After Downfall: 10 years of the Nazi Past in German Culture

A workshop co-hosted by the Department of German and the Institute for Contemporary and Comparative Literature (ICCL) at the School of Modern Languages, University of St Andrews, 27th-28th February 2015.

In the first decade or so after reunification, critical discourse suggested a shift in German cultural memory towards a more empathetic representation of the Nazi past that was less burdened by the guilt of the perpetrators; a development welcomed by some, but which alarmed many critics. An example of that unease was the controversy surrounding Oliver Hirschbiegel's film Der Untergang (2004) and its portrayal of the Führer. The film’s apparent attempt to humanise the Nazi leader, as well as to portray the German Volk as collective victims of a tyrannical madman, was interpreted by some as the culmination of that shift.

Almost a decade later, the fiction bestseller chart in Germany was dominated by a comic novel, Er ist wieder da, by Timur Vermes, in which the first-person narrator, Hitler, wakes up in 2012 and becomes a media mogul; a film is currently in production. What are the developments in German cultural memory over the last decade that have seen this latter text received with such popularity and relatively unproblematically, while the former was seen to be taboo-breaking?

This workshop will bring together both experienced and emerging researchers to trace these developments in the landscape of German cultural memory. It will investigate these issues and set them in the context of global developments in cultural memory of the digital age that call the concept of a ‘national’ memory into doubt. Questions to address include:

- Do trends in contemporary memory demonstrate the completion of a process of ‘normalisation’ of the Nazi past in German culture?
- Is the representation of Hitler, the Second World War and the Holocaust now an unburdened, globalized cultural trope like any other?
- What is the lasting influence of the ‘Germans as victims’ debates of the late 1990s and early 2000s?
- How has generational change affected the national/cultural engagement with the Nazi past?
- In the age of Youtube, social media and instant sharing, what is the impact of digital culture on the concept of a cultural memory as a national construct?

For further information, contact: Colette Lawson, LL38@st-andrews.ac.uk, University of St Andrews, School of Modern Languages, Fife, KY16 9PH.

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After Downfall: 10 Years of the Nazi Past in German Cultural Memory
University of St Andrews, 27th-28th February 2015
WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

Friday 26th February, Arts Building
Registration and Lunch: 12:30 – 1:30pm

1:30pm: Welcome and Introduction: From Downfall to He’s Back!
Colette Lawson, University of St Andrews

1:50pm: Film, History, and Pedagogy: On Downfall and its Aftereffects
Sabine Hake, University of Texas at Austin

2:20pm: Film and history between “staged reality” and visual veracity: Dani Levy’s Mein Führer: Die wirklich wahrste Wahrheit über Adolf Hitler
Alma Melchers, University of St Andrews

2:50pm: “Erinnerung and die Erinnerung”. Holocaust Memory and the Problem of Authenticity in Benjamin Stein’s Die Leinwand (2010)
Maria Roca Lizarazu, University of Warwick

Discussion

3:35 Coffee

4pm ‘Täter-light’: The Normalisation of Collective Trauma in Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter
Helmut Schmitz, University of Warwick

4:30pm Normalizing Nazis in Contemporary Germany Media
Christina Schultz, University of Illinois at Chicago

5pm Abjection, Compulsion and the Desire for Touch in Finsterworld
Dora Osborne, University of Edinburgh

Discussion (5:45 close)

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7pm Wine reception and whisky tasting (Courtesy of Luvians)

8pm DINNER (Forgans)
Saturday 27th February, Parliament Hall

9:30am: Humor and Meta-cinema in recent German film comedy
Marina Behnke, University College Cork

10am: Humour and the Holocaust (Or: Can we (now) laugh about Hitler?)
Seán Williams, University of Bern

10:30am: Holocaust Memory in the Era of 'Vergangenheitsbewirtschaftung': Iris Hanika’s Das Eigentliche (2010)
Mary Cosgrove, University of Warwick

Discussion

11am: Coffee

11:30am: Twenty-First Century Holocaust Documentaries and the Art of Cross-Examination
Brad Prager, University of Missouri

12pm German Suffering / Nazi Perpetration: the Wehrmacht as a Battleground for Germany’s Holocaust Memory
Gary Jenkins, Newcastle University

12:30pm: From the Nazi German to Deutsches Leid: Recent Shifts in Anglo-American Perceptions of mid-20th-century Germany
Maike Oergel, University of Nottingham

Discussion

1:30pm: Lunch

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Fee includes all catering on both days, and three course dinner on Friday night:
Standard fee: £70
Postgraduate Student fee: £50

Registration online:
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