The Arts in Nazi Germany:

A Silent Debate

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Joan Clinefelter, *Artists for the Reich: Culture and Race from Weimar to Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 182 pp., $24.95 (pb), ISBN 1845202015.

Richard Etlin, ed., *Art, Culture, and Media under the Third Reich* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 384 pp., $29.00 (pb), ISBN 0226220877.

Eric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 276 pp., $25.95 (pb), ISBN 0804743274.

Peter Paret, *An Artist against the Third Reich: Ernst Barlach, 1933–1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 191 pp., £25.00 (hb), ISBN 052182138X.

Frederick Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (London: Hutchinson, 2002), 488 pp., £25.00 (hb), ISBN 0091793947.

In the twelve years of the Third Reich, there was no shortage of pomp, terror, hyperbole, vitriol and extremism in the representation of art's role and artists' obligations in the new state. Anyone approaching the subject for the first time might initially stumble upon the sleek and imposing neoclassicism of the Olympic stadium and Reich Chancellery with their muscle-bound statuary, and of Paul Ludwig Troost's House of German Art. Digging deeper, one discovers that Hitler laid the cornerstone for the art museum amidst a pompous procession on the history of 'German' art that borrowed shamelessly from ancient Greece, and that the museum's grand opening in 1937 featured not only a hand-selected collection of works considered truly German, but also an accompanying exhibition of illegally seized modernist art displayed mockingly as the 'degenerate' work of charlatans, racial inferiors and the mentally deranged. One year later it was music's turn: the first Reich Music Days assembled music organisations from around the country, was opened with a speech by the Propaganda Minister on the 'ten commandments' for German music and was accompanied by a parallel exhibition on 'degenerate music' that vilified jazz, modernism and the alleged Bolshevik and Jewish domination of German musical taste during the Weimar Republic. Film could also be an effective – if not *the* most

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Contemporary European History, **15**, 4 (2006), pp. 585–599 © 2006 Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/S0960777306003560 Printed in the United Kingdom

effective – means for mind-control. Alongside Leni Riefenstahl's purely propagandistic *Triumph of the Will* with its imposing images of regimentation and indoctrination were Veit Harlan's adaptation of Leon Feuchtwanger's novel *Jew Süss* and Franz Hippler's antisemitic 'documentary', *The Wandering Jew*, with its images of squalor in the Warsaw ghetto perverted to prove the Jews' 'proclivities' for filth and street peddling, its montages of Jews disguising themselves to blend into mainstream society and debase German culture, its 'history' of the Jewish exploitation of 'host' countries and domination of world politics, and its gruesome filming of a Jewish slaughterhouse.

One would then discover that the arts were not immune to the purges and subsequent reorganisations known as *Gleichschaltung*, a term that has come to imply thorough restructuring and total control. At first glance, the existence of a Ministry for Propaganda and Public Enlightenment and a Reich Chamber of Culture gives the impression of a complete government takeover of the arts and media. And then there was Hitler: the more one learns about his failed attempts to become an artist, his passion for Wagner and close ties to the composer's family and his personal involvement in architectural design and urban planning, the easier it is to imagine that, true to intentionalist models, he was capable of dictating and micromanaging all aspects of cultural life.

Particularly during the Cold War, such first impressions corresponded neatly with the extremism and terror Stalin had exerted in the cultural spheres, lending credence to the totalitarian concept. Furthermore, postwar perceptions of cultural life in the Third Reich were largely influenced by the passionate and compelling arguments of those driven into exile. Complementing Hannah Arendt's analyses of the nature of totalitarianism were the commentaries on German cultural life by the Mann family (Thomas's condemnation of those who stayed in Germany, and Heinrich's play *Mephisto*, a thinly disguised portrayal of theatre director Gustav Gründgens's Faustian bargain with Goering), Theodor Adorno's declaration that no poetry could be written after Auschwitz, and Walter Benjamin's influential formulation of fascism fostering an aestheticisation of politics. The Allied occupying forces also contributed greatly to setting the parameters for future historians. The denazification process assigned the Germans into neat categories of guilt and innocence, while Allied cultural attachés (many of them German refugees) were so convinced of the Nazis' debasement of culture that by the end of the war US officers, commenting on the state of musical affairs, concluded that Hitler 'succeeded in transforming the lush field of musical creativity into a barren waste', that Germany's most talented musicians had gone abroad, and that composers in the Third Reich had produced only works deemed 'psychologically effective to the Nazi cause'.[1] In response, the German cultural elite scrambled to protect their own – even those who succeeded in the Third Reich – and constructed a cultural 'zero hour', reinforcing the image of a Nazi totalitarian cultural wasteland that could serve as a contrast to the flourishing cultural landscape in the new German states.

1 Quoted in David Monod, *Settling Scores: German Music, Denazification, and the Americans, 1945–1953* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 116.

Beginning in the late 1960s, historians began to look more closely at Nazi cultural bureaucracy and, rather than finding evidence of strict control, uncovered administrative chaos and aesthetic inconsistencies between purported ideals and actual artistic endeavours. Hildegard Brenner was the first to uncover the competition for cultural control among leading government and party officials and the infighting that persisted thereafter.[2] Barbara Miller Lane found no clear correspondence between politics and architectural style during the Weimar Republic or the Third Reich, nor any one architectural style or philosophy unique to Nazi Germany.[3] Joseph Wulf's published collections of documents on the arts and media of the Third Reich exposed a surprising degree of collaboration among cultural figures who continued successful careers after 1945, leading to re-examinations of individuals commonly regarded as victims of National Socialism whose stories were complicated by evidence of their attempts, at least initially, to get into the good graces of the regime.[4]

Still, for many years the majority of engagements with the arts in Nazi Germany largely tended to focus on the condemnation of perpetrators or hagiographies of victims, and a fascination with the kitsch, regression, eroticism, monumentality and overt political propaganda that supposedly represented the dominant Nazi aesthetic. It was not until the 1990s that a wave of intense critical examinations of the inner workings of cultural administration and institutions appeared. Alan Steinweis's groundbreaking study of the Reich Culture Chambers went far beyond Brenner in meticulously reconstructing the chaotic genesis and decentralised nature of cultural bureaucracy, the government's appeal to the neocorporatist impulses of disenfranchised arts professions, the limits to coercion and censorship, and the lack of consensus with regard to aesthetic standards.[5] Jonathan Petropoulos reconstructed the administration of the visual arts and the mechanisms that allowed for the seizure and collection of masterpieces among the highest-ranking officials.[6] Michael Kater's social histories of music and musicians showed that objects of derision such as jazz were far more tolerated than one would expect, and that the fates of musicians were determined far less by ideology and far more by cronyism and sheer luck.[7] Glenn

2 Hildegard Brenner, *Die Kunstpolitik des Nationalsozialismus* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1963); and 'Art in the Political Power Struggle of 1933 and 1934', in Hajo Holborn, ed., *Republic to Reich: The Making of the Nazi Revolution* (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 394–432.

3 Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968, 1985).

4 The series 'Kunst und Kultur im Dritten Reich'(Gütersloh: Sigbert Mohn Verlag) consisted of the following volumes, all edited by Wulf: vol. 1: *Die bildenden Künste im Dritten Reich*; vol. 2: *Musik im Dritten Reich* (1963); vol. 3: *Literatur und Dichtung im Dritten Reich* (1963); vol. 4: *Theater und Film im Dritten Reich* (1964); and vol. 5: *Presse und Funk im Dritten Reich* (1964).

5 Alan E. Steinweis, *Art, Ideology, and Economics in Nazi Germany: The Reich Chambers of Music, Theater, and the Visual Arts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

6 Jonathan Petropoulos, *Art as Politics in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

7 Michael H. Kater, *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and Their Music in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and *Composers of the Nazi Era: Eight Portraits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Cuomo's essay collection brought together experts on several of the arts to provide an excellent overview of cultural administration and, while revealing less about the artistic creations themselves, offered an opportunity to observe common patterns of bureaucracy and aesthetic inconsistency, and to conclude that the varied nature of the arts themselves often dictated the degree of control.[8]

At the end of the 1990s two review essays welcomed these new directions, but not without caution, noting that the literature as a whole was fraught with contradictions, and that authors, while not openly debating issues, were frequently talking past each other. Peter Jelavich further warned against jumping to conclusions about art's effectiveness as a vehicle of Nazi propaganda and against assuming that progressive art was inextricably bound to progressive politics, while Suzanne Marchand pointed to the need to look critically at the Weimar era and earlier periods for the ideological roots of what we regard as Nazi culture.[9] Seven years later, these caveats still need to be heeded. For decades Nazi art and culture have fascinated art connoisseurs and history buffs with their outrageous displays, but they also posited a terrain full of scholarly landmines that – as the works under review demonstrate – have yet to be swept.

Even with the new insights gained with groundbreaking studies on cultural administration, institutions, aesthetics and social history since 1990, many recent studies, including some of the work reviewed here, show that prevailing perceptions from the Cold War still have a powerful hold on the general understanding of Nazi cultural life. Totalitarian and intentionalist frameworks have proven especially resilient in the writing of cultural histories, despite the challenges to the totalitarian, fascist, intentionalist and functionalist paradigms as a result of the *Historikerstreit* and the Goldhagen debate. Studies of individual artists have begun to blur the once distinct categories of victims and perpetrators, yet scholarly investments in the life and works of cultural figures previously assigned to the 'victim' category make it particularly difficult to abandon these earlier characterisations. Focused studies on the individual arts have long been at work chipping away at the presumption that a specific Nazi aesthetic drove the production of artistic creations under Hitler.[10] Yet in 2004, as an invited lecturer at the biennial Miller Symposium of the Center for Holocaust Studies at the University of Vermont, I was surprised to observe that even the most highly respected scholars of culture in the Third Reich still struggled to find that 'certain something' that distinguishes those 'Nazi' artistic traits.[11]

8 Glenn Cuomo, ed., *National Socialist Cultural Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

9 Peter Jelavich, 'Review Article: National Socialism, Art and Power in the 1930s', *Past and Present*, 164 (August 1999), 244–65; Suzanne Marchand, 'Nazi Culture: Banality or Barbarism?' *The Journal of Modern History*, 70, 1 (1998), 108–18.

10 See, for example, Olaf Peters, *Neue Sachlichkeit und Nationalsozialismus: Affirmation und Kritik 1931–1947* (Berlin: Reimer, 1998); James van Dyke, 'Franz Radziwill, the Art Politics of the National Socialist Regime, and the Question of Resistance in Germany, 1930–1939', Ph.D. thesis, Northwestern University, 1996; and Paul Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects: A Cultural History of West German Industrial Design* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

11 This discussion did not make its way into the published proceedings, but several chapters in that volume begin to confront many of the historiographical problems discussed here. See especially the

As the following discussion will show, this historiographical problem leaves scholars in a bind, expecting them to navigate between long-standing paradigms and ever-increasing amounts of evidence that erode the credibility of those paradigms. What has emerged is a silent debate, among various authors and even sometimes within the work of single authors, over the existence of a distinctly Nazi aesthetic, the degrees of effective control over artists and their work, the subjugation of the arts to the service of propaganda and even mass murder, and the role of Hitler in establishing aesthetic guidelines and engaging in the day-to-day operations of cultural life. The five volumes under review show that scholarship on the arts in the Third Reich has been exemplary in its civility, rarely if ever erupting into an open conflict over issues that are nevertheless simmering under the surface.

Joan Clinefelter's *Artists for the Reich*, a detailed history of the German Art Society, is an outgrowth of the more recent trend to steer away from scrutinising individual careers and look instead to institutions. While it may seem narrow in focus, it actually allows for some far-reaching observations on conservative trends over several decades, on the degree of totalitarian control of art, and on the question of whether one can speak of a distinct Nazi aesthetic. Her thesis, neatly summarised in her introduction, rejects the notions that 'politics issued orders and art obeyed them' or that 'real' artists rejected Nazism, and holds that any 'Nazi art' is defined less by content and style and more by interpretive gloss (pp. 3–4).

The German Art Society (GAS) was a *völkisch* organisation that was far more stable and consistent in its extremely conservative views than the Nazi party or cultural administrators. From its very beginnings at the turn of the twentieth century its founder and constant driving force, Bettina Feistel-Rohdemeier, consolidated the society's anti-foreign, anti-modern, and antisemitic agenda by targeting French Impressionists and the Secessionist (and Jew) Max Liebermann. Although all artists suffered from the economic vicissitudes of the 1920s, the GAS managed to exaggerate the plight of the 'true German' traditionalists and, through its widely distributed news service and strategic alliances with powerful *völkisch* organisations (and ultimately the Nazi party), managed to become a small but formidable entity. Perhaps its greatest impact came with Feistel-Rohdemeier's original idea in 1933 of purging galleries of modernist works, exhibiting them in a 'chamber of horrors' in order to educate the public of past injuries to German art, displaying the amounts of tax dollars used to purchase the works and ultimately making use of them as 'kindling for the heating of public buildings' (p. 65). Several such exhibits of 'degenerate art' actually took place in various locations before the idea was adopted for the largest and most widely publicised venture in Munich in 1937. The GAS had reached its peak of influence during the times when Nazi views on art were at their most ambivalent. With factions of the party promoting the modernists Barlach, Nolde, Heckel and Schmitt-Rottluff as 'Nordic' expressionists, the GAS found an ally in Alfred Rosenberg, but was also

contributions by Michael H. Kater, Eric Rentschler and Frank Trommler, in Jonathan Huener and Frank Nicosia, eds., *The Arts in Nazi Germany: Continuity, Conformity, Change* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006 [forthcoming]).

chastised for presuming to know more than the party. Ironically, when the war on modernism was ultimately won and modernist artists were pushed to the periphery, the GAS's rallying cries became redundant, and its promotion of traditionalists proved too conservative to accommodate the desired directions for the future of German art.

Clinefelter uses her close investigation of this relatively unknown organisation and its publications to pose probing questions about the nature of 'Nazi art'. As the most consistently conservative champion of traditional, 'true German' art, the GAS and its journal *Das Bild* would likely present the clearest criteria for the artistic goals of the Third Reich. Yet Clinefelter abandons any notions of 'Nazi art', concluding instead that 'art supportive of the Third Reich was less an aesthetic and more a rhetorical practice' (p. 118). The Amt Rosenberg's journal *Die Kunst im Dritten Reich* was long on aesthetic pronouncements but short on contemporary examples that illustrated its ideals. By contrast, the GAS journal *Das Bild*, in its promotion of 'true German' art, rarely engaged in aesthetic discourse and defined its parameters rather around the genealogy, biography and character of the artists it featured. What made art 'Nazi' was not style or content, but the participation of the artists in the regime and the interpretation of the art in the media. As for 'Nazi art policy', Clinefelter shows that such policy was far from consistent and instead involved a constant renegotiation from above and below.

In contrast to Clinefelter's institutional study, Peter Paret's book on Ernst Barlach looks closely at one of the undisputed 'victims' of National Socialism and strives (at times in self-defeat) to defend the actions and views of the protagonist as consistently anti-Nazi. Paret's difficulty in stepping away from looming assumptions about guilt and innocence not only deprives us of a more three-dimensional portrayal of Barlach, but it also leads to contradictions regarding totalitarian control, Nazi aesthetics and Hitler's artistic taste. It is true that Barlach's work was targeted by Nazi party zealots: one of his sculptures and a book of engravings were included in the 'Degenerate Art' exhibition; his war memorials – controversial for several years prior to 1933 – fell victim to the vindictive campaigns of local Nazi party officials; he was forced to resign from the Prussian Academy of Art; and a 1935 publication of his drawings was confiscated by the Bavarian police. It is also true, however, that Goebbels was initially a Barlach enthusiast, that Barlach promoted his own work as true German art to Nazi officials, that he was invited to attend the opening ceremonies of the Reich Culture Chambers, that he signed a petition supporting Hitler's consolidation of power, that – unlike other modernists – his confiscated works were actually returned to him, that when he died in 1938 even an SS newspaper featured a respectful if somewhat critical obituary and that some of his works were reissued during the Third Reich after his death.

One could treat Barlach as an interesting case study of an artist who was committed to pursuing 'true German art', who was reviled and respected at the same time, and who despite serious setbacks chose to lie low and quietly continue working. Instead, Paret must struggle to portray his protagonist as a courageous resistance fighter, liberal-minded champion of individual rights and stubborn representative of all that the Nazis aimed to destroy. When Barlach spoke in 1933 in a radio address of a

'conflict between two races – between those who possess spiritual values and those who do not', Paret dismisses this as 'an apparent reference to the political rhetoric of the day' (p. 23) rather than entertaining the possibility that Barlach, like so many others in 1933, might have actually believed in such a conflict. Barlach's signature on the aforementioned petition is similarly excused as the 'one misstep' (p. 87) of this otherwise 'apolitical artist' (p. 85). Furthermore, in spite of offering evidence of Barlach enjoying more privileges than some of his fellow 'degenerates', Paret seems compelled to flesh out the image of the consummate victim, at times by speculating on acts of terror that never actually materialised. Thus he suggests that Barlach's elimination from the Reich Literature Chamber might have arisen from his simultaneous membership of the Fine Arts Chamber (such dismissals to avoid redundancy were common), 'but it could have also been preliminary to his dismissal from the Chamber of Fine Arts, in which case he would no longer be able to show and sell his work, even in his studio' (p. 133), an injustice that was apparently never meted out. Paret similarly notes that, unlike Emil Nolde – an expressionist artist who actually joined the Nazi party – Barlach was never prohibited from working, but would have been 'had Barlach lived long enough' (p. 147).

Given a dearth of the artist's statements directly defying the regime, Paret must look to Barlach's art to demonstrate his resistance. The discussions of the works are detailed and fascinating, but they also must rely on much speculation about the Nazi aesthetics which Barlach's works supposedly resisted. Thus Paret casts Barlach's works as celebrations of the individual spirit, noting rather tentatively, 'That National Socialism would reject themes that celebrated the autonomous individual goes without saying' (p. 30). That Nazi ideologues failed to recognise such 'bold' defiance can be attributed to the fact that the works 'make no overt political statement', but 'Their very lack of propagandistic symbolism at least made it possible to overlook their implied rejection of any ideology that uses people as raw material for its own purposes' (p. 37).

Paret must further demonstrate that National Socialists in general, and Hitler in particular, pursued a consistent policy to promote their aesthetic goals, even when the evidence is shaky. In his introduction Paret states that 'National Socialism paid constant and anxious attention to the arts, and endowed them with a symbolic significance that the German people was never allowed to forget' because of 'the regime's insistence on uniform obedience to stated and even implied policy in public and private life; and the political and personal meaning that the arts possessed for Hitler', who 'tried to shape the arts into a defining force of the new Germany' (p. 2). With few direct quotes from Hitler, Paret expounds on his disdain for modernism and expressionism but must admit that he was short on specifics and never explicitly targeted expressionist works. Paret makes a concerted effort to understand the public debates over expressionism and the quiet persistence of its supporters even among the most extreme Nazis (including Fritz Hippler, the creator of *The Wandering Jew*), but fails to provide a satisfactory answer to this perceived contradiction, ultimately explaining it away as a manifestation of 'control and terror' (pp. 74 ff.). Not completely satisfied to accept this vagueness on its own terms, Paret

implies that such indecisiveness would eventually disappear, citing the party's divided views on art and speculating that 'unanimity could not be expected, at least not until the Führer expressed his ideas in greater detail and developed specific policies in the cultural sphere' (p. 54).

In the end we must applaud Paret for his intellectual honesty, for he does not try to suppress those details of Barlach's story that do not fit neatly into the hagiography of a victim. We can only regret that Paret did not take the opportunity to throw off the constraints imposed by such hagiographies to explore the more interesting complexities of Barlach's experiences and responses, and to gain a deeper understanding of the intricacies of pursuing an art career in the Third Reich.

With a completely different take on aesthetics, Eric Michaud's *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* (an English translation of the 1996 *Un Art de L'Éternité: L'image et le temps du national-socialisme*) is not really a piece of historical scholarship per se, but more a philosophical confrontation with the apparent Nazi success in using artistic ideals in pursuit of winning widespread support. This may explain why the wave of recent studies on cultural history are largely ignorant of the book's existence, even though historians could glean from it some compelling arguments to challenge notions of a cultural *Sonderweg*. Michaud draws on German and non-German sources going all the way back to antiquity to trace the traditions of envisioning the dictator-artist persona, creating a state cult that draws on Christianity in order to supplant it, and harnessing the power of images to mobilise the masses. In grappling with the question of a Nazi aesthetic, Michaud ventures beyond the traditional assumptions about Nazi anti-modernism, arguing instead that Hitler, von Schirach and others who strove to set the course for art tended towards 'measured modernity', rejecting both photographic realism and the avant-garde, promoting national particularism, and falling in line with ideas that prevailed well before the First World War and not only in Germany. The similarities between German taste and artistic penchants throughout Europe even prompted French historian Pierre Ayçoberry to paraphrase an English socialist's 1943 observation, 'Is not that country simply a caricature of our own countries?' (p. 107). The *Sonderweg* is challenged most strikingly with evidence of eugenics wielding even stronger influence in countries other than Germany. Michaud cites, for example, Nobel laureate Alex Carrel's widely influential book of 1935 and the fact that sterilisation programmes were in operation in the United States, Canada, Switzerland and Denmark before being implemented in Germany, Norway, Sweden and Finland (pp. 124–6). Michaud illustrates how eugenics merged with art to create an ideal of beauty and health that would promote the breeding of pure races, citing the painting *Judgement of Paris*, which shows Paris dressed in shorts and a button-down shirt (much like the Hitler Youth uniform). Michaud also supports throughout the study the power of the image: two striking revelations are the postcards made from photographs of Hitler practising his wild gesticulations, which were distributed, so Michaud concludes, to intrigue those who had not yet attended a rally and to shape expectations that would then be fulfilled, and a wordless advertisement by the Odol company that caught Hitler's attention for its effectiveness in creating interest in a product expressly by withholding any textual descriptions (pp. 191–2). The power of

such strategies, which we would recognise today as effective advertising campaigns, was appreciated not only by Nazi strategists but also by earlier political theorists who attacked democracy from both the left and the right, and not only in Germany (notably Georges Sorel and Gustave Le Bon) (pp. 187–90).

While Michaud draws substantially from Hitler's writings and speeches, Hitler is by no means the sole preacher of the Nazi myth but rather built on the foundations laid by both German and non-German precursors. Frederic Spotts, on the other hand, presents what may be regarded as a Hitler's-eye view of Nazi culture. Its title alone, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, would seem to place the book firmly within the intentionalist camp by implying that Hitler wielded the power to manipulate aesthetics towards fulfilling political aims. In the end, however, the work might better be titled simply *Hitler's Aesthetics*, as it turns out to be an intimate portrait of Hitler's own artistic skills, tastes and passions.

The bulk of Spotts's investigation is taken up with examining Hitler as a failed painter, a passionate patron of the arts and a learned and even highly skilled architect and planner of urban centres and highways. The strengths of this work are that it brings together a wide array of revealing insights into Hitler's underexplored preoccupation with Germany's cultural life, even when more pressing issues of state and war should have been taking centre stage; his fairly sophisticated understanding of music and architecture; and his surprisingly open-minded attitude towards current artistic trends. Particularly in the chapters that fall under the heading 'The Perfect Wagnerite', Spotts manages to debunk many long-held myths about Hitler's complete infatuation only with Wagner, the supposed links between the plots of Wagner's operas and Hitler's politics, and Hitler's interference with artistic matters in Bayreuth. Spotts shows, instead, that the claims of Hitler's inspiration from Wagner originated largely in the minds of German intellectuals in exile (Thomas Mann, Emil Ludwig and Theodor Adorno), that Hitler was much more enraptured by the highly emotive strains of *Tristan und Isolde* than by the nationalist messages of *Die Meistersinger*, and that Hitler's intimate relationship with the Wagner family and protective patronage of the Bayreuth festival actually made it 'the only cultural institution in the Third Reich independent of Nazi control' (p. 258). Spotts debunks several more myths in his chapters on architecture, revealing Hitler to be far more involved in design and planning than Speer had credited him as being, and far more knowledgeable and sophisticated in his skills and tastes. Spotts points out the internationalism of the neoclassical style typically designated as 'Nazi' and Hitler's embrace of the styles as well as the philosophy of the Bauhaus (and, in turn, the efforts of the Bauhäusler to ingratiate themselves with the regime), and he designates Hitler as a true 'modernist' with regard to the forward-looking plans and execution of the autobahn.

Despite these fascinating new insights, Spotts cannot entirely remove Hitler from the epicentre of cultural control. He makes unsubstantiated claims, for instance, that Hitler micromanaged every detail of the Nuremberg party rallies (the only piece of evidence offered up is a 1935 sketch of a lighting design in Hitler's hand), leading to the conclusion that 'Hitler made the dramatic arts a technique of mental manipulation and mind control' (p. 69), but later concludes that 'Hitler had neither a programme

for the arts nor any interest in directing them day-to-day' (p. 74). Asking why Hitler hated modernism (rather than asking *whether* he hated modernism), Spotts must then admit that he never explicitly condemned expressionism and even remained silent ('He winced but said nothing', pp. 157–8) when viewing modernist works in an exhibition. He nevertheless persists in placing the agency of wiping out modernism in Hitler's hands, referring to 'the depth of his hatred and the strength of his resolve to obliterate it' (p. 161), but then acknowledging that he 'shrank from doing anything about it' (p. 162).

Spotts relies on the standard totalitarian-inspired accounts of the government's aims to control all cultural operations, without taking into account the complexities revealed in historical studies of the past ten years. He refrains from looking for direct links between Hitler's own artistic visions and their implementation in cultural policy, instead simply assuming that Hitler 'erred in thinking that by getting control over artists, he was getting a grip on the arts' (p. 174). Yet these assumptions about totalitarian control pose serious problems, especially in his discussion on music. Music was demonstrably the most elusive of the arts when it came even to imagining ways of overseeing its diverse and widespread modes of production lying beyond government or police controls. Amateur music activities had spread beyond churches and schools, *Hausmusik* was thriving in the privacy of the home and technology made much music consumption a purely private matter beyond the reach of censors. Nevertheless, by relying on the standard lore of Nazis suppressing Weimar modernism and combining forces to eliminate dissonance, Spotts must assume that 'Modernism was to be eliminated' and, given Germany's incomparable wealth of musical outlets, 'the scope for political intervention was vast' (p. 271). Spotts claims that banning music was easy; it was so easy, in fact, for Hitler to 'impose his policies' that he could soon relax and enjoy his role as patron (p. 272). Almost in the same breath, however, Spotts must concede that Hitler's refusal to micromanage left music policies in a chaotic state. He concludes, in the end, that Hitler's attitudes toward music were quite liberal after all, and he showed no desire to impose aesthetic restrictions on composers.

The collection of essays edited by Richard Etlin, by its very nature, cannot offer a unified consensus on the state of arts in Nazi Germany, yet it is nevertheless fascinating to see how widely divergent conclusions can be contained in the same volume. The editor's note and introductory chapter ('The Perverse Logic of Nazi Thought') can do little to try to organise and make sense of such a wide range of approaches and often conflicting judgements, except, perhaps unwittingly, to point to the nagging paradox that lies at the foundation of the historiographical problem: the constant need for the Germans to remind themselves that they were a cultured nation, even in the midst of carrying out genocide (pp. 26–7). The diversity of the collection notwithstanding (subjects range from gardening to lighting design[12]), most

12 Some essays are not discussed in this review because they seem to stray too far from the subject of art and policy in the Third Reich. These are Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn and Gert Gröning, 'The National Socialist Garden and Landscape Ideal: *Bodenständigkeit* (Rootedness in the Soil)'; Robert Jan

of the contributions roughly fall into the categories of those that rely heavily on old assumptions and approaches, sometimes running up against irreconcilable, conflicting evidence, and those that offer new insights by thinking outside the box.

In the tradition of focusing on individual guilt, Jonathan Petropoulos's essay 'From Seduction to Denial: Arno Breker's Engagement with National Socialism' can be regarded as the flip-side of Paret's attempt to sanitise Barlach, but Petropoulos is even more determined in his goal of portraying this sculptor as an irredeemable Nazi. Defending the biographical approach for its potential to offer unique insights, Petropoulos lays out Breker's 'Faustian bargain' as an opportunistic compromise of morals that escalated to criminal dimensions. Relying on second-hand aesthetic judgements to assess Breker's art as artistically inferior expressions of racism, anger and militarism, Petropoulos concludes that 'Breker's work evolved into the artistic embodiment of the National Socialist ideology (acknowledging that this was not always a consistent and coherent set of beliefs)' (p. 212). When Petropoulos enumerates Breker's 'criminality' by 'play[ing] an important role in the cultural bureaucracy' (p. 213), he lists roles in purely professional rather than political or administrative bodies. Even his vice-presidency of the Reich Chamber of Visual Arts was perhaps not so criminal as Petropoulos would have us believe when considered in the light of earlier studies of Nazi cultural bureaucracy.[13] Breker's 'albeit minor' role in looting and the use of forced labour in his workshops is certainly reprehensible but not that unusual, and the fact that 'over 80,000 visited the Orangerie show' of his works in 1942 can hardly be inflated into the accusation that he 'played an important role in propagating the culture of the National Socialist new order' (p. 213). Petropoulos does not stop with Breker at pointing the finger, however, and implicates those who defended him in his denazification as no better than Holocaust deniers, and those who continued to commission his works after the war as harbouring 'anti-democratic proclivities and a wish to "normalize" (some would say relativize) the events of the Third Reich' (p. 221).

Karen Koehler's essay ('The Bauhaus, 1919–1928: Gropius in Exile and the Museum of Modern Art, N.Y., 1938') is also somewhat hampered by the received judgements about an individual figure, in this case the émigré architect Walter Gropius. Koehler offers an intriguing thesis that in the anti-communist climate of the 1930s United States, an exhibition of Bauhaus artists in New York depoliticised the artists' work, but in the process she contributes to a monodimensional portrayal of Gropius as a victim of Nazi policies in which, supposedly, 'Modernist architecture was disfavored by Nazi commissioners and eventually outlawed' (p. 292). Koehler falls into the trap of romanticising the leftist politics of the victims, glossing over Gropius's own protestations to Nazi officials that his work should be valued for its Germanness, and, like Paret, she misses an opportunity to study an interesting figure for his complexities. And although Koehler's emphasis lies elsewhere, her acceptance

van Pelt, 'Bearers of Culture, Harbingers of Destruction: The *Mythos* of the Germans in the East'; and Ruth Ben-Ghiat, 'Italian Fascists and National Socialists: The Dynamics of an Uneasy Relationship'.

13 See Steinweis, *Art, Ideology, and Economics*, 47–9.

of the Nazis' engaging in the wholesale suppression of modern architecture is just one more example of the resilience of assumptions about Nazi total control and aesthetic single-mindedness.

Albrecht Dümling ('The Target of Racial Purity: The "Degenerate Music" Exhibition in Düsseldorf, 1938') similarly relies on such assumptions in his exploration of the notorious exhibition at the Reich Music Days. In his drive to envision a consistent Nazi musical aesthetic and its successful imposition on Germany's musical life, Dümling, too, upholds old paradigms of totalitarianism, intentionalism and the uniqueness of Nazi aesthetics. He insists on the existence of strict controls without offering substantial evidence, and presumes that 'Hitler grounded Nazi policy on music according to his own predilections' (p. 54). Dümling is at his most myopic, however, when he selectively quotes Hitler's 1938 Nuremberg speech and Goebbels's 'ten commandments' for German music in order to illustrate the 'clear' consistency of Nazi musical aesthetics (pp. 53–4), the very same documents held up elsewhere to demonstrate just the opposite: that Hitler and Goebbels were intentionally vague and evasive in setting down guidelines for German composition.[14] In the same vein, Mary Elizabeth O'Brien's essay ('The Celluloid War: Packaging War for Sale in Nazi Home-Front Films') offers competent analyses of popular films as a reflection of the zeitgeist of the German home front (a comparison with Hollywood's home-front films would have been fascinating!) but does not support the grander claims that 'Each performance functions as a microcosm of Nazi cultural policy and effective war propaganda' (p. 164). Furthermore, the frequent references to Goebbels's control of the film industry, his attempts to 'booster morale with escapist fare' (p. 170) and his manipulation of the public through such films would have benefited from a closer examination of Goebbels's actual role in their production.

The volume offers just as many contributions that push the envelope by asking new questions, exploring new terrain and facing complexities head-on. David Culbert ('The Impact of Anti-Semitic Film Propaganda on German Audiences: *Jew Süss* and *The Wandering Jew* [1940]') looks objectively at the two most notorious films of the Third Reich and, with meticulous documentation and laudable clarity, shows how the feature film *Jew Süss* succeeded not merely for its racist message, which was not always unequivocal, but for the high quality of the production, the sex and violence, and possibly even the parallels audiences might have drawn between the evil Duke Karl Alexander and Hitler. Just as D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* is recognised for its cinematic innovation in spite of its racist content, *Jew Süss* needs to be judged for its inherent quality in order to understand its effectiveness, even to the point of inciting anti-Semitic violence, rather than fading into oblivion because of post-war condemnations. By contrast, the more graphic and blatantly

14 On the Nuremberg speech, see Michael Walter, *Hitler in der Oper* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1995), 195–7, and Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, 278–9. On Goebbels's 'ten commandments', see Donald Wesley Ellis, 'Music in the Third Reich: National Socialist Aesthetic Theory as Governmental Policy', Ph.D. thesis, University of Kansas, 1970, 126–7, and Pamela M. Potter, *Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler's Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 17–18.

antisemitic 'documentary', *The Wandering Jew*, was orchestrated by the Propaganda Ministry in response to Goebbels's observation after the Kristallnacht pogrom that Germans needed better antisemitic 'instruction', but it failed to reach wide audiences because of its graphic scenes, its unconvincing hyperbole, and its competition with the more successful *Jew Süss*. In the end, Culbert proposes that one cannot judge the effectiveness of these films without considering the changing nature of antisemitic policies and the limited effect any one film can have on motivating populations, concluding that 'No film can make the viewer a willing executioner' (p. 154). Culbert has accomplished two important tasks in this essay: rather than dismissing *Jew Süss* as 'inferior Nazi art', he judges it for its aesthetic qualities and popular appeal, and rather than taking *The Wandering Jew* at face value as a 'typical' Nazi-era film, he highlights its uniqueness and its ultimate failure.

In 'The Drama of Illumination: Visions of Community from Wilhelmine to Nazi Germany', Kathleen James-Chakraborty breaks more taboos by proposing, first, that Walter Benjamin's pronouncements on the aestheticisation of politics was not limited to political or cultural conservatives, but can be attributed as well to the Social Democrats and expressionists in their efforts to reinvigorate theatre and architecture and make them more accessible to the masses. What follows is a fascinating survey of Weimar-era theatre architecture and the dramatic use of light, and how these very same principles were the inspiration for Albert Speer's famous *Lichtdom*, in which spotlights lined the periphery of the party rally grounds and were aimed skyward (the same effect was used at ground zero in New York to commemorate September 11). She then suggests that the populist motives of expressionist techniques were well known already in the 1930s but became suspect after the war, owing to their exploitation by Speer and others. While she sees the *Lichtdom* and the party rallies in general as able to 'annihilate any sense of the individual' (p. 198), contemporaries disillusioned by socioeconomic and political divisiveness of the recent past might have expressed the same in the positive terms of 'building a people's community'.

Other essays in the collection depart from traditional studies of the arts in the Third Reich to open up potentially exciting avenues for research. Paul B. Jaskot ('Heinrich Himmler and the Nuremberg Party Rally Grounds: The Interest of the SS in the German Building Economy') and Karen A. Fiss ('In Hitler's Salon: The German Pavilion at the 1937 Paris Exposition Internationale') expand the scope of the collection by examining the economic motives behind some of the most notorious projects of the Third Reich: the use of forced labour to supply materials for high-profile building projects and the desire to promote trade with Germany as a motive behind the design of the externally imposing yet internally quaint German pavilion at the Paris Exposition Internationale. Both essays do a remarkable job of tracing the interconnections of aesthetics, politics and economics in revealing the intrigues and inspirations behind these projects. And where Etlin's introduction left off by alluding to the nagging paradox of 'Nazi culture', Keith Holz's essay, 'The Exiled Artists from Nazi Germany and their Art', closes the collection by offering some clues to disentangling this paradox by looking to the situation of German exiles. Holz shows how exiled artists were most vocal in proclaiming and redressing Nazi oppression

especially as the war began, when, as 'aliens', they needed to demonstrate their commitment to democracy and distance themselves as much as possible from Nazi cultural life. After the Degenerate Art exhibition in 1937, they even managed to draw new attention to modernism after it had been largely neglected in Britain and the United States, such that 'modern art was revalued . . . to serve as relics of democracy and individualism, available for worship in Western galleries and museums' (p. 354).

A cursory glance at the most infamous examples of Nazi cultural production and administration can leave one with the impression that, consistent with the conceptions of the early post-war years, the arts in the Third Reich were closely controlled by the state, artists had to subscribe to the principles of a well-crafted Nazi 'ideology', Hitler himself made many detailed decisions on cultural questions and any artistic products of the Third Reich were necessarily debased and inferior. Diligent research since the 1990s has made huge strides in questioning these assumptions and couching the more notorious displays of Nazi culture within their proper contexts. Yet despite these advances and the decades of historical debate that have dismantled older paradigms, several presumptions still hold firm in the discussion of the arts and their creators.

The persistence of these presumptions especially in the arts can be explained by a number of considerations: the need for the artistic community as well as the public to believe that, aside from a few contemptible opportunists, artists had a higher calling (and would not co-operate with such a barbarian regime unless forced to do so); the need to create an anti-model of 'Nazi' arts and cultural life that could serve as a contrast against the cultural sophistication and sensitivity pursued since the war; the need for the large number of émigrés to convince their host countries that they were different from the Nazis they left behind; and above all the need to believe that neither arts nor artists could possibly thrive in an atmosphere of murder, racism, degradation, militarism and demagoguery. The highly subjective nature of artistic judgement additionally made it that much easier to dismiss all artistic products of the Third Reich as inferior and unworthy of serious aesthetic evaluation. Yet, as we have seen from the wide range of conclusions in these recent works, the cultural terrain of the Third Reich was far more fertile and variegated than the more familiar wasteland image projected since the end of the war.

As Clinefelter's thesis suggests, the question of 'what Nazi art was' may be successfully supplanted with the question of 'whether Nazi art ever was'. Once that issue has been worked through, whether the solution entails a wholesale rejection or a qualified acceptance of isolated trends or discourses remains to be determined, but confronting such issues will inevitably open up many more intriguing questions. For example, once scholars set aside assumptions about the inferiority of Nazi arts, it will be possible to consider where German arts of the 1930s and 1940s stood internationally, and to begin to look for more similarities between 'Nazi' and contemporary non-German arts. What, for example, distinguishes 'Nazi' painting from the concurrent oeuvre of Norman Rockwell, or 'Nazi' architecture from neoclassical structures simultaneously erected in Washington, DC? How can we account for the fact that the icon of Nazi art, the painting of *The Four Elements* by the 'master of pubic hair' Adolf Ziegler, won the Grand Prix for the 1937 International

Exhibition in Paris, or that Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* won the grand prize at the 1938 International Film Festival in Venice?

The debates on Nazi culture, whether silent or vocal, should inspire future scholarship to acknowledge previous dead-ends and seek out new paths towards viewing Nazi cultural life and its artefacts from a fresh perspective. Jaskot and Fiss have embarked on provocative inquiries into the economics of cultural production, and numerous other studies on individual arts have begun to bring the Nazi years out of isolation and to acknowledge ideological, political and artistic continuities leading up to and following the Third Reich. These and many more promising directions remain open for exploring the cultural history of Nazi Germany and, indeed, seeking answers to the still vexed question of how culture could survive and even in some cases thrive in an atmosphere of hatred and destruction.