

PREFACE

At the risk of imitating Nazi cinema's reduction of history to pathos, I feel compelled to begin with a little confession. Namely, in the course of working through this material, I have been guilty of the very approaches which, much like a reformed alcoholic, I now lambaste. I started out with the usual conviction that Nazi films are of interest only as propaganda, and then advanced to a more sophisticated informed-by-film-theory stage that went something like this: "These movies may *look* innocent, but this is why you, the ordinary viewer, need me, the film critic, to tell you why you shouldn't be enjoying them." In addition to being a bit arrogant, these perspectives are insufficient precisely because they answer our questions too completely, and hence may discourage the asking of further, more complex and disconcerting questions. For this reason, some films on which I published earlier articles (*Jew Süß*, *Friedrich Schiller*, and *Komödianten*) appear here in a vastly more ambivalent light.

I hope in this book to have achieved an epistemological reversal that is simple, but somehow daunting when it's *Nazi* cinema you're talking about: rather than taking ideology as a starting point and looking at how movies show ideology, we can perhaps take movies as a starting point and examine how they harbor, transform, exceed, and undermine political ideology. If we start this way, we may see contradictions where we would most expect ideological homogeneity, and need not be vexed by movies that don't seem to "fit."

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Finally, thanks to Linn and Daniel for putting up with a mother who blocked the VCR with Nazi movies, and to Jochen, whose ideas and works I have recklessly plundered, taking liberties one only dares with a (preferably current) spouse. His occasional critique, always in the tactful, mild-mannered style of German universities in the late sixties, is most definitely reflected in these pages.