Picturing Hitler

Artificial Tension and the Historical Film

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Hitler was aware of the hidden opportunities that films offered in shaping the ideology of the masses. He thus made a great effort to direct his performances. Triumph des Willens (Riefenstahl, 1935), Olympia (Riefenstahl, 1938), and the collection of »Hitler in private« in the Berghof, comprise only a minor aspect of this heritage, which present his self-perceptions, plans, and convictions. Since 1945, such footage has been a significant source of material for research on National Socialism, but has also been used for a variety of film genres and documentaries shown daily on the *History Channel*.

Since the end of World War II, the widespread fascination with and curiosity about Hitler has been translated into profit, and the entertainment industry contributed to the perpetuation of this interest. Over the last number of years, National Socialism has reach international iconic status, and this trend is only growing;[1] Since year 2000, the German industry has produced more feature films focusing on the figure of Hitler than between 1945 and 1999. To mention just a few: Der Untergang (Downfall. Dir. Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2004) Mein Führer – Die wirklich wahrste Wahrheit über Adolf Hitler (Dir. Dani Levy, 2007) and Er ist wieder da (Dir. David Wnendt, 2015).[2]

Within a broader frame of reference, the overall attitude expressed over various media channels can explain to some extent the rising popularity of National

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1 | Translated from original by the Author. »NS ist eine Megaikone geworden. Und da spielen natürlich diese ganzen Popularisierungsmedien eine zentrale Rolle.« Gertrud Koch. In: Yael Ben Moshe: Hitler konstruieren. Die Darstellung Adolf Hitlers in deutschen und amerikanischen Spielfilmen 1945–2009 – eine Analyse zur Formung kollektiver Erinnerung. Leipzig 2012, S. 287–292, hier S. 292.

2 | On the website of the store *Dussmann KulturKaufhaus*, the largest retail store for the purchase of cultural products in Germany, there are today over 4 720 items under the search category of »Hitler«. A plethora of films, music albums, pictures, magazines, and books, from comics such as *Adolf reloaded: »Ich bin wieder zurück!«* (2016) by Theo von Tanne, through fantasy books such as *Hipster-Hitler* (2012) by Archana Kumar and James Carr, to classic history books such as Hitler by Ian Kershaw (2000). See https://kultur-kaufhaus.shop-asp.de/shop/action/quickSearch?aUrl=90008115 &searchString=hitler (13.02.2017).

Socialism. Throughout the last decades the notion of ›evil‹, in numerous television series and films, has evolved into an indefinite, complex, and ambiguous entity. The appealing psychopath in the American TV-Series Dexter (2006–2013) exemplifies this change; although the show often crosses unimaginable limits of barbarism, it does not stimulate revulsion towards the protagonist, a young, attractive man, with a traumatic childhood who audiences learned to love. This approach also applies to Hitler, who has been recently represented as a complex figure, too ambiguous to fully comprehend. Furthermore, when Hitler is embodied by actors such as Bruno Ganz, who usually plays the role of a sensitive character, or is depicted as a comic figure by Helga Schneider – these charming actors shed positive light on the figure and arouse moments in which the audience can or wants to identify with Hitler.[3]

Nonetheless, in parallel to every successful production, scholars and journalists raised the inevitable question of why Hitler's depiction still attains so much attention and elicits such thrill, even among the younger generation? The basis of this interest was thought to be predicated upon the authenticity of the reconstruction, i.e. the effect of the mythical performance of Hitler, as represented in films made during the Third Reich.[4]

This paper aims to offers a substantial explanation regarding the phenomenon of this fascination and seek to address the question of how films depicting Hitler are able to continue to arouse intense emotional responses decades after the end of World War II. I focus on well-known narratives, which had been depicted in several film versions in the past, yet succeeded to arouse anew a sense of mystery, thrill, and anxiety surrounding the figure of Hitler. This effect was achieved despite the fact that these films provided no new or essential historical information, and despite the fact that the viewers are familiar with the narrative's conclusion.

To this end, this paper examine the representation of Hitler in two recent co-productions: Downfall (2004) – the story of the last days of Hitler in the Bunker, and Valkyrie (2008), a film about the story of Stauffenberg and the attempted assassination of Hitler on July 20th, 1944.[5] Although since 1945 the German and American film industry celebrated time and again the story of

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3 | Gertrud Koch. In: Ben Moshe, Hitler konstruieren, S. 290.

4 | Ben Moshe, Hitler konstruieren, S. 37.

5 | Downfall/Der Untergang (2004). Dir. Oliver Hirschbiegel [Film]. Germany, Italy, Austria: Constantin Film Production, Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR), Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), Degeto Film, Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF), EOS Entertainment, Rai Cinemafiction (co-production) (as RAI Cinema); Valkyrie/Operation Walküre (2008). Dir. Bryan Singer [Film]. USA, Germany: United Artists, Achte Babelsberg Films, Bad Hat Harry Production.

Stauffenberg and the final days of Hitler in the Bunker,[6] the recent versions, in contrast with previous productions, aimed at, and gained significant popularity among, audiences from different age brackets. Both Downfall and Valkyrie had Blockbuster budgets, were screened worldwide, and drew the attention of the feuilleton sections in newspapers for month before the films' release. Despite the appeal to mass audiences, I intend to underline the difference in approach between the German and American films, drawing on depictions of Hitler from other genres as well.

I argue that the fascination historical films arouse is based upon what can be termed ›artificial tension‹.[7] The concept of ›artificial tension‹ relates to technical cinematic means, such as music, camera angles, and language, as well as to the content conveyed in the film. These elements support the authenticity of the historical representation, but also include irrational and mythical elements. This combination creates conceptual conflicts within the film and towards it, creating conflicts that stimulate an ›artificial tension‹. Thus, although the viewers know the story and its end well, the ›artificial tension‹ on screen serves as a trigger for raising anticipation, mainly emotional but rational as well, for a new interpretation of historical events and possibly for a different ending. For instance, the choice to use monochromatic colors in the film, with newsreel footage integrated, strengthens the status of the film as a historical document. However, the use of overly dramatic music and unnatural camera angels and movements, eventually interrupt the homogeneity of representation and invite different impressions, which, on the one hand, threaten the authenticity of representation, but on the other hand, embue the representation with uniqness and liveliness.

The apprehension of the Hitler-myth can be understood as complementary to Atze's analysis of the different myths of Hitler in German literature after 1945.[8] Atze outlines the origin of the myths, by which *Mein Kampf* play the key-

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6 | The following is a partial list of the cinema and TV-films produced since 1945 dealing with the attempted assassination: The first was the American film Desert Fox from 1951 (Dir. Henry Hathaway), which was screened in the occupied zones. Then, in 1955, came two German films, Es geschah am 20. Juli (Dir. Falk Harnack) and Der 20. Juli (Dir. Georg W. Pabst). An American film, The plot to kill Hitler (Dir. Lawrence Schiller), was produced in 1990, but was broadcasted first in Germany only in 1999. Two more films were produced in 2004, Die Stunde der Offiziere (Dir. Hans-Erich Viet) and Stauffenberg. The latter, directed by Jo Baier, won the category of best TV-film. In 2008, a cooperative German and American production, Valkyrie was released. In addition, the story about Hitler's last days in the bunker was reconstructed throughout the years: Der letzte Akt in 1955 (Dir. Georg W. Pabst); later the British film, Hitler: The Last Ten Days (Dir. Ennio De Concini) in 1973; the American film, The Bunker (Dir. George Schaefer) in 1984, and Der Untergang in 2004.

7 | Ben Moshe, Hitler konstruieren, S. 220.

8 | Marcel Atze: ›Unser Hitler‹. Der Hitler-Mythos im Spiegel der deutschsprachigen Literatur nach 1945. Göttingen 2003.

element in the construction of Hitler as a messianic figure, as »the savior«, as a soldier, as a great speaker and artist. Other myths, such as the father figure, the ascetic figure, the nature and animal lover, were established through the National Socialist propaganda apparatus. In the second stage, after 1945, in the attempt to destroy these myths, the literature ascribed Hitler attributes such as the architect of extermination, the ›savior role‹ transformed into the role of preacher of hate and murder, an executer and a symbol of the authoritarian personality. Using as their references *Mein Kampf* and the Nazi propaganda apparatus, these references became part of the post-war Hitler-Myth.[9] I believe that the films under discussion can reflect upon the common ground shared by literary and visual representations for the re- and de-construction of Hitler's myth in collective memory.

1. THE CONCEPT OF ARTIFICIAL TENSION

In the early 1940s, the German psychologist Hugo Mauerhofer proposed the term »cinema situation«[10] to denote the state of disengagement from conditions in the outside world in favor of those encapsulated in the cinema.[11] Mauerhofer, and later Langer and Kracauer, elucidated that in a state of voluntary passivity, the unconscious connects with consciousness. Consequently, although not out of a conscious act, the spectator tends to complete missing parts in his imagination through a crossover between scenes or positions. This eventually allows the story in the spectator head to fit his own, private experience.[12]

Russell and Levy suggest that such states of mind could be further intensified, particularly when one reads or watches the same story repeatedly. By re-consuming films and stories, people seek expected rewards, be it laughter, excitement, or relaxation.[13] Following this theory, the consumption of a well-known film-narrative, allows spectators to engage with the story or the protagonist even prior to watching the film – be it a historical film or not. In such an experience,

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9 | Atze, ›Unser Hitler‹, S. 433.

10 | Hugo Mauerhofer: Psychology of Film Experience. In: Richard Dyer MacCann (Ed.): Film: A Montage of Theories. New York 1966, p. 229–235.

11 | This approach was later reflected by McCann in the term »TV-situation«, which can provide a comparable suitable psychological effect. Richard Dyer MacCann: Introduction to ›Psychology of Film Experience‹. In: MacCann (Ed.), Film, p. 229.

12 | Susanne K. Langer: A Note on the Film. In: MacCann (Ed.), Film, pp. 199–204; Siegfried Kracauer: Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality. New York 1997, p. 159–164.

13 | Cristel Aantonia Russell/Sidney J. Levy: The Temporal and Focal Dynamics of Volitional Reconsumption: A Phenomenological Investigation of Repeated Hedonic Experiences. In: Journal of Consumer Research 39 (2012) No 2, p. 342–359.

the historical film, however, has an advantage over fictional films since it relates to reality and presents a story that had real-world implications; thus, the movie plot and the historical story stretch over time, touching on the present. In such a way, the viewer can locate himself in a historical continuity, which provides him with a meaningful existence in time and place. For example, as an Israeli, I connect the triumph of the allies in World War II with the establishment of the State of Israel. Therefore, the stimulus or reward, as a continuous effect, of watching a World War II film bears relevance to my ›normal‹ conscious state.

The suspense felt by a viewer while watching a film whose outcome is already known is defined by the psychologist Richard Gerrig as »anomalous suspense.«[14] Gerrig, who studied the physical and psychological effects of films, suggests that one of the reasons for suspense is our understanding of the world, in which »every situation is unique, and no course of events is literally identical to an earlier one.«[15] Unlike Gerrig, the theory of »cinema situation« and re-consuming suggests that the viewer seeks out the same effect as previously experienced, rather than a new experience. In other words, the decision to watch the same film time and again, or to watch a film with a well-known outcome, is accompanied by the expectation of gaining a certain reward. Regarding the »cinema situation«, the viewer wishes to disengage from the rules of »reality«, as Gerrig suggested, and to engage with a situation in which he or she already knows »what kind of reward to expect.«

The philosopher Nöell Carroll offers more of a comprehensive approach and asserts that by re-consuming the same book or film, we can convince ourselves that we do not know the outcome of the film. Carroll writes:

The audience may not believe that the relevant outcome is uncertain or improbable but, nevertheless, the audience may entertain the thought that the relevant outcome is uncertain or improbable. That is, even though we know otherwise, we may entertain (as unasserted) the proposition that a certain morally good outcome is uncertain or improbable.[16]

Whereas the concept of cinema situation and the theory on re-consuming rest upon the general psychological effects of the film, the theory of artificial tension applies the suspense created during the film to the occurrences in the films, and not merely to the audience choice to disengage from reality or its conventions. The artificial conflicts I refer to here are built upon cinematic elements and content that encourage the suspense and the psychological effects of the cinema situation or the anomalous suspense. Accordingly, although the viewers already

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14 | Richard Gerrig: Experiencing Narrative Worlds. New Haven/London 1993, p. 91.

15 | David Bordwell/Kristin Thompson: Minding Movies: Observations on the Art, Craft, and Business of Filmmaking. Chicago/London 2011, p. 97.

16 | Nöel Carroll: Beyond Aesthetics. Philosophical Essays. Cambridge 2001, p. 267.

know how the story ends – for example, that Germany lost the war and Hitler committed suicide – the artificial tension triggers an anticipation, which is not merely emotional but also rational, since the film aspires to offer new insights. For example, DER LETZTE AKT from 1955, shot in black and white, offers scene artwork which is reminiscent of expressionist film. The film aimed to distort the ›still living‹ memory of Hitler that lingers on from the war generation, while in parallel to historical facts, represented Hitler as a twisted, darkened figure. In contrast, DER UNTERGANG, on the one hand sought to establish historical documentation, on the other, represented Hitler in a way reminiscent of his portrayal in Riefenstahl's films, shrouded in mystery and greatness. The conflicting elements of myth and reality, fiction and history, are responsible for the thrill and excitement these films repeatedly produce.

2. THE FILMS – LOCATIONS OF ARTIFICIAL TENSION IN THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

The film VALKYRIE (2008) is an American-German co-production, with well-known American and German actors acting in both German and English. The co-production of VALKYRIE presents an attempt to offer a shared narrative on the most devastating war in history to two countries that strove to create very different historical versions of the war. This attempt at a shared narrative is in itself a source of ›artificial tension‹. In transforming the two contrasting perspectives – those of the United States and of Germany – into a coherent cinematic narrative, the film industries accomplished an artistic feat of no small measure. This was achieved in three dimensions: The first dimension is the historical narrative, which attempts to shed light on the past. The second dimension is the reproduction of the historical narrative as a story relevant to the values, needs, and trends of the present. The third dimension is the response of the media, which promoted the simulacrum as a ›historical reality‹ by pointing at the authentic shooting locations and offered a discussion around the resemblance Tom Cruise bears to Stauffenberg.[17] This way, even before the premiere, the blockbuster already gained recognition as an authentic depiction, challenging previous documentaries made on Stauffenberg's assassination attempt. In parallel, on January 24th 2009, shortly after the film premiered in Germany, Frank Schirrmacher, at

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17 | See, for example, the article: Stauffenberg photo allegedly altered to resemble Tom Cruise. In: The Local, June 20, 2008), online at www.thelocal.de/2008 0620/12603, and the article of Kate Connolly in *The Guardian*, a year later, June 23, 2008: Tom Cruise's Nazi Photoshop job for Valkyrie, online at www.thegu ardian.com/film/filmblog/2008/jun/23/tomcruisesnaziphotoshopjobforvalkyrie.

that time a prolific writer and essayist for the newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, wrote:

Hollywood achieved what only Hollywood can achieve: to globalize a far-reaching un-known international story and its motif. And Hollywood achieved what it usually can-not: to meet the expectations from such a story.[18]

The article expresses that the most significant accomplishment for Schirrm-acher is that now every teenager in Seoul or Sweden knows who Stauffenberg was, while the debate on historical details in this equation turned out to be ir-relevant.[19] However, when watching the film in Berlin, I could not avoid hearing the laughter of some in the audiences when Tom Cruise appeared on the screen donning a Wehrmacht uniform. There was a surreal dimension to the depiction of this ›true story‹ that stimulated, from the start, an ›artificial tension‹ based on the contrast between previous audience knowledge and logic versus imagina-tion and emotions. This »artificial tension« resulted in (un)expected reactions from the German audience. As a consequence of the attempted assassination, thousands of Germans paid with their lives. The film estranged the audience in Berlin from its own history, thus raising the expectation of an improbable out-come from the outset. Although VALKYRIE was at most a story decorated by both historical figures and stars, it had little relation to the two countries' histories.

VALKYRIE begins with background voices of masses of German soldiers pledging an oath of allegiance to Hitler: »an Oath that won't just die with Hit-ler« explained Stauffenberg. The first scene, after hearing the oath, continues in German, transitions into using both languages, then fading into English, as one historical perspective fades into another. In this scene, Stauffenberg shapes the film's attitude toward Hitler by creating a conflict between Hitler and Ger-many and between Hitler and the rest of the world when Stauffenberg asserts, »Hitler is not only the archenemy of the entire world, but the archenemy of Germany.« This becomes clearer later, when Stauffenberg declares, »We can serve Germany or the Führer, not both.« The allusion to Hitler as ›archenemy‹ forms a reference to Hitler that is set between the rational and the irrational, between the observable and the imperceptible. Such reference, before meeting Hitler, intensifies his presence and enhances his importance even in the scenes where he is absent.

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18 | Translated from original by the author. »Hollywood hat erreicht, was nur Holly-wood kann: eine international weitgehend unbekannte Geschichte und ihr Motiv zu globalisieren. Und Hollywood hat erreicht, was Hollywood nicht immer kann: dem The-ma gerecht zu werden.« Frank Schirrmacher: Der globalisierte 20. Juli. In: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, January 24, 2009), online at www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/kino/operation-walkuere-der-globalisierte-20-juli-1750878.html.

19 | Ibid.

Much like Valkyrie, which exposes the conflict between Stauffenberg and Hitler right at the beginning, Downfall opens with a sequence from the documentary Im toten Winkel (Dir. André Heller, Othmar Schmiderer, 2002), in which Traudl Junge, Hitler's secretary, confesses her misjudgment whereby she admits that she did not recognize early enough the horror created by her boss. This device engages the viewer with Junge's conflict at the film's outset.

While both films use elements of documentation to enhance authenticity, these elements are subjected to different techniques and intentions. Stauffenberg's announcement and the German voice in Valkyrie emerge as part of the reconstruction, as they appear within the narrative. Thus, the conflict in Valkyrie transverses throughout the narrative, illustrating how fundamental it is to the narrative. Downfall, in contrast, excludes the conflict of Junge from the narrative, by presenting the interview with her at the film's outset, before the story begins. Coinciding with this exclusion, most of the scenes in Downfall take place in bunkers, first in Rastenburg and then in Berlin, leaving Hitler and National-Socialism limited in space. Therefore, Junge's ambivalence towards Hitler appears as alienated and distant from the complete and closed story that takes place in the bunker. However, such an artificial remoteness from the National-Socialist past stands in contradiction to Junge's role in the film and, in broader perspective, to the ›sense‹ of National-Socialism; the localization is contradictory to the mythical meaning of Hitler, which breaks boundaries of time and space, thus the ›artificial tension‹ frames the story without utilizing any other means.

Nevertheless, in Downfall, the reconstruction of Hitler's figure in the bunker as isolated and indecipherable, along with the exclusion of Junge's conflict, creates an important recurring motif in the narrative – the concept of unity, illustrated through proclamations of loyalty to the Nazi cause. This allows the cohesiveness of what happens in the bunker to be easily intensified. For example, General Jodl says, »We are soldiers! We gave the Führer our oath;« and General Krebs claims, »We are bound by his will!« Junge states, »We cannot leave him alone.« while Goebbels argues, »We haven't forced anyone. The German people empowered us to do what we did.« The propagandistic concept of »one voice«, »togetherness«,[20] thus becomes an essential motif in the narrative. It sets Hitler at the center of the meaning of this sense of togetherness: Hitler as an integral part of Germany, and Germany as an inherent part of Hitler, as Rudolf Heß said in 1934, at the 6th party-day.[21] Hitler is the consensus that binds the others together, even when this unity is accompanied by conflict. There is no other group or constellation to which this story can be shifted. Thus, although he is »isolated« from the world by residing in the bunker, he intrudes and determines every act and thought of the German people. As a consequence, such presentation not

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20 | Atze, ›Unser Hitler‹, p. 15 f.

21 | »Die Partei ist Hitler! Hitler aber ist Deutschland wie Deutschland Hitler ist!« (Rudolf Heß 1934)

only embodies the mythologization of Hitler during the reign of National Socialism, but averts the possibility of questioning the historical truth of the loyalty of the closest circle during the last phase of Hitler's life.

Although belonging to a different film genre, the satirical film ER IST WIE-DER DA (2015) follows the conventions of Hitler portrayals found in historical film DOWNFALL. The film begins with Hitler coming up from his underground bunker in the 1940s. From the outset, his accent, the color of his uniform, his body language – in essence, the entire verbal and visual semantic nature of the sequence – binds the viewer to the figure of ›the Führer‹. It arouses the impression of a ›real‹ character. The portrayal of Hitler throughout the film, as an odd, misunderstood and a lonely man, coincides with the historical memory which was constructed upon similar aspects in his character. These elements of his character have been encapsulated towards the end, when Sawatzki, who found Hitler, realizes that Hitler cannot be eliminated; after conquering the screen and television ratings as a comic figure, Sawatzki finds out, that the man he was working with is not a fake, but the real Hitler. Then Sawatzki decides to eliminate Hitler, shoots him, and Hitler falls down from the rooftop. While Sawatzki looks for the body, a familiar voice behind him says, »You cannot get rid of me. I'm a part of you, I'm a part of all of you all.«[22] As a myth or as a product of the entertainment industry, in Germany Hitler is integral to the public sphere.

The bond between Hitler and Germany is best embodied in DOWNFALL, in the scene in which Hitler examines at the ›Germania‹ model. The color contrast – Hitler in black and ›Germania‹ in white, as well as the low camera angle which shoots Hitler's close-up as he looks through the model, create a depiction of Hitler as a giant or a god walking above the city. This takes place while both Hitler and ›Germania‹ are cast as complete opposites, but nevertheless supporting each other's strong presence in the frame; Hitler enhances the image of the city, and ›Germania‹ enhances him.

However, the only time when the collective pronoun ›we‹ is omitted and the singular pronoun ›I‹ is used in its place, is when the victories of the German army and the occupation of foreign lands are described. It thus becomes clear that while the film does not seek to bring about a new type of German self-reflection regarding this chapter in its history, it nevertheless continues to emphasize Hitler's achievements and power, and thus it significantly contributes to his mythologization.

Numerous analyses of German cinema have pointed out how the rearmament of West-Germany in the mid-1950s and joining NATO influenced the orientation and the content of films, as these developments promoted a more reconciled approach toward the acts of the German army during the war. Accordingly, from the mid-1950s, the Wehrmacht was portrayed as an opponent

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22 | Translated from original by the author. »Sie können mich nicht loswerden. Ich bin ein Teil von Ihnen, von Euch allen.« (ER IST WIEDER DA {2015}, Dir. David Wendt)

and victim of Hitler and his politics, as Stauffenberg expressed in the film Der 20. Juli (1955):

> The decisive point is that for years crime has been piled upon crime, murder upon murder in the name of German people. It is our duty to resist this by all means. Neither god nor our conscience can free us from this duty.[23]

However, this reframing of the German army's role in film does not seem to have interrupted the idealization of the strong connection between Hitler and the German people. Furthermore, such an approach was not confined to films in which Hitler was depicted. Although between the years 1945 and 2000 very few German films dared to portray Hitler as an actual character, the inability to represent Hitler only supported and enhanced his myth and the bond with the German people, as his presence was embodied by symbols, such as flags, marches, swastikas, and the SS – all of these emblematic illusions to the figure of Hitler.[24] In parallel, the image of the masses was also under-represented in film narratives. As this constellation repeated itself, it indirectly conveyed the deep connection between Hitler and the German nation in Germany's collective memory, a connection that even Downfall has not undermined; even at the tensest moment of Hitler in the bunker, as Hitler bellows at the officers and blames the army for standing in his way and betraying him, he does not include the ›Volk‹ in his grievance.[25]

In contrast to the traditional German approach, Valkyrie challenges and disrupts the German memory by portraying Germany and Hitler as competitors, standing in contrast to each other and embodying different values. As Stauffenberg notes from the start, »We can serve Germany or the Führer, not both.« The decision to assassinate Hitler is intertwined with this conflict at every interaction, and not exclusively between the officers and Hitler. Valkyrie divides all protagonists, including the ›Volk‹, into two groups: Those who supported Hitler and those who supported Stauffenberg. It thus creates an almost equal reflection to both sides. Such an approach suggests that Hitler gained support from people of every social stratum and status. However, more significant to the plot, it maximizes the heroism of Stauffenberg and builds, for the first time, a

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23 | David Clarke: German Martyrs: Image of Christianity and Resistance to National Socialism in German Cinema. In: Paul Cooke/Marc Silberman (Ed.): Screening War: Perspectives on German Suffering. Rochester/New York 2010, p. 40.

24 | Gertrud Koch. In: Ben Moshe, Hitler konstuieren, p. 289.

25 | The conflict between Hitler and the army is central to the narrative. However, as Downfall is not a classic war movie, and since the conflict with the army is depicted only during staff meetings in the bunker with Hitler and there is no attempt by the generals to betray Hitler, this conflict is a pseudo-conflict. It has neither physical nor substantial form. Nevertheless, it does succeed in depicting the army as a victim of Hitler's caprice.

counter-image to Hitler. Unlike DOWNFALL, VALKYRIE strives to lessen Hitler's power. This is achieved mostly through the form of representation. For example, Hitler is never shown alone at his Berghof, but rather in the company of Himmler, Speer, Göring, Goebbels and Keitel, as Stauffenberg stands on the other side of the room. Thus, Hitler moves between these two poles: between loyalty and betrayal, between the figures in the room who embody the leadership of the ›Reich‹, and the figure of Stauffenberg who represents the army, between crime and justice.

In contrast to DOWNFALL, which buries Hitler underground in the bunker, VALKYRIE confronts the viewer for the first time with Hitler outside of Germany, in Smolensk, Russia, on the Eastern front, stepping down from his jet. Later we meet Hitler in the mountains, in his private residency, the Berghof. He is represented over and over again as Riefenstahl depicted him, ›from above‹, and thus exposes Hitler to the world to which he is a threat, as Stauffenberg warns at the beginning of the film. However, in the encounters with Hitler – at first from behind, then in a medium-long shot from the side, and only afterward in a medium-shot over a dark background – he either does not speak or cannot be heard. Later on, the close-ups on different parts of his body, such as his hand or eyes, as well as the long shots and distorted camera angles disrupt again the opportunity to embrace Hitler as a whole, thus interrupt identification with Hitler as a person. While the camera positioning and angles are designed as well to blur the lack of resemblance of David Bamber's depiction to the historical figure, it also helps make each encounter with Hitler less comfortable and more tense as the movie progresses. For example, when Stauffenberg arrives at the Berghof to sign Hitler on the document of »Operation VALKYRIE«, Hitler is shot in profile or through close-ups on his body parts. In this scene, Hitler talks slowly, but the camera is restless. His voice is intertwined as a voiceover, while the shots switch between Hitler, Stauffenberg, Himmler and the document, and Hitler says: »The VALKYRIE, handmaidens of the gods, choosing who will live and who will die, sparing the most heroic from an agonizing death.« When the viewer finally sees Hitler talk, the aesthetics empower Hitler, as he states, while appearing over a dark background and the camera is positioned at a low angle, »One cannot understand National Socialism, if one does not understand Wagner.« His message bears no implication and is not anchored in the substantial world. However, it represents the unnecessary hyperbolic composition that enhances the tension by interweaving Nordic mythology and the Hitler-as-artist myth into the historical narrative. This composition constitutes a new historical interpretation that induces »artificial tension«, whereas beyond the frame of the myth, the ability to understand National Socialism remains un-interpreted and uninterrupted.

Wagner's THE RIDE OF THE ›VALKYRIE‹ is recalled for the first time at Stauffenberg's home as on-music, namely as an integral component in the story. Wagner's piece amplifies the mythical interpretation of the events and

awards Hitler's above mentioned statement prophetic power. Stauffenberg's children are playfully fighting while the gramophone plays The Ride of the ›Valkyries‹. Thus, they embody through their acting and costumes the return of the Valkyries after Siegmund's fight with Hunding. In the following scene, during the allies' attack that shook the house, the gramophone suddenly begins to play The Ride of the ›Valkyries‹ again. This scene grants the music a life of its own, thus increasing its importance and embedding the myth – and more specifically, Hitler's prophecy – within the story.

In contrast to the mysterious reconstruction of Hitler's character in Valkyrie, Downfall promotes a very open concept toward the depiction of Hitler. The convincing portrayal of Hitler allows the camera to capture the complexity of his character, and he is in most scenes presented, running long dialogues that attach the viewer to his figure. In this way, the tension during the encounters with Hitler is decreased throughout the narrative, and Hitler becomes a man with whom the audience can identify. Furthermore, the camera ›straightens‹ the constructed reality according to Hitler's perspective. When Hitler looks at his generals from below, it appears as though we watch them and the world through his eyes.

In Downfall, it is more difficult to detect the ›artificial tension‹. The Hitler character does not invoke the mythic quality of National Socialism to the same extent as in Valkyrie, and the naturalistic filming overcomes and weakens the artificial elements used in the film. When ignoring visual elements and only paying attention to the film's dialogue, it is easier to detect how long dialogues create myth: abrupt sentences which the figure of Hitler bellows at those who betray him; they cause commotion in the bunker and among its residents, and thus attracts the attention of the listeners. The Hitler character rages about lost battles, betrayals, about the people he trusted. These dialogues manifest themselves repeatedly. Yet, in just a few conversations in which he speaks calmly and does not draw significant attention, he explains the sin of compassion, how he handles other »races«, or provides advice on committing suicide. Although these scenes are loaded with hatred and brutality that comprise his demented character, they make up only a minor element in his ›evil‹ characterization or at most enhancing his myth as the »Endlöser« – the apocalyptic messiah.[26] For example, when Hitler explains Junge calmly how to commit suicide, the scene packs a set of horrifying ideas into an elegant package under the mythical umbrella of the father figure. Such decoding of Hitler's character occurs eventually within the emotional and mythical sphere, whereby the historical factuality is validated. However, this verification applies primarily to Junge's confession in the documentary that frames the narrative, in which she argues that despite her relationships with Hitler, she was not aware of his crimes. Her attitude frames

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26 | Atze, ›Unser Hitler‹, p. 433.

the story by projecting beyond the narrative, applying this approach not only to Junge, but to the Germans in general in the 1930s and 1940s.

As a whole, the interaction with women add to the emotional burden of the film, which deepens throughout the plot and contributes to the ambivalence as well as to the mystery surrounding Hitler's character. For example, Eva Braun explains that she has lived with him for fifteen years, but she actually does not know anything about him.

In another scene, when heavy artillery falls around the bunker, Hitler hurries back in, walks down the stairs and leans on the wall for to stabilize himself. This scene ends abruptly with a cut to Junge gazing up to the ceiling as the lighting is suddenly darkened. The classic crossover between the scenes creates the illusion of a mystic connection, an unconscious relationship between Junge, who symbolizes innocence, naivety, and beauty, and Hitler. Hence, we ›feel‹ Hitler through Junge's character and his relationship with her.

The more impalpable the past is, the greater the attempt to induce authenticity through emotional aspects, since identifying with an emotional experience is a valuable means in the process of creating empathy toward the character. In this way, the viewers can relate to the characters and eventually sympathize with their condition. For example, the viewer can sympathize with the roles of wives, such as those of Nina von Stauffenberg or Eva Braun, as loving and supportive partners, as well as their symbolic value. The viewer can also relate to the way in which Hitler served as a father figure replacing Junge's real father, when she is far away from home. Identifying with feelings such as love, tenderness and jealousy comes naturally, as these are already are part of the viewers' personal experience.

3. THE END OF MYTH

The main difference between the two co-productions is found in the location of the myth. In VALKYRIE, Stauffenberg describes Hitler as the ›archenemy‹ and the camera emphasizes Hitler frightening appearance, while intertwining Wagner's music with Hitler's prophecy. By doing so, the film uses mythical elements to cloak Hitler's character as an exterior adornment which reinforces the substance Hitler's character and enhances tension. DOWNFALL, in contrast, does not engage the myth as adornment; nevertheless, myth cannot be differentiated or separated from the historical figure. Requesting that his corpse remain forever »undiscovered«, serves this point well. »The Führer cannot just disappear as an inglorious refugee from the stage of world history,« explains Goebbels; eventually not only the film, but also reality, are consistent with this idea. A notable exception to this trend is found in INGLORIOUS BASTERDS, a film which dares to ridicule the myth of Hitler. As this myth is strongly built upon his suicide

and the missing body, in INGLORIOUS BASTERDS a Jewish underground brigade executes him in public.

Unlike DESERT FOX (1951) and THE PLOT TO KILL HITLER (1990), in which Hitler was depicted as wounded after the assassination attempt, VALKYRIE spares us from such a depiction, and chooses to maintain Hitler's strength. At the very end of the film, Hitler is only heard through voiceover, as he states, »I see in this the hand of providence, directing me to complete my work,« while Stauffenberg and other plotters are being shot – a scene that aims to promote the mythical atmosphere around Hitler's figure as a preacher of hatred and death. The epilogue further intensifies the idea of providence, as it links it with Stauffenberg's description of Hitler as an arch-enemy by reminding the viewer that »the July 20th plot was the last of 15 known attempts by Germans to assassinate Adolf Hitler.«

And what will be of Germany without him? The mise-en-scènes of Hitler's last dinner with Junge, Manziarly and Christian in DOWNFALL was shot through a wide-angled lens, thus conveying a distorted perspective at its end. Likewise, the shadows of Hitler on the wall suggests the shadows of the past, while the empty chair left in the room implies a deep emptiness, that emerges with Hitler's demise.

4. CONCLUSION

When Christian Hartmann, project manager of the scientific edition of *Mein Kampf*, asserted that he would like to »put once and for all an end to the myth,«[27] he did not take into account that he would first have to kill a very profitable ghost. But that is not the entire story. The trouble of »putting once and for all an end to the myth« is to be found in the products themselves, as such ›historical‹ films, which succeed in shaping the historical memory of Hitler outside of historical context, still maintain a documentary-like impression that contains new insights.

By constructing a story on ›artificial tension‹, these films intertwined mythical and irrational aspects with element of knowledge – under these terms, any scenario seems reasonable. Furthermore, these stories could always reproduce themselves, since they are not committed to the historical truth or to knowledge, but to anti-›truthful‹ depiction, such as myth, emotion, and film technique, result in tension, thrill, and insight.

The various Hitler-myths the films contain, partially build upon the National Socialist propaganda apparatus, such as Hitler's eating habits, his fondness for animals, or his affinity to art, ultimately shape a convenient human reasoning

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27 | Translated from original by the Author. Gili Izikovitz: What will they call Hitler's book ›Mein Kampf‹ when its copyright expires? In: Haaretz, February 9, 2016, online at www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/.premium-1.2804147.

that supports the ambivalent representation of Hitler, but more importantly, promote the indefinite notion of ›evil‹. This is deployed satirically in Er ist wieder da, in which the killing of a dog by Hitler strengthens the comical quality and absurdity of his representation. Such an act contradicts certain knowledge the viewer has about Hitler, creating a senseless depiction that is irrational and thus funny.

In parallel, none of the historical films representing Hitler contained visual elements reminiscent of the crimes committed during the reign of National Socialism. Hitler's portrayals are continuously established upon convenient, harmful frames, detached from the memory of the War, the Holocaust, and of other crimes. Thus, the atmosphere around his appearance and his myth could be easily incorporated into historical films and the collective memory without interruption or resistance.