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# How One Writes, Makes, Markets a Movie and How an Audience Reads the Movie: Two Biographical Films of Hitler as a Case Study

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**How one Writes, Makes, Markets a Movie and how an Audience Reads the Movie: Two  
Biographical Films of Hitler as a Case Study**

by

**Nick J. Yeh (Chi-Shu Yeh)**

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Claremont Graduate University in partial fulfillment of  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate Faculty of Cultural Studies  
with a focus on Film and Media

Claremont Graduate University

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Approved by

Dr. Eve Oishi

Cultural Studies

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## APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION

We, the undersigned, certify that we have read, reviewed, and critiqued the dissertation of Nick J. Yeh (Chi-Shu Yeh) and do hereby approve it as adequate in scope and quality for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## **Abstract**

**How one Writes, Makes, Markets a Movie and how an Audience Reads the Movie: Two**

**Biographical Films of Hitler as a Case Study**

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According to John Lukacs, German people's views on Hitler and Nazism once got examined right after the fall the Third Reich in the 1950s but this subject has lost its appeal since then. How do Germans nowadays, specifically those young ones raised in the "New Germany" after the fall of the Berlin Wall, think of Hitler and their country's Nazi legacy? This dissertation is to explore how six young Germans growing up in the new "unified Germany" interpret two films' representations of Hitler and Nazism.

## Introduction

### The Description of the Project

The dissertation is to explore two films' representations of Hitler and a group of young Germans' readings of those films. Films to be examined in this research are *Der Untergang* (2004, English title *Downfall*) and CBS mini-series *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* (2003). Specifically, I would like to firstly analyze the two films in terms of their contents and structures, then study the production of the films and lastly take a look at a group of young Germans' interpretations of the films.

In his book *The Hitler of History*, John Lukacs (1997) suggests that Hitler has been the most widely studied figure of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at least in terms of what has been written about him. Those writings about Hitler may come from a variety of different disciplines. Some of them are journalistic (by Kenrad Heiden a newspaper columnist in the 1930s who followed the development of the regime), come from behind-the-scene secret services (by Trevor-Roper in late 1940s, who recalled his days serving in the British Intelligence Agency) or are based on first-hand observation (by Schramm in the 1950s, who wrote about his privilege to observe Hitler closely because of Schramm's involvement in the war diary of High Command of Wehrmacht in 1942). Lukacs's own interest revolves around people's reactions to Hitler. Lukacs explores how people thought of Hitler shortly after World War II. He garnered interview clips compiled in the 1950s and suggests that people's views on Hitler after World War II can be categorized into the following types: Hitler haters (who hated Hitler for destroying the country), "average" (who believed that Hitler's defeat resulted from being deceived by his subordinates), nostalgic (who had rosy memories of the World War II era), firm supporters (who still were firm believers of the fallen regime) and denial (who said that World War II was the past they did not want to think about anymore).

Ian Kershaw (2001) takes a similar approach to examine people's views on Hitler. In his book *The Hitler's Myth: Image and Reality in the Third Reich*, Kershaw used newspaper interview clips to demonstrate the rise and fall of Hitler's popularity among Germans from 1930 to 1945. Hitler gave German people hope shortly after World War I. Lots of interviewees saw him as a savior and even wrote him fan letters. But this fandom started to wane in the early 1940s.

Lukacs's and Kershaw's research projects have presented how German people viewed Hitler during the war and shortly after the war. What about the younger generation? How do Germans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century see Hitler given what they have learnt about WWII history from their grandparents (who might have been through World War II as teenagers or young adults), parents, school and the media?

### **Rationale**

As mentioned earlier, one reason why this research project is significant is that scholars have explored only German people's views on Hitler in the 1950s. In the following paragraphs, I will further present the uniqueness of this project. Since this project is meant to be inter-disciplinary, I will review what related research projects have been done in numerous fields thus far. My basic argument is (1) in media and film studies, a research project on contemporary representations of Hitler and Nazism and an in-depth analysis on receptions of those contemporary representations of Hitler and Nazism are yet to be conducted (2) The fall of The Berlin Wall and the unification of Germany brought us a new Germany, which emerges with a new identity and possibly in turn, a new understanding of the country's Nazi past.

One of the films to be examined in this research is *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*, a Canadian-American-produced TV movie. Tony Barta (1998) states that, in the English-speaking world,

while there have been a lot of writings about Nazism and films in general, there have not been many writings about Nazism in films. I tried to figure out the credibility of this statement. I did a meta-search on World War II Germany and media using The Claremont Colleges library database search engine and Link+ search engine, the latter operated by a consortium of university libraries on the west coast including major ones such as UC Berkeley's library. Over a hundred volumes popped up. I went through the list and checked out their tables of content and learned that these texts fell into one of the two categories—(1) media or arts during the Nazi era (2) representations of the Holocaust. The former may focus specifically on Nazi propagandas (i.e. *Composing for the Screen in Germany and the USSR: Cultural Politics and Propaganda*, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany*, *The Reichsfilmkammer: a Study of Film Propaganda Management in Nazi Germany*). Or it may broaden its scope to explore the media and arts under the regime (i.e. *Berlin Alexanderplatz: Radio, film and the Death of Weimar Culture*, *Nazi Cinema as Enchantment: The Politics of Entertainment in the Third Reich*, *The Nazification of Art: Art, Design, Music, Architecture and Film in the Third Reich*). The latter examines how the Holocaust has been represented through numerous media: (i.e. *Visualizing the Holocaust: Documents, Aesthetics, Memory*, *The Holocaust in American Film*, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*).

Using the same two search engines, I also looked for books about representations of World War II. Two comprehensive anthologies popped up: *Screening the Past: Film and the Representation of History* and *Re-picturing the Second World War: Representations in Film and Television*. I went through the tables of content of these two volumes. While the US or UK studios have made several films about key figures in the Nazi Party or the party ideology (i.e. *Hitler: The last Ten Days* (1973), *The Bunker* (1981), *Inside the Third Reich* (1994)), films

representing World War II Germany that got to be analyzed in these books were *Schindler's List* in the essay "Smart Jews: From *The Caine Mutiny* to *Schindler's List*" by Sander L. Gilman and *Conspiracy* (2001) in the essay "Commissioning Mass Murder: *Conspiracy* and History at the Wannsee Conference" by S. Gigliotti. (*Conspiracy* is about the Wannsee Conference that decided the destiny of the Jewish people.)

The dig into the library database confirmed and supported Barta's statement. Scholars tend to focus on media and arts under the Nazi regime and representations of the Holocaust. While films about key figures in the Nazi Party or the ideology have been made in the English-speaking world, they have not been analyzed. Therefore, a proposed project, an analysis about *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*, is significant.

The other film to be studied in this research is *Der Untergang*, a German film depicting Hitler's last days in the bunker and the collapse of the regime. Christine Hasse (2006) states that, before *Der Untergang* was released, there have not been German narrative feature films essentially about Hitler or Nazism. *Der Untergang*'s alleged pioneering position aside, the gist of Hasse's argument is that (1) psychologizing Hitler and Nazism may evade the condemnation that Hitler and his accomplices deserve (2) with the expected aura effects of film as a medium, Hitler and Nazism may be glamorized, (3) with the glamorizing effect of film in mind, if a German director really would like to make a film about Hitler or Nazism, how to represent his or her country's controversial former leader and the ideology built by and around him would be a challenge, especially when he or she tried to balance between dramatics and "neutrality" (if he or she believed that there was such a thing) or "political correctness."

Hasse's research indeed appears rather innovative—she explores how Hitler and Nazism are illustrated in what she believes is Germany's very first narrative film about Hitler, and better

still, she even examines how well the film was received in Germany and abroad. But something seems to be missing in Hasse's research. Indeed, *Der Untergang* turned out to be a domestic and international box office hit in 2004. Hasse assumes that success at the box office is equivalent to positive reception of the film. Total ticket sales could be a result of strategic marketing campaigns (Marich, 2009). If *Der Untergang* was as well-received as Hasse claims to be, then the simplest question for Hasse would be—"What did the audience say exactly about the film?" Hasse's research lacks feedbacks on the film from a real audience and that is where this research project comes in.

The end of World War II brought another tension—The Cold War; one major incident during this period was the divide of East Germany and West Germany. Bill Niven, in his 2002 book *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich*, states that West Germany and East Germany tended to hold different mentalities towards Germany's Nazi past, but the approaches appeared the same—avoidance. West Germany chose to ignore the country's Nazi legacy altogether, deliberately creating a periodic blank on the historical timeline while East Germany, identifying itself as a communist state, publicly denounced its affiliation with Nazism, which has a strong capitalist base, and focused on restructuring its society following the paradigm mapped out by the Soviet Union. Niven then points out that in the late 1990s, a few years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unification of Germany, while some social infrastructure was still underway, Germany began to finally address its Nazi legacy at public arenas—holding an international conference to discuss its country's Nazi past, incorporating examination of the country's Nazi history into elementary and middle school curriculum (to some extent even placing much emphasis on it). Niven calls this "a New Germany's look at its country's Nazi past"—Germans finally pluck up their hearts to look back on their dusted past

with a fresh perspective directed by their brand new post-1989 national identity.

The above summary demonstrated the significance of this dissertation. Before moving to the next section, I need to address the question of why these two films were chosen.

Indeed, there have been a plethora of films set in the Third Reich. But having been interested in biographical films and biographical theories, I narrowed down possible options from films set in World War II Germany to biographical films of figures in the inner circle.

As expected, as the leader of the Nazi regime, Hitler is the most popular subject among his cohorts in the eye of filmmakers. While Adolf Eichmann is the subject of only one narrative feature film (*Eichmann (2007)*) and Albert Speer is the subject of two five-hour mini-series (*Inside the Third Reich (1982)* produced by ABC Television and *Speer: Devil's Architect (2005)* produced by Bavaria Media), Hitler has been the subject of several narrative feature films as well as TV movies. In addition to the two texts to be examined in the research project, noticeable ones include: *Hitler: the Last Ten Days (1973)*, *The Bunker (1981)*, *My Fuehrer (2007)*, a fictional account of how Hitler acquired the ability to mesmerize the audience through the help of a Jewish performing arts professional, German title *Mein Führer - Die wirklich wahrste Wahrheit über Adolf Hitler*). My option would not be limited to only one or two films.

I might as well just pick the film *Eichmann* to be the text analyzed in the project or compare and contrast *Inside the Third Reich* and *Speer: Devil's Architect* but I decided to go with Hitler as the subject to be studied. This research project deals with an informant's "interaction" with a text. (The word "interaction" will be further explained in the following section.) Because Hitler is more closely connected to Germany and his influence on the fate of the country might be greater in comparison to Eichmann's and Speer's, an informant's "interaction" with a text about Hitler could be more vibrant. This is the reason why biographical

films of Hitler were preferred over those of Eichmann and Speer.

I mean to explore how contemporary representations of Hitler have been interpreted. This direction of the research ruled out those movies made in the 1970s and 1980s. And I am interested in comparing and contrasting how Hitler is illustrated in an American movie and a German film. Both *Der Untergang* and *My Fuehrer* were made by German production companies. I picked the former because the latter is a fictional satire. *Der Untergang* and *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* were both introduced as “historical pieces” by their producers. It might make better sense to compare and contrast two “historical pieces” as opposed to one “historical piece” and a fictional satire.

### **Literature Review**

The following paragraphs will be devoted to delineating theories about to be used in this research project.

Stuart Hall, a media studies scholar, contends that textual analysis should focus on the scope for negotiation and opposition on part of the audience. According to Hall, there are three positions that viewers tend to take as decoders of cultural images and artifacts: (a) Dominant-hegemonic reading (b) Negotiated reading (c) Oppositional reading. Hall argues that there is also a discrepancy between what the encoder (i.e. a film producer) attempts to convey and how the decoder (i.e. an audience of a film) reads the text. Hall calls such a discrepancy “the margin of understanding.”

Speaking of audience (in this case it may include any kind of message receivers such as readers, moviegoers, lecture attendees, listeners, etc), Jenkins (2007) offers an interesting insight. He proposes the idea of “audiences.” He contends that the audience is not a uniform group. Instead, within this seemingly unified group, there are lots of subdivisions. Each subdivision

must have its own reading of a text. His example is his research on a group of 5-year-old's interpretations of the TV show *Pee-Wee Hermann*. Jenkins reminds us, as he concludes his research, that what he gets out of the research does not have a very high generalizability because (1) children may read the TV show differently based on the developmental stages they are at and as expected, adults do not react to the TV show the same way as children do (2) those children's interpretations of the TV show (a group of middle-class children's readings) must have been quite different from interpretations by children from a different social class.

Jacqueline Bobo, another media studies scholar, is interested in a specific audience's readings of a given text as well. But her contribution to scholarship is more methodological. In her study about a group of black women's interpretations of the film *The Color Purple*, she draws a model which may be followed by later media studies scholars. She firstly writes about how black women have been represented in the past. Later comes textual analysis but she makes sure that the aforementioned historical context will be taken into consideration as she analyzes the film. Furthermore, she also explores the production of the film (i.e. who is the main audience? how did the production company decide how to approach the film project based on how black women have been illustrated historically?) Lastly, she presents interviews with an audience, several black women. Influenced by Stuart Hall, Bobo is especially interested in the negotiation between how these black women see themselves and how they see themselves visually represented on screen. Aware of the limitation of ethnography in generalizing to larger groups, she nonetheless prefers this methodology to allow in-depth interactions with her subjects and richer qualitative data.

## **Methodology**

Given the inter-disciplinary nature of the research project, the project will involve several

methodologies:

1. Textual analysis: This methodology is commonly adopted by literary and film critics. I am interested in the overarching themes of these films. But I will also look into smaller elements which compliment (or in some cases discredit) the films' basic statements. These smaller elements may be narrative structures and forms, scenes, shots and sequences, dialogue, among many others, such as makeup, gestures, costumes and musical soundtracks.
2. Archival: This methodology is meant to obtain information about those film companies, information about their past works, records on how the films were made, rationales behind decisions on how the films were made. I may look into behind-the-scene footage. The behind-the-scene footage will not be limited to those which are usually included in the DVDs as bonuses but also people outside the film companies who follow the film crew as the film crew work on the films. (The clips may look amateurish.) I may also check out interviews with those producers, actors, actresses as well as other crew members published in magazines and newspapers. In addition to commonly mentioned film critique magazines, I will also check out popular magazines, which tend to publish interviews unedited. Lastly, I will check out some public film archives. One place I will have as a source is Internet Movie Database. The Internet Movie Database is not the free version that is open to everyone but one for professionals, which one needs to pay a monthly fee to subscribe to. Literally over a thousand film companies' detailed files worldwide are available to these professional subscribers.
3. Questionnaire: This methodology is commonly used in social sciences mainly for quantitative research. But in this research project, I mainly want to get a general sense of the informants' habit of movie going, such as how often they go to the movies, whether they

prefer to see a movie in the movie theatre or wait for the DVD to come out, etc. So the questionnaire is meant to gather basic information only; the informants' responses are not added up to be run on SPSS or any other statistical analysis software. The questionnaire also has a few questions about the informants' expectations of a film about Hitler

4. Observation and Interview: I will explore a group of young Germans' responses to these two films' illustrations of Hitler. My interviews with these informants will be in-depth interviews (at least 45 to 60 minutes each) so the sample size does not need to be large. Five to six is an ideal number. The informants will be German nationals 18 years of age or older currently in the greater Los Angeles area. Each informant will be invited to watch one of the two films with me individually. I will observe his or her initial reaction to the film as he or she watches the film. Then I will interview him or her right after the screening. The same routine will be repeated on another day with the other film. The one-on-one format is preferred to avoid additional variables such as small-group dynamic (i.e. peer pressure) especially during the discussion period.

### **Chapter Delineation**

Following this introduction, there will be four chapters and they are:

1. Textual analysis: This chapter will begin with identifying the producers' and directors' general approaches toward the subject matter (i.e. demonizing Hitler, humanizing Hitler) which might be revealed through the filmic elements these filmmaking professionals used. The basic argument is that the American production team demonizes Hitler while its German counterpart humanizes Hitler.
2. Production: This chapter is meant to examine the production of the two films in a broader socio-political context. Through information about the two films' production companies and

interviews the producers gave to the press about these films, I want to answer these questions:

(1) what are the natures of the two production companies (i.e. privately owned or governmentally funded)? (2) what are the companies' political proclivities based on the companies' history (i.e. past films the companies have made, the initiation and development of these companies)? (3) if the films had outside sponsors, who were those sponsors? (4) what is the relationship between answers to these questions and the film companies' approaches to the representations of Hitler?

3. Audience reception: This chapter is to present the qualitative data in a coherent narrative—the informants' general approaches to film texts, attitudes towards Hitler and Nazism, national identities and attachments to the national group and readings of the two films. The chapter is not intended to come to a conclusion; allowing the informants to speak for themselves, it is to demonstrate the variety of approaches to and readings of the given film texts we may still see in a group as small as this one.
4. Self-reflection: This chapter is for me as a researcher to reflect upon myself and to examine the process of working on the research project. Specifically, I will be touching on how my identity (i.e. Chinese) might have an impact on my interaction with my informants and in turn my informants' interactions with me. Also, I will be looking at what kind of inner psychological dynamics I might go through when working with these informants and, should the psychical activities negatively affect my role as a researcher, what tactic I might take to remove the obstacle.

## Chapter 1

*“The entire people is devoted to him not only with reverence but with deep, heartfelt love, because it has the feeling that it belongs to him, flesh from his flesh, and spirit from his spirit... He came from the people and has remained among the people... The smallest approach him in friendly and confiding manner because they sense that he is their friend and protector. But the entire people loves him, because it feels safe in his hands like a child in the arms of its mother... Just as we do, who are gathered close by him, so the last man in the farthest village says in this hour: “What he was, he is and what he is, he should remain: Our Hitler!” [An excerpt from a speech Josef Goebbels delivered in 1933]*

### **Abstract / Introduction**

With carefully staged speeches and meticulously arranged interaction with the people, Hitler successfully earned the hearts and minds of the German “volks” during the Second World War. That is the magic of Goebbels’ propaganda machine.

After the collapse of the Third Reich and as a result of the drastic change in the political climate, Hitler has been forced to wear a whole different set of personae. Filmmaking professionals after 1945 take over the director’s chair from Goebbels and construct a “new” Hitler probably Goebbels himself could not help staring in awe. Through an analysis of two biographical films of Hitler (one American and one German), this chapter is inclined to answer this question: How is Hitler illustrated now at least 65 years after WWII ended?

Hitler has been the most frequently explored political figure in western history in terms of books published (Lukacs, 2000; Hasse, 2006). We do not see an equal number of films about Hitler but indeed we have seen some narrative movies about Hitler coming out the past seven

decades—comical (and to some extent satirical) ones such as *The Great Dictator* (1940) and Dani Levy's *Mein Fuehrer: the Truly Truest Truth about Adolf Hitler* (2007, German title *Mein Fuehrer - Die wirklich wahrste Wahrheit über Adolf Hitler*, which is a fictional account of Hitler's work with a Jewish stage performer on refining Hitler's performance on stage), symbolic ones such as Syberberg's *Our Hitler* (1977, German title *Hitler - ein Film aus Deutschland*), dramatic ones such as *Hitler: the Last Ten Days* (1973), *The Bunker* (1981), just to name a few. Producers and directors of these films as well as cinematographers and editors in some cases hired to carry out producers' and directors' visions of the film, as authors, must have held some basic positions, the simplest ones being praising or demonizing Hitler. This chapter is meant to compare and contrast how the American and German authors differ in filmic languages utilized to portrait Hitler in the movies *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* (2003) and *Der Untergang* (2004, English title *Downfall*). (*Hitler: the Rise of Evil* and *Der Untergang* are chosen among all those films about Hitler because they are relatively recent and are "historical" pieces—"based on facts" as the producers themselves have claimed in public.) The basic argument is that, while the American authors demonize Hitler, the German authors humanize Hitler; however, the German authors attempt to sugarcoat the humanization of Hitler by giving their film an objective outlook.

*Hitler: the Rise of Evil* begins with a title card, a quote from Edmund Burke: "... the only thing for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Later in the movie, Gerlich, the journalist who follows the story of how Hitler comes to power, makes such a remark after his initial meeting with Hitler: "He's insane, a complete psychotic. He may be a compelling speaker on stage but in person I could see into his eyes and what I saw was terrifying."

In a later scene, Gerlich makes the same comment, considering Hitler "cold-blooded and psychotic" in reaction to how the judge in court deals with Hitler's case. The reporter further

explicates, “He’s not human. He studied people in order to appear human, but all he’s discovering is our fear and our hatred. And now we’re all running towards a monster we should be running from.” These quotes summarize the American filmmakers’ general approach to their Hitler—Hitler is evil, a monster and psychotic. How did these American filmmaking professionals make this argument through numerous filmic elements?

The American filmmakers’ position is reflected via the filmic narrative’s basic character setup—who is the hero? It is true that *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* is about Hitler, in particular how he rises to power from an abused, estranged child, a poor soldier from Austria to a man in charge of Germany. During the first five minutes of the movie, the audience is inundated with collages of Hitler from his childhood to young adulthood—his school days where little Adolf gets inspired by Wagner’s music, his hatred towards his father, his attachment to his mother, his attempt to get into The Fine Arts Academy, his days as a vagabond where his anti-Semitic thoughts take shape and flourish as a result of his exposure to some radical speeches on the street, his fight with his superior, a Jewish gentleman himself, in the army during World War I over a medal.

The American filmmakers efficiently build up the image of Hitler, particularly who he is and what has made him who he is. Presumably and to a large extent, Hitler is the subject of this biographical film. But is Hitler the protagonist and modern fictional hero?

Greek and Roman mythologies and ancient theatres have shaped the tradition of conventional narrative structure in western civilization. Audiences find themselves identifying with Hercules, Odysseus as well as others and go through an emotional roller-coaster-ride as they follow these heroes through one adventure after another. Mainstream classic Hollywood cinemas generally adopt this formula. David Bordwell (1997) sums up the narrative equation as such—Character (Hero) + Causes (natural, social) → Decision + Action. Plots after the first act

revolve around how the hero's decision comes about, how the hero carries out the objective and what the result of the heroic deed is (i.e. triumphant, tragic).

According to Bordwell's formula, Hitler is not the hero of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*, but Gerlich, the aforementioned Aryan muckraker journalist, who, according to the American film team, is in fact barely known in history (Peter Sussman, in press, 2003). Indeed, Hitler occupies the first 5 minutes of the movies and it is not until some time after the introduction of Hitler that Gerlich is initiated to the audience. But this kind of arrangement succinctly sets up the protagonist-antagonist contrast, where Hitler is the bad guy while Gerlich is the good guy trying every means possible to fight against the baddy.

Gerlich is first introduced to the audience as a journalist always "doing his job" to have the press "reflect its time." In a chaotic street in Munich in 1919 where mobsters and enraged veterans protest, destroy national monuments and even shoot political opponents in broad day light, the audience finds Gerlich in a suit covered with dust and dirt and with messy hair, risks his life chronicling what is happening with a pen and a notepad. The subsequent scene shows Gerlich rushing back to the printing room with his notes doing dictation with a secretary. While reminded that his bride, the judge as well as his relatives and friends are waiting in the church for him at his wedding, Gerlich postpones the most important moment of his life and has his job as a reporter as the priority.

The Gerlich-Hitler (protagonist-antagonist) contrast is established when Gerlich and Hitler have their first encounter and the socially conscious journalist makes taking down Hitler as his ultimate mission. (Gerlich as the hero + National Socialism promoting hatred → Gerlich wants to bring Hitler down + Gerlich tries one way or another to realize his objective) Taking his party propaganda manager's advice, Hitler pays a visit to Gerlich with the hope that Gerlich

will be willing to wield his pen for the National Socialist Party. A gentleman and positioning himself as a professional, Gerlich begins the conversation with praises on Hitler's marvelous strength of lung on stage regardless of some fundamental differences between the two in terms of political beliefs. The gap between the two men and the protagonist-antagonist contrast become apparent when Hitler hysterically responds to Gerlich's rejection to his invitation. Gerlich says, "I don't write propagandas." Hitler flares up; Gerlich, though taken aback a bit by Hitler's unexpected explosion, manages to handle himself with the aplomb of a professional. In the following scene, Gerlich is seen having a luncheon with Commissar von Kahr; Gerlich relates to von Kahr the gist of his meeting with Hitler and his impression of the man. Von Kahr agrees to form a coalition with Gerlich to fight against Hitler, the protagonist-antagonist contrast established.

Indeed, the rest of the film illustrates how Hitler comes to take charge of the National Socialist Party and eventually Germany, but following the classic model formulated by Bordwell, the audience is directed to follow Gerlich's numerous attempts to "bring Hitler down." Gerlich teams up with von Kahr until the National Socialist Party takes over the Reichstag, von Kahr without any more political power. A newspaperman, Gerlich then makes the best use of resources available to him, including establishing an underground newspaper to "bring to the people the real news" and working with Hitler's former collaborator. Gerlich's good-guy image is emphasized in the scene where his wife really would like him to withdraw before getting himself into further trouble. Gerlich states that his social responsibility comes first, "If I don't do this, I won't be able to live with myself." History has already told us how the story ends. Hitler and other evildoers prevail; Gerlich sacrifices for what he believes in and becomes a true martyr, a tragic hero, as the title of the film has suggested, beaten by the devil.

Bordwell (1997) reminds film studies students that, in addition to how cameras and lighting are utilized in the composition of a film, musical soundtracks should not be overlooked. He states that, the function of musical soundtracks is “to actively shape how we perceive and interpret the image.” The aforementioned protagonist-antagonist contrast is strengthened through the thematic melodies written for a selection of scenes in the movies. The movies adopt quite a few memorable melodies, including the German national anthem and some cabaret pieces, but the composer for the musical soundtracks has two original pieces repeated throughout the films as a way to weave together the plotlines, turn on the audience’s emotional switch and construct the films’ overall texture.

The film has two main thematic melodies. The first one is introduced to the audience at the opening of the movie. It begins with a slightly inharmonic C minor base and then repeats the same melodies with numerous variations in F minor and E minor. Heavy-sounded string instruments in the foreground, in the background are human (predominantly male) vocals and pan-clanking effects similar to those used in the opening of *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. The inharmonic melodies are meant to churn up some discomfort, foretelling the emergence of something unpleasant. The human vocals, often associated with something religious or spiritual, paired with the inharmonic main theme, tinge the whole musical piece with a strong occult flavor. The other piece is used for the first time in the scene right after Hitler’s upbringing montage. On the street, a newsboy gives out paper spreading the information about the eruption of the First World War. People throng the plaza. One public speaker manages to mobilize the crowd to join WWI because of Germany’s ethnic affiliation with the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The crowd hoorays. In this scene, heroic melodies switching between F major and D minor are used. The energetic and inspiring piece is presented with a band with wind musical instruments

in the foreground and gives the audience a sense of victory or great deeds accomplished.

The inharmonious melodies are first used in the opening credits and they continue as the movie moves into the montage which demonstrates key moments of Hitler's life. Such an arrangement with the musical piece hinting the imminence of an occult-like figure followed by the introduction of Hitler builds a nexus between Hitler the character and the moods and emotions the musical piece tries to stimulate. Hitler is recognized as an occult-like, dangerous figure. (The construction of the devilish image is also the result of the use of lights and cameras, which will be explicated later in the chapter.) The inharmonious string piece appears to be Hitler's "theme," used throughout the film to "instruct" or "remind" the audience how to interpret Hitler's actions and situations he is in. The Hitler theme appears for the second time when the unemployed Hitler, a spy for an underground organization, attends a periodical meeting at a beer hall and gets into an argument with a speaker over Germany's national identity. The Hitler theme firstly helps establish Hitler's bad-guy image at the very few scenes where the theme is used and then serves as reminders of or instructions for how later scenes Hitler is in should be read.

Although the main focus of this discussion is how the American filmmakers construct Hitler's negative image through the film text, as an extension of the examination on the film's protagonist-antagonist opposition, we can take a look at the use of the inharmonious melodies' counterparts. The heroic melodies, as mentioned earlier, are introduced in the scene where Germans come together to come to the rescue of Austria. It appears for the second time when Gerlich is introduced to the audience and becomes Gerlich's theme song. This Gerlich theme is subsequently adopted in a number of scenes in which Gerlich takes different tactics to "bring Hitler down"—publishing the speech he wrote for von Kahr which should have been delivered at

a beer hall, secretly assigning his colleagues and associates to follow news about Hitler, in particular the party's campaign strategies and tricks. The heroic theme strengthens the protagonist-antagonist contrast—with Gerlich represented with heroic melodies and as a synonym to the righteous, as an opposite to Gerlich, in this case particularly the melodies he is associated with, Hitler has his negative image inconspicuously emphasized.

Lukacs (2000), aware of the general public's tendency to see Hitler as an incarnation of evil, proposes the "historicization" of Hitler in place of the demonization of Hitler. However, the TV series' executive producers and director stick to the conventional view and such a position can be detected in the visual aspects of the filmic language used by these filmmaking professionals. The next few paragraphs will be devoted to examining how these American filmmakers utilize camera movements and camera angles as well as lighting to construct the image of Hitler as a villain in the audience's minds.

The executive producers and director of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* follows the conventional Hollywood camera-shooting and editing style to make cuts and camera movements (at times even the existence of the camera) as undetectable as possible (except in a few occasions where montage is used to show a long time in real life in seconds). However, in two scenes, the film team abruptly breaks the long lasting equilibrium of the visual narrative, the tempo, and switches to close-ups and extreme close-ups to magnify the argument that Hitler is a bad guy.

The first scene is the one discussed earlier, where Hitler pays Gerlich a visit with the hope that Gerlich may succumb to his eloquence and sincerity and be willing to be National Socialist Party's mouthpiece in the press. The cinematographer uses mostly medium shots in the scene but turns to close-ups as soon as Hitler flares up in reaction to Gerlich's rejection to his invitation. With the inharmonious Hitler theme in the background, the audience sees Hitler from

shoulders up on the screen, firstly dumping the cake in his hand in contempt and then barking, spitting pieces of the pastry as he speaks.

The bad-tempered scoundrel transforms into a political lunatic in a scene in Part II of the film. In the scene, in his trademark brown-shirt covered with brown party leader blouse, on the podium in the Reichstag, Hitler madly proposes the bill that all civil rights be suspended. The camera, tilting upwards, spotlights only Hitler's chin and lips as Hitler announces the suspension of civil liberty in a shrilling, high-pitched voice, saliva belching from the mouth.

While close-ups are generally meant to build identification (or at times even intimacy) between the audience and the featured character (Branco, 2000), the cinematographer, implementing the executive producers and director's will, uses the close-ups and extreme close-ups to achieve just the opposite. With medium shots being the predominant camera option and to maintain a distance between the audience and a character in the movie (Hitler in this case), an abrupt switch to close-ups and extreme close-ups may be too close. Hitler's presence, in these two scenes, when switching from medium shots to extreme close-ups, turns out to be an intrusion.

In addition to the use of close-ups and extreme close-ups to pile up the audience's negative reaction towards Hitler the character, these filmmakers of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* take advantage of another characteristic of camera—tilting. Classic Hollywood cinematic narrative likes using low-angle shots to emphasize or magnify a featured character's heroic (or at times monstrous) imagery. In the previously analyzed cake-spitting scene, the American authors of the film text have done just that. But in actuality the cinematographer and editor of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* make a more complex arrangement elsewhere to build up Hitler's negative image—a low angle-high angle shot pairing.

Typically, the camera, when utilizing the low angle-high angle shot pairing, starts with a

medium shot or close-up to feature Hitler from a low angle. Then the camera either turns 180 degrees or cuts to shoot what Hitler is looking at or facing at the moment from the back of Hitler's head through a high-angle shot.

Pierre Gill, The ASC Award winner at American Society of Cinematography and Emmy nominee for best editing and the key cinematographer for *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*, utilizes the low angle-high angle pairing more than once in the film. Among numerous scenes in which low angle-high angle pairing are used, two are worth a mention. One of the scenes is where Ernst Hansfstaengl (Hitler's propaganda manager before Goebbels comes on board) is exposed to Hitler's power on stage for the first time and gets mesmerized and inspired. In this scene, when featuring Hitler, the camera begins with a low-angle close-up. Then the camera cuts to a high-angle shot from the back of Hitler's head overseeing the hooraying and cheering audience in the beer hall. The camera subsequently zooms in to feature the inspired Hansfstaengl, who gets so blown away by Hitler's speech that he gives a big applause, unaware of his friend's call for his attention. The scene ends with a long shot from Hansfstaengl's (as well as other beer hall audience's) perspective at Hitler and with the camera zooming in to spotlight the dark-angel-like Hitler in a black cloak.

Why does the editor want to insert these high-angle shots before showing other things especially considering screen time? Such a choice may be understood as the American filmmakers' effort to strengthen Hitler's bad-guy image through physical movement of the camera and reflection of Hitler's psyche.

By being drawn from the low-angle shot where the audience (both the audience of the film and the audience in the beer hall, who the film audience to some extent identifies with as it watches Hitler's speech together) faces Hitler the big monster to the high-angle shot where the

film audience gets to temporarily be displaced to look at the audience in the beer hall and itself, the film audience is struck to realize how little it is facing Hitler. Furthermore, with the camera placed at the back of Hitler's head in a high-angle position, the audience of the film may see the audience in the beer hall through Hitler's perspective. This temporary and brief identification with Hitler allows the audience of the film to slip into Hitler's head and sense how tiny and manipulate-able a crowd can be to Hitler through Hitler's daunting overview on the beer hall audience.

With the two scenes interpreted above wrapped up with Hitler being illustrated as a dark angel and a harsh character, the editor of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* tries to inconspicuously direct the audience of the movie to go through this process—the audience firstly notices the oppression Hitler may have on itself (low-angle shot), then explores Hitler's pathological worldview (high-angle shot) and lastly is hit hard to be reminded of the numerous dark personae that Hitler may assume (dark angel and harsh character).

The authors of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* use frontal harsh light to illustrate Hitler's harshness in one of the beer hall scenes. They continue to make the best use of light to add another layer to Hitler's cult-leader image as Hitler in the movie takes over the party and has full control over the Reichstag. These non-German filmmakers utilize a lot of strong backlight, oftentimes coming from the window, which may allow the audience to see only the silhouette of a character as opposed to the whole clear feature. Such a lighting choice usually is meant to get the audience more engaged in what is going on on the screen; forced into taking a closer look at what is demonstrated to it, the audience cannot help relinquishing its passive position in this screen-audience dyad but taking an active, participatory role (Branco, 2000).

However, the strong window backlight in *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* is also designed to

construct Hitler's cult-leader image. This window backlight setup appears repeatedly, particularly in Part II of the film. The most noticeable scene in which the window backlight is used is where Gregor Strausser, who is proposed to be the vice-chancellor of the Reichstag to block Hitler from taking complete control over the parliament, is summoned to the party headquarter. Hitler sees Gregor Strausser's acceptance of the offer as a betrayal and wants Strausser removed from party position immediately.

The Strausser scene has a simple but significant setup. In the front is Hitler barking at Strausser; in the back is a big window with a big party emblem (breast eagle and Swastika) situated just above Hitler's head. As soon as Strausser is dismissed, Hitler turns 90 degrees to face the camera. In this dim headquarter office, the window, particularly the piece where the party emblem is placed, is the only source of light. Hitler, surrounded by an aura, looks like an apotheosized cult leader (i.e. Anton LaVey on the back cover of his *Satanic Bible*), creepy, dangerous and evil.

While the visual composition of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* primarily is meant to make Hitler appear as a bad person and horrifying cult leader, the American authors of the visual text manage to demonstrate how sick Hitler can be through dialogue and his interaction with others around him. David Cherniack, a filmmaker who was given the privilege to document the production process of the film, suggests that Hitler in the film is illustrated as a "sociopath" and a person with "Borderline Personality Disorder."

In conventional psychopathology, there is not a clear or fixed definition for sociopath yet the American authors' as Cherniack has suggested, indeed, through Hitler's interaction with others in the film, illustrate Hitler as a person showing some characteristics of Borderline Personality Disorder. According to American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic Criteria

DSM-IV-TR, a Borderline Personality Disorder patient generally has a “pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self-image, and affects, and marked impulsivity by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). The patient may fall into “a pattern of unstable and intense interpersonal relationships characterized by alternating between extreme idealization and devaluation.” He or she may also have affective issues, in particular “affective instability due to a marked reactivity of mood (e.g. irritability, anxiety),” and/or “inappropriate, intense anger or difficulty controlling anger (e.g. frequent displays of temper, constant anger)”.

If we elaborate the definition of Borderline Personality Disorder cited above with everyday language, a person with Borderline Personality Disorder has unstable, amorphous self-image. He or she is constantly in search of answers to the questions—“Who am I” and “What am I.” A person with Borderline Personality Disorder frequently reenacts the negative emotions he or she holds towards people in his or her early life (i.e. resentment as a result of desertion) onto people he or she later interacts with (“transference”). A person with Borderline Personality Disorder tends to be egoistical, self-centered; it is one way for him or her to make sure that “I am” and is certain of his or her own existence. Categorization of people around him or her falls into two opposing groups—“those for me” and “those against me.” Should he or she feel his or her existence gets threatened, the person has a strong proclivity to get angry as a result of anxiety and as a way to safeguard his or her sense of existence. Always in dire need of emotional attachments, the person likes to be liked and can never stand desertion (Brown & Barlow, 2001).

The American executive producers and director’s depiction of Hitler’s childhood through young adulthood in the first few minutes of the mini-series pretty much follow the classical psychoanalytic model—an abusive father paired with a supportive mother (Cherniack says

“overindulging” mother) resulting in young Hitler’s full emotional investment in his mother and disdain for his father, and foreshadows how Hitler’s life might look like in later part of the film.

Such a classical Freudian understanding of Hitler’s psyche is reflected through or determines these authors’ portrayal of Germany’s former Fuehrer. In the opening montage which summarizes Hitler’s upbringing and development to young adulthood, these non-German filmmaking professionals begin with Hitler’s father showing Hitler the place he used to work before he retired and introducing young Hitler to his former colleagues. Young Hitler curses under his breath, “Stupid old fool.” Then the audience sees Hitler’s mother caressing the boy Hitler affectionately and hears her saying to Hitler, “You’ll get what you want in the end. You’ll be a painter, an artist... anything you want, oh my little genius.” The brief peaceful moment is abruptly interrupted when Hitler’s father discovers that Hitler burned his beehives again. Hitler is shown severely beaten.

Mother’s health goes downhill as Hitler moves from childhood to young adulthood. Strongly attached to his mother emotionally, Hitler firstly faces his mother’s imminent death with denial and then turns the love for his mother into hate: “She will do anything to ruin my career!” By the deathbed, Hitler’s half-sister Angela promises Mother to assume the maternal role, considering that Hitler “is so sensitive” and probably cannot “survive without” Mother.

After the funeral, Hitler is found in tears, Angela by his side. Angela wants Hitler to put himself together, “Adi, I know it’s hard but you have to be brave.” Taking his sister’s encouragement for questioning his legitimacy to be still hooked to his mother, Hitler turns defensive and even verbally abusive towards the mother surrogate, “Don’t tell me how to feel. You didn’t love her. She was only your stepmother. You wouldn’t know how to love anyone. You’re just a lump, a passant, good-for-nothing and breeding more bitches like you.”

Hitler's unexpected rage is a strong contrast to the end of the montage where Angela brings Hitler's share of the inheritance in person to Hitler in Vienna the time when Hitler is truly financially desperate and the opening of the scene in which Hitler has Angela manage his country bungalow in Obersalzberg.

Hitler's emotions towards people are illustrated in the movie as fluctuating between love and hate on a case-by-case basis. (Hitler may have only hate towards some people because these people are always "against him.") Hitler's switch between love and hate towards Angela becomes a pattern which the audience can see across Hitler's relationships and interactions with numerous other characters in the film, an implication for his personality disorder tendencies.

Among characters that Hitler comes in contact with in the film, three are worth an examination—his dog Foxl during WWI in the trenches, Ernst Rohm and Geli (Angela's daughter). Hitler's interaction with them in the mini-series comes in as a support for Cherniack's understanding of the American filmmakers' general approach to Hitler—that Hitler might show signs of a person with Borderline Personality Disorder.

Foxl is introduced to the audience when Hitler is presented going on one of his messenger duties. He finds the poor dog nestling up to a dead soldier; he adopts her as his pet and companion. Up until he gets injured and hospitalized, Hitler keeps Foxl by his side in the trenches. Once Hitler attempts to order Foxl to be seated when she is fed. Foxl pays no attention to her master's order, running around playfully. The generous corporal (at least generous to Foxl) all of a sudden turns into an abusive master, severely beating up Foxl. He shouts, "You make a fool out of me. You try to humiliate me!"

The "speculated" Foxl incident (as the executive producers called it in an interview) may be read in multiple facets. There is no doubt that Hitler's sudden anger is unexpected and to

some extent, improper. He might as well just get on with other duties in the trenches and ignore the discrepancy between what he wanted Foxl to do and how Foxl actually responded to his order. This improper urge of rage may show that Hitler meet one criterion for Borderline Personality Disorder. But as mentioned earlier, DSM IV-TR's criteria for Borderline Personality Disorder also may include not only impulsivity per se but the interpersonal aspect, which then brings the discussion back to the mother-son relationship.

Hitler's anger towards Foxl in that instant is a replication of his love-hate relationship with his mother and mother surrogate. Hitler shows affection towards Foxl; he even has built up a certain bond with her as both are deserted wanderers in the time of turbulence. However, Hitler flares up at Foxl's ignorance of his order. Though to some extent meeting the criterion for Borderline Personality Disorder and having a self-image not completely solid, according to montage before the Foxl incident, Hitler in the film is presented as having a grandiose self.

Constantly rejected by The Fine Arts Academy, when his mother asks him how the entrance exam goes, Hitler replies, "Someday I shall be a great artist, Mother." Hitler makes this remark unabashedly regardless of the constant rejections he gets from The Fine Arts Academy; he obviously believes he is going to be a great artist though the reality has proven otherwise, and has an over-positive image of himself. This background information may come in handy as one manages to conceptualize Hitler's reaction to Foxl's inattentiveness to her master's order. Hitler considers Foxl's ignorance of his order a big threat to his grandiose self—a great man and artist of tomorrow is "made a fool of" in public (with other soldiers in the platoon present) by an animal. At that moment, affection and love are replaced by overwhelming anger and hatred. The American filmmakers manage to show that, at that very moment and in that scene, to Hitler, Foxl is no longer that poor little thing that he picked up by the side of a dead soldier but another object

that jeopardizes his sense of existence.

The authors of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* (re)present Hitler as a person with a personality disorder not only through his interaction with Foxl or others in early chapters of his life. The audience may find this sudden situational switch between black and white repeated in his relationship with Geli, his niece (Angela's daughter).

Geli waltzes into Hitler's life as an angel when Hitler is temporarily out of politics waiting for a comeback. In the Obersalzberg country house scene, Geli is introduced as a beautiful young woman. Though Hitler responds to Geli's thanks for his arranging this short-time getaway solely out of courtesy, his body language expresses something else—"Uncle Dolf" falls for his stunningly attractive niece and cannot get his eyes off her.

As soon as Hitler decides to return to politics after a break, he wants to take Geli with him. The innocent girl is recognized as her uncle's mistress. Tabloid presses write about the pair's visits to the operas. However, Hitler's affection for his pretty little niece goes bad when Hitler sees Geli starting to have some intimate physical contact with her young driver. He has the driver dismissed immediately and then puts Geli in house arrest: "Now your Uncle Dolf is here to protect you..."

The house arrest results in Geli's attempt to escape; the suffocated girl hops on a train when her uncle is busy with a dinner party. Geli is caught. Hitler alludes to Foxl when he gives Geli the one last lesson: "I had a dog like you once. Couldn't get it into her head who her master was. Kept running away. So I penned her; she escaped. I beat her; she tried to bite me. I chained her and she strangled herself. She was stupid, Geli. Don't be stupid." Later that night, in the spacious, well-lit but lonely house, Geli shoots herself.

Eva Braun is introduced to the audience in the scene where Hitler catches Geli being

romantically involved with the young driver. When Eva finally fills in the slot Geli left for whoever bothers to claim and moves into the Obersalzberg mountain resort, Angela raises up the red flag before Eva's involvement with Hitler has gone to the stage where Eva may end up just like her predecessor: "He chained [my daughter] and abandoned her."

Angela's terse but powerful remark succinctly summarizes how Hitler is illustrated interacting with Geli as well as significant people around him. The bungalow scene just adds another layer to the American filmmakers' basic approach toward Germany's former Fuehrer—Hitler shows some characteristics of a Borderline Personality Disorder patient maintaining a somewhat unhealthy or even pathological relationship with a person close to him.

Indeed, Hitler is shown physically "chaining" Geli, keeping her in physical confinement. But these American filmmaking professionals may have this chaining convey another layer of meaning. As soon as Hitler meets the adult Geli at the Obersalzberg bungalow, he has found a new person he can attach himself to. He has her around at all times—in the car when he has a quarrel with Ludendorff, at the party headquarter when he chides the young Goebbels, at Hanfstaengl's social function even she obviously looks bored and unhappy. The audience sees Geli's presence in almost every scene until she kills herself.

The American filmmakers manage to show that Hitler has finally found the missing piece of the puzzle. In a way, Hitler in the movie sees Geli as part of himself. When Geli begins to move away from him, one way to keep the self from crumbling is to "chain" that part of self with the hope that it will not drift off shore. Hitler later cannot but take the action to "abandon" that vanishing part of self before that part of self is gone to avoid desertion. He wants to be the person actively dumping that part of self as opposed to letting that part of self walking away from him. That part of self is eventually gone for good. Hitler falls into depression, feeling as if some

important part of his body has been amputated. He sobs as he fondles the gun with which Geli killed herself days before, “What about me? It was my gun. This is all I have left...”

The above “mini psychoanalysis” was mainly meant to demonstrate how the authors of the film text depict Hitler as a person with symptoms of Borderline Personality Disorder, which then fits into or add another layer to their larger argument that Hitler is a baddy (if not evil then at least sick). But one does not require formal training in psychotherapy or to be familiar with the DSM-IV diagnostic criteria to notice Hitler’s abnormality in *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*.

The American filmmakers’ carefully crafted script presents Hitler as a self-centered person with over-generalized and distorted worldview often reinforced by defense mechanisms such as denial. Over-generalization can be seen as an erroneous cognitive shortcut (Brown & Barlow, 2001). The audience may be aware of this in Hitler’s numerous comments on the Jewish people in the film.

As early as the beginning of the film, Hitler is found promoting the equation “Jews = Marxist = unpatriotic” among his buddies at the WWI frontline: “Marxists. Socialists. Jews. They call themselves Communists now and they’re everywhere, except here at the front.” Hitler keeps disseminating his dangerous gospel when he finally has a small stage in the beer hall: “Marx was a Jew. The Communist Party is run by Jews.”

Further into the film, this false equation gets developed into Hitler’s suggestion on public policies. In the scene where Hitler is invited to give a speech at Hanfstaengl’s dinner party to present his ideas for the first time outside the lower-middle class dominated beer hall, Hitler says, “We must remove the Jews. They run our banks. They lost us the war. They’re responsible for the economic disaster we’re in.” To Hitler, Jews are the parasites and the only way to cure the disease is to get rid of them (“deport them” and later build “the camp”).

Hitler's distorted view on the Jews does get challenged. Hitler attempts to sell his anti-Semitic idea to the underground organization he takes part in soon after WWI: "The Nationalist agenda must include the elimination of the Jews." The information officer of the underground organization says it is simply "not feasible." Blocking the message from entering into his cognitive processing database or simply dismissing the piece of information altogether in case it contradicts his already established belief, Hitler responds, "Oh, it's very feasible, sir. Just drive them out."

Hitler is shown using the same defense mechanism when Geli vows to leave Hitler. Geli sobs, "Please, I want to go home. I don't want to be here anymore." Hitler denies Geli's feeling altogether as if he covered his ears with hands mumbling that he was not hearing what Geli just said: "Of course you do [want to be here]."

The executive producers and director of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* systematically present Hitler as a dark, evil and abnormal being. The setup of "Gerlich vs Hitler" shrewdly takes advantage of the classic protagonist-antagonist contrast and establishes Gerlich's image as the person the audience identifies with and Hitler's persona as a bad guy. With the inharmonious melodies in the background, Hitler's emergence is recognized as a devil's lurking and looming from the darkness; the use of low-angle shots and strong backlights is meant to achieve similar semiotic and visual goals. Lines in the film give the audience the impression that, if Hitler does not have a personality disorder or show some characteristics of some personality disorder, he at least has some psychological issues

We should now shift our discussion to analysis on the film *Der Untergang*.

What about the German authors of the film *Der Untergang*? While the US filmmaking professionals confront Hitler with harsh condemnation, the German counterparts (producer and

director) tend to present Hitler as a human being who, like anybody else, can have different dimensions or sides. Aware of the conventional view on their former Fuehrer, the German producer and director package their humanization of Hitler with seemingly detached, objective setup and narrative tactics.

*Der Untergang* is partially based on Traudl Junge's biography. Frau Junge served as Hitler's secretary for about 4 years until the end of the war. Her biography *Bis zur letzten Stunde* is her recollection of her days with Hitler, interwoven with her responses to interview questions and self-reflection as well as self-criticism compiled by Melissa Muller. The main plot of the film starts with Junge (at that time Fraulein Humps) being initiated to and hired by Hitler, and closes at Germany's surrender to the Russians. Through Junge's eyes, the audience sees Hitler's last days in the bunker and the collapse of the Nazi regime.

As mentioned earlier, the German authors of the film text basically mean to present both dark and bright sides of Hitler. Simply put, unlike their American counterparts, these German filmmaking professionals of the film manage to humanize Hitler and even to some extent sympathize with him. However, the German filmmakers sugarcoat their humanization of Hitler by taking a seemingly objective stance..

The German filmmakers' attempt to distance themselves from the Nazi matter can firstly be sensed in the setup and basic structure of the film. Unlike the American filmmakers' preference for a completely linear narrative structure (the first scene being boy Hitler sitting in a classroom listening to a lecture and Wagner's music and the last scene being the adult Hitler, the Fuehrer, speaking to over thousands of SS men on a podium), the German authors of the film text begin and end the film with real-life Traudl Junge commenting on her choice of working with Hitler and that experience's impact on her decades later. Junge passed away in 2002, just

shortly before the film was about to move into production. Therefore, the footage that frames *Der Untergang* was not the filmmakers' interviews with Junge for the very film project. They were taken from the documentary *Im toten Winkel - Hitlers Sekretärin* (2002, English title *Blind Spot. Hitler's Secretary*), in which Junge reflected on her days of working for the Fuhrer.

Such a setup of having the documentary footage mentioned above as the opening and ending of the film may be read in two ways, both reflecting the German producers and director's attempt to emotionally separate themselves from the subject matter. On the first level, these German filmmakers' choice of bracketing up the main plot with documentary footage is to hint that the main plot is a visual reconstruction of what in actuality has indeed taken place. The utilization of conventional filmic narration in the main body of the film should be treated as a docu-drama if not a documentary.

The German filmmaking professionals want to send the message that their film is based on statements from someone who has witnessed what happened and who has even played a part in the drama at those historical, crucial moments. An audience may not totally agree to where the German producer or director stands, or like what it sees, but the German filmmakers would like the audience to bear in mind that they do their utmost to present "what it is" or at least what it is to them with available first-person accounts as the basic skeleton as opposed to having the (re)creation of Hitler's or Nazis' image be a product of certain ideologies.

In short, these German filmmaking professionals' underlying message behind the bracketing arrangement is: "This is how and what it is whether you like it or not. We are not making things up. Frau Traudl Junge has been there. We just tell you what she says through a narrative film, which is easier for you to understand and appreciate."

On the other level, the German filmmakers have Traudl Junge's statement as a shield.

Junge appears like Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*. *The Great Gatsby* is about the life of Jay Gatsby yet the narrator of the tale is Nick Carraway, an intimate friend of Gatsby's. The reader learns about the rise and fall of Gatsby through Carraway. Owing to Carraway's close affiliation with Gatsby, credibility of Carraway's account cannot escape challenge (i.e. lying, exaggerating, understating to save Gatsby because of close friendship with Gatsby).

Junge in *Der Untergang* may find herself in a similar situation; the German producer and director take a good advantage of that. Should the film ever suffer from criticism, they may go about the criticism in two directions—(1) the film is based on one person's personal account of the subject matter, which like anyone else's, should not be expected to be flawless and is not but one perspective among many others (2) like Nick Carraway, Junge, due to her privilege of being able to work side-by-side with Hitler, is an "unreliable narrator" and one should be smart enough to be at least a bit doubtful about her tale.

The two interpretations of the bracketing tactic may sound somewhat contradictory—one with the footage as a backup to enhance the validity of the tale while one with the footage as a deduction. But both interpretations show that the bracketing arrangement works perfectly in keeping a distance between the German authors and the subject matter and subsequently protect the German authors from being attacked: "We are presenting what it is" or "We are just telling Junge's story, one of many out there."

The German producer and director's effort to tinge the narrative film with documentary flavors can also be detected in the numerous filming techniques they use. The first one is the utilization of natural lights. The film, unlike *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*, does not involve a lot of locations. It mainly covers Hitler and his associates' last few days in the bunker so the majority of the story takes place in the notorious bunker in Berlin.

Shooting the film's interior scenes in their Munich studio, the producer and director of *Der Untergang* had their props department reconstruct the bunker sets based on floor plans available in historical archives. This means that, in addition to the basic structure, the filmmakers and their prop department need to build in the necessary facilities according to the floor plans and it would include the light-bulbs on the wall. The German filmmaking professionals tend to have those light-bulbs as the only source of light on the set, making all of the bunker scenes appear rather dim.

One example of the utilization of natural light is the scene in which Albert Speer visits Hitler in the bunker to bid Hitler farewell. The set (Hitler's private study, where Speer meets with Hitler for one last time) appears so dark that one might get the impression that the only source of light on that set was a fireplace somewhere and he or she could merely see the feature of Hitler or Speer. This natural lighting option is truly a deep contrast to common studio production, where main characters tend to be perfected with all front light, side light and back light (Branco, 2000) and is meant to make the film recognized as a visual reconstruction of a historical event as opposed to a normal entertainment cinema.

The German filmmakers give the film a "realist" taste also through their camera option. Right after the documentary footage opening (interview with real-life Traudl Junge) is a scene in a forest, where young Junge together with a group of young women are escorted by a few SS men to Hitler's abode and headquarter in Rastenburg, East Prussia. After the basic "establishing" shot (introducing the location and Junge), the filmmakers follow the actors and actresses further into the forest with a hand-held camera and maintain a medium-range (medium-shot) distance.

The hand-held camera and medium-shot distance become the predominant filming approach throughout the film. The audience may feel as if it was watching a live journalistic

documentation of an actual incident. This realist sense is especially strong in the few exterior scenes in which the film team manages to illustrate street battles and combats outside the bunker.

Right after Traudl is offered the job and those girls taken to Rastenburg together with her cheer, the film cuts to Berlin, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1945, Hitler's birthday, four and half years later. The whole sequence begins with a close shot of Swastika and breast eagle on the headquarter (Hitler's) bunker followed by a bird view of the bunker and the surrounding to show the destructed state of the site. After the establishing shots, the filmmakers switch back to the aforementioned filming approach to illustrate the heated combat. Though not necessarily with the intention to make the audience to be unaware of the existence of the camera as the film team of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* does, the German filmmaking professionals in fact appear like a journalist running after soldiers who gun down enemies, get killed or duck for covers. For a moment, a bomb explodes and the camera shakes as a result of the vibration of the eruption. The seconds of vibration may send the message to the audience that the audience is watching an incident through the eye of a reporter, not a filmmaker of a narrative feature in a well-staged performance.

The choice of "deliberate camera vibration" can be seen in at least one more scene. Hitler has decided to commit suicide with his mistress. Hitler's adjutant (Gunsche) is personally ordered by Hitler to prepare some gasoline with which he will then burn Hitler's and Eva's corpses after Hitler and Eva kill themselves. Gunsche phones his colleague (Kampa) to make the necessary arrangement. Suddenly, a bomb explodes behind Kampa; the camera shakes. In a conventional situation, the camera, set to be invisible, would not have shaken as the bomb went off

Earlier, there was a quote from Bordwell, which summarizes the function of musical soundtracks in films. Interestingly, a sharp contrast to *Hitler: the Rise of Evil, Der Untergang*

uses very few original musical pieces. The audience probably can notice the utilization of original musical pieces only at the opening and finale of the movie.

The absence of musical soundtracks in the main body of the film can be interpreted as another way for the German filmmakers to fence up the critical distance. From these filmmaking professionals' perspective, this non-existence of musical soundtracks is a way to demonstrate their effort to avoid turning on the audience's emotional switch considering the main function of musical soundtracks in films. From the audience's perspective, this absence of musical soundtracks just adds another layer to the film's realist and journalistic texture. Live reportage of actual events, when broadcasted on TV, almost always includes no musical soundtrack. Together with the shaky hand-held camera, the absence of musical soundtracks in *Der Untergang* can strike at least some casual viewers as live news footage.

The German producer and director, as authors, seem to try their utmost to keep a critical distance between themselves and the subject matter they illustrate in their text. They use documentary footage of a key person in the historical event to either give the narrative film a documentary feel or to break off its nexus with the controversial figure should they face any criticism. These German filmmaking professionals add another layer of documentary impression by using natural light, hand-held camera and through the absence of musical soundtracks. Through the use of documentary footage, natural light, hand-held camera and absence of musical soundtrack, the German authors intend to vow to the global community that *Der Untergang* is an objective portrait of Hitler. But are the German producer and director as innocent as the aforementioned setup has suggested? Unlike *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*, which establishes Hitler's devilish image at the very beginning of the film through the utilization of inharmonious thematic melodies (a kind of implication), *Der Untergang* explicitly makes a statement that Hitler is a

warm individual through dialogue.

Right after the scene in which Traudl and other young women are taken to Hitler's headquarter in East Prussia, in the waiting room, Hitler meets with his secretary candidates. The Fuhrer, at the character formation and character establishment stage of the film, in sharp contrast to the powerful dignitary on a podium or in rallies, looks very laid-back. All those secretary candidates spring up from their seats at seeing Hitler stepping out of his study to meet with them; they stand upright, holding their breath and give the Fuhrer the Nazi salute.

Hitler walks up to each of those women and asks her to tell him what her name is and where she is from. The first lady ends all of her answers with the proper closure "Heil, mein Fuehrer." The second young woman does the same. But Hitler, the creator of this whole salutation ritual, interestingly, says gently, "No need for the formality." This line effectively presents Hitler as an easy-going fellow, not a rigid man who creates a gap between himself and people he interacts with using propriety. This line may even, at least temporarily, take Hitler out of the totalitarian machine—here Hitler is just another employer meeting with his future employees for the first time.

After the introduction, Traudl is invited to Hitler's study. Slipping a piece of paper into the typewriter, Traudl at times takes a peek at Blondi, Hitler's German shepherd. Aware of the scared expression on Traudl's face, Hitler says, "My Blondi won't hurt you. She's very intelligent. She's much smarter than most people." He then walks towards Traudl. Traudl looks nervous. Hitler tries to calm down this 22-year-old girl, who since that day has been working very closely with him until the very end, "Don't be nervous. I make many mistakes during dictation. You won't make nearly as many." These few sentences illustrate Hitler as an empathic person (contrary to the conventional image of him as a cold-blooded dictator) and even a person

with the humor to recognize his own flaws, make fun of himself and to shed his apotheosized leader persona.

Hitler then starts reading out loud his draft while Traudl attempts to type up the speech. The young secretary is too slow to catch up; she just stops all together, distressed. Hitler approaches the typewriter and finds that Traudl does not get even half of the speech down. Showing no sign of rage, Hitler leans forwards and smiles, "I say we try it again eh?" Traudl feels relieved and grins gleefully. The next scene cuts to Traudl standing outside Hitler's office facing all of the other girls: "I made it. He just hired me."

While Hitler is generally recognized as a dictator, if not bad then at least distant, the producer and director of *Der Untergang*, through the aforementioned character establishment scene, bring Hitler down from the pedestal. But these German filmmakers move right along making Hitler a loveable but withering leader betrayed or deserted by his followers. They achieve this through the abrupt switch from medium shots to close-ups and extreme close-ups (coinciding with Branco's view on the function of close-ups mentioned earlier).

One of the previous paragraphs comments on the filmmakers' choice for medium shots. Medium shots, in this context, in addition to bringing necessary realism and journalistic texture to the film, may also make the camera resemble human eye (i.e. if in normal distance, one can see the other from waist up, and this is pretty much what he or she will be seeing through a medium shot without the camera panning up or down) (Branco, 2000). Such an arrangement may inconspicuously draw the audience into the drama. The audience may feel that it is present as the story unfolds.

With the audience participation established, the filmmakers then at times abruptly switch to close-ups or extreme close-ups. This sudden twist, with the camera serving as the audience's

eye and those predominant medium shots making the audience feel like a member of the cohorts struggling in the bunker, drags the audience into even getting closer to those characters, in particular Hitler. The audience can now take a more intimate look at these “monsters” and the proximity is so close that the audience can take a very good look at their expressions, which the audience probably cannot help being moved or touched at times.

The authors of *Der Untergang* here use close-ups quite often. Among those scenes where close-ups are used, two are especially emotionally powerful, which may make the audience sympathize with this withering deserted leader. In one scene, at the sight of the destined downfall of the regime, Hitler discusses with Eva together with Traudl and Gerda (a colleague of Traudl's) which seems to be the least painful method to put an end to one's life. Hitler suggests cyanide capsules. Eva requests one. The camera begins the scene with a medium to medium-long shot to capture the whole group sitting in a sofa (a bit like the establishing shot for the scene). Then the filmmakers cut to a medium to medium-close shot and position themselves as observers of the discussion or even members of the group sitting on the edge of the sofa.

As Hitler snaps out a few cyanide capsules from his drawer, Traudl asks, “May I have one too?” The camera then switches to close-ups. It features Hitler's and Traudl's hands as Hitler gently places a cyanide capsule in Traudl's hand, affectionately squeezes and then grabs his young secretary's hand. Then the camera takes a close shot at Hitler as he sadly says, with tears in his eyes, “Sorry that I don't have a better gift to give you.” This close-up sequence elevates Hitler from an approachable employer to a caring human being.

By now, with Hitler coming down from the pedestal and then being represented as a caring boss established, the audience must have to some extent accepted the Fuehrer on screen and may appreciate his emotions in numerous contexts. In other words, here Hitler, like anybody

else, can show compassion; therefore, he can have any other emotions not just anger like a mad man. Hitler's expressions are generally justified.

These German filmmakers then take an advantage of this Hitler-as-an-emotional-being establishment and then place Hitler in a context where he is betrayed or deserted. In a normal situation, one can earn sympathy if he or she is dumped or betrayed. Now that all of previously formed persona and previously ingrained stigmas have been removed and Hitler is recognized as a human being just like anybody else, he should have no problem earning sympathy, in this context, from the audience.

In the movie, the audience sees Hitler's aids walking away from the dying leader one by one—Himmler, Goring and then Speer. Speer's desertion is extensively illustrated in this film. The audience may find itself feeling sorry for Hitler. While Hitler sees his acolytes leaving him one by one, Speer flies in to meet with him.

About to cheer for this belated emotional support from his long-time comrade, Hitler soon learns that Speer does not carry out his will of total destruction and worse still, that Speer is here to bid him goodbye. The scene begins with the typical medium shots when Speer steps into Hitler's private study. The audience's emotional engagement may emerge when Hitler invites Speer to take a seat. The camera turns from medium shots to medium-close shots, positioning itself between Hitler and Speer, who sit face-to-face. The audience goes from an objective observer of the interchange to a mute participant. The camera cuts between Hitler and Speer; the audience, through the camera, places its eye on whoever is speaking.

The audience may hit the first emotional climax when Speer confesses that he never carries out Hitler's order of maiming Berlin; in fact, Speer tries to talk his boss into sparing the people. The inter-cut stops for a moment; the camera then features the enraged and disappointed

Fuehrer, who firstly cracks a pencil with his own bare hands and subsequently rubs his forehead.

Through the close-up, the audience senses Hitler's anger and depression built up from the beginning of the scene and justified in consequence of how Hitler has been illustrated up to that point (a down-to-earth and even somewhat caring leader betrayed by this closest ally and thus who has every reason to be upset and disappointed).

The ultimate climax of the scene is the closure of the scene, where Speer walks out of Hitler's private study. Through a medium shot, Speer is shown closing the door behind him. Then the camera switches to close-ups again, this time to spotlight a teardrop coming out from Hitler's right eye. Here, the filmmakers use not only close-ups but also a long take. The audience now is drawn into not only taking a look at Hitler in a rather intimate proximity but also gazing at him, absorbing the mood and energy of the character at the very moment. Hitler is no longer that dreadful dictator but a nice leader betrayed and deserted by his former subordinates and deserves sympathy or pity.

One may argue that, towards the end of the film, the warm and caring leader gradually turns into a rather irrational being. Indeed, in *Der Untergang*, Hitler has a distorted view of Germany's condition—when von Greim and Reitsch (two top-notch pilots of the Reich) fly in to meet with him, he makes von Greim the head of the Luftwaffe and vows to help von Greim rebuild the air force with the best planes in just few days when every piece of information has proven that Hitler's proposal is never any bit feasible.

The audience also witnesses Hitler's temporary psychical regression—when Fegelein (one of his key hands and Eva's brother-in-law) is not at his disposal and cannot be located, Hitler yells and pounds the table vehemently like a child crying for candies.

The above two scenes appear in the second half of the film (80 to 85 minutes into the 2 ½

hour version) and Hitler remains more or less like this the rest of the film. With Hitler's fluctuation of moods and emotions having been generally justified by then, the German producer and director fabricate the plot in a way that may make the audience believe that Hitler's cognitive problems (erroneous beliefs of and distorted views on Germany's condition) is the result of deception from his subordinates. Generals do not present to him the full picture of the current condition; those who do are silenced on account of peer pressure. Hitler's loyal follower Dr. Goebbels always poisons Hitler with his venom to convince him that the Reich will be reborn from the ruin again soon. Together with the Hitler-as-an-emotional-being position established in the first half of the film, the movie contends that Hitler is a normal human being, a warm and caring leader, and the situational absurdity is passively formed by the very milieu (those around the Fuehrer).

The analysis above demonstrated how these German authors systematically humanize Hitler. They begin with shattering the previously established image of Hitler as a cold-blooded dictator and then illustrate their country's Fuhrer as a warm, caring human being who unfortunately gets betrayed and deserted by his acolytes. They also try to make the audience empathize (at times even sympathize) with Hitler by switching from medium shots to close-ups or extreme close-ups. But interestingly, these German filmmaking professionals package this biographical film of Hitler, a film meant to humanize Germany's former dictator, as a seemingly objective piece with journalistic outlook and a docu-drama impression bracketed with interview clips with real-life Traudl Junge.

Outside the inner circle, Hitler is known only through selected newsreels, printed materials, audio recordings, etc. Over 65 years after WWII, it is even harder for the general public to piece together a picture of Hitler based on reliable sources. It is interesting to see the

two camps of filmmaking professionals of different nationalities come down to two opposing images of Hitler—a psychotic swine or even devil (the American filmmakers) and a caring leader betrayed by his subordinates (the German filmmakers). The above analysis is nothing but a textual examination from a third party. It should be interesting to hear from these two groups of filmmaking professionals in their own words.

## Chapter 2

“Money talks”—This phrase may be apprehended or appreciated differently in different contexts. In the media industry, it may mean one’s necessity to endear himself or herself to people who he or she may not be in a friendly term with yet who unfortunately have the financial power to sabotage the project in production if they choose to do so. As early as the 1960s, in a comedic way, the classic TV sit-com *The Dick van Dyke Show* (1961), in the episode originally aired on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1961., illustrated the protagonist (Rob Petrie starred by Dick van Dyke), a TV show chief writer, having to attend several dinner parties which he actually either had no interest in but that he eventually attended because he considered it his “job” to “entertain the show’s sponsors.” Contrary to *The Dick van Dyke Show*, the film *The Insider* (1999) managed to elevate the writer-sponsor dynamic to a macrocosmic level—the tug of war between a tobacco company and CBS with the former trying every effort to influence the latter’s presentation of tobacco’s hazardous impact on human beings’ health in its hit show *60 Minutes*. The tobacco company wanted to make sure that its dirty secret—that the company had already concluded from its research that its tobaccos could cause cancer but that the company was not willing to disclose this finding—would not be known to the general public. *The Dick van Dyke Show*’s and *The Insider*’s dramatizations of what happens behind the scene, albeit focusing on the media industry on different levels, share one implication—those who hold the money hold the power. “Money talks” in this context may mean that those with money could determine who does the talking (if they do not do the talking themselves), what should be talked about and how one should talk about it (the format and position to take).

Thomas Elsaesser (1989), in his book *New German Cinema: a History*, refers to the concept of text producers (in this context the film directors) as “autors / authors.” (This is called

“auteur theory,” which will be elaborated later in this chapter.) These authors have films as a medium through which they express themselves. This concept has been so vastly accepted and so deeply rooted in people’s mind that it is almost an axiom that a text, be it verbal or visual, should be treated as a direct reflection of the author (i.e. the author’s personality, his or her particular views on a given subject matter). But as Elsaesser’s numerous case studies have unfolded later, an author almost cannot escape a third party’s effort to harass his or her “baby”—those who finance the production manage to intervene from start to finish. With Elsaesser’s insight as a starting point, this chapter is meant to explore how a third party might have an impact on the author-text dyad in a broader socio-historical and socio-political context. More specifically, the chapter is to explore how two films about Hitler were financed and in turn, how the financing of the two films (*Hitler: the Rise of Evil*, made by the Canadian film company Alliance-Atlantis, who maintains an office in the States and often produces programs for CBS, and *Der Untergang*, made by Constantin Film AG, a German film company) affected the authors’ approaches to the subject matter.

Alliance-Atlantis emerged in 1998 and has been recognized as the 6<sup>th</sup> largest media production firm in the world in revenues and employee body as a result of the merger of two Canadian production companies—Atlantis (established by Michael McMillian in 1978) and Alliance (established by Robert Lantos and Victor Loewy in 1985). This media powerhouse currently maintains offices in London, Sydney, Los Angeles, among many other cities around the world to handle projects Alliance-Atlantis picks up locally. (The production of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* thus was mainly handled by the company’s LA office.)

With an office in Los Angeles, Alliance-Atlantis, although Canadian-based, as an international media production company, now indeed sets the US viewers as one of its target

audiences. This the-US-as-the-major-market orientation does not come accidentally. Before the two particles joined forces to form Canada's largest production company, Alliance and Atlantis had already been seeing the American market as their main target. As early as Atlantis' initiation days, Atlantis' film *Boys and Girls* (1983) won an Academy Award in the short-film category. (To be eligible to be nominated for an Oscar, a film needs to have been screened in theatres in the US as opposed to going directly to DVD.(Lovell & Sergi, 2005)). As for Alliance, its television division received a Golden Globe award in 1997.

After the merger, Alliance-Atlantis continues doing its utmost to win the hearts and minds of the American people and American film and TV critics. Alliance-Atlantis' early big hits include the *Austin Powers* film series, *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *CSI* TV series. The *CSI* series collected at least 4 Emmy's Awards together with many other awards and nominations. This award-winning series was produced for CBS and opened up a long collaboration between the two corporations. CBS purchases TV programs that Alliance-Atlantis produces and broadcast them on its numerous channels. Indeed, Alliance-Atlantis has established working relationships with other networks as well. *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* was originally meant to be sold to ABC before the network turned it down and CBS picked it up (Davis, 2002).

Constantin Film AG, the German film company that produced *Der Untergang*, was formed by Waldfried Barthel and Presven Philipsen on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1950 in Frankfurt, Germany. The current official name was not registered until December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1964. At the moment, the company headquarter is located in Munich, Germany, and the company maintains a branch on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles.

Constantin Film AG has identified itself as a somewhat "international" media service provider; that is, similar to Alliance-Atlantis, Constantin Film AG has been eyeing markets

outside Germany, the US market in particular, up from the start, though indeed, it has been producing films for the domestic market as well. As early as the 1960s, Constantin had been teaming up with American film companies to entertain the English-speaking audiences (mainly the American audience). Its credits include the Harry Alan Towers' *Fu Manchu* series and three of Clint Eastwood's spaghetti westerns. Constantin's affiliation with the US continues into the 1980s and even into the millennium. *The Name of the Rose* (1986) and *Fantastic Four* (2005) are just a few proofs of Constantin's aim at the US market and its ability to win the hearts and minds of the American audience (Bloomberg Business Week Archive, 2010).

The current structure of Constantin Film AG with the company being chaired by Bernd Eichinger (the producer of *Der Untergang*) as the general manager came to shape in 1978.

As the opening paragraph of this chapter and those vignettes remind us, we may find it helpful to get a glimpse at how these two film companies finance their projects. Alliance-Atlantis, a stand-alone private firm and with ready money at its disposal, unlike an independent film company, does not live on loans or backers' investments. A client such as CBS does not contribute to Alliance-Atlantis' budget for a film project; it just purchases the completed product and that is the only time when money changes hands. Alliance-Atlantis gets a project going at its own expenses as soon as a proposal interests a potential buyer with an almost definite buy (Bloomberg Business Week Archive, 2010).

Alliance-Atlantis' insistence on living on its ready resources (usually revenues earned from the previous film) can be traced back to the antediluvian era when Alliance and Atlantis separately struggled to carve spaces for themselves in the industry. Atlantis began with McMillian and his friends' personal investments coming out of their own pockets, a combined cash of 300 dollars. It survived by gaining profits from making short films gearing towards the

general public—it sold one piece to a client and the revenue fed into or became the base for its next project. As soon as it was in a substantial shape, Atlantis invited some outside investors by selling minority of the shares (stocks) to EC Television, an American-based media company (Encyclopedia of Small Business Archive, 2010).

Alliance started off as a distribution company. Its early-day profits almost all came from acquiring distribution rights of soft-core porns such as *Pink Flamingo* (1972). When it finally had enough money under its belt to make a feature, Alliance opened an art-house theatre called “Rambrandt,” where this film as well as the company’s future features would be screened. This model of a film company owning a theatre to ensure an arena for its own films was later incorporated into how Alliance-Atlantis functions. After the merger, Alliance-Atlantis purchased Festival Cinemas, a film theatre chain (Encyclopedia of Small Business archive, 2010).

A strong contrast to Alliance-Atlantis, Constantin Film AG, though in existence for over 60 years, has little money attached to a project at the initiation phase. The company functions very much the same way as an independent film company in the US does, living heavily on loans, fundraisings, and sponsors regardless of its long affiliation with the US film industry, especially when it produces German films. Typically and as is the case of *Der Untergang*, Constantin turns to two governmental fund granting institutions—Film FernsehFonds Bayern and Filmforderungsantalt (German Federal Film Board). The board of Film FernsehFonds Bayern offers an applicant for its funds “comprehensive advice and mentoring” ranging from screenplay to sale and distribution, and offers the applicant financial support under the condition that the applicant and his or her production team agree to spend “1.5 times the loan amount in Bavaria” (FFF-Bayern, 2003). (Called “the Bavaria Effect,” this policy is meant to boost up the economy of the region and promote its local cultural activities.) The maximum fund that the board grants

for a feature film project is Euro \$ 1,000,000.

By the same token, the German Federal Film Board is set to “promote German cinema and to improve the structure of German film industry, to support the national economic and cultural distribution abroad as well as to work towards an alignment and coordination of the film support measures by the Federal Government and regional states” (FFA, 2004). Rather meritocratic in its fund granting policy, the German Federal Film Board decides whether an applicant can win its support based on “reference points.” Reference points are calculated from both “the commercial successes as well as the successes at internationally significant festivals and awards”(FFA, 2004). 150,000 reference points are required from last film within a year from its first release for an applicant to be eligible for the grant. The maximum grant for a feature film project, too, is Euro \$ 1,000,000.

The opening paragraph touched on Elsaesser’s constant reference to the concept of text producers as “authors.” This “author theory,” initiated and promoted by Andre Bazin, Francois Trauffault as well as many others, as a reactionary antagonism against John Grierson’s notion that drama is “on your doorstep” and that a filmmaker’s role is to simply record (or report) the occurrence with the proper gadget, rooted in the spiritual belief known as “personalism,” proposes the idea that a film should represent a filmmaker’s “personal vision” (Bazin, 1951; Trauffault, 1959). Alexandre Astruc (1964) coins the term “cinema pen,” which refers to a filmmaker’s relationship with his or her camera; the concept of a filmmaker as an author, thus, has been well established.

After sketches of exterior factors on how the two films to be examined here got made, we should turn our attention to the interior factors—the key persons who pulled the strings and kept the production teams in operation. But considering the author theory just mentioned, who would

be counted as “authors” of the two film texts discussed here? Before we peek into those key persons’ backgrounds, it should be noted that performing arts industries in the US and Europe function quite differently. According to Kadi Tudre, an European director having spent 3 years in the US, the US performing arts industry is executive-producer or producer-centered while the European one is director-centered (Tudre, 2008). More specifically put, in the US, an executive producer (or a producer in some cases), as the person who is in charge of the finances, decides the direction of the whole project, the director no more than a laborer hired to execute the executive producer’s or producer’s will; compared to his or her American counterpart, an European director has relatively more freedom or liberty to follow his or her own heart, thus allowing his or her own view on a given subject matter better reflected, or is in a collaborative relationship with the producer as opposed to being a puppet. (As expected, in the case of *Der Untergang*, the two fund-granting boards could have their say on the direction *Der Untergang* would be heading from script to production stages. This issue will be touched on in the later part of this chapter.) For the structural differences between the two film industries, key persons to be discussed on the American camp will be the mini-series’ executive producers and key persons on the German camp will be the producer and the director.

The executive producer chair was shared by two dignitaries in Alliance-Atlantis: Peter Sussman and Ed Gernon. Sussman, born and raised in Toronto, was the CEO of the company’s Entertainment Group during the time when *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* was produced. Prior to serving as the executive producer of the mini-series, he had been in the same position on the board for two other productions—*Nuremberg* (2000), a dramatized account of the Nuremberg trial starred by Alec Baldwin as Justice Robert H. Jackson made for Turner Network Television (TNT), and the feature film *The Quarrel* (1991), based on a Yiddish short story by Chaim Grade

titled “My Quarrel Hersh Rasseyer.” Gernon was in his eleventh year with Alliance-Atlantis the time the company made *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* and was the head of the firm’s long-term programming division. Before collaborating with Sussman in this executive position, he had held the same position in *Joan of Arc* (1996), in which Sussman took part too.

Constantin Film AG’s general manager, Bernd Eichinger, got involved in *Der Untergang* as the producer. Prior to his tenure at Constantin Film, Eichinger had studied Direction and Production Management at Munich Academy for Television and Film. Once working as a distributor, he was responsible for the release of *Das Boot* (1981), *Der Name der Rose* (1986), among many others. His production arm mastered a two-track strategy with the hope that both international and domestic markets would receive even amount of attention.

Olivier Hirschbiegel accepted Constantin Film’s invitation to assume the role of director. He began his career in the mid-1980s as a TV talent, taking up directing, acting and writing responsibilities. He stepped into the big screen and won accolades of both domestic and foreign audiences and critics in 2001. His feature *Der Experiment* (2001), inspired by Dr. Philip Zimbardo’s notorious Prison Study, was the winner of Bavaria Film Award, Audience Award at German Film Award, Best Director at Montreal Film Festival and People’s Choice at Istanbul Film Festival.

Wim Wenders, the German director renowned for his critically acclaimed works such as *Paris, Texas* (1984) and *Wings of Desire* (1987), was asked to comment on films dealing with Hitler and Nazism in general when *Der Untergang* was released. Wenders contended that a film handling Hitler and Nazism was supposed to “say something” and “make a point” (Hasse, 2006). More easily put, an author (the producer of a visual text) needed to maintain a clear argument, which would determine or reflect the direction of the film. In this particular case, the authors,

through the composition of the visual text, had to answer this question: “What do I think of Hitler and Nazism?” With Wenders’ reminder in mind, in the following paragraphs, we will be digging into what these executive producers and producers’ views on Hitler (at least publically claimed ones) are, whether there is a discrepancy between what they once vowed to do and what they ended up doing.

CBS basically advertised *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* as a “historical” piece tinged with some microcosmic psycho-historical flavor. Leslie Moonves, the president of CBS, stated during the incubation phase of the project in an interview that the work in progress, then tentatively titled *Hitler: the Early Years*, was meant to “psychologize” Hitler. Obviously influenced by classical Freudian conceptualization of a man’s development, the film was not intended to illustrate “Hitler the goose-stepping, ranting Fuhrer” but “Hitler the misunderstood son, the young soldier, the painter manqué” (Davis, 2002).

CBS, after the mini-series went on air, took one step further packaging this “historical” piece, a dramatization of history, as a reconstruction of actual historical occurrences. Though the mini-series could fall into the category of “fictionalization of historical events” (Rosenstone, 2006), owing to the authors’ taking the “dramatic license” to “compress” or “condense” numerous incidents, CBS nonetheless presented the mini-series as a carefully composed reconstruction of Hitler’s time and even devoted a website to the mini-series with a Teachers’ Study Guide section. To some extent, CBS believed that the mini-series gave a depiction of the period and events valid enough to serve as an extension of what a history textbook may tell students.

Indeed, Alliance-Atlantis did its utmost to make the story told through the mini-series as historically accurate as possible or so it seemed. On the mini-series’ website, Prof Charles Maier

of Harvard University and Prof Cornelius Schnauber of University of Southern California, both specializing in German history and literature, were listed as “historical consultants.” During the production stage, Dr. Ian Kernshaw, the world renowned scholar on Hitler and Nazism, was on the advisory board as well.

Sussman, in an interview during the production stage of the project, stated that, though well aware of conventional and general public’s view on Hitler, he wanted to do exactly what would be deemed politically incorrect, unfavorable, or as he called it, “too progressive” (Aish, 2002) As early as the preparatory phase, Sussman had received quite a few criticisms: “Do you run the risk of making Hitler human?” Sussman responded, “I hope so.” He then elaborated, “We’d be doing ourselves a disservice if we didn’t show that Hitler was human... he didn’t have claws and fanged teeth and breathe fire. He lived and walked among us.” Sussman wrapped up the discussion by stating that he wanted the piece’s illustration of Hitler to be “truthful.”

Interestingly, Alliance-Atlantis’ and CBS’s conception of “historicalness,” in addition to commonly construed and expected “objectiveness” and “accuracy,” seemed to also include staying “apolitical.” To be more exact, Alliance-Atlantis and CBS, mindful of how sensitive the subject matter the mini-series was dealing with was, restrained themselves from meddling with political matters. Indeed reflecting their views on Hitler and Nazism, or rather reflecting the network’s standard perception of Hitler and Nazism, Sussman and other authors’ interviews with the press always eventually returned to discussions on the mini-series itself. This apolitical stance to some extent could safeguard the “historicalness” that the network had vowed to align itself with. So when Gernon took the liberty to make a comparison and contrast between German people’s support for Hitler during WWII and American people’s aye to George W. Bush when Bush decided to send American troops to Iraq, he had to pay a dear price for this wit and wisdom.

Gernon gave an interview to TV Guide just shortly before the mini-series went on air. In the interview, he stated that “fear was behind the German public’s acceptance of Hitler’s policies” (AP, 2003). He then suggested that American people were supporting George W. Bush’s Iraq policy “because of the fear of what will happen if they don’t” (AP, 2003). Though he was never quoted directly linking Bush to Hitler, this unfavorable parallel between Hitler and Bush cost him his livelihood. According to the network’s public statement, Gernon got fired on April 6<sup>th</sup> from Alliance-Atlantis because his comments to TV Guide were “insensitive and outright wrong” and because “his personal opinions are not shared by CBS and misrepresent the network’s motivation for broadcasting this film” (AP, 2003). CBS “has tried very hard to frame [the mini-series] as a historical piece that in no way sensationalizes or offers excuses for Hitler’s actions.” No matter Gernon’s comments sounded favorable or not, he should not have made the comments the first place as the comments blemished the apolitical image that the network wanted to present.

Psychologizing Hitler, being “truthful” and making the mini-series a “historical” piece might be nothing but part of the network’s campaign and advertising strategy. While Sussman stated in one of the interviews that the mini-series was based on “extensive reading and research,” and Gernon echoed, these authors did not really set historical accuracies to be their priority. Confronted by David Cherniack (a documentary filmmaker) about the mini-series’ faithfulness to actual historical events, Gernon said a historical drama or a dramatization of history needed to be faithful to only “the spirits of the events” (Cherniack, 2003). Sussman called this bend of history an author’s “dramatic license” and with that, he contended that the mini-series ought to be appreciated because its representation of Hitler and Nazism was not “factually incorrect”—at least to *his* knowledge and perception of that part of history.

Some parts of the mini-series suffered severe criticisms from at least one Hitler and Nazism scholar (who will be discussed and cited later). The most noticeable part was the Hitler-beating-the dog scene. Young Hitler, then a soldier during WWI spending most of his time in the trenches, was illustrated being sent to deliver a message. On his way back, he found a dog curling against a dead soldier; he adopted the dog as his pet and named him Foxl. In one scene, young Hitler wanted to train Foxl to sit as commanded. Foxl paid no attention to his master's order. Infuriated, Hitler picked up a stick and severely beat Foxl. In old document photos, Hitler's only known pet was the German shepherd Blondi. Hitler's relationship with Foxl was completely speculated.

Gernon provided an explanation for the Foxl setup: "I've seen footage, this dog, this German shepherd, that [Hitler] wants so badly to connect to, and the dog winces when he comes near. Now, I am a dog owner. [Dogs] do not wince unless they have been beaten. They just don't. And it is pretty clear to me and to a few other people who train dogs. The only explanation is that [Hitler]'s abusive and that makes sense, when you look at his personal relationship" (Cherniack, 2003). This human-dog relationship was never documented, completely fictional and was speculated based on nothing beyond Gernon's anecdotal evidence and *his* personal view on Hitler's personality traits. The mini-series is far from being a "historical" piece.

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, a historian specializing in Hitler and Nazism, in an interview, was asked to comment on the Hitler-beating-Foxl scene. "I am not very comfortable with that," remarked Goodrick-Clarke (Goodrick-Clarke, 2003). Goodrick-Clarke in fact was not the only person who had expressed his concern. As soon as he noticed the executive producer's and producer's preference for dramatics to detail, Ian Kernshaw withdrew from the advisory board.

An extensive interview, in contrast to a brief, structured press conference, often confronts

an interviewee with a topic he or she tries every effort to avoid but eventually cannot run away from. In the end, the authors of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* admitted that they did “bend history” a bit. But this time, they had the audience as their protective shield. Henk von Eeghen, the editor of the mini-series, made a confession—“I think right now for the majority Hitler is the symbol of evil....You are going to bend history to some extent... because [you’re] making something for a large audience” (Cherniack, 2003). Cherniack actually interviewed von Eeghen in von Eeghen’s editing room, clips from the film in progress visible in the background on von Eeghen’s computer. In response to Cherniack’s follow-up questions, von Eeghen later did admit that he was making Hitler “evil” but he insisted that he did this because that was what the audience had been “accustomed to.” “[As a filmmaker targeting at the mainstream audience], you just have to follow the flow,” said von Eeghen.

Henk von Eeghen’s confession might protect Henk von Eeghen against one’s further questioning on the mini-series’ historical accuracies. Sussman’s defensive tone, on the other hand, could make one just more curious about how “truthful” Sussman and his team made the mini-series to be. While von Eeghen admitted that the mini-series was going with the public’s “flow” to make Hitler an evil individual, Sussman denied the “accusation” altogether: “You think there are moments that suggest that Hitler is a darker character than he [actually was]? Well, I don’t think in fact we are doing that.” He, too, then dragged the audience into the tug-of-war: “It’s hard to imagine that the audience is believing that [we] are making Hitler too dark.”

There was a moment of tense silence between Cherniack and Sussman. Sussman then continued: “[I don’t believe] that the audience [will] believe that [we] are going to make Hitler our best pal, you know, which is, of course, nonsense.” Indeed, a biographer should never make his subject his “best pal” if he really wants to make a “historically correct” film. But being

objective is not equivalent to demonization; when one is not considered the best pal, he is not necessarily falling on the other side of the spectrum becoming a devil. Sussman's ending remark in that part of the interview, apparently falling victim to binary opposition, was to take advantage of the last possible straw, no matter how irrational it might seem, to safeguard the "historicalness," which so sacredly elevated the mini-series from base and elementary sentimental entertainment.

Gerlich, the German muckraker journalist in the mini-series who tried every effort to uncover Hitler's dark secrets but unfortunately became a martyr, called Hitler "a psychotic... not human... a monster that we should be running from." Gerlich's remark, in fact, was Gernon playing a ventriloquist. While Sussman, committing to making a "historical" piece," had vowed to make Hitler "human" despite how unpopular this position might be, and Gernon had supported Sussman's point of view, Gernon, in the interview, which then was turned into a 45-minute documentary, eventually inadvertently revealed how he really thought of Hitler: "I believe he is a socio-path. It seems to us that he was a creature who looks human, sounds human but in fact is profoundly flawed... not human" (Cherniack, 2003).

The above quote from Gernon maybe should be treated as Gernon's personal view—after all, Gernon indeed later made the Hitler-Bush comparison, which upset the network, and Alliance-Atlantis had to ask him to leave. But the opening of this sentence "It seems to us" may mean that the above view was shared by other authors of this film text. The interview in which Gernon made this remark was conducted during the production phase of the project; Gernon was not fired until the mini-series was about to go on air. Gernon's notion that Hitler was not human was endorsed by those who financed the TV mini-series.

By now, we may say what Gernon, Sussman and von Eeghen divulged in their extensive

interview with Cherniack has shattered the network's claim that *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* was a historical piece; what the mini-series really was is nothing but another common representation of Hitler which catered to the whim of the general public. What Gernon and Sussman really thought of Hitler determined who would be the best choice for this controversial role. *The Jewish Journal*, a community non-profit weekly serving the Jewish community of Greater Los Angeles, took very strong interest in the mini-series as early as the project was announced. In July 2002, it sent one of its staff journalists to interview numerous people involved in the project, including Sussman. During that phase, the Scottish actor Ewan McGregor was the star name being bruited abroad for the lead. But since "actors can't play pure evil" and "have to find the humanity in the character to make it work" (Davis, 2002), and on account of McGregor's already established stardom, the network was afraid that Hitler would get humanized and to some extent even be surrounded by some unnecessary auras. For the fear that Hitler might get apotheosized, McGregor was eventually never chosen and, two weeks before the actual shoot, the role went to another Scottish actor, Robert Carlyle, who played opposite to McGregor in *Trainspotting* (1996) and has been recognized for his success in playing shady characters.

In addition to its wish to go with the public's flow, the network, well aware of its major audience falling between 18 and 34 of age (coinciding the age of Hitler in the mini-series), really would not like to see the audience identifying with or sympathizing with Hitler, or responding to the mini-series the way Dean Marvin Hier of Simon Wiesenthal Centre and Museum of Tolerance foresaw: "He's a teenager like me. He had a bad family life. It's not his fault. If they would have taken him into art school, he wouldn't have been such a bad guy. He just got some bad breaks." McGregor's established aura might churn up the identification and sympathy; Sussman and Gernon consequently were in favor of who had been remembered for portraying

a bum, rascal or scoundrel so that some negative connotation could be erected right at the start.

Ian Kernshaw withdrew from the advisory board at the early stage of the production. Here is Gernon's rationale behind letting Kernshaw walk in Gernon's own words: "He is a historian. His entire name is synonymous with details, meticulous research, painstaking, you know, details... now we have a greater freedom" (Cherniack, 2003). But Gernon and his author cohorts nonetheless still needed some academics' endorsement to strengthen the historical-piece image that they attempted to sell. Therefore, they brought in scholars who might not be as critical when it came to historical accuracies to be on the consultation board.

The aforementioned Dean Marvin Hier was one of the advisors. For his concern for the fear that the major audience would identify and sympathize with Hitler, in spite of the fact that the mini-series covered Hitler's life from young adulthood to his early rise to power as the leader of the Partei and thus the Holocaust never would have been part of the plot, Hier insisted that Holocaust be incorporated into the mini-series in one way or another. The mini-series ended with title cards enumerating the dead tolls under the Nazi regime with horrendous photographs of the concentration camps in the background. This abrupt cut from the ending scene where Hitler vowed to build a greater Germany in front of thousands of SS men to the depressing title cards was meant to make sure that, in case anyone ever identified or sympathized with Hitler, he or she then ought to be reminded of all of the atrocities with the jaw-dropping statistics and graphic pictures of concentration camp victims.

In *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*, the aforementioned muckraker journalist Gerlich was the good guy. He tried everything he could to unveil Hitler's dark secret to wake the masses up from the collective mania and mesmerism. He came across quite a few obstacles—he lost his job for insisting on keeping track of what was happening behind the curtain, was threatened, eventually

arrested and was sent to a concentration camp.

Sussman discovered Gerlich through German books that he and his colleagues had translated. “When we discovered him, I loved that he wasn’t Jewish. I felt that his cause would resonate better with a broader audience by him not being Jewish,” stated Sussman, “Otherwise, you risk of people saying, ‘Yes, of course the Jews are going to speak out’” (Aish, 2003). Gerlich’s non-Jewish heritage, as Sussman said, probably indeed could allow the audience to more easily identify with Gerlich and in turn to agree on Gerlich’s action and position, which was in line with the network’s or was a reflection of the network’s.

But it might be interesting to also examine those key authors’ background. Sussman was in fact born and raised in a “conservative Jewish congregation in Toronto” (Davis,2002); Leslie Moonves, the CBS president who said that the mini-series was meant to psychologize Hitler as opposed to demonizing him was Jewish (Davis,2002). Dean Mervin Hier was a Jewish rabbi, together with Joseph Telushkin, another person on the advisory board. Before the completed film went on air, Sussman sent it to Telushkin and Telushkin’s colleagues. The film won 15 nods from the rabbi jury—literally everyone on the review board: “Staggering. Peter, you have nothing to worry about” (Aish, 2003).

Goodrick-Clarke, in the 2003 interview he gave to Cherniack, shared with us his insight on how the conventional Hitler-as-devil view came about and got developed—“Hitler somehow becomes inflated in the post-war era, particularly since the 1960s, to an archetype figure of evil. It was almost a kind of titillation for the media to indulge the image of Hitler as frightening, obscene and extraordinary, some overwhelming, demonic presence that will turn the whole world up-side-down and threaten to engulf us. It is a quick way of re-drawing the boundary to black-and-white restoring some kind of cognitive order to a world that may in fact involve several

shades of gray where discrimination and judgment may be necessary” (Goodrick-Clarke, 2003).

In no way was Goodrick-Clarke proposing a chicken-or-the-egg argument. Rather, he believed that the post-WWII political climate, in particular the one since the 1960s, has been serving as the incubator for the Hitler-as-devil sentiment. Such a sentiment has always been there, be it dormant or not, and the media take the pleasure nourishing that sentiment. Then there comes the never-ending cycle in which the media keep feeding the general public that sentiment and the general public, if not dazed, addicted or craving for more, internalizes the badly demonized image of Hitler as the only truth, acquiring to appreciate nothing else.

*Hitler: the Rise of Evil* stepped in long after “the flame” of the Hitler-as-devil sentiment has been burning; it is never “the spark” but the “oxygen” to keep the flame going at most, as Klein and House would say in their politics-as-camp-fire metaphor (Klein & House, 1989). In addition to purposefully or subconsciously feeding oxygen into “the flame,” Alliance-Atlantis, or the authors of the text, probably could not help throwing themselves into and becoming a particle of that everlasting cycle to keep the wheel turning as audience-minded, profit-oriented text manufacturers.

Von Eeghen’s confession, together with Sussman’s defensive tone and Gernon’s notion of Hitler being a sociopath, seems to make perfect sense now placed in the post-1960s political climate that Goodrick-Clarke just mentioned. According to the article published in *The Jewish Journal*, the group of authors at Alliance-Atlantis initially sent its Hitler proposal to ABC Entertainment. ABC turned down the proposal. The proposal then went through some modification and CBS picked it up. Susan Lynn, President of ABC Entertainment, explained the rationale behind the rejection—“To do a responsible mini-series about Hitler may be in conflict with doing a show that will attract a big audience” (Davis, 2002).

Even though CBS was well aware of the direction that the Hitler project had to take eventually and regardless of the fact that the very direction was meant to make the Hitler project “a show that will attract a big audience,” why did the network still manage to package the mini-series as a historical piece?

Alliance-Atlantis sold *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* to CBS to entertain, if not to educate, the American public. However, already identifying itself as an international production company as it extended its arm across the US-Canadian border, Alliance-Atlantis, not beyond one’s expectation, had audiences outside Canada and the US in mind when producing the mini-series. The mini-series was premiered in the US and Canada on May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2003. It then moved westward to be shown on an Australian TV station about two months later and continued to entertain or educate audiences in the greater Pacific by being screened in Japan.

But the mini-series’ primary foreign audiences were in Europe—Belgium, Switzerland, The Netherlands, France, Slovenia, Hungary, Spain, Greece, Italy and the most important of all, Austria and Germany. Titled *Hitler - Aufstieg des Bösen* and dubbed with German, the mini-series was premiered in Austria and Germany in September 2004. Aware of the fact that Nazism could still be a touchy issue in Germany, CBS chose to be cautious when it packaged and marketed the mini-series in these German-speaking countries. The historical-piece, truthfulness declaration was the firewall which could be most easily erected. Should any audience in Germany (or Austria) felt offended or hurt having his or her crimson nostalgic bubble shattered, Alliance-Atlantis could step back and said that no matter this individual liked it or not, the mini-series was a historical piece based on “extensive research.” Those small groups of audiences aside, Alliance-Atlantis took the historicalness stance to make sure that German audiences would be ready to buy what was presented to them.

Prior to *Der Untergang*, which came out in 2004, German audiences had never seen any visual dramatization of Hitler like *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*—at least, that was what Alliance-Atlantis wanted the German audiences to think. *Der Untergang* was the German people's very first confrontation with Hitler through visual media narrative (Hasse, 2006). Before that, German people had been exposed to only common American representations of Hitler, which were products made under the post-1960s Hitler-as-devil influence. At hearing that *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* was going to be a historical piece and a psychologization of Hitler in lieu of the common demonization of Hitler, German audiences would be looking forward to this fresh illustration of their former Fuehrer and were willing to tune in. In short, packaging the mini-series as a historical piece regardless of the fact that it was in actuality just the opposite was an international marketing strategy.

Alliance-Atlantis took a rather smart strategy to market *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* and the strategy seemed to work. While the TV movie was aired on CBS drama channel, the German version was shown on a history channel whose programs are almost always documentaries, not dramatic features (Stasny, 2010). This shrewd move allowed the "Hitler product" to strike the audience (at least a German audience) as a truly "historical" piece due to the nature of the channel the film was shown on, as opposed to another dramatized illustration of Germany's former Fuehrer, whose position the German audience could have guessed and which the German audience might have been fed up with.

In 1993, The Polone Company, The Kushner-Locke Company and The Hearst Entertainment co-produced a docu-drama called *JFK: Reckless Youth* (1993), a dramatization of JFK's early days as a student. Regardless of the piece's dramatization nature, the production company, when marketing this piece, managed to package this 3-hour TV drama as a fact-based

documentary, in particular when the drama was released on DVD. While normally major cast's names are printed on the front cover of a DVD, one would not find any actor's or actresses' names on the front cover of the JFK TV drama DVD. The only production information available was on the back cover but the credit section included only the composer for the soundtrack, editor, producer and executive producer, a sharp contrast to a common dramatic feature, whose marketability might rely on stardom.

Alliance-Atlantis took a marketing strategy similar to The Polone Company. Not only choosing a history channel as the channel to have the mini-series shown in Germany as a way to position the TV movie as a historical piece, Alliance-Atlantis modified its original trailer before it was dubbed in German for its German audience—it took out the part which featured the main cast (e.g. clips from the movie that said who played Hitler as well as other roles). By cutting out the cast section of the trailer and not naming the all-star cast, Alliance-Atlantis wanted to promote the dramatization of Hitler's early life as a documentary or a docu-drama, which, unlike a dramatic feature, probably relied heavily on its realistic (re) presentation of a historical event as opposed to stardom (i.e. audience's pre-established identification with actors who played the roles.)

Alliance-Atlantis' choice of selling the mini-series to a history channel in Germany instead of a drama channel and its tactic of editing out the all-star cast section of the trailer before showing it to the German audience to give the German audience the impression that the TV movie was not another common dramatized depiction of Hitler but a serious documentary or docu-drama made the German audience long for the mini-series with angst but also excitement.

On Internet Movie Database Message Board (professional version), some Germans had started talking about the mini-series before the TV movie was premiered in Germany. One

German user of Internet Movie Database, on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2004, stated that, as a German national, he believed that he was very familiar with German history, Hitler's rise and fall included. But he had to admit that "Hitler's life from his childhood until his being elected Reich Chancellor" was "the period that my mind has never been seriously tackled before." For this Internet Movie Database user from Germany, especially considering the mini-series' vowed "historicalness," the TV movie came in to help him put in the missing piece of the puzzle. He was very much looking forward to seeing, as he put it, a "fresh look" at his country's former leader. Another Internet Movie Database user from Germany missed the premiere and, not seeing the German history channel planning on having a re-run in the near future for the mini-series, said he "could not wait for the DVD to come out" because "I am into history and the film is said to be a historical film." Alliance-Atlantis' marketing strategy, with German people's common attitude towards their Nazi past in mind, seemed to work—German audience was looking forward to the TV movie, a "fresh" and "historical" piece.

While Alliance-Atlantis marketed *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* as a historical piece despite all of the evidence which has suggested otherwise, how did the production team of *Der Untergang* package their representation of their former Fuehrer?

The authors at Constantin Films, too, wanted to give the audience the impression that they were making a responsible illustration of the Fuehrer and people around him, even a reconstruction of what had happened in the Hitler bunker the last few days of the collapsing Third Reich. Hirschbiegel stated, "The film is meant to be a theatrical film and also a documentation of history." He further elaborated a bit on what he meant by "documentation of history": "We don't make anything up. Everything Hitler does in the film has been historically proven" (Koch,2004). This means that the German authors, unlike its American/Canadian

counterparts, tried to avoid taking the “dramatic license.”

The German authors’ meticulous attention to historical details was not limited to plot, tone or texture but also included the technical aspects of the whole production. The props department, under the direction of Hirschbiegel and Eichinger, reconstructed the bunker set based on the original floor plans available in historical archives. On the set, other than the camera, only documented hardware could be seen, including light. The set designer said, “The most important thing is for us to make it real... We want to show accurate pictures and absolute truth... No extra light”(Koch, 2004).

Since the bunker set was dressed exactly as what the bunker looked like in surviving archives, including the acreage, it did not allow the camera attached to a crane. Hirshbiegel said, “We shot the scenes in the bunker with a handheld camera” (Koch, 2004). This technical decision added more realism to the film—the film might not as much strike the audience as a carefully staged performance and was closer to the “documentation” ideal.

Concerning how exactly the authors of *Der Untergang* illustrated Hitler on screen, Hirschbiegel used this word to summarize his colleagues’ general approach—“three-dimensional.” He argued that demonstrating Hitler as nothing but a demon appeared to be a reductionistic answer to the question why Hitler and his acolytes could grasp the hearts and minds of the German people.

Bruno Ganz, a Swiss actor who played a minor role in the film *The Boys from Brazil* (1978) (a fictional account of Dr. Mengele successfully cloning Hitler and sending these little Hitlers all over the world with the hope to rejuvenate the fallen Reich) and who once was shocked to realize the facial resemblance between himself and Hitler, was the first choice for the role Hitler in *Der Untergang* and he indeed took the task. Ganz suggested that people should

have advanced from ridiculing Hitler (referring to Chaplain parodying Hitler in *The Great Dictator* (1941)) and pathologizing Hitler (referring to Anthony Hopkins' and Alec Guinness's assumptions of the role Hitler in *The Bunker* (1981) and *Hitler: the Last Ten Days* (1973) respectively) to something else. Ganz stated, "Hitler was nice to women; he loved children; he loved his dog...He could be very generous but on the other hand he was brutal" (About Film, 2004). He wanted to show both of these dimensions. He then said Hitler felt "empty" deep inside his heart and he really would like to show that too.

To Ganz, playing Hitler as a monster was not enough—there was other stuff. When asked if he was humanizing Hitler, Ganz said his approach was not to "humanize Hitler" but to (re)present a "better-rounded" Hitler, a contrast to the commonly perceived one-dimensional picture. He further defended his "better-rounded" personification of Hitler: "Usually when you are offered a role like this, you are asked to impersonate him, to play him realistically. Of course, one has to overcome the moral qualms but dwelling on the moral issues isn't what I do" (About Film, 2004).

Hirschbiegel and Eichinger came to Ganz's rescue with the hope that the "better-rounded" and "three-dimensional" argument could appear more convincing. Eichinger said, "The biggest danger is, and it happened to Alec Guinness and Anthony Hopkins, to illustrate Hitler as a psychopath or weirdo" (Koch, 2004). Hirschbiegel chimed in with more detail. To put together a comparatively "truthful" picture of Hitler, the human side of Hitler was always the integral part: "It is the human side of Hitler that lures people into his kingdom... Hitler succeeded in manipulating people only because he was human being" (Koch, 2004). A responsible author of a biographical film would not leave out that crucial component.

David Maraniss, the author of Bill Clinton's biography *First in His Class*, in the opening

chapter of the biography, discussed an interesting psychological process he had been going through throughout the composition of the volume: “I came to like [Clinton] even when I disliked him and dislike him even when I liked him” (Maraniss, 1996). Ganz underwent a similar dilemma throughout the time when he had to check in and had the makeup on as the Fuehrer for 13 to 18 hours per day every day. Ganz admitted that he hated Hitler for those “horrible things” that Hitler had done and said but he had to temporarily suspend that hate or contempt—“...I decided to do the [role] and do it right. I can’t hate Hitler completely or I won’t be able to play him” (Koch, 2004).

Fortunately, when dealing with the inner conflict and dilemma mentioned above, Ganz found his unique heritage came to his rescue. “I was born in Switzerland. My mom is a real Italian, from the north... I have a Swiss passport. My parents and grandparents were not in any of this [Nazi] stuff,” said Ganz (Koch, 2004). He said his non-German background allowed him to step back a bit and be detached when he assumed the role of Hitler.

While Ganz could somewhat emotionally distance himself from the subject matter the film managed to deal with, some others on the production team, on account of their German identity (or rather, nationalities), could not help being at all times emotionally involved or even stuck. The aforementioned choice of making the film “real” was not merely a German’s responsibility to history but his or her self-assigned mission. Hirschbeigel eventually connected this decision of making the film “real” to his national identity: “[Hitler and Nazism] is a historical subject that I had been interested in starting at a very early age. And I thought I had the responsibility to do it because I am German, kind of like a historical task... a task for me as a German and as a director to make it real” (Koch, 2004).

Thomas Kretschman, the actor who portrayed Hermmann Fegelein (Eva Braun’s brother-

in-law) in *Der Untergang*, too, saw his participation in the film as his mission as a German: “To show Germans making a critical movie about a German issue is important” (Koch, 2004). For Kretschman and other German authors of the text, *Der Untergang* was not just another project which they took part in and then got paid for, or another arena on which they showcased their talents. It was a platform where they could finally pluck their hearts to demonstrate Germans’ perspective on the issue, which, before then, got talked about only by their American and British counterparts.

One last thing worth a mention was the German authors’ attitude towards and their way to handle the Holocaust. While *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* deliberately inserted title cards before the ending credits to stress the atrocities under the Nazi regime though the film covered only the early years of the regime and tried every effort to make the title cards as graphic as possible, *Der Untergang* ended with plain title cards just to state when WWII wrapped up. When asked why there was no scene depicting the concentration camps, Hirschebiegel gave a very interesting response: “The camps in 1945 were either not existing anymore because the Russians had freed the few remaining prisoners... [And] it’s an insult to the victims, really, to try to recreate that situation at the camps... it would have [also] taken away from the intensity of the film, which very much relies on the audience being emotionally involved with those [Nazis]...” (About Film, 2004).

*Der Untergang* was well-received in Germany and abroad (at least in the US) and it won the accolades of the critics. Though the film was shown on only one screen on its opening weekend in the US, the box office was able to make roughly US\$ 24,220 in two days (Box Office Mojo, 2010). The film was premiered in Germany on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2004. As of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2004, 4521903 tickets had been reported sold (Box Office Mojo, 2010).

Considering German people's proclivity of watching movies at home on TV as opposed to catching latest films in movie theatres (Kaes, 1992), *Der Untergang* could truly be deemed a great hit.

Moreover, the film earned critical acclaim at domestic and international film festivals, among them Oscar 2005 Best Foreign Film. The audiences' land-slide positive reaction was a bit beyond Bruno Ganz's expectation because he admitted in an interview during production stage that he really had not the slightest inkling of "what will happen" but he said he always kept audiences in mind, especially those abroad: "It is something that will also be shown abroad" (About Film, 2004).

Those German authors of the biographical film of Hitler sublimated the audience-mindedness Ganz mentioned to a mission to not only rekindle discussions on Hitler and Nazism but also to steer discussions on the subject to a new direction. Bernd Eichinger stated, "I hope there will be discussions on a high level because the film has a high level. We took the risk of making a film that might not work. It would be sad if there were only discussions on a low level...I would like the film to be discussed on a high level because we deserve it" (Koch, 2004). Eichinger was referring to common demonization of Hitler and Nazism and his and his author cohorts' effort to drag the audiences away from that "low level" with the hope that people would be directed to view Hitler and Nazism in a new light.

The above analysis on *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* ended with the authors' assertion that the network was making a historical piece being a mere international marketing strategy. The authors of *Der Untergang* vowed to make a historical piece too and to some extent, they did do as they had stated, at least technically (e.g. dressing the set based on surviving floor plan documents, taking no dramatic license). They then related their effort in achieving ultimate

realism and accuracies to their identity as German nationals. Indeed, Echinger's and Hirschbiegel's statements deserve benefit of the doubt. One question now is—was the film project that personal to Echinger and his teammates? More precisely put, was the direction of the film really fully Echinger's and Hirschbiegel's personal decision?

The general direction of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* was heavily determined by the general public's preconceived view on Hitler and the will of Sussman and those on the advisory board. One should be reminded that the big bosses pulling the strings behind *Der Untergang* were the two governmental film boards, who supervised the production team from script to sale and marketing and whose missions had been to promote local cultural activities and national cinemas in domestic and foreign markets. It is reasonable to presume that the film boards, as part of the German government, would very much like to form a new discourse on and a fresh narrative about Hitler and Nazism, and through the alternative discourse and narrative, direct audiences, in particular those outside Germany, to see Hitler and his period in a new light. In a way, the German film boards intended to challenge that dominant discourse and narrative which Goodrick-Clarke mentioned with the hope that Germany and her people could finally peel off that devilish monster masks they had been forced to wear since WWII.

The German film boards' speculated intention might well explain the German authors' approaches to the subject matter the film tried to deal with. It is quite impossible for German nationals to sever themselves from Hitler overnight. In the eye of foreign audiences (non-German audiences), Germany and Germans have always been connected with Hitler. One way to handle the historical stain would be to "tune down" Hitler's diabolical image a bit. By presenting a "better-rounded" Hitler (in actuality more or less humanizing Hitler), the German film boards hoped foreign audiences could get the message that the German people were not led by a devil

during WWII but at most a bad leader who had issues to deal with himself. With Hitler, what Germany and her people had long been associated with, morphing from the devil to an individual of flesh and blood, the long-lasting stain on Germany and German people consequently might then fade away.

As Stuart Hall (1992) has pointed out, not all audiences are passive receivers or readers of texts. Some might have the cognitive capacity to challenge and criticize the position of a text presented to them. The German film boards could foresee criticisms from some audiences on the “three-dimensional” illustration of Hitler. The “absolute truth” assertion could serve as a firewall. Similar to the way Alliance-Atlantis defended its demonization of Hitler, the German film boards, through Eichinger’s and Hirschbiegel’s interviews with the outside world, could defend its humanization of Hitler—everything presented on screen was based on documented materials, had been “historically proven” and nothing was speculated. More simply put, when questioned about their legitimacy of criticizing Anthony Hopkins’ and Alec Guinness’ portrayals of Hitler and their argument for Bruno Ganz’s personification, the German film boards could say that, no matter one liked it or not, the film was presenting “what it is.”

The “historical-fact-as-a-firewall” mechanism could help us comprehend Hirschbiegel’s rationale behind the “Holocaust issue.” The authors of the first-ever biographical feature of Hitler in German gave a series of interviews in the US in 2004 with the hope to get more exposure as an Oscar hopeful. In these German authors’ interviews with American journalists, the “Holocaust issue” was always brought up. The earlier quote showed that, to Eichinger and his other German author cohorts, it was not historically correct to include scenes featuring those atrocities in the concentration camps because by then, those in the concentration camps had already been liberated.

Eichinger's answer to the concentration camp question indeed may sound legitimate and convincing but Eichinger gave another explanation, which revealed another layer of the German authors' interaction with the subject matter. In an interview given to a journalist in LA shortly before the 2004 Academy Award ceremony, in response to the journalist's constant interrogation on the "Holocaust issue," Eichinger bounced back with this terse remark—"It's just not relevant" (About Film, 2004). Eichinger then calmed down and followed up with the statement quoted earlier—that he wanted to make a film that initiated discussions on Hitler and Nazism on a "high level."

The LA journalist's constant probing pinned Eichinger to the wall and Eichinger found himself revealing his true color (primary intention for leaving out the Holocaust)—after all, he spent a big chunk of his time during the interview defending his and other authors' decisions on how Hitler was illustrated in the biographical film (a responsible illustration of Hitler being a kind of "impersonation" and including some humanity into the personification) and indeed, the Holocaust was not "relevant" to the subject matter ("three-dimensional depiction of Hitler, humanization of the Fuehrer). He then consciously switched gear to put himself back on track—he wanted future discussions on Hitler and Nazism to be on a "high level," breaking off from the common demonization of the country's former leader. He wanted to give a politically acceptable answer that might override or patch up, if not to erase, that "slip of tongue," which might not sound as favorable.

Steering audiences, especially those outside Germany, towards seeing Hitler in a new light was never an easy task. The German film boards truly hoped that through altering foreign audiences' view on Hitler, who Germany and her people could never break off from, Germany and Germans could then divest themselves of those creepy white masks and robes which those

outside Germany put on them and have them wear all these decades. But the sentiment and atmosphere which Goodrick-Clarke mentioned persisted up to the millennium. If anyone dared to take up the task of ridding the long-lasting view on Hitler in the bud, that person had better know what he was doing, how he could properly carry out that task and be sure that the mission could be accomplished. This contender was more than welcomed to ask for financial support from German Federal Film Board.

German Federal Film Board eventually agreed to provide some financial support to Eichinger and his fellow authors to carry out the mission of altering Hitler's image and in turn Germany's image—this group of authors had accumulated enough “reference points.” Recognitions at international film festivals plus remarkable box office records meant that Eichinger and his cohorts knew how to make films that could win the hearts and minds of the audiences and critics. The German Federal Film Board believed that Eichinger as well as the writing team he formed, based on the impressive records, would have no problem implementing the task and could have the chance of modifying foreign audiences' view on Hitler and in turn their perception of Germany together with her people. Therefore, the fund was gladly granted.

“Money talks”—this succinct adage perfectly encapsulates the politics in the media industry. Those who hold the funds hold the power to determine the destiny of a text from start to finish. This is exactly the case of Constantin Film AG and *Der Untertan*—the two governmental film boards, as those who controlled the financial condition of the film project, utilized their status as the moneymen to achieve their political end, which was to attempt to change the public opinion.

The case of Alliance-Atlantis and *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* was a bit more complicated. Indeed, the executive producers and advisory board plus the key persons of the network or rather,

the executive producers, under the supervision of the key persons of the network, determined the general direction that the mini-series was going to take. (Just think about what Rob Petrie was afraid of actually happened to Gernon.) But there was a third factor—audiences' preconceived view on the subject matter. The network did hold the full power over the mini-series project but, as a corporation setting financial gains to be its priority and seeing the text it produced as a product, could not help catering to the whim of the audiences and reinforcing the already established public notion.

Media art in a way is an art of communication and persuasion. *Der Untergang* obviously was a big office success and a lot of people both in the US and abroad tuned in to watch *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*. But the impressive number of people having watched the film and the mini-series does not necessarily mean that these people were all convinced by the messages the film and mini-series tried to convey. The following chapter will be delving into a group of audience's actual reactions to these two media texts.

## Chapter 3

### Introduction

Marx Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, during the 1930s when Hitler and his entourage were at the zenith in power, had the wisdom to be aware of the collective frenzy the Nazis managed to put the masses into through their collective repressive scheme, and these two sociologists and Media Studies forerunners utilized their strength of lungs and wielding of pens to the fullest in an attempt to wake the masses from the collective mesmerism. Its desired outcome aside, the two prophets' proposed concept ("the cultural industry") together with their warning that the masses should have been conscious of the manipulative nature and intention of those behind the scene still seems fresh and trendy to some extent and continues to influence scholars into the millennium. While Adorno and Horkheimer's spirits keep on waving the red flag, Douglas Kellner takes an issue with Adorno and Horkheimer. Kellner (1992) suggests that Adorno and Horkheimer should have taken one step further exploring real-time and real-life audience reception. Kellner asks a blunt but good question—are audiences like puppets on the strings as Adorno and Horkheimer thought them to be? He calls Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis nothing but the duo's own elitist criticism on the masses and mass culture (Kellner, 1992).

Kellner is not alone. Stuart Hall, grounded from his fieldwork in his early days as a researcher committed to connecting his research projects with local communities, as early as the 1970s, has expressed a strong interest in audiences' reception (or what he calls "decoding"). He suggests that a text does not have a fixedly encoded meaning or message—at least from an audience's standpoint. Audiences are not passive recipients of that seemingly fixed meaning; instead, their different approaches towards interacting with the text and degrees of involvement

in the decoding process determine what messages the audiences may get from the text. Hall (1979) concludes that basically audiences' approaches to a literary and visual text may fall into the following three categories—(1) dominant-hegemonic reading (“unquestioningly identifying with the hegemonic position and receiving the dominant message of an image or text”) (2) negotiated reading (“partially accepting the preferred position and at times resisting or modifying it in a way which reflect an audience's personal experience and interest”) (3) oppositional (counter-hegemonic) reading (“well cognizant of the dominant code and preferred reading but consciously and actively rejecting the preferred reading and bringing in to bear an alternative frame of reference”).

Regardless of the fact that he proposes the idea of “dominant-hegemonic reading,” according to Lisa Cartwright and Marita Sturken, Stuart Hall believes that very few people fall into this category because a text cannot satisfy all viewers' or readers' cultural and historical experiences, memories or desires. Because of that, there is always some degree of negotiation going on. Following Hall's notion, Cartwright and Sturken (1998) contend that an audience's relationship with a text is almost always “interactional.” Juriji Lotman (1935) makes a similar comment from a cinematic standpoint—he considers an audience a participant as opposed to a bystander or observer. Be it participatory or interactional, George Lakoff, a cognitive scientist and a media scholar, states that an audience always brings in his or her past experience when reading a text—an audience's past is in constant communication with the text under investigation (Lakoff, 1992).

Stuart Hall's convenient classification of audience into three types based on their approaches towards a text insinuates that audience is not a homogenous entity. John Fiske brings the idea of multifarious nature of audience more to the surface. He coins the words “audience”

and “audiences”—An “audience” is “a homogenous group of people reading the text” while “audiences” are “multiple readings of the same text” (Fiske, 1992).

Henry Jenkins elaborates Fiske’s argument by demonstrating his field research on a group of five-year-olds’ readings of the classics children TV program *The Pee Wee Herman Show*. Siding with Hall, Jenkins summarizes that these five-year-olds, with worldviews different from adults, as expected, paid attention to things an adult audience might disregard and therefore came out with understandings of the show quite different from an adult audience. He further argues that, even within one seemingly unified group, there can still be differences in approaches to the same text among subgroups—a group of Black American 5-year-olds from lower-middle class families might have drastically different readings on the TV show from Jenkins’ participants (white children from upper-middle class families) (Jenkins, 1992). Fiske’s concept of “audiences” and Jenkins’ demonstration come as a compliment for and expansion of Hall’s view on audience reception.

Jacqueline Bobo picks up where Hall, Fiske and Jenkins left off and weaves the three scholars’ concepts together neatly. Bobo (1995) examines a group of black women’s interpretations of Stephen Spielberg’s film adaptation of Toni Morrison’s novel *The Color Purple* (1985). In her multi-faceted and multi-layered examination, following Fiske and Jenkins, Bobo picked a group of middle and lower-middle class black women as her informants, well aware of the fact that even within women, there are subdivisions and each subdivision should be treated as one audience, and putting Hall’s notion into practice, she invited her informants to have their socialization experiences and narratives (i.e. who they are, how it feels to be black women in the mainstream culture) as back stories as these informants shared with her their processes of interacting with the movie (i.e. how it feels to see themselves being illustrated in the movie)

Ien Ang's notion and summary provide a rather holistic approach to audience reception studies—"A more thorough cultural approach to reception would not stop at pseudo-intimate moment of the text-audience encounter but address the differentiated meanings and significance of specific reception patterns in articulating, more cultural negotiation and contestation (Ang, 1989). This is where this chapter comes in. Built upon these predecessors' insights, this chapter is meant to explore, as a result of growing up in Germany, how a group of young Germans (aged 18 to 30) interpret two biographical feature films (as opposed to documentary films) about Hitler—*Hitler: the Rise of Evil* (2003, produced by Alliance-Atlantis for American TV station CBS) and *Downfall* (2004, German title *Der Untergang*). More specifically put, this chapter is to examine how a group of young Germans' general approaches to film texts, their understandings of WWII history (accumulated through primary education together with discussions on related topics with family members) as well as their attachments to the nation as a social group interacted with these two film texts.

### **Significance of the Research Project**

This research project deals with young Germans' interpretations of two films' representations of Hitler and Nazism. It deserves its place in the academia and can contribute something to our understanding of media and culture because of the following reasons:

1. The younger generation's views on Hitler have not been examined yet: John Lukacs, in his book *Hitler of History* published in 2000, briefly summarizes past research done on German people's views on Hitler and Nazism after the fall of the Third Reich. Lukacs, a scholar who was able to escape being a victim under the totalitarian regime and who has been devoting the majority of his academic career to writing about the fallen Reich, states

that German people's views on Hitler and Nazism were briefly explored during the 1950s. Then such a topic seems to have been abandoned or has lost its favor.

2. Past research projects confuse people's reactions to representation of Hitler and Nazism with these people's view on Hitler and Nazism: Thomas Elsaesser (1990) studies how West German film industry addressed Hitler and Nazism from the 1960s onward and in turn West German people's general responses to those films (as opposed to real-life, real-time responses conducted in this research). Coinciding with Lukacs' notion, Elsaesser's research focuses mainly on the film industry instead of the German people, but when he does shift gears a bit, he takes those West Germans' views on those films for their views on Hitler and Nazism, completely disregarding the fact that these people were reacting to representations of Hitler and Nazism as opposed to Hitler the person and Nazism the regime or ideology..
3. This project is contemporary and deals with the here-and-now: Over the past few decades after The Second World War, we have seen the production of numerous films about Hitler and Nazism, mostly coming from the English-speaking countries, such as *The Bunker* (1981) starred by Anthony Hopkins and *Hitler: the Last 10 Days* (1979) starred by Alec Guinness. Elsaesser, from his archival research, concludes that German films (West German films) up to the late 1980s only set the Nazi past in the background and did not confront Hitler or Nazism heads-on (Elsaesser, 1990). *Der Untergang* (2004) (the German film the participants in this project interacted with) is arguably the very first German narrative feature film directly addressing the country's Nazi past. Together with the other film, which was produced in 2003, this project is to look at young Germans'

interactions with two contemporary films about Hitler and Nazism, not illustrations produced in the distant past.

4. Audience's interaction with a feature film about Hitler stops at a superficial ("pseudo-intimate") level: Christine Hasse (2006) brings audience reception of representation of Hitler quite up-to-date, analyzing audience's response to the film *Der Untergang*. Hasse obtains data of total box office receipts the film collected worldwide and congratulates the film on its success in winning the hearts and minds of both domestic and foreign audiences. Indeed, Hasse addresses audience reception of one of the films examined in this project but her exploration has two problems. It repeats the mistake of treating audiences as one single unified whole without realizing the subcategories within this seemingly homogenous body. Secondly and more crucially, Hasse concludes her research on audience reception solely based on box office receipts. The fact that a film is a box office hit is not necessarily a reflection of an audience's positive response to the film. It may result from a successful marketing strategy. Even if it could reflect an audience's positive view on the film to some extent, examination on this view should not have stopped at such as a superficial level. The simplest question for Hasse would be—"What did the audience say was good about this film?"
5. The (re)unification of East and West Germany might have an impact on German people's views on (the representation of) Hitler and Nazism: Bill Niven, in his 2002 book *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich*, explores how German people deal with the country's Nazi past after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the initial chapter, Niven says, "Now (the year 2000) is the time [to explore this issue]" (Niven, 2002). Ten years had elapsed before Niven conducted his research and numerous post-

1989 political infrastructures had finally kicked in and been in place; that was where Niven's research came in. The research project here involving six young Germans is a follow-up of Niven's research—how do German people look at Hitler and Nazism (or rather the representations of Hitler and Nazism) 20 years after the unification of East and West Germany, in particular those young Germans who were born shortly prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall and who grew up in the new united Germany with a potentially different understanding of the country's image and past?

In short, the project, picking up where previous scholars have left off or filling in what predecessors seem to have missed and overlooked, is one-of-its-kind.

### **The Project and the Methodology**

To be eligible to take part in this research project, one needed to be a German citizen aged 18 to 30. This age group was chosen because one of the things examined in the interviews was young Germans' schooling, in particular what school had taught them about WWII. Young Germans aged 18 to 30 entered elementary school after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when Germany was more likely to have a more "commonly shared" understanding of its Nazi legacy. West Germany and East Germany have often been recognized as two separate countries with East Germany, if not following, then influenced or even controlled by the Soviet Union, thus holding a completely different interpretation of Germany's Nazi past partially reflected in its school curriculum (Niven, 2002). Picking this age group would narrow down the informant pool to those who had received their basic education in the unified Germany and rule out those who once had been educated in East Germany, "another country" as Niven would call it.

Prior to the commencement of the recruiting process, the project got approved by Claremont Graduate University's and Pitzer College's Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) as the

lengthy recruiting process began at The Claremont Colleges, where the researcher is a student. Approval from Pitzer's IRB was to allow the recruiting pamphlet to be distributed among exchange students from Germany in Claremont, who, except one, spent their semester abroad at Pitzer College. Approval from Claremont Graduate University's IRB, in addition to making sure that the remaining exchange students from Germany at The Claremont Colleges would not be left out, was to allow the researcher to branch out to include Germans off campus in the area. The researcher had an associate (an active member of an international cultural exchange organization in Germany and a graduate student at University of Heidelberg) who knew friends or colleagues who would be travelling to the area the time the research was to be conducted. The recruitment letter was e-mailed to those young professionals or recent college graduates from Germany as soon as the research was approved by the IRBs.

The associate of the researcher's at University of Heidelberg, however, was not invited to be one of the participants; considering the sensitive nature of some of the interview questions, the associate might be a bit evasive in her responses with the fear that frankness could have a detrimental effect on her friendship with the researcher.

After the standard recruiting and admission process (e.g. disseminating the recruiting letter, answering potential participants' questions and concerns, collecting the signed consent forms), the research project went like this—initiation questionnaire, screening of film # 1 (with the researcher present the whole time) immediately followed by interview # 1, screening of film # 2 (with the researcher present the whole time) immediately followed by interview # 2. A subject was requested that the initiation questionnaire be completed and returned prior to the screening of film # 1. The initial questionnaire was made of open-ended questions about an informant's general habit of movie going, responses to films and film companies' general

marketing strategies, approaches to film texts and views on Hitler. (Detailed questions are included in the appendix.) Answers to those questions were not expected to be long and the whole questionnaire would not take more than 10 minutes to complete.

A subject was given the liberty to decide which film he or she would like to watch first. Assumed to have seen *Der Untergang* but not *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*, in fact one informant had seen both prior to being invited to take part in the research, one had not seen either of them and one had seen *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* but not *Der Untergang*. But those who had seen at least one of the two films gladly agreed to review the one they had seen previously with the researcher. The researcher managed to allow a one-week break between the first screening and the second screening to avoid the possibility that a participant might mess up the plots of the two films or feelings he or she held towards the two movies. Interview # 1 lasted for 1 to 1.5 hours and interview # 2 went for 30 to 45 minutes.

The researcher meant to create a safe and comfortable environment (private setting of the informant's choice) where the informant may share with the researcher his or her views without being judged or without feeling being monitored. The researcher generally took down anything a subject was kind enough to share in the form of key words and phrases during the interviews. If an informant granted the researcher permission to tape-record the interviews, the researcher would then transcribe the recordings verbatim.

Though the interviews were designed to be semi-directed (as opposed to directed or undirected), interview questions all fell into one of the following categories (1) definition of a good movie (2) what makes you want to see a movie (3) how did and do you acquire knowledge about Hitler and Nazism (4) how would you like Hitler to be illustrated in a movie (5) how strongly do you identify with your country (6) what do you think of the movies' depictions of

Hitler (i.e. memorable lines, scenes) and how would you do differently were you given a chance to remake these films. Interviews all followed this sequence with a complete open question “Do you have anything to add” and a brief discussion on current national or international event which might be related to the subject matter as a closure.

### **The Participants**

Eventually, six young Germans accepted the invitation to take part in this innovative and exciting research project. Below are their profiles:

1. Carlotta: An exchange student from Germany, she majored in English Education (Teaching English as a Second Language) and Special Education at a university in central Germany which started as a Teacher’s Seminar (equivalent to a normal teachers’ college in the US). She grew up in Berlin and fell into the youngest age group (18 to 22).
2. Evelyn: The facilitator of the group, she was the first person responding to the researcher’s recruitment letter and helped mobilize other exchange students from Germany at The Claremont Colleges to take part in the project. A classmate of Carlotta, she, too, fell into the youngest age group (18 to 22).
3. Katja: A friend of Evelyn’s, she answered Evelyn’s call to join the team. She was of the same age as the other two female participants (18 to 22).
4. Addi: He was a telecommunication technician who worked at a cell phone company (Verizon’s sister company in Germany). Born and raised in southern Germany, he identified himself as a “Swabian,” a group who originated from southern Germany but some of who later settled down elsewhere (i.e. Austria, Switzerland, Turkey, Romania and the US) as part of centuries long Diaspora and who is said to be the most reserved, if not conservative among all German subgroups, and who tries anything possible to

preserve Germanic cultural heritage. But contrary to Swabians' stereotypical conservative traits, Addi had a passion for Asian cultures, in particular Vietnamese and Chinese cultures. Addi's age fell between 23 and 27.

5. Michael: A former representative of Citi Bank in Germany and currently an employee of a community bank in a small town not far away from Stuttgart, southern Germany, Michael was the other proud Swabian in the group. During the pre-initiation phase of the research, he introduced himself as a Swabian and enjoyed sending the researcher information about southern Germany's local cuisines. Michael was born in the same year as Addi, falling into the age group of 23 to 27.
6. Steffen: A recent graduate from a foreign language academy in Munich, indeed Steffen was still another participant born and raised in southern Germany (Bayern, the Free State of Bavaria). But he was not a Swabian—his parents immigrated in the early 1980s from Poland to Germany, where he was born shortly afterwards. This young German national of Polish descent was an aspiring documentary filmmaker, whose short music videos and a stunning documentary dealing with nuclear wars were available online. He was of the same age as the other two male participants, falling into the age group of 23 to 27.

With these informants' background information in mind, we may take a closer look at each of them, in particular his or her general approach to movies, attitude towards Hitler and Nazism, understandings of WWII history and lastly in turn, views on the two films' representations of Hitler and Nazism. But since our further discussion may involve the potential discrepancies between the messages a producer of a text manage to convey and the messages a decoder (i.e. reader, audience) receives, it might be helpful to first summarize these text producers' positions..

### **“Hitler is human”**

Leslie Moonves, the president of CBS, during the incubation period of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* (which was back then titled *Hitler: the Early Years*), stated in an interview that the film was meant to “psychologize” Hitler—what the network would like to show the audience was “[not] Hitler the goose-stepping, ranting Fuhrer” but “Hitler the misunderstood son, the young soldier, the painter manqué” (Davis, 2002). In spite of the danger of being “too progressive,” Peter Sussman, one of the two executive producers of the TV mini-series, stated that humanization of Hitler was the path that he and his production team were going to take: “We’d be doing ourselves a disservice if we didn’t show that Hitler was human... he didn’t have claws and fanged teeth and breathe fire. He lived and walked among us.” In other words, *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*, at least as declared by the production team, was moving away from conventionally appreciated demonization of Hitler. If not illustrated as “a nice guy” as Katja put it, then the former Fuehrer would be (re)presented as partially good or someone to sympathize with.

Hirschbiegel and Eichinger, the director and producer of *Der Untergang*, began explicating their team’s basic approach by criticizing commonly accepted illustration of Hitler: “The biggest danger is, and it happened to Alec Guinness and Anthony Hopkins, to illustrate Hitler as a psychopath or weirdo” (Koch, 2004). Hirschbiegel further stated that in addition to the generally known negative sides of Hitler on screen, a human side also needed to be incorporated:” It is the human side of Hitler that lures people into his kingdom... Hitler succeeded in manipulating people only because he was human being” (Koch, 2004). In short, the filming team of *Der Untergang*, too, vowed to (re)present a Hitler who, albeit all of the shortcomings in personality, deserved sympathy if not any bit of adoration from the audience.

**Carlotta: “Perfect German guys, men or boys would be tall and muscular but he was short and not muscular at all.”**

Carlotta did not consider herself a movie-goer. Regardless of the significance of *Der Untergang* in German film history, she did not catch the film when it first came out. She watched the film for the first time at school in a history class and then at home on DVD. “I watch around 2 movies in the cinema per year,” stated Carlotta, “I wait to watch a movie on DVD or TV.” And among those movies Carlotta did see in the theatre, majority of them were not German, “Out of six movies I watch in three years, one or two are German.”

As an audience, Carlotta would like a movie to be “smart, well-made and not boring,” as movie watching was to help her “find rest after a stressful day.” To her, a good movie allowed her to “feel the characters in the movie” and create a channel for “catharsis.” One key for a movie to resonate with her was “realism.” Here, “realism” did not insinuate that Carlotta appreciated only typical drama and rejected comedies or fantasies. In fact, Carlotta listed *Amalie* as one of her favorite movies. Carlotta’s definition of “realism” has two layers—(1) emotional connection with the actors and actresses (2) physical presentation of an actor or actress.

“Emotional connection” was an elaboration of what was quoted earlier, which was cited from Carlotta’s initiation questionnaire—she needed to be able to “feel the people,” either to empathize, sympathize or even identify with the characters so that the movies could “totally break your heart or make you laugh.” On the second level, which was related to the first level to some extent, Carlotta preferred a more down-to-earth actors or actresses. Although not a big fan of German cinemas, Carlotta believed that German films did a better job on this aspect compared to their American counterparts: “I think a lot of German movies are more realistic than American movies... a lot of American movies are always about a super pretty girl. You can never connect with this super pretty girl because she is just a made-up.”

While some people might decide to see a movie because certain actors or actresses are in

it, stardom did not seem to work on Carlotta. Because “there are lots of actors I don’t know,” Carlotta’s decision on whether to see a movie or not was heavily dependent upon “reviews.” Interestingly, “reviews” here did not refer to critiques from distant individuals in the press regardless of those experts’ authoritative status in films—“The most important [source] is from people I know who like movies... people who may share the same taste with me about movies.”

“Scary, crazy, megalomaniac and electrifying” were a few adjectives that popped up when Carlotta thought of Hitler. “I have seen some movies about Hitler, in which he is powerful,” said Carlotta. But she believed “other sides of Hitler is quite important too... such as weak[ness].” Though with a strong preference for a better-rounded Hitler on screen, where both the conventionally construed monstrous image and the contrasting “weak” side could both be included, Carlotta strongly opposed the idea of making Hitler a nice person—“I would not want a movie where Hitler is characterized as loving, wonderful person only. That would be a downright lie and people might watch and think, ‘Wow, he is very nice. Let’s all hate Jews.’” Furthermore, admittedly, as a teacher, Carlotta said she would be interested in seeing a movie about Hitler’s life before “he was the Fuehrer”: “I’d like to go back very early, probably as a child... his childhood, his teenager time.”

According to Carlotta, in Germany, each province set up its own curriculum and granted teachers the liberty to choose actual texts used in class as long as the books fit the guideline. In the district where she was from, WWII history represented a “huge chunk” of the history class—in fact, “it is half of what we learnt in [our] history class.” Carlotta said, if she remembered correctly, her initial exposure to that part of history was in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The whole thing was repeated again in high school but with further detail. Typically, combining history class with German (reading and writing for elementary school students), the teacher assigned students to

read *Diary of Anne Frank*. Carlotta said, due to schedule conflict, her high school class missed the concentration camp tour. But she got much out of other activities, such as individual and group research projects and presentations and movie screenings. Movies she saw in her history class, in addition to *Der Untergang*, included *Nappola* and *Sophie Scholl*. A person interested in history, Carlotta visited museums on her own to learn more about the country's Nazi past.

“I know that there are old people who are afraid to talk about the [Second World] War because [of] what they did and what they saw but there are also old people who like to talk about it, to share their experiences,” said Carlotta in response to the question about whether she learnt about WWII history from discussions on the topic at home. Unfortunately, Carlotta was not able to collect anecdotes from people who have “been there and done that.” Her grandparents did not live long enough to share with Carlotta their stories; Carlotta's mother passed down the family tales. Carlotta's grandparents from both sides were indeed from Germany but they lived as expatriates in Croatia and Hungary during the 1930s. When the war broke out, one of his grandfathers joined the SS, Nazi's elite guards whose membership required that an applicant stood at least 5'9” and that he could provide genealogical record tracing back to 1790s that proved his racial purity. When the researcher inadvertently mentioned the elitist nature of the SS and the high selectivity of its membership, Carlotta was found drawn back a bit: “My mom said [joining the SS for my grandfather] was involuntary...uh, there was my mom. She said it was involuntary.”

The interviews were conducted during the time when the world soccer match was wrapping up. The annual match that year was held in Germany and the German team made it to the final. One of the interviews briefly touched on this heated topic around the world, in particular in Germany, which then led to a brief mention of national identity. On the scale of 1 to

5, Carlotta rated herself 1 on national identity. “The whole national thing doesn’t really reach me, ever. I’d not be proud of myself of being a citizen of some place. There are nice things about Germany but that should not be something I should be proud of because I didn’t do anything to make it that way.” Carlotta said she was glad that the annual soccer match was held in Germany—“Germans could show that [we] were very, very polite to everyone that was in our country... We could show our hospitality.” Of patriotism, Carlotta made an interesting comparison: “Germans’ patriotism is very low compared to countries like France and the States.”

Carlotta opened her comments on *Der Untergang* as such—“It’s very good because it is based on facts [and] it is very realistic.” Carlotta said that before *Der Untergang* came out, believing that the production team would follow her preference for realism, she presumed that the production team might end up making “a crying Hitler.” Indeed, making a “crying Hitler” was one element of a good movie for Carlotta, where she could then “feel” the people.” But pure sympathy was not something she wanted and luckily, the production team was able to find a good balance.

Carlotta contended that only through showing Hitler’s weakness (i.e. symptoms of Parkinson’s Disease in the scene where Hitler awarded a group of Hitler Youth members for their brave act of bombing Russian tanks) as well as other human qualities could his evil side be set out—such a better-rounded characterization showed that a human being could do “cruel things” to other human beings. Carlotta pointed out that *Der Untergang* did a great job capturing Hitler’s human side: “He has the girl [on his laps] and children singing and stuff [in the bunker in the movie]. I knew that before—he loved children a lot. And he loved animals a lot. He was super-nice to his dog.” It is through such a character development at the first half of the film together with commonly and conventionally shared knowledge that made what Hitler was shown

doing “scary.” Carlotta said she could never forget the scene in which Hitler poisoned his beloved dog Blondi. The act of poisoning Blondi itself was not scary, Carlotta stated; in fact, this decision indicated that Hitler really cared about Blondi—“Hitler didn’t want [Blondi] to suffer under the Russians, the enemies. He just didn’t want Blondi to suffer.” But such a caring person as Hitler could actually kill millions of innocent people who were not related to him, “That’s scary. Wow!”

When asked whether there was any specific scene in *Der Untergang* that she might never forget years after watching the film, Carlotta, without giving a second thought, pointed at the scene in which Megda (Goebbels’ wife) poisoned her own children. “To kill your own children? I still can’t understand that,” said Carlotta. But with a little reminder, Carlotta did recall Megda’s rationale behind poisoning her children—Frau Goebbels could not imagine her children living in a society without National Socialism. “Just not to live without Hitler or Nazism? That’s just crazy!” Carlotta shook her head as making such a remark.

Basically, Carlotta considered the film’s representation of Hitler and Nazism in congruence with her understanding of the period. If there was anything that might not resonate with her, it would be the depiction of Albert Speer. “Speer was presented a bit too nice,” commented Carlotta, “Goebbels is presented like huge, super bad. Next to him is Speer, who is then like an angel. I did feel a bit uncomfortable about it.” But then Carlotta said, “I could just forget it.” She labeled Speer as a minor character, who was on screen only for 5 minutes or so, “It didn’t bother me too much.”

Carlotta found the exterior scenes in the movies, albeit representing a comparatively small chunk of screen time, fascinating, in particular the street battle scenes and vivid depictions of civilians being killed. When prompted, Carlotta was able to summarize the production team’s

basic position or rather, take-home message that it would like to convey to audiences: “Hitler is not always powerful... that in the end, he is out of his mind, if he ever has one... he went crazy and got totally confused. He is weak. He might be powerful [at some moments] but he is not a strong man.”

Carlotta was available for the second interview and screening two weeks after the first one. After the warm-up and check-in (i.e. summary of the previous session), Carlotta jumped right into a comparison and contrast between *Der Untergang* and *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*—“I did not like it as much as *Der Untergang*.” “No,” Carlotta followed up right away, “It’s not because it was not in German.” Carlotta’s criticism on *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* could be traced back to her definition of a good movie mentioned earlier—realism. “I did not find it as realistic.”

In the case of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*, Carlotta’s reference to “realism” had two levels—historical accuracies and the overall visual presentation. Carlotta said she did consider *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* “a good movie, because it showed Hitler’s days before he became the Fuehrer,” something she would really like to see, but she found herself constantly mumbling to herself “really?” as she watched the TV movie. She had the opening scene of the second part of the TV mini-series as an example: “When Hitler was to leave the [Landsburg] prison [where he was imprisoned for treason], [the prison guard and young Rudolf Hess] already started calling Hitler ‘Mein Fuehrer.’ I was like, ‘Really? That early? People already called him Mein Fuehrer?’ At that time, he wasn’t that popular.”

Carlotta’s criticism on the TV movie’s overall presentation coincided with her “super-pretty-girl” notion. Firstly, Carlotta took an issue with the production team’s use of strong front lights, side lights and back lights, which beautified almost all characters in the mini-series and the film sets—“The shine in the movie, the color... I just didn’t like that. [These arrangements]

made the movie very unrealistic to me.” She then took one step further commenting on the makeup used on the actors and actresses, an echo to her point made in the questionnaire and the beginning of the first interview—“ [Those actors and actresses] were all beautiful people, even Hitler, with that hair, mustache... Hitler never looked gross in the movie.... They overdid the makeup... those characters or actors were not real people to me.”

In addition to the beautification through makeup and hairdo, Carlotta believed that there was much to be desired on the actor’s (self)-presentation as Hitler. “I don’t know [if] it was the producer who told him to act like that or it was his own idea but I don’t like it very much. I feel that was very un-human... I was like, ‘This is not a real person, not a human being.’” Carlotta then briefly brought in the point she had made on *Der Untergang* to better explicate her argument—while *Der Untergang* chose to set out Hitler’s cruel side by also presenting Hitler’s human side (a caring person doing evil thing), *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* jumped right off presenting Hitler as “a crazy person.” Such a convenient (or simplified) arrangement, Carlotta stated, made her less engaged as an audience: “ When you see Hitler simply as a crazy person, you might think that [the Nazi regime and atrocities] were something of anomalies... just a crazy person doing some crazy things, not something which may happen again if we don’t learn our lessons.”

Carlotta was able to identify one scene in the very beginning of the TV-series, which served as the base for her Hitler-not-as-a-human-being impression—Hitler-beating-dog scene. While *Der Untergang* built up Hitler’s caring image at the very beginning (i.e. Hitler being nice to his new secretary), Carlotta said, the mini-series went just the opposite—“Hitler did not care about Foxl [his dog]... he was even abusive toward Foxl...” Such a setup gave Carlotta the impression that Hitler was not human if not just crazy as a character.

Albeit all of the above chastisement on the production team on its general approach to

how Hitler was illustrated, Carlotta liked the Hitler-Gerlich contrast (good-guy-bad-guy contrast). “I did like that [setup] because it showed both sides.”

Among numerous remarkable scenes in the TV movie, Carlotta found the one in which Hitler kissed Gaeli (Hitler’s niece) most unforgettable. In this scene, Gaeli, feeling that she was like a caged bird or jailor after coming to Munich with her uncle, attempts to hop on a train to escape when her uncle is busy with a dinner party in celebration for the Nazi Party’s breakthrough at the parliament. Gaeli wants the taxi driver to drive her to the train station when Hitler comes in and wants her to just forget about the idea of running away. The scene ends with Hitler vehemently grabbing Gaeli and kissing her. “I don’t know if [it means that] Hitler was [having an intercourse] with her... but he was doing [against her will]. That was not human.”

In addition to presenting more of Hitler’s human side, a more down-to-earth lighting and makeup, Carlotta wished to have seen more of Hitler’s childhood because “it only represented 5 minutes” of this 180-minute TV movie.

One thing worth a mention was that towards the end of the first interview, the discussion briefly touched on a recent article on the Internet about Hitler’s racial and ethnic heritage. This article stated that some saliva samples from Hitler’s nephews as well as other relatives suggested that Hitler was of North African and Jewish descent, not a pure Aryan. Initially, Carlotta was taken aback in awe, completely astounded: “I will have to read the article to see if [evidence] was valid.” Disbelief soon turned into acceptance—“ Why shouldn’t I believe it? Perfect German guys, men and boys would be tall, muscular but he was short and not muscular.”

### **Evelyn: the passive mobilizer**

Evelyn was in fact the first person among the 17 who received the initial recruitment letter and it is she who mobilized other exchange students at The Claremont Colleges to join her to take part

in this innovative research project, but due to schedule conflict, she was not able to arrange her first screening until Carlotta was done with her first one. Evelyn called the researcher and then set up a brief preliminary meeting with the researcher prior to getting into the official initiation stage and she said she would be more than happy to do whatever she could to help.

Evelyn did not call herself a movie-goer either. She saw 5 movies per year in the movie theatre; only 2 among the five were German and the other three were American. She usually waited for the DVD as opposed to catching a new movie in the movie theatre.

While Carlotta stated that a good movie needed to allow her to “feel the people,” Evelyn said a good movie needed to be able to “still touch me when it was over.” She then said that a good movie needed to “make me think” or was one “which I can see parallels to my life.”

Similar to Carlotta, Evelyn loved “realistic stories” but she would not mind watching a science fiction once in a while.

Evelyn, like Carlotta, decided what movie to see or whether one movie was worth watching based on whether who tended to share the similar movie tastes with her had something good to say about the film. However, she would not completely disregard film critics’ comments and a good trailer on TV could serve as a good igniter as well.

As an audience, when watching a movie, Evelyn said she had the proclivity of paying attention to these three aspects—whether the film had “an interesting plot,” if the plot had “a rise in tension” and whether the film had “good actors.” Good actors here was not necessarily equivalent to stardom though Evelyn admitted that who was in a movie indeed could have some impact on her final decision on what movie to see, as the previous paragraph has just illustrated. Here “good actors” meant good acting, actors who could portray their roles very well.

Here are adjectives that Evelyn could think of to describe Hitler—“evil, cruel, tyrannical,

racist, diabolical, inhuman.” Able to come up with the most adjectives to describe her country’s former Fuehrer, all of them extremely negative, when asked what if a film’s depiction did not meet any of these “standards” or even went completely opposite from them, Evelyn gave a terse but interesting response—“Images are deceiving.”

Compared to Carlotta’s school district, Evelyn’s did not place as much emphasis on Hitler or Nazism. But the school did stress that “Hitler was a catastrophe for Germany and the world.” Evelyn’s school district did not incorporate a visit to one of the concentration camps into its curriculum. But it did assign students to read books such as *Diary of Anne Frank* and it showed documentaries in class. Outside reading and the Internet served as the sources through which Evelyn learnt about Hitler and Nazism outside the classroom.

Evelyn described WWII as “a big tragedy”—“My grandparents lost their brothers during the war.” One might have the sensitive antennae to pick up the underlying pain which still remained in Evelyn’s family decades after the closure of the international drama of bloodbath. “My parents couldn’t talk about their experiences (of being under the regime) because they were not yet born. My grandparents died when I was very little.” While Carlotta’s grandparents passed down their tales to Carlotta’s mother and Carlotta’s mother recited those tales to Carlotta, Evelyn’s grandparents, as the above sentences might have suggested, were not willing to talk about their WWII days to their children (Evelyn’s parents). The wartime was an old wound that ought to be left untouched.

Evelyn loved to call herself a “cosmopolitan” as a result of having the privilege to “do a lot of traveling abroad.” She said she might appear very “German from outer appearance with blond hair and blue eyes” and that her food taste was very German with a love for “coffee and cakes like what other Germans do” but she also appreciated “international cuisines such as

Mexican, Indian, Chinese and Greek.” For her constant exposure to foreign cultures, Evelyn rated herself 2 to 3 on the scale of 1 to 5 in terms of how “German” she would consider herself to be.

Here is how Evelyn would like Hitler to be illustrated on screen as an extension of the list of adjectives she had used to describe her country’s former leader: she wanted Hitler on screen to be “a very unpleasant and diabolical character that frightens people with his terrible screaming voice and his cruel, commanding and manipulating tones and behaviors.” She would also like the movie to show that Hitler had “a blinded worldview, winding people around with his little finger and a devil in disguise.”

Evelyn did not have many comments to make when the interviews went into discussions on the actual contents of the two movies. She did not specify any scene which had left a mark in her mind or identified the two production teams’ basic positions. But she did make such a comment: “Hitler was scary; both films have shown that.”

### **Katja: Your average informant**

Katja was Evelyn’s classmate at school and like Evelyn, had very tight schedules. But she was able to eventually put the two interviews on her agenda by mid-term weeks (early November). Informed that the first interview could take up to 90 minutes and the second up to 60 minutes, she was willing to allot the amount of time she was told required and she appeared to be very cooperative within the timeframe.

Compared to the other two female participants, Katja went to the movie theatre more frequently. She said she could see up to 10 movies per year in the movie theatre. Out of those 10, about 3 were German; all of the others tended to be American if not British. Despite the fact that she patronized the movie theatre more often, she admitted that she would see a movie in a

theatre only if she “really wants to see it.” Otherwise, she “had rather wait for the DVD.”

Katja said a good movie needed to have “interesting plots” which could “offer you something to think about after watching it,” along with “realism.” Here, Katja defined “realism” as having “authentic characters” and “actors having empathy for their roles.” “Realism” could also include making sense—the plot ought not to be “too exaggerated” or “lose realistic sense.”

Similar to the other two female informants, Katja decided what movie to see based on her friends’ comments on it along with trailers on TV.

Katja picked these adjectives to describe her country’s former Fuehrer—“obsessed with a thought,” “extremely racist” and “sick in his head.” Personally, she would love to see a movie depicting or examining Hitler’s “personality, his thinking and what caused him to think like that.” She was interested in “a psychological analysis of his character” though she said a film company could take whatever stance that resonated with it. The bottom line was that she did not want to see Hitler to be illustrated as “a nice guy”—“I would be mad and boycott the film if somebody made a movie like that.”

Katja learnt about her country’s Nazi past solely from school. Her grandfather was stationed in North Africa during the war but “I did not have the chance to talk to him.” She then succinctly summarized how WWII history was taught: “[The school] taught us about all events that caused the war and what happened during the war and how different countries reacted [together with] how Jews were treated.” A fieldtrip to a “Komzentrationslager” was incorporated into the curriculum as well as some readings and movie screenings. In her school district, WWII was not treated any bit differently from “any other period in world history with some dates and events highlighted.”

Though raised “in a traditional family in a small village,” enjoying “a good German beer”

or simply “being German” and giving herself a 4 on the self-rated German-ness scale, she said, “I am not patriotic except during the time when the soccer World Cup takes place.”

Katja liked *Der Untergang* for its “realistic portrayal,” in particular the capture of Hitler’s “desperation” and “how everything came to an end,” which, Katja said, she had very little knowledge of before. Walking into the screening room not knowing what to expect, Katja stated that she found *Der Untergang* “surprisingly good.”

Indeed describing Hitler as an “obsessed person,” Katja did not appreciate a film that focus solely on this very dimension of Hitler’s personality. This was the major reason that she found *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* less appealing in comparison to the German film. “In *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*, Hitler was shown as someone always disgusted by others for his obsession. This might make people take pity on him. I don’t like that.”

These two films were the very first narrative features about Hitler that Katja saw in her life. Towards the end of the second interview, she made such a remark—“I felt ashamed that a German person could do such cruel things and I wish I could just erase these historical events so that Germans could get rid of that history. [What these movies showed] shocked me. But I guess it’s good to make movies like these to show what happened in a reflective way so that we can make sure that we are aware of what happened and can prevent the same thing from repeating.”

### **Addi: a proud Swabian**

Addi was the very first male informant responding to the recruitment letters disseminated off campus and the interviews were conducted shortly after Christmas. Though a bit reserved, Addi loved joking around a bit once in a while and seeing a smile on the researcher’s face.

Addi introduced himself as an avid movie-goer. He saw 15 to 20 movies in the movie theatre per year. Among those 15 to 20 movies he saw in the movie theatre, at most 2 were

German. He said he preferred foreign movies. Those German movies he did see in the movie theatre were comedies.

Constantly keeping a lookout for new movies, Addi said he did not necessarily see all movies in the movie theatre. He might end up waiting for the DVDs. But he rarely watched movies on TV channels.

Addi's definition of a good movie was that it had "a good director, good story and not-so-boring plot." Addi took one step further explaining what he meant by "not-so-boring plot"—"A movie should be different from life and should not be anything [ordinary]." Moreover, a good movie ought to be "something new," original in topic or a new approach to an old topic.

Addi, like his female compatriots, would decide to see a movie because "my friends like it." But he would make sure that his friends would not reveal too much so that "they won't spoil the fun."

Addi chose "cruel" and "awful" as the adjectives he would use to describe his country's former leader.

In addition to depictions of true events happening to or around Hitler, Addi would like to see something of a drastically different kind made into movies, imagined events countering actual occurrences if possible. One example Addi gave was a movie like "*Inglorious Bastards*," where Hitler was killed by Americans" or a piece showing a world 50 years after WWII with Germany being the winner.

Addi summarized his school's position on Hitler and Nazism: "Hitler was evil and Nazism or racism was not the right thing for this modern world. In short, Nazism and racism were terrible and ought not to be tolerated."

Addi said contemporary Germans' views on Hitler and Nazism was pretty much the

same—“Most people displace it... file or forget.” He remembered once asking his father about the war after watching a documentary but Addi’s father did not have much to say. Addi’s grandfather passed away before Addi was born so regardless of his strong interest in the topic, he was not able to obtain first-hand information or personal account about the war.

Addi was the only informant who said that his family kept any WWII memorabilia: “My father has a picture book [with photos of Hitler from newsreels, newspaper clips labeled with numbers], a bit like Hitler collector fan book that we have in modern days of soccer players. It’s funny to see that they made a thing like that.”

Addi considered himself “very German,” giving himself a 4 on the self-rated German-ness scale. He attributed the high rating to his Swabian background: “I am assiduous, precise, pragmatic, reliable, accurate and well-organized. And I like German food. My parents taught me to be like that.” He later admitted that his passion for foreign cultures and strong interest in mingling with people from foreign countries would not be considered “typical German.”

Addi was the first participant who spoke highly of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*. One reason might be that there were some gaps between events in his comprehension of what happened in those 20-some years under the Nazi regime. “Before I watched this movie, I didn’t know all about his rise. I knew that he wrote his book *Mein Kampf* in prison but I didn’t know how he got in prison.” He further stated that this movie could serve as a good supplementary teaching material for teachers teaching children about Hitler and Nazism.

Indeed, the TV movie did not change his preconceived view on Hitler or Nazism but Addi stated that he liked it when the production team touched on Hitler’s nationality issue—“It was a good thing they showed that Hitler was not born a German but an Austrian and that he didn’t get his German citizenship until later.”

Addi said he could never forget those scenes in which Hitler was summoned to speak in front of a big crowd and the crowd cheered or was greatly inspired. “Hitler was insane. It was fascinating to see that so many people were [motivated or mobilized] by him and were willing to follow him. It’s very important to show that.”

Overall, Addi believed that *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* “did a great job” capturing main events during the period and the essences of those events so there was not much to be desired.

Addi did not make a direct comparison and contrast between the two films; the second screening and interview was not made possible until 3 weeks after the first one. While Addi would like to see “something new “ in a movie and *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* indeed brought him something new, he said that *Der Untergang* showed him something he “had already known.” Addi did not consider this “un-originality” detracting from the film’s quality—at least, it meant that the film “was based on facts, something open to the public and written documents.”

Addi said, “I’ll never forget the scene in which [Frau] Goebbels poisons her children.” For a time, Addi deemed the scene beyond belief, “Kill your own innocent children because [you think] they can’t live without Hitler or Nazism? I don’t know if that’s truth or not but it’s true that Goebbels had a lot of children.” Addi then shared with the researcher his speculation of why this scene was written into the movie, “I think the film team wanted to show how insane and fanatical a person could be [under a political regime.]” And Addi considered the film team making a good decision throwing in the scene—“It’s important to show to the people that Nazism [and] racism were dumb and should have no place in modern society.”

Towards the end of the second interview, Addi made a very interesting comment—“In the USA, it is normal [for an American] to be proud of his country, to sing the national anthem before a sport event. In Germany, nobody shows his national pride because if you do, you will

be called a Nazi. So I am not proud of my country. I don't want to be a Nazi.”

**Michael: another Swabian**

Michael, like Addi, shared a similar reserved outlook but he could appear quite excited when touching on topics he had passion for. He loved talking about WWII history and he enjoyed sharing with others his cultural heritage. He stayed in touch with the researcher between interviews to introduce to the researcher a few Swabian local cuisines.

Michael seldom went to the movies. He preferred watching TV in his cozy home and his favorite programs were those documentaries on History Channel.

Though not a movie-goer and preferring documentaries over narrative features, Michael was still able to give a definition of what he considered a good movie—“... a good movie should be able to entertain me from the first minute to the last, makes me feel that I am part of the movie, has a good story and actors who fit their roles perfectly.” A good story, to Michael, needed to be “interesting,” as other participants had stated, but it needed to be “logical” as well.

Michael was able to clearly identify his school's teaching objective for classes about his country's Nazi past: “The target was to teach the students that Germany caused WWII and that it was our duty as Germans [to make sure] that such a thing would never happen again, [such as] the Holocaust.” His history teacher led a group discussion on “how Hitler could rise to power so easily and if this would repeat itself in today's society.” And the lecture did not focus on war itself (i.e. important dates) but “the Holocaust and Germany's unconditional surrender.” “The goal was to make students realize that The Third Reich was a regime of terror.”

Michael did not get to meet any of his grandparents except his maternal grandmother, who passed away when he was five. But Michael did get to learn something about WWII from his father. His grandfather was a radio engineer for a bomber. His plane was shot down by the

Russians. The young German engineer did survive the crash but lost his legs as a result. “I know that, although he was a German soldier, he was not a big supporter for the regime... My family was like millions of other families. We just wanted to survive the hard time.”

While Addi at times emphasized his Swabian heritage and called Hitler a “non-German, non-Swabian guy” despite the fact that Hitler tried one way or another to present himself otherwise, Michael did not stress his Swabian background as much in the official interviews. He rated himself 2 on the self-rated German-ness scale—“I feel more European than German” though “I am a proud German.” He then chuckled: “But the rating would go up to 4 when the soccer World Cup comes around!”

Michael took an issue with how Hitler was illustrated at the beginning of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*, specifically the depiction of Hitler’s days in the trenches during WWI. “This illustration was very close to the Nazis’ illustration of Hitler—Hitler as a war hero,” commented Michael.

Michael said it was true that not a lot of Hitler’s early days had survived a “historical facelift” operated by Nazi propaganda machine but it was also for this very reason that a lot of representations of the period, including the TV movie examined here, could not help having materials “produced by the Nazis” as the primary sources. Michael was not comfortable with those scenes in which Hitler was (re)presented as a brave corporal, who volunteers to carry a message going through the enemy line—“At the beginning of the war, everybody was very motivated to fight and to win. But that mood changed when they arrived at the front to see and experience the whole thing personally. I’m pretty sure that Hitler was not so crazy about the war after he experienced the heavy stuff.” Michael then digressed for a moment to talk about Hitler’s childhood: “Hitler had a pretty good life as a child because of his orphan pensions after his mother died. The fact that he was poor was not true.” Michael then concluded, “This and the

WWI-hero parts [in the movie] all came from *Mein Kampf*.”

Michael gave a comparatively positive review on *Der Untergang*, in particular the actor’s personification of Hitler—“I personally think it was a good illustration. Bruno Ganz’s voice did not come out too strong or too much over the top.” The movie’s overall depiction of Hitler was “very close to” the image of Hitler that Michael had in his mind.

Michael particularly liked the production team’s arrangement of showing Hitler’s generous side at the beginning of the film (e.g. Hitler being generous, kind to and supportive of his new secretary). “This made Hitler’s madness [in the later part of the movie] even more illogical.”

Michael said he could not forget the scene in which a group of Hitler Youth members vow to stop Russian tanks from romping into Berlin. The other unforgettable scene was where Frau Goebbels poisons her children. “These scenes showed how mad a system could be and how mad a system could make the people to be.”

Michael did have a minor complaint regardless of his generally positive review on *Der Untergang*—“ I would recast Goebbels; [that actor] fit better in a *Zombie* movie than this kind of drama. His look was too much.”

Michael believed both movies to some extent wanted to show a “collective madness” that German people were in during WWII. “That was exactly what we were back then... but not today. We have a stable democratic system and a totally different set of values.”

Michael said these two movies’ positions were “very close to” his understanding of that part of history.

### **Steffen: the “new” German**

Steffen did not strike the researcher as a reserved individual but rather shy. One possible reason

was his stuttering issue but as long as given enough time to fully express himself, Steffen could be the most thoughtful among the group. And once feeling comfortable enough to open up, Steffen provided the most fascinating comments, many of them truly beyond one's expectation.

Though an aspiring filmmaker himself and truly in love with film as an expressive medium, Steffen saw only one to two movies in the movie theatre per year. The major reason for this was that most movies out there failed to meet his standard: "The kind of movies I like, such as *Blade Runner*, *The Matrix*, *Inception*, etc, are rarely made."

Though born and raised in Germany, Steffen basically did not see German movies: "I don't like German cinemas. In my humble opinion, they appear to be pretentious and self-obsessed. [Those movies] are not made to entertain but to preach. That's not art. That's not good movie-making."

For Steffen, going to the movies was mainly to be stimulated by those stunning "visual effects" or "sound effects." "[Going to the movie] is about the visual experience... If people want to hear a lot of dialogue, they can simply attend a stage play or listen to a radio drama."

Steffen still watched comedies but he "had rather watch them on TV and would not even bother to buy the DVDs."

Stardom did not have any effect on Steffen's decision on what movie to see—"An actor is never a reason for me to go to the cinema." Neither were film critics' as well as friends' commentaries—"Their [views] are all purely subjective." He believed that movie going was a person's own interaction with the visual text and ought not to be influenced by others.

Though preferring rather "graphic" movies, Steffen was able to provide his insight on what elements a good movie might need to have in terms of plot and content. "A good movie is able to convey two completely different themes into one narrative." Here Steffen referred to

numerous subplots which seemed to oppose one another and lead to directions exactly opposite from what might be expected at the beginning based on characters' backgrounds and characteristics. One example he gave was of the film *Forrest Gump*. The protagonist, a seemingly "stupid" man in the cohorts, "was the only person acting rationally throughout the movie, while Jenny, who actually has the mental capacities to lead a successful life, goes bad and Lt. Dan, a 'normal man,' attempts to achieve the goal of being a war hero at all costs."

Steffen added, "A movie can become a masterpiece if the plot is embedded in a larger context, like a historical period, which provides enough room for interpretations, offers viewers a new look on their generation and makes them think more deeply about the given time and space."

As an audience, Steffen, as a person appreciating the visual aspect of film as a medium, focused on "cinematography." He also paid attention to actors' performance. "I want to see the actors interpreting the screenplays naturally as if no instruction was given. [Otherwise], they are just reading or are robots on screen."

Steffen, when asked what kind of movies about Hitler he would like to see, gave a rather extensive response. Here is Steffen's answer unedited: "What really would make me want to see a new Hitler movie is a whole new portrayal of the era 1900 to 1933. So far filmmakers have been reluctant to analyze in their Third Reich pictures what actually was the catalyst that made the German population fall for Hitler's promises and hate speeches. There were specific reasons why Jews were viewed so negatively during that time like German employees being dismissed by their Jewish employers. Of course, such points are controversial, but I think it would be intriguing to finally make a movie on National Socialism from the perspective that Hitler's followers were actually just victims of their time and they were lacking the broader view we now

have on what it takes to act humanely and to get rid of one's own prejudices.”

Steffen was capable of summing up his history teachers' view on Hitler—“They generally refused to picture Hitler as a mentally ill person. They'd rather think of him as an ambitious and aggressive politician pursuing radical goals as opposed to a sociopath suffering from an inferior complex. Depicting Hitler as a sociopath [could be a problem] because then one would say that he was not to blame for what he did.”

Steffen learned about his grandparents' days under the regime through his parents. “My maternal grandfather even was a member of the Polish Resistance fighting against the Reicharmee.”

Concerning German identity, Steffen said, “I don't really feel 100% associated with German culture [because of our family's immigrant status.]” He further explicated, “[Growing up] I had a lot of contact with immigrant children from Romania, Croatia and Turkey. Actually, my story sounds very typical after the fall of the Iron Curtain. The border opens and people from Eastern Europe move to wealthy Germany for better life. The population becomes more multicultural.”

Steffen shared his life of being raised in Germany, “My mom cooks meals that are not considered German at all. Those dishes are her own creations or classic Polish dishes... I don't consider myself really German but also not Polish, since I don't speak the language. I am actually very cosmopolitan.”

Steffen began his comments on *Der Untergang* by summarizing the production team's speculated position: “The movie portrays Hitler as a very self-obsessed and withdrawn man... not interested in what the German people want but merely taking the liberty to impose on the German people his idea of a future Germany. “ Obviously, this (speculated) position went

against what Steffen was educated to believe but Steffen said he appreciated this stance as well.

Steffen's summary of the production team's position might stem from the scene which he labeled as the most memorable among all scenes—the scene in which Hitler refuses to accept the real reason why German Army has not reached Berlin (most battalions have long been smashed or the troops are short of supplies) and then Hitler starts ranting hysterically. “This is the moment when all people present notice that there is something seriously wrong about this man,” said Steffen. Steffen believed that the production team of the film managed to “hint possible mental illness in Hitler... a person losing common sense and locking himself away from reality.” He then admitted, “[The film] did change my view on Hitler a bit.”

When asked how he would do it if ever given the opportunity to remake *Der Untergang*, Steffen provided a quite extensive layout. To begin with, Steffen would adopt “a very different structure.” The film would set Hitler's last days in the bunker as the present time and, through flashbacks, allows Hitler an arena to “recall the early stages of his life, such as his artistic ambition... frustration of failing the art college entrance examination, his painful time in WWI...his explanation for coming to the necessity of getting rid of Jews.” Such an arrangement was meant to “suggest that Hitler suffered from some disturbed personality and to show Hitler's worldview through his own account of those events.” But Steffen said he would also handle the piece with caution—“I would not want to show him as an innocent victim.”

Steffen spoke highly of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*, even though he also labeled *Der Untergang* as an “almost perfect film”—“I liked the fact that film showed him as a human being with emotions, hopes, desires, sorrows and frustrations.” Steffen did notice the mini-series' historical inaccuracies though but those irregularities did not bother him: “It was supposed to be art, not a history lesson.”

Steffen said, before he was involved in this research project, he had always believed that Hitler “was a man with artistic talent who should have succeeded and stood out among his fellow men but who was taken to another direction by fate.” The mini-series’ portrayal of Hitler was “very similar to” what Steffen thought of Hitler.

Steffen liked the scene in which Hitler submits a report to the German Labor Party to his superior to propose the idea of having all Jews be deported, which Hitler’s supervisor rejects due to the suggestion’s unfeasibility. “Jews should be deported... It’s very feasible, sir,” says Hitler. Steffen liked this scene very much because it effectively presented “Hitler’s true view.”

Steffen gave Robert Carlyle a big applause for the actor’s portrayal of Germany’s former Fuehrer. If the TV movie was ever to be remade, he would love to see more of Hitler’s childhood.

## **Findings**

This small group of participants tended to agree that a movie needed to have an interesting plot (i.e. good story, something new) in order to attract their attention. An actor’s aura (e.g. stardom) might not always be the key determinant of a film’s value. If an actor’s presence ever had any impact on a film’s value in any way, it would be quality of the actor’s performance rather than the performer’s pre-established fame. This might be owing to the fact that there have been so many professional actors and actresses out there; especially for these participants born and raised in Germany and so far away from the capital of entertainment, they would not always keep themselves updated of emerging talents.

It is interesting that these informants had the proclivity of deciding what movie to see predominately based on “word of mouth.” This word of mouth would not be any random hearsay but rather comments made by someone who an informant shared similar tastes with. All

female participants shared this tendency along with one male participant. One female participant might also take critics' views into account. One participant would have trailers as the major determinant.

Indeed, while numerous school districts might share some similar class activities when teaching students about the country's Nazi past, there was not necessarily a uniform interpretation of that part of history, in particular how Hitler should be positioned in history. There might be an underlying bottom line, which was to make sure that "the horror" would not repeat itself. But if one wanted to point his finger at particular individuals to have those individuals to take the blame for "the horror," these subjects' teachers seemed to attribute the atrocities to different people. On the nature-nurture spectrum, Steffen's teachers wanted their pupils to believe that Hitler's problem was more of nurture (i.e. an ambitious artist going bad because of numerous circumstances) while other participants' teachers suggested otherwise (i.e. Hitler was born cruel, simply crazy).

These participants did not seem to share the same amount of knowledge about their country's Nazi past. These differences might be in part due to how much emphasis the school would like to put on the subject matter. Such inner discrepancies might also result from their families' attitudes towards the distant past. Carlotta said, "I know there are old people who are afraid to talk about it because of what they did or what they saw. There are also old people who like to talk about it, to share their experiences." This is exactly what we saw in these informants. Carlotta's family seemed to have no problem openly discussing Nazi history though there could be some small errors in the tales when those tales got passed down from one person to the next. We see differences in degree in how comfortable these German families were with discussing the families' days under the Nazi regime. In the case of Evelyn and her family, WWII was truly

something they would like to file and forget.

One thing worth a mention is that, while a recent survey which involved 2,000 Germans aged 14 and upwards shows that 60% of those filling out the questionnaire shared the sentiment “I’m proud to be German” and 78% would opt for German nationality with “near or absolute certainty” if free to choose their nation (Schreiber, 2009), participants in this research project tended not to have a high national identity. It is hard to attribute this tendency to one single factor. One possible reason for these participants’ relatively lower national identity level might be their constant exposure to foreign cultures (e.g. extensive travel, being a member of an international organization, being an exchange student). The fact that these participants were willing to come all the way to the US for school for a semester or simply for a vacation means that they were willing to come out of their comfort zone to be stimulated by and to appreciate something different from what they were used to. This suggests that they were not jingoists.

Addi’s notion might also serve as a possible explanation for these Germans’ lower national identity level—patriotism in Germany could be labeled as an equivalence to or support for the rejuvenation of Nazism and would need to be oppressed. Several participants stated that they were not patriotic (i.e. “I’m not patriotic,” “Patriotism never reaches me”).

To some extent, these German participants maintained a kind of love-hate relationship with their overall German identity. On the one hand, they were emotionally attached to that group identity, or even narcissistic about that part of their personal identities (i.e. proud of being a German) but on the other hand, they wanted to disown that part of identities due to the fact that it has been tainted ever since WWII (i.e. wishing to erase that Nazi part from history). One subject in this group (Michael) conveniently set a cutting point (“That was what we were back then but not now”) to split Germany into half—that before 1945 and that after 1945; he then

identified with the latter, the one not tainted.

At least one subject in this pool stated that his or her national identity level might be raised at some moments or in some contexts as a result of certain events that required Germans as a group to “fight against” others (the increase of us-them opposition). Michael brought up the World Cup and said he would rate himself a 4 on the German-ness scale while most of the time he would not rate himself as high. So Michael could fall into that 60% and 78% in Schreiber’s research during World Cup season while the rest of the time, he could be the other 40% and 22%.

In this small subject sample, we may notice that within Germany, some people might hold a stronger attachment to their regional culture than the main “Germanic” one. Throughout the interviews, Addi enjoyed being a representative of the Swabian people and tried one way or another to imply that his comments made in the interviews could more or less be traced back to his Swabian root. However, we might not conclude that all Swabians had such a strong regional identity. Though indeed taking pride in Swabian cuisines, Michael identified himself as a European rather than Swabian or German. Swabians represent 1 – 2% of total population in Germany (Bayern Statistics and Databank, 2010).

What, to some extent, can be a compliment to Niven’s research is that the fall of the Berlin Wall has brought us a “new Germany.” To begin with, as Steffen stated, the new Germany was made of lots of immigrants from Eastern Europe—the German population now is no longer monolithic as it once was. But this pluralism might still be in an amorphous state with the old element remaining as the base. Here, Steffen, having himself as an example, demonstrated a kind of identity crisis that a second-generation immigrant might experience—he did not feel 100% German but he did not identify with his parents ethnically or culturally without being able to speak his parents’ mother tongue.

We may say that for this research project, we recruited a group of “audiences” as opposed to an “audience.” Indeed, we found drastic differences (at least according to Fiske’s standard) even within these 6 individuals all holding German passports. With that aside, we could still see differences among these subjects in terms of their readings of these two films, particularly what kind of person they thought the film teams were trying to make Hitler to be on screen. But eventually, these participants more or less fell into the “negotiated-reading” category, agreeing to the films’ speculated stances despite the fact that they did criticize those films during the interviews, except one participant, Evelyn. She nodded her head throughout the discussion on those two films, appearing to agree to every single thing shown on screen. So was she a “dominant-hegemonic reader?”

We might recall those adjectives Evelyn came up with to describe Hitler—“evil, cruel, tyrannical, racist, diabolical, inhuman.” If we took the two film teams’ declared positions (humanization of Hitler, Hitler as a failed artist) into account, then Evelyn might no longer belong to the dominant-hegemonic group but could be seen as an oppositional reader because her readings of the two films were in sharp contrast to the film teams’ positions. But if we examined Evelyn’s comments more closely, we might find that Evelyn was not oppositional after all. When asked to identify the two films’ views on Hitler, she stated that in *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*, Hitler was illustrated as “a devil in disguise... winding people around with his little fingers” and in *Der Untergang*, Hitler was “a very unpleasant and diabolical character that frightens people because of his screaming voice and his cruel behavior.” So for Evelyn, the two film teams’ basic positions were that Hitler was a “devil in disguise” (evil), “diabolical” and a figure who “frightens” people (terrifying). These stances were in line with her view on Hitler.

Evelyn shared with us her family history, in particular the heart-breaking story about her

grandparents losing their brothers in combat. This piece of information might help us place Evelyn's readings of the films in context.

It is Evelyn's wish of not seeing horrifying history repeating itself that Evelyn adopted the seemingly dominant-hegemonic reading approach. For her, "terrifying" and "diabolical" Hitler in movies served as a reassurance—she could then convince herself that a figure as Hitler now would live only on screen, not in real life anymore. When watching the two movies examined in the research project, she played out the defensive mechanism called "confirmation bias" (McGraw, 2002), where information that contradicts established opinions or desired statement gets discounted or filtered out. All of those parts in the two movies where Hitler's human sides were depicted got disregarded with only the "terrifying" and "diabolical" parts entering into her memory bank. The two films then could serve the reassurance and remedy purpose that she would like films about Hitler to serve. One comment might verify Evelyn's utilization of confirmation bias—when asked what she would say if a film's depiction of Hitler was contrary to her view on the country's former Fuehrer, she responded tersely, "Appearance is deceiving." She simply labeled anything in conflict with her notion and called them "deceiving."

The conceptualization of Evelyn's readings of the two films might draw us back to Hall's insight—a reading of a text can be an interaction between a shared memory or personal history and the text. Evelyn's case was the interaction between a text and a shared memory (her family's trauma). In Steffen's case, it was the interaction between Steffen's personal experience and the text (specifically, *Hitler: the Rise of Evil*).

Steffen contended that film watching was "the audience's personal interaction with the film." Janet Radway, from her classic study on a group of housewives' readings of romance novels, concluded that these women she worked with were apt to see readings of texts (those

novels) as a personal or private activity and this tendency was partially shown in their emotional attachment and strong identification with characters in the stories (Radway, 1993). Steffen was doing just what those housewives were doing. As an aspiring filmmaker still attempting to break into the film industry but to no avail thus far, Steffen found some similarities between himself and Hitler, in particular Hitler's attempt to get admitted to The Fine Arts Academy.

James Monaco (2000) argues that Bruce Willis' characters in the late 1980s and early 1990s typically have some soft spots or "flaws," (i.e. showing fear, being depressed, making mistakes) which then make these heroes more down-to-earth and believable. These German participants seemed to call for something similar when it comes to the depiction of Hitler but in an opposite direction. Willis' characters are meant to show a common man doing great deeds as opposed to a distant flawless superman in eye-catching attire, be it neoprene muscle suit or cowboy costume, doing something marvelous. A better-rounded character development has been expected for "a good guy" on screen but now this probably might be suggested for a "bad guy" as well. In addition, a great deed looks greater if carried out by "a guy next door"; atrocities might look scarier when it is done by a seemingly normal person. An audience might be truly stunned on account of their relatively lower expectation, no matter the occurrence was positive or negative.

## **Conclusion**

Indeed, a reader's reading of a text can be an individual's "personal" interaction with the text but the examination of the text-reader dyad will not appear complete without the activity of decoding being placed in a broader socio-cultural context. In the case of these informants, their readings of the two films were constantly shaped by their ongoing socialization process—their family upbringing, their schooling, their exposure to related subjects in the media, their identification

with certain groups, etc. It is through the exploration of these subjects' socialization process that these subjects' readings of the texts could be better comprehended and appreciated.

It is also worth a mention that a modern audience might not be as passive or ill-informed as it is thought to be. This small group of audiences demonstrated an awareness of the filmmaking process beyond the two texts and at times the ability to be critical.

Though a sample as small as this one can never represent the general audience as a whole, it might be interesting to compare and contrast the informants' responses to interview questions.

Firstly, almost all informants (five out of six) stated that a good movie needed to have "interesting plots" or needed to be "interesting," though "interesting plots" could mean different things to different people. Two informants (Evelyn and Michael) defined an interesting plot as something which might provoke some thinking ("make you think," "make me think afterwards") while two informants (Carlotta and Katja) suggested that an interesting plot needed to be able to provoke certain emotions ("totally break your heart or make you laugh").

Four informants (Carlotta, Addi, Michael and Steffen) stressed the entertainment purpose of a feature film. For them, interesting plots needed to be "not boring," "entertaining," "not preaching" or "something original and new." However, one among these four (Addi) stated that no matter how entertaining a plot was, it had to make sense and should not have been farcical ("logical").

To two of these six young Germans (Michael and Carlotta), their emotional connection with characters in a movie or a movie as a whole was very important. They wanted to be able to "feel the characters" or "be part of the movie." The emotional connection could be established or enhanced by giving the movie a "realist" feel (i.e. using natural light and no makeup on actors).

Five of the informants (Carlotta, Katja, Evelyn, Michael and Steffen) were not frequent movie goers. This phenomenon coincides with Kaes' finding that German people do not usually go to the movies and prefer watching movies at home (Kaes, 1992).

All of the six preferred American movies over German films—at least they all ended up watching more American movies than German ones if they ever went to the theatre. One (Steffen) stated that German films tended to be “preaching and pretentious.”

Four informants (Carlotta, Evelyn, Katja and Addi) decided whether or not a movie was worth watching based on their friends' comments but two of these four (Carlotta and Evelyn) would also take film critics' reviews into account although critics' reviews would play relatively minor roles in their decision-making process.

Three informants (Steffen, Michael and Evelyn) would be triggered to watch a film if the film was marketed with a good trailer.

Five informants' views on Hitler constructed based on what they had learnt about Hitler from school were very negative (“crazy,” “diabolical,” “evil”) while one informant's (Steffen's) was less so (ambitious politician going down a wrong track).

Two informants (Carlotta and Steffen) directly stated that they would like to see a movie about “Hitler's childhood.”

Three informants (Carlotta, Michael and Addi) found Megda-poisoning-children scene most unforgettable in *Der Untergang*.

Interestingly, four informants said they did not find any moments in *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* particularly memorable. One (Carlotta) named the Hitler-beat-Foxl scene; one (Michael) named the scene towards the end of Part I where Hitler was given a light sentence of nine months at court for treason.

The production teams of both *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* and *Der Untergang* stated publicly that they meant to humanize Hitler (“make Hitler human,” “three-dimensional”). But not all participants could get the crucial “message.” First of all, two informants had no idea of where these two production teams stood when asked about the production teams’ position(s). Secondly, the other four informants, who did somewhat summarize the production teams’ position(s), did not necessarily agree on the “message” they got from the two production teams.

One informant (Katja) believed that the American production team tried to (re)present a desperate Hitler while the German production team sympathized with Hitler (“make him someone you can take pity on”). One informant (Addi) believed that both production teams wanted to (re)present Hitler as an insane individual, which was very close to his personal view on Hitler. One informant (Michael) criticized the American production team for sentimentalizing Hitler’s early life (illustrating Hitler as a boy with an unpleasant childhood and a brave soldier during WWI) and thought that the German production team wanted to present how “illogical” Hitler was towards the end of the war. Only one informant (Steffen) partially got the production teams’ message(s)—he found that the German production team presented a Hitler who lost touch with reality, probably a bit insane, but that, quite different from its German counterpart, the American production team made Hitler more like a “human being with drives and ambitions.”

If we deem sympathizing with Hitler and sentimentalizing Hitler’s early days a way to humanize Hitler (sympathizing with Hitler so making him a human being as opposed to a psychopath or devil; sentimentalizing Hitler’s early days so that Hitler would be a human being that the audience takes pity on or looks up to), then two informants (Michael and Steffen) got the American production team’s message and one informant (Katja) got the German production team’s. If only the exact wording could be counted (“humanize,” “human being”), then only the

American production team's message went across and was received by only one informant (Steffen).

This small group of informants—middle-class Germans aged 18 to 30—indeed cannot represent all “audiences” but one may take these informants’ responses to interview questions into consideration when he or she decides what movie to make, how he or she may make the movie and how he or she should market his or her movie. A movie can be of any genre but needs to be original and entertaining. It should be able to provoke certain emotions and thinking but should never “preach.” A movie might be appealing if it has an all-star cast but what matters more may be the actors’ acting skills. The most efficient marketing tool (free and traveling fast) is “word-of-mouth.” A good trailer can help too. Film critics’ positive reviews, interestingly, might relatively have less impact.

When making a biographical film of a figure as controversial as Hitler, one might need to find a good balance between (re)presenting the figure’s positive side and illustrating the figure’s dark side. Depicting a figure such as Hitler as pure evil or pure good may not resonate with the audience. Too extreme an illustration (i.e. pure evil) could keep an audience emotionally detached from the film (i.e. He’s just a crazy person) right from the start and subsequently fail to churn up the emotion (i.e. fear for the character) the film is meant to ignite. Furthermore, one should not expect that his or her set position or “message” (i.e. the controversial figure as a saint or devil) will necessarily be picked up by the audience. This discrepancy between the message that a filmmaker intends to send and the message which the audience receives might be the result of the “interaction” between the audience’s life experience and the text.

Lastly, the audience may be interested in a psychological conceptualization of a controversial figure’s behaviors (what makes him who and what he is), in particular his

childhood.

This research project with such a small sample was never intended to encapsulate all Germans' views on Hitler or all Germans' readings of the two film texts. Differences in responses to those interview questions even within this small group would make generalization impossible. Rather, this project could serve as an inspiration or starting point for a more extensive project of a similar nature with a larger and more diverse informant body. As Lukacs's and Niven's findings have suggested, it is time for us to reexamine how Germans think of Hitler decades after those major events that have changed the country and the world.

## Chapter 4

Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater, in the essay she presented at National Council of Teachers of English titled “Turning in Upon Ourselves: Positionality, Subjectivity and Reflexivity,” makes the following comments: “For ethnographers, writing about how we are positioned is part of the data. We are trained to take field notes on how we negotiate entrance into the community, how we present ourselves to our informants, how we perceive ourselves to our informants, how we think our informants perceive us—in addition to what we think is linguistically and socially significant in the culture under investigation” (Chiseri-Strater, 1996). Chiseri-Strater means to remind social scientists, in particular those who adopt field research as their method of collecting data, of the impact of their presence on their informants, in turn data they may obtain, the fact that they are never “the invisible man” no matter how hard they try to be, and of the need to treat their presence as one of the variables when they analyze the qualitative data. Chiseri-Strater, as the title of her essay has foreshadowed, later proposes the idea of asking a researcher to be “reflexive”—a researcher is suggested to reflect upon the “process” of conducting his or her research project. The self-reflection exercise is hoped to go beyond a diary-like narrative to allow the researcher to be critical about his or her own approach towards the subject matter and informants under examination (Chiseri- Strater, 1996).

Chiseri-Strater’s remark on ethnography, in the mid-1990s, may be seen as nothing beyond a re-iteration, echo or reassurance; at that very space and time, the proposal was never considered original. Jennifer Robertson, in *Anthropological Quarterly*, writes: “It is now taken for granted that a good ethnography should be ‘reflexive’” (Robertson, 2002). But looking back, on the historical development of ethnography, Robertson states that self-reflection did not earn its orthodoxy in fieldwork until early 1980s. According to Robertson, Jay Ruby’s edited volume,

*A Crack in the Mirror: Reflexive Perspective in Anthropology* (published in 1982), finally confirms the arrival of reflexivity in ethnography. A social scientist or a humanist is now expected to have “the capacity to turn back upon or to mirror on himself or herself” (Robertson, 2002). Robertson further elaborates that Ruby’s proposition stems from his awareness of the mode of ethnographic writing “in which factual material was presented by an omniscient yet invisible author-narrator whose methods of fieldwork and data collecting were not always manifest, and who did not address the effect of her or his presence on others, much less the various effects that others may have had on her or him” (Robertson, 2002). Ruby proposes reflexivity as a corrective to that mode. Since then, self-reflection has become a standard process. It has been so well recognized that this trend inspires some scholars to go back to re-examine their past research. One example is Margery Wolf, who conducted an extensive field research project in Taiwan on Shamanism back in the 1960s but then in early 1990s revisited her old field notes and published the classic text *A Thrice-told Tale: Feminism, Ethnography and Responsibility*, a more “up-to-date” volume interwoven with tales about her process of working with local people.

This closing chapter of the dissertation indeed is to create an arena for me as a researcher to “mirror on” myself and to even conduct a critical “autopsy” upon myself to follow the footsteps of my predecessors who have treated self-reflection as part of their qualitative data. But it has another significance—my rather unique position as a researcher from the East. D. Soyini Madison, in the upcoming book *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics and Performance*, says, “Positionality is vital because it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege and biases ...” (Madison, 2012). Madison, in addition to reminding ethnographers of the need to address their positions, takes one step further suggesting ethnographers to examine the power

struggle between themselves and their informants, assuming that an ethnographer is the privileged while the informants are the under-privileged. Before Madison makes this remark, Michelle Fine outlines three positions in ethnographic research—(1) ventriloquist stance, where a researcher, serving as a tape recorder, “objectively” reports what informants say, completely detached (2) positionality voice, where an ethnographer lets the informants do the talking with the hope to eventually counter or challenge dominant discourses and practices (3) activism stance, where a researcher intends to have his or her work serve as “intervention for social change” (Fine, 1994).

The ideas Madison and Fine enumerate have often been recognized as a conventional school of thoughts. This school of thoughts may be traced back to the same underlining assumption or tradition—ethnography, grounded in and deriving from westerners’ examination on the “Others’” cultures, is an activity of a person of a higher social-economic status or from a better-developed world to study a group of people who are comparatively marginalized. Madison’s remark is to bring the class struggle between an ethnographer and his or her informants to the conscious level. The warning against the “ventriloquist stance” is to prevent an ethnographer’s self-assigned or conventionally recognized privileged status from aggravating the pre-established power imbalance between the ethnographer and the informants through pseudo-scientific, seemingly objective methodologies; the positionality-voice stance is meant to create or maintain an at times superficial equality between the researcher and the informants; activism stance, with the assumption that the researcher’s society is more “advanced” or “civilized,” is to, hopefully through direct interactions with the informants, enhance the informants’ quality of life and even to imbue, if not only to introduce, the researcher’s more “civilized” value into the informants’ minds. But what if an ethnographer comes from a less privileged society in

comparison to his informants?

The following paragraphs will begin with a truncated historical account and narrative of what led to my investment in this research project followed by the self-reflexive “self-representation” delineated by Chiseri-Strater quoted at the beginning of this essay. I will then move one step further examining how my Asian background interacted with my informants’ European identity (or identities), especially considering the fact that Asian cultures generally are deemed more primitive in comparison to western ones based on conventionally construed binary oppositional system. Particularly, I will be discussing some psychical processes I went through during the process of working with my European informants and what tactics I took to work out the dynamics which might have negative impact on my role as a researcher.

Born and raised in a small town (Chutung) in Taiwan, about 2 hours southwest of Taipei, I had been taught by American teachers from elementary school to high school (only for the subject of English, 3 to 4 hours per week). It is through my English class in my 7<sup>th</sup> grade that I developed my passion for creative writing. One’s racial identity undergoes three stages—(i) Pre-encounter or unexamined ethnic identity, where one’s ethnic or racial aspect of self-identity has never come to the foreground owing to the lack of exposure to other ethnic groups (ii) encounter and immersion or ethnic identity search, where one, as a result of interacting with another ethnic group, comes to search for the answer to the question “who am I” in racial terms (iii) internalization and achieved ethnic identity, where one eventually finds the answer to the question “who am I” in racial terms, no matter the answer bears the undertone of whether or not one group is more superior than the other (Cross, 1992). During these formative years, though taught by American teachers (interestingly, all Caucasian teachers), I had never been aware of the differences between myself and my teachers, ethnic issues never on my radar. To me, those

teachers were just human beings speaking a language different from my mother tongue.

Throughout my adolescent years, I managed to polish up my skills as a writer, composing short stories (3,000 to 6,000 words) each summer. I also started to take interest in script writing. In addition to those short stories, I also produced student radio dramas with my cousins and sister. I played multiple characters in those radio dramas, was responsible for plot development and composed theme songs for the numerous series.

In July 1998, just shortly before I went off to college, through a non-profit organization, I got acquainted with “Mikey,” a 21-year-old inmate in the state of Georgia, who I am still in touch with up to now. Mikey was the first foreigner I knew outside a professional relationship (i.e. teacher-student relationship). Half Irish and half German, he identified himself as a “Neo-Nazi,” having stabbed a knife into a black couple’s chests 40-plus times until the husband and wife were bathed in a pool of blood and having been serving his time since the age of 16. (His court case attracted media’s attention for a short period of time; a publisher in California once wanted to publish a book about it.) Wearing a Swastika tattoo on one of his arms, Mikey was a firm believer in the superiority of the Aryan race and once talked extensively about the “racial hierarchy,” where whites were on the top, then the “yellow people” (Asians), then the “red” (Native Americans, Hispanics, “Spaniards”) and the bottom “Jews and Niggers or Negros, who should be exterminated.” Mikey was blunt. Though never verbally violent towards me, he could be overcome by impulses. (We mainly write letters; we once talked on the phone when I lived in Boston from 2002 to 2004.) I had heard of racism and racial discrimination but it is my communication with Mikey that I realized how serious racism could be in real life.

I conducted my first field research project in my sophomore year in college for a media and cultural studies class. The semester-long project led me to interviewing WWII German as

well as American veterans to see propagandas' impacts on them. It was not easy to work with German informants. A lot of them could get very emotional—one could talk to them about anything but the WWII era.

March 1999 marked an important moment in my life—I wrote a radio drama (revelation of a forbidden love under the Nazi regime based on some biographies I read during my free time). This piece won the accolade of the professors in the literature department and better still, that of Mr. Yi Chang, an award-winning director who was the key person in Taiwanese film history in the 1980s.

I started my Master's in Mental Health Counseling Psychology at Boston College in 2002 right after I graduated from college with a BA in English Literature in Taiwan. Caucasian students represented at least 80 to 85% of the total student body at Boston College. I experienced racial discrimination head-on. I went into a pizzeria place for a late dinner after class. When I was in a line waiting to place my order, the clerk skipped me, asked those white students after me for their orders and asked me last after all of the white students behind me were taken care of. When I finally walked out with my food, I noticed that a white student in my class was sitting in the back watching “the show” and stared at me when I stepped out with my pizza.

I witnessed and experienced racial segregation in my classrooms at Boston College. I and my roommate (A Taiwanese American) together with two Japanese girls always sat together in the corner; behind us were a black girl and a black guy. In the class Multi-cultural Issues in Counseling, white students sat in the front, non-white in the back, and the class very often resulted in frustrating quarrels—white students hated it when their whiteness was recognized as an original sin and non-white students accused white students of playing innocent and of presenting themselves as victims of affirmative action.

In 2005, I came to California to start my doctoral studies. Fortunately, the racial discrimination nightmare barely repeated itself. I wrote the first draft of my full-length screenplay in December 2003 when I was “stranded” in my apartment in Boston for a week as a direct reaction to Mr. Yi Chang’s personal congratulations on my work on the Nazi-love-story radio drama in college. Now that I was not far away from the capital of the entertainment industry, I really needed to take advantage of the resources. I was lucky enough to come across professionals in the industry who were willing to give me feedback on my numerous drafts and also through them, I was able to work briefly with the late Monsieur Michel Hugo, the cinematographer of the original 1960s *Mission: Impossible* TV series, nominee for an Emmy and a great teacher (professor of Film at UNV-Las Vegas), who helped me understand the language of films. However, I had problem getting my foot in the door. No companies requested my screenplay in response to my “cover letter.”

I had been in touch with Herr Carr, an oral historian living in Frankfurt once featured on History Channel and who helped me with my field research back in 2000. In 2007, Herr Carr introduced me to Frau Vollmerhaus and her son Mike. Frau Vollmerhaus, around 78 at that time, a retired elementary school teacher, enchanted me with her tales about growing up under the Nazi regime. I learnt a great deal but the information was gathered with tactics as Frau Vollmerhaus and Mike were both very straight-forward when it came to emotions, in particular negative ones. I often got intimidated. In my culture, this was never expected—a person, when in a bad mood, will try suppressing his or her negative emotions (i.e. anger) when he or she talks to a person who was not the igniter of those negative emotions. It took me a while to learn that I should not have taken how Frau Vollmerhaus interacted with me at some moments too personally.

And since they were the very first Germans I knew and talked to, I could not help taking their way of interacting with me for how Germans interact with others in general.

My roommate from 2005 to 2007, Dave Hausser, a political science student and a (3<sup>rd</sup>-generation) German American, came back on campus to visit me in September 2008. He knew about my constant work with Mikey and my small personal collection of WWII German relics together with my communication with Frau Vollmerhaus. At the dinner table, he recommended some books about representations of Hitler and a possible research project along with a feasible research methodology, which later served as the basic structure of this dissertation.

My creative writing “career” was still in a pathetic state. An Italian director taught me how to write a proper cover letter. I sent it to over 200 companies before it attracted some attention. The economic downturn made a lot of independent film companies to be willing to produce only “in-house” scripts. One producer showed strong interest in the proposed project but either because the interest waned or he had too many projects under his belt, he reduced the frequency of communicating with me and eventually stopped talking to me altogether. Over one and half years had tip-toed away before I decided to drop the project. (Later, the producer was found dead suddenly one night at the age of 28, cause unidentified; his death was reported in the newspaper.)

I was back on ground zero. I sent my cover letter to another 300 companies before I was offered a contract with a film company I then worked with for 18 months. I found myself privileged because I was given the opportunity to learn by doing, re-writing the script from beat sheet, treatment, scene list to script. But at times the work could be frustrating—I was chided for not doing things right. And I was caught in the ugly politics in the film industry, particularly the tug-of-war between the producer and the director. The contract ended in the past April and I

withdrew from the team, beaten and enraged.

On the other hand, a short film script I wrote back in early 2008 caught a producer's attention. He asked me to write two more of a similar theme. I did; the second of the two got rejected. The producer began fundraising campaign in January, 2011, thus far to no avail. I personally think that unless a project has moved into pre-production, one should never announce that he "has a project." Thus far, none of my projects is in pre-production. I still cannot introduce myself to others as a screenwriter and can feel frustrated thinking about it.

Steven Bailey, in the book *Media Audiences and Identity*, splits identity into two parts—"I," the outer impulsive actor and "me," the inner being conventionally adherent to symbolic norms (Bailey, 2005). I personally understand Bailey's insight as such—"Me," one's inner self sculpted by the socio-cultural surroundings and the base of one's identity; "I," the self-presentation which may often impulsively react to outer stimuli, in particular those challenging or threatening the inner self, the "me." Carl Rogers proposes such concepts as "real self" and "ideal self"—"real self" is who realistically is, and "ideal self" is who one wishes to be (Rogers, 1952).

I tend to conceptualize racism or rather, white supremacy, using Bailey's and Rogers' constructs. White supremacists have a collective image of "ideal self" (which may be traced back to the imperialist era). There is drastic "incongruence" between their "ideal self" and "real self." These white supremacists, having long internalized the self-idolized image, take the "ideal self" for "real" self" and keep on living with that false image. Racists' "me" has been elevated. Whenever they feel that their high status is threatened (i.e. anti-racists' effort to confront them), they (their "I") react impulsively in order to safeguard that "me" from being dragged down from

the pedestal.

Mikey introduced himself as a Neo-Nazi and white supremacist right at the start of our communication. Over the years, he has turned “mild” in his tone and learnt to respect others, including non-white people. In his early days, he got into fights with black inmates almost all the time—I remember numerous incidents where he came back to me for comfort with bruises. He then learnt to dine with black inmates without confronting them physically or verbally. Now Mikey can team up with black inmates for baseball practice though at times, he finds himself emphasizing his Neo-Nazi identity in some of our discussions—“No matter what, I will always remain a Neo-Nazi deep in my bone and blood.”

It is an interesting contrast to compare Mikey with my classmates at Boston College, who often identified themselves as left-leaning liberals and strong believers in social justice, who condemned racism but actually did what they said they were condemning. When I realized that left-leaning liberals (relatively open-minded and open to equalitarianism) could actually be racists, I could not help assuming that the majority of white people were racists to some extent.

Robert E. Lane, in his classics text *Political Psychology*, states that a person’s identity consists of three parts—“self-awareness,” “self-description” and “self-esteem” (Lane, 1962). This may be translated into thus—one’s awareness of what he or she is good at, one’s belief in himself or herself in being able to handle tasks revolving around the thing he or she thinks he or she is good at, and the gap between how good one believes he or she is and how good one “actually is” which may result in what he or she thinks of himself or herself as a whole (self-worth).

The past few years, I have been facing an “identity crisis” (Erikson, 1965). Eric Erikson believes that one major task for a young adult is to find his or her professional niche in the

society. Growing up, I have always believed that I am a good storyteller and writer. I won awards at writing contests (both in Chinese and English). And Mr. Chang's comment on my radio drama script suggested that I got a talent for script writing. So I have long identified myself as a writer, in particular a scriptwriter. I want to break into the film industry as a screenwriter one way or another. However, one rejection after another frustrates me. I start to have "self doubt." I feel lost.

Chinese people believe in harmony. This belief in harmony is very often reflected upon interpersonal relationship and how Chinese people interact with others. The basic rule of thumb is, when communicating, one should make sure that the other will not be offended, intimidated, frustrated, etc so that the harmony can be maintained. Should there be any potential that the other may be offended or that any negative emotions may be begotten, the person is supposed to try his or her utmost to minimize the impact.

My experiences of working with WWII German veterans and the Vollmerhaus family gave me the impression that Germans could get intimidated easily. Partially owing to cultural differences, on several occasions, these German elders could flare up out of the blue and hung up the phone in the middle of the conversation because they "don't want to talk about it." This, along with the belief that all whites can be racists to some extent, their collective tendency of bouncing back if they feel their elevated "me" was challenged, made me to be extra cautious when dealing with participants and even potential participants in my dissertation project.

My challenge as a Chinese researcher began at as early as the recruitment stage. To begin with, while The Claremont Colleges had 17 students from Germany the semester I conducted the field research, only 4 responded to my invitation to take part in the research, all females. One of the four constantly expressed her interest in the research project but did not even return the

signed consent form; she kept apologizing for 6 months without taking any further action.

I was able to have the recruitment letter distributed among some young Germans visiting this area between Christmas and February through an associate of mine. I faced a similar challenge. Eventually, I ended up having only 3 male participants. I was well aware of my own frustration but partially because of my Chinese harmony upbringing and also with the fear that I might breach the research protocol, I could not but send friendly reminders to those who once said they were willing to take part in the research project but never even hit goal one with consent forms. I did not feel comfortable with constantly buzzing those potential participants until they gave in as I would do with submission of my screenplays as a person wanting to break into the film industry so desperately. It would just break the harmony I was brought up to appreciate. And also, I was not asking for services but favors, especially from those who might consider themselves every inch the superior. The only thing I could do was to report the situation briefly to my committee so that my stress level might be brought down a bit.

Carlotta was my very first informant. It was a pleasure working with her—she was polite, approachable, always willing to share and wore a smile all the time. When I transcribed the recorded interviews verbatim, I noticed one tendency—whenever I referred to WWII Nazi history, I almost always said “that part of history.” I conceptualized this peculiar expression as a “euphemism”—because of the sensitive nature of the subject matter to some Germans up to this day (as my past experiences of working with those German WWII veterans and the Vollmerhaus family have suggested) together with my impression that Germans could be easily intimidated if I was not cautious enough, I subconsciously used that peculiar expression with the hope that a potential negative impact on Carlotta could be avoided.

I did the same thing whenever I talked about Jewish people—I always used “Jewish

people” instead of “Jews” because I personally consider “Jews” with the same connotation as “Chinks.” I knew that Carlotta and other participants must have felt comfortable enough with discussing Nazism and Nazi history or they would not have chosen to take part in the research project. Eventually, to prevent such strange expressions from popping up again, I decided to better familiarize myself with the interview question list and stay close to what was written on the list.

When I was trained to be a psychotherapist, one thing I feared the most in therapy sessions was reticence and silence. Reticent patients might be easier to take care of because I could use the techniques “restatement” (repeating key words in the sentence the patient just said) and “reflection of feelings” (identifying the emotion attached to the sentence just said) to coax the patient into elaborating. But silence could be hard because in a way, it could reflect my incompetence.

The thing I feared the most as a therapist in training now repeated itself in my interviews with my second informant—Evelyn. Evelyn was the “leader” of the group—she was the first person responding to my recruitment pamphlet and mobilized her friends to join her to take part in the project. However, she was unusually quiet during the two interviews. “Restatement” or “reflection of feelings” did not work. I felt insecure, a bit frustrated and anxious during the two interviews and spent more energy dealing with my own emotions than posing and phrasing my questions. I thought Evelyn, probably not well informed of the nature of the interviews or what to come, was offended by some of the questions.

Silence in interviews became even longer and more often as the interviews became more advanced (moving into discussions on films). Towards the end, I even began to experience some sense of guilt, almost finding myself apologizing for asking questions that I should not have

asked. But later, I convinced myself not to take those awkward moments too personally. Evelyn actually called me to learn more about the research project before she signed up so she must have been well aware of what was to come. Furthermore, Evelyn considered herself a “cosmopolitan,” being exposed to a lot of different cultures including Chinese, so she must not have been as racist as I expected her to be.

Steffen was one-of-its-kind among the participants—a Polish born and raised in Germany and an aspiring filmmaker attempting to get into a film school. I personally believe that Steffen’s identification with Hitler in a large part derived from the similarity between his current status and Hitler’s early days (attempt to get admitted to the Fine Arts Academy but to no avail.)

Hitler was my 7<sup>th</sup> (distant) subject in the research project in addition to these 6 informants. I managed to stay detached from Hitler—Hitler was a painter *manqué* and I a screenwriter *manqué*. Steffen’s background indeed helped me understand where he was coming from (an aspiring filmmaker watching a film about a life of a painter *manqué*). Though able to be completely detached from Hitler, I found myself empathizing with Steffen, at times to the extent that I felt like sharing with him all of my struggles and hardship I encountered as I tried to break into the film industry. Between the two interviews, Steffen stayed in touch with me and talked about his aspirations. (In fact, he and I still chat via Skype once in a while up to now.) I felt his passion for being a filmmaker. Indeed, I was struggling myself with my creative writing career but I was a bit ahead of the game compared to Steffen. So I had a strong urge to share some of my stories with Steffen. But could I do that?

In psychotherapy, it has been written into the rule book that a therapist never talks about himself or herself (“self-disclosure”). The only therapeutic “technique” he or she may adopt is called “intimacy,” which is to discuss his or her therapeutic relationship and its impact on

therapeutic sessions (i.e. You don't seem to trust me as a therapist. Maybe you can tell me what worries you). "Intimacy" is the furthest a therapist may get in this professional relationship.

What about an ethnographer?

Despite the fact that an ethnographer's relationship with an informant may be less formal than that between a psychotherapist and a patient and oftentimes an ethnographer may meet with an informant at a rather informal setting (i.e. an informant's private home), ethnographers seem to resent self-disclosure or "self-revelation." Ruth Behar contends that, since ethnography is to "give voice to others," there is "no greater taboo than self-revelation" (Behar, 1996).

Interestingly, while psychotherapists' relationship with their patients are strictly professional and self-disclosure is limited to discussions on the therapeutic relationship in sessions only, key figures in psychotherapy propose more leeway. Winnicott (1971) suggests that at times, "self-disclosure" could have a positive impact on a professional relationship—it could demonstrate the working professional's "credibility and genuineness." And Epstein (1977) suggests that self-disclosure helps analysands (patients, those interviewed) normalize their thoughts and feelings. In other words, those interviewed would feel that, with the therapist or interviewer disclosing his or her own true feelings, some probably a bit embarrassing, those interviewed might then feel less uneasy divulging their true feelings or thoughts.

Eventually, I chose to go with Winnicott's and Epstein's propositions. I decided to share with Steffen some of my tips on how I marketed myself in the film industry. I shared with Steffen those tips, not only through our e-mail exchange between the two interviews but also during our second interview. I should say, this "self-disclosure" was a turning point in our working relationship. Steffen later came in more relaxed, more comfortable with sharing his thoughts. I suppose it is partially for this reason that he later was willing to reveal his "true"

feelings towards Hitler (e.g. he sympathized with Hitler), which made the qualitative data more interesting and show a whole different dimension which we normally did not expect.

In Chapter One, I argued that the production team of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* (re)presented Hitler as a devil, a psychopath and even a person with symptoms of Borderline Personality Disorder while the production team of *Der Untergang* illustrated a withering Hitler abandoned by his acolytes but it tried to sugarcoat this approach by giving the movie an objective (journalistic) outlook. In Chapter Two, I summarized from numerous behind-the-scene interviews that, while the American production team publicly stated that it meant to make a “historical” piece, “humanizing” Hitler, and the German production team announced to the world that it meant to also give the audience a “historical” piece, a “three-dimensional” depiction of Hitler (a way of humanizing Hitler to include both bright and dark sides though the production team did not like this wording), the American production team later to some extent admitted that it had to (re)present a Hitler that could be accepted by the general public (“Hitler is completely flawed, not human”) and the German production team, deliberately leaving out some negative stuff that Hitler was associated with (the Holocaust), vowed that it wanted to generate discussions on a “high level” on Hitler and Nazism. Both production teams’ positions (both publicly stated and actual ones) might be affected by the financing of the projects—*Hitler: the Rise of Evil* was controlled by market-oriented company executives while *Der Untergang* by the numerous regional and federal film boards that hoped to alter the deeply rooted image of Hitler, Nazism and in turn Germany. In Chapter Three, I concluded from my interviews with 6 young Germans that, while production teams of both films stated that the “messages” they tried to convey were both a “humanized” Hitler, not all of the informants got the companies’ messages;

this miscommunication might be a result of the “interaction” between these informants’ experiences and the two texts.

The close readings of the two films in Chapter One came in as a support for the points explicated in Chapter Two. The production team of *Hitler: the Rise of Evil* packaged its work (demonization of Hitler) as a “historical piece”; the discussion on the film’s numerous filmic elements such as protagonist-antagonist setup, camera angles, camera movement, lighting, musical soundtrack and dialogue confirmed the production team’s Hitler-not-human stance. The German production team’s “three-dimensional” depiction of Hitler was more of giving the previously established image of Hitler a face-lift, in particular rectifying those extremely negative images (leaving out Holocaust); indeed, there was no scene illustrating the atrocities of concentration camps in *Der Untergang* but more crucially, the narrative structure, the camera movement as well as other elements (re)presented a dying Hitler deserted by his followers, not a horrifying dictator he usually comes to know.

It is true that Chapter One is not but another “audience’s” reading of the two films. Chapter One’s textual analysis aside, even within “an audience,” there could be differences in interpretations of the same text. This research in no way is to challenge Jenkin’s concept of “audience” but a small, seemingly monolithic group such as the 6 young Germans in this research project, who could be considered “an audience” as opposed to multiple “audiences,” could have readings as much different from one another’s as demonstrated in the fieldwork explicated in Chapter Three. This very well comes in as a support for Hall’s concept of negotiated reading and the idea that there is a constant interaction between a text reader’s personal experiences and the text. But how small (or big) should a group be considered “an audience?” How many similar traits should a group of people share (regardless of the size of the

group) to be considered a group? To answer Bobo's and Fiske's proposals, are age, gender and class the only categorical boundaries? In the case of Michael and Addi, we saw that regional or sub-cultural identities might have some impact as well. Particularly in the case of Evelyn, whose family history sounded rather tragic and who thus had developed a relatively strong contempt for Hitler and Nazism, it seems like every individual could be seen as one unique audience because no one shares exactly the same life experience with another human being.

In Chapter Two, Goodrick-Clarke was quoted as saying that from 1960s onward, Hitler has long been recognized as an "incarnation of evil" and that it has been a "titillation for the media" to depict Hitler as such. In Chapter Three, Niven argued that the unification of Germany prepared Germans to reexamine their Nazi past and to see that Nazi legacy in a new perspective. From my interviews with these 6 young Germans, I indeed saw some reexamination of Germany's Nazi past (i.e. through school curriculum) and better still, some young Germans' call for a new interpretation of that part of history and a new illustration of their country's former Fuehrer through films regardless of their different national identity levels. Is what these young Germans asked for a "historicization of Hitler" as Lukacs proposes? Not necessarily, but these young Germans truly would like to see a better-rounded portrait of their country's former leader. They did not ask that the long recognized monstrous side of Hitler be left out; in fact, the majority of them preferred that the devilish side of Hitler be kept. But they did request that Hitler's human dimension, such as weakness and warmth, which is very often left out, be added in. These informants' preference matches with Lukacs' proposal that "demonization of Hitler" be replaced with a completely different discourse. From a marketing perspective, a filmmaking professional has to realize that demonization of Hitler is no longer the trend and that it might have lost its appeal; people, at least some Germans, young Germans in particular (who could be

the major film market in Germany), have moved on.

Barta (1998) concludes that there has not been writing on Hitler in films; Lukacs (2000) discovers that the last research on people's views on Germany's late Fuehrer was conducted in the 1950s. Barta's and Lukacs's statements, along with others enumerated in previous chapters, indicate the significance of this dissertation research project. The small sample size is never meant to encapsulate all contemporary young Germans' views on Hitler or their views on representations of Hitler, but is hoped to be a starting point for a more extensive examination on this topic. And hopefully, this project may trigger some reframing and rethinking of the "power structure" within the ethnographer-informant dyad to develop some alternative approaches to data collecting which, still within the ethical boundary, may allow us to see a picture that we might not see otherwise.

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## Appendix I

1. How many films do you see per year in the movie theatre?
2. Among the films that you see in a movie theatre every year, how many of them are German films?
3. If a new movie comes out, would you prefer to catch it in the movie theatre when it comes out, wait for the DVD or watch it on a TV channel when it is shown?
4. What's your definition of a good movie?
  
5. What do you look into / for in a movie?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. If there'd be a new movie about Hitler, what would make you want to see it? (Please check all that apply.) (1) The poster (2) The trailer on TV (3) What people who've seen it said about it (4) film critics' reviews on the film (4) Actors / actresses / who is in the film (5) Others (Please specify.)
7. What would you like to see in this new movie about Hitler?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. What are the first few adjectives that pop out of your mind when you think of Hitler? What'd you say if the Hitler in the movie was totally opposite from all these qualities you just gave me?

## Appendix II

### Interview Question Sample

**\*\*\* The interviews will be semi-structured, which means that questions posed may be partially based on what a participant has said previously. But actual interview questions will not go beyond the presented scope and will be chosen from this interview question bank.**

1. What is your definition of a good movie?
2. What do you tend to pay attention to when seeing a movie?
3. If a friend of yours would like you to tell him or her whether a film is worth-watching or not, how would you respond? You may say, the film is good or bad because....?
4. The film you have just watched is about Hitler and Nazism. I am wondering how you come to learn about and understand the history.
  - (a) How did the school teach you about Hitler and Nazism? What is the school's basic stand or position? What are a few words that you can think of right now which may sum up the school's view on Hitler and Nazism?
  - (b) How did the school teach the history of Hitler and Nazism? What activities were incorporated into the lessons?
  - (c) What's your family's view on Hitler and Nazism? Did your grandparents or parents ever talk about their lives under the Nazi regime? Did you ever ask them questions about their experiences of living under the regime? Why or why not?
  - (d) Does your family keep any World War Two memorabilia? If so, what has your family kept? Does the artifact bear any significance?
  - (e) Where else does your knowledge about Hitler and Nazism come from? What are the sources' views on Hitler and Nazism?
5. If there was a new film about Hitler, how would you like Hitler to be illustrated in the film? (The informant may be primed to answer this question based on his or her responses to Question 1 and Question 2 if the informant doesn't know how to answer this question but the informant should be encouraged to make his or her answers as extensive as possible.)
6. I'd like you to answer the following questions as a German national:
  - (a) Now the world is a global village. We have been exposed to other cultures. I suppose it is even more so now that you are in the US at the moment. But I presume there are still things considered "German." On a scale of 1 through 5, how "German" would you consider yourself to be? Why do you give yourself this rating? Maybe you can talk a bit about your way of life, things you appreciate, tastes, hobbies, food preferences or anything you can think of that support this rating?
  - (b) Let's now talk about the movie. Before we begin, I'd like to review a few things you have told me. (Summarize what the informant's has said thus far, in particular his views on Hitler, his definition of a good movie, things he may pay attention to when watching a movie, his expectation on how Hitler should be represented in a movie.) What is your opinion on this film's illustration of Hitler? What are some good things about this film's representation of Hitler? What are some bad things, if any? Does anything in the film contradict your knowledge about Hitler or Nazism?
  - (c) Following your previous comments, I'd like to know how much similar this film's representation of Hitler is to Hitler's image in your mind? How much different?
  - (d) Now I'd like you to recall moments in the film. Is there any part in the film that bears significance to you or which you may not forget? It can be lines or dialogues in the

movies, specific shots such close-ups at certain objects, scenes, things used in the films as props, songs, gestures, etc. What is the relationship between the part in the film you just mentioned and your overall view on the film's representation of Hitler? What do you think the film team means to get at with these memorable parts? What do you think is the film team's general position or statement?

(e) If you were given an opportunity to re-make this film, what would you do differently?

(f) Now I'd like you to reflect upon your overall experience of watching this film. As a German national, how did you feel when seeing yourself represented in the film (by an American TV company or a German company)? I have noticed, based on what you've said to me, that the film's position is not completely in line with yours. What was your reaction or what did you say to yourself mentally when there was such a discrepancy? How did you work it out if the discrepancy churned up some emotional disturbance? Or did you work it out at all? (The interviewer may summarize the informant's comments on memorable parts in the film and the film company's alleged position if the informant needs some direction in responding to this question.)

7. Any additional comments the informant would like to make concerning the film or the screening of the film.