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German Civ 2320

Lesson 5

Hitler and the Aestheticizationof Politics

German philosopher, Walter Benjamin, coined the term “Aestheticization of politics” to describe and depict the Nazi movement and overall German fascism movement. This describes the movement and particular politics as an art form, that evokes a positive and feverous response from the public, then relates this reaction to the fascist Nazi movement. Through the use of film, radio, symbolism, and propaganda the Nazi party used this political art form to captivate the public and gain their undying support.

The Aestheticization of politics was expanded on by Siegfried Kracauer who said that the imagery and films that the Nazis created were not a replacement of reality, but were meant to create a hyper reality in which the fears and concerns of the people were greatly exaggerated. This kind of political propaganda left the viewer unable to separate reality from the actual propaganda because they were wrapped up into the dramatics or controversy of the movement and what they were viewing. Few things so eloquently fit the role of “Aestheticization of politics” or portrayed the hyper Nazi reality as the film triumph of Will.

The film Triumph of Will was one of the greatest single pieces of Nazi propaganda by being well filmed and directed and as well as the effect it had on its viewers. Adolf Hitler, who helped create this film, felt that propaganda was of the utmost importance to Nazi movement. We can see this in their vast use of posters, symbols, pamphlets, and films such as Triumph of Will that helped drive his Fascist Nazi movement. Along with propaganda Hitler believed that mass rallies played a key role in the success of his party and movement, aided by his incredible public speaking skills, Hitler was able to create a national fervor. The basis of the speeches and propaganda was to push the message to a vast number of people and create a groupthink or echo chamber response to increase his power.

Although Walter Benjamin’s “Aestheticization of politics” idea for the Nazi’s political movement was well received, it was not without its own criticism. The criticism lies with the fact that it is hard or impossible to relate a specific style or aesthetic form with any particular ideology because they can change and move away from each other so quickly and easily. Another problem is it not provable whether it is more honorable to make decisions logically or base them off of aesthetics. This conflict means that no one choice is inherently better than another person’s. So, the debate on whether the large and lavish political displays have an effect on the success of a political campaign is inconclusive.

Though the idea of “Aestheticization of politics” is relatively old the implementation of it has not faded in our modern political landscape. The use of symbolism such as the Republican Elephant or the Democrat’s Donkey, or the party colors or red and blue, respectively, plays a almost major role in the US political scene. When a representative of this party goes on TV they wear the tie color of their party to make it easy to distinguish which “side” they are on, or when election coverage is happening media outlets with have graphics of the two animals “fighting”. This symbolism is far reaching and engrained in politics. Along with traditional media, platforms such as Twitter and Facebook broadcast the messages of these parties and their supporters to vast number of people faster than ever. With this last American election, in particular the quick spread of news and opinions, spread by real people or fake Russian bots, and the use of highly cherry picked facts or plain wrong or fake controversies mirrors the way the Nazis dominated the minds of the German people and propelled their message forward.

Walter Benjamin’s, a German philosopher, term “Aestheticization of politics” in reference to the Nazi movement and the German fascism movement sought to describe the Nazi movement as an art form. This art form had the sole purpose of evoking a positive and feverous response from the public and exaggerated their fears and concerns with Germany. This would then be related to the fascist Nazi movement and shows them as the solution to their problems while blinding their logical judgement with drama and fear. Through the use of film, radio, symbolism, and propaganda the Nazi party used this political art form to captivate the public and gain a lasting and powerful support.