

Remapping the World in Film: Visual Geographies in Nazi Cinema

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Imagined Spaces in Nazi Cinema

Following Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities, this article focuses on the relationship between imagination and the production of truth via space. Nazi cinema has been widely interpreted as a vehicle of immense importance for the rediscovery and authentication of collective myths, symbols or memories, and which thereby reconstructs an ideal image of the nation in an easily accessible form. In this context, fascism, and especially National Socialism, has produced much discussion for its overwhelming use of visual aesthetics. From its beginnings in 1933 to its end in 1945, the National Socialist propaganda ministry, led by Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment, turned Germany's film industry into a dangerous machine of mass manipulation.

The popularity of films in the Third Reich, as Mary-Elizabeth O'Brien has pointed out, depended heavily on their ability to alter reality through an intense emotional involvement, which was achieved through the use of famous lead characters and the return to popular genres (4). Erica Carter has further argued that German cinema after 1933 was designed with the intention of projecting positive social fantasies and of displaying a hegemonic social order through Kantian evocations of the beautiful and the sublime. Recent scholarly emphasis on the emotionality Nazi cinema elicited through its form serves as the framework for this enquiry. My article specifically looks at the way in which Nazi films sought to create an emotional attachment by imagining and reorganising space. It argues that the fusion of the visual geographies on screen with the mental geographies of the audience establishes a semiotic landscape that provokes an emotional response.

The following interpretation emphasises the importance of cinematic space for truth claims. My analysis sheds new light on three blockbusters produced under the National Socialist regime: Leni Riefenstahl's famous propaganda piece *Triumph des Willens* (*Triumph of the Will*, 1935), Veit Harlan's anti-Semitic hate film *Jud Süß* (*Jew Süß*, 1940) and Josef von Baky's fantasy comedy *Münchhausen* (1943). In accordance with Giuliana Bruno's reflections on emotional topographies in film (2), my a close analysis of individual scenes explores how these three blockbusters mobilise and remap space as emotionally and politically charged geographies.

My analysis is informed by contemporary conceptions of space. In her study *For Space*, Doreen Massey argued that the portrayal of space as a closed concept throws into question the politics of those geographies, since space, as a product of interrelations, is constructed out of multiplicity (9–13). My argument further follows Denis Cosgrove's assessment, according to which landscape becomes a projection of ideological concepts when alternative modes of experiencing these spaces are erased (39). If place construction, then, is understood as an imagined remapping of the world according to the dominant class, it can be assumed that film is also a cultural product influencing the construction of national identities. Unsurprisingly, cinema, including German cinema, has become one of the most popular objects of inquiry for geographers exploring the construction of dominant ideologies and reconfigured notions of national identities (see Fisher and Mennel 9; Carter and McCormack 228; Cresswell and Dixon 1). For Jeff Hopkins, cinematic place is therefore "an ideologically charged cultural creation whereby meanings of place and society are made, legitimized, contested, and obscured" (47).

The three-dimensional, cinematic landscape encourages the viewer to experience the projection as heterotopic truth that hides its own artificiality through emotional attachment. This conceptual framework of space and emotion opens up wider questions concerning the politics of imagined cultural fantasies and collective desires under National Socialism, such as: What information about place is given in a particular sequence and why? What is the function of cinematic space constructed explicitly to challenge dominant political rhetoric? Can notions of authenticity truly be negotiated through the manipulation of space and the use of visual iconography? And how do cinematic truth claims of inclusion and exclusion influence the audience? Do we, for example, detect spatial constellations, which, instead of confirming them, expose certain claims by the protagonists as false?

In their frequent use of collective imaginative geographies, all three films approach truth and authenticity in the Third Reich via depictions of fictional space. In each case, spatial migrations mobilise and manipulate the concept of *Heimat* (homeland), seeking to either establish or restore it. Self-reflexive moments in *Münchhausen*, however, allow the evaluation of differences, as the film redefines previously established truths as fictions. *Münchhausen's* world is one of chaos and disorientation, which expose Nazi cinema's imaginary landscapes as unbelievable.

Triumph of the Will

As famously indicated by the celebration of 'Blood and Soil' (the belief in the national soil and pure German blood as the basis for creating a pure *Volk*), spatial metaphors in political speeches often served as a preparation for and glorification of geopolitical concepts, both before and during the Third Reich. In their 'Blood and Soil' rhetoric, the Nazis rarely missed an opportunity to emphasise the equation of place with identity and the all-encompassing dream of an exclusive *Volk*. This is most notably shown in Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935) and *Olympia: Fest der Völker / Fest der Schönheit* (*Olympia: Festival of the Nations /*

Festival of Beauty, 1938). Filmed over seven days from 4 to 10 September 1934, Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* goes far beyond a simple portrayal of the National Socialist Party rally in Nuremberg. Riefenstahl's elaborate choreographies of gigantic parades, powerful speeches and military spectacles, coupled with the film's aesthetically-pleasing Nazi iconography and displays of unity, shaped the false image of a strong and vibrant nation standing behind its leader. In short, the film presents a fiction made from mass ornaments and therefore suggesting infallibility, since the mass ornament, according to Kracauer, "is an *end in itself*" ("Mass Ornament" 76).

In light of the film's outstanding success, Joseph Goebbels awarded Riefenstahl the National Film Prize on 1 May 1935. He emphasised the film's relevance "because it reflects the present: it describes in unprecedented scenes the gripping events of our political existence". There is no doubt about Goebbels's shamelessly manipulative and highly politically motivated assessment of *Triumph of the Will* as a "reflection of the present" (qtd. in Giesen 29f.). His words nevertheless give insight into one of the propaganda ministry's ultimate goals, namely that of presenting on screen an image of Germany as it was, a perfect vision of what it thought Germany's true reality to be. To this end, the cinematic vision of Germany was to become the viewer's internal reality, ultimately transforming fiction into truth.

With this in mind, the following interpretation will take a critical look at a lesser-known scene, which hides between the famous parades and often-analysed mass ceremonies: the beginning of the scene "Youth Encampment" (minutes 14:00 to 16:00). Within the larger framework of the film, these initial images play rather a small role, embellishing the transition between a night rally and the introduction of the Hitler Youth, with Adolf Hitler or other party leaders notably absent. The sequence shows the beginning of a new day in the 'true' Germany, displaying various images of the city of Nuremberg in the morning. In about two minutes, Riefenstahl wordlessly establishes a Nazi fantasy of the perfect space.

Circling around each other, various locations from Nuremberg's medieval landscape flash before the audience in a spectacle of intensity and movement, providing through its bird's-eye view a powerful imaginary perspective (see Bruno 177). Recurrent structures and a steady rhythm help to simulate the presence of a common centre, despite the absence of a leader. In addition, the initial alternations between towers, roofs and windows establish the image of a densely-built location, closed from within. This imaginary paradise appears out of the darkness and anything beyond it is erased from the gaze of the camera. The scene's intentional spatial limitation receives further intensification through repeated returns to watching the space of Nuremberg through a closed, a half-closed and an open window. Circular and rectangular patterns on the window, as well as curtains, obstruct and frame the view. The repeated act of opening the window intensifies the desire to glimpse this 'true' Germany in all its magnificence as a unity of man and nature.

When the camera finally allows the audience to see through the window, a vase with flowers and a large Nazi flag are placed alternately between the viewer and the building on the other side, as though designed to evoke happy feelings

of springtime awakening and a rebirth of the German nation. This flag had been kept from our view until then, but the alternation of the scenes implies that it had always been there, albeit hidden and invisible. The climactic re-appropriation of the flag heralds a new stage in the Nazi fantasy. As the camera slowly glides over different buildings and towers, streets and rivers (always in the same harmonic and slow movement, accompanied by melodies reminiscent of Wagnerian music), Nazi flags suddenly appear everywhere. They are above us, underneath us, left and right, behind bushes, on churches and even mirrored in the river. They present a narcissistic dream of an all-encompassing, almost supernatural presence, reshaping the world through aesthetics. As church bells are heard at this moment, the Nazi fantasy of a total encirclement reaches its culmination and then dissolves into the tents of the Hitler Youth in front of the city, a future army already in the current time shielding and protecting this imaginary geography of a sacred German realm.

Riefenstahl produces a highly political space out of the real city of Nuremberg. Her presentation of its architecture is the realisation of an imagined cultural fantasy, of collective desires and dreams. This German space, pinned down by the Nazi flags as spatial markers, redeems old hierarchies and erases places of memories which would otherwise have reminded the audience of suffering, failure or misery. The presence of this superimposed surface accords with the political designs of the National Socialist Party. It combines a glorious medieval German past with a vision of Germany's future for an exclusive and purified Aryan community, in which the landscape takes on the central role.

Riefenstahl's presentation of architecture as a vessel of collective fantasies in *Triumph of the Will* was echoed in Adolf Hitler's address at a party rally in 1937 when he effusively declared the importance of redesigning the Königsplatz in Munich. For Hitler, the redesigning of buildings was to be a crucial means of achieving the mental unification of the people since "these buildings will inspire German society with a proud consciousness" (qtd. in Spotts 99f.). The necessity of creating community through the reshaping of the landscape also marks Riefenstahl's visual representation of Nuremberg. The medieval city, as seen through the Nazi lens, simulates truth whilst being an idealised image, a narcissistic projection of a super-reality onto the portrayed space and thereby onto the German consciousness. This superimposed dream of the *Volk*, however, also rests on destruction: before the vision of this screen reality can become truth, an urgent wish frequently revisited in the film's speeches, the world as it currently exists has to be destroyed.

*Jew Süß*¹

In their famous study "The Nazi Myth", Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy point out that the National Socialist creation of Aryan identity was based on the "projection of an image with which one identifies" (305). Whereas Riefenstahl's cinematic world portrays visions of Nazi fantasies of an apparently perfect

¹This part of my article was previously published in German in a slightly altered version as part of an extensive interpretation of Harlan's *Jew Süß* (see Daffner).

world, other films promoted by the regime portrayed the opposite. In utilising the centuries-old anti-Jewish myths of the wandering Jew or the Jewish parasite (see Bein 3–40), Veit Harlan's infamous masterpiece *Jew Süß* (1940) was one of the most hate-mongering and also most popular productions of the Third Reich, seen by over twenty million Germans. According to Harlan, his film *Jew Süß* showed the "true face of the Jew", a statement which indicates the work's anti-Semitic content (see Von der Heiden 196; Hickethier 224). The film's main intention was to prepare the German audience for the so-called Final Solution, the deportation and mass murder of European Jewry. Harlan's film portrays the rise and fall of the historic figure of Joseph Süß Oppenheimer, who in 1733 leaves the Jewish ghetto in Frankfurt and becomes the new minister of finance under Duke Karl Alexander von Württemberg. Oppenheimer manipulates the duke in various ways and finally achieves his goal when the duke abolishes the Jewish ban in the city of Stuttgart. In addition, Oppenheimer introduces high street tolls, has the blacksmith hanged, and rapes the beautiful Christian girl Dorothea Sturm. When the duke dies of a sudden and unexpected heart attack, the angry citizens decide to hang Oppenheimer.

Right from the first scene, Harlan's choice of Württemberg as the location prepares the audience for the main plot of a German paradise lost and found.² *Jew Süß* starts with a visual remapping of Aryan identity within a geopolitical frame. In a sort of utopian wholeness, the audience first encounters the imaginary space of Württemberg in the form of a map, a form that, for Benedict Anderson, has the potential to be the most powerful source of nationalism (175–76). Harlan's map establishes the duchy of 1773 as an anchored container. The visual geography of Württemberg serves to trigger a spatial 'truth' in the viewers' minds, prompting a new configuration of their mental map. Just as Riefenstahl's film had presented a Nazi reflection of reality, Harlan reminds the audience of a Württemberg 'as it was' and 'as it should be', a spatial fantasy that lacks internal pluralities or differences. The contemporary audience encountered a place with clear boundaries and memorable reference points, a place that can be addressed, a place that exists, even if only in the abstract form of a map.

Consequently, the map of this Württemberg represents what Duncan S. A. Bell has called a *mythscape*, "the discursive realm, constituted by and through temporal and spatial dimensions, in which the myths of the nation are forged, transmitted, reconstructed and negotiated constantly" (75). According to Bell, the spatial impression of a linear historical timeline in *mythscape*s establishes the claim of a "nation with moral and political authenticity" (76). This notion of authenticity is also confirmed in Harlan's scene when the spectator sees a close-up of the map's centre, which shows Stuttgart as a stable and protected core. Harlan's medial space implies that Württemberg and, as suggested by the film's propagandistic intention, also Hitler's 'Thousand-Year Reich' can only exist like this. In this Germany, all social movement has come to a halt, as repeatedly emphasised in the following scenes, which introduce Württemberg's uniform citizens and their complete admiration for their new duke, who solemnly declares Württemberg the "holiest land

²My analysis follows the film protocol published by Maurer and Radevagen.

under a German heaven”, a German paradise with a stable centre and no peripheries.

Harlan’s cinematic depiction of the Jewish ghetto is quite different. As with the ‘German’ space of Württemberg, Harlan also introduces this new space with a formal signifier. As pointed out by Linda Schulte-Sasse, a close-up of Württemberg’s royal crest dissolves into a similarly shaped oval door sign with Hebrew letters which, supported by apparently Jewish music, helps to identify this new space as Jewish (75). However, the dissolve of the Württemberg crest into the Hebrew door sign not only emphasises the otherness of the new space, but constructs its visual opposite. What is deemed the Jewish space appears as a negative of the German space, and leaves no room for similarities. Unlike the ‘truthful’ image of Germany on screen, the Jewish space becomes a space twice removed. It presents an apparently disturbing reflection in the purity of Germany, ultimately obstructing and destroying the view of the latter, as symbolically demonstrated by the superimposition of the two signs.

As a result, the Jewish ghetto is neither positioned at the margins nor constructed as on a hybrid periphery. With the cinematic aid of the dissolve, Harlan transforms his imaginary Jewish space into that which is not and which should not be. The dichotomy between the positive German space and the negative Jewish space receives further support through its design and décor. Whereas the German space consists of bright rooms and a clear hierarchy within a wide, orderly space, the Jewish space appears as dark, narrow and chaotic. Without a real centre and in disturbing complexity, the camera shows one long street encased between run-down buildings. Instead of urban cosmopolitanism, impressions of disorientation and restlessness prevail. In line with Nazi ideology then, the counterpart Harlan establishes can only lead to its elimination, as personified in Oppenheimer’s death at the end of the film and the simultaneous construction of a collective memory of “Never forget!” Future examples of Jewish disturbances, according to the film’s final message, should trigger the same reaction: an exclusion of alien elements and the unity of insiders.

Münchhausen

As early as 1947, Siegfried Kracauer asserted, “all Nazi films were more or less propaganda films, even the mere entertainment pictures which seem to be remote from politics” (*Caligari* 275). Marc Silberman has argued similarly that *all* artistic productions within the Third Reich were permeated by National Socialist ideology (87). There seems to be no doubt about the Reich ministry’s all-encompassing coordination and that popular cinema helped to sustain the Nazi regime, even if only by providing the illusion of a public sphere free from politics. Too often dismissed as escapist entertainment, popular cinema in the Third Reich was also put to instrumental uses, mobilised and functionalised for political causes. A closer look at the film industry between 1933 and 1945 shows an increasing number of entertainment films, whereas political films, as Karsten Witte has pointed out, sank to 8%

of all films after the Battle of Stalingrad in 1943 (104). Germany's changing political and military fortunes after 1939, as Erica Carter emphasises, also produced a shift in film aesthetics, towards mass-culture spectacles (17). Particular material, as Rentschler further emphasises, was adapted at certain times for a specific reason ("Introduction" 3f.). For the Nazis, the classical literary canon of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries became the main topic for entertainment films, a celebration of Germany's golden age of literature even and especially in the darkest of times. One famous example is Josef von Baky's expensive and extravagant feature film *Münchhausen*. Commissioned as part of the twenty-fifth anniversary of UFA and one of the first colour films, it received attention for its elaborate special effects and its star-studded cast.

The movie was an instant hit with German audiences, due in great part to being a literary adaptation. German author Erich Kästner, despite not being on good terms with the party, wrote the screenplay based on a classic literary text from the German canon, the tales of Karl Friedrich Hieronymus Freiherr von Münchhausen, the infamous "liar baron" (see, for example, *Marvellous Travels on Water and Land: Campaigns and Comical Adventures of the Baron of Münchhausen* [1786] by Gottfried August Bürger or *The Surprising Adventures of Baron Münchhausen* [1785] by Rudolf Erich Raspe). Today the film is infamous for having been produced during a period of the war marked by suffering and misery, and for coinciding with the regime's slow downfall. Despite the times, Goebbels allocated a budget of around five million Reichsmark to the production, had actors recruited from the SS, and opened up museums and palaces to be filmed for the extravagant settings (see Hull 253). When *Münchhausen*'s premiere finally took place on 5 March 1943, it was overshadowed by the catastrophic events at Stalingrad. For Goebbels, as Rentschler underscores, *Münchhausen* became a miracle weapon to avert the inevitable defeat, a "male fantasy of control" ("Triumph" 21). Von Baky's *Münchhausen*, then, is relevant because of its mere context, a well-known story retold with the aim of empowering an increasingly desperate nation.

The story of *Münchhausen* is quite different from the films previously discussed in that it admits its own spatial fantasy. As Rentschler points out, "*Münchhausen* stands out as one of very few German films of the Third Reich with a self-reflexive framework" (*Ministry* 198). Not disguised as documentary, as was the case with Riefenstahl's film, not claiming to be historical truth as Harlan's *Jew Süß*, *Münchhausen* is, from beginning to end, a self-reflexive exposure of Nazi fantasies about space and conquest. Baron Münchhausen was, and still is, a figure best known for his lies. As we watch the film, we nonetheless listen to his stories about adventures in foreign lands. Wherever he goes, he is not only smarter or stronger than his enemies but also manages to win over every woman's heart. The audience follows Münchhausen as he travels to Russia, Turkey, Italy and even to the Moon, breaking the laws of time and space, faster than everyone else, wittier than anyone else and even gaining eternal youth in the process.

The following interpretation takes a closer look at the cinematic portrayal of Münchhausen's most popular story, told repeatedly since the nineteenth century,

namely the ride on the cannonball (minutes 51:05 to 53:30). When approaching the scene in the historical context, it is above all a light-hearted effort, presumably meant to revive German spirits after the setback of Stalingrad. It was also meant to demonstrate that German technology and special effects were equal to those of their American (and by implication, Jewish) competitors. Münchhausen's ride on the cannonball is thus part of a larger propagandistic intention to underscore German strength. At the same time, von Baky's cinematic fantasy also exposes the regime's contradictions and weaknesses.

The famous cannonball scene starts on a battlefield in 1737, at the Russian-Turkish siege at the fort of Ochakiv, led by the German Count Marshal von Münch. The advances have come to a complete halt and neither side attacks, everyone is waiting, nothing is moving: two separate spatial entities are facing each other. The mere existence of the other space once again destroys the Nazi fantasy of a pure German paradise, as it does not allow for anything outside its realm. The claim to space must be absolute, as we have seen in both Riefenstahl's and Harlan's films. Münchhausen, then, attempts to come up with a plan to cross from one space to the other. When an impatient general ignites the cannon, Münchhausen finds himself unexpectedly flying to the other side.

The ride on the cannonball quickly becomes a spectacle, in which instead of expressing anxiety or remorse, Münchhausen gains control over the situation and even has time to smile and wave into the camera. In this moment, we come face to face with Nazism's love of the self, as an idealised image of Aryan strength looks us straight in the eye. Münchhausen's acknowledgment of our presence lifts us up to his height and turns us into his mirror image: united we fly next to him and follow him willingly on his path as he undoes spatial boundaries. At the same time, this self-reflexive moment disrupts the film's illusion. As if to say "what I am doing right now is quite impossible", the baron connects with the audience in a space in between, devoid of any distinct background features. Münchhausen's famous wink not only curtails any spatial belonging but also points to cinema's power to create spatial illusions. For Rentschler, this self-reflexive acknowledgment of public deceit allows the creation of credibility even when lying: "Suspending the laws of time and the powers of gravity, Münchhausen celebrates a fake world and a sham hero and invites its audience to share the fantasy" (*Ministry* 213). Of relevance to my discussion here is whether this invitation is supported by the visual geography of the film.

In the following scene, the viewer sees Münchhausen through the lens of the opponent, in a sort of double-gaze. Through the sultan's spyglass, Münchhausen's space is reduced to a castle's white pointy tower, a phallic imperial landscape in medieval form. Seen nowhere in the previous scenes, the landscape we view through the lens is not the actual Ukrainian background, but a projection of his opponent's imagination. The same is true for the new space Münchhausen (and with him, the audience) is about to enter. The Ukrainian city of Ochakiv appears as the epitome of what Edward Said characterised as "latent orientalism", a place

with soft, round and feminine features, reduced to sensuality and passivity (208). Münchhausen's target is, as seen through the imperial gaze of the camera, the other, the conquerable or the inferior, and it is easily penetrable, as Münchhausen's subsequent crash into this oriental space demonstrates.

In a time of total war, *Münchhausen* cleverly negotiates the imaginative geographies of foreign terrains. Von Baky's film does not reject the existence of spatial generalisations and prejudices, nor does it erase the geographical landscapes and imaginative geographies known as the West vs. the Other. Instead, Münchhausen's transition from one spatial concept to the other reveals two striking mental maps full of ideological inscriptions, modern myths and alternative longings, that come together in the spy-glass, a self-reflexive metaphor for the power of illusions on screen. The exposure of spatial images as collective fictions complicates the film's ideological project. In addition to Schulte-Sasse's interpretation of the main protagonist as an allegory for cinema's power over time and space (304), *Münchhausen* disrupts truth claims through spatial exaggeration and caricatured reductions of landscapes to prejudice-ridden mental maps. In the deliberate escalation of its exaggeration, the film's geographies create moments of subversive potential, subtly inviting the viewer to confront the political content of what is being depicted.

Self-reflexive moments allow the evaluation of differences, as the film carefully and covertly undermines its own visual geographies. Mobility lends itself, as Tim Cresswell and Deborah Dixon emphasise, to the cinematic portrayal of change and allows reflective commentary on key social institutions such as family and home, flag and country, and even civilisation and humanity (11). "This is unbelievable", Münchhausen comments when he miraculously gets up unharmed and jumps down from the roof. Even though Münchhausen's role is that of an active master of space, a mythical embodiment of the Aryan superman who takes us with him to forbidden places, the Baron reacts with surprise and disbelief. Two years before the end of the Third Reich, von Baky's *Münchhausen* exposes Nazi cinema's imaginary landscapes to be exactly what they are, unbelievable.

Emotional Topographies in Nazi Cinema

As a visual embodiment of social processes, popular cinema immerses the audience in its various proposed perceptions of reality. German cinema after 1933 was no different, in that it sought to bring together social problems and collective fantasies, mass entertainment and popular ideas. On the one hand, the act of going to the cinema provided an escape from the trials and tribulations of everyday life in the Third Reich. On the other, Germany's entertainment industry after 1933, as Rentschler has pointed out, was dominated by entrenched National Socialist ideas and intentionally designed to create "overpowering illusions and captive audiences" (*Ministry 1*) for political purposes. Goebbels's ministry of propaganda, above all, emphasised an idealised projection of the nation and created aesthetic paradises through the use of metaphors on screen.

Reading film as a semiotic landscape and dynamic participant in the production of national identities (see Aitken and Zonn, *Re-Presenting* 17) provides a crucial insight into the power of the moving image. What Rentschler has called the “ministry of illusion” (*Ministry*) helped to fortify the Nazi regime’s imagined image of the German people, but, as my analysis suggests, this image of a people arose from an image of *place*. This premise raises important questions about the role of films as sites of political contest, as suggested by Andrew Crampton and Marcus Power (5). By exploring the interconnection between cinema and geopolitics, my interpretation of key scenes in three famous films of the Third Reich—Riefenstahl’s ‘morning in Nuremberg’, Harlan’s ‘map of Württemberg’ and von Baky’s ‘cannonball scene’—show that the intended propagandistic outcome depended heavily on the use of emotional topographies.

In accordance with Bruno’s conclusion that the geography of cinema produces emotion, the spatio-visual choreography of the three films addresses the interplay of exterior spaces on screen and interior space or mental maps. Riefenstahl and Harlan sought to erase the mental distance between film and spectator through the use of idealised and emotionally charged settings. Mobilised in this way, cinema was designed to adapt memory by creating specific emotional responses. All-encompassing viewpoints, such as the repeated glimpse through the window (Riefenstahl) or the zooming-in on the map (Harlan), become means to feed the audience’s “fascination for views and the physical hunger for space” (Bruno 172), while simultaneously making claims to truth and authenticity.

In satisfying spatial curiosity, the different visual geographies forge idealised notions of exclusive territories. Whereas *Triumph of the Will* and *Jew Süß* charge their spaces with righteousness, promise and hope, the exaggerated cultural fantasies in *Münchhausen* display a world of impossibility and disorientation. Revealing the mechanism behind authenticity claims, through spatial caricature, *Münchhausen* exposes its own illusions as unreliable. The extent to which *Münchhausen* succeeded as a subversive piece remains uncertain, given the ambivalence of its messages, its nuanced obliqueness and the popularity of the film as escapist entertainment in the nation’s last years of the war. Yet each of the sequences I have discussed offered a vision of an imagined Germany, a remade Germany that existed only as maps drawn on the silver screen. As such, they provide a privileged insight into the relationship between politics, media and identity in the age of mass culture.

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