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## Marking Time

### Women and Nazi Propaganda Art during World War II

Barbara McCloskey

#### Abstract

"Marking Time" considers the relative scarcity of woman's image in Nazi propaganda posters during World War II. This scarcity departs from the ubiquity of women in paintings and sculptures of the same period. In the fine arts, woman served to solidify the "Nazi myth" and its claim to the timeless time of an Aryan order simultaneously achieved and yet to come. Looking at poster art and using Ernst Bloch's notion of the nonsynchronous, this essay explores the extent to which women as signifiers of the modern – and thus as markers of time – threatened to expose the limits of this Nazi myth especially as the regime's war effort ground to its catastrophic end.

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## Women and Nazi Propaganda Art during World War II

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The image of woman as mother, muse, and sex object was a crucial component of National Socialist art under Hitler. These portrayals adorned Party buildings as sculpted reliefs, filled the annual Great German Art Exhibitions in painted form, and reached a mass audience through postcards and films. They helped to ensure the masculinist ethos of Nazism, reinforce social policy on gender roles, and extend state power into the private realm. A preeminent example of this imagery is *Die vier Elemente* (The Four Elements) painted by Adolf

Ziegler.<sup>1</sup> The work was completed in 1936 and selected by Hitler himself to serve as the centerpiece of the first annual Great German Art Exhibition the following year. Ziegler was an architect of the Nazi cultural program and took a lead role in the systematic purge of modernist art from Germany. This purge was part of Hitler's larger campaign to eradicate the alleged formlessness and feminization of the despised Weimar era. With its chaste allegory of woman as earth, air, fire, and water, *The Four Elements* served as a painted manifesto of Germany's new, purified, and securely patriarchal cultural order. As Ziegler himself put it, his triptych visualized in clear and unequivocal terms the Nazi worldview and "its philosophical core: the affirmation of the laws of nature."<sup>2</sup>

Given the apparent importance of woman and her image in Nazi propaganda, the virtual absence of women in German World War II poster art--arguably the most propagandistic of media--is all the more notable. This scarcity contrasts with the greater, indeed iconic presence of Rosie the Riveter, Ruby Loftus, and Mother Russia in American, British, and Soviet posters of the same period. Instead, those few German posters that do include women and appear from time to time in studies of the World War II era comprise a small and predictable repertoire of beatific mothers, Aryan goddesses, and Gretchens in *Volkstrachten* (traditional folk costume). The dearth of woman's image in German World War II poster art is the focus of this contribution to *Contemporaneity*.

The relative absence of women in Nazi posters points to an important, though visually repressed, presence of crisis in the regime's ideology. I argue in the following that attempts to contain woman's image exposed from the start fissures in the Nazi dream of a homogenous *Volksgemeinschaft* (people's community).

This essay is adapted from a lecture delivered in November 2007 at the *Women in World War II* conference organized by Helena Gosילו at the University of Pittsburgh and at the *German Art and Culture since 1933* symposium organized by April Eisman at Iowa State University in October 2008. I thank the organizers and participants at these venues for their helpful responses to this analysis.

<sup>1</sup> Illustrations of Ziegler's *Four Elements* and all other paintings and sculptures discussed in this essay can be found in the following sources: Berthold Hinz, *Art in the Third Reich* (original German edition 1974), trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979); Peter Adam, *Art of the Third Reich* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992); and Hans-Jörg Czech and Nikola Doll, eds. *Kunst und Propaganda im Streit der Nationen 1930-1945* (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Kathrin Hoffmann-Curtius, "Die Frau in ihrem Element: Adolf Ziegler's Triptychon der 'Naturgesetzlichkeit'," *Kritische Berichte* 17, 2 (1989): 5-6.

More importantly, and of greater interest to the editorial concerns of *Contemporaneity*, is the manner in which the depiction of women also intervened in the *Ungleichzeitigkeit* (nonsynchronism) of Nazi temporality. I borrow this notion of nonsynchronism from Ernst Bloch.<sup>3</sup> Bloch was an early and insightful observer of the Nazi attempt to incorporate different temporalities, or social modes of experiencing and living in time, into its peculiar and popularly persuasive brand of atavism and futurity. For him, Nazi ideology was defined through its effort to reconcile the rural and the urban and the traditional and the modern. The leadership's attempts at reconciliation ceaselessly confronted material and social contradictions that defined relations between these disparate modes of being in German society of the 1930s and 40s.

Bloch's notion of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* described the German state of affairs under Hitler, but it also, and more poignantly, played a prescriptive role in his revolutionary dialectic. He saw transformative potential in the material and social contradictions of a nonsynchronicity that might yet turn Germany's unfolding history in a progressive direction. His insistence on taking time seriously set his analysis apart from others on the Marxist left who continued to herald the working class as the historical agent of socialist revolution. They accordingly dismissed as anachronistic and politically inconsequential the interests of a rural peasantry and petite bourgeoisie seduced by Nazism's appeal to earlier social modes. Time and tragedy would prove this dismissal fatally flawed.

In time, Bloch too would see the hopefulness of his revolutionary dialectic extinguished in the ruins of Hitler's Third Reich. His concept of the nonsynchronous has nonetheless enjoyed an afterlife in more recent analyses of "the Nazi myth" as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy described the Hitler phenomenon in the 1980s.<sup>4</sup> Most relevant here is Eric Michaud's *Cult of Art in Nazi Germany*, which built on Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's insights regarding the importance of art for the Nazi myth and its project of racist self-definition and "will to form."<sup>5</sup> For Michaud, this myth included an expressly temporal dimension intrinsic to a Nazi eschatology that heralded the Thousand-Year Reich as a salvation simultaneously achieved and yet to come.<sup>6</sup> Continually resurfacing in this timeless time of Nazi myth, however, was the sign of woman and her uncontainable timeliness. In the following, I examine various permutations of woman's image in Nazi paintings, sculpture, and poster art. Through this survey, we shall see the manner in which women marked time in ways that troubled the seamless *Gestalt* of the Nazi myth. In conclusion, we will also consider the extent to which woman and her imaging in the Third Reich continue to trouble our understanding of the Nazi myth today.

For this study, I surveyed approximately six hundred German posters of the Second World War housed in the Hoover Institution at Stanford.<sup>7</sup> Only thirty-three contained images

<sup>3</sup> Ernst Bloch, "Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics" (1932), trans. Mark Ritter, *New German Critique* 11 (Spring 1977): 22-38.

<sup>4</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Nazi Myth," *Critical Inquiry* 16, 2 (Winter 1990): 291-312.

<sup>5</sup> Eric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* (original French edition 1996), trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Michaud's concept of Nazi myth exceeds the Third Reich as an historical phenomenon. He defines it instead as a "structure" with deep roots in the European past and with continuing resonance in the present. See Michaud, xi-xiv.

<sup>7</sup> The Hoover Institution in Stanford possesses the largest collection of German posters of the Nazi period in the United States, second only to that of the Library of Congress in Washington DC. The Library of Congress collection remains uncatalogued and could not be consulted for this essay.

of women. Thirteen of these depicted female nurses in support of the Red Cross and mothers and children as part of fundraising drives for family charities. The remaining twenty were issued by the Propaganda Ministry or regional Party organizations to rally support for the war effort; a sampling of this latter group will be discussed in the following pages.

The relative absence of women in Nazi-era posters diverged sharply and programmatically from woman's pervasive presence in Weimar visual culture. Before Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in 1933, woman, specifically in her guise as the New Woman, served as an icon of the Weimar Republic's accelerated tempo of modernization. Her image embodied the era's changing gender roles and its flourishing mass culture industry of advertising, film, fashion, and consumerism. Artists prominently featured the New Woman in *Neue Sachlichkeit* paintings. She also saturated Germany's 1920s mass-marketing poster and illustrated journal advertisements. Her streamlined silhouette of short-bobbed hair and sheath dresses rendered her ideally suited to the graphic precision of commercial propaganda. The New Woman thus announced modern subjectivity as mass media in the era of mechanical reproducibility.

Beginning in 1933, Hitler instituted a series of social changes that reversed Weimar's demographic trend toward women working outside the home. Nazi legislation redefined women within the domestic sphere and as propagators of the race through its marriage loan program. Meanwhile, policies that aimed to decrease the effects of economic depression returned men in greater numbers to the workforce. These measures were most successful among the middle and upper classes for whom wage concerns were less pressing than they were for peasants, workers, and others of the lower socio-economic rungs of German society. It was also among this middle and upper class demographic that the Reich's appeal to traditional gender roles had its greatest resonance.<sup>8</sup>

Oil painting in particular gave form to the Reich's new social order in the early years of the Nazi art program. These works frequently configured woman in traditional terms as the nurturing center of the Aryan family. Artists were exhorted to depict not one or two, but several children as part of any image devoted to German family life. Such directives vividly demonstrate the unabashed use of high art media in the Third Reich for overtly propagandistic purposes, in this case providing visual persuasion for Hitler's accelerated birthrate policies.<sup>9</sup> In these works, women appear in rural settings and engaged in a way of life safely removed from the corrosive taint of the New Woman's urban modernity. Paintings and sculpture, media in which woman's image became ubiquitous after 1933, also safely ensconced her in the sanctity of high art. Art thus helped to insulate women from the iniquity of the Weimar-era commercialism for which the New Woman's image had become the privileged sign.

Woman as the subject of Nazi high art also legitimated the proliferation of paintings and sculpture devoted to the time-honored theme of the female nude. Sepp Hiltz and Ivo Saliger were among those painters who specialized in presenting woman according to the most

<sup>8</sup> Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); and Tim Mason, "Women in Germany, 1925-1940: Family, Welfare and Work," *History Workshop*, part 1 (Spring 1976): 74-113, and part 2 (Autumn 1976): 5-32.

<sup>9</sup> Czeck and Doll, 316.

stringent dictates of the Aryan ideal.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, their canvasses confront us with women who eschew makeup and the permanent wave hairstyles made fashionable at the time by Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, and other film idols. Instead, Hiltz and Saliger's women embody an ideal Aryan type with physiognomies composed of high foreheads, aquiline noses, and oblong faces. Also in compliance with the ideal, each woman appears with her long tresses of "natural" hair pulled into a tidy, braided bun at the back of the head. Moreover, their bodies are appropriately slender, but not skinny, and possessed of a glowing, healthy skin that pointedly distinguishes these Aryan women from the pale reediness of their New Woman predecessors.

Works on view in the Great German Art Exhibitions typically cloaked renderings of the female nude in the acceptable guise of Greek and Roman mythology. Artists also hewed closely to the Party line by adopting various modes of realism, including those that emulated the exacting character of photography, over and against the figural distortions of modernist art. Saliger's images in particular draw on the rhetoric of the photograph and its documentary claim to truth by employing flash-like illumination and a flat, stage-prop treatment of background landscape. His works portray Dianas and Venuses in settings with the rocks and trees of the out-of-doors. But his handling of cast shadows and use of artificial light signal that these settings are meant to be understood as existing within an interior, studio space. Moreover, Saliger's inclusion of pubic hair on the bodies of his nude goddesses recalls a similar pictorial strategy used by Ziegler ("the master of German pubic hair") in his iconic painting *The Four Elements* of 1936. This motif worked in concert with the classical iconography and photo naturalism of Ziegler and Saliger's images to naturalize the ideal Aryan body as true to nature. True to the Nazi myth, it also rendered that body simultaneously contemporary and timeless. Such paintings thus took their coercive place in the Nazi biopolitical order by imaging Aryan perfection as a realizable ideal for women in the Third Reich. Within that order, these works also provided a visual rationale for Nazism's use of eugenics, mass sterilization, and murder in order to enact its project of racial purification and supremacy.

In his study of *Art in the Third Reich* (1974), Berthold Hinz identified the commencement of World War II as the moment when Nazi imagery began to reflect the regime's shift away from its earlier populist phase. After 1939, autocracy replaced populism and the leadership took to crass assertion of its prerogatives over the values of Christian bourgeois morality. These values had been used by the regime to garner public support in its early years. Key for Hinz in this regard was the appearance of paintings in the Great German Art Exhibition of 1939 that departed from moralizing images of women as keepers of the hearth and home. Instead, these works foregrounded woman's "sanctioned sexual domination" and her role as satiator of male fantasy.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, 1939 saw the unveiling of Paul Mathias Padua's startling interpretation of *Leda and the Swan* in the Great German Art Exhibition of that year. From the Renaissance onward, art works devoted to the mythic encounter between Zeus and Leda typically stressed the elements of courtship and love contained in the tale. Padua's rendering, by

<sup>10</sup> See Irene Guenther, *Nazi Chic?: Fashioning Women in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Berg, 2004) for a thorough discussion of ever-changing and contradictory Nazi ideas on women and fashion. "Hard-liners" within the leadership were nonetheless consistent in their efforts to "rescue" women from fashion by insisting on a cosmetic-free, "natural" look as most consonant with the Party's *Blut und Boden* ideology. Among other things, hard-liners also spearheaded attempts to battle the appeal of French couture among German women by (fruitlessly) extolling the virtues of *Volkstrachten*.

<sup>11</sup> Hinz, 150.

contrast, exceeds the bounds of art with a version of *Leda and the Swan* that borders on the pornographic. His swan's craned neck and extended wings signal climax while Leda either surrenders to or recoils from the moment with her head thrown back, her right arm shielding her eyes, and the fingers of her left hand tensely splayed over the rumpled bedding on which the sex act takes place. Leda's jewelry, painted lips, and lacquered fingernails underline her morally questionable status as either a prostitute or a woman "fallen" by other means, namely through the corrupting artifice of modern cosmetic fashion. In either case, Leda appears literally prone to, and presumably deserving of, the sexual exploitation to which she is subjected. Fearing public outcry, exhibition organizers Heinrich Hoffmann and Gerdy Troost urged that Padua's *Leda and the Swan* be withheld from the 1939 Great German Art Exhibition. Hitler nonetheless insisted on its inclusion.<sup>12</sup> In a precautionary move, officials admonished the press to refrain from any "negative discussion" of the painting three days before the opening of the exhibit.<sup>13</sup>

Padua's salacious image appeared in the 1939 Great German Art Exhibition alongside other works that also figure into Hinz's thesis regarding the onset of the regime's autocratic phase. Specifically, paintings by Georg Friedrich and Adolf Ziegler introduced the theme of the Judgment of Paris into the annual exhibit for the first time.<sup>14</sup> Friedrich chose a historicizing approach to his rendering of the mythic tale in which Paris selects Aphrodite over Hera and Athena as the most beautiful among the three goddesses. His figures appear in antique garb and the goddess Aphrodite possesses a voluptuous form more consonant with the beauty ideals of Greek and Roman statuary than contemporary notions of healthy Aryanism. Ziegler, by contrast, incorporated the theme into the timeless time of Nazi myth by rehearsing in his version the preferred Aryan female body type, which he first introduced in his *Four Elements* of 1936. His version of the myth was illustrated in the 1939 edition of *Die Kunst im Deutschen Reich* devoted to the Great German Art Exhibition of that year. Nazi art critic Robert Scholz made no mention of Friedrich's contribution in his review of the display. In contrast, he lavished fulsome praise on both Ziegler and Padua for leading the way toward a revived appreciation of the "beautiful human body" that had been lost during the years of modernist distortion.<sup>15</sup>

For Hinz, Ziegler and Padua's images did nothing more than pander to the lascivious voyeurism of the male audiences for whom they were intended. Michaud further anchors the exploitive nature of these works within the Nazi biopolitical order where they served as instruments for the "shaping of tastes and vital reflexes" aimed at reproduction of Aryanism's racist ideal in real life.<sup>16</sup> This dynamic of spectatorial disciplining was made most evident in photo reproductions of Josef Thorak's sculpted version of the Judgment of Paris theme, which debuted in the Great German Art Exhibition of 1941. As Michaud notes, photographic

<sup>12</sup> Ines Schlenker, *Hitler's Salon: the Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung at the Haus der Deutschen Kunst in Munich, 1937-1944* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 129.

<sup>13</sup> Otto Thomae, *Die Propaganda-Maschinerie: Bildende Künste und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit im Dritten Reich* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1978), 45.

<sup>14</sup> Works shown in the Great German Art Exhibitions can now be viewed online as part of a research database devoted to art in the Third Reich compiled by the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte in Munich. Go to: [www.gdk-research.de](http://www.gdk-research.de).

<sup>15</sup> Robert Scholz, "Tradition und Zeitauftrag," *Die Kunst im Deutschen Reich* (August 1939): 253. See also Scholz's more explicit defense of contemporary nude painting published the following year: Robert Scholz, "Das Problem der Aktmalerei," *Die Kunst im Deutschen Reich* (October 1940): 292ff.

<sup>16</sup> Michaud, 158.

versions of the sculptural group, which were featured in the art press, occasionally eliminated the figure of Paris altogether and substituted his scrutinizing gaze with that of the camera lens.<sup>17</sup> The consumer of the image thereby assumed Paris's position of judging and selecting. Viewers were thus put through the paces of experiencing an erotic gaze evacuated of desire and reduced to its most instrumental purpose of making a correct--and predetermined--"choice."

These pornographic, exploitive, and manipulative images by Padua, Ziegler, Thorak, and others made their way with greater frequency into the Great German Art Exhibitions from 1939 onward. And their appearance there may indeed have signaled a change in the leadership's attitude toward its art public. But what Hinz identified as a break between periods of Nazi populism and autocracy in 1939 is better understood as a contradiction between populist and autocratic approaches to social policy that dogged the regime throughout Hitler's reign. The Sterilization Law of 1933, the enactment of race-defilement legislation in 1935, and an easing of divorce regulations in 1938 exposed early on the leadership's duplicitous appeals to Christian morality, on the one hand, and its simultaneous efforts to undo that morality in the name of racial purification, on the other. In 1935, woman's objectification as a means to Nazism's end was made plain with the introduction of Heinrich Himmler's *Lebensborn* procreation order. The order promoted sexual contact between the SS and Aryan female civilians as a matter of patriotic duty. Himmler's dual goal was to maintain a high birth rate despite wartime restrictions and to further the master race. Single women selected for *Lebensborn* duty were charged not only with breeding the Aryan elite; they were also to serve as unalloyed examples of the *Blut und Boden* ideal. Accordingly, these women were prohibited from wearing lipstick, using fingernail polish, or plucking their eyebrows.<sup>18</sup>

The extent to which the art public was able to make connections between these policies and the images that confronted them from the walls of the Great German Art Exhibitions is unknown. However, some idea of viewer response can be gleaned from government security service reports on these annual shows. These reports, which began to be maintained in 1940, lend insight into public opinion that was otherwise silenced in the regime's highly regulated art press.<sup>19</sup> In 1940, they document public demand for more works having to do with contemporary events, including war images and depictions of labor.<sup>20</sup> In 1942, these reports also indicate a progressive decline in attendance at the yearly exhibitions particularly among workers and rural visitors. Their diminished presence was attributed to increasing travel and economic difficulties since the outbreak of the war.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the largely middle and upper class art public that still visited the annual shows registered its growing displeasure particularly with the number and character of the nudes on display. They also complained about the frequent dissemination of such images in the form of postcards. Comments recorded from 1941 and 1942 compare the Great German Art Exhibition to a "meat market." Moreover, some visitors demanded a more aestheticizing approach to

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> On *Lebensborn*, see Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 398-99; Richard Grunberger, *The Twelve-Year Reich: A Social History of Nazi Germany 1933-1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 244-45; and Guenther, 99.

<sup>19</sup> Thomae, 46-47.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 61-62.



portrayal of the human body in works that tended more toward the "unclothed" as opposed to the "nude." In 1942, attendees at the Great German Art Exhibition especially criticized paintings by Ziegler, Hiltz, and Saliger for being "too naturalistic."<sup>22</sup>

Public opinion favored works such as Josef Thorak's *Two Humans*, which security service reports recorded as one of the most popular works on view in the Great German Art Exhibition of 1941. Thorak's sculpture presents an idealized and traditional configuration of male protectiveness and female vulnerability. The male figure provides gentle support for his female counterpart, who balances on a canted surface as she extends her arms back and over her head to entwine him in a loving embrace. *Two Humans* thus presents a vision of gender relations based not on domination and "selection," but rather on shared desire and intimacy. A survey of catalogues from the Great German Art Exhibitions suggests that the more popularly acceptable portrayal of the nude evident in Thorak's *Two Humans* began to displace the crass configuration of woman as sex object that had made its way into earlier Great German Art Exhibitions. In the wake of Germany's defeat at Stalingrad in 1942, Hans Schmitz-Wiedenbruck's *Nation at War* was among those works that resorted to chaste and maternal images of women in order to provide a continuing rationale for the increasingly desperate war effort. His canvas features a Madonna-like woman cradling a small child in her arms, who is seated at the center of the composition. Soldiers on the battlefield and laborers on the home front defensively encircle her as an emblem of a German hearth and home worth defending. Poster artists, by contrast, faced the challenge of reconfiguring woman's image in ways that rallied support for the war effort not only among men. As we shall now explore, events also required their propaganda works to solicit support from women whose labor outside the home was demanded with evermore urgency by the changing realities of war.

Two posters from the Hoover collection include images of women in propaganda related to the issue of territorial expansion and the political instrumentality of Germans beyond Germany's borders. One from the Augsburg branch of the Nazi Party depicts a woman of the Reich Labor Service (as indicated by her blue dress) marching in formation between two men, one dressed in military garb and the other as a farmer (Fig. 1).<sup>23</sup> All three display squared jaws and straight backs that declare their resolute and militant support for "all Germans in the East." A large swastika flag hovers above and behind them, framing their unstoppable advance across a desolate plain. It descends from the heavens and anoints the marchers' forward advance with an unsubtle reference to the Party and the sanctity of its racially superior mission.

The second Hoover collection poster referring to German territorial expansion was produced in Munich sometime after 1939. In this instance, the artist deviated from our previous example in which woman was presented as a desexualized Party automaton. Instead, woman appears more eroticized in the Munich poster, complete with heavily made-up eyes and painted lips (Fig. 2). Her blond, curled hair and clothes are dramatically windswept by the raging inferno behind her. A mother, she cradles a newborn in one arm while comforting a tearful young girl with the other. In this case, the artist combines the image of woman as mother with that of sexualized female victim. Such images took their place in an extensive propaganda campaign designed to rally men to the battlefield with stories of the murder and rape of German women and children by enemies of the expansionist Reich.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 57, 63.

<sup>23</sup> See Guenther, 124-25, on the attire worn by women and girls of the Reich Labor Service.





**Figure 1**

"The NSDAP is the support of all Germans living in the east," undated. Poster Collection, Hoover Institution Archives, GE 1052.



**Figure 2**

"Bavarian charity drive: ease the need of Germans living outside Germany! Help the pioneers of the German way of life!," 1939-45. Poster Collection, Hoover Institution Archives, GE 235.

Several additional posters surveyed for this essay come from the Propaganda Ministry's anti-espionage Shadowman campaign that began in 1943.<sup>24</sup> In one image, a woman fashionably attired in an orange shirtwaist dress and turban drapes herself on the arm of an off-duty serviceman (Fig. 3). The two engage in an intimate conversation that is literally cast into darkness by the enlarged silhouette of hat-wearing man. The couple's shadowy encounter is thus rendered simultaneously illicit and potentially injurious to the nation. The poster encourages viewers to understand the threat as emanating not only from the eavesdropping specter who hovers nearby, but also from the flirtatious overtures of attractive young women who might seduce hapless servicemen into surrendering vital secrets.

Posters in the Shadowman campaign suggest that the women of most concern were those outside the regulatory constraints of the home and loose not only on the streets, but also within the workforce. Another image from this series depicts a telephone operator seated before a large and busy switchboard (Fig. 4).<sup>25</sup> The operator turns genially in the direction of the shadowman whose dark silhouette falls on the wall behind her. Bright light from another source illuminates her smiling eyes, lips parted in speech, and the tight, regimented rows of her restrained, but fashionable permanent-wave hairstyle. Citing the need for chemicals, the Reich Minister for the Economy banned these hairstyles altogether in January 1943 only to lift the ban due to public complaint in March 1943. By then, however, few women--and certainly not your average switchboard operator--could afford them.<sup>26</sup> With her "artificial" coiffure, the operator of the Shadowman campaign takes her place among the ranks of urban, white-collar working women beholden to frivolous, "unGerman" fashion. Moreover, her feminine vulnerability risks not only her own security, but also that of the nation. Too trusting and chatty, her loose lips might indeed "sink ships."

Female workers fared better in poster propaganda when they could be abstracted from the negative taint of the urban. In a Propaganda Ministry poster titled "You Also Help" from 1941, a female worker, a nurse, and a farmwoman stride happily along, arm in arm, over an undefined landscape (Fig. 5). Behind them, the slightest suggestion of factory structures (at left) and cattle (at right) indicate the actual context for the help they are called on to perform. A colossal head of a male soldier hovers above them, god-like, in the sky. His sober visage provides a stern counterpoint to the smiling faces and light, happy-go-lucky steps of the women below. Their work may be necessary, but the omniscient presence of male military prowess above guarantees that their efforts are a temporary lark that will end with the "inevitable" victory to come.

Several of the Hoover posters used woman's image to urge public contributions of used clothing and linens to help offset material shortages during the war.<sup>27</sup> In one, a distinctly maternal woman, depicted with puffed sleeves and soft beneficence, carries a full armload of coats, shirts, and sweaters ready for donation (Fig. 6). This poster was produced in Berlin for a June 1942 clothing drive, shortly before the opening of the German offensive on

<sup>24</sup> Czech and Doll, 353. See also Andreas Fleischer, *"Feind hört mit!": Propagandakampagnen des Zweiten Weltkrieges im Vergleich* (Münster, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> Her blue blouse indicates she is not one of the so-called gray mice, the name given to the thousands of gray uniformed women who were trained in communications after the war commenced. See Guenther, 126.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 249-250.

<sup>27</sup> *Winterhilfswerk* (winter relief work) came into being already in 1931 and was folded into the Nazi drive for autarky after 1933. It was designed to provide needy Germans with clothing and other supplies. See Guenther, 232.

Stalingrad. After the Reich's resounding defeat in that conflict, the leadership was forced to pursue the total mobilization of women for the war effort. The military had been urging the conscription of women since 1940 in the face of failed attempts to exhort their voluntary help in alleviating critical labor shortages in war factories. On January 28, 1943, a compulsory work registration decree was finally enacted. Drafting women signaled a reversal of the social policies that had proved successful in garnering middle and upper class support for the regime in its first years. The leadership had long delayed this course of action, rightfully fearing popular disapproval.<sup>28</sup> The fact that economically privileged women were still able to dodge service resulted in heightening growing class tensions.<sup>29</sup>



**Figure 3**

"The enemy is listening!," 1943-45. Poster Collection, Hoover Institution Archives, GE 1188.

<sup>28</sup> Mason, 21.

<sup>29</sup> Guenther, 249.





**Figure 4**

"Pst!," 1943-45. Poster Collection, Hoover Institution Archives, GE 1189.



**Figure 5**

"You also help!," 1941. Poster Collection, Hoover Institution Archives, GE 1070.



**Figure 6**

"Give to the old clothes and textile collection drive, June 1-15, 1942," 1942. Poster Collection, Hoover Institution Archives, GE 1049. "Give to the old clothes and textile collection drive, June 1-15, 1942," 1942. Poster Collection, Hoover Institution Archives, GE 1049.

After Stalingrad, poster artists faced the task of initiating women into Germany's new reality. The challenge was not only to rally the perennially suspect urban woman to the cause, but also to license her efforts within a male factory setting. In one solution, Fritz R. Weber depicts a vigorous phalanx of men strapping on their helmets for battle in his poster titled "Harte Zeiten, Harte Pflichten, Harte Herzen" (Hard Times, Hard Duties, Hard Hearts) (Fig. 7). They join the charge behind a large swastika banner that flaps above their heads. The composition as a whole is a slashing diagonal of outstretched arms, blowing flag, and striding legs that underscores the heightened drama of the moment when the men heed the call to defend the fatherland. They hand their wrenches and hammers to the crowd behind them in the knowledge that others will take up the work to be done in the factory, which appears in the background. Shown prominently in the foreground of the crowd are two women with their shirtsleeves rolled up and their strong arms and hands at the ready for the tools handed to them. Their identity as modern, urban women is present but understated with their fashionable permanent-wave hairstyles making a covert, but crucial appearance. The blond curls of the woman at right are almost, but not entirely, obscured from view by the outstretched arm of the woman at left. And while a coil of brown hair peaks out from

under the headscarf of the woman at left, the rest of her head is blocked out altogether from the compositional frame. Produced in 1943, "Hard Times" was adapted for a printed version of Josef Goebbels's declaration of total war announced at the Berlin Sportpalast in February 1943.<sup>30</sup> The Propaganda Minister's speech was a last-ditch effort to rally national unity and support for the regime's floundering war effort among a population increasingly resentful of shortages, air raids, mounting death tolls, and a leadership that betrayed its social promises.

In 1944, security service reports indicate that the Propaganda Ministry's Shadowman campaign encountered increasing public ridicule.<sup>31</sup> The populace appears to have become unmoved by appeals to the enemy without as suspicion mounted that the real enemy existed within. Attempts to whip up public paranoia fell on deaf ears as people began to regard propaganda posters as little more than a waste of precious resources, especially after the onset of extreme paper shortages in spring 1943. Given that the Shadowman images also tended to configure modern, urban women as the weak link in national security, it is conceivable that these propaganda campaigns also suffered from alienating a constituency on which the regime was increasingly--and reluctantly--reliant.



**Figure 7**

Fritz R. Weber, "Hard times, hard duties, hard hearts," 1943. Poster Collection, Hoover Institution Archives, GE 1228.

<sup>30</sup> Andreas Fleischer, "Politpropaganda zwischen Bauhaus und Wirtschaftswunder: ein Beitrag zum Verständnis ausgewählter Plakate und Kampagnen der Jahre 1935-1955," in *Die Nützliche Moderne: Graphik- & Produkt-Design in Deutschland 1933-1955* (Münster: Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte), 76.

<sup>31</sup> Czech and Doll, 353.





**Figure 8**

"Help: give to the textile, linens, and clothing collection drive, 1944," 1944. Poster Collection, Hoover Institution Archives, GE 1215.

Indeed, images that configured men as protectors and defenders of women, home, and family in the last years of the war could only exist in the rarified realm of high art as women too were drawn into the war effort. Poster artists only infrequently took up the challenge of addressing the changing reality of women as the war drew to its desperate close. The sign of this crisis was indeed the modern, urban woman above all, whose image made only a brief and tentative appearance in Nazi propaganda campaigns in the late war years. Another example is a poster devoted to a clothing collection drive in 1944. Unlike her earlier, more maternal counterpart (Fig. 6), this woman is decidedly young and urban with her painted lips, eye shadow, and telltale permanent-wave hairstyle (Fig. 8). The squared shoulders and pointed collar of her dress combine with her sober expression to convey the restraint and selflessness demanded by current realities. The young woman holds out to the viewer a meager pile of clothes in a humble gesture of sacrifice that signals the increasing extremity of the time. The reason for the drive comes into view behind her where men engage in combat on a low hillock. The pitched roofs on the houses, which appear behind the coils of smoke at the far left, suggest that distinctions between home front and battlefield have now all but disappeared.

The Nazi war machine collapsed in 1945 after six years of mass death. Once again, women served as an emblematic sign of the times, in this case in the guise of the *Trümmerfrauen* (rubble women) who began the inch-by-inch, piece-by-piece task of putting their cities, villages, and lives back together again. Documentary photos record these women bending, stooping, and scouring through wreckage to salvage what could be salvaged and clear away what could no longer be redeemed. Their sunken eyes, sack-like clothing, and limp, unwashed hair further register the deprivation and extremity of war's end. The Nazi regime they once knew had been undone from without by Allied strategizing. The fundamental contradiction between its traditional social policies and the modern imperatives of mechanized warfare had also contributed to the undoing of the Third Reich from within. As



we have seen, the poster art of this era, in its circumlocutions around the image of those very women the regime increasingly relied on to realize its war aims, registered this crisis in visual terms. History "resolved" this crisis in 1945 when women were literally bombed back to another era bereft of permanent waves, fashionable make-up, and the confident posture of the modern. In the end, Nazi hard-liners got their way on the woman front, but only in the wake of the regime's ignominious demise.

In his analysis of the Nazi myth, Michaud recounts how Hitler's cultural ideologues assigned to painting and sculpture a special role in the formation of the Third Reich's racist *Gestalt*.<sup>32</sup> These media, above all, had the capacity to enfold within themselves past tradition and an ideal Aryan future to which present reality was slated to conform. Given the centrality of her image to the timeless time of the Nazi myth, woman's relative exclusion from the time-bound immediacy of propaganda posters comes as little surprise. When she did make an appearance there, however, she exposed a widening chasm between Nazism's aspiration to an eternal present and the rapidly changing realities of its war campaign. In her allegiance to fashion, the modern, urban woman above all marked time in a manner that the regime, especially in its period of disintegration, could no longer afford to exclude from its image realm.

To look beyond her picturing and to interpret woman's allegiance to fashion in the Third Reich as somehow dissident or subversive is to misconstrue a central feature of the Nazi phantasmagoria, however. As scholars have demonstrated, the Third Reich proved itself consistently adept at using fashion, entertainment, and other arenas of everyday desire and fantasy to preserve the illusion of freedom, personal fulfillment, and individual choice within its dictatorial machinery.<sup>33</sup> None other than Hitler recognized the importance of keeping beauty parlors open even under conditions of total war.<sup>34</sup> Women marking time in Nazi reality and its visual economy did nothing, in short, to hasten the regime's end. Modern woman's enduring traces, faint as they are, nonetheless permit an important glimpse of the limits of the Nazi myth and its *Gestalt*. Troubling those limits, woman and the complexity of containing her image held out the possibility of exposing the Nazi myth to reason. As we know, that reason remained in abeyance throughout the Third Reich. It remained so until the regime's fantasy of a timeless time was finally extinguished by the demands of time and a post-war history still coming to terms with the Nazi myth's seductive powers.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, his discussion of Baldur von Shirach's discussion of the relationship between art and reality. Michaud, 95ff.

<sup>33</sup> On the historiography of this issue, see Lutz P. Koepnick, "Fascist Aesthetics Revisited," *Modernism/Modernity* 6, 1 (1999): 51-73.

<sup>34</sup> Guenther, 250.



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