



David B. Dennis, *Inhumanities: Nazi Interpretations of Western Culture*

Inhumanities: Nazi Interpretations of Western Culture by David B. Dennis

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crees, he seldom dives into analyses of drafts or meeting minutes to unearth the specifics of Stuckart's personal role (197–220, 258–74). Very few documents are really new for the specialist, and Jasch often fails to provide the historical and political context necessary to illuminate those that are already familiar. Hence, in the discussion of compulsory divorce, neither the status of the war, nor the goals of deportations, nor the general politics of mixed marriages play a role. Jasch concludes his discussion of the war years by showing how Stuckart ended up in Flensburg in May 1945 as acting head of the Reich Ministry of the Interior in Dönitz's short-lived post-Hitler government.

The book's final chapter is devoted to Stuckart's role after the war. Following his arrest, he testified at the International Military Tribunal (IMT) in Nuremberg and helped to paint the picture of an administration powerless against an almighty Nazi Party (382). Although he was charged in the Nuremberg Wilhelmstrassen trial in 1947 for his connection to genocidal policies, both his mild sentence of just three years in prison and his course through the denazification process shed light upon the sophisticated defense strategies of former Nazis and their lawyers. As Jasch demonstrates in this most interesting portion of his study, Stuckart's case illustrates how by 1950 a leading Nazi could, in spite of an IMT prison sentence, receive a category IV status (*Mitläufer*) in Lower Saxony and just a short time later begin a new political career. Stuckart was soon back at work drafting laws for the Bund für Heimatvertriebene und Entrechtete, one of which, in 1951, ended denazification in Lower Saxony. At the time of his death in 1953, however, an active appeal was under way in the higher court in Berlin, where judges had declared him an active Nazi rather than a passive *Mitläufer*.

While Jasch satisfies all doubts that Stuckart contributed to the escalation of Jewish persecution and extermination, and thus pronounces him a "juridical perpetrator" (*juristischer Täter* [453]), he nonetheless fails to establish Stuckart's actual role in the legal and practical initiatives undertaken against Jews and other groups. He also leaves open Stuckart's position in the inner circles of power and his relation to the SS, lacunae that Jasch concedes in a rather brief conclusion.

Yet the volume closes with some useful tools. It provides a biographical index and short biographies of little-known ministry personnel, and the back matter, including the bibliography (which, with a few exceptions, covers historiography only up to 2006), comprises almost eighty pages.

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Inhumanities: Nazi Interpretations of Western Culture. By *David B. Dennis*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. xvi+541. \$35.00 (cloth); \$28.00
(Adobe eBook Reader).

For some time now, scholars have devoted considerable attention to analyzing National Socialist Germany as a cultural system. In part, this has entailed inquiring into the very reality of Nazi totalitarianism, above all in the sense of the institutional and more informal practices that aimed not just to disseminate and inculcate Nazi visions of Germany as a racial community but also to make that *weltanschauung* an unavoidable component of everyday life. In addition, historians have sought to make sense of the Nazi Party's presentation of itself as an innately cultural movement—one that both promoted "real" German (or Aryan) culture and that denigrated and banned "degenerate" culture in all its forms. Hence, in addition to assessing cultural discourses within Nazi propaganda, scholars

such as Glenn Cuomo, Michael Kater, George Mosse, Jonathan Petropoulos, Pamela Potter, and Alan Steinweitz have interrogated the elaboration and implementation of cultural policy in the Nazi state. This work has illuminated our understanding of the complex processes of cultural inclusion, exclusion, and co-optation in Nazi Germany as well as the consequences of such policies for cultural production.

With *Inhumanities*, David Dennis pushes these discussions of culture in Nazi Germany in new and important directions. Instead of continuing to investigate the structures of and individuals involved with the Nazification of German cultural life, Dennis essays an analysis of the very content of “Nazi culture.” At one level, his project involves fleshing out the Nazi cultural canon’s contents, not just in terms of individual artists, composers, and writers but also of their specific works. At the same time, he seeks to understand the development and propagation of this canon by investigating how the Nazis interpreted the works and their artists. It is above all through this act of interpretation and appropriation, he observes, that the Western and German humanistic traditions were transformed into Nazi “inhumanities.” To address these questions, Dennis analyzed some 1,600 articles that appeared in the daily “cultural section” of the Nazi Party newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, between January 1920 and April 1945.

The book itself is organized in terms of five multichapter parts. The first of these reveals the Nazis’ general strategy toward cultural appropriation: identify a “Germanic” basis for cultural greatness; portray the artists as partisans of the people (*das Volk*); emphasize the political dimensions of the artists’ work; assert that antisemitism was ingrained in the Western tradition; and vilify Jewish creativity. Accordingly, Dennis reveals, the Nazis could claim masters like Rembrandt (a “Nordic” artist), Machiavelli (a “*völkisch*” pioneer), and even Michelangelo (on account of his “Germanic” depictions of struggling to overcome the world; see 19). As necessary, “problematic” elements of an artist’s past were overlooked or explained away, such as Handel’s love of England, Schiller’s and Goethe’s universalism, and Richard Wagner’s racially ambiguous family background. In short, Dennis argues, Nazi interpretations were rooted less in outright fictions than in highly selective, idiosyncratic assessments of history and traditional lines of interpretation in which an artist’s biography routinely mattered more than the specific merits of a work.

Against this backdrop, Dennis examines cultural developments in Germany and Europe from the Enlightenment forward. Part 2 shows how the Nazis used an antielitist, anti-rationalist, and antiuniversalist discourse to undercut the broader importance of Classicism and the Enlightenment. Rather, it was Romanticism—especially the “steely” heroic, *völkisch* Romanticism of Richard Wagner, but also of Ernst Moritz Arndt or Heinrich Kleist—that won endorsement.

A similar principle guides the cultural triage of the turn-of-the-century art discussed in Part 3. “Good” art, the *Völkischer Beobachter*’s contributors asserted, values content, the soul, and the *völkisch* community (e.g., the Expressionism of George, Rilke, and Böcklin, but also the music of Brahms, Brückner, and Pfitzner), whereas they branded as “bad” art that was too abstract, revolutionary (notably the Realism of Zola and Hauptmann), socially irrelevant (Heinrich Mann, Tolstoy), diseased (French Impressionism *tout court*), and, of course, Jewish (von Hofmannstahl, Mahler, Schoenberg).

The final two parts also have a chronological cast, but of a different order. Part 4 sheds light above all on the *Völkischer Beobachter* as participant in the Weimar era’s culture wars, contesting the “Jewish, democratic, republican” (309) spin on Goethe and Schiller, lambasting the lack of public support for Wagner, and leading the public outcry against Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* (book and film). Part 5 closes with a trio of chapters that explore how Nazis instrumentalized culture to advance their own political objectives after January 31, 1933: from properly German celebrations of Bach and Schiller

to repeated references to Germany as a *Kulturnation* during the war. In addition, Dennis adroitly notes how the Nazis found it easier to celebrate past achievements than promote a new age of German art.

Admittedly, a number of Dennis's observations, including the special place of Wagner in the Nazis' cultural outlook and their selective appropriation of artists and their works, are hardly earth-shattering. But his detailed and insightful documentation of the sheer range and scope of the Nazi's cultural project is pathbreaking and immensely valuable. Moreover, as a result of his methodological choices, Dennis has ended up producing the first book-length study that examines the *Völkischer Beobachter* across the entirety of its existence.

Unfortunately, Dennis limits most of his discussion of that paper, its contributors, and matters of reception to a few pages in his conclusion. A more serious problem is the sense of repetitiousness that pervades much of the book. Dennis acknowledges this but says that he was trying to approximate the "flow" that contemporary "readers would have experienced" (8). I'm not convinced by this. The book would have been stronger as a study in five more argument-driven and focused chapters (rather than parts). Giving greater priority to the overarching argument would also have encouraged a greater level of engagement with the secondary literature than its confinement mainly to the beginning of each chapter allows.

Nevertheless, *Inhumanities* represents a major contribution to the literature on National Socialism. Scholars in that field, as well as those interested in questions of German culture and nationalism, will find in it much to treasure.

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Beschämende Bilder: Deutsche Reaktionen auf alliierte Dokumentarfilme über befreite Konzentrationslager. By *Ulrike Weckel*. *Transatlantische Historische Studien*, volume 45. Edited by *Hartmut Berghoff* et al. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012. Pp. 672. €76.00.

The Allied campaign to reeducate Germans after 1945 has been the subject of historical interest for decades. How this Allied campaign worked (or not) in court and in the classroom has attracted a great deal of scholarly concern, and yet there are still aspects of this Allied reeducation campaign about which we still know surprisingly little.

Ulrike Weckel's impressively researched and wide-ranging *Beschämende Bilder* goes a long way toward addressing that gap. In particular, she is interested in tracing the ways in which so-called atrocity films (she prefers the English term to the less sharp German equivalent, *Gräuelfilme*) originated, were understood, and were legitimated as educational tools for remaking the "German character" at the time. To be clear, hers is not a book for those with short attention spans or weak wrists: it weighs in at 663 densely packed main-text pages with elaborate footnotes. However, there is much to commend it for serious study.

Beschämende Bilder is divided into four sections: the origin and development of the Allied atrocity films across all the military occupation zones; the role of film in the Nuremberg Trials and its echo in the world press; the effort to use film as a means of studying and reeducating German POWs; and analysis of how these films were shown to and received by the German public at large in the late 1940s. Weckel traces the production and reception of a few famous films in particular, including *Nazi Concentration Camps* and *Todesmühlen* (Death mills), as examples of this new genre. Of late, other scholars, such as