

Summer 2017

An Accident of Resistance in Nazi Germany: Oskar Kalbus's Three-Volume History of German Film (1935–37)

Joel Westerdale

Smith College, jpwester@smith.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.smith.edu/ger_facpubs

 Part of the [German Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Westerdale, Joel, "An Accident of Resistance in Nazi Germany: Oskar Kalbus's Three-Volume History of German Film (1935–37)" (2017). *German Studies: Faculty Publications*. 1.
https://scholarworks.smith.edu/ger_facpubs/1

This Article has been accepted for inclusion in German Studies: Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Smith ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [href="mailto:scholarworks@smith.edu"](mailto:scholarworks@smith.edu).

JOEL WESTERDALE

An Accident of Resistance in Nazi Germany: Oskar Kalbus's Three-Volume History of German Film (1935–37)

ABSTRACT: This article reconsiders the first comprehensive history of German film, Oskar Kalbus's two-volume *Vom Werden deutscher Filmkunst* (On the Rise of German Film Art, 1935) in terms of its contemporary reception in Nazi Germany and in light of a newly surfaced third volume. This is the first article dedicated to a work that scholars have long cited, though rarely without suspicion. The newly surfaced typescript for *Der Film im Dritten Reich* (Film in the Third Reich, 1937) confirms the author's National Socialist sympathies, but at the same time it highlights by contrast the virtues of the two published volumes.

KEYWORDS: film historiography, German film, Third Reich, cigarette albums, antisemitism

Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947) continues to exert extraordinary influence on the discourse of German cinema before 1933. Rare is the examination of Weimar film that does not pay its respects to this groundbreaking work. And yet the source that Kracauer himself cites more than any other in his study garners no such respect today. Appearing two years after the Nazis came to power in 1933, Oskar Kalbus's two-volume *Vom Werden deutscher Filmkunst*

(*On the Rise of German Film Art*, 1935), the first attempt at a comprehensive history of German cinema, is frequently dismissed as a dubious product of the new German regime. That it was issued not by a traditional publisher but by a cigarette company as part of a promotional campaign further compromises its status. Yet despite this odd and problematic provenance, the exiled Kracauer would refer to *Filmkunst* a remarkable ninety times in the course of his 1947 study. Following Kracauer's lead, scholars today continue to conjure Kalbus when other references to some pre-1935 German film prove scarce. Such appeals, however, rarely appear without a disclaimer: Kalbus is the "Nazi-historian,"¹ the "Nazi publicist,"² the "Nazi-oriented critic."³ From such descriptions, one would hardly guess that *Filmkunst* and its author Kalbus, who first joined the Nazi Party in 1940, were in fact pilloried in the party press, that the publisher halted publication of *Filmkunst* due to pressure from the National Socialist regime, and that this response likely prevented a third volume from making it to press. In light of its contemporary reception, the historical value and the ethical shortcomings of Kalbus's *Filmkunst* are perhaps not as straightforward as the requisite disclaimer might lead one to believe. *Filmkunst* may not secure for its author "a place of honor in the synagogue,"⁴ as one Nazi critic from the time claimed, but its place in film historiography warrants reconsideration.

*****INSERT FIGS 1 and 2*****

Catalyzing the current reevaluation is the recent surfacing of *Filmkunst*'s unpublished third volume. Volume 1, *Der stumme Film* (Silent Film; fig. 1), and volume 2, *Der Tonfilm* (Sound Film; fig. 2), chart a largely chronological course from precinematic technologies to the establishment of the National Socialist regime. Volume 3, *Der Film im Dritten Reich* (Film in the Third Reich), was to be devoted to contemporary German cinema. According to the author's memoir, the work was completed but fell victim to scandal and never appeared.⁵ One typescript

copy did survive, however, waiting to be read in the archive of the Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (Hamburg Institute for Social Research). Dated October 1937, the document, consisting of 446 typed pages pristinely preserved in a hardcover binding, represents a stark departure from the two published albums in both form and content. Volume 3 is precisely what one would expect from a “Nazi film historian”: an account of German film that amounts to little more than National Socialist boilerplate. By comparison, volumes 1 and 2, while certainly flawed, present an inclusive history that largely reflects the diversity of German film production before the rise of the Nazis. Somewhat ambivalent about the work he would cite so frequently, Kracauer describes the two published volumes of *Filmkunst* as “a Nazi-minded product with some remnants of pre-Nazi evaluations.”⁶ By examining these volumes in light of their origins and reception, and in comparison with the unpublished third volume, it becomes clear just how valuable those “pre-Nazi evaluations” are for our understanding of German film history.

THE FILM PEDAGOGUE

Oskar Kalbus (1890–1987) had a sustained interest in the intersection of film and education. His career in film began after he served in the First World War, when he joined director and producer Richard Eichberg’s Berlin-based Central-Film Gesellschaft in 1919 as the corporation’s financial manager. At that time the twenty-seven-year-old began publishing a column in the daily *Film-Kurier* on “Current Issues in the Film Industry.”⁷ Shortly thereafter in 1920 he would join the fledgling documentary division (Kulturabteilung) of the Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft (UFA) as a consultant and he would begin making regular contributions to the film trade journal *Der Kinematograph*. Occasionally, his articles touched on theoretical considerations of the cinematic apparatus, such as “The Muteness of the Film Image” (included in the 2016 anthology

of early German film theory, *The Promise of Cinema*⁸), but most of his articles focused on practical concerns, from dramaturgical issues to trade shows, admission prices, censorship, and economics. The one issue that would accompany Kalbus throughout his career, however, was the potential of film as an educational tool.

As consultant to and soon-to-be head of UFA's documentary division, Kalbus was a staunch advocate for the use of film in schools. Beyond *Filmkunst*, arguably his most influential book was *The German Educational Film in Science and the Classroom* from 1922.⁹ Even after transferring in 1926 to the UFA division responsible for the distribution of feature films, he remained invested in film's educational potential, founding in 1928 the production company, *Das Auge der Welt—Bühne für Kunst und Leben im Film* (Eye of the World—Stage for Art and Life in Film). The company pioneered the genre of the cross-sectional compilation film (Querschnittsfilm), producing in its first year an educational film about film, *Henny Porten: Leben und Laufbahn einer Filmkünstlerin* (Henny Porten: Life and Career of a Film Artist). Kalbus followed this in 1929 with a compilation of romantic film sequences, *Rund um die Liebe* (All About Love). With *Eye of the World*, Kalbus shifts from film as a tool of general education to film as a means to educate about film itself. This venture into film historiography would set the stage for his activity during the Third Reich and his authorship of *On the Rise of German Film Art*.

Though named executive director of UFA-Distribution Inc. (Ufa-Filmverleih GmbH) in 1933, Kalbus maintained his film-pedagogical course. At the behest of UFA's general director Ludwig Klitzsch, he drafted with journalist and film scholar Hans Traub plans for a new German Institute for Film Studies,¹⁰ which led to the establishment of the UFA-Lehrschau (UFA Educational Exhibition) in 1936 (fig. 3). The exhibition, equipped with an archive and library,

was to provide theoretical and practical instruction for the next generation of German filmmakers. The institution would eventually cede this role to the rival Deutsche Filmakademie (German Film Academy), established in 1938 under the direct control of Joseph Goebbels' Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. Kalbus himself would lecture at the German Film Academy in its inaugural semester.¹¹ *On the Rise of German Film Art* was yet another manifestation of this sustained pedagogical impulse.

*****INSERT FIGS. 3, 4, and 5 HERE*****

In keeping with his advocacy for film as an unconventional yet effective tool for popular education, Kalbus would avail himself of another unconventional yet effective tool to disseminate his own knowledge of film history: the cigarette album. The two volumes of *Filmkunst* were not issued by any established book publisher but by the Cigaretten-Bilderdienst (Cigarette-Image-Service) in Altona-Bahrenfeld, which was run by the tobacco giant Reemtsma. Smokers could redeem *Bilderschecks* (picture coupons) that came with their cigarettes for packets of numbered images, to be pasted into a collector album sold separately (figs. 4 and 5). Such cigarette albums were immensely popular, covering a wide array of topics, from art and technology to wildlife and world events. With their mass-market appeal and emphasis on images, they were particularly well suited for cinema culture, offering the film historian an opportunity to publish the kind of study that might otherwise prove cost prohibitive—one that combines a book's sustained narrative with an illustrated journal's abundance of images. According to an internal company history, between January 1932 and May 1943 Reemtsma distributed 13.75 billion picture coupons.¹² The company employed 150 people in its *Bilderdienst* (picture service) who issued in that time 4.13 billion images, of which many found a place in the 18.75 million albums sold. Reemtsma alone would issue twenty-two different albums between January 1932

and June 1943, of which the two volumes of *Filmkunst* comprised numbers 10 and 11 (fig. 6). Many of these albums are still readily available today from antiquarian booksellers.

INSERT FIG. 6 HERE

Cigarettes, collector albums, and film share a strange affinity that surely contributed to the success of *Filmkunst*, which sold over 300,000 copies between the two. While the popularity of volumes 1 and 2 is certainly linked to their wealth of images (fig. 7),¹³ they are not without their scholarly ambition, which sets them apart from most other cigarette albums. Opening volume 1, the author feigns modesty by inviting his work to be read in “idle hours” and treated as one might a family album. He nevertheless aspires to “fill a gap in the specialist literature on film” by providing “a historical retrospective on the gradual rise of German film creation from its very first beginnings” (1:3).¹⁴ The two richly illustrated volumes were certainly not the first foray into the history of cinema, but unlike, say, Georges Michel Coissac’s *Histoire du cinématographie* (1925) or Paul Rotha’s *The Film Till Now* (first edition 1930), *Filmkunst* trained its eye expressly on the development of film in Germany; and unlike Hans Richter’s *Filmgegner von heute—Filmfreunde von morgen* (1929), the objective was not to be polemical but comprehensive.

INSERT FIG. 7 HERE

FILM HISTORIOGRAPHY 1935

1935, the year of *Filmkunst*’s publication, was pivotal for the emerging self-understanding of German film. It was the year of Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*; the year Berlin hosted the misleadingly titled International Film Congress,¹⁵ and, crucial for Kalbus, the year that the Reichsfilmarchiv (Reich Film Archive) opened its doors. In New York the Museum of Modern Art was opening its film library and the British Film Institute established the National Film

Library. But the Reich Film Archive, established the previous year and opened in February 1935 to great fanfare with Adolf Hitler and Goebbels in attendance, provides the rationale for Kalbus's project: "Today's great need for a historical retrospective emerges clearly from the guidelines for the Reich Film Archive" (1:3). He aligns his ambition with that of the national film archive as laid out by the current president of the Reich Chamber of Film, Fritz Scheuermann (1887-?): film positives, negatives, photos and advertisements were to be collected for the "reciprocal dialogue between those who work on German film, to elevate the film work of today to the film artwork of tomorrow. With the help of old and new, domestic and foreign, good and bad, permitted and banned films, the kind of objective, unconditional, open criticism of professional life is to be employed with complete freedom of thought, which alone can be the basis of any artistic creation" (1:3). Kalbus distinguishes his approach from that of Goebbels, whom he also cites at length in his introduction, and to whom he cedes the project of evaluating these films. His own objective is simply to provide a historical retrospective that charts the milestones of German film in the context of contemporary film production.

This approach differs substantially from another influential history of film that appeared in the same year: Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach's *Histoire du cinéma*. The notorious French study provides the prime example for what David Bordwell calls the "Standard Version" of film history, with its "division into national schools, the emphasis on celebrated creators, and the proposition that the history of film is best understood as a search for the distinctive qualities of film as an art."¹⁶ Kalbus's *On the Rise of German Film Art* is clearly sympathetic to the latter ambition, aiming to establish "film art as an absolute, independent art form, the seventh and newest art" (2:3) and regularly celebrating key players in this development. Yet oddly, where the "Nazi-oriented critic" departs most appreciably from the fascist sympathizers Bardèche and

Brasillach is in the role national identity plays in his depiction of film history. Whereas the “Standard Version” tends to orient itself in terms of national schools—French Impressionism, German Expressionism, Soviet montage, Italian Neorealism—volumes 1 and 2 only infrequently portray German film as something particularly German. While his project focuses quite explicitly on the development of *German* film art, references to the particular nature of German film—as opposed to the films of other countries—are remarkably few. What makes this noteworthy is that Kalbus clearly has no ethical aversion to aligning his project with the racially inflected nationalist ambitions of the National Socialists. Kalbus cites Goebbels’ speech at the opening of the Reich Film Archive approvingly in his introduction to volume 1, and in the album’s closing passage he introduces a Nazi position without warning when he abruptly claims that the German film industry of the silent years was dominated by the “unserious elements of foreign race” (1:133). Most overt references to the role of film in the ruling Nazi regime come at the beginning or at the end of each volume, suggesting that they may have been tacked on to appease the powers that be. He employs certain phrases over the course of the text that expose the Nazi influence, for instance, when he refers to the era of the Weimar Republic as the “Systemzeit” (Time of the System) or the Treaty of Versailles as a “Gewaltfrieden” (forced peace; 2:10). He also criticizes Ernst Lubitsch’s early comedies (1914–17) for their “impudence alien to our nature” (1:34),¹⁷ as Kracauer points out. Occasionally, Kalbus will broadly simplify German taste, aligning it, for instance, with Nordic reserve, as opposed to the southern European penchant for grand gestures (1:21). German contributions to film technology, such as Meßner’s Maltese cross or Tri-Ergon sound-on-film, also receive special attention. But Kalbus does not dwell on them; he may mention that the Skladanowskys exhibited their apparatus first, but it is with the Lumière Brothers that the era of film begins and cinema embarks on its “triumphal

procession” (1:9). German cinema itself comes across as a heterogenous affair, in terms of its origins, its products, and especially its creators.

THE INCLUSIVE NATIONALIST

Kalbus does not reduce German film to any particular style or genre, and certainly not to the Expressionist films that so often come to represent early German cinema. “The Expressionist film” is only one of the over twenty-five genres discussed, including hygiene films (Aufklärungsfilme), monumental films, historical, costume, society, and mountain films. This diversity of genres is coupled with an exploration of female characters. Kalbus provides a typology of female figures that includes among others, the *Backfisch* (teenage girl), the ingénue, “das Girl,” the wifely woman, and, of course, the vamp. Among the technical aspects of film discussed are the unchained camera, use of special effects, makeup, close-up, and lighting. Little here is particularly innovative or insightful. What is remarkable, however, is the sheer quantity of films Kalbus mentions. In the text of the first volume alone he discusses approximately five hundred titles, and accompanies these with nearly two hundred high-quality photographic images. The proportions of volume 2 are comparable, although it does differ significantly in structure. It still emphasizes genre, but more space is dedicated to individual directors, as well as to developments in film ushered in by the rise of the Nazi regime.

Nationalist sentiment makes itself felt early in the second album, *Sound Film*, when it portrays America’s earlier adoption of sound as resulting from strategic financial calculations by Warner Bros., rather than the kind of aesthetic deliberations ostensibly favored by the Germans (2:9). In the same breath, however, Kalbus pokes fun at those “clever” Germans who long disparaged the turn to sound (2:10), keeping them behind the times. Toward the end of the album

Kalbus makes his sympathy for the German nationalist cause abundantly clear by including lengthy excerpts from speeches by Goebbels in a section with the title “Film-Deutschland erwache!” (Film-Germany, Awake! 2:102–3), which transparently evokes a popular Nazi slogan. This section is followed by a lengthy paean to the 1933 propaganda piece from Gustav Ucicky, *Flüchtlinge* (Refugees), as an expression of the “new spirit” of Nazi Germany under the Führer (2:104).

Despite such sympathies, Kalbus does not refrain from discussing many personae non gratae excluded by the ruling regime. Lubitsch provides the most obvious case. Kracauer and subsequent scholars rightfully criticize Kalbus for his offensive remark regarding his early films’ “impudence alien to our nature,” but they disregard the effusive praise he heaps upon the director elsewhere. The section “New Ways to Film Art” (1:45–47) presents an appreciative discussion devoted entirely to the films Lubitsch made in Germany before his emigration to Hollywood in 1922, including *Die Augen der Mumie Ma* (Eyes of the Mummy, 1918), *Carmen* (Gypsy Blood, 1918), and *Sumurun* (One Arabian Night, 1920), the latter of which Kalbus claims Lubitsch directed “with a splendor that had not yet existed in Germany” (1:47). Kalbus even adopts the director’s own description of his works: “He didn’t make ‘German’ or ‘American’ films, but quite simply Lubitsch-films” (1:45).¹⁸ Elsewhere he would claim Lubitsch outright for Germany. It was only through the international success of comedies like Lubitsch’s *Die Austernprinzessin* (The Oyster Princess, 1919), he maintains, that “those abroad knew that the Germans could write, perform, and direct film comedies just as good as their film dramas” (1:85). Kalbus thus enlists the peerless Jewish director as an early standard-bearer for German comic prowess, apparently oblivious to the perils of self-contradiction.

Another figure Kalbus treats inconsistently is Richard Oswald, whom he introduces, using a typical Nazi slight, as “Richard Ornstein, referred to as Oswald” (1:42). This appears amid Kalbus’s self-righteous discussion of the lewdness that led to the confiscation of Oswald’s two-part social-hygiene film, *Prostitution* (1919). Elsewhere, however, Kalbus speaks of Oswald in only the highest terms (with no mention of his birth name) and appears to have shed his own prudishness when he chastises the director for sanitizing history in *Lucrezia Borgia* (1922), a film that Kalbus nevertheless deems to be “constructed with a perfection that approaches the heights of the great visual arts” (1:53). He heaps even more praise on Oswald’s *Carlos und Elisabeth* (Carlos and Elisabeth, 1924), which he considers the director’s best work (1:70), and *Unheimliche Geschichten* (Uncanny Stories, 1919), which he lauds as a conquest of new filmic territory through special effects (1:94).

Kalbus would treat still other Jewish and exiled filmmakers as integral to the *Rise of German Film Art*: for instance, Friedrich Zelnik, “a great master of handling the masses” (1:73); “the genius director Lupu Pick” (1:73); Carl Mayer, “whom we have to thank for many a top-notch silent film” (1:100); and Ludwig Berger, “this man of quill and stage who not only has visual skills, but also culture and taste” (1:86). The latter would be one of the featured directors in volume 2, along with Erik Charrell, Friedrich Hollaender, Anatol Litvak, Hanns Schwarz, Robert Siodmak, and the actor Jan Kiepura, all of whom were blacklisted by the Nazi regime (fig. 8). Though rightly criticized for his antisemitic statements, Kalbus expends far more ink in the two albums of *On the Rise of German Film Art* extolling the contributions of Jewish filmmakers to the development of German cinema than he does on attacking their ancestry or character. And that got Kalbus into trouble.

INSERT FIG. 8 HERE

“EVIDENCE OF ANTI-NAZI ACTIVITY”

In filling out his denazification questionnaire after the war, Kalbus categorized himself as *Gruppe 5*, the group of Germans who could demonstrate “Beweis für antinationalsozialistische Betätigung” (evidence of anti-Nazi activity).¹⁹ He clarified this classification with the following claim: “In 1937 my books were confiscated by the Gestapo for glorifying the Jews and they were attacked in the Party press. A further book was banned by Minister Goebbels.”²⁰ The confiscated books he mentions are evidently the two published volumes of *Filmkunst*, while the banned book is apparently the proposal for a German Institute for Film Studies he drew up with Hans Traub.²¹ The third volume of *Filmkunst* likely also met with comparable resistance. According to Kalbus’s memoir—written in the third person and compiled by his wife, but clearly from his own hand: “before the completed manuscript for the third volume went to press, the first two volumes suddenly ignited a commotion. High-ranking SS leaders made [Heinrich] Himmler aware that a great number of Jewish directors and actors were honored as ‘film artists’ and were even being immortalized with photos in the Reemtsma film books.”²² In this account, a furious Himmler vainly tried to confiscate the more than a “million copies” of *Filmkunst* but only managed to raise the ire of Goebbels, who saw Himmler as poaching on his territory. Goebbels assigned the issue to Hans Hinkel, a special commissioner at the Propaganda Ministry who specialized in removing Jews from cultural activities (Entjudung). Kalbus maintains that because Hitler and Hermann Göring enjoyed the albums immensely, Hinkel, who would later head the Propaganda Ministry’s film division, did not pursue the investigation further.

Goebbels himself nevertheless set about to “deliver a blow through our press”²³ that would deter Kalbus from writing for good. Though Kalbus provides no source for this quote, his claims to have been sharply censured in the Nazi press are accurate, despite initial acceptance.²⁴

Vicious attacks did appear for precisely the reasons he claims. One article in the party paper *Der SA-Mann* lambasted *Filmkunst* alongside another cigarette album issued by Reemtsma, *Modern Painting*.²⁵ Criticism of the latter fell in line with the common Nazi dismissal of modern art—that the works of Max Liebermann, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, George Grosz, Otto Dix, Marc Chagall, and so on were “degenerate.” Criticism of *Filmkunst*, on the other hand, took little heed of the films themselves, aiming instead at their creators. This article, entitled “Art-Preserves” (Kunst-Konserven), attacks Kalbus for daring not only to acknowledge the role of Jews in the development of German film art but for perpetuating awareness of this contribution: “Oskar Kalbus has preserved them. In his texts they are celebrated as masters of *German* film art.” For this reason he deserves “a place of honor in the synagogue.” Among those Kalbus discusses, but whom the author of the article would have his reader forget, are Oskar Karlweiß, Richard Tauber, Erik Charell, and Fritz Kortner.

Another caustic review that appeared a month earlier likewise excoriated Kalbus for producing a text “teeming profusely with Jews and Jewesses,” whom he presents “as *Germans*.”²⁶ This lengthier article, which focuses exclusively on *The Sound Film*, condemns Kalbus not only for merely mentioning Jewish filmmakers but also for celebrating them, and particularly for celebrating them as German. “One may well respect (Austrian crooner Richard) Tauber as a Jewish singer,” the unnamed author chides, but he cannot fathom “what that has to do with the rise of *German* sound film.” He derides Kalbus as a “worshipper” of “the Jew Erik Charell,” chastising the author of *Filmkunst* for daring even to describe the masterful camerawork of *Der Kongreß tanzt* (The Congress Dances, 1931). Depicting “the Jew Ludwig Berger” as the “pinnacle of German sound film directors” constitutes another unforgivable transgression, as is Kalbus’s uncritical treatment of G. W. Pabst’s *Westfront 1918* (1930). That

Kalbus dares utter the name Bela Balasz [*sic*] in the same breath as that of the Reich Film Dramaturge Willi Krause is for *Der Mitteldeutsche* the height of audacity.²⁷

Why two articles would appear almost simultaneously more than two years after the initial publication of *Filmkunst* is up for speculation. One clue lies perhaps in their frequent mention of the publisher that provided the many images for the albums: Ross Verlag. Ross—not Reemtsma, not the Cigarette-Image-Service Altona-Bahrenfeld—bears the brunt of the critics’ ire. This is remarkable, considering that the name Ross appears not on the title page of *Filmkunst* but only on the verso. The prominent role attributed to Ross may derive from the fact that Ross, whose postcards of film stars were a well-established favorite among collectors, was a successful Jewish-owned business. In 1937, Ross Verlag was forcefully acquired—that is, aryanized—by Tobis-Klangfilm (soon thereafter Tobis Filmkunst G.m.b.H.). The attack on Ross, along with its aryanization, is entirely in keeping with the operations of Hinkel’s special unit for Jewish issues (Judenfragen), which sought to drive Jews out of business and cultural affairs.

Pressure from the Propaganda Ministry was felt at Reemtsma as well, albeit less intensely. As an internal company history describes it: “We were unable to offer much resistance to the wishes of the Propaganda Ministry after the Third Reich sharply attacked us for publishing the collector albums *Modern Painting*, *Silent Film*, and *Sound Film* Initially these works were confiscated by Nazi organizations. Subsequently, publication of these collector albums was prohibited.”²⁸ Reemtsma replaced *Modern Painting* (no. 2 in their series) with the presumably less “degenerate” *Gothic and Early Renaissance Painting*. The two film volumes were superseded by *Renaissance Painting* (no. 10) and *Baroque Painting* (no. 11) (see fig. 9).²⁹ Any plans to publish the third volume of *Filmkunst* were abandoned.

****INSERT FIG. 9 HERE****

VOLUME 3: FILM IN THE THIRD REICH

While the first two volumes of *Filmkunst* may have been condemned for “glorifying the Jews,” there is little chance the third would have been subjected to this line of attack, for what it offers is a kind of codicil that blatantly attempts to make amends for its predecessors’ perceived transgressions against party convictions. The introduction, dated October 1937, clearly anticipates the attacks leveled by *Der Mitteldeutsche* and *Der SA-Mann*.³⁰ In doing so it deviates strongly from the precedent set in the first two volumes. Had the three volumes ever actually appeared together, the narrative thus constructed would have been a strange, broken, and inconsistent account of German film history.

INSERT FIG. 10

The title page of the bound typescript reads: *On the Rise of German Film Art, 3rd Part: Film in the Third Reich. Selection and Arrangement of Images and Texts by Dr. Oskar Kalbus* (Vom Werden deutscher Filmkunst. 3. Teil: Der Film im Dritten Reich. Auswahl und Zusammenstellung der Bilder und Texte von Dr. Oskar Kalbus) (fig. 10). The source of images remains unmentioned, even on the verso, perhaps because the document does not yet contain any. Rather, it is composed of 446 single-sided typed pages consisting of a title page, a table of contents with sixty-six headings, an unpaginated introduction (Einleitung) of two-and-a-half pages, and 439 numbered pages that make up the body of the text. Rather than following the chronological thrust of the first two volumes, each of which begins by exploring the emergence of new cinematic technologies, volume 3 begins by setting the ideological stage with nearly forty pages on the “sowing and reaping of National Socialist film leadership” (Saat und Ernte nationalsozialistischer Filmführung). This is followed by a brief tour through recent accomplishments in German film, beginning with a chapter dedicated to Peter Hagen’s

Friesennot (Frisians in Distress, 1935) under the strangely aggressive title “Durch Stosstrupps zur Filmkunst” (By Means of Shock Troops to Film Art), followed by chapters on Riefenstahl’s pre-*Olympia* films and on the first two winners of the National Film Prize. Beyond this point, chapters focus largely on genres, many of them familiar from the first two volumes: historical films, war films, adaptations of modern novels and plays, society films, adventure films, travel films, problem films, and so on. Other genres are new, with chapter titles that reflect the author’s enthusiastic affirmation of party film politics: “The Heroic Principle in Film,” “The Resurrection of the Peasant Comedy” (Bauernkomödie), and “Films Featuring Landscape and Tradition.” This political orientation is apparent in other chapter headings as well: “Film-Axis Rome-Berlin,” “The Struggle Against Political Crime,” and “Healthy Sensuality in Film.” As in volume 2, there are chapters that explore the musical possibilities of sound film, with individual chapters dedicated to various musical genres and to individual stars. In this regard, the third volume coheres with the first two volumes as well as the first two volumes cohere with each other.

There are, however, substantial differences that set *Film in the Third Reich* apart. First, it launches with a thirty-eight page ideological screed that, excluding an extended quote from Curt Belling, official party spokesperson on film matters (3:35), mentions only a single film, and a foreign one at that, namely Lewis Milestone’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930; 3:5). Little of what Kalbus reports here concerns film exclusively, but rather it seeks to situate film in a Spenglerian history of decay and renewal brimming with clichés of the will and the power of the racially homogenous community. Unlike the first two volumes, which celebrate the unique character of cinema as the seventh art, film in this account is but another component in the greater National Socialist program, and one that doesn’t always enjoy a privileged position. Sandwiching film among other media, Kalbus writes that “the educational system, theatre, film,

literature, press, and radio ... are all means to serve the moral recuperation of the body of the German people and the preservation of the eternal values that live in the essence of our culture” (3:6).³¹ Such Nazi boilerplate, rather than cinema itself, ties the volume together thematically.

As the volume progresses, Kalbus pays more attention to the films themselves, but whereas the first album mentions about five hundred films over 136 pages, the ratio here is closer to three hundred films over nearly 450 pages. At times the motivation behind the text is unclear—do the details of the famous singer Benjamino Gigli’s birth (3:203), for instance, offer much to our understanding of his films? That Kalbus would dedicate four pages to Lilian Harvey’s return to Germany in Paul Martin’s *Black Roses* (*Schwarze Rosen*, 1935; 3:389–93) makes sense, though it still constitutes a lengthier discussion of a single film than one finds in either volume 1 or 2. When, however, the author devotes comparable space to what were even at the time largely inconsequential films—two pages to Steinhoff’s *The Wet-Nurse King* (*Der Ammenkönig*, 1935; 3:340–41), for instance, or Wysbar’s *The Gray Pike’s Wharf* (*Die Werft zum grauen Hecht*, 1935; 3:345–46), let alone nearly five pages to the early works of Kurt Skalden (3:360–64)—it creates the impression that Kalbus is simply trying to fill pages. Whereas the first two volumes follow what appears to be a strict format, each coming in at exactly 136 pages, space here is apparently of little concern. Unfortunately, given the ideological biases at work, the additional verbiage yields little.

Beyond this structural difference, *Film in the Third Reich* openly attacks the films that it celebrated in volumes 1 and 2, particularly those made during the Weimar Republic. “For fifteen years, from 1918 to 1933,” Kalbus writes, “Germany lay in a cultural trance. It was a time without German style, because Germany was without a unified ideal of beauty” (3:5). In many ways it is true that German films of the Weimar period were stylistically diverse, but rather than

celebrate this rich abundance as he did before, Kalbus now disavows it as a deficiency. And what is more, he dismisses these films as definitively non-German, despite his work's title: "Before January 30, 1933, hardly a film made it to the screen whose scriptwriter or composer or director was not foreign to our species (artfremd); often all the collaborators were non-Aryans" (3:9). Clearly, Kalbus in 1937 sees the first two volumes of *Filmkunst* as a liability requiring explanation. In his introduction, he presses his reader to take a closer look at volumes 1 and 2: "Those who know how to read between the lines of the first two film books ... will have recognized to their horror the spiritual (geistige) dominance of the Jews in German film before the political upheaval of 1933" (3:introduction). The third volume, with its proud discussion of the Nazi film industry, is to provide a counterbalance.

Unlike in the first two volumes, in *Film in the Third Reich* Kalbus weighs in on the political value of the films discussed. He criticizes volumes 1 and 2, for in them, the "cinematic achievement was not judged according to its value for the physical and mental well-being of the German people, but rather for its 'intrinsic value.' That which Joe May, Karl Grune, Ludwig Berger, Hanns Schwarz, Fritz Lang, Reinhold Schünzel, etc., produced was praised and adored as 'skillful,' with no regard for the content" (3:introduction). In volume 3 he returns to a position akin to one he had advocated fifteen years earlier in a three-part article on "Politics and Film."³² Using Lang's *Der müde Tod* (Destiny, 1921) and *Der verlorene Schatten* (The Lost Shadow, Rochus Gliese, 1921) with Paul Wegener as examples, Kalbus maintains here, "it would be a good thing if the German film, in addition to the typical political film, presented an inconspicuous picture of the *German essence* (italics original), thereby promoting Germanness in a subtle way." As Sabine Hake notes, this approach prefigures what would later become official Nazi film politics.³³ Having avoided discussion of film's political impact in volumes 1 and 2, he

enthusiastically returns to film as *Kulturpolitik* in 1937. Taking his cue from Wilhelm Weiß, editor in chief of the official party daily, *Völkischer Beobachter*, Kalbus explains, “What is decisive today is not whether the critic finds a work good or bad, but what issue is being fought for on the stage or in the film” (3:25). This easily transforms from description to prescription, evaluating not only what a film shows, but what it should be: an expression of the *Volk*, the German people as a whole and not the individuals who comprise it (3:28). Kalbus himself does not take the lead in this enterprise, but cedes the floor to Goebbels, whose “Seven Principles of Film Art,” delivered at the 1935 International Film Congress Berlin, Kalbus cites at length (3:31–34).

Such liberal use of lengthy quotation further distinguishes volume 3 from its predecessors. While isolated quotations from Goebbels embellish the introductions of volumes 1 and 2 and provide the focus of the section “Film-Germany Awake,” volume 3 frequently cites Goebbels at length, often over several pages (e.g., 3:25–27, 31–34, 36–37). Figures lower in the Nazi hierarchy also flesh out its pages: for instance, the aforementioned Hans Hinkel (3:344–345); Oswald Lehnich, president of the Reich Chamber of Film (3:22); and Alfred Klütz, of the Berlin public prosecutor’s press office (Justizpressestelle). The latter, whose connection to film may be less immediately apparent, contributed advertising material for the film *Stronger Than Paragraphs* (*Stärker als Paragraphen*; Jürgen von Alten, 1936), praising the film for depicting law enforcement as efficient, in contrast to its depiction in English and American films (3:256). Through the regular use of such quotations, Kalbus shields his text from the kinds of criticisms leveled at the first two volumes. The words of Goebbels, Hinkel, Lehnich, and other figures seen as beholden to the Nazi movement, such as Leni Riefenstahl and Heinrich Spoerl, presumably

furnish incontestable verification of the study's party loyalty. At the same time, they ingratiate Kalbus to those who might otherwise stall the author's professional advancement.

That Kalbus is not averse to flattery is apparent in his overwrought description of Lehnich's appointment to the presidency of the Reich Chamber of Film: "The one-time university professor and finance minister for the state of Württemberg—the scholar, the economic leader, the National Socialist—came to Berlin to put his overabundant experience and knowledge at the service of the German film industry. Since November 1935, a brave, honest, and fervent National Socialist has been piloting the fortunes of German film" (3:14). Such overblown prose creates the impression that Kalbus is trying hard to curry favor with German film authorities after *Filmkunst* volumes 1 and 2 compromised his career. Unfortunately for Kalbus at the time, volume 3 never appeared.

AFTERLIFE

Despite the controversy surrounding volumes 1 and 2, Kalbus was invited to lecture on film history at the German Film Academy when it opened in 1938. Material from all three albums appears in these lectures, though detailed reports in the daily *Film-Kurier* make no mention of them.³⁴ In his opening lecture, Kalbus himself seems to deny their existence, claiming "there exists no book on the topic [of these lectures]: that is, no book that discusses the development of film and cinema, film technology, film art, and the business of film, chronologically."³⁵ By 1940, however, the *Film-Kurier* would again openly thank Kalbus for the contribution to the study of film made by *Filmkunst I* and *II*, with no reference to their praise for excluded filmmakers.³⁶

Clearly preoccupied with the criticisms of volumes 1 and 2, Kalbus defends himself one last time at the close of volume 3 by returning to the notion that his earlier inclusion of Jewish

filmmakers was simply unavoidable. Kalbus cites ad nauseam numbers concocted by the film-statistician Alexander Jason to “expose the absolute domination of Judaism over German film before 1933” (3:437). Appealing to these statistics, Kalbus explains that it was simply “unavoidable that in the first two film-books . . . numerous Jewish filmmakers of all kinds had to be mentioned or shown in text and image” (3:438). The inclusiveness that was and continues to be the greatest strength of *Filmkunst*’s first two volumes, the inclusiveness that aroused the ire of Nazi critics and thereby formed the basis of his denazification defense, was not his fault. He was compelled to include Jews by sheer force of numbers.

As reprehensible as Kalbus’s third installment to *Filmkunst* is, the way in which it contrasts with the first two helps to emphasize their positive contributions. Their comparatively restrained nationalist tendencies allow for a richer account of the country’s film culture, not only in the kind of people who make the films, but the kind of films that they make. Volumes 1 and 2 depict German film as more diverse than what one is led to believe in Bardèche and Brasillach’s *Histoire du cinéma* or even Kracauer’s *From Caligari to Hitler*. These latter works, much like *Film in the Third Reich*, subscribe to a particular understanding of German national identity and thereby limit their analysis to films that reinforce their preconceived notions of German culture, such as its ostensible penchant for the macabre or its appetite for subjugation. Current scholarly exploration into German cinema before the Third Reich tends to forego antiquated notions of national character as a determining factor in film production and encompasses a great generic variety beyond the canon of films gathered under recognizably German rubrics like Expressionism, chamber play film (Kammerspielfilm), or the New Sobriety (Neue Sachlichkeit). Perhaps precisely because it takes the Germanness of its multifarious subject matter for granted, the published volumes of *On the Rise of German Film Art* unwittingly avoid this pitfall. This is

not to say that they do not contain Nazi elements that must be called out, but when Kracauer described the albums as “a Nazi-minded product with some remnants of pre-Nazi evaluations,” we must not forget the value of those pre-Nazi evaluations and the films they include. The German emigrant William Dieterle, a declared antifascist, emphasized this in his review of *Filmkunst* for the inaugural issue of *Hollywood Quarterly*, which appeared directly after the war in 1945. For him, the value of *Filmkunst* lay not in the evaluations themselves, but in its breadth of coverage: “These two volumes may well serve as record of the high standard the German films once held, and as a sorrowful reminder of those artists who contributed to that greatness.”³⁷ Considering how often Kracauer and subsequent scholars refer to them despite awareness of their National Socialist leaning, that is exactly what they appear to do.

POSTSCRIPT

After the Second World War, Kalbus continued to work in the film industry. From 1952 to 1955, he served as general director for Columbus-Film Distribution (a subsidiary of Columbia, later called Columbia-Filmgesellschaft Inc.), advising on such films as Käutner’s *Die letzte Brücke* (The Last Bridge, 1953), a rather sympathetic portrayal of Yugoslav partisans in the Second World War; the French-West German production *Das zweite Leben/Double destin* (A Double Life, 1954) by Russian-born French Jewish director Victor Vicas; and Pabst’s *Der letzte Akt* (The Last Ten Days, 1955), an account of Hitler’s final days in the bunker. Before he could relaunch his career after the war, however, Kalbus had to present himself for denazification. As Kalbus portrays it in his memoir, “the Heidelberg court [named him] ‘a resistance fighter in the early years of the Third Reich.’ It’s a crazy world . . . ”³⁸ This last sentence suggests that the author of *Film in the Third Reich* does not quite believe it himself.

Notes

Special thanks to Joseph McVeigh (Smith College), Philipp Stiasny (Filmuniversität Babelsberg “Konrad Wolf”), Paul McEwan (Muhlenberg College), Clemens Rohfleisch (UB Heidelberg), and Reinhart Schwarz (Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung) for their help with this study.

¹ Sabine Hake, *Cinema's Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany, 1907–1933* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 209, 303n1.

² Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 198–200.

³ Leo Braudy, “The Double Detachment of Ernst Lubitsch,” *Modern Language Notes* 98, no. 5 (Dec. 1983): 1077.

⁴ “Kunst-Konserven,” *Der SA-Mann* 47 (November 20, 1937): 5.

⁵ Oskar Kalbus, *Die besten Jahre eines Lebens für den Film: Eine Rückblende auf sieben Jahrzehnte (1890–1960)*, comp. Maja Kalbus (Wiesbaden: Film-Echo, [1961?]), 64.

⁶ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, rev. ed., ed. Leonardo Quaresima (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 52.

⁷ Oskar Kalbus, “Zeitfragen der Filmindustrie,” *Film-Kurier*, 1919, 38, 42, 50, 55, 59, 63, 66, 71, 76, 82, 96. For an extensive bibliography of Kalbus’s publications, see *CineGraph: Lexikon zum deutschsprachigen Film*, s.v. Oskar Kalbus, by Jörg Schöning (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1984–), D1–D4.

⁸ Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael Cowan, eds., *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory, 1907–1933* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 485–87.

- ⁹ *Der deutsche Lehrfilm in der Wissenschaft und im Unterricht* (Berlin: Heymann, 1922). For more on Kalbus's sustained interest in documentary film, see Kay Hoffmann, "Ein früher Kämpfer für den Kulturfilm: Oskar Kalbus und die Filmgeschichte," in *Wie der Film unsterblich wurde: Vorakademische Filmwissenschaft in Deutschland*, ed. Rolf Aurich und Ralf Forster (Munich: edition text + kritik, 2015), 150–57.
- ¹⁰ Oskar Kalbus and Hans Traub, *Wege zum Deutschen Institut für Filmkunde* (Berlin: Schere, 1933).
- ¹¹ The University of Heidelberg Library houses Kalbus's personal library (collection "Kalbus") and papers (Heid. Hs. 4133). These lectures are available in the Kalbus Collection: Oskar Kalbus, "Wesen und Geschichte des Films" (Essence and History of Film) Winter-Semester 1938–39 (Kalbus 783::1) and Summer-Semester 1939 (Kalbus 783::2).
- ¹² Philipp F. Reemtsma, et al., *Reemtsma: Beiträge zu einer Firmengeschichte* (Hamburg, 1952), 294.
- ¹³ Not all who sent in for the images purchased the accompanying album. From April 1935 to April 1938, the *Bilderdienst* distributed 159,051 sets of images for *Silent Film*, compared to 119,017 albums. From July 1935 to March 1938, it distributed 258,946 sets of images for *Sound Film*, compared to 194,190 albums sold. This amounts to about 75 percent, or just under the 80 percent average claimed by Reemtsma et al., *Reemtsma*, 295.
- ¹⁴ References to *Filmkunst* include volume (1, 2, 3) and page number.
- ¹⁵ See also Yong Chan Choy, "Inszenierung der völkischen Filmkultur im Nazionalsozialismus: Der internationale Filmkongress Berlin 1935" (PhD diss., Berlin Technical University, 2006), <https://depositonce.tu-berlin.de/handle/11303/1587>; and Malte Hagener, "Institutions of Film

Culture: Festivals and Archives as Network Nodes,” in *The Emergence of Film Culture*, ed. Malte Hagener (New York: Berghahn, 2014), 302.

¹⁶ David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 38.

¹⁷ See also Ofer Ashkenazi, *Weimar Film and Modern Jewish Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 173n45.

¹⁸ Compare Ernst Lubitsch, “Film-Internationalität” (1924), in *Werkstatt Film: Selbstverständnis und Visionen von Filmleuten der zwanziger Jahre*, ed. Rolf Aurich and Wolfgang Jacobsen (Berlin: edition text + kritik, 1998), 152.

¹⁹ See his “Meldebogen auf Grund des Gesetzes zur Befreiung von Nationalsozialismus und Militarismus vom 05.03.1946,” completed 23 April 1946, Heid. Hs. 4133, I, 1, University of Heidelberg.

²⁰ “Meine Bücher 1937 wegen Judenverherrl. von Gestapo beschlagnahmt u. von der Parteipresse bekämpft. Ein weiteres Buch von Min. Goebbels verb.”

²¹ Though Kalbus does not name the banned work in his denazification questionnaire, it is mentioned by name in the judgment (Spruch) rendered by the Heidelberg court, file number 59/3/991-32939, Heid. Hs. 4133, I, 1, University of Heidelberg.

²² Kalbus, *Die besten Jahre*, 64–65.

²³ *Ibid.*, 65.

²⁴ On May 25, 1935, the official party paper for cinema owners, the *Reichsfilmblatt*, printed the entire introduction to volume 1 (vol. 14, no. 21).

²⁵ *Moderne Malerei*, Reemtsma's series no. 2, ran from January 1932 to May 1937, selling 272,997 packets of images and 201,210 albums. Reemtsma et al., *Reemtsma*, 295.

²⁶ "So geht es nicht!" *Der Mitteldeutsche* 43 (October 24, 1937): 1.

²⁷ NB: Kalbus spells Balázs correctly (2:3).

²⁸ Reemtsma et al., *Reemtsma*, 295.

²⁹ Other albums were spared public attack yet were apparently also of questionable political bent. *Images from All Over the World* (no. 1) was replaced by *Plants of Our Homeland* in 1937; *Wonders of the Animal World* (no. 3) by *Animals of the Homeland* in 1938; and *Fairy Tales of Other Nations* (no. 4) by *German Fairy Tales* in 1939. The albums expressing more blatantly Germanocentric or outright National Socialist sentiments—with titles like *Germany Awakens* (no. 8), *Images from German History* (no. 12), *Adolf Hitler* (no. 15), and *Robber State England* (no. 16)—ran without interruption.

³⁰ It is possible that Kalbus predates his work so that volume 3 appears to have been completed before these two criticisms appeared; he cites in his conclusion to volume 3 statistics posted in Munich at the exhibition "The Eternal Jew" (Der ewige Jude) at the Library of the German Museum (3:438); this exhibition did not open until November 8, 1937.

³¹ This sequence of media echoes Hitler's announcement in the *Völkischer Beobachter* on March 23, 1933, of "a systematic campaign to restore the nation's moral and material health. The whole education system, theater, film, literature, the press, and broadcasting—all these will be used as a means to this end"; quoted in Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion*, 227.

³² Oskar Kalbus, "Politik und Film," *Der Kinematograph*, 1922, 805, 810, 819.

³³ Hake, *Cinema's Third Machine*, 210.

³⁴ For coverage of Kalbus's lectures at the German Film Academy, see *Film-Kurier*, November 18 and 23, 1938; December 24 and 29, 1938; and February 22, 1939.

³⁵ "Dr. Kalbus eröffnete seine Vortragsreihe in der Filmakademie," *Film-Kurier*, November 18, 1938).

³⁶ See, e.g., "Dr. Kalbus wird 50 Jahre alt," *Film-Kurier*, December 7, 1940.

³⁷ William Dieterle, "Made in Germany," *Hollywood Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (October 1945): 126.

³⁸ His actual words are: "So rund und bunt ist die Welt . . ." Kalbus, *Die besten Jahre*, 66.

Joel Westerdale is associate professor in the Department of German Studies at Smith College, where he teaches courses on Weimar and Nazi cinema. His publications on film include articles on the German avant-garde as well as on comedic aspects of Expressionist cinema. His current book project examines the myth of the "dark German soul" and its role in the development of the early Weimar cinema canon.