



Photography in the Third Reich

Art, Physiognomy and Propaganda

EDITED BY CHRISTOPHER WEBSTER



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Christopher Webster (ed.), *Photography in the Third Reich: Art, Physiognomy and Propaganda*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0202>

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ISBN Paperback: 978-1-78374-914-0

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-78374-915-7

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-78374-916-4

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 978-1-78374-917-1

ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 978-1-78374-918-8

ISBN Digital (XML): 978-1-78374-919-5

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0202

Cover image: Erich Retzlaff, *Joseph Goebbels*, 1933, reproduced in Wilhelm Freiherr von Müffling, ed., *Wegbereiter und Vorkämpfer für das neue Deutschland (Pioneers and Champions of the New Germany)* (Munich: J. F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1933), p. 11.

Cover design by Anna Gatti.

Introduction

Editor's Introduction

Christopher Webster

When photography was born from the union of chemistry and optics ('officially' in 1839),¹ it was long anticipated and much desired. From the Renaissance onwards, the urge to provide greater and greater accuracy drove artists to use optical aids when drawing, such as the Camera Obscura. Among the newly wealthy and emergent middle classes of this anthropocentric era, born out of the Enlightenment, there was also a desire for an image-making process that did not rely on the expensive and elitist process of painting. Devices such as the Camera Obscura led to other machines that could provide simple but accurate likenesses. The advent of photography in 1839 presented to the world a device that seemed capable of reproducing reality so exactly as to seem a very piece of that reality itself. Even a scene physically far removed from the intended viewer's gaze could apparently be brought from the realm of the exotic to the innocuous space of the drawing room of any European or American household. Through optics and chemistry, a translocation occurred where it seemed that the receiver of the photograph could hold and read a fragment of another place. Although it did not provide an actual window onto reality (after all, the photograph in its flattened, monotone, shrunken state is a derivation of what the cameraman saw) it was so unique in its time that it appeared to do so.

As the next best thing to the 'real', the photograph quickly assumed a position as arbiter of truth without precedent. This was particularly

1 Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre's photographic process was disclosed to the French public on 19 August 1839.

relevant in an age when empiricism was the cardinal rule. Photographs appeared as certainties. They seemed *certain* because they were verifiably of *something* — even the photocollage or the carefully assembled photomontage were composed from pieces that had at first been a representation of an object before the lens. Photography lent gravitas to the past and framed collective histories: from the family snapshot to the state occasion; from the dance floor to the battlefield; from birth to death. The photograph was regarded not only as a scientific marvel but also as an objective aid to recording, which would affect a revolution in human perception. The photograph became *evidence* and purported to display things *as they were*. Within months of photography's invention and announcement the new photographers began to travel to every corner of the European-dominated world.

The ability of the camera to take (as opposed to make) a seemingly 'true' portrait likeness, a *vera icon*, ensured its popularity. When portraits were made, physiognomic science was quickly applied to read the shadow on the photographer's plate. Until relatively recently, physiognomy was generally assumed to be able to reveal, by careful study of the features and body of the subject, something about the inner person. The Swiss pastor Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801) famously helped to revive physiognomy as a credible study after it had fallen somewhat into disrepute during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, when it became associated with palmistry and other divinatory practices. The Renaissance polymath Giovanni Battista della Porta (1538–1615) for example, had been brought before the Inquisition after over-enthusiastic Neapolitans had hailed him as a 'magus'. Della Porta had, amongst his other publications, also published *De Humana Physiognomoniam* in 1586. In *De Humana*, Della Porta's makes a comparative study between the external characteristics of humans and animals. As with many of the nascent scientists of the Renaissance, Della Porta's worldview was intrinsically spiritual and magical, a kind of spiritual metaphysics.

Lavater described how, after careful training, the physiognomist could make a reading of the character in the face; in so doing he was drawing on a broad tradition that included Della Porta. Lavater ensured the continuing popularity of such an understanding through likeness. Nor should the extent of his influence be underestimated. After Lavater's

death in 1801 the *Scots Magazine* remarked that he had been, 'For many years one of the most famous men in Europe'.²

For Lavater, the likeness was a derivation of the mark of the creator, a mystical connection to a higher ideal that through moral degradation led to visual 'types.' Lavater posed the rhetorical question:

The human countenance, that mirror of Divinity, that noblest of the works of the Creator — shall not motive and action, shall not the correspondence between the interior and the exterior, the visible and the invisible, the cause and the effect, be there apparent?³

The empiricist nineteenth-century sciences, which sought reason over superstition and evidence over faith, nevertheless explored processes of visual examination that were linked to, and born out of an understanding of what was effectively an esoteric physiognomy and widely divergent interpretations of Darwinian evolution. Thus, when photography was invented at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was quickly assimilated as a tool for making physiological assessments, both in the service of science and as a more populist cultural record. Certainly, by the end of the nineteenth century, the camera was being applied prolifically throughout emergent scientific fields of study, such as anthropology, as a measuring and classifying device.

In the late nineteenth century, many in Germany, a country that had only recently been forged into a national state, were keen to demarcate and underline what could specifically be regarded as 'Germanic', both visually and otherwise. One symptom of the cultural anxieties of the era was the emergence of the *völkisch* movement, an eclectic mix of philosophies and trends that involved notions of ethnicity, *Heimat* (or homeland), a return to the land, nature, and romanticism, in particular. Science and photography became inextricably intertwined with these notions especially as several leading scientists, including Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919), endorsed a social-Darwinist and ethnically-led hypothesis of German racial science. German science, therefore, laid down the visual formatting for the photographer's approach to the visage of the German *Volk*.

2 John Graham, 'Lavater's Physiognomy in England', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22:4 (1961), 561.

3 Johann Kaspar Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy for the Promotion of the Knowledge and Love of Mankind* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1789), p. 24.

By the early twentieth century, ethnographic images were commonly utilised as an increasingly sophisticated tool to validate claims centred on the distinction between one race and another. Scientific texts such as *Deutsche Köpfe nordischer Rasse* (German heads Nordic race, 1927)⁴ written by the racial scientists Hans F. K. Günther (1891–1968) and Eugen Fischer (1874–1967) set out to illustrate the Nordic ‘type’ using the clear eye of the photographer’s lens. The use of photography as a comparative means of assessment and identification became increasingly paramount during this period, not only in scientific documents, but also in popular publications that contained photographs of racial types from around the world displayed in photographic charts. What these studies highlighted was not only the geography and range of race, but also what was perceived as the negative admixture and miscegenation that, according to celebrated scientists like Günther), posed a threat to the German race.

In line with the development and use of documentary and creative modernist photography in other parts of the world, Weimar Germany (1919–1933) also quickly established the photographic form as a revelatory medium to document the German people. Moreover, whether the political ideology was of the left or of the right, many photographers were galvanised to impose a typological approach even in their creative practices. Progressive photographic practice in Weimar Germany emerged emphatically and innovatively with its rejection of ‘arty’ Pictorialist practices of manipulation to offer something straight, direct, sometimes brutal — what came to be characterised as the ‘New Vision’. This was when photography, ‘came to occupy a privileged place among the aesthetic activities of the historical moment’.⁵

The photographic focus on physiognomy in Germany that preoccupied so many of the photographers between the two world wars was a focus common to those with conservative or nationalist sympathies, as well as to those who rejected or were unaffiliated with the extremes of the political axis. The celebrated and influential photographer August Sander (1876–1964), for example, employed

4 Eugen Fischer and Hans F. K. Günther, *Deutsche Köpfe nordischer Rasse: Ergebnisse des Preisausschreibens für den besten nordischen Rassenkopf* (München: J. F. Lehmann Verlag, 1927).

5 George Baker, ‘Photography between Narrativity and Stasis: August Sander, Degeneration and the Death of the Portrait’, *October* 76 (Spring 1996), 76.

physiognomy as the central pillar of his portrait catalogue of the German people. According to George Baker, Sander had followed a personal visual interpretation of Hegelian dialectics and sought to demonstrate how degeneracy is co-equal with progress.⁶ In 1931 Kenneth Macpherson, writing about Helmar Lerski's (1871–1956) book *Köpfe des Alltags* (Everyday Heads), thought that the photographer had defined a 'clear definition of the physionomical-psychological accord; a blending of visible and 'invisible', so that rather more than character delineation is there [...] Pores of the skin, cracked lips, hairs in the nostrils — these are part of the purpose and reality'.⁷ But photographers who would later prosper under National Socialism also adopted these approaches using a 'clear definition of the physionomical-psychological' as defined by those Weimar proponents of the 'New Vision'.

When the National Socialists emerged as the dominant political force in Germany in 1933, many photographers who coordinated themselves according to the new dispensation (the *Selbstgleichschaltung* or self-coordination) were already considered as pioneers in their photographic output with regard to depictions of the racial German proletariat. Indeed, their work seemed an ideal vehicle to broadly disseminate notions centred on the *Volksgemeinschaft* or people's community. The work was invested with a romantic artfulness that made the images visually appealing, as well as carrying the legitimisation of document. This was a time when:

[...] ordinary people increasingly recognised themselves as inhabitants of cultural territories distinguished by language and custom [...] As Germans came to regard each other as contemporaries, they took increasing interest in the tribulations of fellow citizens, tied their own biographies to the national epic, and thereby intertwined personal with national history.⁸

These photographs were born from a then emergent modernist photographic practice, which often possessed the descriptive vigour of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) and the directness of an Edward

6 See George Baker, 'Photography between Narrativity and Stasis' (1996).

7 Kenneth Macpherson, 'As Is' (1931), in David Mellor, ed., *Germany — the New Photography 1927–1933* (London: The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), p. 68.

8 Peter Fritzsche, 'The Archive', *History and Memory* 17:1/2 (Spring/Summer 2005), 17.

Weston. These portraits are presented without filters and where there is a hint of a romantic vision it is far removed from the soft vagueness of Pictorialism. They have more in common with Walker Evans' portraits of sharecroppers in Alabama or Dorothea Lange's Depression-era migrant workers. These American counterparts were producing photographic studies as a marker of their time, when their subjects were enduring the trauma of the Depression and its deleterious effect on labour and farming. Supported by government salaries, these photographers sought to 'show and tell', to underscore the primacy of the American relationship to 'honest labour' whilst simultaneously highlighting the plight of these people in turbulent and even disastrous economic times.

Their German contemporaries echo this concerned documentary approach. However, images of plight were not recorded, but rather a celebration of the peasant and proletarian. These photographs are situated as a counterpoint to the perceived dangerous effects of Weimar cosmopolitanism and urban living. They emphasize notions of *Heimat* and *Blut und Boden* (Blood and Soil), concepts that were embedded in National Socialist thinking. They were constructed images of 'Ethnos'.⁹

The subjects recorded in their portfolios are often constructed as striking and unavoidable. Very often, the subjects are encountered face-to-face, almost literally. In the folio publications that included much of this work, many of the portraits are reproduced at near-life-size, creating an unsettling sense of intimacy — sharp eyes, creases of skin, wrinkles, stubble, and roughness. There can be no doubt that this work was often an attempt to ennoble the subjects.¹⁰ Clearly these are not 'neutral' photographs; their use by, for example, the *Rassenpolitische Amt der NSDAP* (the Office of Racial Policy) in various publications and expositions situates them as *political* objects and thus inextricably bound to the fundamental belief system of the National Socialist state.

In the first serious post-war examination in English of the art of National Socialism, Brandon Taylor and Wilfried van der Will's *The*

9 The editor has used 'Ethnos' as a summary term for this ethnically driven approach to (in particular) the autochthonous peasant and other 'people of the soil'. These were images about the 'tribe', about blood and belonging, framed, as this text explores, through a modern lens of myth, politics, and science.

10 Although this was not exclusively the case — see for example Andrés Zervigón's discussion on Erna Lendvai-Dirksen in this volume.

Nazification of Art (1990) suggested that the historical unwillingness to discuss the subject of National Socialist creative making in any critical depth had been the result of an:

[...] understandable reluctance [...] to enter into discussions about National Socialist art for fear of being accused of implying support either for the works under review or for the regime which sponsored them. On the other hand, the tendency to condemn all such works as 'horrific' to an equal degree is a sure sign that the process of historical, social and aesthetic analysis has yet to begin.¹¹

Although there has been a plethora of studies on a wide variety of aspects of image-making in the Third Reich, including film, the graphic and fine arts, in the (nearly) thirty years since *The Nazification of Art* appeared, a focussed examination in English of the work of specifically *creative* photographers of Ethnos who flourished under National Socialism is now long overdue, particularly in relation to understanding the lasting historical legacy of their work as 'art' employed as propaganda.¹² Yet, such examinations are still fraught by the potential for negative reactions to the topic, especially in modern-day Germany and Austria. As a result, the photography under scrutiny here has received scant non-judgmental

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- 11 Brandon Taylor and Wilfried van der Will, *The Nazification of Art: Art, Design, Music, Architecture and Film in the Third Reich* (Winchester: The Winchester Press, 1990), p. 5. Even this valuable academic text did not explore creative photography in any depth.
 - 12 Exceptions do exist in German. Rolf Sachsse's book *Die Erziehung Zum Wegsehen: Photographie im NS-Staat* (Dresden: Philo and Philo Fine Arts, 2003) is a well-researched, broad, yet detailed study of this period but only available in German; another good example (also only available in German) is the series of essays on the work of Erna Lendvai-Dircksen: Falk Blask and Thomas Friedrich, eds, *Menschenbild und Volksgesicht: Positionen zur Porträtfotografie im Nationalsozialismus* (Münster: Lit, 2005). Paul Garson's *New Images of Nazi Germany* (Jefferson: McFarland and Co. Inc., 2012) is an interesting study but, like his earlier volume *Album of the Damned* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 2009), has an emphasis on personal photography and snapshot photography. Other studies are broader in their scope (i.e., their historical focus is broader) such as Klaus Honnef, *German Photography 1870–1970* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) or focus on very specific topics, such as Janina Struk's excellent *Photographing the Holocaust* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), or deal with the periods prior to Hitler (in particular the Weimar period) or post-Hitler. Relevant recent studies of interest in English include Elizabeth Cronin's *Heimat Photography in Austria: A Politicized Vision of Peasants and Skiers* (Salzburg: Fotohof Edition, 2015). However, literature on specifically creative/art photography during the Third Reich, and in particular by those supportive of the regime, remains remarkably scarce.

critical attention in the various histories of photography, largely because of the political affiliation of this work prior to 1945 and the ongoing political bias of some contemporary academics. As the historian Anna Bramwell has suggested, 'Reading history backwards has its problems, especially when it is done from the highly politicised (and nearly always social democratic) viewpoint natural to historians of Nazi Germany'.¹³ This volume is intended to be a part of a process of re-evaluation *in context*.

Though it has been well documented how many creative photographers made the decision to leave Germany prior to or soon after the January 1933 electoral success of Adolf Hitler and his *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP),¹⁴ there were some who not only tolerated, but welcomed the political change and, through self-co-ordination with the regime, continued to practice as creative freelance photographers during the twelve years of the Third Reich. This book therefore is a photo-historical survey of the work of some of those select photographers who *embraced* (or at least professionally endured) National Socialism and the formulation of a somatic vision that accorded or aligned itself with a National Socialist worldview.

Involved as it is in the main with creative practice, this text places a deliberate emphasis on those photographers who made an idealised (and aesthetically guided) representation of the overarching notion of *Blut und Boden* (Blood and Soil), often through the image of the German peasant (and his landscape) and almost invariably through an interpretation of physiognomy. The idea of 'Blood and Soil' predated National Socialism, however, the idea was adapted and upheld as a core tenet of the movement and has since become synonymous with National Socialism.

Again, according to Anna Bramwell, 'Blood and Soil' as understood by National Socialism,

... was the link between those who held and farmed the land and whose generations of blood, sweat and tears had made the land part of their being, and their being integral to the soil. It meant to them the unwritten

13 Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler's 'Green Party'* (Abbotsbrook, Bourne End, Bucks.: The Kensall Press, 1985), p. 2.

14 Hitler's National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) won the national elections on 30 January 1933, signalling the beginning of the so-called 'Third Reich'.

history of Europe, a history unconnected with trade, the banditry of the aristocracy, and the infinite duplicity of church and monarchy. It was the antithesis of the mercantile spirit, and still appeals to some basic instinct as a critique of unrootedness.¹⁵

This book examines the influence of pseudo-scientific notions (such as physiognomy) as well as *völkisch* culture on photography and how this ethnically orientated photography was exploited by the regime (but also enthusiastically produced) after 1933. It analyses the social, political, institutional and cultural processes that affected the photographic practices of select photographers and the proliferation of their influential work during the twelve years of National Socialist rule in Germany. This book sets out to explore how an aestheticized photography was used to create a visual correlation to the 'Master Race' (and its antitheses) and continued to do so under the auspices of the National Socialist state. The contributions to this volume explore the question of whether we can talk of a distinct National Socialist photographic style and posits that if it does exist it might be argued to lie in a stylised representation of the body as constituent parts of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (the people's community) by these often passionate photographers, who were concerned with imposing a new National Socialist and *völkisch*-influenced reading of the notion of a 'Blood and Soil' Ethnos.

Where National Socialist ideology itself was conflicted and conflicting (shifting emphasis over its twenty-five-year period from the original twenty-five-point programme of 1920), after 1933 all aspects of culture, including photography and the visual arts, were deeply impacted by the specific demands of the new government. By the mid-1930s, the regime's policy towards the visual arts had effectively become a reflection of Hitler's personal taste for a form of 'Heroic Realism' with 'Blood and Soil' as a core element of these representations.

In the Weimar era, photographers such as Helmar Lerski and August Sander had developed their physiognomic precepts for photography on notions such as class and social position; photographers under National Socialism on the other hand, based their studies on biology, culture, and the homeland or *Heimat* (and to some degree a mythic melange of all of these), the guiding principles of 'Blood and Soil'.

15 Bramwell, *Blood and Soil* (1985), p. 53.

Many of these photographers, for example, Erna Lendvai-Dircksen (1883–1962) and Erich Retzlaff (1899–1993), had already begun developing a catalogue of racially ‘satisfactory’ and ‘heroic’ peasants during the Weimar period. Whereas their approach became officially sanctioned by the regime after the *Gleichshaltung* (co-ordination) of culture that began in 1933, photographers like Sander were censured. This book includes examinations of how already established, as well as emergent photographers reflected these ‘Blood and Soil’ tendencies in their portfolios and publications, and how personal ideology, social advancement, scientific discourses, and political pressure influenced their practice and output.

In the first chapter ‘State’, Rolf Sachsse explores the interplay between National Socialist policies towards the arts and photographic aesthetics where ‘media modernity was introduced into a totalitarian government structure’, as well as how this interaction created a lasting legacy in (West) Germany after 1945. Sachsse unravels the seemingly contrary positions of National Socialism’s celebration of the past and its emphasis on a modern industrial vision, weaving a discourse that examines how ‘New Vision’ approaches to media, design, and photography played on paradoxically archaic depictions of Germans themselves, their history, and their landscape. It was, as Sachsse asserts, a process of encouraging a ‘looking away’ that used state-of-the-art approaches.

Chapter two, ‘Leaders’, describes how leadership was framed as an aesthetic manifestation of the *Führerprinzip* (leader principle), the model for leadership in the National Socialist state. The chapter focuses on select publications by one specific photographer, Erich Retzlaff, to explore how this photo-construction extended, like the *Führerprinzip* itself, through the so-called National Socialist ‘elite’, for example, in publications such as *Wegbereiter und Vorkämpfer für das neue Deutschland* (Pioneers and Champions of the New Germany, 1933). It is argued that many of the photographs, such as those reproduced in *Wegbereiter* and other publications like it, go beyond mere record and physiognomically position these men as a new type of man, a political elite. This presentation of an ethno-nationalist elite included sportsmen, artists, and, later, military figures, amongst others. Using these and other

photographic examples, the chapter explores how the physiognomic profile of Hitler can be read in conjunction with an attempt to develop a broader physiognomic portrait of a National Socialist leadership elite.

Following on from the themes developed in the second chapter, in chapter three, 'Workers', Andrés Zervigón examines the framing of the 'Germanic' peasant and worker, and Erna Lendvai-Dircksen's 'psychological' approach in particular. Zervigón explores how these close-up photographs often forced the viewer to look longer at the face of the subject, to engage with it, and thus to read it as framed by a mode that employed both archaism and ultra-modernity. Zervigón argues that the reading of the photograph was thus determined by the context within which the image was framed and the milieu in which it was being presented. From the modernity of the *Reichsautobahn*, to the lone farmer at work with the scythe and the peasant girl in traditional costume, this photography seemed to set out to create an aestheticised and propagandistic record of paradoxical modernisation and entrenched tradition. At the centre of these visual constructions were the workers themselves as time-worn or idealised bodies, racial paragons, and dramatic physiognomic types.

Ulrich Hägele (chapter four) follows the development of the visualisation of the notion of *Heimat* from its Romantic origins in the nineteenth century through to its manifestation as a genre of creative photography during the era of the Third Reich. Hägele surveys the often convoluted and ideologically entangled use of *Heimat* that found its political apotheosis after 1933 with an emphasis on the work of Erna Lendvai-Dircksen and Hans Retzlaff. Using these specific examples, Hägele explores the photographic manifestation of *Heimat* as projected onto the individual situated within the land and as part of the land itself in a 'Blood and Soil' context. The chapter sets out how the relationship of these photographic portfolios to National Socialism was more complex than has formerly been proposed, with an examination of their placement as 'documentary'. The essay appraises these photographer's works as more than merely a blunt affirmation of National Socialist ideology, arguing rather that they were informed by a broader sense of national romanticism.

Chapter five, 'Myth', explores this notion of a 'national romanticism' further by examining the controversial impact of nineteenth-century

völkisch and occult currents on National Socialism, and how this supposedly parlous influence leached into image-making and into photography in particular. Using select examples, the chapter explores the photographic framing of the German as 'other'. National Socialist ideologues and propagandists, like their predecessors in the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century *völkisch* mise-en-scène, clearly recognised the unifying power of myth and thus promoted (and exploited) it as part of their overarching cultural programme. The work of controversial scholars such as Herman Wirth, and the influence of political institutions such as Himmler's *Ahnenerbe*, played a role in directing this visual manifestation of the (specifically) rural inhabitant so that they were presented as a race apart, having a semi-divine origin in a mythical *Urheimat* in the 'ultimate north'. As images of Ethnos, these photographic portfolios 'revealed' the peasant as an archetypal figure.

In contrast to chapter five, Amos Morris Reich's essay 'Science' (chapter six) enters into the respective scientific logics of a variety of scientific and scholarly fields and reconstructs, from within, the use of photographic techniques with regards to 'race' before and during the National Socialist period. From a methodological perspective, the text surveys Rudolf Martin's standardization of photography as a measuring device in physical anthropology. The second part explores how, during the Third Reich, these techniques were redefined because their scientific, political, and aesthetic contexts had been transformed. Morris Reich argues here that the range of scientific and ideological positions with which photography was aligned became smaller, and rather than being guided by any substantial scientific questions, these positions were used to uphold components of the National Socialist worldview and, sometimes, immediate political concerns. But this process of contraction was not limited to the science-politics nexus, in the strictest sense of the term, as it reflected wider contemporary cultural-political processes. The chapter ends by exploring how, during the Third Reich, the scientific uses of photography increasingly overlapped with National Socialist aesthetic ideologies in general and with certain branches of documentary and art photography in particular.

Photography in the Third Reich is an exegesis of the work of select photographers and aesthetic photographic practices during the Third Reich. It is not intended as an overview of photographic practice and application *per se* during the Hitler years, rather, it is specifically focussed on those photographers who engaged with work that emphasised an anti-rational, anti-enlightenment, and romantic model, creating a visual framework upon which ideas relating to the *Volk* could be hung, especially in the image of the autochthonous peasant.

This aesthetic photography presented the subjects as inhabitants of an idealised space and underlined a radical traditionalism relating to Ethnos. The subjects represented a connectivity with the past through customs, dress, and, in particular, the face, as representative of breeding and 'good blood'. The ideal that was visualised looked backwards through a blend of myth, tradition, race science, and occult currents to a divine origin of the 'Aryan' who had, it was suggested, emerged in a distant time from an *Ultima Thule*. And, Janus-like, this work was part of an ideology that also looked forward to a rebirth, an epic palingenesis¹⁶ where, out of the dying decadent world, a new one would be forged in fire and blood.

This book also explores how this interpretation of the autochthonous *Volk* was directed by and co-opted for political propagandistic purposes and where it might be said to fit into an aesthetic and contextual understanding of photography from this period. Although not specifically an eisegesis of the relationship of this photography to ethnic cleansing as a result of racial political policies, it will be argued that the work of these photographers created a mindset of national uniqueness, a visual ethnic identity, and ultimately a reactionary intolerance in the metapolitical crucible of the Third Reich.

Read on a formalist level (a medium-specific approach to interpreting photography using notions such as style, self-expression, aesthetics and photographic tradition) this creative photography of the Third Reich carries all the merits of what is considered 'great' modernist photography from that period. In terms of a purely aesthetic reading (composition, tone, technique, expressiveness, originality, etc.) they are often outstanding and certainly equivalent to the work of their peers

16 On this notion of a national 'palingenesis' see Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism* (2007).

outside of Germany who are still highly regarded by critics, collectors, museums, and galleries. But such a reading only reveals one facet of their construction. Reading these images from a post-modern and non-aesthetic context (as objects spawned with a particular social function and ideological coding) is also insufficient, however, even when it allows a sharper analytical review of their origination. This book adopts both approaches (formalist aesthetic *and* analytical). This co-dependent reading facilitates an analysis of these images' aesthetic presence as material objects when reproduced in magazines and other media, such as 'coffee-table' picture books, *allied with* the historical, socio-cultural, and political origins that made these photographs so powerful as carriers of meaning, which potently added to the German national myth.