

Wile E. Coyote in the Bunker

Film, History, and the Haunted Unlife of Adolf Hitler
on the Silver Screen

Vinzenz Hediger

Natürlich war Hitler ein Mensch. Was soll er denn sonst gewesen sein? Ein Elefant? (Of course Hitler was a human being. What else would he have been? An elephant?)

– German literary critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki, a Holocaust survivor, on *Downfall*, after it was widely criticized for depicting Hitler “as a human being”

I

For some time now professional historians have been aware, or have been made aware, that writing history is not least a literary endeavour. In his seminal work, *Metahistory* of 1973, Hayden White subjected the works of a number of classic nineteenth-century European historians from Europe, from Jules Michelet to Jacob Burckhardt, to a structural analysis.¹ White defined a historical work as a verbal structure in the form of narrative prose discourse. Historians, he claimed, use emplotments – models that are structurally homologous to literary plot devices such as romance, tragedy, satire, and comedy. Rather than merely relate the “facts” about the past, then, historians dramatize history, and thus explain history in affective and emotional terms. A few years after *Metahistory*, in 1981 the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur published the first volume of his three-volume study *Temps et récit*, which explored the relationship of narrative structure and the experience of time.² Taking a classic statement by Augustine about the elusive nature of time as his starting-point, Ricoeur anchored White’s analysis in both hermeneutics and philosophical anthropology, and argued, through a re-reading of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, that narrative is a technique for configuring and apprehending the experience of time. In order to underscore this particular point, Ricoeur goes on to show that even in the works of decidedly anti-narrative twentieth-century historians

such as Fernand Braudel and other authors of the Annales School, narrative prevails. Without narrative and emplotment, then, there is no experience of time, which also means that there is no experience of history. Somewhat earlier than both White and Ricoeur, and perhaps even more radically, the German historian Reinhart Koselleck argued that without the concept of history there is no history. Koselleck's variation of meta-history was *Begriffsgeschichte*, the history of concepts. Far from merely tracing the genealogy and etymology of certain words along the lines of the Oxford English dictionary, *Begriffsgeschichte* in Koselleck's sense argues that concepts have a direct bearing on our knowledge and experience, and hence our capacity to act.³ Thus certain key concepts of philosophical and political discourse are *Erfahrungsstiftungsbegriffe*, concepts that open up a field of potential experiences that would be unthinkable and thus unliveable without these concepts. One of Koselleck's main findings was that *Geschichte*, the German term that denotes not only the practice of historiography and its subject, but also the possibility that a group of individuals or objects both *have* and *make* history, is one of a number of *Kollektivsingulare*, or singular terms that describe the collective experience of a multi-faceted set of facts and processes, that emerge in the German language around 1800; other examples would be *Bildung* and revolution.⁴ As long as there is not "*Geschichte*" there is no history in the sense of a collective experience of a historical past and the possibility of creating a future individually or collectively – "making history". With regard to professional historiography, this is literally the case: the emergence of the concept of *Geschichte* in the German language coincided with the emergence of modern historiography in German universities, with historical research conducted by professional historians with a critical approach to source materials.⁵ Contrary to a point made by the English philosopher Michael Oakeshott – who argues that history and experience have to be strictly separated, not least for methodological purposes, and defines "history" as that which is most emphatically not experience, and so has no bearing on our current existential concerns⁶ – Koselleck also postulates a strong link between *Geschichte* and *Erfahrung*, history and experience: history *is* experience, and only becomes possible within the horizon of a shared experience of a group of individuals. With regard to media and media history, however, Koselleck's main points seem to be that history as we both tell it and experience it is not only shaped by emplotments and narratives on a conceptual level, for history exists only if we have a word for it. If for Ricoeur narrative is the only way we can acquire a sense of time, language, the medium of concepts, for Koselleck, is the media *a priori* of history.⁷

If we take our lead from the work of Bernard Stiegler, who enlarges Jacques Derrida's concept of "trace" – the absence of presence – and its most obvious

instance, writing, to include all media as they partake in a comprehensive process of “grammatization”,⁸ we can expand Koselleck’s insight beyond the medium of language to other media, particularly the technical media of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For instance, we can ask how history, *Geschichte* – the experience of history and of having a history and the practices both of making and writing history – is affected by the emergence of recorded time in the form of image and sound recordings on film and other formats.

Not least among the advantages of asking this question is that it immediately shifts the terms of the debate about film and history. The perennial primary focus of any discussion of film and history is “accuracy”. The most pressing issue for many historians dealing with film always seems to be whether the cinematic representation of a historical event corresponds to “the facts”, to an academically sanctioned version of that historical event as set down in writing and transmitted in print. It is perhaps almost too easy to deconstruct this emphasis on correspondence and accuracy as a defence mechanism of sorts. Anxiety about the affective appeal and power of the image has been a philosophical concern since Antiquity, and fears of the image have not subsided in the modern period; indeed, quite to the contrary.⁹ In his *Laocoon* essay, for instance, one of the founding texts of modern aesthetics published in 1766, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing opposed painting to poetry by emphasizing the emotionally overwhelming power of pictorial representations. Poetry, on the other hand, because it is expressed in the medium of writing which parses out meaning in discrete elements as a succession of letters and words, has the effect of distancing and allowing the reader to preserve a rational stance towards the spectacle.¹⁰ Against this backdrop of a long and well-established tradition of iconoscepticism – not to say iconophobia – dragging the film image into the court of correspondence and accuracy would seem like an contra-phobic attempt to reign in the supposedly overwhelming power of the image and re-affirm the epistemic primacy of writing and, with it, reasoned – written or, preferably, spoken – argument. But whatever the psychological dynamics underpinning the critique of inaccurate representations of history on film, there is no doubt that such arguments consistently assume that text is somehow both more neutral and reliable with regard to the representation of historical events than the image, particularly an image that displays a reconstruction of the event. Always the written word is on the side of truth; always the film image already exists beyond that truth.

Notwithstanding the fact that any written version of the historical facts would, pace White and Ricoeur, already be an emplotment in its own right, with its own anthropological motivation (and justification), expanding Koselleck’s hypothesis about the conceptual basis of history from language to technical media, including film, juxtaposes the film image and writing in

ways that are potentially both more complex and less hierarchical than the order of image and writing that we tacitly suppose and explicitly reiterate by asking questions about correspondence and accuracy. But if we take our clue from Koselleck (and Stiegler) and abandon the quasi-legal framework of holding the film image accountable for constantly exceeding the literal truth – the truth of writing – for an approach that simply ranks cinema among the other media that enable and inform our conceptions of history, how exactly does cinema affect our conception of history, and with it our capacity to experience, make, and write history? While this question is too large to be answered in the short space of an essay, what I would like to do here is at least to sketch the issues involved in answering.

II

A first step towards sparing the moving image the standard trial in the iconophobic court of correspondence and accuracy is to allow cinematic narratives equal standing with written accounts in an analysis along the lines proposed by Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur. If historical works use emplotments, and if narrative answers a human need in apprehending the experience of time, why not also the narratives and emplotments of cinema? Film scholars at least have long answered this question by expanding meta-historical approaches inspired particularly by the work of Hayden White to cinema.¹¹ And the debate has been far from limited to an analysis of narrative structure and emplotment only.

When Oliver Stone released his film *JFK* in 1991, most of the ensuing controversy focused on questions of correspondence and accuracy, with historians and politicians publicly disputing Stone's reading of the Kennedy assassination as a government-sponsored assassination plot along the lines of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, where Claudius (Lyndon Johnson) murders old King Hamlet (Kennedy) and goes on to wreak havoc on the house of Denmark (the US, then engaged in an escalating war in South-East Asia).¹² Stone's multi-layered montage served as one of the points of attack for the film's critics. True to the mechanics of modern iconoscepticism, critics deplored the overwhelming force of the montage and the film's incessant stream of images, and they accused Stone of fabrication because the film's montage combined archival footage with re-enactments and entirely fictional material without clearly marking out the distinctions. It fell to film scholars to shift the perspective and ask what, if anything, the film's striking montage style had to do with its vision of American history, and of historical experience more generally. For Robert Stam, for instance, the film's montage was an allegory of the state of fragmentation in which the culture wars of the 1960s to 1980s had

left American society. Others argued that the film's montage was a symptom of trauma, or rather a visual strategy expressive of the traumatic nature of the historic event of Kennedy's assassination. If the film's tag line was "The story that won't go away", this reading suggested that the tag line should have been "The story that won't go away because it can never be fully told". *JFK*'s montage produces an excess of images precisely because no image can ever fully capture the historical truth as long as all the facts are not known. *JFK* would thus be a film without an ending, a film that symptomatically shows what happens to film when a story that matters has no ending and when the storyteller – and the audience along with her or him – is trapped in a loop of eternal retellings of the same story, with no ending in sight for them or the story.¹³

The example is relevant here because through what we might call the excessive aesthetics of the traumatic loop, *JFK*'s montage style points to both the range and the limits of the film image with regards to both historical experience and historiography. The film provides a visual and visceral experience of what it means to be trapped in a traumatic loop: it is about history as experience, but about the experience of something historical not receding into the past of history in an Oakeshottian sense. Yet it provides this experience precisely to the extent that, and because, the image fails to witness and capture what we assume to be the essence of the historical event. For as long as the image fails to do so, images proliferate, with each image making way for yet another image that fails in the face of the event. But once we have an image of the event – literally a full picture – an image that shows who did it and why and leaves no questions unanswered (at least not for the time being), the traumatic event can fade away and thus become an event that is more strictly historical: over and done with, a thing of the past.

Oliver Stone has often claimed that he is an historian not *of* cinema, but *through* cinema, and one could argue that in *JFK* he reaches the level of meta-history with a brilliant dramatization of his failure to finish the story. Stone, however, is far from alone among directors in donning the mantle of the cinematic historiographer, nor in turning films into meta-historical reflections on the possibility of historical experience in and through film. Film-makers from David Wark Griffith to Jean-Luc Godard have long claimed a privileged status for the film image with regards to historical events. If David Wark Griffith answered Woodrow Wilson's contentious judgement that *Birth of a Nation* was like "writing history with a lightning bolt" with some ambitious claims for cinema of his own, such as the vision of a library of the future which would contain nothing but film records of historical events and thus make critical historiography superfluous, Jean-Luc Godard suggested that cinema's historic and historiographic mission was, or rather would have

been, to bear witness of the history of the twentieth century. One of the main strands of argument in Godard's six-hour video essay *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1989–1998) is that cinema has largely failed to accomplish this mission. The entire argument, however, is built on the assumption that, by virtue of its indexical relationship to reality, the film image would have been singularly well placed to succeed. It is important to note, however, that Godard makes his argument about the range and failure of the film image in relation to the historical event in yet another multilayered montage that combines a multitude of images of varying provenance, documentary material with archive material and fiction film excerpts, combined with photographs, paintings, music, and sound snippets.¹⁴

While Oliver Stone's *JFK* and Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* have different agendas to pursue and stories to tell, and tell them very differently, they make a similar theoretical point. Through their montage they exemplify the relationship of image and event not merely as one of reference, of correspondence, and accuracy of representation. It is a dynamic, experiential relationship that shapes the modalities of historical narrative, and with it the different modes of memory and of historical experience. In order to further explore that relationship I would like to turn to another, more contemporary example.

III

When Oliver Hirschbiegel's dramatization of Hitler's last days in the Berlin bunker, *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*), premiered in 2004, the film received an unusually strong endorsement from *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), a conservative German daily newspaper. This endorsement came as no surprise, however, since the film script was very closely based on a book by Joachim Fest, a conservative journalist and historian who had been FAZ's culture editor from 1973 to 1993. In the ensuing debate about the film, which was produced by Bernd Eichinger, Germany's most consistently successful film producer of the last thirty years, *Downfall* was largely spared any charges of factual inaccuracy. Instead, the film's detractors focused on the other aspect of the quasi-legal framework for the critique of historical films: the overwhelming and supposedly seductive power of the image. While most critics praised Bruno Ganz's hyper-naturalistic performance in the role of the dictator, the film's critics blamed the director for showing Hitler "as a human being" – for depicting complex emotions in his protagonist, and for allowing the audience to empathize with someone who is, arguably, history's greatest monster. On the occasion of the French premiere, for instance, documentary filmmaker Claude Lanzmann was quoted in *France-Soir* to the effect that the film was

“perverse and dangerous”, and Norbert Frei, a well-respected academic historian, then at the University of Bochum, took the film apart in an opinion article for *Le Monde*. In the best Lessing tradition, Frei described the film as dangerous and pernicious by citing the director’s failure to establish the requisite emotional distance between the audience and the horrible monster on-screen.¹⁵ FAZ left it to their long-time literary critic, Marcel Reich-Ranicki, a Holocaust survivor, to reiterate the newspaper’s original position in a satirical vein with his statement that Hirschbiegel had to show Hitler in this manner because, after all, the dictator was “a human being” and not an elephant.

After a few months the controversy died down. No lasting damage seemed to have accrued to Western civilization from partially empathizing with history’s greatest monster on screen. Yet very recently, in 2009, *Downfall* re-emerged at the centre of another controversy. Producer Bernd Eichinger and his company, Constantin Film, had taken legal action against YouTube and certain YouTube users in order to ban videos based on an excerpt from Hirschbiegel’s film. In the excerpt we see Bruno Ganz as Hitler raging at his most important generals upon learning that his last lines of defence outside Berlin have fallen. It is a key scene in the film, the moment when Hitler realizes that there are no more military options for him to pursue. The – mostly anonymous – makers of the videos had taken the original German dialogues and added subtitles, creating new readings of the scene. In one video Hitler throws a tantrum when he learns that Barack Obama had won the presidential election, in another video he explodes in rage at the news that Michael Jackson had died, and so forth. Constantin Film and Bernd Eichinger claimed that these videos constituted an infringement of their copyright and obtained a court order that these videos be taken down. Within hours of the videos being removed from YouTube a new version appeared in which Hitler explodes with rage at the news of Constantin’s lawsuit.

The *Downfall* videos are an illustration of what Richard Dawkins, in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene* terms a “meme”, a unit for a cultural idea that self-replicates and a response to selective pressure in cultural environments.¹⁶ Together with Richard Hofstadter, Dawkins developed “memetics” as a theory of mental content based on an analogy between Darwinian evolution and the development of culture. According to memetics, memes emerge on the basis of processes such as “informational selection”, or selection on the basis of truth value or moral relevance, and “emotional selection”, or selection on the basis of the meme’s capacity to evoke strong feelings, particularly strong negative feelings such as fear, anger, and disgust.¹⁷ The Internet has been a fertile environment for memes. Many Internet memes, of which the *Downfall* meme is perhaps one of the most famous, have involved some sort of copyright issue due to the fact that they involve the re-use or re-mix of copyrighted materi-

als.¹⁸ The first of these *Downfall* videos appeared in 2006, and they became a network node on YouTube in 2009. While it would be interesting to reflect further on how memes emerge and on the complex relationship of copyright and cultural evolution, I would like to focus on another aspect of the *Downfall* meme: the seemingly unavoidable return of the irrepressible monster, Hitler. For what the figure of Hitler is obviously not is merely a thing of the past – as little as Kennedy was merely a historical figure from a distant past that had to be revived and brought back to memory when Stone made JFK.

Another way to account for the fact that the figure of Hitler is anything but a thing from the past, and continues to thrive in our contemporary media environment, is to suggest that the figure of Hitler itself constitutes a meme. When Mike Godwin formulated “Godwin’s Law” in 1989, which states that in every online argument one of the parties will, of necessity, sooner or later invoke Hitler or the Nazis by way of comparison, he was only half joking.¹⁹ In the neo-Darwinian terms of memetics, the figure of Hitler appears to be highly successful both in terms of informational and emotional selection. Few historical figures are as recognizable and can be as easily evoked as Hitler. A hat and a little black moustache applied to any figure usually suffice to introduce, or rather re-enter the figure of Hitler into any context. On a textual level Hitler has, in a fact, the recognizability of a cartoon figure like Mickey Mouse (who, coincidentally, rose to international prominence in exactly the same years as Hitler, in the late 1920s and early 1930s). Apart from political caricatures, Hollywood films such as Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator* and Lubtisch’s *To Be or Not To Be* were probably among the first cultural texts to exploit the fact that the figure of Hitler was what we now call a meme. In cinema, the comedian Mel Brooks continued in that tradition, starting with his first film, *The Producers*, in 1969, which told the story of a scheme hatched to bankrupt a Broadway musical company with a production entitled “Springtime for Hitler”, which features a casting scene in which dozens of singing and dancing Hitlers line up on stage in a Broadway theatre. Although far from being made by Hollywood, the *Downfall* videos, the works of an emergent new remix culture, much like a similar production, a mash-up video that combines archive footage from a Hitler speech with a recording of a comic set by Bavarian comedian Gerhard Polt about a man who has been tricked into a hire contract for a luxury car,²⁰ continue in that same tradition.

What appears to be important is that the Hitler meme thrives not on the re-appearance of the original (in whatever form), but on *doppelgänger-tum*, duplication and dubbing. Significantly, both *The Great Dictator* and *To Be or Not To Be* revolve around the figure of a Hitler doppelgänger and feature characters who look like, or can easily be made to look like, Hitler. Non-comedic films about Hitler also hinge on the quality of the central

performance. *Downfall* received good reviews in part because of the hyper-naturalistic rendering of the dictator's tics by the Swiss actor Bruno Ganz, generally acknowledged to be the greatest living actor of the German stage. *Downfall*, in other words, works because Ganz is, or does, a "good" Hitler. Biopics of course always depend to a certain extent on the likeness between the film's star and the historical figure he or she portrays.²¹ But while in other biopics the star's image usually exceeds the memetic presence of the character, in Hitler the meme always exceeds the actor's performance. For all of Bruno Ganz's high-art troubles, almost anyone can play Hitler as long as they don a moustache and a uniform, a point aptly demonstrated by the casting scene in Mel Brooks's *The Producers*. The logic of the doppelganger, of duplication and dubbing, applies to the remix and mash-up videos as well. In the case of the leasing contract video mentioned above dubbing is the whole point: the video lip-synchs footage of a Hitler speech with a comic creed from a popular stand-up comedian. In this video, Hitler re-enters as a kind of ventriloquist's puppet of sorts, a re-entry into a different context with a comical effect not unlike that of Mel Brooks's "Hitler rap" and a short segment entitled "Hitler on ice", with the dictator appearing in an ice-skating revue, both featured in Brooks's *History of the World, Part 1* from 1981. Similarly, the *Downfall* Internet videos create Hitler doppelgangers by substituting subtitles for dubbing. The strategy is what you might call reverse ventriloquism. Rather than lending a new voice to the historical Hitler, the *Downfall* Internet videos retain the original dialogue, but add new meaning through their written translations. Of course, the idea that what Hitler says does not really matter is at least as old as Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, in which the Hitler/Hynkel figure shifts into an incomprehensible parody of German whenever he ascends to the lectern to deliver one of his rants. The German film director Helmut Dietl picked up on Chaplin's idea in his 1992 film about the forgery of the infamous Hitler diaries, a comedy revolving around Germany's (and Britain's) perverse but continuing infatuation with everything to do with Hitler. The film took its title, *Schtonk!*, from one of the pseudo-German words the Hitler/Hynkel figure sputters in Chaplin's film. The title insinuates that to the dictator/orator's audiences then, as to all those who wanted to believe that the Hitler diaries actually existed in the 1980s, what Hitler says (or writes) matters little so long as it is the "Führer" who says (or writes) it. It should be noted in passing that this is very much in line with Hitler's persona, for he is remembered less for his speeches – no Gettysburg address there – than for his oratory, including his bodily performance. However, Hitler's body-speech performance translates so well and lends itself so readily to re-entries into other contexts partly because there is, in a fundamental way, nothing to translate; because as speech it is always fundamentally inarticulate. Chaplin was merely the first

to see this. Picking up Chaplin's thread, the *Downfall* videos exploit precisely the inarticulate nature of Hitler's performance. Rather than having an actor don a moustache and a uniform, the *Downfall* videos re-enter the Hitler character into multiple new contexts merely by re-framing the meaning of his emotional outburst. The *Downfall* videos establish the figure of Hitler as a nodal point in the world of social networking through the Internet. He is a universal blogger-avatar of sorts, someone who has an Internet platform and something to say about everything. But the effect of subtitling is essentially the same as it is for impersonations of the doppelganger scenarios: there is a Hitler for every occasion. In the Hitler meme, it would seem, the figure of the dictator not only goes forth, but has already multiplied abundantly.

By providing a Hitler for every occasion through what amounts to reverse ventriloquism, the *Downfall* videos play on yet another key element of what the historian and Hitler biographer Ian Kershaw calls the "Hitler myth".²² "*Wenn das der Führer wüßte*", "If the Führer knew about this", was a phrase much heard in Nazi Germany, generally used to reconcile the evidence of malfeasance with the image of the "Führer" as a force for good: if only the Führer knew about this, none of this would happen, because the Führer would not allow it. The *Downfall* videos are about what happens when the Führer finally learns what happened. But what happens then is not what the self-deluding citizens of Nazi Germany expected. What happens in the *Downfall* videos is something else, but it is always the same: whatever the news, the Führer erupts in impotent rage.^{22b}

One could argue that the *Downfall* meme is not relevant to a discussion of film and history since it falls into the realm of comedy. The court of accuracy and correspondence has no jurisdiction over comedy; comedy can do (almost) anything. However, it seems doubtful whether we can still discuss cultural memory and historical consciousness without taking into account what we might call their media environment – the environment of technical media in which both memory and historical consciousness of collective groups become possible. Whether we analyse historical consciousness by way of discourse analysis or in terms of memes and informational and emotional selection, the ubiquity of the figure of Hitler, if nothing else, seems to indicate that the trial of accuracy and correspondence can no longer fully do justice to the circulation of images of historical events. Rather, we should think of an occurrence such as the *Downfall* video meme as something akin to the concepts, the *Begriffe*, of *Begriffsgeschichte*, and so study their emergence, their semantic structure, and their agency.

In sum, the impotence of the Führer's rage in *Downfall* provides a possible point of entry. Steeped in psychoanalysis as we all are, it would be tempting to read the persistence of the *Downfall* meme as that of the Hitler meme

more generally, as a return of the repressed. However, I would argue that a slightly different logic is at work here. In a recent essay on the excess of animated bodies in cartoon animation films, Christian McCrea reflects on the fact that in animation films the bodies of the characters seem impervious to physical violence.²³ No matter how deep the abyss into which Wile E. Coyote falls in his futile attempts to catch the Road Runner, no matter how big the rocks that land on his head after yet another of his traps for Road Runner ensnares him rather than his intended prey, he always comes back, seemingly unscathed, to hatch another plan. Rather discuss the eternal return of Wile E. Coyote in terms of a compulsion to repeat fuelled by some sort of death drive, or a return of the living dead along the lines of the *Zombie* figure, McCrea proposes to discuss the imperviousness of cartoon characters in terms of a “haunted unlife”. They haunt their worlds, they never die, but they are not quite alive either. In his impotent rage, indefatigably exploding at every piece of news but always impotent to do anything about it, the Hitler of the *Downfall* meme resembles nothing so much as Wile E. Coyote, who never gets anywhere with his plans but never gives up. In another essay on animation, Sean Cubitt recently argued that the concept of animation – in the sense of the attribution of volition and self-sustaining life to inanimate objects and technical devices, and as different from animism – is historically speaking fairly recent.²⁴ It only becomes possible to think in terms of animation at around the same time that the modern, biological concept of life emerged – in the early nineteenth century – which coincidentally was also the time when *Geschichte* became a new conceptual reality. Perhaps the lesson, however preliminary, of the haunted unlife of the figure of Hitler on screen is this: the question is not so much how well a film represents the past, but how film becomes a stage on which, in a dramatic confrontation with selective memory and through the medium of the meme, the past struggles for its survival.

Sammanfattning

I en analys som utgår från historiografiska teorier – t.ex. Ricoeur, Hayden White och Reinhard Koselleck – studerar Vinzenz Hediger filmklipp på Youtube. Den teoretiker som ges särskild emfas är Richard Dawkins och dennes begrepp ”meme”, ett kulturellt uttryck som av sig själv replikerar den omkringliggande kulturen och som svarar på vissa fenomen i den kulturella sfären. Memer har varit särskilt vanliga på Internet och i denna text ägnar Hediger sig särskilt åt klipp från Oliver Hirschbiegels *Unggöngen* (2004), filmen om Hitlers sista dagar i Berlin-bunkern i april 1945. Här ställs bilderna av Bruno Ganz som Hitler i oväntade och nya kombinationer.

Keywords: Theory of historiography, memes, Adolf Hitler, Youtube, *Downfall* (2004)

Notes

- 1 Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore 1973.
- 2 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, i, trans. David Pellauer, Chicago 1990.
- 3 *Begriffsgeschichte*, coincidentally, is akin to what Georges Canguilhem called historical epistemology and what Canguilhem's student Michel Foucault later labelled as the study of systems of knowledge and discourse. Like Canguilhem, Koselleck expands Kant's question "What can we know?" to become "What can we know at a given point in time?", and like Foucault, Koselleck assumes that concepts give substance to social realities that would not exist without them. Neither Koselleck nor Foucault is a constructivist, then; rather, they are nominalists.
- 4 Reinhart Koselleck, "Die Geschichte der Begriffe und Begriffe der Geschichte", in id., *Begriffsgeschichten*, Frankfurt am Main 2006, pp. 56–76; Reinhart Koselleck, "Über die Verfügbarkeit der Geschichte", in id., *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeit*, Frankfurt am Main 1989, pp. 260–277.
- 5 Luigi Marino, *Praeceptores Germaniae. Göttingen, 1770–1820*, trans. Brigitte Szabó-Bechstein, Göttingen 1995; Friedrich Jäger and Jörn Rüsen, *Geschichte des Historismus. Eine Einführung*, Munich 1992.
- 6 Michael Oakeshott, "The activity of being an historian", in id., *Rationalism in politics and other essays*, London 1962, pp. 151–183.
- 7 Reinhart Koselleck, "Darstellung, Ereignis und Struktur", in id., *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeit*, Frankfurt am Main 1998, pp. 144–157.
- 8 According to Stiegler, grammatization is the reduction of fluxes to discreet, formal, and reproducible elements. Bernard Stiegler, *Mécréance et discrédit, i: La décadence des démocraties industrielles*, Paris 2004, pp. 65–67.
- 9 For an intellectual history of iconoclasm and iconophobia, see Alain Besançon, *L'image interdite*, Paris 2000.
- 10 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "Laokoon: oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie", in *Werke*, vi, (ed.) Herbert G. Göpfert, Munich 1974, p. 155.
- 11 The work of Vivian Sobchak and Michael Renov is particularly relevant here. See Vivian Sobchak, "Surge and Splendor: A Phenomenology of the Hollywood Historical Epic", *Representations* 29 1990, pp. 24–49; *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television and the Modern Event*, (ed.) ead., AFI Film Reader Series; New York 1992; and *Theorizing Documentary*, (ed.) Michael Renov, AFI Film Reader Series; New York 1993.
- 12 For a thorough documentation of that controversy, see *JFK. The Book of the Film*, (eds.) Oliver Stone and Zachary Sklar, New York 1994.
- 13 For both readings, see Vinzenz Hediger, "Montage der nachträglichen Angst. Vom Schreiben und Umschreiben der Geschichte im Kino", *Cinema* (Zurich) 43 1998, pp. 47–61.
- 14 On Godard's montage and his conception of (film) history, see Trond Lundemo, "The Index and Erasure: Godard's Approach to Film History", in *Forever Godard* (eds.) Michel Temple, James S. Williams and Michael Witt, London 2004, pp. 380–395.
- 15 See "Im Geschichtsprozeß", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 5 January 2005. The title of the article is a pointed play on words, for *Prozeß* in German means both "process" and "trial". The idea that history is a process is of course current among Marxist thinkers, and thus the title

- artfully implies that it was mostly left-wing late-Marxist intellectuals who attacked the film and submitted *Downfall* to an ideologically motivated trial of sorts.
- 16 Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford 1976; see also <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/downfall-hitler-meme> (10-09-17).
- 17 See, for example, Chris Bell and Emily Sternberg, "Emotional Selection in Memes: The Case of Urban Legends", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81/6 2001, pp. 1028–1041.
- 18 On the legal and cultural implications of such practices see Lawrence Lessig, *Remix, Making Art and Commerce in the Hybrid Economy*, Creative Commons Licence Version, <http://www.bloomsburyacademic.com/remix.htm> (10-09-17).
- 19 http://wz.eff.org/Net_culture/Folklore/Humor/godwins.law (10-09-17).
- 20 See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15I9ii8RnnE> (10-09-15).
- 21 On the textual dynamics of the biopic, see Henry Taylor, *Rolle des Lebens. Die Filmbiographie als narratives System*, Marburg 2001.
- 22 Ian Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth". Image and Reality in the Third Reich*, Oxford 2001.
- 22b Victor Klemperer, a professor of French literature at the Technische Universität Dresden who survived the Nazi period in Dresden, discusses Hitler's oratory style in several places in his diary, which was published posthumously in 1995. Regarding a Hitler speech in Königsberg in March 1933, Klemperer writes: "Ich verstand nur einzelne Worte. Aber der Ton! Das salbungsvolle Gebrüll, wirklich Gebrüll, eines Geistlichen!" ("I understood only a few words. But the tone! The unctuous roar, really roar, of a chaplain." (Victor Klemperer, *Tagebücher 1933–1934*, Berlin 1995, p. 8) About a later speech in July 1933, in which Hitler triumphantly claims that his enemies were laughing at him in January but are laughing no more, Klemperer writes: "vielleicht ist er im Augenblick allmächtig – das aber war Ton und Gebärde ohnmächtiger Wut" (op. cit., p. 43). To a perceptive listener, it would seem, Hitler's oratory was both fundamentally inarticulate and an expression of impotent rage from the outset.
- 23 Christian McCrea, "Explosive, Expulsive, Extraordinary: The Excess of Animated Bodies", *Animation* 3/1 2008, pp. 9–24.
- 24 Sean Cubitt, "Observations on the History and Uses of Animation Occasioned by the Exhibition Eyes, Lies and Illusions Selected from Works in the Werner Nekes Collection", *Animation* 3/1 2008, pp. 49–65.