



Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Degree in International Relations

Final thesis

Nazi propaganda through German cinema and the works of Helene Riefenstahl

Author: Teresa Arana Cardelús

Supervisor: Almudena González del Valle

Madrid, April 2020

Preface

As it is commonly known, the Second World War marked the beginning and end of an atrocious period of time within human history. The impact and effects of the Nazi Reich left a symbolic mark behind, together with a legacy and trembling lesson for the international community. Even though this might seem as a common topic from which we apparently know everything from, I firmly believe we still have a lot to learn and a long road ahead of us, since the world and world leaders do not seem to have fully understood the seriousness of the matter.

The atrocities and brutalities committed during times of war are not even bearable for the human eye and deep understanding; suffering, horror, pain and terror are only some of the words that can be used to try to depict the horrendous reality from too many individuals during the regime of the Nazis. A denoting factor that contributed significantly to the triumph and success of the Nazi Regime, controlling the minds and actions of their citizens was the influence and polished usage of propaganda.

We often forget or tend to underestimate the power and ability of communication, especially if it targeted towards masses and the populace. Hitler's dowry of speech combined with the blind faith of his followers and Goebbels' mastery of the Nazi propaganda took over the world. I hereby underline the importance of communication and communication theories, as well as the right usage of the media for a hearty and prosperous society to grow. It is with the greatest of pleasure that I further use this opportunity to express my respect and pay tribute to the victims of the Second World War, their families and loved ones. It is an honor for me to be granted this opportunity to write about such a serious and symbolic topic, and in all candidness, I hope this humble work is capable to match up to the memoir of those times.

Teresa Arana Cardelús

Madrid, April 21, 2020

INDEX

1.	INTRODUCTION	3
1.1.	MOTIVATIONS	5
1.2.	STATE OF THE ART	6
2.	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	8
2.1.	NAZI GERMANY HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	8
2.2.	CINEMA HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	13
	2.2.1.THE BIRTH OF CINEMA	13
	2.2.2.GERMAN CINEMA IN THE 20's	16
2.3.	THEORY OF COMMUNICATION AND MASS MEDIA	17
	2.3.1. INTRODUCTION	17
	2.3.2. MASS SOCIETY CRITICS – AN ONGOING DEBATE	19
	2.3.3. MASS SOCIETY THEORY IN MODERN TIMES AND THE ORIGINS OF PROPAGANDA	24
3.	OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS	29
4.	METHODOLOGY	30
5.	ANALYSIS	31
5.1.	TRIUMPH OF THE WILL	31
5.2.	OLYMPIA	39
6.	CONCLUSIONS	43
7.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	47

1. INTRODUCTION

Few were able to imagine the destruction and suffering; the pain and terror; the barbarities and remnants that were going to take place, not only in Germany and Europe, but at a world level, throughout the 20th century. Today, few are able to imagine the extent to which social media has shaped and determined our lives and choices. Most of our personal information, including some very intimate parts of it, is available to almost anyone who seeks for it. Public authorities, relatives, friends, or strangers may know details about our personal life that we do not realize we made public. We share our hopes, dreams, frustrations and fears, best moments and fake realities through a lens that has taken over today's game. For example, Facebook and Twitter are now the first source of news for an increasing part of the population in societies with higher Internet penetration, as opposed to traditional media or newspapers (Kennedy, 2019, pág. 10); main influencers and celebrities compete head-on with main political leaders in terms of number of followers in social media, which may in the end determine the scope of influence of whatever political message; disinformation and misperception of political events across social networks are causing a broader political polarization that may explain the unprecedented events we are witnessing across the World (Tucker, 2018, pág. 40).

It is precisely because of the previously mentioned issues and situations that I became increasingly worried about the prominent role that social media plays in our lives, the ridiculous yet colossal effects it has on society and at the individual level. And that impact on individual freedom by means of controlling information and the challenges this might lead to, reminded me of the time where there were none but one message, even in the world of entertainment. Therefore, this study aims to explore that same massive impact at the hand of cinematic evidence: the consequences and effects that Nazi propaganda and symbols had through films.

The 20th century has been marked and shaped by a variety of events, some atrocious, others glorious. One of these events that clearly falls into the category of 'atrocious' is the Second World War, from which we claim to know much, yet fail to understand and apprentice from the legacy it left behind. Hitler, Goebbels, Himmler, Hofmann, Heydrich, had the common goal of expanding the Nazi regime. With the impeccable management and superb control of

media, the Nazis gained unimaginable mastery of people's minds and consequent actions. This undeniable command has been studied for years by many experts, leading to the general conclusion that propaganda was one of the main elements that kept the Third Reich as powerful and indestructible as it was (Hürten, 1995). The application of propaganda and the long – lasting effects it had on the German population can be understood as an art. According to the Oxford Dictionary, art is to be understood as «the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power». Not surprisingly, this art was related to the other artistic branches of the Nazi regime such as the imperial neoclassical architecture of Albert Speer, the classic sculpture of Arno Breker, the bucolic 'Aryan' paintings of Adolf Ziegler... and cinema. It would seem rather impossible, that with such beautiful features and power, one would make wrongful use of this means of expression, as it happened during this regime.

Nazi culture and mentality, embedded in traditional German views and beliefs, were some of the crucial elements used for the manipulation of the masses. Culture, as a rather abstract and alluring concept, can occasionally be very convoluted. Through the usage of cinema, theater and other means of entertainment, Nazis expanded their total power of every aspect of daily life. That said, this control of the 'propaganda game' and the channel of information may certainly be compared in a way to what social media has brought to our society, which entails a disclosure of relevant parts of our privacy. In the same way, after scrutiny of various documents, one can easily recognize that elements of control used back in the 20th century are still perceivable today, and to a much bigger extent (Bathrick, 2007). Social media has taken the lead today and, the same way the Nazi State controlled the one channel of communication and information, platforms such as Facebook and Instagram are for many the main (and only) channel where they communicate and get informed.

This paradox of controlled entertainment that is still noticeable in today's society is what motivated me to focus on the 'screen' the Nazis used to work with, and the master behind it: Leni Riefenstahl. On the basis of a theoretical framework and the cinematic works of Leni Riefenstahl, *Olympia* and *Triumph of the Will*, this study will examine Nazi propaganda in depth,

its messages and symbolism. In order to better understand the overall picture, this study will start by offering a historical overview of Nazi Germany and cinema, followed by the dissertation of mass media and communication theories. It is important to mention that this production will focus on history, cinema, Nazism and propaganda, together with its respective theories and critical aspects. Hereafter, the state of the discussion will be explained in relation to the research topic; superseded by the methodological explanation regarding the elaboration of this thesis. Finally, a series of conclusions will be drawn from this examination project and some recommendations will be made regarding the current situation and future perspective.

1.1. MOTIVATIONS

History and its course have always been a matter of interest and worth of examination. Important lessons have been learnt from past mistakes, yet there is still much to learn and continue to prevent future conflicts and catastrophes. A perfect example of this situation is the Second World War and hereby we are not only referring to Germany, but to all nations and states involved in the turmoil. Nonetheless, Germany deserves special mention, not only in a negative sense for its blame but also for its ‘mind conquering’ art and merit.

Going back to our memories from school, we will most likely remember history as a boring subject, but now, looking at it from a different and grown perspective, it seems fair to state that history is not only a fascinating but also tremendously significant topic for our society. History matters because it can potentially provide us solutions to many of the problems of the present. At its best, history is there to introduce us to some of the things we need, but that are not sufficiently visible in the world today. As a society of the 21st century, we are highly obsessed by what is happening right now, what others think of us, our image and presence, the way we portray ourselves to the world... the list continues with no apparent end.

Unknowingly, we are hugely biased towards the present. The news – which is about the most prestigious force in the world today – circles obsessively around some of the things that have happened literally in the last five minutes and yet, many of the most important things that we need to nourish, sustain and inspire us are rather ancient. Nowadays, in a completely

superficial and self – centered world, what we need above all else are good ideas and history is full of them. In this sense, it is of paramount importance to highlight the role of social media, which is amongst some of the reasons just mentioned, why this final project topic has been chosen. The almost unconceivable link between the massive usage of social platforms such as Facebook and Instagram and getting to a point of no return in terms of brainwash is just one step away. Social media has become part of our nature: we post, we share, we like, we comment... personally, I believe we have turned addicted and little, if not anything, can be made in order to reverse this situation. Departing from this rather pessimist thought, if there is nothing we can do, at least we can learn from the past and similar situations that have already affected severely humankind. Hereby we refer to the main topic of this thesis: propaganda.

My ever-growing concern about our society has led me to try and establish the similarities about propaganda back during the Nazi regime to what we deal with today, concluding that the need to take action is rather prominent.

1.2. STATE OF THE ART

As it often occurs with a variety of words, one cannot be always certain of its 'real' definition. Nonetheless, specific terms can be highlighted in some common definitions. Propaganda, for instance, is today defined by the Oxford Dictionary as «ideas or statements that may be false or exaggerated and that are used in order to gain support for a political leader, party, etc. ». Collins Dictionary adopts a similar position, namely «propaganda is information, often inaccurate information, which a political organization publishes or broadcasts in order to influence people».

Contrary to the previously mentioned dictionaries, Merriam Webster Dictionary and Cambridge Dictionary offer different options and alternatives to this one term. Cambridge Dictionary states, on a first basis that propaganda is «information, ideas, opinions, or images, often only giving one part of an argument, that are broadcast, published, or in some other way spread with the intention of influencing people's opinions »; and on a second basis defines it as «the activity of spreading particular ideas, opinions etc. according to an organized plan, for

example by a government; the ideas etc. spread in this way». Merriam Webster further provides diverse options, yet all similar to the ones formerly exposed; «the spreading of ideas, information, or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause or person», or «ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one's cause or to damage an opposing cause» (Merriam Webster Dictionary , 2020).

And the importance of understanding what the current definition of propaganda is lies in the fact that it continued to be a tool for social control after the end of the totalitarian regimes of the last century, and it is still alive today. Since the fifties, scholars have been studying political discourse and advertising as frequent fields for the use of propaganda: the art of presenting 'facts' by interested parties and selectively suppress others is what contemporary press and media theorists like Herb Schiller, Kathleen H. Jamieson, Paul Waldman or linguist Noam Chomsky, identified as modern propaganda (Baran & Davis, 2015, p. 53). In that regard, Edward S. Herman studied the power of business and government elites to control the flow of information through 'filters' that would ensure a political consensus out of the apathy of the general population along with the appearance of democratic consent. These filters, as in the author's words, were: *ownership, advertising, sourcing, flack* and the media's belief in the 'miracle of the market', meaning a decreasing independence of journalists, a higher power when it comes to public relations of private and public entities, and the support of the *status quo* by the media (ibid, p. 54).

Other critics highlighted the role of media in shaping the population's behavior by means of manipulating it with polls and surveys which were designed to increase media's power (Laitinen, 1997, pág. 237). That is what ultimately should be regarded as modern propaganda in the eyes of Laitinen and Rakos and confronts the traditional idea of the liberalization of the channels of information of the second part of the 20th century with «current mechanisms of influence, through direct economic and indirect political contingencies» (ibid). In connection with that, theorists from the opposite ideological spectrum: Shapiro, McGann, Goldberg...that is to say the Right (the Left theorists were the pioneers in reconsidering the propaganda theory), also criticized how biased media was when presenting information to the public, but there seems to not be good academic foundation to support that (Baran & Davis, 2015, p. 55). Probably the

most innovative ideas for the propaganda theory are those who link it with mass society theory and media effects, like Rebecca Curnalia referencing how elites are able to set the political agenda by framing an ‘attitude object’, making it broadly accessible and influencing perceptions, so a consensus is created by a silent or conformed majority (Curnalia R. M., 2005, p. 253). For this author, this would be what explained the consensus on the War on Iraq or the economic practices that led to the financial crisis in 2008, and might as well be an argument to back up all the unprecedented political events that we have witnessed in the recent years, such as Brexit, the wars on Ukraine and Syria, the appearance (some victorious) of new political parties all over Europe...

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. NAZI GERMANY HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The rise to power and control of Adolf Hitler is a rather complex process, derived from a variety of aspects and consequences from World War I, which is why in order to locate this analysis and study, we will start with an historical overview from the Weimer Republic until the taking over of the Nazis.

The First World War ended in 1918 and as a punishment for losing, Germany’s wartime allies, the Austro – Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire were carved out of its territory shortly afterwards. The pressures of defeat plunged Germany to chaos and as a result if this, the Kaiser abdicated. Revolution and counter – revolution were the order of the day and the small town of Weimar (due to the fact that Berlin was too dangerous at that time), the Weimar Republic was declared. The next year, in 1919, the allies signed the Treaty of Versailles which dictated the terms of the allied victory (Askani, 1996). The Rhineland was occupied by the Allies, Germany further had to massively reduce its military, pay war reparations and also had to accept almost full responsibility for the war’s outbreak (Hürten, 1995). This Weimar Republic turned out to be one of the most democratic nations in the world at that point; suffrage was granted to everyone over the age of 20, including women and the German people could vote on two aspects with regards to the national government: every seven years they voted on a president who presided over the German Parliament, the *Reichstag*; and every four years people would

vote for political parties in the national elections for the *Reichstag*, a system known as proportional representation, whereby the percentage of votes nationally dictated the percentage of seats in the *Reichstag*. The president could call elections whenever he felt and also had to appoint the chancellor who ran the government and proposed laws (Askani, 1996). These laws had to be passed by a majority vote in the Reichstag and since no party ever got 50% of the seats, that meant that the parties would have to cooperate.

Yet democracy did not guarantee harmony and numerous attempts at revolution, such as the quickly aborted Socialist Republic of Bavaria and the 1920 Revolution led by Dr. Wolfgang Kapp took place (Bell, 1986). Kapp seized Berlin and the German army refused to attack him because there was a strong belief that Germany had only lost the war due to political betrayal. Kapp's revolution was only ended by a general strike which ground the country to a halt. This, however, did not help the German economy and eventually Germany missed a war payment. The French wished to punish the Germans for this, whereas the British wanted leniency. The French government decided that if the Germans would not pay them, they would simply take the money instead and it was in 1923 that the French occupied the heavily industrialized region of the Ruhr (Bell, 1986). The reason for this was that German reparations could be paid in raw materials, many of which were actually produced there. Another way that German reparations could be paid was in foreign currency, which was only possible through the printing of more paper marks. This created the hyperinflation that the Weimer Republic is famous for. In November 1923 another attempted revolution occurred in Munich, led by Adolf Hitler and undertaken by the SA, the military arm of the National Socialist German Workers Party, better known as the Nazi Party.

This revolution failed when other nationalist politicians refused to help Hitler and the army was called in (Coy, 1970). The leader of the revolution was wounded and imprisoned shortly afterwards, and it was in prison that Hitler wrote his worldwide – known autobiography *Mein Kampf*. This testimony became later on the bedrock of Nazi ideology. All of this would make it seem like the Weimer Republic was about to collapse, yet it managed to survive due to the intervention of two specific individuals: Gustav Stresemann, who helped to repair relations with France, and Charles Dawes, an American who contributed to relieve some of Germany's economic burdens (Askani, 1996). Germany's repayments were lowered, the French agreed to

leave the Ruhr and America agreed to loan Germany money which created a strong economic link between both countries.

The Great Depression struck, tanking the economy of the United States and hence dragging Germany with it. Paul von Hindenburg, president of Germany at the time, failed to get the *Reichstag* to agree on a response and as a result he had to invoke Article 48 of the German Constitution, which allowed the president to pass laws without the approval of the *Reichstag* in times of emergency (Schmädeke & Steinbach, 1986, pp. 598 - 616). The biggest problem of Article 48, however, lied under the fact that there was no definition of an emergency, meaning it was open to abuse. We find ourselves now in 1930 and the German people turned to different political parties to try and fix the problems; some turned to communism while others placed their faith in the Nationalist Socialists (Coy, 1970). The Nazis believe that the German – speaking peoples should be united in a single state and argued that Communists and the Jews were the enemies of the German people and as such had to be removed.

The Nazis were popular because they wished to disregard the Treaty of Versailles which many Germans considered insulting (Askani, 1996). They also wished to limit any foreign involvement in German affairs by limiting the numbers of foreigners in Germany; another reason was people's anger with the continuing economic crises which they were desperate to end. A series of elections led to a massive increase in the number of seats held by the Nazis and in 1932 they were the largest party by far. After continuously coming first, Hitler asked President Hindenburg to be named Chancellor, which he refused several times because they were worried that Hitler would overthrow the government. Eventually, after the Nazis' continuous victories and elections, Hindenburg decided to name him Chancellor in January 1933 (Hürten, 1995). Immediately, Hitler started working to overthrow the government.

The event of a fire at the *Reichstag* by a young Dutch communist was used as a perfect cover by Hitler to paint all communists as the enemies of Germany (Askani, 1996). Under pressure from Hitler, Hindenburg issued the *Reichstag* fire decree and the *Reichstag* passed the enabling act which suspended many civil liberties and made Hitler the de facto dictator of Germany. These were passed mainly because the opposing communist parties were outlawed and

that the vote was being held in a building filled with armed members of the SA. Over the next months, Hitler established the secret police, the well – known GESTAPO in order to strengthen and establish his position (Hürten, 1995). He further outlawed trade unions as they were seen as breeding grounds for communists and in July of that same year, he abolished all other political parties. In 1934 Hitler ordered the SS, another paramilitary group, and the Gestapo to eliminate his enemies, which included the head of the SA, Ernst Röhm, in an event known as the Night of the Long Knives (Hürten, 1995). It was essentially because Hitler felt that the SA was the only force capable to stop him. Shortly after this purge, President Hindenburg died, and Hitler assumed the role of President as well as that of the Chancellor.

It was then when he declared himself the *Führer* of Germany and using Article 48 to create a single – party dictatorship. The lives of Germans changed massively under the new Nazi regime. The media was brought under the control of Joseph Goebbels, the Minister for propaganda and key figure for the further analysis in this project (Hürten, 1995). Heinrich Himmler was placed in command of the Gestapo and the SS who were ordered to kill anyone who disagreed with the Nazi government. Germans, for the most part, accepted having fewer freedoms in return for a higher standard of living and because the Nazis had ended the chaos from the decade before they took power. The Nazi government established the German Labor Front, which was like a trade union except without representation. The Nazis also established the ‘Strength Through Joy’ program which was designed to keep workers happy and it even helped to reduce class barriers by making vacations clubs, cinemas and other recreational activities open to people outside of the upper classes (Coy, 1970). The most popular creation was the people’s car, better known as the *Volkswagen*, which further bridged the class divide since it could be paid in installments. In 1936 Hermann Göring was put in charge of the economy, beginning the four – year plan which was supposed to make Germany entirely self – sufficient within four years. Unemployment virtually disappeared, conscription was instated, and major works were undertaken, most famously the *Autobahn* and the *Berlin Olympic Games* (Bessel, 1987, pp. 97 - 110). The most important part of the four – year plan, however, was that it saw the beginning of a German rearmament which was a violation of the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler’s plan to unify the German people picked up towards the end of the 30s; in 1938 after some double – dealing threats and referendums, German troops marched to Austria and Hitler announced its annexation.

After negotiations with the British and the French, it was agreed that Germany would annex the ethnically German Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia (Askani, 1996). Soon afterwards Germany occupied half of it which was not agreed; the Lithuanians then caved into Hitler's demands for this territory. Meanwhile, the British and the French, afraid of a new major war in Europe, did not intervene to deter Hitler from seizing more and more territory.

An agreement was then made between Germany and the Soviet Union (Molotov – Ribbentrop Pact) to divide Poland and on September the 1st 1939 the beginning of the end took place: the Germans invaded Poland and two weeks later the Soviets would do the same, leading to the beginning of the Second World War (Askani, 1996). France and Britain had an agreement with Poland and declared war on Germany although this last one would quickly overrun France. In 1941 the Germans invaded the Soviet Union, shortly before declaring war in the United States. Initially, the Germans were very successful and by 1943 the *Third Reich's* dimension had expanded tremendously. The allies, particularly the British and the United States began bombing against German cities, most notably Cologne and Hamburg (Hürten, 1995). These attacks were designed to destroy German factories and infrastructure as well as frighten the Germans into submission. Further on, the German economy did not change drastically at the beginning of the war since Germany had already been producing arms for many years. One significant difference between Germany and the allies was that Germany was very reluctant to have women working in the factories, which ultimately lowered the number of available workers and frontline soldiers. In the conquered territories the Nazis implemented a policy of forced labor; in Poland many women were forced to work farmlands to produce food while men worked in factories (Askani, 1996). Many Jewish people, alongside anyone else considered undesirable, were used for slave labor to produce weapons, some of which they sabotaged. Throughout Europe the Jewish populations rounded up and were inhumanely placed into concentration camps. The original purpose of these camps was not extermination but forced labor, yet they all had horrendous mortality rates...

Before and throughout the war, the Nazis had attempted to decide on what they would do with the Jewish population of Europe; at first, the Nazis wished to deport them and in fact some were sent to Palestine. Auschwitz and Treblinka are some of the best – known concentration

camps due to their ridiculously high murder rates, where over half a million people were murdered. Throughout the Holocaust it is believed that roughly five and a half million Jews were killed, alongside roughly the same number of Poles and Soviet prisoners; gypsies, those with mental and physical disabilities as well as homosexuals and colored were also exterminated (Hürten, 1995).

Having failed to conquer the Soviet Union, the tide of the war changed against the Nazis and the Soviets managed to force them all the way back into Germany, liberating many of the concentration camps on the way; at the same time, the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada amongst others, invaded Western Europe and together they managed to push the Nazis back into Germany as well. Most of the German High Command including Hitler committed suicide in April 1945 and the country surrendered in May of that same year, thus ending the *Third Reich* and the Nazi regime (Irving, 1978) . Germany was occupied and the surviving Nazi leaders were put on trial at the famous Nuremberg Trials, where many were sentenced to death. After its surrender, Germany and Berlin were split into occupied zones and both began the process of denazification. The allied occupation zones were soon combined into the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet occupied zones became the German Democratic Republic, known as West and East Germany respectively (Bell, 1986). They would remain divided until 1990 at the end of the Cold War; ultimately the legacy of Nazi Germany is complex: the Nazis, whilst committing unimaginable crimes, managed to reinvigorate Germany and build it into a military powerhouse. The Nazis brought about immense suffering across the European continent and their actions reduced many countries, including Germany itself to ruins. The consequences of Nazism are severe and manifold, which is why we need to further analyze and comprehend the heritage and evidence that has been left behind.

2.2. CINEMA HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.2.1. THE BIRTH OF CINEMA

Since its inception in the late 19th century, cinema has become one of the most popular and inspiring forms of entertainment, art, education and propaganda. The birth of cinema is one of many interconnecting events and inventions around the world, born out of an array of new

technology, revolving around machinery, photography, optical illusion and a human love to be entertained and inspired. Cinema, being a complex sociocultural phenomenon rather than just a simple invention and as its fellows' disciplines within the art family, has a historical background and pathway.

The *camera obscura* also described as a dark room can be considered as one of the prerequisites of cinema. For many years, this phenomenon has been well – known within the specialized industry and it is a device that «consists of a box or a room with a tiny hole in one side. Light from an external scene travels through the pinhole and strikes a surface inside where it is reproduced upside – down but with color and perspective perceived» (Giannetti, 2013). As difficult as it seems to imagine, in the 16th century, audiences sat inside camera obscuras as a way of spectacle.

One of the marvels of cinema is that none of the countries can claim its paternity and it is a worldwide endeavor, encompassing many different people from around the globe. It was in 1824 in England that Peter Mark Roger first came out with an explanation for how moving images create the illusion of motion (Giannetti, 2013). Although later proven to be incorrect, this system is known as the persistence of vision, this, simply defined is when a series of pictures of frames are played or presented at a rate fast enough to trick the human mind into thinking it is viewing a moving image. The effect of the persistence of vision the writer David Parkinson notes, was defined in 1824 by Peter Mark Roger, as the ability of the retina to retain an image if an object from one twentieth to one fiftieth of a second after its removal from the field of vision, however, it has since been shown that the film seems to move because the brain and not the eye is accepting stimuli that it is incapable of perceiving as separate. The brain has a perception threshold below which image is exposed to it will appear as continuous in films speed of 24 frames per second is below that threshold, thus making cinema itself a strange and complex art form, for it is primarily an illusion (Ferro, 1988). It is a mystery as to when it was first noticed that playing images next to each other and viewing them in quick succession created the illusion of a moving image. Motion of images are one part of the founding principles of cinema, but key to its development was the projection of images and shapes the origins of light – projected images date back to the puppets of China, India and Java. It was not until the 17th century that

light – projected imagery would start to become popular in Europe and North America and it was a magic lantern that captivated people’s attention (Ferro, 1988).

The magic lantern was used as a form of entertainment; the magic lantern itself is simply a lantern which its light source usually created by a wick or candle is used to project a single slide or shape onto a wall or flat surface. This magic lantern we come talking about relates directly to the modern – day slide projector and only contributed in part to the development of cinema, albeit an important one. Various enhancements of this technology were developed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, thus building the groundwork of a cinematic film projection. In 1877, photographer Eadweard Muybridge made a breakthrough in the ‘magic lantern’ in order to prove that during the gallop of a horse there was a moment when its four hooves were in the air, and was able to achieve it by photographing the moment with 24 cameras, which he projected in 1879 on a circular disk of glass, making both rider and horse look like they were ‘moving’ (Cook, 1996, págs. 3 - 4). However, it was Étienne-Jules Marey, a French physiologist, who recorded the first moving images with his ‘chronophotographic gun’ to take series of photographs of flying birds in 1882. They were followed by the invention of Thomas Alva Edison's ‘Kinetograph’. the first true motion-picture camera, whose recordings were seen individually in boxes called ‘kinetoscopes’, and then perfected by other projector devices that spread throughout Europe and North America, like the ‘Latham loop’, the ‘Bioskop’ in Germany, the ‘Vitascope’ and the most successful one: the Lumières’ ‘Cinematographe’ (Cook, 1996, pág. 6).

In this early stage of cinema, what began as a simple entertainment through specific scenes without a plot, evolved to storytelling out of the experience of theater, giving rise to narrative cinema. Georges Méliès was the first one to develop this new cinema in France, but it was in the first years of the twentieth century when the future big film-production centers were established in the United States and Europe, led by Hollywood and the French Empire of the Pathé Brothers, after Méliès' decline. Simultaneously, the film industry of other European nations such as Italy and the United Kingdom also woke up in this decade, but the American domination of the international market was clear through the next years. However, this domination did not include Germany which, as a warring party of the First World War,

consumed mostly domestic and Scandinavian cinema. This decade saw the a new usage of cinema for political purposes like Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, a film of high technical value but very controversial because of its defense of the Ku Klux Klan, or *Hearts of the World*, a British propaganda movie that tried to force the United States to get involved in the war against Germany (Cook, 1996, pág. 10).

2.2.2. GERMAN CINEMA IN THE 20's

As discussed above, Germany did not develop a big international cinema industry before and during the Great War like the Americans and its European neighbors did, so there was no foreign influence in the origins of German cinema except for the 'static and solemn' Scandinavian films, as found in movies like *Der Student von Prag*, *Der Golem*, and *Homunculus* (Cook, 1996, pág. 104). Indeed, the Nordic impact was clear in the post-war German movies to the extent that several Scandinavian filmmakers (Sjöström, Stiller, Dreyer...) moved to Germany and started production companies there, but the actual take-off of German domestic production came in 1917 with the creation of the UFA (*Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft*). This was a subsidized film production conglomerate that General Ludendorff ordered to create as a strategy to counteract anti-German propaganda movies «which was to become the greatest and largest single studio in Europe before World War II» (Cook, 1996, pág. 106). First as a distributor for small production companies in the 20's and later as a producer by itself, the UFA lead the way of the so-called Golden Age of German Cinema.

This expansion of German Cinema can be explained by the abolition of censorship during the first phase of the young Weimar Republic because it allowed the development of all kind of intellectual trends that would end up in the screen. Pioneers of cinema emerged from the miscellaneous radicalism that was buried when in war and brought out classic films that have endured to this day. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* in 1920, which is the story of a hypnotist who uses a sleepwalker to commit murders, can be set out was the starting point of this new era of German filmmakers in general, and of Expressionism in particular. Even though other trends were also well-known all over the world, like the historical realism led by Ernst Lubitsch, the Expressionist movement was to become the symbol of the decade. The same way futurists in

Italy or surrealists in France (like Buñuel and his *Un Chien Andalou*), Germany exploited its homegrown style by hands of Fritz Lang, F. W. Murnau, Robert Wiene, Lupu Pick, Paul Leni, G. W. Pabst and others, leaving in their wake such titles as *Siegfried* (1923), *Metropolis* (1926), *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922), *Sylvester* (1923); *Der letzte Mann* (1924), *Tartuffe* (1925), *Faust* (1926)... while the UFA was expanding immeasurably (Ibid, p. 110-121).

At the end of this decade German cinema experienced a decline under pressure from Hollywood and the recent penetration of its movies in the country that led many of the big stars of the screen (and behind it) to leave and settle in the United States. During this period «Paramount and MGM offered to subsidize UFA's huge debt to the Deutsche Bank by lending it four million dollars at 7.5 percent interest» (Ibid, p. 122), so they managed to control economically the film machinery in the much-weakened post-war German economy. The UFA would be chaired by Dr. Alfred Hugenberg, a Nazi sympathizer and prominent politician, which would help to establish the institutional propaganda by the upcoming regime. That convulsive scenario of economic and political crisis, post-Expressionism, was the framework in which Leni Riefenstahl, the leading role of our research work, would develop her career.

2.3. THEORY OF COMMUNICATION AND MASS MEDIA

2.3.1. INTRODUCTION

Through the whole of media, communication and hence, technological advancements, we can clearly recognize a shift and radical evolution in methods and techniques. The very essence and common ground, however, has been long present and its ‘ancient’ procedures still are perceptible now. The presence and intervention of media in our lives has become increasingly relevant, we could even argue that today, one would be incapable of conceiving a life without media and their immediate link to electronical devices. It is not false to state, however, that the role of media has, to some extent, gone too far. As we know it today, media are the capacity of mass communication through a variety of elements, such as the radio, television, the internet, newspapers etc. this concept of a far – reaching phenomenon has not always existed and traces its origins back to the end of the 19th century and played a significant role at the beginning of the 20th century (Baran & Davis, 2015).

Communication and the art of communicating and expressing ourselves, nonetheless, a variety of elements are crucial components for humans, their lives and overall development, reason for which it is one of the oldest symbols that characterizes human beings. Our ability to communicate, the use of language and words, signs and symbols has been on a constant transformation and growth process. Such has been the course of evolution, that experts such as the sociologist James Carey, philosopher and sociologist Herbert Marcuse, Ferdinand Tönnies, Stanley J. Baran and Dennis Davis, together with many more, have for long been debating about its origins and eventual radicalization, what we denominate today as propaganda.

The very essence of mass communication, which has later on led to propaganda, is manipulation; the art of shaping and reshaping our perception of society and the world, in such a way that we will not even be aware of this manipulation process; several elements play a distinctive role when it comes to media and mass communication, since one of the main actors are the public, the masses and the population of a country. In their book *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment and Future*, the authors describe propaganda as follows: «no – holds – barred use of communication to propagate specific beliefs and expectations». In the subsequent sections we will contemplate the different propaganda theories, with a special focus on the early – midst 20th century, and akin to that, the arousing concerns, debates and assumptions that developed from it. Political propaganda as such did not exist as a concept, but rather the idea of mass communication theory and mass society theory. In both, media became the main focus and actor, since its content had a far – reaching effect and influence, together with a mind – blowing ability of messages ‘to persuade and convert thousands or even millions of individuals to extreme viewpoints and engage in seemingly irrational actions’ (Baran & Davis, 2015).

To better trail and understand the role of propaganda during the epoque of Nazi Germany, we must return to the basics and origins of communication, the different theories and principles, as well as the critics and concerns that already started in the 19th century.

2.3.2. MASS SOCIETY CRITICS – AN ONGOING DEBATE

The very foundation and establishment of the political system of the United States of America felt threatened by the rise of propaganda. This sudden threat towards the American magnate meant a general menace towards all democratic systems at an international level. The struggle, nonetheless, led to a double -edged dilemma, since the prohibition of propaganda itself would oppose the very instinct and nature of a democratic regime: freedom. The dilemma was gigantic, since both elements, propaganda itself and the prohibition of it, would lead to the destruction of democracy. «Strict censorship might undermine democracy just as corrosively as propaganda» (Baran & Davis, 2015).

Throughout the struggle, a new and more positive term was coined, based on the principles of serving as a tool to build better ideals so that the overall social order turned out to be as perfect as possible. This new idea is to be named as white propaganda, the international suppression of potentially harmful information and ideas, combined with deliberate promotion of positive information or ideas to distract attention from problematic events (Baran & Davis, 2015). The main idea concerning this new term was to combat ‘bad propaganda’ and represent the positions and stances of the elite, who were considered to be more literate and who knew what was best. Nonetheless, the rise of propaganda took place during a very problematic period of time; the 20th century was riddled with disastrous and yet some marvelous events which greatly shaped the evolution of propaganda and its impact on the people. Furthermore, the appearance of new technologies and the arrival of electricity to the rural areas «opened the way for the spread of thousands of electrical appliances» (Baran & Davis, 2015). It seems no crazy allegation to state that the media itself was one of the most affected areas with the improvement of technology due to the great need for fast and efficient distribution of information within an industrial order. This rapid adaption period could easily be compared to the situation that has taken place now in the 21st century, as Baran and Davis state ‘consider the widespread use of the Internet and smartphones has forced alterations in the way we do many routine and important things’. There is no denial in stating that our society has been greatly affected, both in good and bad ways, with the impact of new technologies. Some argue we have even turned into slaves of these new technological devices, the same way the German population once were slaves of the

propaganda portrayed by the Nazi regime. Today, technology has also been described as a threat for many job opportunities and for the development of humans, their behavior and thinking process, as well as creativity and capacity to think. Back in the late 19th century ‘social critics even accused media of profoundly altering families – the most basic social institution’ (Baran & Davis, 2015). We could ask ourselves at this point, is technology and, to some extent, media, as threatening as it once was for our social institutions?

But let us move to the more theoretical part, the different theories and assumptions concerning the role and effects of media on society. The wholesome of mass society theory and the branches that derive from this result from a variety of theorists, concerns about elements such as the radio, television, movies and all sorts of communication methods (today we would add social media and its massive influence on the people at all levels).

The main argument concerning mass society theory deals with the belief that it emerged as a response of social elites to modernization and their struggle to deal with the rapid – changing situation (Baran & Davis, 2015). Modern society was a fraud, it was a threat and its people were full of sins and deeply vulgar, according to the view of the elites. Their fear, nevertheless, was the capacity of the average population to express themselves; as Beniger puts it, ‘ always the opinion of relatively small publics have been a prime force in political life, but now, for the first time in history, we are confronted nearly everywhere by *mass* opinion as the final determinant of political, and economic action’. In the eyes of the elite, they were the only ones with sufficient knowledge and power to guide the nation, their words and beliefs were the valid ones and the rise of mass communication was a radical game changer. It fears the emergence of a new type of social order – a mass society – that would fundamentally and tragically transform the social world (Baran & Davis, 2015). Does this statement relate to our current situation? The following assumptions about the role of media, individuals and the nature of social change trace back to the origins of communication, however, they are easily adaptable to the modern times. Davis and Baran explain it beautifully in their book:

1. The media are a powerful force within society that can subvert essential norms and values and thus undermine the social order. To deal with this threat **media must be brought under elite control.**
2. Media are able to **directly influence the minds of average people**, transforming their views of the social world.
3. Once people's thinking is transformed by media, all sorts of **bad long – term consequences** are likely to result – not only bringing ruin to individual lives but also creating social problems on a vast scale.
4. **Average people are vulnerable to media** because in mass society they are cut off and isolated from traditional social institutions that previously protected them from manipulation.
5. The social chaos initiated by media will likely be resolved by **establishment of a totalitarian social order.**
6. Mass media inevitably debase higher forms of culture, bringing about a **general decline in civilization** (Baran & Davis, 2015, pp. 35 - 38).

Taking a closer look to the first assumption, due to the tremendous power of the media and its sphere of influence regarding the people, we can directly link it to the outcome of Hitler's rise to power in Germany and the transcendental impact it had later on in Europe. His Nazi party quickly turned radio into an effective propaganda tool that helped consolidate his power (Baran & Davis, 2015). This leads us to the second assumption and its evident relation to the Nazis, the 'power to reach out and directly influence the minds of average people so that their thinking is transformed' (Davis, 1976). One of the biggest threats related to media is its lack of need to involve all the aspects of a person's life, since it can indirectly reach all of them through the direct – effect assumption, which states that the media can produce all sorts of effects in and of. As the sociologist James Carey explained it: «the media collectively, but in particular the newer, illiterate media of radio and film, possessed extraordinary power to shape the beliefs and conduct of ordinary men and women» (Carey, 1997, p. 15).

Moving on to the third assumption and its analysis, media is easy to blame on the vast majority of social problems that societies have faced and still face today. [...] virtually every

major social problem we have confronted has been linked in some way to media – from prostitution and delinquency to urban violence and drug usage [...] (Davis, 1976). It is especially interesting to note that what philosopher, sociologist and politician Marcuse defines as ‘bringing ruin to individual lives but also creating social problems on a vast scale’ referring to the impact of media, which is still recognizable today with social media, especially Instagram. Through the creation and portrayal of a fictive reality, we believe things and lifestyles that are not attainable. This leads to deep frustration, leading to this ruin mentioned by Marcuse.

As wrongful as it seems to deliberately categorize the nation as ‘average people’, it has been proven that the vast majority of a population is rather influenceable due to their degree of illiteracy. What Kreiling argues, however, is the role of institutions when it comes to the populace, the protection they offer because they take into consideration the masses and not only the elite. More conservative visions, which trace back to the medieval times, prioritize and dignify the image of traditional orders opposing the ‘severe limitations of traditional social orders’ (Baran & Davis, 2015). In this sense, media provides the necessary guidance that is believed to be needed by the ‘average people’, as the authors state it: [...] when people are stripped of the protective cocoon provided by a traditional community, they necessarily turn to media for guidance and reassurance [...]. To what extent, however, do we really need guidance? In this sense, media turns out to be a very trusted source of information when it comes to politics and economics, education, religion and, of course, entertainment.

In order to counteract against media and its chaotic social order, there is a need for the ‘establishment of a totalitarian social order’ (Davis, 1976). The solution against radicalism was believed to be solved with more radicalism in the form of a totalitarian regime. ‘Fascism in Germany and Communism in Russia provided examples of what could be accomplished by totalitarian rule. The People could be led to rise from the pit of a lost war and economic depression to forge a seemingly prosperous and highly productive social order (Baran & Davis, 2015). These two realms of study and governing systems were somehow the ‘trend’ in the mid-20th century and their leaders firmly believed that the masses had to be guided and led by a totalitarian figure because themselves alone were ‘too apathetic and ignorant’ to do so. In this context, media was considered to be the most effective and powerful tool; its means of

expression offered totalitarian leaders' endless options to reach out to the masses, such as radio and newspapers, but especially movies and hence, cinema. The connotations desired by the leader were obtained through movies, since they 'were able to communicate powerful images' which greatly shaped the views and perceptions of society (Baran & Davis, 2015). We could technically refer to it as a process of brainwashing or indoctrination that took place little by little, until there was no way back. It is crucial to note that the living standards and overall situation during the rule of the Nazis or Communists, little hope was little and 'people had strong reasons for *wanting* to believe the promises about jobs and personal security made by the extremists'. Moreover, media that acted against the judgement and view of the Nazis, for instance, were shut down, strictly banned and the repercussions for such inappropriate actions were severely punished.

The sixth and last assumption relates to the general belief that mass culture derives in the deterioration and eventual failure of civilization. This thought was influenced by the traditional ways and line of argumentation following the decades of the Enlightenment, in which the elites were those who knew about the world and offered new views, analysis and posed new question and problems to the world, questioning almost everything. This real and philosophical movement highlighted and importance of 'the Enlightened', who were considered to be the leaders and savors of the populace, answering to rather complicated and controversial inquiries. Their knowledge was believed to be reason enough to take the lead and in their eyes, they were «responsible for nurturing and promulgating a higher form of culture, high culture, not only within their own societies but also around the world» (Davis, 1976).

It has been shown that the general assumptions about media and its impact on society greatly suits the actions of the Nazi regime and furthermore, that they are easily applicable to our society, our social problems and current situation. The main difference, nonetheless, is that totalitarianism has been abolished and, in general terms, switched to a democratic system. The problem now is that other challenges have to be faced, and although totalitarianism has been outweighed, disappointment has taken the lead amongst our populations and citizens. This last statement in fact leads us to the existence and relevance of two major concepts that played a key role not only during the 19th century, but also during the Nazi regime in Germany. *Gemeinschaft*

and *Gesellschaft* are two German terms that could, to some extent, be considered as very similar terms, yet they have different connotations and hence, different meanings. According to Ferdinand Tönnies, a German sociologist, *Gemeinschaft* is to be understood as the traditional folk cultures, whereas *Gesellschaft* is the modern industrial society (Tönnies, 1887). We could say that within a *Gemeinschaft*, there are no rules or norms strictly written, people were governed by personal relationships, a deep feeling of mutual interdependence and respect that covered all aspects of life, permitting a peaceful cohabitation. On the other hand, we find the term *Gesellschaft*, and, in this case, we already find some established norms and other ‘formal regulations’. People in this scenario rely more on rational choices than in tradition, contrary to those within a *Gemeinschaft* (Tönnies, 1887). If we had to find a suitable translation, we would denominate *Gemeinschaft* as community and *Gesellschaft* as society. Controversies increased with the influence of media, since it was believed to wrongfully influence, in the sense that it reassured the establishment of weak social institutions, which fall under the category of *Gesellschaft*, instead of aiming at the survival of folk communities, their traditions and values.

2.3.3. MASS SOCIETY THEORY IN MODERN TIMES AND THE ORIGINS OF PROPAGANDA

The basic assumption and idea about mass society is its tremendous influence due to the ever – growing ‘uninterested and uninvolved’ citizens. As Davis and Stanley mention in their book, mass society has some strengths left, yet many more weaknesses. We must not forget, however, that media, if used properly, is an incredible tool that should not be abused or corrupted. Here is where one of the main problems resides, the advantageous use of media on behalf of the elites, their interests and ideas. To some extent, we can still perceive this uneven distribution and manipulation of the media today; one must only focus on the different TV channels that are available and how they manage to manipulate the messages of, for example, political leaders, so that ‘the average people’ believe what is in the best interest of that channel and its political tendency.

Furthermore, what remains from former mass society are three main elements: «high culture proponents, opponents of media concentration, and in social science circle where researchers see the operation of a powerful mass media in conjunction with an increasingly

uninterested and uninvolved citizenry» (Baran & Davis, 2015). These concepts and allegations are still visible in our society, in the sense that, although we have endless information available, somehow, we still manage to fail to act as committed and interested citizens. Globalization has changed the game and the availability of options now is just unbearable to some extent. Likewise, the conception of 'high culture' could still be applied today, if we take a closer look at social media, which represents the trend nowadays, also differentiates a higher culture. As the British intellectual and philosopher Roger Scruton puts it, «[...] a process that is eating away the very heart of social life, [...] by putting everything – virtue included – on sale» (Scruton, 1998, p. 55). This idea of selling everything, the lack of privacy and the constant need to share and post everything on social media is leading to a situation of no return. Moral values and principles have lost all importance and significance in our society, a society where the approval of others weighs more than anything else.

As it has been previously mentioned, the second element that needs to be highlighted in terms of mass society theory is the idea of concentration. The term here does not refer to the traditional meaning of concentration (as in the human mind and capacity to focus), but rather the accumulation of power. In his work *Media Monopoly*, Ben Bagdikian defines concentration as «the ownership of different and numerous media companies concentrated in fewer and fewer hands». Today, once again, we can compare this thought to our times; television and the media in general are controlled and deeply biased, we read those news and information that responds to our demands and beliefs, we look that information up that is of our interest, we follow those we believe in etc. all of these aspects formerly mentioned have contributed to the creation and beginning of propaganda and propaganda theory.

As it happens to many concepts when they first have to be defined and coined within society, it is a complex process. Propaganda is no exception to this, and only gradually did it develop into a 'communication strategy'. Through the years, many theorists and experts struggled to define this new phenomenon, yet some managed to provide an accurate image of it. The main scheme is that it involves the diffusion of certain beliefs and assumptions through the means of communication.

Nonetheless, the core aspect within propaganda is the extreme effect it has on the people (Pratkins & Aronson, 1992). The process itself is very twisted, since propagandists' ultimate goal is to change the people's reality and perception so that they end up truly accepting that 'established reality' as their own. Nazis were absolute geniuses in this sense. The head of film propaganda during the Nazi regime, Fritz Hippler, stated that key to effective propaganda were two elements: firstly, the simplification of the issue that was going to be dealt and secondly, the technique of repeating that simplification over and over again until it sticks to the people to the core (Ibid). Propaganda «persuades people without seeming to do so; features the massive orchestration of communication and emphasizes tricky language designed to discourage reflective thought. The propagandist believes that the end justifies the means» (Sproule, 1994, pp. 3 - 5). The extremely important and interesting aspect when it comes to propaganda and the conviction on propagandists' side is that they saw themselves as a necessary tool in order to show the people the right way, the way that showed truth.

Nonetheless, propagandists also had to face challenges and those opinions that differed from theirs. Concepts such as 'disinformation' started to come into the picture, where propagandists spread false information related to the opposition in order to discredit it (Baran & Davis, 2015). In addition to the creation of 'disinformation', during the time of the Nazis, another concept came to live which was 'black propaganda' and did not mean anything else than the systematic 'transmission of lies'. To control people's minds without borders and maintain power, Nazis used this propagandistic method quite frequently. Through this technique they ensured to be in constant control and did not risk the change to any sort of disorder or disturbance within the Reich. The concept of totalitarianism and the according propaganda to that way of thought was widely spread through Nazi Germany; hence mass communication was indeed very important since it had the effectiveness needed and furthermore was regarded as 'an effective mechanism for controlling large populations' (Baran & Davis, 2015). It is important to mention at this point what the authors describe in the second chapter of their book as «the propagandists' argument», which stated the following: 'if only people were more rational or intelligent, we could just sit down and explain things to them, person to person. But most aren't – especially those who need the most help. Most people are children when it comes to important affairs like politics. How can we expect them to listen to reason? It's just not possible'. In a

manner, we see that propagandists vigorously tried to convince themselves of the rightness and ethics of their actions, which itself hints to the idea that they were aware of the brutality and impureness of their actions.

To conclude this section related to communication and communication theory and in order to better comprehend and analyze Nazi propaganda, we will study the propaganda theories from the hand of three of the most important and provocative thinkers of that time, namely, Harold Lasswell, Walter Lippmann and John Dewey. All three of them, especially Lasswell and Lippmann, agree on the concept of a ‘scientific technocracy’, meaning that an educated social science – based elite charged with protecting vulnerable average people from harmful propaganda’ (Lasswell, 1927).

Harold Lasswell’s perspective is quite pessimistic; he takes off from the psychological point of view and the role that media plays on people’s lives when they are in a critical personal situation. One will turn to propaganda to find reassurance and hence, according to Lasswell, propaganda is not so much the meaning of specific messages, but rather people’s mindset and condition that will detonate the desired effect. As Lasswell puts it, ‘when average people are confronted daily by powerful threats to their personal lives, they turn to propaganda for reassurance and a way to overcome the threat’. (Lasswell, 1927). Once again, the best example of this theory is Germany under Hitler’s mandate, where an entire nation became psychologically unstable and therefore exposed and weak towards manipulation. The authorities, in this case Hitler and the master of propaganda, Goebbels, were perfectly aware of this unsafe condition that the vast majority lived in and took great advantage of it. Before the Great Depression and the arrival to power of Hitler in Germany, Lasswell had already published an article in 1927 describing the task of a good propagandist:

«[...] the propagandists may say to be concerned with the multiplication of those stimuli which are best calculated to evoke the desired responses and with the nullification of those stimuli which are likely to instigate the undesired responses. [...] multiply all the suggestions favorable [...] restrict all suggestions which are unfavorable».

What is especially interesting about Lasswell's work is his perception towards propaganda, not as a mere tool to lie to people, but rather a process in which people need a period of acceptance to get used to a sudden shift in actions and ideas. This process of acceptance could be defined as a 'cultivation' process, through which the average people, slowly, start realizing the differences. Crucial during this period is the introduction of certain symbols to the people. Lasswell argued that such 'master symbols', as he denominated them, were strongly linked to certain emotions that had the tremendous power of stimulating the people (Lasswell, 1927). To conclude on this author's behalf and, 'although he respected the cunning way that the Nazis used propaganda, he was not convinced that they really understood what they were doing' (Baran & Davis, 2015), reason for which, in his texts and ideas, he believed that a scientific technocracy was best suited for the delivery of propaganda and information. This elite group would in fact, favor the good rather than the evil promulgation of news and was, in Lasswell's eyes, the only hope and solution available.

Harold Lasswell's theory and opinion about a leading elite group was shared and commonly preferred throughout the 1930s. His texts and books brought curiosity into one of the most relevant and acclaimed columnists of the *New York Times*, Walter Lippmann. This author's differentiating aspect was the division between «the world outside and the pictures in our heads» (Lippmann, 1922). Moreover, Lippmann ought to be necessary a drastic change within the political systems, since the existing one was out of reach from the vast majority, the average people. The contribution of Lippmann was the proposal of the creation of an 'intelligence bureau', where specialists and only the elite (similar to Lasswell's view) would be able to access and it would be a group 'who could be trusted to use scientific methods to sort fact from fiction and make good decisions about who should receive various messages' (Baran & Davis, 2015).

Philosopher and propaganda critic, John Dewey was one of the first ones to object Lippmann's view. His idea was less twisted and complex than the establishment of an elite that would guide everything; he understood education as the principal tool for each and every person to be able to defend themselves from bad thoughts and corrosive propaganda. A good education was a simple, yet superb tool to protect oneself from harmful propaganda. For Dewey, media had

only one job: «to interest the public in the public interest» (Baran & Davis, 2015). Although his principles and thoughts had a valid starting point, he was considerably criticized due to his lack of action. He wanted to reform the educational system, howbeit little progress and change was made; furthermore, Dewey demanded journalists to stimulate its public on topics such as world affairs and politics, which he believed would be enriching for the population, instead of trying to brainwash them with useless information and drama. Communication for Dewey had a more profound meaning than for many other critics, since he believed that communities made use of communication «to create and maintain the culture that bonds and sustains them. When media assume the role of external agents and work to manipulate the pictures in people's heads, they lose their power to serve as credible facilitators [...] the public forum itself is likely to be destroyed» (Baran & Davis, 2015, p. 52).

To conclude, it would not be illegitimate to state that propaganda is still alive today. We do not have to imagine propaganda as the way it was in Nazi Germany, with a new banner and multiple other symbols, hatred speech and the overall control of people's lives; but we can imagine today's political discourse and advertising methods which, politicians, businesses and media play a key role in this sense, as they are able to shape people's notions of reality and the scope of importance by showing only what they want to show. This new conceptualization of propaganda is what we are going to discuss in the subsequent sections.

3. OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

As it has been mentioned at the very beginning of this work, Nazism could be classified under one of the most horrendous events of human history and remembrance. There is no denying in Hitler's charisma, power of speech and capacity of influence amongst the masses, yet it was not all by himself, as many wrongfully tend to believe. This, amongst other reasons that will subsequently be explained, pushed me to question myself the actual power of communication and disinformation. Symbolism played a crucial role concerning this aspect, reason for which the chosen movies will be analyzed and linked to the Nazis' conquest over the German population, their minds and actions. This final thesis, therefore, wants to set the

framework of the wrongful usage of propaganda throughout the Nazi regime in relation to the growing magnitude of the cinema and the visual arts.

Triumph of the Will and *Olympia* are two of the greatest works elaborated from a cinematic and propagandistic point of view, its manipulation techniques are barbaric and this work aspires to its examination in order to draw conclusions about the major role that the media and propaganda had during the Nazi regime for the ruling establishment of the Third Reich. What symbolism is used in Leni's movies and is there a certain technique? What is the underlying meaning of these symbols? To what extent was the power of the Nazis related to their capability of using propaganda and its diffusion amongst the masses? Shall we be of any concern, regarding the situation with the media at our current time? As it may already have been perceivable after the exhibit and explanation of the theoretical framework, the similarities and dangerously close elements between the propaganda used in the late 20th century and how social media operates today are quite striking. One of the main goals of this final thesis is to raise awareness regarding the gravity of this situation.

Hence, after explaining the methodology and process followed throughout this thesis, this study will continue with the analysis of Leni Riefenstahl's productions and its management of the symbols and latent messages that severely influenced the German nation and are a great example of the evil usage of propaganda.

4. METHODOLOGY

This final thesis has been elaborated due to the magnitude and poignant influence of the media in recent years. Due to the fact that the phenomenon of the media has not been a 'new creation' but has rather been present in human life for decades, this study traces back to its origins and greater impact during the Nazi epoque through the works of Leni Riefenstahl. It is for this purpose that this study has focused on the theories of communication and mass media, key aspects in order to investigate the media's power.

The starting point of this final thesis and elaboration of the theoretical framework was the study of a variety of documents and sources which explained the origins of communication theories and studies, which later derived into the main topic of this study: propaganda. Through the role of cinema as a forged instrument of political control and with the cinematic knowledge of Leni Riefenstahl, Nazi symbolism and its meaning were analyzed in depth, together with the books and analytical work of Rosa Sala Rose and her *Diccionario crítico de mitos y símbolos del nazismo*¹. This part was conducted after watching Leni's works *Olympia* and *Triumph of the Will* (*Triumph des Willens*²) and investigating the elements of propaganda and symbolism that appeared constantly. The visual effects of these two movies greatly contributed to the further study and understanding of propaganda itself and confirmed the role and significance of propaganda previously studied through written sources.

It is from the role of propaganda and the outcome of the Second World War that the state of the art could be elaborated, focusing on the statements and theories of the Frankfurt School and some of its significant figures, such as Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno and Curnalia who further examined the role of propaganda and the media, narrowing the space closer to our present time and situation.

5. ANALYSIS

5.1. TRIUMPH OF THE WILL

In the following part, we will investigate Nazi symbolism at the hand of *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia*, along with some of the proposals and studies of Rosa Sala Rose and her dictionary of Nazi symbolism. The study will commence with *Triumph of the Will*, introducing the movie individually and establishing a brief framework so that later on, the analysis of the symbology can be conducted respectively. It is worth mentioning before starting the in depth analysis of this documentary that the precedent movie to *Triumph of the Will*, namely *The*

¹ Author's note: critical dictionary about Nazi myths and symbolism.

² Original title of the movie in German.

Victory of Faith (Sieg des Glaubens³), Leni's first attempt to film Nazi propaganda, greatly influenced and helped to the production of the latter (Court, 2020).

How powerful can the movies really be? If we consider the impact that movies have in our present society and the devastating damage they can cause in people's minds, it seems not inappropriate to suggest that Leni's movies severely affected the German population. Brainwashing is a term commonly used in our environment, nonetheless this technique has been used for several decades already, without people even noticing, as the term properly indicates. This is exactly what was happening to the vast majority of the population during the Second World War in Germany.

Under Hitler's orders and desire, the 1934 Nuremberg Rally, that took place in September was to be filmed by Leni, where followers from all over the Third Reich gathered to honor the perished Nazis and, most importantly, to see the Führer; hence, the movie *Triumph of the Will* recorded the marches of the Nuremberg Rally and was firstly screened in 1936 after which the movie director won not only a Cultural Achievement Award but also a gold medal in 1937 at the World Exhibition in Paris (The History Place, 2001). Nonetheless, it is of paramount importance to remember that *Triumph of the Will* «was a propagandist, ideological event promoting the ideals of the National Socialist German Worker's Party (NSDAP). Regardless of the talent of the director [...] it would still transcend into propaganda because of the key nature of the event» (Court, 2020). As movie criticist Gary Jason puts it, «the unique power of cinema is that it presents us with images and sounds [...], it works on the preliterate observational level. We see and hear things, including the facial and body language of the characters», which is exactly the key advantage that Riefenstahl used during her filming. Most of the scenes, if not all of them, represent Hitler's magnitude and the unconditional adoration on behalf of the public; additionally, and as Court highlights, «virtually no frame is without Nazi insignia» throughout the whole movie (Court, 2020).

One of the most relevant and unique facets, nonetheless, is the sound. If we must consider that other movies with a similar goal, yet filmed in 1927 and 1929 were mute, the difference in

³ Original title of the movie in German.

terms of power and influential strength, together with the opportunity to film Hitler's charisma and talent in public speaking are just game changers (Trimborn, 2018). Besides the uncommon feature of sound, Leni was determined to create such an outstanding and innovative work that further creative elements were introduced, such as the 'moving' camera; this means nothing else but to film from different perspectives and angles, instead of just from one point of view, which was the technique that had been used so far (Riefenstahl, 1934, 22:15 – 25:00), as Jürgen Trimborn explains it in German: «... *die neuartigen, bewegten Fahraufnahmen, während zuvor die Kamera das Geschehen stets nur von einem einzigen Standort aus aufgenommen hatte*⁴». This new technique was tremendously loved by the public because it offered them the opportunity to 'experience' the ongoing event even if they were not physically present, the variety of angles and distances contributed to the overall production of the film. Moreover, and as it is recognizable throughout the documentary, due to the proximity between the Führer and Leni, together with his approval for her to move freely around him, *Triumph of the Will* presents one of the most astonishing components of all: a close – up of the Führer himself, a way, in which no one had ever filmed him before (Trimborn, 2018), «... *Hitler aus nächster Nähe filmen zu dürfen; sie konnte dadurch die ersten Großaufnahmen des Diktators auf die Kinoleinwände bringen und Hitler so zeigen, wie ihn vorher noch niemand gesehen hatte*⁵». In addition to this already meaningful characteristic, she was able to film and record the Führer in more 'intimate' situations, such as side conversations with members from the political party or even the own Führer contemplating the parades, which contributed to a more close feeling on behalf of the public towards their leader. In this sense, she «pushed the boundaries of established documentary technique [...], tracking movements, extreme wide and low angles, superimposes, quick cuts; long lenses; and the revolutionary juxtaposition of music and cinematography» (Court, 2020, p. 3).

The first and opening image breaks through the viewer with Hitler's airplane descending from the sky and flying over streets fully crowded with people waiting for the Führer's arrival (Jason G. J., 2006). Followed by this glorious outset, we are led through the streets of

⁴ Translator's Note: «... the novel, moving driving shots, whereas previously, the camera only showed the events from a single location».

⁵ Translator's Note: «... to film Hitler at close range, which enabled her to bring the first close – up of the Dictator to the cinema screens and to show Hitler in a way that no one had ever seen him before».

Nuremberg, Hitler in his majestic procession of vehicles, saluting the crowd that is cheering and stretching their arms out to their beloved leader (Riefensthal, 1934). An unimaginable number of relevant lines and statements are made throughout the documentary, yet probably the most dominant and compelling one is the one ‘One People, One Führer, One Reich, One Germany’. This scene with Hitler, surrounded by the workers, the Nazi flag and the Eagle shows the greatness of the nation and they all effectively illustrate Nazi ideology (Court, p.5). together with the underlying image, as Court recalls in his deep film analysis, «the shadow of the low – flying plane overlooks the procession and closely resembles that of an eagle – a symbol of the Third Reich» (Ibid). With the appearance of this symbol, we will proceed to explain its origins and meaning through book *Diccionario crítico de mitos y símbolos del nazismo*⁶.

The eagle (in German: Adler) as such, without any connotation or hidden meaning, has been the symbol of sovereign power *par excellence*. Its symbols are the claws and the bill, which represent the legitimate weapons of the State for protection (Rose, 2003, p. 39). As such, the tradition and image of the eagle started its journey through the Roman Empire all the way to the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, reason for which the Third Reich also adopted the *Adler* as their representing symbol and animal (Ibid); apart from its rather traditional meaning, the eagle had nevertheless a second reading, linked to the religious and mythological explanation of the fowl. Due to its physical capacity to fly at a great height, it has been related to the spiritual domain; equally important and linked to the Nazi mentality, because the eagle is a daytime bird, it was associated to the sun, the light and fire (Ibid). this capacity to fly and have an overall view from above denoted power and control, which were aptitudes the Führer enjoyed.

Later on, in 1923, the Führer himself designed a drawing of the Nazi eagle, this version, however, had a few changes: the animal was holding a swastika surrounded by a crown of leaves between its crawls; it clearly represented the bond between the *Reich* and the Nazi Party (Rose, 2003, pp. 39 - 40). Interestingly enough, when he decided to invade Poland, he believed it would be best suited if a few changes were made to the object between the crawls of the predatory; instead of holding a swastika, the eagle was now holding an earth globe, as a sign of Germany’s will to conquer the world (Ibid, p.45). Moreover, the eagle is compared with the German aircraft

⁶ Note of the author, translated: Critical dictionary of myths and Nazi symbols.

and airmen, aiming to inspire the younger ones in order to affiliate to the Nazi aircraft (Ibid, p. 44). All in all, it seems safe to suggest that the *Adler* represented a fundamental symbol of the Nazi regime, mentality and feeling, serving also as propagandistic and decorative element in almost every Nazi building (Ibid).

Already into the fifth minute of the documentary, we recognize the acclaimed salute from Hitler and how the masses reply to this with eagerness (Riefenstahl, 1934, 5:00 – 5:10). It is surprising that the film does not include any sort of voice cover and fully relies on the noise and screaming of the crowds along with the energetic music. The following minutes, filled with greetings from both sides are striking due to the magnitude and underlying power of the *Hitler – Gruss*⁷, also known as the *Heil – Gruss*. Considering the reappearing image of the Nazi salute, we will continue to examine its historical background and meaning, according to Rose Sala Rose, as it has been done with the Eagle previously.

Originally, the movement of putting the right arm up, facing the palm down, dates back to the Roman Empire; believed to have been used to salute the Cesar and show respect (Rose, 2003, p. 322). This is how the symbol prevailed throughout Europe until the German youth made it theirs by including it as a normal greeting instead of making use of the more *bourgeois* manner. It took not long until Hitler himself also introduced this movement into the military, incorporating a very significant and determining aspect; when directed to him personally, it had to be accompanied by his name: ‘*Heil, Hitler!*’ or ‘*Heil, mein Führer!*’ (Ibid). It is important to note, nonetheless, that a proper law was never enacted, yet the slightest act of refusal to elevating one’s arm or an ‘unconvinced greeting’ was regarded as an act of revelry which had to be severely punished and was nothing but betrayal to the party (Ibid, p. 323). Furthermore, the Nazi greeting ‘*Heil Hitler*’ could and was indeed also used as an external provocation and defiance act, as General von Ribbentrop did in London when saluting the Queen of England at her crowning ceremony (Ibid, p. 325). Additionally, the word ‘*heil*’ had another meaning, related to the Christian and religious aspect. In German, *heil* also means redemption, deriving in *heilig*, ‘holly’; and *Heiland*: ‘Messiah’. In this sense, Hitler was also linked to the belief that he was the

⁷ Note of the author, translated: Hitler greeting and, secondly, the Heil greeting.

⁸ Note of the author, translated: ‘Heil, my Führer!’, making reference to Hitler as the Leader.

savor and evoked the association between Hitler and Jesus Christ, leading to the Christian interpretation of Jesus as the beginning and the ending; the Alfa and Omega (Ibid, p. 326).

Another striking scene is to be found in minute 14 of the movie, where the massive Hitler Youth (Die Hitler Jugend)⁹ camp is shown, their daily lives and, most importantly, how happy and joyful they all are. The young men that are filmed have been carefully selected, tall and handsome that are always smiling, enjoying their time at the camp and evoke a very strong community feeling (Jason G. J., 2006). This community feeling had to be passed on to the populace, so that they realized the importance of strong unity and the privilege of working as a whole towards a better Germany. Interestingly enough, although at the beginning a deemphasized Germany is mentioned, one that has been suffering for 20 years, the scene in the Youth camps however, shows food in abundance, there is nothing lacking in the camp, Leni makes great cinematographic footage of this, representing the honor of serving Germany and the reward the men got as a response for their service and duties for the motherland. Furthermore, and related to this scene, *Triumph of the Will* also focuses on the labor force, the scene with the workers holding their shovels instead of guns is deeply wistful, followed by the speech on behalf of the Führer in order to instigate the inner feeling and strength of these workers, reminding them of their uniqueness and essentiality within the German nation (Court, 2020, p. 5). In order to enhance the drama of this scene, combined with the profound words of Hitler's speech, Riefenstahl decided to merge the back-sound music of the traditional German Armed Forces song, *I had a Comrade*; aiming directly to the mental state of the audience and successfully triggering their deepest emotions (Ibid, p. 6). Once again, Riefenstahl owned not only the full attention but also conquered the hearts of the Germans by recalling to the dead in the First World War; combined with the voice of the Führer expressing his 'plans for a better future', pointing each and every important line out (Ibid).

Through the whole of the documentary we see Leni's perfect combination of full happiness and joy in people's faces, intertwined with intense snapshots of the Führer, a new technique that caught not only the viewers, but also the filming crew by surprise, the *Schuss* –

⁹ Original name in German for the Hitler Youth

*Gegenschuss*¹⁰ effect. This led to the creation of a rather ‘suggestive’ effect that has been described by many as an erotic bond between the people and Hitler (Ibid), where the Führer had a somewhat bilingual conversation with the populace. Enthusiasm in this sense is mutual, not only is the audience deliriously enchanted by the presence of their leader, Hitler himself also presented his firm belief in what he preached on the center stage. It is recognizable in the movie that Leni choses to film certain individuals from the crowds who are especially enthusiastic or who perfectly match the German prototype, they all «*stellen Inkarnationen der Liebe zum Führer dar*¹¹» (Trimborn, 2018). Furthermore, as Court highlights, «the extensive emphasis on the movement of Hitler’s hands – the ‘hammering’ of symbolism – is an important an powerful element here», representing one of the main scenes where the director’s work can be categorized as propaganda (Court, 2020, pp. 4 - 5).

In the closing scene, Riefenstahl alludes to the music of Wagner (which she also does throughout the documentary) and his opera *Götterdämmerung*¹² «the use of this musical theme is no coincidence» (Court, 2020, p. 7) because she knows that the sole magnitude of the speech would perfectly fuse with the glorifying music. At this point, it is valuable to study the impact that Wagner had on Hitler leading to the expansion of his music during the Third Reich. Rising nationalist movements started to emerge towards the end of the 19th century, where the figure of Richard Wagner, theorist and musician, establishing a new theoretical framework, which was expressed through his musical dramas and blended with the growing German patriotism (Rose, 2003, p. 408). The Wagnerian stream offered to the people what Christianity seemed to have left behind, a sense of mystification and the need to understand the world as a whole, without leaving any component from the equation. It is precisely for this reason that his work, which combined musical, dramatic, ideological and mythic elements, was the answer that many were looking for (Ibid, p. 409). This way, musical drama developed into a fairly religious comprehension, acquiring even sacramental and liturgical connotations. Furthermore, Wagner himself was an anti-Semite, believing in the superiority of the ‘Aryan race’, which only fueled the turmoil that was slowly growing in Germany regarding this topic (Ibid).

¹⁰ Note of the author: description of the used technique ‘shot – counter shot’.

¹¹ Translator’s note: referring to the people who ‘represented the incarnation of love for the Führer’.

¹² Translator’s note: Twilight of the Gods

Thomas Mann, a distinguished Wagnerian of the era, affirmed after the war that «there is much Hitler in Wagner» (Rose, 2003, p. 410) and confirming this statement, Hitler himself declared in the Festival of Bayreuth in 1925, that Wagner's work «encompassed everything that National socialism aspires to» (Rose, 2003, p. 410). Hitler's cult towards Wagner persisted after the death of the musician, promising to the city of Bayreuth, Wagner's hometown, to maintain the prestige and honor of the theorist who significantly contributed to the mentality of the Reich (Ibid). Richard Wagner's music corroded the German society: it was played at ceremonies, celebrations and gatherings, yet also cruelly used in concentration camps when the Jews were sent into the gas chambers (Ibid, p. 414). *Twilight of the Gods*, his previously mentioned work, was the musical carrier of Hitler's death announcement through the radio (Ibid). This production in turn, was the concluding cycle of four music dramas composed by Wagner. It also has a mythological and symbolic meaning; since the real outcome of the story is rather contradictory to the original preach of the Nazis (Rose, 2003, pp. 88 - 93).

The authentic meaning of this myth traces back its origins to the German – Nordic pessimistic ideology; which essentially describes the *Ragnarök*¹³, a war between mythological monsters and creatures and gods, resulting in the complete destruction of the world, its end and recurrence (Ibid, p. 88); in this sense, Wagner's representation also culminates with a tremendous fire that extinguishes the world. The concept of slow decay is reflected throughout the performance, which initially contradicts to the powerful and expansionist attitude of the Nazis. Nonetheless, the collapse of the Third Reich was looming and with the prophecy of *Ragnarök*. Franz J. Müller, a former member of the Nazi resistance stated that «when the Germanic has no way out, then there is the heroism of the sunset, the twilight of the gods» (Ibid, p. 91). Substantially, this state of mind meant nothing but to resist until the very end, even though it proved to be an absolute failure in the battle of Stalingrad, where combatants fanatically rejected any rational analysis of the situation and denied the imminent defeat (Ibid, p. 92). The final days of the Third Reich represented nothing but the prophecy of the twilight of the gods, whilst Hitler remained to be represented as a God until his very own 'heroic' death. The impact of such image of the Führer as a deity is an exceptional technique of Riefenstahl to conclude the film.

¹³ Note of the author: An Old Norse phrase which refers to the prophecy of the end of the world.

5.2. OLYMPIA

After filming *Triumph of the Will* and the consequences this event had on Leni's life and career, she firmly stated not to work as a documentarist ever again. However, the greatest event not only in international but also in documentary terms was about to take place in Berlin: the Olympic Games 1936. Even though Hitler himself was not too convinced about the idea of hosting the Olympic Games, it was Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels who finally managed to persuade him, alleging for the spread of Nazism not only inside and across Germany, but also outside the country (Hart-Davis, 1986). Ironically, it was the second time that Germany was appointed for hosting the Olympic Games, since the first time they were cancelled because of World War I and this way the International Olympic Committee intended back in 1931 when chosen, to bring Germany back to the world community (Ibid); little did they suspect that Germany's expansionist desires, anti-Semite policies regarding Jews and the incorporation of new enemies to the Reich concluded in a bloodshed that has marked human history. The film is divided in two parts; firstly, we are introduced into the historical background of the Olympic Games, where the Greek city of Olympia is depicted as ideal example. In the second part is focused on the Games in Berlin themselves (Riefenstahl, 1994). As it has been mentioned in the previous analysis of *Triumph of the Will*, its significant contribution was the incorporation of sound and editing effects, components that are also identifiable in *Olympia*.

The Summer Games corrupted all the principles and morals concerning a sports competition, establishing Nazi control and promoting Aryan superiority and preference. Athletes were idealized in sculpture, the papers and overall, with «well – developed muscle tone and heroic strength and accentuated ostensibly Aryan facial features », and this, in turn, symbolized the prerequisites for being part of the Nazi military service (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2020). Already before the Games, in 1933 the Nazi regime published the 'Aryans only' policy, where it expressively discriminated anyone who was 'non – Aryan', meaning in this sense the Jews, descendants of Jews and the Roma people, along with the fact that the regime was extremely racist (Ibid). they were expelled of any sports facilities in the country and also any association they ever belonged to. And yet, even though the situation continued along this line, as a result of her innovative cinematic techniques, and the perfect mixture of sports, art and

propaganda, *Olympia* won Riefenstahl numerous awards such as a special award from the International Olympic Committee «for depicting the joy of sport» (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2020). At this point, it seems suitable to present the meaning and path of the ‘Aryan’ symbolism and meaning. Aryan, in German *Arier*, is undoubtedly one of the core elements that supported Nazi ideology and world vision. The term derives from a variety of studies, being comparative linguistics and racial anthropology the main streams which provided the Aryan denomination a rather religious nature (Rose, 2003, pp. 50 - 51). Secular sentiment during the epoque of the Enlightenment refused to believe that all human races, meaning Semitic, Hamitic and Japhetic, all descendants from Noah, as described in the *Genesis*, were hence, Jewish (Ibid, p. 51), reason for which they preferred to trace the origins of humankind back to the Far East instead of the Middle East. British linguist Sir William Parsons established a comparison between the main classical European languages and affirmed the existence of an Indo-European language family, however, this did not imply the presence of a far Eastern home for the creation of humankind (Ibid).

In Germany, Friedrich Schlegel, significantly contributed to this theory and study by including a new category into the field, namely the anthropological and racial one and he presented the thesis of the existence of a superior race created in the North of India, from which they expanded through the whole West, providing tribes and villages with their knowledge and founding empires on their way (Ibid, p. 52). This unique race managed to inhabit even the bleak Scandinavian territories and Schlegel appointed this remarkable Indian – Nordic breed as ‘Aryan’. It derived from a Greek term, yet Schlegel created an etymological linkage between the Greek source *ari* and the German word *Ehre* (honor) setting somehow the basis for the future belief of a superior race in Germany (Ibid). During the following years, abundant theories, studies and statements were made regarding this topic, however, it was not until 1845 where Christian Lassen, Friedrich Schlegel’s very own disciple, created the polarization between races. Pioneer of the vast majority of Nazi dogmas, he defined the main components of the myth when stating that the stronger one was worthy of the victory, the superiority of the white race and the creative and youthful nature of the more recent species, making reference in this sense to the Germanic people (Rose, 2003, pp. 53 - 54). A bounteous number of linguists and authors such as Max Müller, Guido von List and Lanz von Liebenfels, greatly contributed to the expansion of

this antisemitic mentality through Europe, incorporating racist streams as well as the juxtaposition of white supremacism (Ibid, p. 55 – 58). Hitler himself argued that the fundamental predominance of the *Arier*, «did not only reside on their intellectual and physical capacities, but on their disposal to sacrifice themselves for the greater good of their racial community» (Rose, 2003, p. 63).

Lenis's work filming and editing the Games truly was a masterpiece, since together with the ability of the Führer himself, Germany «camouflaged its racist, militaristic character while hosting the Summer Olympics. [...] the regime exploited the Games to bedazzle many foreign spectators and journalists with an image of a peaceful, tolerant Germany» (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2020). Examples related to this fake portrayal include the temporary removal of signs against the Jews and Jewish community, the displacement of gypsies into special camps and foreigners could not be penalized regarding homosexuality (it was forbidden in the Nazi regime). The Berlin Olympic Games introduced a new element which until today has persisted in time and tradition: the carrying of the torch to lighten up the fire and officially inaugurate the international event. Plenty of symbolism and acquaintance is to be scrutinized in the following passage, since the torch is related to Ancient Greece and the concept of fire and light, which at the same time is related to evolution and the capacity of humankind. We will now proceed to analyze these elements that are directly and also indirectly represented in *Olympia* and have a strong historical and cultural baggage from which not many from the audience were aware of.

The ancient symbol of truth and light has been associated in contemporary times to the torch, *Fackel* in German, stemming from the mythical story of Prometheus who stole the fire from the gods with a torch so that he could give it to the humans (Rose, 2003, p. 45). In Germany, torches were often used at nocturnal parades or celebrations because the visual effects of such ceremonies resembled a 'rushing river of light' and were quite impressive; Hitler himself made use of this 'artistic' detail when he came to power in 1933 (Ibid, p. 46). In addition to this ocular effect, the beacon had an extraordinary symbolic meaning within the viewpoint of the Nazis and was adapted to the racist values of the regime, which was a thought designed by the Brit Thomas Arnold already back in 1842 (Ibid). Arnold established a channel between race and

progress, where the torch served as symbol of evolution for ‘generations’: first the Greeks, transferred to the Romans and, finally, it belonged to the Germanics, who preserved the legacy and developed the medieval civilization (Ibid, p. 46 – 47). It is for this reason that at the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games, this ritual of the torch lighting was executed for the first time, appealing to Ancient Greece. The torch as an instrument is very representative, yet the defining element and explosive combination is with fire, *Feuer* in German, which also has a close connection to Greece, power and Nazism. Crucial moments that have been historically defining for the ultimate establishment of the Nazi regime have been marked by the interference of fire: the 5th of March 1933 the Reichstag burned and with it, German communism; the 10th of May of the same year, German universities ‘burned’ down Jewish intellectualism (books and all sorts of works); and, finally, between the 9th and 10th of November 1938, the *Kristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass), a bloodbath took place when the German synagogues were burned, extinguishing this way the Jewish identity (Rose, 2003, p. 151). Another connection to the long list of atrocities committed by the Nazis in relation to the use of fire was the cremation of the Jews in the concentration camps (Ibid).

The symbolic dimension from all these actions must be observed from the ancient apocalyptic view of fire as a purifying element (Ibid, p. 152). Nazism intended to «transform the German people from the inside » and to establish the «fall of the old era and the announcement of the beginning of a new one » (Ibid). Lastly, fire also keeps a close emblematic relation to the Aryan race, in which already in the early 19th century, nature philosopher Lorenz Oken associated the four elements to each of the human races, whereby air represented the Mongol race; water embodied the Indian race; earth was attributed to the black race, and the philosopher further argued this statement by arguing that due to their incapacity to blush because of their color, this was a clear sign of their lack of internal life and therefore, they also lacked on humanity; this leaves us with fire as the element corresponding to the white race, who is perfectly capable of blushing and turning red, a clear sign of humanity, metaphorically connected to the idea of fire and passion (Ibid, p. 154).

*Griechenland*¹⁴ had an outstanding influence and clout not only on the Olympic Games and the film *Olympia*, but most importantly on Hitler himself, because it was the utmost representation of perfection in all senses (Rose, 2003, p. 178), reason for which he wanted to embezzle Ancient Greece as the origins of the Aryan culture. It is from Sparta and its antidemocratic state – structure, amongst other reasons that the Hellenistic model turned into the suited *Weltanschauung* for the Nazis (Ibid, p. 181). Some of these reasons just mentioned for the admiration on behalf of the Nazis for the Spartans include the fact that they were a political and social elite which coerced and enslaved indigenous people, together with its highly militaristic organization and reluctance towards foreign influence and streams (Ibid, p. 182). Nonetheless, it is not only with regards to their mentality and social superiority, but as we can appreciate in Riefenstahl's work, it also included the architectural perspective, from which Hitler most admired its strategical angles for the access of natural light and monumental buildings, from which we can highlight the Hellenic, yet Nazi construction in Nuremberg, of the colossal tribune in the Zeppelinfeld (Ibid, p. 188). Finally and as it is recognizable in the film, the racial interpretation of the classical Greek canon is clearly portrayed by Leni and her filming skills: through the filmic overlap of naked athletes on Greek statues, it seems as if the classical Hellenic ideal takes on life and embodies the German athlete, who would embody Aryan racial perfection, (Rose) whilst she consolidates the over two thousand years of difference between the past and the present, between Greece and Germany, reducing it to the extent that the viewer is not able to make a distinction (Ibid, p. 189).

6. CONCLUSIONS

The very own nature of a final degree thesis does not permit such an extensive work in terms of extension as a doctoral thesis would do, for instance; reason for which we have just analyzed in depth two of the major cinematic works created by Leni Riefenstahl, trying to establish and examine the appearing symbols and their underlying meanings of Nazi ideology. We believe that this study has been able to illustrate to some extent the power and magnitude of audiovisual media through the lenses of cinema. In particular, the study has tried to illustrate the ability of cinema to contribute to the undeniable and absolute control of an authoritarian regime

¹⁴ Note of the author: Greece in German.

such as the Nazi one during the mid 19th century. This regime started around the time when mass media appeared in western societies and cinema was still regarded as a rare concept. Nonetheless, cinema has remained a main mass media to this day with great success. It is well known today that governments, political parties, journalists and businesses, as well as international organizations and associations have been provided with powerful tools to communicate their messages to the greater public; nevertheless, today the public has also been provided with a variety of tools, which in turn leaves us all somehow in square one. This, however, was not the reality faced back in Germany during the rule of the Nazis, where propaganda became an irrefutable reality.

Due to the NSDAP's tremendous influence and mastery in the propagandistic sector, this thesis wanted to focus on this wrongful usage of propaganda during the Third Reich. The growing presence of the cinema and cinematic recordings positively guided propaganda needs of the Reich as seen in the movies analyzed throughout this project, and the Nazi party did not fail to benefit from every situation they were given in order to show and highlight the significance of their thoughts, beliefs and actions. Specifically, this work has aimed attention at Leni Riefenstahl's movies because they managed to portray in almost 4 hours (*Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia*) the core image and symbols of what would last for more than 10 years of Nationalist Socialist Germany, leaving a mark in human history and memory.

Her technical abilities achieved to create the deity yet proximity of the *Führer*, to spread a united message, to set a common national goal, and to implant ideas and emotions amongst ordinary people. We asked ourselves when thinking about the objectives of this work, whether the documentaries of Leni Riefenstahl contributed to the propaganda regime of Nazi Germany and furthermore, to what extent and through which techniques. We also stated the importance of symbolism, analyzed extensively through the work of Rosa Sala Rose, closely examining the symbols chosen to appear in the movies, together with their cultural and meaningful baggage.

We believe that this study has been able to identify the tools that Leni used in a pioneering way to settle the principles of film propaganda through documentaries. Her handling of the moving camera, closeups, the *Schuss - Gegenschuss...* would determine a new paradigm

in the way States and leaders would communicate their political messages. As a film making technician, she consciously used the camera to bring out the most intimate part of the leader and the feeling of belonging to a group, a community of shared goals with a purpose. As we have seen in the analysis, her films helped to create a shared reality through a range of behaviors, symbols and role models that would guide the true German nation, since not all of them were 'true' Germans to the eyes of the Führer.

The lifting of the arm and saying *heil Hitler* or the enhancement of athletic life as depicted in the films are an example of the willingness to create physical bonds between group members, as thoroughly described in the analysis of this work. Moreover, the use of the imperial eagle, the *swastika*, the fire, the harmony of classical Greece or the passion of Nordic mythology, are visual reference marks that each had been present in other civilizations and cultures, but combined in a new context and under a new political authority were able to create a new individual identity and group loyalty. The music of Wagner and the selection of military songs with great emotional significance made the masses participate in a common sensory reaction, making them feel even closer to the place where the action takes place. Also, the image of the individual who is a role model for the group of which the group participates through the idea of race, who is strong, joyful, young and faithful follower of the leader, sets a potentiality that anyone can (must) try to achieve. All these attributes and symbols mentioned were of great interest at the beginning of this work, due to the fact that its underlying meanings played a distinctive role during the Nazi regime. Consequently, it would be positive to affirm that the question suggested in the third section of this written dissertation concerning symbolism portrayed in Leni's documentaries, has been successfully answered by offering an extensive analysis and investigation of the terms presented.

Having set the theoretical framework of the wrongful use of propaganda as it was established in the objectives of this final thesis, we can confirm the power and sphere of influence of the cinema and other visual arts. The Olympic Games are now an example of international cooperation, sportsmanship and effort, while they can also be used to worship a superior race in confrontation with others and as a showcase for a power with a desire for world domination. A political rally can be an example of democratic plurality or the struggle for human

rights, and also the maximum representation of totalitarianism, militarism and expansionism together with the breakdown of individualism. With that in mind, Leni had the technical ability to bring the new reality to the maximum possible German audience in the 1930s, but also abroad where other countries learned the lessons and emulated them.

As it was mentioned at the very beginning of this concluding part, the very own nature of a final degree project does not deliberately offer the extension that a doctoral thesis would, for instance; enticement that we would like to employ in order to suggest for future works and lines of thought. As shown throughout this extensive analysis of Leni's documentaries and intentional usage and propagandistic symbols, however, we strongly believe that this project could be regarded as the founding pillars of what could derive into a much deeper and vast investigation, where techniques and challenges of the 21st century ought to be examined in order to establish certain patterns between those methods employed during the Nazi regime and the ones that are applied today. Are there any similarities or parallelisms between Riefenstahl's creations and today's societies? Could fake news be classified under the same umbrella as implacable propaganda? It seems obvious to state that our current reality is rather bias; symbols, news and behaviors that we are exposed to on a daily basis, the overall information we are given has been manipulated. This is the reason why we believe that more analysis like the one that was conducted are worth the effort in the future, considering the ever – changing aspects of nations and especially if we think about the effects that we have been witnessing recently. The way in which information is portrayed can play a distinctive role regarding its acceptance by the public, which makes the clear and objective understanding of messages essential in pursuance of the truth.

The Nazi regime was aware of the wrongful usage it was perpetrating, yet we must aim to develop a method to unravel the final intentions of messages, and we will be able to select the messages that lead to rightful goals and purposes.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Askani, B. (1996). Anno - Geschichte für Gymnasien: ANNO für das Gymnasien allgemeine Ausgabe: Band 4: Das 20. Jahrhundert. In B. Askani, *Anno - Geschichte für Gymnasien: ANNO für das Gymnasien allgemeine Ausgabe: Band 4: Das 20. Jahrhundert*. Westermann.
- Baran, S. J., & Davis, D. (2015). *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future*. Cengage Learning.
- Bathrick, D. (2007). Holocaust Film Before the Holocaust: DEFA, Antifacism and the Camps. *Cinemas*, 109 - 135.
- Bell, P. M. (1986). *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe*. London.
- Bessel, R. (1987). *Life in the Third Reich*. Oxford.
- Carey, J. (1997). *A Critical Reader*. London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Cook, D. A. (1996). *A History of Narrative Film. Third Edition*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Court, C. (2020, February 19). *Triumph of the Will: Using Film to Blur the Boundaries of Reality and Idolatry*. Academia Education . Retrieved from Academia edu: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307957598_Movie_review_of_Triumph_of_the_Will
- Coy, J. P. (1970). A Brief History of Germany . In J. P. Coy, *A Brief History of Germany* . New York: Facts On File. An imprint of Infobase Publishing.
- Curnalia, R. M. (2005). *A retrospective on early studies of propaganda and suggestions for reviving the paradigm*. *The Review of Communication*, 5(4), 237-257.
- Curnalia, R. M. (2005). A Retrospective on Early Studies of Propaganda and Suggestions for Reviving the Paradigm. *Review of Communication* , 253.
- Davis, D. (1976). *The effects of mass communication on political behavior*. Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Ferro, M. (1988). *History and Cinema (Contemporary Film Studies)*. Wayne State Press University .
- Giannetti, L. (2013). *Understanding Movies (13th Edition)* . Pearson.

- Hürten, H. (1995). *Deutsche Geschichte in Quellen und Darstellung, Band 9: Weimarer Republik und Drittes Reich 1918 - 1945*. Reclam.
- Hart-Davis, D. (1986). *Hitler's games: the 1936 Olympics*. London: Century .
- Horkheimer, M. (2002). *Critical Theory; Selected Essays* . New York : Continuum Publisher Company.
- Irving, D. (1978). *Hitler's War. The War Path. Hitler's Germany 1933 -9*. London.
- Jason, G. (2006, November 20). *researchgate.net*. Retrieved from Research Gate : https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307957598_Movie_review_of_Triumph_of_the_Will
- Jason, G. J. (2006, November 20). Movie review of: Triumph of the Will. *Research Gate*.
- Kennedy, P. J. (2019). *Where do people get their news?* Zurich : Economic Policy, 34(97), 5-47.
- Kershaw, I. (2000). *HITLER, 1936 - 1945: Nemesis*. Penguin Books .
- Laitinen, R. E. (1997). *Corporate control of media and propaganda: a behavior analysis*. (G. P. Group, Ed.) Cultural contingencies: behavior analytic perspectives on cultural practices, 237-267.
- Lasswell, H. (1927). *Propaganda Technique in the World War*. University of Chicago.
- Lippmann, W. (1922). *Public Opinion*. New York.
- Mack, M. (2000). Film as Memory: Siegfried Kracauer's Psychological History of German 'National Culture'. . *Journal of European Studies* , 81 - 157.
- Merriam Webster Dictionary . (2020, April 5). *Merriam - Webster*. Retrieved from merriam - webster : <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/propaganda>
- Newman, N. &. (2013). *Social Media in the Changing Ecology of News: The fourth and fifth estates in Britain*. International Journal of Internet Science, (7)1.
- Pratkins, A., & Aronson, E. (1992). *Age of Propaganda: the Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion*. Owl Books U.S.
- Riefenstahl, L. (Director). (1934). *Triumph of the Will* [Motion Picture].
- Riefenstahl, L. (Director). (1994). *Olympia* [Motion Picture].
- Riefensthal, L. (Director). (1934). *Triumph of the Will* [Motion Picture].

- Rose, R. S. (2003). *Diccionario crítico de mitos y símbolos del nazismo*. Barcelona: Acantilado.
- Schmädeke, J., & Steinbach, P. (1986). *Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus. Die deutsche Gesellschaft und der Widerstand gegen Hitler*. Munich.
- Schneider, R. C., & Stier, W. F. (2001). *Leni Riefenstahl's "Olympia": Brilliant cinematography or Nazi propaganda?* New York: The College at Brockport: State University of New York.
- Scruton, R. (1998). *Modern Culture*. New York : Continuum.
- Sproule, J. M. (1994). *Channels of Propaganda*. Eric Clearinghouse on Reading .
- Tönnies, F. (1887). *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* .
- The History Place. (2001, February 17). *History Place*. Retrieved from Historyplace.com: <https://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/triumph/tr-will.htm>
- Trimborn, J. (2018). *Riefenstahl: Eine deutsche Karriere. Biographie*. Aufbau Digital.
- Tucker, J. A. (2018). *Social media, political polarization, and political disinformation: A review of the scientific literature*. William Flora Hewlett Foundation.
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. (2020, March 7). Holocaust Encyclopedia: Leni Riefenstahl. *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*.
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. (2020, March 7). *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*. Retrieved from <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-nazi-olympics-berlin-1936>