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Heart and Clock

Time and History in The Immortal Heart *and Other Films about the Middle Ages*

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Non-Linear Time in Medieval Film

Films about the Middle Ages are different from films taking place in the modern period.[1] On the basis of the now numerous and sophisticated studies that suggest so, I have previously argued that it is useful to think of medieval film as its own genre or sub-genre of historical film (Bildhauer 2011: 12–18). Here are some of the distinct characteristics of the historical approach in films that stage premodernity: such films represent film's potential to engage with the past as superior to that of writing; they depict the agents of history less as individual subjects than as entities embedded in more abstract forces or collectives; and, crucially in the context of this volume, they show history and time as being non-linear, as not passing in a measurable, chronological sequence.

Particularly relevant for the present collection and for an innovative methodology of historiography and historiophoty is the question I shall address in this chapter: how exactly does medieval film challenge the linearity of time, and what alternatives to it does it present? Using a sample of about 200 medieval films (that is, films set between 500 and 1500 AD, or otherwise identified as medieval by their makers and audiences), mostly coming from a broadly German tradition, I have observed that they deviate from sequentiality predominantly by allowing some form of co-presence of past, present, and/or future in one single moment (Bildhauer 2011: 25–50). The past is no longer safely in the distance; nor is the future. For example, the legend of Faust is often depicted in medieval film as one where the coexistence of different times becomes possible – Faust is able, by devilish magic, to return to his youth. In F. W. Murnau's famous 1926 version, there are many instances of past and future being shown as co-present in striking images – such as that of the old man Faust seeing in a bowl a vision of his youthful

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Figure 20.1 Young Faust and Old Faust reflected in a bowl. *Faust* (1926). Producer: Erich Pommer. Director: F[riedrich] W[ilhelm] Murnau

self, together with his own aged hand and the reflection of his old bearded face (which are visible behind the young man's right ear); the vision prompts him to swop places with this youth (see Figure 20.1).

This sense of non-chronological time and of the co-presence of its parts is marked as ''medieval'' through the very fact of the film being set in the Middle Ages.

In their representation of the Middle Ages as a period of alternative perceptions of time, medieval films are able to draw on a long tradition, both of popular and of scholarly opinion (Oexle 1994). Researchers have observed many different medieval attitudes to time, but there is some consensus among those willing to generalize that medieval conceptions differ from modern ones in two main ways: first, while modern time is measurable by clocks and imagined as a succession of precise points on an irreversible timeline, medieval time was vague and only roughly divided into the rhythms of day, night, and the seasons; second, while modernity believes in historical progress and change, the Middle Ages felt past, present, and history to form a continuous unity within the wider framework of eternity. The idea that people in the Middle Ages perceived time in this way is not necessarily correct, but it has a long and illustrious pedigree and still dominates scholarship. Marc Bloch summarized the first opposition between the modern measurability and the medieval vagueness of time in his seminal *Feudal Society*, whose French original edition was published in 1939:

> These men [of feudal Europe], subjected both externally and internally to so many ungovernable forces, lived in a world in which the passage of time escaped their grasp all the more because they were so ill equipped to measure it. [. . .]

> This is to continue till the moment when – towards the beginning of the fourteenth century – counterpoise clocks brought with them, at last, not only the mechanization of the instrument, but, so to speak, of time itself. (Bloch 1962: 73–4)

The second point – the emphasis on the intertwinement of past, present, and future that supposedly characterizes medieval Christian views of time (and which is so evident in *Faust*) – was influentially formulated by Jacques Le Goff:

> men in the middle ages felt or believed that everything which was fundamental for mankind was contemporary. Each year in the liturgy an extraordinary condensed form of sacred history was brought back to life. It was a magical mentality which turned the past into the present, because the web of history was eternity. (Le Goff 1988: 175)

Each individual, too, was constantly reminded of her mortality and felt "that one was being directed toward eternity" (183). If medieval historians did acknowledge historical change, "the direction of history sloped downwards in a decline" (166) rather than toward progress.

Medieval films have used this alternative sense of time perceived by historians as an inspiration toward rethinking the twentieth and twenty-first centuries' relationship with the medieval past. If the past is not necessarily gone, then the Middle Ages may still reverberate in the present. In many films, precisely this idea of time is dramatized in the form of the reanimation of the dead – not as ghosts, but in physical, material form. For instance, in *Golem: How He Came into the World* (directed by Paul Wegener, 1920) – a film set in the medieval Jewish ghetto in Prague – the ancient figure of the dead giant Golem comes to life in order to enforce the rights of the dead, though ultimately he proves incompatible with the present (see Figure 20.2, Bildhauer 2011: 51–73).

Clock Time: The Birth of Modernity in *The Immortal Heart*

Not all medieval films' alternatives to linear time are inspiring; some are deeply inhuman. The national socialist film *The Immortal Heart* (directed by Veit Harlan, 1939), which deals with the invention of the watch, firmly falls in the offensive category. Released in the same year as Bloch's *Feudal Society*, this film shows precisely the emergence of the modern, linear sense of time – reflected in the belief in a constant, measurable flow of time and in historical change – out of the old medieval perception in which allegedly time is not precise, not much changes from one generation to the next, and the whole of time is contained in the eternity of the hereafter. In order to explore different models of envisaging history, and their political implications, I shall now show how invested *The Immortal Heart* is in promoting a modern sense of time, but also how the film remains committed to a conception of time as a non-linear and whole entity.

Figure 20.2 The Golem figure awakes from the dead. *Golem: How He Came into the World* (*Der Golem, wie er in die Welt kam*, 1920). Producer: Paul Davidson. Director: Paul Wegener

In *The Immortal Heart* the new idea of time is brought about through the heroic self-sacrifice of the locksmith Peter Henlein – a historical figure who was credited with inventing, if not linear time, then at least the means to measure it: the pocket-watch. The film is set in Nuremberg in 1517 – a juncture that is customarily seen as marking the break between the medieval and modern eras.[2] Nuremberg was at that time one of the richest and biggest merchant cities in the German empire, with flourishing trade, arts, and crafts, and it reported directly to the emperor. Several other historical Nurembergers who are still known today, both in Germany and beyond, also play a role in the film beside Henlein: two of his closest friends in the plot are the explorer Martin Behaim (1459–1507), who designed the oldest extant globe, and the physician and historian Hartmann Schedel (1440–1514), who wrote a major chronicle of world history and geography. Additional mention is made of the artist Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), the poet Hans Sachs (1494–1576), and of Martin Luther (1483–1546), although he was not from Nuremberg.

The film telescopes time to make these famous figures look as if they were all of a similar age (mature men of substantial standing in the community) and as if historical events and technological innovations that in reality spanned over a century had occurred within the space of a few weeks in 1517: the development of a clock working with a spring rather than with weights (historically, this happened around 1430); Behaim's work on his globe (historically, this took place in the 1490s); the invention of a watch small enough to be carried around (historically, to be dated in the 1490s); the publication of Luther's 95 theses (this did happen indeed in 1517); and Henlein's death (historically, an event that occurred in 1542).[3]

Although the film plays fast and loose with the chronological sequence, it does so, paradoxically, in order to give itself an air of historical authenticity by including well-known historical figures. The only date it is careful to get right is that of the publication of Luther's 95 theses in 1517, probably because viewers might remember it precisely.

Apart from invoking these historical characters and events, the plot is entirely fictional. It is based on the drama *The Nuremberg Egg*, by Harlan's father Walter, and it mixes the conventions of the medieval film with those of the biopic and of the melodrama. Peter Henlein rightly suspects his young assistant Konrad to be in love with Henlein's young wife Ev. When Henlein confronts Konrad, a bullet is accidentally fired and buries itself in muscles close to Henlein's heart. Henlein now faces a stark choice: either to undergo surgery – an intervention that might cure, but might also kill him – or to do nothing, while the bullet, as his physician explains, will wander slowly toward his heart over the next few weeks or months. He decides to postpone the operation – knowing full well that it will then be too late to save his life – because he wants to have time to develop a clock for Behaim that can work at sea independently of weights, a clock that he thinks will be his legacy. Apart from Behaim, all those around him advise him against this – including Ev, who actively sabotages his project in order to persuade him to save his life instead. Despite their interferences, Henlein finishes a small egg-shaped watch a few weeks later. It is now too late for surgery, but Henlein dies a happy man, proud to have ''given birth'' to his invention, and having blessed Konrad and Ev's union.

At first blush, *The Immortal Heart* seems not to be a medieval film at all. It depicts in a very explicit, almost didactic fashion the emergence of modernity and of a modern understanding of time – as measurable clocktime and as chronological timeline, which progresses historically. It links the development of this experience of time to the invention not of the mechanical clock as such (which dates back to at least the thirteenth century), but of a portable clock that allows a reliable and widely accessible measuring of time. The late medieval world depicted in the film is already quite familiar with time-keeping: there is a clock on the town hall; Henlein has several clocks in his house; and appointments are routinely set for a certain hour, which assumes that everyone concerned will be able to tell the time. The shortfalls of existing clocks, however, are dramatically demonstrated in the opening episode, in which a storm destroys Behaim's exploring ship as he desperately tries to stick to his course while mapping the western African coastline. As he explains later, his sundials and pendulum clocks do not work at sea in stormy weather, so that, if he did not want to lose all his previous measurements, he had to try to resist and persist until the weather improved. Henlein decides to do his best to invent a new clock in order to prevent similar disasters in the future and to allow Behaim, who is in danger of losing the support of the Nurembergers, to continue his expeditions. The film here invokes geographical exploration in the ''age of discovery''; that is, one of the best-known markers of historical progress from the medieval period to the modern. Popular opinion still holds that Christopher

Columbus discovered America and proved that the earth is not flat, even though experts now know that medieval Viking explorers had reached North America centuries before him, and that most medieval people were well aware that the earth was shaped like a globe. Similarly, *The Immortal Heart* presents Behaim's project of filling in the empty patches of a still partially uncharted globe as an iconic image of progress from the ignorance of the Middle Ages (see Figure 20.3).

Not only does Henlein invent a tool for more easily and dependably measuring time, which in turn enables further progress; he also pioneers a modern understanding of time as proceeding steadily forwards. Henlein conceives of his life-time as relentlessly and irrevocably moving toward an aim, like the bullet in his chest. The invention of firearms is another stereotypical marker of the turn from the Middle Ages to modernity (again, it still dominates popular knowledge, despite scholarly evidence for the use of gunpowder and explosives well before 1500). *The Immortal Heart* portrays Henlein as instrumental in the creation not only of the watch and the globe, but also of this third paradigmatically modern object – the bullet. Henlein is introduced in the film shooting a handgun on a target; he complains about never being able to hit the center and begins to develop the idea that a long, pointy bullet would be more accurate and would go "unhindered straight into the target."[4] It is this new bullet that is accidentally fired and buries itself near Henlein's heart. From now on, Henlein himself is relentlessly propelled toward a target. His sense of time is embodied in the bullet's movement, which measures out the remainder of his life. The awareness of his imminent death through the bullet does not suggest to Henlein – as it might have done to a medieval person – a presence of the future in every moment, a compression or telescoping of time into a "long now" in the shadow of death. Instead, he becomes aware of the linearity

Figure 20.3 Behaim's globe as a marker of modern exploration. *The Immortal Heart* (*Das unsterbliche Herz*, 1939). Producer: Gerhard Staab. Director: Veit Harlan

of time and of the progress he aims to make. Rather than trying to slow down or stop the bullet's travel, or to anticipate the end and prepare for it (as someone might have done in the Middle Ages), he sees the bullet as a measurement of the time still available to him for action and of the progress he can achieve in it. He asks his doctor, Schedel, how much time he has left, and then sets to work with manic energy, despite his suffering. He is now shown typically bent over the watch-to-be at his workbench, only reluctantly pausing to interact with others (see Figure 20.4).

Henlein's sense of his own life-time as a rapid linear stream is matched by his belief in the historical progress of communities, of his town and nation, and in a marked difference from one generation to the next. He expresses the belief that a genius can bring about historical progress for town and nation when he convinces his fellow citizens that Behaim's expeditions are of epoch-making significance and are therefore worth the loss of a few ships and lives. As the importance of his own invention dawns on him, he envisages it, too, as bringing about historical change after his death: it will be produced in all the great cities of the empire and used all over the world. Ev also highlights, somewhat anachronistically, the historical change that this invention will bring about: ''I can see already how the schoolchildren will have to learn by heart the famous name Peter Henlein: 'In the year 1517 the pocket-watch was invented by Peter Henlein, the famous master locksmith and genius.' ''[5]

Because it results in postponing surgery, Henlein's struggle to finish his invention before his demise takes on the value of a heroic fight: he bravely faces death for the higher good of historical progress, in a way that is typical of national socialist film heroes.[6] What Henlein sacrifices in order to produce this new tool for measuring time, and what stands in the way of his progress, is not just his life, but also the

Figure 20.4 The genius in typical work mode, with Konrad and Ev. *The Immortal Heart* (*Das unsterbliche Herz*, 1939). Producer: Gerhard Staab. Director: Veit Harlan

comforts of the old medieval understanding of time. The latter can be glimpsed in some of the other characters: the belief in an afterlife and the sense of generational continuity rather than change. Ev, Henlein's mother Barbara, the barber-surgeon Brachvogel, and the clergyman Weihrauch all display the alleged tendency of medieval society to stasis, to resisting change: they adhere to the premodern Catholic beliefs in religious rather than medical healing methods, and (in the case of Brachvogel and Weihrauch) in public methods of punishment that seem old-fashioned even to many of their contemporaries. Ev, in particular, cannot understand how the traditional life-cycle of procreation could be less important to her husband than his discovery. Henlein, on the other hand, rejects the Catholic orientation toward an afterlife in favor of conceiving of his own lifetime as making steady progress until it culminates in death. Responding to his mother's worries about his punishment in hell for refusing the operation, Henlein states that he does not believe in hell, because "who goes to hell is already in hell here on earth and not only in the hereafter."[7] Lutheranism, as he explains it, does away with the need for transcendence and speculation about a future after death and emphasizes instead the immanent world and human life on earth. Because the completion of his invention and of his life fall together for Henlein, this film, like many others from the Third Reich, makes death seem an aim in itself.

Henlein's understanding of time – both that of his own life and that of the nation – as propelled by a relentless progression is also shared by the film itself. The story of his last weeks is told in strictly chronological fashion, Henlein's fight against various resistances to finish his watch before the bullet reaches his heart providing the strong narrative motor that pushes the film forward. The plot is unusually tightly constructed for a medieval film: it is linked together in a causal chain of events. The shortness of the future – the fact that Henlein knows he has only a few weeks left to live – here works as a deadline that drives the plot, rather than as an element bringing the future into the present in a non-linear fashion, as usually happens in medieval film. The film is punctuated by close-ups of the clock, which in other films would serve as interruptions of the plot's linear trajectory; but here they propel it forward instead. Not only do they show the mechanical parts always in motion rather than static as time ticks on; they also form, together, a series depicting the different stages of development of the clock, from a spring in a door-handle (which inspires Henlein to use a spring), to a simple spring-and-wheel mechanism (via a detour through the old pendulum clocks working with cylinders that allow them to play a tune on the hour), to the addition of an escapement, a spring being wound tight, and eventually the finished watch (see Figure 20.5).

The dominant impression is thus that the close-ups not so much interrupt a chain of events as reveal their underlying relentless propulsion. Moreover, *The Immortal Heart* clearly buys into its protagonist's idea of historical progress by showing this progress in the making. The film depicts the inventor of the clock as surrounded by a significant group of forward-thinking men (Luther, Behaim, Schedel, Dürer) who are themselves groundbreaking in their own areas – the Reformation, the

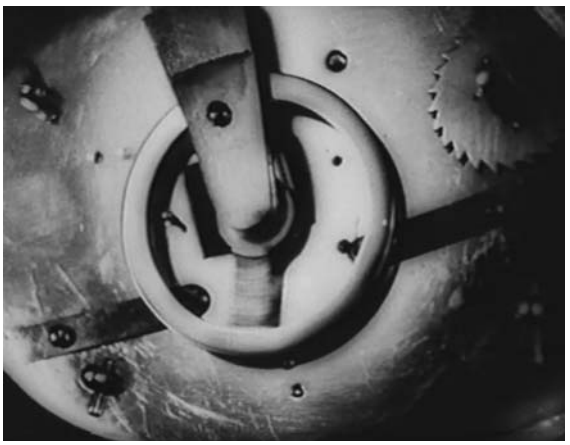

Figure 20.5 The relentless pace of the watch. *The Immortal Heart* (*Das unsterbliche Herz*, 1939). Producer: Gerhard Staab. Director: Veit Harlan

exploration of the world, the dissection of the human body, and the invention of firearms. Henlein thus appears not as an exception, but as participating in the inevitable dawning of a new period.

Heart-Time: The Persistence of the Middle Ages in *The Immortal Heart*

So far the overt message of this film is obvious to the point of didacticism – an obviousness to which Joseph Goebbels may have referred when he described *The Immortal Heart* as an ''educational film'' (''Kulturfilm'', according to Harlan 1966: 69) and said in his diaries that it was ''a little overdone in parts'' (1982: 6). This film, with its emphasis on linear time, historical change, and causal connections between events, would appear to be almost the exact opposite of what can be expected of a medieval film. Nevertheless, on closer inspection, its straightforward narrative of progress turns out to be disrupted by the sense of time as a non-linear entity, which is so characteristic of the genre of medieval film and of the national socialist belief in an organic, continuous unit of the nation that persists over time. Closer attention to the filmic imagery reveals that Henlein's belief in bringing about historical change through the invention of his clock has more in common with the old medieval hopes of continuity in an eternal life and in the generational cycle than may initially be apparent. The first indication that time may not have become more measurable through Henlein's work is that the clock is never actually used to tell time. The stated reason for developing it is to quantify not time, but how long it takes to get to a certain point on an unmapped coastline. As Behaim explains, the coast's length can then be calculated by dividing the duration of the trip by

Figure 20.6 Ev queries the function of the watch. *The Immortal Heart* (*Das unsterbliche Herz*, 1939). Producer: Gerhard Staab. Director: Veit Harlan

the speed of the vessel, so that the clock ultimately measures distance, not time. When Henlein shows the watch to Ev at an intermediate stage of its fabrication, she rightly points out its uselessness for telling the time (see Figure 20.6): ''Why is that the clock? Where are the hands? Just tell me what time it is.''[8]

He never answers her question. Most of the clocks and indications of time in the film also function not so much to tell the time, but as deadlines or reminders that time is running out for Henlein. The court, for example, imposes that Behaim must find within a year a clock that does not become seasick; it summons Henlein to court at 11 a.m. one morning and by 6 a.m. on another, or else Ev will be exposed on the pillory until 6 p.m. The clocks, sometimes visible in the background in Henlein's house, do not inform about the precise chronology of the plot either, but call to mind that his days are numbered and that (when he goes to bed at 6 a.m.) his rhythm is getting out of sync with that of Ev and the world around him.

Far from seeing it just as a tool for measuring and instigating progress, Henlein repeatedly compares the timepiece to a baby, and himself to its mother, thus reintroducing the notion of a generational cycle. This begins when he likens himself to his own pregnant mother, when she urges him to have surgery:

> Do you remember what you used to tell me so often, that you were afraid of thunder and lightning while you carried me under your heart, and that no thunderstorm could bother you when I was then in the cradle? But my child is yet to be born, and when it is there, you can come, but no sooner.[9]

He explicitly imagines the clock as his offspring again, in talking to Ev:

> This watch, this is my child. I would very much like to look back on something at the end of my days and say, this is my work, I have created this, I alone.[10]

Figure 20.7 Henlein tells Konrad he is like a sheaf bearing fruit. *The Immortal Heart* (*Das unsterbliche Herz*, 1939). Producer: Gerhard Staab. Director: Veit Harlan

He further links the invention to fertility when, talking to Konrad about his desire to complete it even at the cost of his life, he compares himself to a sheaf bearing fruit (see Figure 20.7).

Ev's father speaks of the watch-making as "laying eggs," since the pocket-watch is nicknamed "the Nuremberg egg" on account of its shape – and perhaps because the name Henlein sounds like Hennlein ("little hen") or Hähnlein ("little rooster"; both pronunciations are used in the film). In the end, the release of the watch into the world indeed mimics something between giving birth and laying an egg: Henlein lies back in great pain, attended to by his mother and his physician (as well as by Konrad, Ev, and Behaim), clutching the watch in his fist, in his lap area under his big belly, and then releasing it onto the floor (see Figure 20.8 and Figure 20.9).

So, while achieving historical progress, Henlein also just inserts himself back into a substitute for the medieval life-cycle. While Linda Schulte-Sasse (1996) has shown that similar imagery in other Nazi films contributes to making machines appear organic and thereby less threatening, and Jana Bruns (2009: 198) stresses that Henlein's references to the watch as his child make women appear superfluous, this imagery also serves to turn clock time back into cyclical time. If the clock incapsulates the film's and its protagonist's sense of time as a measurable and constant stream toward progress, the alternative sense of time is embodied not only by the child, but also by the heart. A heart keeps a natural, not strictly regular rhythm and has a limited lifespan, in contrast to the unvarying and perpetual ticking of the ideal clock. It seems initially as if the watch, for Henlein, had replaced the heart as well as the child. He decides to sacrifice his biological heart for the sake of the watch. Clasping his chest in pain becomes one of his characteristic gestures – when speaking to Konrad in the field, when waking up at his workbench, when fleeing to Nuremberg castle – always reminding viewers that the watch is

Figure 20.8 Henlein ''gives birth'' to his watch. *The Immortal Heart* (*Das unsterbliche Herz*, 1939). Producer: Gerhard Staab. Director: Veit Harlan

Figure 20.9 The egg-shaped watch is released and rolls to the floor. *The Immortal Heart* (*Das unsterbliche Herz*, 1939). Producer: Gerhard Staab. Director: Veit Harlan

more important to him than his heart. Ev accuses him not only of having no interest in producing children, but also of having ''no heart.''

Ultimately, however, this comparison does not mechanize Henlein's heart but humanizes the watch, and reintroduces a sense of time as an organic rhythm and continuum. Just as the watch takes over the role of a child, so it is also repeatedly portrayed as a heart in Harlan's film. His heart has become so entangled with the watch that he seems to feel the watch's pain and to suffer when it suffers – most memorably when Ev destroys the unfinished watch, making Henlein clutch his chest. At the climactic end of the film, Henlein's death, the ticking of the watch is

reinterpreted as the natural rhythm of a heartbeat, and its longevity as a continuity of the organic body, even after death, in the wider whole of the nation. As Henlein lies on his deathbed, the ticking of his watch is audible at various times in the background. Henlein asks Konrad to spread the knowledge of how to construct the watch in all the big cities of the German empire, in a somewhat anachronistic emphasis on German nationhood. He resists the modern idea of progress that will measure time for financial gain – an idea embodied by Ev's father – and explicitly asks that this merchant may not be allowed to make money out of the timepiece, bequeathing it instead to the national economy. When he holds the watch to his ear, the ticking on the soundtrack also becomes louder, and then blends into the dying Henlein's panting in a similar rhythm, in pain. After he has dropped the watch to the floor, he asks to "let it roll, let it roll from Nuremberg into the whole world."[11] As he breathes his last, he continues, clutching his heart: "My heart stops beating, but it will keep ticking in the millions of yet unsewn pockets."[12] Just then, the ticking becomes audible again, and it continues while he dies, before blending into Johann Sebastian Bach's baroque music that plays on over a cut to Henlein's funeral procession – during which both watch and body are carried through town together.

This extraordinary sequence portrays not so much Henlein as a machine as the watch as an organic thing. The rhythm of the watch becomes natural, like a breath or a heartbeat, through its being merged with Henlein's breathing. When Henlein refers to the watch as his heart, this likewise suggests that time may be less mechanical than clock technology would indicate. Secondly, the sequence reintroduces the idea of a continuity of time even after one's death. The survival of his heart as the watch will ensure a future after death for Henlein, as he can materially survive in or near the collective bodies of the town and nation through his invention. Even as his biological heart gives out, his metaphorical heart, the watch, will live on in this way in the organic continuity of the nation, city, and world and become the immortal heart of the film's title. So medieval notions of a continuity of time and of a generational cycle return within Henlein's seemingly ultramodern idea of a linear time. The watch may be a modern, mechanical version of a child or a heart, but it is modeled on them nonetheless.

The Immortal Heart itself shares not just Henlein's ideology of progress, but also his return to the notions of the afterlife and of the generational cycle in a modern guise. Its understanding of history is partly that of linear causation: it suggests that we live the way we live because Henlein invented the pocket-watch, and the spirit of modernity was born in the Nuremberg of Schedel, Behaim, and Dürer. It also has elements of an allegorical conception of history, claiming that the medieval period was not so different from the present, as a time when heroically self-sacrificing geniuses are needed. But the film's overall view of history is closest to Henlein's and his clock's. As the film is surprisingly vague about how much time actually passes from one scene to the next and from the beginning to the end of the plot, the dominant impression of time for the audience is not one of measurability, but of a subjective perception of time.

The film also places a strong emphasis on the generational continuity of the past into the present, which is typical of national socialist ideas of the nation as a community that extends into the past and future through shared bloodlines and traditions. Like Henlein's, the film's own notion of history is one of a continuous organic body: the body of a nation. When Henlein envisages his heart as living on in the pockets of the nation, the audience is co-opted into becoming part of this continuing collective body. This happens first when we hear the ticking and thereby experience the world from Henlein's perspective. Second, the funeral procession ends with shots of the city that were clearly filmed in contemporary Nuremberg rather than in a studio and thus open the film up into the present, while at the same time they eradicate historical distance by filming only streets that had been carefully prepared to look medieval and by editing out any modern buildings or objects.

That the procession was staged with thousands of real-life Nurembergers as extras enhances the impression of a continuity between past and present and of a collective social body of city, nation, and world. Especially if a viewer had a watch in his pocket, he could feel himself directly interpellated by Henlein's last words. With reference to another of his historical films, *Kolberg* (1944), Veit Harlan makes explicit what this strategy aims at:

> I want to show the audience of today the heroism of its forefathers, I want to tell it: from this core you are born, and with this power, which you have inherited from your ancestors, you will also gain victory today. The people shall be empowered to match up to their fathers.[13]

The continuity between generations, present and past, is here emphasized and put in the service of the nation. If the "immortal heart" of the pocket-watch gives Henlein an afterlife in the collective body of the nation, the film *The Immortal Heart* keeps him alive in the nation's mind.

Conclusion

Although it would be comforting to think that a Nazi belief in the linear teleology of time could be undermined by the subversive power of medieval film even in the hands of skilled ideologues, this is not the case. *The Immortal Heart*'s view of time as both measurable and progressing, as allowing cyclical and continuous elements, is actually typical of Nazi conceptions of history, especially those proposing a return to premodern agricultural society, as the politician and popular historian Richard Walter Darré did. However, paying attention to the conceptions of time and history in this film allows a closer analysis of the paradoxes involved in what Jeffrey Herf (1984) calls the "reactionary modernism" of national socialism: an embracing of technological progress, oddly coupled with a wish to escape the decadence of bourgeois urban modernity by returning to premodern simplicity.

As we have seen, the actual concept of history transported here can be understood not so much as a clash between modern beliefs in progress and nostalgia for premodernity, but as the modern idea of progress itself incorporating cyclical elements: the idea of an afterlife in the body of the town or nation, and of the generational cycle of technological innovation. The analysis of time in *The Immortal Heart* also allows us to nuance what Schulte-Sasse has observed in the Nazi "genius films," among which this production should surely be counted: "the Genius film's obsession with a forward temporality (against stasis) that ultimately transcends itself in timelessness" (1996: 279). It is not so much timelessness that is achieved through forward temporality, as historical progress and organic continuity.

Notes

1 Scholarship on medieval film includes Aberth (2003), Amy de la Bretèque (2004), Bernau and Bildhauer (2009), Burt (2008), Burt and Haydock (2007), D'Arcens (2009), Driver and Ray (2004), Elliott (2011), Finke and Shichtman (2009), Gorgievski and Leroux (2007), Harty (1999), Haydock (2008), Kelly and Pugh (2009), Kiening and Adolf (2006), Lindley (2008), Meier and Slanička (2007), Pugh and Ramey (2007), Shippey and Arnold (2002), Williams (1990); on important areas of medieval film, see in addition, for example, Aronstein (2006), Harty (2002), Harty (2011), Haydock and Risden (2009).

2 Although 1517 is just after my cut-off point of 1500 for the end of the Middle Ages, the setting is referred to as medieval and non-modern by the director Veit Harlan, by the lead actress Kristina Söderbaum, and by most of the few scholars who have discussed this film. Harlan (1966: 70–71) expressly describes the setting as medieval when he talks about how, for the filming of the outdoor mass scenes, the citizens of Nuremberg were asked to wear "medieval" costumes and "everything modern [was] removed from all the streets"; Söderbaum (1984: 119, 121) also mentions the "medieval" costumes; Eeghen (1997: 68) speaks of the "medieval funeral procession"; Noack (2000: 162) refers to the "medieval folkdress"; and Buchloh (2010: 40) to the "medieval cityscape of Nuremberg" and the "medieval clothes." Bruns (2009: 193, 192), on the other hand, wrongly situates the film in "seventeenth-century Nuremberg," which to her is still "pre-modern." All translations and transcriptions from the film and other sources are mine. The film version used is the VHS version released by Polyband (101 minutes). In the subtitled 16 mm version at the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek in Berlin (1,005.5 m; 91.33 minutes), in particular scenes criticizing traditional religion have been edited out. On the different cuts, see Eeghen (1997: 56–57 and 65–68).

3 On the development of clock technology and the exaggeration of Henlein's role, see, for example, Dohrn-van Rossum (1996: 118–123).

4 "Ungehindert direkt auf das Ziel los."

5 "Ich sehe schon, wie die Kinder in der Schule den berühmten Namen Peter Henlein auswendig lernen müssen: 'Im Jahre 1517 wurde die Taschenuhr von Peter Henlein, dem berühmten Schlossermeister und Genie, erfunden.' "

6 See for example Lowry (1991); and, on an unrecognized genius's self-sacrifice, Schrödl (2004: 58–71). This sacrifice explains why this is such an odd melodrama: rather than

the heroine sacrificing herself for her husband, as in many Nazi melodramas, the husband here replaces her as the protagonist and sacrifices himself for progress, taking on feminine characteristics and in turn leaving the adulterous woman unpunished and looking toward a positive future. On comparable Nazi melodramas, see Ascheid (2003a and b), Fox (2000: 43–69), O'Brien (2004: 161–205).

7 "Wer in die Hölle kommt, der ist schon auf der Erde in der Hölle und nicht erst im Jenseits."

8 "Wieso ist das die Uhr? Wo sind denn die Zeiger? Sag mir doch, wie spät es ist."

9 "Erinnerst du dich, was du mir so oft erzählt hast, dass du Angst hattest vor Donner und Blitzen, als du mich unter deinem Herzen trugst, und dass dir kein Gewitter mehr etwas anhaben konnte, als ich dann in der Wiege lag? Aber mein Kind will erst geboren werden, und wenn es da ist, dann kannst du kommen, aber nicht eher."

10 "Diese Uhr, das ist mein Kind. Ich möchte schon sehr gerne am Ende meiner Tage auf etwas zurückschauen können und sagen, das ist mein Werk, das habe ich geschaffen, ich allein."

11 "Lass sie rollen, lass sie rollen aus Nürnberg über die ganze Welt."

12 "Mein Herz hört auf zu schlagen, aber es wird weiterticken in den Millionen noch ungenähten Taschen."

13 "Ich will dem Publikum von heute das Heldentum seiner Vorfahren vor Augen führen, will ihm sagen: Aus diesem Kern seid Ihr geboren, und mit dieser Kraft, die Ihr von Euren Ahnen ererbt habt, werdet Ihr auch heute den Sieg erringen. Das Volk soll die Kraft bekommen, es seinen Vätern gleich zu tun" (Harlan 1983: 397).

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