Paris in the Dark

Smoodin, Eric

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Occupied Paris

1939–1944, 2009

On January 1, 1941, the French newspaper *Le Matin* ran photographs of four movie stars in its section listing “les spectacles” in Paris. At the top of the page, Brigitte Horney in *Les Mains libres* (*Befreite Hände*; 1939), and below that, Marika Rökk in *Allô, Janine* (*Hallo Janine!*; 1939), Ilse Werner in *Bal masqué* (*Bal paré*; 1940), and Zarah Leander in *Marie Stuart* (*Das Herz der Königin*; 1940). Even for the reliably rightwing and collaborationist *Le Matin*, this stands out as extraordinary, and would have been inconceivable less than a year earlier. Indeed, this display of some of the greatest divas of German cinema, just six months after the French surrender, points out how thoroughly German the French cinema had become, and how quickly. Of course, French actresses appeared in movies in Paris that week: Edwige Feuillère and Arletty, for example, along with such actors as Jean Gabin and Louis Jouvet. Nevertheless, this single page of movie ads, listings, and photos provides ample evidence of National Socialism’s uses of German movie stars to produce a seemingly benign and celebrity-based cultural occupation of Paris and the rest of France.

How did this rapid and seemingly smooth transformation happen? We need to return to Paris, to the late summer and early fall of 1939, just after the beginning of the war. Had you been in the city then and wanted to get your mind off European affairs for just a few hours, your opportunities for doing so at the movies would have diminished considerably, from month to month and even from week to week, precisely because of the war. Just a few days before France surrendered to Germany in June 1940, only around 50 of the 230 or so cinemas in Paris still were showing movies, and by the time the Germans entered the city on June 14, all of the cinemas had closed. The process had been a gradual one, with many businesses shutting down in the
Figure 5.1 Brigitte Horney, in the upper right, featured in *Le Matin*, January 1, 1941, along with, from the bottom to the top, Zarah Leander, Marika Rökk, and Ilse Werner. Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.
first few months of the year as Parisians, confronted by the inevitability of the Nazi army, fled the city. The closures of cinemas affected every neighborhood, but particularly those on the periphery of Paris and the smaller cinémas des quartiers there.

Many of the major cinemas already had closed in the days leading up to the surrender, although there were still a dozen open in the ninth arrondissement, always such an important area in Parisian exhibition. In the last available listings, for the week of June 5, 1940, just a little more than two weeks before the June 22 armistice between France and Germany, the Roxy cinema in the northernmost section of the ninth showed Miss Manton est folle (The Mad Miss Manton; 1938), with Barbara Stanwyck and Henry Fonda. The Paramount, on the southern end of the arrondissement, was in the fourth week of playing Le Café du port (1940), directed by Jean Choux and with slightly lesser French movie stars: René Dary and Line Viala, a singer making her only film appearance. In between those two cinemas, audiences in the ninth could see reprises of the Columbia film Miss Catastrophe (There’s Always a Woman; 1938) or the British adaptation of Shaw’s Pygmalion (1938) or the 1939 French film Deuxième bureau contre kommandantur, as well as other movies. In the working-class twentieth arrondissement, however, where there typically had been around twenty cinemas before the war, all of them showing subsequent-run films, only one remained in business, the Ciné-Bellevue, which showed a documentary that had come out before the beginning of hostilities but was titled, appropriately enough, Le Monde en armes (1939).

As an occupying force, the Nazis hoped to provide Parisians, no less than the rest of Europe and the United States, with the certainty that the city was back to business as usual despite the French surrender. As Evelyn Ehrlich has pointed out in her study of National Socialist film policy during the war, when the Germans installed Philippe Pétain as the leader of Vichy and occupied the rest of France, they found an ideal but now unused film infrastructure—studio space and cinemas. They also understood the incentive for maintaining a French film industry that had a significant global presence and reputation, and could be used to help develop the face of benevolent German power. In October 1940 the Nazis formed their own movie studio, to make French movies in France and with a name so vague—Continental Films—that it could not really be associated with Germany. They also banned, first, all British films, and then, between 1940 in the Occupied Zone and 1942 in Vichy, all American films as well. Paul Virilio has described the shock of this embargo on Hollywood. “At a stroke,” he wrote, “there would be no more American magazines, no more newspapers, above all, no more movies.”
The Nazis formed the Comité d’organisation des industries cinématographique (COIC), under the aegis of the Vichy regime, to administer this new, German-run film industry in France, and to try to convince French audiences that nothing had changed. To do so, and along with facilitating the bureaucracy of a vast entertainment industry, the Nazis understood the importance of regular news and publicity about the cinema, especially in Paris and aimed at the “average” fan. Of course, throughout the entire Occupation period, when the French read their newspapers, they were, in fact, reading news controlled by Germany.

In film journalism nothing signifies the French surrender in June 1940 more than the end of one publication and the beginning of another. Pour Vous, which has been such a valuable source for my study, had been perhaps the leading French film tabloid since its first weekly issue in 1928, with its broad view of the French film scene in general along with its focus on all the films playing in Paris in particular. Even though it was the sister publication of the rightwing newspaper L’Intransigeant, Pour Vous ceased to exist after the surrender. In its place, starting in early 1941, German authorities published their own French-language film weekly, Ciné-Mondial, providing much the same information as Pour Vous and other prewar movie tabloids, but with an emphasis on Franco-German cultural relations and on the place of German cinema in France. Just as with the name of the film studio—Continental—the very title of the magazine (in English, Cinema World) indicated a reach transcending national boundaries, a proposed international scope beyond the claim of Pour Vous, a name that seemed directed at the individual reader rather than a more global audience.

Much more than gossip and news about movies and movie stars, film exhibition would be vital to the German plan for the normalization of the film culture in Paris, and so the Nazis made sure that cinemas went back into business throughout the city. By the end of June 1941, just one year after the surrender and the closure of all of the cinemas in the city, around 150 of them had reopened. These cinemas would be concentrated in the most well-heeled parts of Paris, with the cinémas d’exclusivité in the second, seventh, eighth, and ninth arrondissements. At least ten of the cinemas that went back into business quickly were within just a few blocks of each other on the Champs-Élysées: the Élysées-Cinéma, the Ermitage, the Lord Byron, the Portiques, and the Normandie, among others, and also the Biarritz which, interestingly enough given the eventual ban on Hollywood movies, reopened in July 1940 with an American film, They Shall Have Music (1939). Neighborhood cinemas, those cinémas des quartiers, also reopened, even in the more working-class eastern
periphery of the city. In the twentieth arrondissement, the Pyrénées showed subsequent-run films, for instance during the week of June 28, 1941, when *Musique de rêve* (*Traummusik*; 1940), a German-Italian coproduction, played there.⁹ Within just a few months there were even more cinemas in the twentieth, so that by September movie fans in the neighborhood could go to the Avron, the Cocorico, the Tourelles, the Gambetta-Aubert-Palace, as well as the Zenith to see movies that had long before left their opening engagements and were now making their way through the city.¹⁰ The Nazis employed the same strategy in other neighborhoods, in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and nineteenth arrondissements, for example, which were all somewhat removed from the areas with Paris's most distinguished cinemas.

In fact, it seems as if reopening all of these cinemas as soon as possible was more important to the German Occupation project than having enough films to fill them. French movies, of course, dominated these screens, but there were far more reprises than new films while the production side of the German-controlled French film industry got itself up to speed. In the first year or so of the Occupation, the newest French films—and there weren’t many—were playing at the most prestigious cinemas. *L’Enfer des anges*, for instance, from 1941 and directed by Christian-Jaque, played at the Ciné-Opéra on the avenue de l’Opéra in the second arrondissement in June 1941. Maurice Tourneur’s *Volpone*, also from 1941 and with two great stars, Harry Baur and Louis Jouvet, showed at the Marivaux just a few blocks away on the boulevard des Italiens. Elsewhere in the second, where cinemas before the war had shown the most recent films from Europe and the United States, movie fans had to settle for reprises. They might go to the boulevard des Italiens to see Charles Boyer in *Orage* (1938) at the Impérial-Pathé, or Pierre Larquey in *La Griffe du hasard* (1937) at the Cinéac Italiens. On the boulevard Poissonnière, they could watch Boyer yet again in Marcel L’Herbier’s *Le Bonheur* (1935) at the Parisiana, or the 1937 Italian film *La Grande révolte* (*Condottieri*) at the Gaumont.¹¹

At the same time, just one year after the surrender, German films naturally enough played throughout Paris. The great German star Zarah Leander appeared in two movies. *Première*, from 1937, showed in many cinemas in the city, at the Voltaire-Aubert-Palace in the eleventh arrondissement, for example, and also at the Montrouge-Aubert-Palace in the fourteenth, while the film she made with Douglas Sirk in the same year, *La Habanera*, was featured in cinemas all over the city. As one might expect, that 1940 homage to anti-Semitism, *Le Juif süss* (*Jud Süß*), played in Paris that June, at the Jeanne d’Arc in the thirteenth.¹²
Mostly, though, there were French films. Once again using the end of June 1941 as an example, many of those films were older and some of them quintessentially French, like Marcel Pagnol’s *César* (1936). Or they starred popular French performers: Maurice Chevalier in Julien Duvivier’s *L’Homme du jour* (1937) playing in the nineteenth arrondissement, or Danielle Darrieux, whose 1932 film *Le Coffret de laque*, an adaptation of an Agatha Christie play, ran in the tenth at the Folies-Dramatiques.13

The splashiest film event of the Occupation was the 1944 Paris premiere of the Technicolor extravaganza *Les Aventures fantastiques du Baron Münchausen* (*Münchhausen*; 1943), produced in Germany at UFA to mark the studio’s twenty-fifth anniversary and starring a who’s who of German cinema, including Hans Albers as the baron, Brigitte Horney as Catherine the Great, and Ilse Werner as Princess Isabella.14 *Ciné-Mondial* ran articles about the movie and photographs from it for weeks in preparation for the film’s opening at the Normandie cinema in early February 1944. The Normandie, at 116 avenue des Champs-Élysées, had closed in early February 1940 (the 1939 British film *Les Quatres Plumes blanches* had been the last film to play there), and its reopening, along with the other cinemas on the Champs-Élysées, had been, as we have seen, a priority for the Nazis. At least by early 1943 the Normandie had reopened with *Mariage d’amour* (1942), a French film from Continental. *Münchausen* played at the Normandie through May 16, when it was replaced by the Continental film *La Vie de Plaisir* (1944), starring Albert Préjean. That three-month run counted as a long one for the Occupation, but not absolutely out of the ordinary. The week *Münchausen* began its run at the Normandie, *L’Inévitable M. Dubois* (1943), starring Annie Ducaux, was just finishing up a four-and-a-half-month appearance at the cinema next door, the Cinéma des Champs-Élysées. But leaving the Normandie did not mean leaving Paris. *Münchausen* appeared immediately and exclusively at the fashionable Caméo cinema at 32 boulevard des Italiens in the ninth arrondissement, and the film played there for more than two months, at least through the week of July 26, 1944. After that, listings for the next few weeks of the Occupation seem not to be available. In fact, it is possible that as the Allied army closed in on the city, and with a surge in fighting in the streets between the Resistance and the Nazis, often right in the center of Paris, cinemas began closing once again, just as they had four years earlier. The move to liberate Paris began in full on August 19, 1944, and the city was free by August 25.

Despite the premieres, the new French films, and the reopenings of so many cinemas, the film culture of the Occupation might only be considered normal, or similar to that of the prewar period, in relative terms. It certainly had more
Figure 5.2 The Normandie cinema on the Champs-Élysées, where Les Aventures fantastiques du Baron Münchausen opened in 1944, as it looks now. Photograph by author.
in common, for instance, with the period before September 1939 than it did with the early summer of 1940, when the cinema in Paris, really, ceased to exist. There were plenty of indications, though, of the strangeness of cinema during the Occupation. Regardless of location, none of the cinemas showed movies all week. Almost all of them were closed on Tuesdays, and many of them also opted for one other day to shut down, probably a result of the crippling shortages in the city, particularly of electricity.\textsuperscript{15} The Nazis mandated that several exhibition sites have the label soldatenkino (soldiers' cinema), a cinema reserved for members of the German military and typically among the most important in the city, for instance the Marignan on the Champs-Élysées and the Rex on the boulevard Poissonnière. Of course, drawing as they did crowds from across the city or from within neighborhoods, cinemas also functioned during the Occupation as ready-made locations for Nazi surveillance.\textsuperscript{16} The cinemas of Paris, those prewar sites of escape, contemplation, or distraction, worked very much as an implementation of what Ronald C. Rosbottom has called the Nazis' determination to “reduce spatial freedom” for everyone in the city.\textsuperscript{17}

Nevertheless, and as we will see, the Nazis tried to make Parisians think of the cinema as a refuge, and consider the spaces of cinema and the stars on-screen as signs of the benevolence of the occupying force. Film exhibition and the production of celebrity came to be central to the project of the German Occupation of Paris, and placing stars within certain exhibition contexts, those that signified the glamor of prewar French cinema, served a vital function in the strategy to place entertainment in the service of fascism. Indeed, one of the stars of \textit{Münchhausen} stands out as an ideal case study of so many of these aspects of Nazi film culture in Paris.

**Nazi Stardom in Occupied Paris**

We can return now to that January 1, 1941 issue of \textit{Le Matin}, the one with the images of so many great German actresses. The most prominently featured of all of them, Brigitte Horney, serves as a particularly interesting instance of the Nazi star in occupied Paris. The period of her greatest celebrity coincided broadly with the history of National Socialism in Germany. She began making films in 1930, and in 1933, the first year of Hitler’s chancellorship, she appeared in only her fifth film, \textit{Heideschulmeister Uwe Karsten} (The Country Schoolmaster). In 1939, as the war in Europe began, she starred in no fewer than five films, including \textit{Befreite Hände}, which, as \textit{Les Mains libres}, opened on the Champs-Élysées in Paris at the end of 1940, an early demonstration of the importance of German melodrama on French screens during the war. Beyond
her films, however, Horney’s celebrity and star persona served National Socialism in a number of ways, and always as a means for establishing the logic of Nazi power in France and of a multinational European cinema controlled by Germany.

An extracinematic component to her biography makes Horney interesting as well. She was the eldest of three daughters of the feminist, neo-Freudian psychoanalyst Karen Horney. The information remains sketchy, but all of the sisters seem to have had vexed and emotionally distant relationships with their mother. As one biographer has written, “Karen Horney’s approach to child rearing . . . resembled her approach to gardening: both were something she supervised and others carried out.”18 The Horneys were not Jewish, but Karen left Germany for the United States in 1932, before the ascendancy of National Socialism but with the handwriting, perhaps, already on the wall. She had her youngest daughter, Renate, with her when she arrived in Chicago, to begin work at the Institute for Psychoanalysis, and her middle daughter, Marianne, would join them a year later. Brigitte, having just begun a promising theatrical career, stayed in Germany.19 During her subsequent work in film, and at least in the French context, Horney’s connection to the preeminent feminist psychoanalyst seems never to have been mentioned. The various discussions of Horney, however, in film magazines or newspapers, certainly invoked those qualities that also might have been associated with her mother. News reports and features often stressed a sort of well-bred, intellectual cosmopolitanism that transcended national boundaries, and that made the actress as much at home in Paris as in Berlin.

The beginning of the war also hastened shifts in established celebrity and in the production of stardom. Lilian Harvey, one of the great German stars throughout the 1930s, left the country in 1939 and stopped making films entirely in 1940.20 In France after the surrender, Michèle Morgan, one of the most popular of the country’s movie stars, left for Hollywood and stayed away for the duration of the war, while the ban on American films deprived audiences in France of such longtime favorites as Jeanette MacDonald and Marlene Dietrich.21 The wartime German film industry largely filled this void through films with established French stars who made movies for Continental and also through German stars, both longstanding, as in the case of Zarah Leander, and new, as with Horney.

By the time of the Occupation, Horney already had achieved at least the beginnings of an international reputation. In January 1935, for instance, L’Afrique du Nord, a weekly newspaper published in Algiers, announced on its movie page that UFA’s Le Diable en bouteille (1935) had just completed
production, and saw fit to mention that while Kate de Nagy acted the starring role in both the French- and German-language versions, in the latter Brigitte Horney would appear in place of Gina Manès.22 That German version, Liebe, Tod, und Teufel, played in New York in May 1935, and the reviewer for the New York Times dutifully described Horney’s character as a “shady local.” In fact, that same critic (who signed reviews “H. T. S.”) developed something of a fixation on Horney as her starring vehicles came to New York. He commented on her “rather indefinable allure” in Verklungene Melodie in 1938, described her as the “alluring wife” in Der Gouverneur, from 1939, and then the same year assured readers that she was “as alluring as ever” in Ziel in den Wolken.23 But she was never remotely as well known to American audiences as such German actresses as Lilian Harvey, who had starred in movies made in Hollywood, or Dorothea Wieck, who also had worked in the United States after the international sensation of Mädchen in Uniform (1931), in which she had played the teacher, the object of all of the young girls’ fascination. In France before the war, Harvey, Wieck, and other German stars, such as Anny Ondra, were significant draws at the box office, while Horney enjoyed only a very minor celebrity.

After the Germans took control of French cinema, they were determined to present Horney as an entirely new star to audiences in Paris and elsewhere in the country. In December 1940, newspapers started advertising Horney in Les Mains libres, her film from 1939, in which, to the extent that we can make out the plot from available materials, she plays a peasant who is also a brilliant sculptress, and who, after she comes to Berlin, ultimately chooses her art over the man she loves. Le Petit Parisien announced that this film “will reveal” to Parisians “the great star,” Brigitte Horney.24 Then, just two days later in its review of the premiere, the newspaper continued to discuss Horney in terms of dramatic disclosure rather than mere reintroduction, referring to the “revelation” of the film, “this unknown actress, Brigitte Horney,” and assigning to her those traits that came to mark her in French journalism of the period: intelligence, sobriety, truth. Underscoring this description, and under a photograph of Horney in the film, a caption asserted “une révélation.”25

Le Matin agreed, and in precisely the same terms, but now extended to the nation rather than only the capital. Anticipating the opening of Les Mains libres, Le Matin claimed that the film “will reveal” to “all France . . . an artist of the first rank, Brigitte Horney.”26 This revelation of the great star coincided with the reopening of a significant exhibition site, the Cinéma des Champs-Élysées on Paris’s most famous avenue in the very fashionable eighth arrondissement. With only around 450 seats, the Cinéma des Champs-Élysées
had never been among the largest exhibition sites in Paris, but it had long been among the city’s prominent sites for seeing films. In just one example among many, *Anna Christie*, Greta Garbo’s first sound film and a major cultural event in Paris, had opened there in 1931. During the gradual closing of Parisian cinemas in the lead-up to the surrender in June 1940, the Cinéma des Champs-Élysées seems to have stayed open until the middle of January, when it showed *Ennuie de ménage*, a title lost to us now but apparently the French name for a foreign film.

Thus the presentation of the new star and the newly reopened cinema coincided, each one contributing to the significance of the other. With Horney, the Germans showed all Paris the National Socialist gender ideal, the romanticized eternal feminine of her character’s peasant upbringing, and also the new woman who feels completely at home in densely urban Berlin. The space of this presentation, the Cinéma des Champs-Élysées, assured Parisians about the reestablishment of pre-Occupation French culture, but, of course, fully thanks to the efforts of the occupying authority. We are used to the Nazis’ ideologically charged architecture: Albert Speer’s Reich Chancellery, his stadium at Nuremberg, and his plans for a sort of Haussmannization of Berlin. The Cinéma des Champs-Élysées indicates yet another architectural mode, one that acknowledges the usefulness of buildings from before the war restored to prewar use, in this case the showing of films. That space, however, would come to be co-opted by the Nazis as a showpiece for the new, wartime German film industry in France, and as the site for the creation of one of that industry’s chief commodities, the movie star.

The film opened as a fully multimedia event, one that stressed the film industry’s development of celebrity, the architectural space of the culture of the Occupation, and also the relationship of both to the collaborationist journalism of the period. When *Le Petit Parisien* announced the premiere, and in its subsequent advertising for the movie, the newspaper took credit for presenting the film. The exact link is unclear and remained unacknowledged in other newspapers, but it seems evident that Parisian movie audiences must have understood that Horney’s “new” stardom indicated direct links and cooperative efforts between visual and print media and the spaces of leisure and entertainment.

This linkage helped establish a standard practice for the German occupying authority. Less than a year and a half later, for example, for Easter, at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées on the avenue Montaigne in the eighth arrondissement, the media corporation Radio-Paris, in cooperation with two film magazines—*Ciné-Mondial* and *Film Complet*—staged a “grand gala” of stars of radio,
theatre, and cinema, all of them introduced by Vichy officials. The event was more overtly ideological than the opening of *Les Mains libres*. While that film may have depicted Horney as the female model of National Socialism, the Easter gala, in the words of the Vichy bureaucrat who opened the event, announced itself specifically as a celebration of the families that trained children to be heads of households, and especially girls to be mothers. To underscore the message, the famous theatre and film star Jean Tissier appeared onstage with Anne Mayen, who had played a supporting role in Renoir’s *La Règle du jeu* (1939), and so too did composer Raymond Legrand, with various stars of French radio.

The Easter gala seems to follow directly from the opening of *Les Mains libres*, both of them using significant theatrical spaces and emphasizing the political role of celebrity while connecting film with other media industries. It should be pointed out, however, that French film culture during the war might also seem little different either from before the Occupation or from the installation of Philippe Pétain in Vichy. When *Les Mains libres* opened in December 1940, a revival of Julien Duvivier’s 1937 film, *Un carnet de bal*, played at one of Paris’s most famous cinemas, the Ursulines, in the fifth arrondissement. Another reprise from 1937, *Pépé le Moko*, showed as well, at the Folies-Dramatiques in the tenth arrondissement. Other, now forgotten, French films from before the surrender played throughout the city: *Quartier latin* (1939), *Bécassine* (1940), and *Circonstances atténuantes* (1939), for example. Thus Parisian audiences, at least, might see not only Brigitte Horney along with other German stars, but such quintessentially French performers as Fernandel, Junie Astor, Sylvia Bataille, Michel Simon, and, of course, Jean Gabin. Indeed, until 1944, when the German authorities realized that Gabin, who had left for Hollywood, had no intention of returning to France and so banned all of his films, several of the great star’s prewar movies—*La Belle Équipe* (1936) and *Le Jour se lève* (1939) in addition to *Pépé le Moko*—were a frequent presence in French cinemas during the Occupation.

We can see here the back and forth of French cinema during the period, at least in those locations—usually urban, such as Paris—where we have sufficient information. Familiar French films, many of which would never be taken for Nazi propaganda, playing alongside French films made by Continental, the German film company, or films from studios in Germany that either clearly espoused a party line or, like *Les Mains libres* (a Tobis production), might be shown in ideologically overdetermined contexts. Shortly after the premiere of Horney’s film at the Cinéma des Champs-Élysées, however, *Les Mains libres*, like other first-run films, made its way through the rest of Paris.
and, probably, France as well. By the middle of January 1941, the film had moved to another posh cinema, the Français on the boulevard des Italiens in the ninth arrondissement, where viewers could see the dubbed French version (the information is unclear, but the film that opened in Paris probably was subtitled, rather than this subsequent, dubbed “version française”). The ads for the film still stressed Horney as an “incomparable artist whose talent lights up this simple story” and also emphasized the atmosphere of the cinema itself (“what a wonderful ambiance”). But Les Mains libres, as well as Horney, had shifted from an exhibition context indicating the connections between popular media, architecture, and National Socialism, to one that stressed the conventionally smooth machinery of film distribution throughout a major city.35

During the war, stars appeared not only in movies, and not just at special events in Paris. Rather, the Germans mobilized movie stars and other celebrities, French as well as German, as entertainers and ambassadors, and sent them to locations important to the war effort. The Germans also enlisted something of an intellectual star system in their efforts, rounding up famous, and willing, French novelists and journalists, for example, to attend the Congress of European Writers in Weimar in October 1941. When those writers met at the conference, or visited Goethe’s home, even they became movie stars of a sort, as their activities were duly recorded by the Actualités mondiales newsreel cameras and then shown to French audiences as proof of a new, modern, international community of philosophers, artists, and writers produced under the auspices of National Socialism.36

It would be celebrities from the entertainment industry who performed most conspicuously for the Germans. When German stars came to France, they invariably met publicly with French celebrities, as was the case one evening in 1942 when Marika Rökk, the Hungarian-born German film actress, shared a stage at the Casino de Paris with the greatest of all icons of the French music hall, Mistinguett. Ciné-Mondial duly reported on the event, and stressed both the internationalism of the meeting by referring to the stars as “European” rather than as one particular nationality or another, as well as the quintessential Frenchness of Mistinguett, labeled as “our Miss National.”37 French stars, of course, also went to Germany. In 1942 a who’s who of French celebrities—including, once again, Raymond Legrand as well as the great chanteuse and actress Fréhel—traveled to Germany to entertain the French workers there. In the most famous trip of all from the period, Maurice Chevalier arrived in Berlin in 1941 and then performed nearby at the Alten Grabow prisoner-of-war camp, where he himself had been held after his capture in World War I, and where many French soldiers from the current war still were incarcerated.38
What was almost certainly the most extensive official trip to Germany began in March 1942, when the “train of stars” left the station in Paris for a tour of Berlin, Munich, and Vienna, with Brigitte Horney ultimately playing a significant role as an ambassador for Franco-German relations. The eight French participants included some of the most significant stars of European cinema, including Danielle Darrieux, Junie Astor, Suzy Delair, and Albert Préjean, and they were accompanied by the screenwriter André Legrand (no relation to Raymond) and film journalist Pierre Heuzé. The participants came ostensibly in the name of the cinematic arts, invited by Carl Froelich, the president of the Reichsfilmkammer, the organization that held significant control over the German film industry during the period, as well as by Alfred Greven, an executive at Continental Films. Darrieux, Préjean, and the others brought French films with them to show in Germany and also planned on visiting German film studios. The event had enough significance as Nazi propaganda that it was front-page news in *Le Matin* and a cover story in *Toute la vie*, which from its first issue in August 1941 became one of the more important weekly French magazines during the war, while *Ciné-Mondial* enlisted Heuzé to report on the trip over a two-month period.39

For the French movie fan, this kind of visit and its place in the popular film tabloids were nothing new. Other major stars had gone to Germany before, typically to make films, and the press covered those visits as well, and in a manner that prefigured the 1942 trip, as signs of the French cinema’s place in Europe broadly and of the possibility of cooperative filmmaking efforts. As early as 1931, and over a two-week period, *Pour Vous* covered the trip Annabella took to Berlin, where she planned to make films. Emphasizing the role of the French film star as a cinematic emissary, the same tabloid in the same year wrote of the Franco-Romanian star Pola Illéry, who had appeared in *Sous les toits de Paris*, bringing that film herself to Düsseldorf for a special presentation.40 Naturally, in 1942, the collaborationist press failed to report on levels of coercion. Darrieux, for instance, took part in the tour as a means of protecting her companion at the time, Dominican diplomat Porfirio Rubirosa, who had been imprisoned by the Nazis when his country sided with the Allies.41 In other words, in much the same way that *Ciné-Mondial* resembled *Pour Vous* and other prewar French film journals, and in much the same way that the celebrity of Darrieux, Préjean, or Astor seemed unchanged by the war, the 1942 trip to Germany may have seemed like nothing unusual within the French film culture of the period.

One of the early reports from the trip isolated the ideological project of the tour: to humanize Nazi officials on the one hand and to support the
geopolitics of a Nazi-controlled Europe on the other. Titled “Better than a Dream . . . the Reality of the Future,” this dispatch from Heuzé has the actress Suzy Delair exclaim to one of the accompanying German officials—Fritz Dietrich, the chief of the SS—“But you are so elegant!” Then Heuzé moved from the personal to the poetic, and claimed that, at night, as the train moves across the countryside, “it seems as if one great land stretches out before us; it’s Europe!” with this singular land mass, without national boundaries, precisely that which was “better than a dream, perhaps the reality of the future.”

Heuzé’s subsequent dispatches in Ciné-Mondial followed the same pattern. When the travelers arrived in Berlin the streets appeared to be larger than those in Paris, but the people looked the same and all of them seemed to be saying “Bonjour! Bonjour!” The always happy Junie Astor smiled at them, but both Viviane Romance and Danielle Darrieux had tears in their eyes, in anticipation of this “great adventure.” At various stops along the way they had wonderful conversations with Nazi officials, who spoke “with heart, and with the echo of humanity.” They met with Carl Froelich, who had been one of the producers of La Nuit est à nous (1930), which Heuzé identified incorrectly as the first French sound film. Thus the inextricable linkage between German and French film history, and the blurred boundaries between one and the other, just as the different European nations all seemed the same from the train that carried the emissaries of French cinema.

All of the travelers and their hosts spoke the “universal language” of cinema. “Is it German?” Heuzé asks. “Is it French?” These conversations produced a “veritable spiritual communion.” Despite all the ways that cinema transcended national difference, though, Darrieux seemed nervous before presenting her most recent film in Germany, according to Heuzé the first French film shown there since the beginning of the war. Darrieux had no reason to be jittery, as the screening quickly resulted in a “miracle.” Parisian audiences were known to be extraordinarily critical, but the German viewers “abandoned themselves” to the film, thereby giving evidence that, eventually, France and Germany will experience “a great reconciliation . . . under the sign of cinema.”

At the party after the screening of Darrieux’s film, the visitors met with painters, sculptors, writers, musicians, and movie stars, and Heuzé marveled that he could also speak with German boxer Max Schmeling, with whom he discussed the famous French fighter from the 1920s, Georges Carpentier. Schmeling marked the low-culture end of this broad spectrum of elites brought together under the aegis of National Socialism. The next day, when the “little caravan” traveled to the UFA studio in Babelsberg, Brigitte Horney counted for the high-culture end.
number of German stars and filmmakers, Heuzé singled out Horney for special attention. Horney sat next to him and the two engaged in a multilingual conversation. “We exchanged confidences half in French and half in German,” Heuzé wrote, “and we each used a little Latin, when there were gaps in our vocabularies.”

Their brief relationship across languages stands in for the ideological possibilities of rapprochement between France and Germany, one of the ongoing tropes of Heuzé’s dispatches. That relationship might have had some difficulties—those moments when neither French nor German seemed to work—but remained possible nonetheless because of a shared educational upbringing, one that prepared them both to speak in Latin.

Horney here emerges as emblematic of one of the contradictions of National Socialism. At least since the beginning of World War II, Western politicians as well as scholars have written of the German rejection, during the period, of the “cosmopolitan character” of the ruling European aristocracy. No less a diplomat than George Kennan, who served in so many US State Department positions during the war, viewed that cosmopolitanism as one of the last hopes for restoring a democratic Europe. As others have pointed out, though, the
remnants of this “aristocratic cosmopolitanism” also created a formidable rightwing support of Nazism.\(^49\) If it is possible to collapse these ideological issues onto the uses of celebrity, then we can see how Horney functioned, at least on this tour of French stars and filmmakers, as one of the signs of the benefits of the cosmopolitan, something she could share with the French stars and particularly with the writer Heuzé. Her ease in different languages, including her proficiency in Latin, showed the possibilities of a postwar confederation of European countries, controlled by Germany but respectful of all the old lines of class, education, and culture.

At least in the extant, German-controlled French sources, the period from the Parisian opening of *Les Mains libres* to her meeting with the representatives of the French film industry marks the height of Horney’s celebrity and, apparently, of her usefulness to the cultural aims of National Socialism. In March 1942, just before that trip to Germany began, *Ciné-Mondial* ran a story on Horney and her new film, *La Tempête* (*Das Mädchen von Fanö*; 1941), and celebrated the naturalness of the actress’s “face without makeup” and her “heart full of light.” In discussing Horney, the author of the article, Pierre Leprohon (who would become one of postwar France’s leading film historians), claimed that nothing was more important to her than the cinema: “If you asked Brigitte Horney what art meant to her, she undoubtedly would respond that it was her life.”\(^50\) Toward the end of 1942, Horney’s film *Illusion* (1942) opened, and that, too, marked an occasion to extol the naturalness of her beauty and her art: “There is nothing artificial about her—from the lashes that fringe her eyes to the feelings expressed by her lips.”\(^51\) These two films opened in two of the most fashionable cinemas in Paris, the Marivaux in the second arrondissement in the case of *La Tempête* and the Biarritz on the Champs-Élysées for *Illusion*. Just as in the case of *Les Mains libres*, here Horney’s apparently fully natural elegance and acting combined with the grandeur of Paris’s best cinemas to produce a cinematic experience showcasing the various forms of Franco-Aryan truth and beauty.

Horney’s next appearance, and her last during the war, would be in *Münchausen*. The ample French publicity about the film that is still available to us, however, both before the film’s opening in Paris and after, rarely mentioned Horney, despite her role as Catherine the Great. Usually, the French press covered the production details of *Münchausen*: the color process used to film it, the exorbitant costs, the length of the film. Readers also learned about the historical importance of the film, which linked German cinema to the French tradition, as the great Georges Méliès himself had made a version of the baron’s adventures when the cinema was still “hesitantly” coming
Largely because of its rococo Technicolor fantasy, *Münchausen* has come down to us as ideologically neutral, and Horney has seemed an actress whose films, either narratively or stylistically, did little to advance the party line, unlike Zarah Leander, perhaps, or Kristina Söderbaum. Nevertheless, *Münchausen* served precisely ideological functions in the French collaborationist press, which typically claimed that the international success of the film proved to a skeptical Europe that Germany did not simply dwell on the war, and might “forget about combat now and then in order to pursue more interesting projects.”

After *Münchausen*, Horney disappeared from French movie screens and also, practically, from the French press. That disappearance tells us something about the vagaries of stardom in general, but also provides information about the status and development of national cinema during extraordinary periods dominated, in this case, by war and by occupation. It is altogether possible that, despite the best efforts of the French press and the splashy reopening of the Cinéma des Champs-Élysées, *Les Mains libres* failed to attract large crowds in Paris or elsewhere in France, and the same may have been true for Horney’s next films, *La Tempête* and *Illusion*. In that case, then, Horney’s
career paralleled that of so many performers in France, Germany, the United States, and elsewhere whose stardom may have lasted only a few years. Indeed, while not discussing specific films, Evelyn Ehrlich has pointed out that attendance at the German films playing in France dropped considerably during the first years after the surrender.54

The political realities of the war and the approaching defeat of Germany also almost certainly affected Horney’s status as a celebrity. In early June 1944, *Le Matin* announced that “*Au bout du monde* (Am Ende der Welt) with Brigitte Horney” had just finished shooting. In perhaps a sign of the changing cultural landscape from wartime to postwar France, the same issue of *Le Matin* announced the coming premiere of Albert Camus’s first theatrical piece, *Le Malentendu*.55 The following month, *Ciné-Mondial* ran a story on *Au bout du monde* with pictures of Horney, whom the magazine called “one of the most engaging and original stars of the German screen.”56 Just one month later, in August, the Allied forces liberated Paris and were pursuing the Germans throughout the rest of France. *Au bout du monde*, the last film Horney made under National Socialism and the occasion of the last references to her in the German-controlled French press, did not premiere in Germany until 1947.

The press coverage of the last year or two of the war, in *Le Matin* as well as *Ciné-Mondial* and other sources, and also the details of film production, indicate another possibility for the apparent decline of Horney’s stardom, and another way of understanding European national cinemas from this period under the shifting pressures of war. The opening of *Les Mains libres* in 1940 certainly was one of the signs of the German takeover of French film in the first months after the surrender. In the long lead-up to the liberation of France in August 1944, however, the French cinema—and French film culture broadly—seems to have become much more French and much less German.

Colin Crisp has noted that, while the French film industry had been “paralyzed” after the surrender, film production by French companies increased over the course of the war, in part because the Germans realized they could not simply flood the French market with their own films and expect enthusiastic audience response. In the occupied north of France, for instance, filmmaking activity went from nothing in the aftermath of the surrender to forty-three films being produced in 1941, and more still in 1942 and 1943, and there were increases, as well, in the Vichy-controlled south.57 Although it had no oversight over the films made by Continental, COIC controlled most of the rest of this production activity, and the extraordinarily complicated legal and economic relations between that organization, French production
companies, and German authorities have been detailed most notably by Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit and Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, as have the frictions and cooperative activities between such wartime centers of French film production as Paris, Nice, and Marseille. It is important to point out that increased activity by French production companies was not at all antithetical to the aims of German officials, who typically sought to exploit French cinema as a sign of Nazi benevolence and commitment to cultural uplift. Nevertheless, over the course of the war, French cinema came to be centered increasingly in France rather than in Germany, and under the purview of French rather than German production companies.

Precisely because of these complex relations, agreements, and coercive actions, and because of shifts in production and financing, the French cinema of the war has proven difficult for historians to label with any certainty. This cinema marks either a departure from anything that came before or after, or business as usual with some variations, or a combination of both. As it had before the surrender and as it would after the fighting had ended, the French press emphasized performers. During the final stages of the war, publicity increasingly went to French rather than German stars. Ciné-Mondial, which had so championed Franco-German cooperation early in the war with its photos and stories about French and German stars meeting on stage or in studios, stressed French star photos and publicity in its final stages of publication. One of the weekly’s last issues, from late May 1944, provided a cover photo of Odette Joyeux as well as an article about her, and photographs and news briefs about Georges Marchal, Maddy Breton, Annie Ducaux, Fernandel, Charles Trenet, and a back cover image of Liliane, while mentioning only one German star, Jenny Jugo. In another issue from the same year, when the journal wondered what “today’s anointed stars” would be doing if the cinema had never existed, the inquiring reporter asked only French performers: Raymond Bussières, Madeleine Sologne, Jean Marais, Gisèle Pascal, Michel Marsay, and Junie Astor.

During the same period, and throughout 1943 and 1944, Le Matin ran photographs of movie stars and other celebrities every week, in a combined Saturday and Sunday issue, and with just a few exceptions they gave readers images of French actors and actresses. They ranged from some of the most famous of all French stars, for instance Pierre Fresnay and Arletty, to popular performers from the period, such as Gaby Morlay and Odette Joyeux, to those who seem to have had a brief celebrity but are more or less unknown to us now: Maurice Baquet, Michèle Alfa, Josseline Gaël. German stars rarely appeared. A random search through 1944 found only Olly Holzmann, who
enjoyed a brief vogue as a leading lady in German movies toward the end of
the war.62 Just as it would have been unthinkable, a few months before that
1941 issue with its photographs of Horney, Leander, Rökk, and Werner, for
Le Matin to publicize so many German stars, so too does it appear to have
been impossible for the newspaper to let German performers dominate the
movie page as the war wound down.

The temptation may be to read the declining presence of German films in
French cinemas, as well as Horney’s disappearance and that of other German
stars from French film journalism, solely in terms of the changing fortunes
of war and of the impending liberation of Paris and the rest of France. But
the shift toward increased French production, and an emphasis on French
stars, also came as part of Germany’s desire to support French filmmaking as
the sign of Nazi cultural broad-mindedness, and demonstrated Germany’s
practical understanding that French audiences preferred French movies and
personalities. Of course, Continental, the German studio, produced many of
these French films, while COIC, run by Vichy, controlled most of the others.
Moreover the French stars themselves did not simply stand as the unprob-
lematic antifascist binary opposites of Horney and other National Socialist
performers. Several had gone on that 1942 tour of Germany that included a
meeting with Horney. In another case, Arletty endured postwar imprison-
ment for her affair with a German officer.63

Instead, we can use the shift as a means of understanding some of the deter-
mining factors on stardom. During what we might refer to as “typical” peri-
ods, stardom can be bound up in so many things: audience preferences, genre
cycles, the relative strength of certain film companies, and so on. There are
also periods when more isolated causes may have an overdetermined effect on
the creation of stardom. The transition to sound, which I described earlier, in
the late 1920s and early 1930s probably hastened the demise of Emil Jannings
as an international star, because his thick German accent made it difficult
for him to work in Hollywood, while the new technology launched the film
careers of Maurice Chevalier, Marlene Dietrich, and others.

In the case of Brigitte Horney in France and particularly in Paris, the exi-
gencies of war and German control worked together to create her stardom.
These efforts to make her a star may have failed, and in any event her French
celebrity was short-lived. Much more significantly than Horney’s films,
German film policy during the war produced Horney’s celebrity itself, and
used it to facilitate ideological ends in ways that her films probably never did.
Horney’s stardom may well have been more significant as an aspect of the
French press than the French cinema, and so her celebrity functioned broadly
in film culture and somewhat negligibly in the films themselves. Horney’s importance came as a representative of German cosmopolitanism during that tour of Germany, as a sign of a rebuilt French film industry, albeit under German control, with her film reopening one of the most important cinemas in Paris, and as a symbol of the Nazi feminine ideal not just in her movies, but in the ways that she and her films were written about in newspapers and film magazines.

After the liberation of France and the subsequent German surrender, Horney became something of a lesser, local celebrity, appearing in films and television shows in Germany from the late 1940s to the mid-1980s. She died in Germany in 1988, and there are no obituaries in French sources, or at least none that are readily available. Only scant evidence of her stardom remains today, in various reconstructions of *Münchausen*, for example, and in one contemporary film that investigates the cinema of the Occupation as well as international film celebrity.

In Quentin Tarantino’s *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), there is just a trace of Horney, and really only of her name. In a small bar in the Occupied Zone, not far from Paris, a German major, a British officer posing as a German captain, his two colleagues, and a German actress working for the Allies play a party game, before the typical Tarantino carnage that kills everyone in the bar except the actress. As the major explains it, “The object of the game is to write the name of a famous person on [a] card . . . Real or fictitious, doesn’t matter.” Cards are passed to the right, and the players moisten the cards without looking at them and stick them to their
foreheads. They then ask questions about the names on their foreheads and guess what is written there.

The five names on the cards are indeed famous, both real and fictitious, and four come from the movies. There is the explorer Marco Polo; then Brigitte Helm, the actress known for her role as Maria in *Metropolis*, who appeared in many other German films; G. W. Pabst, the director who fled fascism for the United States and France but then returned to make films in Nazi Germany; and King Kong. The major, who initiated the game, writes “Brigitte Horney” on his card, and passes it to the British officer on his right.

The card is visible for only a few seconds in just a few shots, while the major asks a series of questions that allows him to guess that the card on his forehead says “King Kong.” But in this movie that so lovingly, and violently, details the importance of cinema during the war, to the Germans, to the French, and to the Americans, the brief reference to Horney and her status as a “famous person” tell us a great deal about her celebrity. This scene, of course, takes place outside of any cinema and is devoid of images of any of those named on the cards. It is the major, the only Nazi at the table, who writes down Horney’s name. That her name should appear on a card at all, along with such iconic figures as Pabst, Helm, and King Kong, indicates something of her importance to wartime cinema. The play between legibility and invisibility—her name is both easy to see and also hidden, offscreen or difficult to read—seems to work as a metaphor for the fleetingness of her stardom, and also for the way that it might linger in memory and in national culture.