

PLENARY LECTURE "MODERN HISTORY"

Presenter: Klaus S. Davidowicz, University of Vienna

Title: **"Propaganda as Entertainment - The Challenge of Nazi Propaganda Movies for Today"**

The Nazi regime used very early a wide range of media for its purposes, for self-expression and deception. The movie industry was at the center. Equipped with modern technology and with the aim of creating politically and ideologically transformed illusions, a movie world was constructed, which in its entirety reveals the interweaving of racist body cult and fascist ideas of art. About 1150 movies were shot in the Third Reich. 70 films are direct political propaganda - but each movie had a political task. Propaganda through entertainment was the motto. In the studios, feature films were produced that were successful in reaching millions of viewers and at the same time bringing the political messages of national socialism to women, men, and, above all, to the youth. The national-socialistic view of history, the glorification of Germanism, and the incantation of a great German empire combined with the images of racist and anti-Semitic incitement, with militarism and „Durchhaltekitsch“ were transformed into movies. Goebbels preferred indirect, subtle propaganda. Film culture in the Nazi era meant a clever combination of entertainment and mediation of political content. The history of Germany was rewritten in those movies: historical figures (Mozart, Schiller, Schläuter, Friedrich II, etc.) became the precursors and pioneers of the Third Reich and they also became symbols for central ideas such as the „Führer principle“. They were transfigured as spiritual genius leaders and "superhumans", for whom other laws apply.

Most research since the 1960s has focused on the war and historical films, such as „Erwin Leiser, Deutschland, erwache!“ Propaganda im Film des Dritten Reiches. Rowohlt: Reinbek 1968; 3rd 1989“ and "David Welch, Propaganda and the German Cinema," London: Tauris 2001“. There are also more apologetic works and studies which presented the movies as movies without historical or political backgrounds, such as "David S. Hull, Film in the Third Reich, Berkeley: UCP 1968". Karsten Witte was the first who revealed that "entertainment comedies" such as "Die Feuerzangenbowle" also contained fascist propaganda: „Karsten Witte, , Lachende Erben, toller Tag : Filmkomödie im Dritten Reich, Berlin : Vorwerk 8, 1995.“ Today, only 40 movies from the Third Reich are as "Vorbehaltsfilme" not released for distribution. But highly problematic films such as "The Great King", "Triumph of the Will", "Wunschkonzert" or "Feuerzangenbowle" are available everywhere, on YouTube you can watch all propaganda films , and the ORF broadcasted before the Olympic Games 2016 Leni Riefenstahl's "Olympia 1936". How can we deal with this cinematic heritage in the present? The presentation tries to present possible solutions.