of culture propaganda and with tremendous success.

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