

Does Laughter Make the Crime Disappear?: An Analysis of Cinematic Images of Hitler and the Nazis, 1940-2007



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[The Great Dictator](#)

Filmmakers have lampooned, mocked or otherwise made us laugh at Adolf Hitler, the leaders of the National Socialists and the pomp associated with Nazism from the time the Nazis rose to power in Germany. Even as history was marking Hitler and his ministers as monstrous killers, cinema was giving them comic personas that produced laughter rather than fear in viewers. Films portrayed the deeds of the National Socialists as chaotic bumbling, diverting attention away from danger they posed for their eventual victims. In the early 1940s, before the extent of the Holocaust was widely known, comic portrayals of Hitler and the Nazis, such as found in Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940), occasioned only minor controversy. After all, laughing at one's adversaries is a received and accepted antidote to dealing with outside threats. After 1945, though, as the world became aware of the Holocaust, laughing at Hitler seemed wrong, even if the comedic narrative excluded references to genocidal crimes. Nonetheless, directors laughed at Hitler and even found humour in Nazi persecution of the Jews. The latest of the films to laugh at the crimes of Nazi Germany, Dani Levy's *Mein Führer: Die wirklich wahrste Wahrheit über Adolf Hitler* (2006), appropriates the received cinematic image of Hitler and the Nazis as clowns, made popular by Chaplin's Adenoyd Hynkel.

The question posed in the title to my essay, whether laughter makes the crime disappear, suggests ideological bias against laughing at tragedy. Yet that is not my intent, as laughing at adversity is a traditional remedy to dealing with pain. As related to the Holocaust, cultural critic and historian Louis Kaplan notes that

humor offers an alternative to memorialize the Holocaust in the post-war era. This transgressive commemorative practice values the power of laughter as liberating and as a means of survival in the face of death. (1)

The question I hope to answer is not *if* humour is appropriate, but whether there is a line beyond which humour does more than help us cope with tragedy and becomes a means to help us forget or ignore it. The first part of this essay looks at the caricatured portrayal of Hitler and the Nazis in representative films from 1940, the year Chaplin made *The Great Dictator*, to 2006, when Levy released *Mein Führer*. The second analyzes Levy's film, the first mainstream comedy to combine the Hitler/Nazi caricature with the crimes of the Third Reich, moving beyond laughing at the perpetrators of the Holocaust to laughing at its victims as well. (2)

Humour plays multiple roles in helping us experience the full extent of our humanity, which in turn helps us come to terms with the present and the past. Among characteristics that theorists attribute to humour (3) is its propensity to offend, "[to move] its audience out of the comfort zone in order to force a consideration of more questionable areas of human existence." (4) When a joke or a film offends too much, we call it sick or in bad taste. Most of us laugh nonetheless. Humour also deflates. It is "always rather humiliating for the one against whom it is directed" (5). If the object of ridicule is not present during the telling of the joke, we tell it anyway, because deflation does not merely embarrass the other, it also gives the audience a position of safety, a means to "tackle something scary" (6) or to broach a subject that is taboo. The following two jokes illustrate these characteristics:

Horowitz [a code name for Adolf Hitler in Yiddish jokes about persecution of the Jews during the Third Reich] (7) comes to the Other World. Sees Jesus in Paradise. "Hey, what's a Jew doing without an arm band?" "Let him be", answers Saint Peter. "He's the boss's son." (8)

As World War II drew to a close, the advancing Russians came upon a town only recently vacated by the retreating Germans. They went to the Jewish ghetto and found that every single Jew, man, woman and child, had been hung from hastily erected gallows. As they stared in silence, one Russian soldier said to another, "Look what a horrible thing those barbaric Germans have done; they have hung every Jew in the town." "Yes," said the other, "it is a terrible thing. They didn't leave a single one for us to hang." (9)

Both of the aforementioned jokes depend on the listener's knowledge of anti-Semitism and persecution of the Jews by the Nazis, two decidedly non-humorous themes. The first joke does not necessarily make us uncomfortable. Even though it recalls the anti-Jewish policies of Nazi Germany, it never refers to the Holocaust; and the participants are in a safe or neutral environment, the hereafter. Thus, one can imagine that, whether told to someone experiencing persecution in the ghetto or to someone listening fifty years later, the joke could elicit a smile. In contrast, the second joke references not only the Holocaust and not only the murder of a village, but an environment in which hatred still exists. Although the joke belongs to the Yiddish tradition of gallows humour, the punchline awakens memories and emotions most listeners might not want to think about, much less laugh at. Most listeners would probably call the joke sick. One need only imagine it being told by a German, or any non-Jewish person, to understand its potential for controversy. (10)

Sensitivities change. Material that was passable and accepted as humorous in the past may seem inappropriate to later generations, aware of ethnic and religious genocide. Chaplin, for example, wrote after the war that had he known the actual horrors of the German concentration camps, he could not have made *The Great Dictator*, as he "could not have made fun of the homicidal insanity of the Nazis" (11). Whether one accepts the sincerity of Chaplin's post-war regret (12), one cannot dismiss his acknowledgement that historical retrospect affects reception of his movie. Themes that were suitable for comedic treatment pre Holocaust or before people became aware of the extent of the genocidal policies of National Socialism were no longer proper subjects for comedy after the photos of the camps were made public. After the war, laughing at such universal suffering became taboo.

The Great Dictator (1940)

Yet, *The Great Dictator* is not an affront to good taste, nor was it the first movie to lampoon Hitler. At times, the film is a lyrical satire reminiscent of Chaplin's great silent films and his persona of the Little Tramp, eliciting laughter and tears through careful choreography. At other times, it is political farce, following the tendency of the period to lampoon Hitler's megalomania. When he foregrounds the harsh treatment of Germany's Jewish population, he does so not to use persecution of the Jews as a source of humour but in order to ridicule Hitler and the Nazis. In scenes that have Jewish residents hiding or running from the Nazis, the film's focus is on the ineptitude of the Nazis. To be sure, the film reveals no awareness of the tragedy to which anti-Semitism will lead, but it could not have, as the magnitude of the killing was still in the future.

The Great Dictator did not create much controversy when released. Although some reviewers criticized the film for its heavy-handed message (13), for the most part reception was excellent; and, since its release, the film has become a comedy classic. The humour in *The Great Dictator* functions similarly to that in the joke about Horowitz (Hitler) and St. Peter cited earlier. It comes not from making light of the Holocaust but from ridiculing Hitler, which may explain why the major controversy of the time came from groups favouring Nazi Germany or countries afraid to insult its leaders. (14) The film's humour further ensues from the motif of a man trading places with his doppelgänger and from Chaplin's balletic choreography, a trademark of his persona as "the tramp". Humour and pathos though are just a preamble to the moral of the movie. At the end of the film, the barber, played by Chaplin, is impersonating the dictator Adenoid Hynkel, also played by Chaplin. He is giving an impassioned plea for peace, understandably out of character for the dictator. At this moment, Chaplin asserts himself into the speech, breaking through the narrative and addressing the audience with a message of universal peace. Roger Ebert described the effect of the film's end as adding an editorial to a comedy. (15) The film does not intend to make viewers uncomfortable. Yet, immediately after the war, newsreels and photos of the liberation of the camps and the realization that these camps had been "death mills" (16) left no safe place from which to laugh at the film. Even if the film does not laugh at the suffering of the Jews, knowledge of the tragedy precludes laughing. Hence, the film becomes problematic for Chaplin. It also is emblematic of why controversy surrounds any comedic treatment of the Holocaust.

American and British films have consistently portrayed Adolf Hitler and the Nazis as comical figures, monstrous murderers, to be sure, but murderers whose cinematic persona occasions laughter rather than fear, dismissal rather than acceptance, exception rather than rule. Portrayals of Hitler as a foolish and silly tyrant, and of his officers and private army as bumbling idiots have multiple sources. Contributing to this received caricature was the manner in which the Nazis presented themselves to the world: as goose stepping, salute happy and staccato-voiced bullies. Political cartoons, jokes and films lampooned Nazi self-presentation as soon as the Nazis came to power. (17) It was Chaplin's

portrayal of Hynkel (Hitler) and the Jewish Barber (Hynkel's double), however, that has had the most influence on later portrayals. His Hitler so captured the cinematic imagination that it influenced the received image of later generations. Indeed, over the decades, Adolf Hitler's screen persona has turned into Adenoid Hynkel. It is the goal of this essay to describe how portrayals of Hitler and the Nazis have not changed much over the past sixty-five years and to examine how the retrospective knowledge of the outcome of Nazism is problematic when using it to produce laughs.

Perhaps it is only natural that artists and the public perceived Hitler and the Nazis as Chaplin portrays Hynkel, given the National Socialist tendency for self-posturing. In any event, comedic references to Nazis and fascists as pompous bumblers predates Chaplin, beginning during the Third Reich and reaching to the present. During the war, laughing at Hitler had ambivalent origins. When American and British schoolboys and soldiers sang "Whistle while you work, Hitler is a jerk, Benito Mussolini pulled his weenie and now it doesn't work", the puerile lyrics did more than characterize Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini in the vernacular as wankers. The rhyme diminishes the dictators' power to intimidate. By forming a bond among those participating, the chant gives them the vantage point of superiority. At the same time, it renders the enemy ineffectual, at least in a virtual sense. (18)

"Whistle while you work" was merely one of many examples of using humour to deflate Hitler and the National Socialists. For cartoonist David Low (1891-1963), who drew political cartoons for the *London Evening Standard*, depicting the Nazis as ridiculous was more effective in building morale than showing them in a position of power:

I have been looking at some 'anti-Nazi' cartoons from Denmark current in 1937 showing Nazi leaders as dreadful brutes. That kind of thing no doubt had the effect of building up the idea that Hitler was too, too, too powerful to resist. [...] Personally, I know that cartoons of mine, that got under their skins most were those which made them [the Nazis] look like damn fools. (19)

His Girl Friday (1940)

Not all humorous references to Hitler had as obvious a political intent of mobilizing opinion against the Nazis. In the film *His Girl Friday* (Howard Hawks, 1940), for example, Hilde Johnson (Rosalind Russell) laments that newspapers are not writing about Adolf Hitler and the Nazis but prefer instead the sensation of crime reporting. Her boss, Walter Burns (Cary Grant), quips that Hitler belongs in the funny papers. This fleeting gag in a screwball comedy – it lasts under thirty seconds – reflects in a nutshell the mood in America before the United States entered World War II: on the one hand, Hitler was to be taken seriously, as speeches by politicians and editorials in the media made clear; on the other hand, the exaggerated ceremonial pomp of the Nazis and Hitler's oratorical style were predestined for the comics, and perhaps not to be taken seriously. The gag in *His Girl Friday*, placed as it is in a discourse on sensationalizing the news with trivia, illustrates the historical moment of 1940. It focuses on the real and present threat Nazi Germany was presenting to the security of the world, and the reluctance of many to perceive that danger, preferring instead to relocate the Nazis from the front page to the comic section. *His Girl Friday* reveals the tendency of humour to disarm and enhance its referents simultaneously. The line foregrounds Hitler, the historical figure, and relates him to a real historical situation existing outside the movie. He is a definite threat. The movie also transforms Hitler into a non-threat, relegating him to the comics and giving him the gravitas of Blimpie in *Popeye* or the Captain in the *Katzenjammer Kids*, popular strips of the day. (20)

As America's entry into World War II approached and once the country joined the Allies against the Nazis, laughter became a popular weapon to protest Hitler's growing power. Comedies about the Nazis joined Hollywood's serious filmic contributions to the war effort. (21) In 1942 Walt Disney Studios produced *Der Fuehrer's Face* (Jack Kinney, uncredited) a seven-minute cartoon in which Donald Duck suffers under the Nazi leader. (22) Moses Horwitz, better known as Moe Howard, the Boss in the series *The Three Stooges*, wore a faux Hitler-like moustache and slapped around his sidekicks in *You Natzy Spy!* (Jules White, 1940). The pun-heavy lampoon predates Chaplin's film by almost a year. The Stooges reprised their parody a year later in the sequel, *I'll Never Heil Again* (aka *Heil No More*, Jules Whites, 1941). (23) On the one hand, the abusive physical humour associated with the Stooges trivializes the bullying or goon-like behaviour associated with Hitler's *Sturmabteilung* or SA. On the other hand, the contextual referents raise the Stooge's silliness above vaudevillian slapstick and, like the films *His Girl Friday* and *The Great Dictator*, allow the situation to be seen in refracted light.

To Be Or Not To Be (Ernst Lubitsch, 1942), one of the best-known comedies set during the Third Reich besides *The Great Dictator*, mixes humour and drama to bring viewers into the tragedy then occurring in Europe. Lubitsch's Nazis are the equal to Chaplin's and the Stooges' characters in bumbling ineptitude. At the same time, the plight of the Polish troupe of actors working in the resistance highlights the seriousness of events in Europe and foregrounds the dangers faced by Hitler's opponents. Even as viewers laughed, they must recognize that the threat of Nazism was not a trivial matter. Although Lubitsch focuses on Polish rather than Jewish victims of Nazi policies, he nonetheless underscores danger to Europe's Jews through the inclusion of a Jewish member of the troupe, whose role as Shylock in the troupe's *Merchant of Venice*, exemplifies Europe's anti-Semitism. Moreover, as the film came out two years after *The Great Dictator*, *To Be or Not to Be* holds more immediate emotional punch than the earlier. In place of the pathos found in Chaplin's film or the anarchic slapstick in the Stooges' short, Lubitsch offers an even mix of tragedy and comedy, suggesting the true horrors of Nazism.

After the war, in spite of the earnestness with which films from Hollywood and other film industries treated the Third Reich, the Nazis remained the butt of visual gags, but without reference to the Holocaust or even elements of Jewish persecution. For example, the American television series *Hogan's Heroes*, which premiered in 1965, lampooned received images of Nazi ineptitude for its six-year, 168-episode run. Five episodes featured stories with Hitler, referencing both Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* and the July 20 attempt on Hitler's life, but as comedy. Other episodes revolved around spies, the German underground, and escape plans, to highlight the cleverness of the prisoners in thwarting their German captors. The one episode to feature a minority, *The Gypsy*, used the movie stereotype of fortune-tellers for sit-com laughs, overlooking the degree to which the Sinti and Roma, as the ethnic group is referred to in Germany, were persecuted. By 1968, however, in the middle of the run of *Hogan's Heroes*, Mel Brooks' *The Producers* had its first appearance as a non-musical movie, asking tongue-in-cheek whether the theatre world was ready for a comedy based on Hitler and the Nazis. The boldness of the concept, the fact that writer-director Brooks is Jewish, and the Yiddish jokes won over critics and viewers. Above all, by foregrounding the awareness of Nazi crimes within the plot, Brooks was able to forestall criticism. The film does not so much trivialize the Third Reich as it does the attempts by popular culture to

trivialize the Third Reich. Brooks had his cake and ate it too.

Few post-war German films dealt with portraying the general events of the Third Reich and the Holocaust. Those that did were warnings about repeating mistakes of the past rather than parodies of the Nazis or outright comedies. *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (*The Murderers Are Among Us*, Wolfgang Staudte, 1946), for example, focuses on hunting down a war criminal, a post-war profiteer who wraps his lunch in a newspaper bearing the headline "2 Million Gassed". Moreover, fewer still included portrayals, however brief, of Adolf Hitler, although his speeches served as points of reference in those films that did try to come to terms with the past. Humour was notably absent in any of the German movies dealing with the Third Reich. With the exception of a few films, such as *Wir Wunderkinder* (*Aren't We Wonderful*, Kurt Hoffmann, 1959), German filmmakers avoided laughing at the past. Hoffmann's film mocks Hitler as a house painter in a short student cabaret skit within the film. The skit also plays on the Chaplin/Hitler doppelgänger motif found in *The Great Dictator*. (24) Other notable exceptions are *08/15* (Paul May 1955) and *Jakob der Lügner* (*Jacob the Liar*, Frank Beyer, 1975).

Hitler: ein Film aus Deutschland (1977)

For the most part, film comedies with Hitler as the focus are absent in the decades after the war. Parody is not, especially as the years pass. In *Hitler: ein Film aus Deutschland* (1978), Hansjüren Syberberg caricatures Hitler as broadly as Hollywood comedies. His over-the-top visual tour de force is aimed at exposing the inherent fascism within people that allowed a man like Hitler to come to power. The film is an allegory in the format of a Wagnerian Germanic epic. At a time when Germany was only beginning to address the Holocaust in films in a serious tone (25), Syberberg was finding humour and absurdity in Hitler, the Nazis and the consequences of the Third Reich. The film presents a series of vignettes that portray Hitler (Peter Kern) variously as clown and as marionette, sometimes with absurd and controversial results. One episode, for example, parodies the closing sequence of Fritz Lang's masterpiece, *M* (1931), whose working title had been *Murderers among Us*. German actor Peter Kern, as Hitler, imitates Peter Lorre's portrayal of Hans Beckert, a serial child murderer in the film. Kern recites the monolog that Beckert delivers in his defence after being captured and tried in a kangaroo court. Pleading for the jury of criminals to understand his obsession to murder young children as not within his power to control, Kern's Hitler turns Beckert's rationale into an absurd justification for the Holocaust. Carried to its conclusion, the monologue implies that Hitler murdered the Jews because an inner voice compelled him to. Moreover, by conflating the serial killer and the perpetrator of the Holocaust, Syberberg suggests that Hitler seduced the German people with superficial promises of happiness, just as Beckert lured his child victims with balloons and toys. At the same time, the director suggests that it is impossible to find reasons for the fascination that Germans in the Third Reich had and later generations still have for the German leader and Nazism. The film ridicules Hitler, to be sure; it also implicates the viewers (or their parents and grandparents) because they accepted this pathetic man, as he is portrayed in the film, as the country's leader. That is, Syberberg turns ridicule of the Nazis against the viewers by asking them to see Hitler as a reflection of the fascism within themselves, just as Lorre's Beckert asked his jury of peers to understand his crimes as a reflection of their own criminal nature.

The first full-fledged comedy on Hitler appeared in 1989. *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler: Die letzte Stunde im Führerbunker* (Christoph Schlingensiefel, 1989) exploits the legend of the excesses of Nazi sexuality. To be sure, Schlingensiefel's film is far from mainstream; indeed, it is at the extreme end of the class of films sometimes described as alternative cinema. Nonetheless, the film broke 'an unofficial taboo for German artists against lampooning Nazi leadership and portrayed Hitler and the Nazi cohort not merely as comedic figures but as outrageous buffoons. In his sixty-minute feature, Schlingensiefel creates a travesty of the received historical portrait of Nazism and fascism, as found in films such as Luchino Visconti's *La Caduta degli dei* (*The Damned*, 1969), Liliana Cavani's *Il Portiere di notte* (*Night Porter*, 1974) or Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò o le giornate di Sodoma* (1975), all serious explorations of the relationship between fascism and sexuality. Schlingensiefel blends the cinematic portrait of Nazi and fascist perversion found in these films with the comedic distortions of Chaplin, Horwitz, and Brooks. As an alternative film, not widely distributed, *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler: Die letzte Stunde im Führerbunker* passed relatively unnoticed.

In contrast, Agnieszka Holland's *Europa Europa* (1990) became an international cause célèbre because of its reception in Germany. Appearing one year after Schlingensiefel's film, *Europa Europa* had wide distribution. The controversy that ensued after its release suggests how sensitive the subject of Hitler and laughter was in Germany at the time. Holland's images of Hitler dancing with Josef Stalin to Johann Strauss' "Blue Danube Waltz" or her depiction of the German dictator hiding in a closet holding his crotch, an allusion to the jokes about the Nazi leader's scrotum missing a testicle, were tame in comparison to Schlingensiefel's salacious satire. Nonetheless, the German film jury responsible for nominating a German film in the foreign film category of the Academy Awards caused a minor sensation by passing over the film. They argued that the film was directed by a Pole, not a German. Yet, in 1986, the jury had nominated Holland's *Bittere Ernte* (*Angry Harvest*) as Germany's entry in this category, negating their argument that the director was not German. The decision to overlook *Europa Europa*, titled *Hitlerjunge Salomon* (*Hitler Youth Solomon*) in German, occasioned a debate between defenders of the film, who reflected Germany's cinema élite (26), and opponents, who represented many critics and apparently the public, as the film was not successful in Germany. Arguments centered on whether the film was being slighted because it dealt with the Holocaust, an issue that critics of the decision felt Germany might not be ready to confront, or quality, which the jury was claiming. *Bittere Ernte* had also dealt with the Holocaust, without obviating its acceptance as a German film, suggesting that the topic by itself was not behind the negative decision. Quality could indeed have been the reason, as members of the jury described the film as "trash" and "embarrassing". A review in *Die Welt* called it "voyeuristic" and "sexually overwrought", and a critic for *taz* wrote that it was "unbelievable" (27). Yet, the film won a Golden Globe as Best Picture, suggesting its cinematic value.

What neither side spoke to in the debate was the film's use of humour to deal with the Holocaust. *Bittere Ernte* is a dramatic film, belonging to the group of serious works that are often cited as helping Germans come to terms with the past. In contrast, *Europa Europa* finds humour in a young man who tries to undo his circumcision, suggesting he is not only hiding from but for a time denying his Jewish identity. (28) It may be that German film critics were not ready for a humorous portrayal of the Holocaust.

By the 1990s, Germans, especially young adults, seemed ready to laugh at Hitler and the Nazis. Serdar Somuncu, a Turkish-German stand-up comic, lampooned both Hitler and Joseph Goebbels in his comedy club routines. Writer and critic Josh Schonwald describes a Somuncu performance as follows:

This was not the United States, Poland, South Africa. This was Germany. The twenty and thirty-somethings in the studio audience, the children and grandchildren of Nazi lieutenants and SS troops, were not just laughing at Hitler, they were roaring. (29)

Somuncu's main comedic shticks, evident from CDs of his performances, Schonwald's review and videos on *YouTube*, are blurting out the name Hitler at random moments, in succession, and reading Hitler's *Mein Kampf* or Goebbels' address at the Sport Palace (18 February 1943). (30)

Schonwald's description of the crowd as "roar[ing] with laughter" suggests an audience reacting to different aspects of humour as described by theorists since Aristotle. (31) The act presents an incongruous situation that allows viewers to feel superior to the Nazi leaders and at the same time experience release from an uncomfortable situation, namely a comedy routine about Hitler. Somuncu demystifies the ideology found in Hitler's name, his writings and Goebbels' speeches, thereby highlighting the Nazi leadership's rhetorical excesses. In this, his stage persona is a mirror reflection of Chaplin's Hynkel, Stooge Moe Howard's Hailstone and Donald Duck's nightmare. Whereas those characters, themselves caricatures, copied the tone of Nazi rhetorical bluster and embedded it in pathos (Chaplin's Hynkel) and slapstick (all three characters) in order to expose its absurdity, Somuncu recites the words without commentary until the context in which they are being read, by an angry comic in a comedy club routine, renders them hollow. Second, Somuncu empties the word Hitler of any lexical meaning and the name of any historical significance by repeating it until it is reduced to phonemic sounds. That is, he exploits a children's game of replacing nouns in a series of sentences with the same word over and over, a linguistic activity that generally ends in the release of explosive laughter. Third, Somuncu's routines expose the absurdity of a situation that begs the question that the characters Hynkel, Hailstone and Donald Duck were suggesting more than fifty years earlier, "How did the German people ever let these clowns come to power?" The question is never answered.

The first mainstream, albeit independent, German film to break the taboo against laughing at Hitler, the Nazis and the Holocaust was Kai Wessel's *Goebbels und Geduldig* (2000). How strong that taboo was can be seen in the fact that Wessel's film debuted at film festivals in Brazil and the United States nine months before opening in Germany. (32) *Goebbels und Geduldig* borrows the central conceit from Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, that of a Jewish *doppelgänger* impersonating a Nazi leader. Playing with the received myths about Nazi rivalries and sexual liaisons, which Schlingensiefel had exploited in *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler*, the film presents a comedy of errors as Goebbels and Harry Geduldig, both played by Ulrich Mühe, the star of *Das Leben der Anderen* (*The Lives of Others*, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2005), exchange roles in a double intrigue. Heinrich Himmler holds Geduldig captive in a fortress, planning to use him as Goebbels' stand-in after he assassinates the minister of propaganda. Goebbels, who senses the threat to his life, tries to kill Geduldig but ends up merely changing places with him. No one suspects the switch except Magda Goebbels (Eva Mattes), who convinces Geduldig to murder her husband, as she is in love with Hitler. Geduldig is killed by opponents of Goebbels, who think they are assassinating the minister of propaganda.

Goebbels und Geduldig played on Germany's major television network, ARD, with seemingly only minor protest, in spite of the absurdity and controversial nature of the film's content. Historian Klaus Hesse objected that it was dangerous "to trivialise a historic figure like Goebbels. He represented brilliance of power and also in one way represented brilliance of evil" (33). A survey taken around the time of the film's release found that "most Germans think a TV comedy about Goebbels is inappropriate because its history still haunts its people" (34). For the most part, though, the film played without the controversy surrounding *Europa Europa* and without the debates that accompanied *La vita è bella* (*Life is Beautiful*, Roberto Benigni, 1997), due perhaps to the fact that it received no major release in Germany or abroad before it played on television.

In contrast, the next mainstream Holocaust comedy, Dani Levy's *Mein Führer: Die wirklich wahrste Wahrheit über Adolf Hitler* (2006), a film funded by the German film industry but directed by a Swiss filmmaker, called forth criticism both for its subject and for its genre. Two years earlier, reviewers had criticized *Der Untergang* (Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2004), a serious attempt at capturing Hitler's depression in the face of inevitable defeat, for its lack of historical context and for humanizing Hitler without the historical underpinning of his actions. In similar fashion and for similar reasons, Levy's film occasioned protest; film commentaries criticized the comedic tone of the movie, and conversely its lack of humour, in spite of this comedic format. Early criticism came in a *Bild-Zeitung* headline as the film was being shot in Berlin: "Nazi-Spuk mitten in Berlin – Muss das sein?" Reviews of the film suggest a three-way division of opinion. Some critics felt that treating Hitler and the Nazis as comic figures trivialized the Holocaust. Other critics held that satire was appropriate for any material, but they found that Levi failed to create a true comedy, substituting melodrama for biting humour. Still other critics thought the film succeeded in getting viewers to laugh at the past without obscuring history's lessons. (35)

In a number of interviews, Levy justifies the use of humour even when treating subjects such as Hitler and the Holocaust, arguing that laughter can diminish Hitler's hold on the public's imagination. For Levy, too much authenticity and believability in a portrayal of Hitler, even if that portrayal is critical, create a cult-figure. Laughing at Hitler can prevent that from happening. (36) Moreover, Levi comments that given the exaggerated theatricality to which the Nazis were prone, they parody themselves. He relies on the received historical image of Nazism as transmitted by texts, photos and film archives of the period to show that his portrayal derives from reality, for the Nazis were in Levy's opinion self-caricatures. (37) Whether Hitler and the Nazis are intrinsically funny is not in dispute, nor is whether comedy is suitable for dealing with historical trauma, over seventy years of comedy and laughing at Hitler suggests they are and it is. The question asked directly and indirectly by detractors and supporters of the film is whether Levy's comedy helps viewers overcome the trauma of the past or simply ignore it.

Levy deconstructs Hitler's charismatic mystique, suggesting that the German leader's oratory greatness was a charade, the creation of a good teacher. The ironic joke around which everything in the film revolves is that Hitler's speech coach was a Jewish actor whom the Nazis had deported to the concentration camp in Sachsenhausen, along with his family. Goebbels commands Adolf Israel Grünbaum to bring Hitler out of the depression he has fallen into because of Germany's immanent defeat and to coach Hitler in oratory so that he can inspire the German people to fight to the end, a policy known in German as *Durchhalten*. Levy borrows from a number of sources, including Chaplin, modern legend, received images and history to fashion Adolf Hitler as a man of utmost absurdity. From *The Great Dictator*, he takes the motif of

bellicose Nazi leader replaced by a soft spoken Jewish *doppelgänger*. Unlike Adenoid Hynkel (the name given to the Hitler figure in Chaplin's film), who is not aware of his Jewish double delivering a speech in his guise, the Hitler character in *Mein Führer* asks Adolf Grünbaum to be his voice off stage as he (Hitler) stands in front of the German people. Moreover, there is a striking difference in the two speeches. Chaplin's Jewish barber delivers a plea for peace, in direct contrast to Germany's war effort at the time. Grünbaum, speaking for Hitler, delivers a justification for the Holocaust and acknowledges the genocidal policy known as the "final solution".

From legend and history, Levy derives the film's central conceit that Hitler's charisma was an affectation learned from others. According to reports, Erik Jan Hanussen, a charlatan mind reader, worked with Hitler on the use of hand movements when speaking to a crowd. (38) The story has been the subject of several films, including *Hanussen* (O. W. Fischer, 1955), *Hanussen* (István Szabó, 1988) and *Invincible* (Werner Herzog, 2001). In all versions, Hanussen is spiritual advisor to Hitler until the Nazis discover his Jewish origins and murder him. Other accounts say that Hitler developed his oratorical style by observing Benito Mussolini's effect on crowds. A third influence came from the actor Paul Devrient, who in his memoirs, written after the war, claims to have trained Hitler early in his career in the art of effective speaking. (39)

Levi transposes this seemingly mundane idea that Hitler's oratorical style was the product of others into absurdist comedy. In place of Devrient, a non-Jewish actor who worked with Hitler at the beginning of the Nazi leader's trajectory, he creates Grünbaum, a Jewish actor who is released from a death camp to work with the Führer on his final speech. He structures Hitler's role as *mensch*, a man with more complexes than a Woody Allen character, the most striking being a severe feeling of inferiority. Levy turns the historical Hitler's megalomania and the cultural and rhetorical excess of the Nazis against him. As his predecessors, Chaplin, Schlingensief, and Somuncu, among others, Levy derives his caricatures from Hitler's mannerisms and by stressing the extremes of Nazi ideology. These include NS-uniforms, pompous and obligatory greetings of "Heil Hitler", exaggerated propaganda speeches of Joseph Goebbels and the far-fetched racial theories of the superiority for the so-called Nordic or German Aryan.

Hitler and the Nazis most assuredly would not have seen the pomp of their ceremonies, the affect of their greetings, and the exaggeration of their rhetoric as caricature and as open to ridicule. For artists to portray the Nazi leader and his ministers as caricatures requires that they be removed from their cultural, linguistic and historical context. Only then can their actions become comedic and seen as self-parody. When the Nazis were still in power, Chaplin, the Stooges and Disney removed Nazi leaders from the cultural-political context of the times, thus deflating their power. Chaplin admits as much when he writes after the war that the film was made without awareness of the actual situation faced by the Jews. The stooges likewise place their figures in a world of slapstick in the fictional realm of Moronica. Through animation, Disney's cartoon world automatically removes any semblance of a real context for Donald Duck's Führer's blustering. For his part, Somuncu deliberately removes Hitler and Goebbels from their linguistic context; substituting the word Hitler for nouns in his routine until the name calls forth laughter and loses all significance. In similar fashion, by reading Hitler's *Mein Kampf* or Goebbels' Winter Palace speech in the atmosphere of a nightclub, he highlights the absurdity of the content. Isolated from their ideological underpinning, Hitler's anti-Semitic cant and Goebbels's admonition to "total war" have no force other than to cause laughter.

Levy removes Hitler and the Nazis from their historical, although not geographical context. Two years earlier, Oliver Hirschbiegel had also created an ahistorical portrait of the Nazi leader in *Der Untergang*, but he kept his figure in a world that simulates reality, preventing viewers from seeing Hitler as caricature or self-parody. Hirschbiegel's Hitler thus retains the danger of a man who was capable of sanctioning the murder of millions of people. Levy in contrast situates Hitler in a fantasy, the absurdity of which not surprisingly emasculates Hitler. The film's Hitler resembles the Hitler portrayals in the films of earlier directors; he is a blustering tyrant and nothing more.

In the early 1940s, portraying Hitler as an absurd character gave viewers a charm with which to ward off his evil. The rhyme cited earlier of "whistle while you work, Hitler is a jerk" reflects both the fear the Nazis instilled in others and people's attempts to overcome that fear through ridicule. Hollywood's early films on the Nazis created a safe harbour from reality, but they grounded their caricatures in the reality of the period. Hitler's danger is never reduced, even as viewers laugh, as the context of the situation outside the theatre reminded them of the threat the Nazis posed. (40) In other words, although Hitler is portrayed as ridiculous, thus deflating his power to intimidate for the duration of the film, audiences never forgot the real Hitler and his threat to their wellbeing. By the time of Schlingensief's *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler* and Somuncu's linguistic tour de force, the memory of the danger that Hitler and the Nazis meant to the world had receded into the distant past. Their ridicule begins to deconstruct any power that the Nazis might still hold over the present as a malevolent force. Schlingensief reduces Hitler and his cohort to a pornographic fantasy. Somuncu reduces the name Hitler, which had become privileged as different somehow from other names, to a linguistic shtick. Levy completes this demystification of Hitler by removing the one characteristic that placed the Nazi leader above all others in the received gallery of dictators, his reputed charisma. Levy introduces Hitler as someone who never had any real power.

In the last sequence of *The Great Dictator*, Hynkel the dictator has been replaced by Hynkel the Jewish Barber, both characters being played by Chaplin. Throughout the film, Chaplin has used German-sounding gibberish to lampoon Hitler's style of speaking. Here, as the barber steps outside his character, Chaplin the actor steps forward and delivers a plea for universal understanding. The scene creates the ultimate in comedic subversion, reversing the buffoonery of the previous ninety minutes to convey a serious message of peace. Chaplin forces viewers to confront their reaction to his caricature as he pleads for world peace; war at this point is no longer a laughing matter. Hitler is no longer funny. The comedy that we saw in the early scenes, even those portraying persecution, no longer makes us laugh. Moreover, Chaplin delivers his message with a sense of genuine urgency, obviating (41) any ironic reading.

Levy parodies both form and content of *The Great Dictator* in the closing sequence to *Mein Führer*. Adolf Grünbaum, a Jewish actor, has been released from the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen to coach Hitler in a speech. The war has not been going well, Berlin is collapsing, and Goebbels and the other ministers believe Germany needs inspiration; but Hitler is both depressed and in a funk and not in a position to inspire the German populace to fight to the death. Grünbaum and Hitler somehow connect on a personal basis, in spite of Hitler's anti-Semitic rants and in spite of the escalating series of conditions that Grünbaum demands be met by the German leader if he is to receive help. Hitler learns quickly and is poised to make the speech of his life, when he develops laryngitis. Grünbaum again agrees to help to save the

moment, hiding behind a podium and delivering the leader's address as Hitler lip synchs the following words:

My fellow Germans! It is over! Darkness will descend and envelop us. The sun will no longer warm us. The German people will be destroyed. Is that what you want? [The crowd responds "No" and Hitler continues to lip synch Grünbaum's words.] No, we want to lie on the Adriatic, soaking up the sun with bodies that deprivation and defeat have turned to steel. The German soul is a clean soul. We are proud of that! We have to look to the future with united strength. Let us not forget the many problems that we have already solved: those involving communists and those concerning homosexuals! Above all, however, we have solved the Jewish problem. (42)

During the address, the camera cuts between Hitler lip-synching and Grünbaum speaking, the latter being on camera for the words: "above all we have solved the Jewish problem. We have interned thousands, hundreds of thousands in camps and annihilated them, in order to cleanse our people of this bacillus." (43) During a rhetorical question of whether this was the right thing to do, the camera cuts back to Hitler, who continues: "it was necessary for us, this final solution! It was done to satisfy our tortured soul." (44)

The closing sequence of *Mein Führer* subverts the movie's parody of Hitler and the Nazis. Similar to the way Chaplin got viewers to laugh at bumbling inadequacy, only to subvert the laughter with a serious cry for peace, Levy has audiences laugh at ineptitude, only to reveal the reality behind the incompetence. The shock of realization is stronger than in earlier comedies because the film with the advantage of hindsight can include references to the Holocaust and because the audience, with the knowledge created by historical discourse, is aware of the death of millions at the hands of the Nazis. Moreover, neither the address nor the actions of the characters as they reference the Holocaust in the final speech is out of character with the rest of the play. Words and actions reinforce Nazi crimes, as they have been manifest throughout the film, as if forcing viewers to question why they might have been laughing. As the address continues, the question of why one is laughing becomes even stronger:

We trample under foot, as they have trampled on and laughed at us. We are taking our revenge on the Jews, the homosexuals, the communists in all of Europe for the tortures and humiliations in our nurseries. [...] We are a people of disobedient and unloved children! Save me! (The crowd responds in kind, "save me!"). (45)

This final sequence merges Grünbaum and Hitler. Both have been fictionalized in accordance with received legend and history: Grünbaum becomes not only the source of Hitler's rhetorical skills but the catalyst for the Nazi leader's psychological healing. Hitler in turn becomes a subject for psychoanalysis. Together they deliver the film's final speech, which rises above the fiction. Rather than resolve the conflict inherent in the comedy of the preceding scenes, the final moments proceed to analyze history. As in *The Great Dictator*, the text of the fictional story is replaced by the director's metatext, which speaks directly to us about the historical moment. Unlike in Chaplin's film, the admonishment is not to love thy neighbour but rather to hate that which is different. Furthermore, it is delivered not by Hitler, or Hitler alone, but by his Jewish stand-in. The result is that a tragedy of psychological dysfunction replaces the comedy of ridicule. Two characters who have stood at opposite ends of humanity suddenly come together and proclaim that the genocidal policies of Hitler and his followers were the result of a bad childhood, Hitler's and that of the Germans in the crowd listening to him (presumably the parents and grandparents of many in the audience viewing the film). Hitler, his words being spoken by the Jewish concentration inmate Grünbaum, justifies his crimes as the result of trauma inflicted on him by his father. The response of the Volk suggests that they too have been similarly abused. Levy appears to attribute the Holocaust to the father-son conflict of German Expressionism and to bad child rearing. In an interview that appears with the published screenplay to the film, Levy cites psychoanalyst Alice Miller and her study of the importance for children to receive parental approval as an influence on his characterization of Hitler. Responding to a question about the historical accuracy of the film he defends his psychoanalysis of the Nazis as follows:

Modern thought recognizes the important fact that leaders and politicians who were unloved as children are particularly dangerous. Their sense of justice is completely destroyed and they cannot distinguish between right and wrong. (46)

Levy's attribution of the murder of millions of people to Hitler's unhappy childhood precludes satirical interpretation. The result is that Levy's comedy may have "knocked Hitler from a pedestal", as was his stated purpose for the absurdities in the film, only to place him on a psychiatrist's couch. When Hitler and Grünbaum deliver their anti-Semitic rant, the absurd alternate reality the film has created dissolves. It is replaced by historical nonsense: viewers are witnessing a Jew who empathizes with his persecutor (47) and a murderer who has morphed into Hans Beckert from *M*, who murdered because he had to. It is troubling indeed to attribute genocide to psychotic urges brought about by a bad childhood.

Equally as disturbing as advancing popular psychology for the Nazi's program of murder is that the film's humour has relegated Hitler through its absurd caricature, to a pantheon of fools, a rogues' gallery of criminals who have no real power outside of their existence in the funny pages. Levy's *Mein Führer* is the culmination of a process begun by Hollywood in the 1940s. The film recycles tropes from those films that have become clichés: the Nazis as bumblers, Hitler as powerless and the victims of NS-policies as in control of their destiny. A film's images are understood within their historical context, which includes the referents outside the film, the immediacy of the world that is presented and the familiarity of the audience with that world. That is, the reality outside the film filters or tempers the absurdity on screen. Subversion of Hitler in 1940 took away his cultural relevance and thus his power to frighten, but the events outside the movie theatre restored Hitler's true danger. Levy's *Mein Führer* denies more than the Nazis' cultural relevance, it negates their historical relevance. Sixty years after the Third Reich ended, is there anything outside the theatre to restore it? Is it possible that the film destroys Hitler's historical relevance and lessens our ability to remember accurately? Is Levy's Hitler merely the cinematic evolution of Chaplin's Hynkel into a charm that diverts our attention from the historical truth and the horrors of the world?

Endnotes

1. Louis Kaplan, "It Will Get a Terrific Laugh: On the Problematic Pleasures and Politics of Holocaust Humor", in Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson, and Jane Shattuc (Eds), *Hop on Pop* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 354.

2. Roberto Benigni's Italian *Life is Beautiful* preceded *Mein Führer* by 10 years and the East German dramatic comedy *Jakob der Lügner*, directed by Frank Beyer, was released in 1975. But both of these films mix drama with comedy, pathos with laughter. *Mein Führer* is pure farce.
3. See Jeffrey H. Goldstein and Paul E. McGhee (Eds), *The Psychology of Humor* (New York and London: Academic Press, 1972) and the entry on humour in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* located at <http://www.iep.utm.edu/h/humor.htm>.
4. Kaplan, p. 344.
5. Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1914), 135. Available online at <http://books.google.com/books?id=lr-b1FMy3iMC&printsec=titlepage&dq=Henri+Bergson#PPP9,M1>.
6. Quoted in Shai Oster, "Holocaust Humor", *Utne Reader*, 31 October 2007, available online at <http://www.utne.com/1999-09-01/holocaust-humor.aspx>.
7. Kaplan, p. 346.
8. Quoted in Kaplan, p. 348.
9. Quoted in Wendy Doniger, "Terror and Gallows Humor: After September 11?", excerpted from the author's Huizinga Lecture delivered on 14v December 2001 at the University of Leiden and available online at <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/News/911doniger.html>.
10. The situational requirements are similar to those in the use of epithets. Racial nicknames used by members of the racial or ethnic group being so named have a different affective response than if uttered by a non-member.
11. Charles Chaplin, *My Autobiography*, (London: Bodley Head, 1966), p. 148.
12. Kaplan, for example, writes: "The latter-day naysayer [Chaplin] to Holocaust humor ('Had I known ...') is challenged by the compelling insistence of the Chaplin who proclaimed that he 'had to do it.'"
13. See the review by Glen Abel on the DVD release in 2003 of *The Great Dictator* available at http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/hr/search/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1930421. See also the review by Bosley Crowther published in *The New York Times*, 11 October 1940, available at <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9D0CE5DA103BE433A25755C1A9669D946193D6CF>.
14. Abel.
15. Review, *The Great Dictator*, September 27, 2007, available at <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070927/REVIEWS08/70927002/1023>.
16. One of the post-war films the Allies showed the Germans in a re-education campaign carried the title *Todesmühlen* (*Death Mills*). It is available at http://resources.ushmm.org/film/display/main.php?search=simple&dquery=Death+Mills&cache_file=uia_DrrXgE&total_recs=10&page_len=25&page=1&rec=4&file_num=160
17. Sidney "George" Strube's cartoon (*Daily Express*, 28 Sep 1934) gives us an early example of the contemptuous brand of humour aimed at deflating the Nazi image. <http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/record/GS0328/zoom>.
18. The rhyme is a good illustration of Thomas Hobbes's theory that "the passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others..."
19. Quote accompanying a political cartoon by Sir David Low with the caption "Hitler will provide the stomach-ache." *Evening Standard*, December 14, 1939. <http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/record/LSE2719>.
20. Six decades later the Nazi leader was still providing laughs as a comical figure. Franz Liebkind (Will Ferrell), the writer of "Springtime for Hitler," the fictional musical in Mel Brooks's *The Producers* (2005), chastises Max Bialystock (Nathan Lane), the producer of the musical, that he has "made a fool out of Hitler." Bialystock's reply that "he didn't need our help" was merely the latest of a series of caricatures of Hitler lampooning his bellicose manner.
21. Frank Capra's "Why We Fight" series, showcases various war actions. Films such as Anatole Litvak's *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939), traces the actions of a German fifth column in America. These films were intended to rally Americans to the common cause of defeating fascism.
22. Cartoon can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HDAXHM5LBRY>.
23. For a discussion of these films and others see Georg Seeßlen, "Zu Hitler Muss Uns Immer Wieder Etwas Einfallen," 179-199, in *Mein Führer: Die Wirklich Wahrste Wahrheit über Adolf Hitler: Das Buch zum Film*, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2007.
24. To be sure, the scene itself takes place in 1931, before the comparison made by Chaplin's film. But as *Wir Wunderkinder* was made in 1959, the reference to Chaplin's film is clearly intended.
25. The first such attempts were made in East Germany, *Nackt unter Wölfen* (Frank Beyer 1963) and *Jakob der Lügner* (Beyer, 1975). West German directors focused instead on ordinary Germans as victims of a dictatorship in such films as *Der Fussgänger*, *Mädchenkrieg*, or *Tadellöser und Wolff*. See Robert C. Reimer and Carol J. Reimer, *Nazi-retro Film: How German Narrative Cinema Remembers the Past*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1992), and entries on "Vergangenheitsbewältigungsfilm" (301-304), "Holocaust in Feature Films" (153-157), and "War Films" (315-317) in *Historical Dictionary of German Cinema*, Reimer and Reimer, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008.
26. The group included directors Michael Verhoeven, Volker Schlöndorff, and Wolfgang Petersen, and actors Hanna Schygulla, Senta Berger, and Armin Mueller-Stahl. They called on the Academy Awards to redress the slight by nominating the film in other categories for which it was eligible.
27. See "Kulturnachrichten: Golden Globe für Europa Europa," *Deutschland Nachrichten*, 24 January 1992, 7.
28. For additional commentary see Reimer and Reimer, *Nazi-retro Film*, 145-47 and entries on "Europa Europa" (100-01) and "Agnieszka

- Holland" (153) in Reimer and Reimer, *Historical Dictionary of German Cinema*.
29. Schonwald, Josh, "The Rise of Hitler Humor," in *Otium*, Vol 2 # 4, 13 January 2006. Available at http://otium.uchicago.edu/articles/hitler_humorist.html.
 30. In addition to the description by Schonwald, one can get an idea of Somuncu's performance at YouTube.com, especially the routines, "Being Hitler," "Hitler Sein," and "Ich bin Adolf Hitler," and also from his CD performances "Serdar Somuncu liest aus dem Tagebuch eines Massenmörders – Mein Kampf," (2000) and "Serdar Somuncu liest Joseph Goebbels. Diese Stunde der Idiotie: Wollt Ihr den Totalen Krieg? Live-Lesung," (2003).
 31. Goldstein and McGhee describe over 10 theories of humour from biological to psychological in *The Psychology of Humor*. Aaron Smuts focuses on four main theories: superiority, relief, incongruity, and play in his internet essay in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
 32. Sao Paola Mostra de Cinema, 24 October 2001; Coachella Valley Festival of Festivals, 1 November 2001; Munich Film Festival, 29 June 2002
 33. Quoted by BBC News 21 November 2002. Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/tv_and_radio/2495839.stm.
 34. BBC News 21 November 2002.
 35. The assessment is based on the reviews, mostly in German, available at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0780568/externalreviews>.
 36. Levy's justification echoes that of cartoonist Sir David Lowe, who over 70 years ago wrote that "showing Nazi leaders as dreadful brutes... no doubt had the effect of building up the idea that Hitler was too, too, too powerful to resist." See note # 19. More recently, Daniel Kothenschulte, writing in a review available at <http://www.filmportal.de>, interprets Schneider's Hitler as a parody of Bruno Ganz's portrayal in *Der Untergang*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 09.01.2007.
 37. Dani Levy, 209-214, *Buch zum Film*, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2007.
 38. For a biography of Erik Jan Hanussen see Mel Gordon, *Hanussen: Hitler's Jewish Clairvoyant*. Feral House: Los Angeles, 2001. Gordon contends that without Hanussen's help, Hitler would not have been elected to the Reichstag.
 39. Werner Maser, editor. *Mein Schüler Hitler. Das Tagebuch seines Lehrers Paul Devrient, bearbeitet und herausgegeben von Werner Maser*. Ilmgau Verlag, Paffenhofen 1975. That Hitler was coached in the art of speaking was also a topic in Bertolt Brecht's drama about Chicago gangsters, *Artuo Ui*. Cited in Gustav Seibt, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 08.01.2007, available at <http://www.filmportal.de>.
 40. Of course the question has never been answered, nor can it be, whether any of the material in the films would have been funny had the true context, the mass murders of Jews on the way to and in the concentration camps, been known.
 41. Years later the pacifism of the movie's close haunted Chaplin when he was investigated by the House Un-American Activities Committee, which saw in the movie's plea for peace a tendency toward a leftist even communist ideology. In its day, viewers could have understood the film as a call for appeasement.
 42. Deutsche! Es ist aus! Die Finsternis wird kommen und uns einhüllen. Keine Sonne wird uns mehr wärmen. Das deutsche Volk wird untergehen! Wollt ihr das? (das Volk: Nein) Nein, wir wollen unseren von Entbehrung und Niederlagen gestählten Körper an der Adria baden. Die deutsche Seele ist eine saubere Seele. Darauf sind wir stolz! ...Mit geeinter Kraft müssen wir nach vorne schauen. Vergessen wir nicht! Die vielen Probleme, die wir schon gelöst haben. Mit den Kommunisten, mit den Homosexuellen! Aber vor allem haben wir das jüdische Problem gelöst. All quotes come from Dani Levy, *Buch zum Film*, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2007.
 43. "Vor allem haben wir das jüdische Problem gelöst. Wir haben Tausende, Hunderttausende in Lagern interniert und vernichtet, um unser Volk von diesem Bazillus zu reinigen."
 44. "es war uns ein tiefes Bedürfnis, die Endlösung! Eine Befriedigung für unsere gequälte Seele."
 45. "Wir treten in das lächerliche Antlitz, wie man uns getreten und ausgelacht hat. Wir rächen uns an den Juden, den Homosexuellen, den Kommunisten in ganz Europa für die Qualen und Demütigen in unseren Kinderzimmern. ... Wir sind ein Volk von ungehorsam, ungeliebten Kindern! Heil mich selbst!" to which the Volk responds "Heil mich selbst!"
 46. "Es ist eine ganz wichtige und durchaus moderne Erkenntnis, dass Führer und Politiker, die ungeliebte Kinder waren, besonders gefährlich sind, weil sie in ihrem Gerechtigsempfinden völlig gestört sind, in ihrem Empfinden, was richtig und was falsch ist."
 47. Levy in his interviews does not refer to the Stockholm syndrome, the theoretical phenomenon that holds victims identify with their captors; it would thus be unfair here to attribute his conclusion to this psychological phenomenon.

Adolf
Hitler

Charlie
Chaplin

cinema and
Nazism

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attitudes toward Hitler, (b) the perceived role of the German population in Nazi Germany, (c) the perception of present danger from national socialist tendencies, and (d) the subjective need for continued preoccupation with German history. A total of 110 Germans were interviewed. Results are discussed with regard to the public controversy concerning a potential trivialization of Hitler and National Socialism by the movie. Keywords: media influence, National Socialism, Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler, exemplification theory, demonizing, personality moderators. In recent years, the manner in which the media deals with the German history of National Socialism has undergone a profound change: Central figures of the Nazi regime are increasingly focused on as private persons (Reichel, 2005). Hitler only laughed at his silly request as he despised the monarchy. In 1938 when the Nazi unleashed Krystallnacht on the Jews of Germany the Kaiser said "that for the first time in my life I am ashamed to be a German." When the Nazis stormed through the low countries and defeated France in 1940 the Kaiser sent a congratulator. Continue Reading. However, Bismarck was a convinced monarchist. I'm quite sure that he wouldn't have liked the abdication of the Emperor and the Republic that followed. An Analysis of Cinematic Images of Hitler and the Nazis, 1940-2007. Robert C. Reimer. September 2009. Feature Articles. Issue 52. Filmmakers have lampooned, mocked or otherwise made us laugh at Adolf Hitler, the leaders of the National Socialists and the pomp associated with Nazism from the time the Nazis rose to power in Germany. Even as history was marking Hitler and his ministers as monstrous killers, cinema was giving them comic personas that produced laughter rather than fear in viewers. Films portrayed the deeds of the National Socialists as chaotic bumbling, diverting attention away from Nazi propaganda as the archetypal and, in many ways, most likely case for strong effects has rarely been studied. We collect extensive data about Hitler's speeches and gauge their impact on voter support at five national elections preceding the dictatorship. Our findings suggest that Hitler's speeches, while rationally targeted, had a negligible impact on the Nazis' electoral fortunes. Only the 1932 presidential runoff, an election preceded by an extraordinarily short, intense, and one-sided campaign, yielded positive effects. This study questions the importance of charismatic leaders for the success of populist movements. "Randomization Analysis of Experimental Data. The Fisher Randomization Test: Comment." Journal of the American Statistical Association 75 (371): 591-3.