

Title	Ways of making him talk: the sonic afterlives of Hitler's silent home movies in Philippe Mora's 'Swastika' (1974) and David Howard's 'Hitler Speaks' (2006)
Authors	MagShamhráin, Rachel
Publication date	2013
Original Citation	MagShamhráin, R. (2013) 'Ways of making him talk: the sonic afterlives of Hitler's silent home movies in Philippe Mora's 'Swastika' (1974) and David Howard's 'Hitler Speaks' (2006)', Germanistik in Ireland: Yearbook of the Association of Third-Level Teachers of German in Ireland, 8, pp. 125-144
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Rights	© 2013, Association of Third-Level Teachers of German in Ireland.
Download date	2024-04-25 15:33:30
Item downloaded from	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/10468/3055">https://hdl.handle.net/10468/3055</a>

Rachel MagShamhráin

**Ways of Making Him Talk: The Sonic Afterlives of Hitler's Silent Home Movies in Philippe Mora's *Swastika* (1974) and David Howard's *Hitler Speaks* (2006)<sup>1</sup>**

But these images of the Führer serve only to tantalize us: we can see the private man, but we cannot hear him. [...] With this soundtrack we will get closer than ever before to Hitler's private world.<sup>2</sup>

As artefacts, home movies may have self-evident historical relevance, but certainly not in the raw. Despite their seemingly indexical relationship to reality,<sup>3</sup> – an assumption that is based on an imagined point-and-shoot innocence – as Zimmermann has pointed out, they in fact “require mining, excavation, exhumation, reprocessing, and reconsideration.”<sup>4</sup> This article examines two slightly but crucially divergent versions of one such act of reprocessing, analysing how each act of repurposing brings radically different types of historical meaning to the fore. Focusing on two cases of the addition of what we might call semi-synchronous, or, to borrow Steve Wurtzler's term, “pseudo-synchronous sound,”<sup>5</sup> to originally silent

---

<sup>1</sup> A version of this article was presented at “Saving Private Reels: On the Presentation, Appropriation and Re-contextualisation of the Amateur Moving Image,” held at University College Cork in September 2010. The author would like to thank the organizers, Gwenda Young, Barry Monaghan and Laura Rascaroli for their feedback which helped to develop those ideas into the material presented here.

<sup>2</sup> Revealed: Hitler's Private World [alternative title: Hitler Speaks: Hitler's Private Movies]. Directed by David Howard. Produced by Martin Morgan. 2006. Monster Films [1:18-52].

<sup>3</sup> Rosenstone notes a tendency to think of all documentary film in this way, remarking that “[o]stensibly, the documentary directly reflects the world, possessing what has been called an ‘indexical’ relationship to reality – which means it shows us what once was there, in front of the camera, and in theory, what would have been there anyway were no camera present.” Robert Rosenstone: *History on Film / Film on History*. Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia Zimmermann: Introduction. *The Home Movie Movement*. In: Karen Ishizuka and Patricia Zimmermann (eds.): *Mining the Home Movies. Excavations in Histories and Memories*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008, p. 1-28, here p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> We might define this as sound designed to appear to emanate naturally from on-screen action but which is, in fact, not location sound but a recreation. Wurtzler uses the term “pseudo-synchronous” in the context of early sound cinema to describe the non-diegetic

home movies of Hitler and his inner circle, this essay compares the very different implications in each case. We have in these silent home movies, their subsequent deciphering by lip-readers and redubbing to produce what seems to be but ultimately is not original sound, a very literal example of Richard Fung's assertion that "home movies do not speak for themselves."<sup>6</sup> This analysis considers what this silent footage does say when it is 'made to speak,' and examines that retrieved sound's relationship to authenticity, specifically in this case authenticity of historical experience. Sound here is understood to be complicit in the audience's desire for a kind of full body experience of the historical figures shown, ever closer and more personal. It seems particularly apt then that the footage in question here, the occasion of these desires, was for the most part shot by Hitler's most intimate associate, his lover Eva Braun, who was uniquely positioned to capture his most private moments on film. In other words, two impulses seem to be at work in synch here, at times seeming even to merge with one another: the desire for intimacy in the sense of knowledge of the personal life of a dictator which seems to drive modern audiences to want to find out what was really being said in the silent footage, and the intimacy of a home movie shot by a lover.

The more general question of the importance of sonic history – in the sense of a soundscape of the past as opposed to a history of sound – is also raised by these two re-soundings of silent amateur reels. As Coates puts it, we need to ask "what have we gained as historians [by] reconstructing the sounds of the past [...]. To become more fully immersed in the past in this way is thrilling and poignant and satisfies the craving for closer contact with the foreign country that is the past. But even if we could listen directly to aural worlds we have lost [...] how much better an understanding [...] would we achieve?"<sup>7</sup> This article argues that Philippe Mora's addition of sound to originally silent film works ideologically contrapuntally to the seemingly innocuous images, exposing the reels as an intrinsic part of Nazis self-stylization for propaganda purposes, designed as they were as a harmless façade for brute-force genocidal politics. It further argues that Mora's dissonant re-couplings of sound and image, often to comical effect, constitutes an attempt to countervail a certain persistent reverence for and susceptibility to the Nazi aesthetic that seems to

---

sound that was at times still employed to accompany the action on screen, using "sound effects that create[d] an acoustic representation [...] approximately analogous to what one might expect" of the visual content. He describes this process as "approximate synchronization with depicted sources," to distinguish it from real synchronization. Steve Wurtzler: *Electric Sounds. Technological Change and the Rise of Corporate Mass Media*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 247-48.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Fung: *Remaking Home Movies*. In: *Mining the Home Movie*, p. 29-40, here p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Coates: *The Strange Stillness of the Past. Toward an Environmental History of Sound and Noise*. In: *Environmental History* 10/4 (2005), p. 636-65, here p. 656.

characterize contemporary reception of the regime.<sup>8</sup> Howard's use of sound, on the other hand, reinforces the original aesthetic, titillating contemporary audiences with a promised intimacy with a Hitler who conforms to the Nazi regime's "wholly fabricated" presentation of the Hitler persona which particularly "stressed his personal simplicity and modesty."<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly, the more ideologically problematic of the two cases discussed here met with less public controversy, in part possibly because of an emphasis on sober scientificity which attempts to belie any ideological position. In David Howard's 2006 documentary *Hitler Speaks* (alternative name *Revealed: Hitler's Private World*), made in cooperation with the History Channel, the technologically vouchsafed exactness of the sound "restoration" process is foregrounded to such a degree that it features alongside "private Hitler" as the film's second subject. Consisting of a combination of intimate details about the sound retrieval process and intimate home movie footage to which the technique has been applied, its artificial-but-genuine soundtrack accompanies selections from some 300 minutes of film showing Adolf Hitler and friends which were discovered by chance in the early 1970s by German-born Australian film-maker Philippe Mora, director of our other film. Albert Speer himself had accidentally revealed the recordings' existence to Mora when they met after Speer's release from prison. Taking unrepentant pride in his membership of Hitler's inner circle, and showing the Nazis' peculiar interest in immortalizing themselves on celluloid, Speer had shown Mora a short home movie of his own in which Eva Braun appeared holding a hand-held movie camera. This image of Braun with a camera led Mora to suspect that footage filmed by her must exist somewhere. (It is revealing that Mora was more interested in tracking down the footage shot by Braun than in anything recorded by Speer, despite the fact that Speer had been Hitler's architect, Minister for Armaments, and close personal friend.) In search of these lost reels, Mora contacted one of the first Allied soldiers to enter Hitler's private mountain retreat at the end of the war, and he confirmed that extensive footage of this kind had indeed been found there. Mora then discovered that the US Marine Archives in Washington still had the recordings, although they displayed remarkably little interest in them. Considering the film to have no evidentiary value and therefore to be generally trivial, they handed it over to Mora who incorporated some of the silent footage into his narrator-less 1973 compilation documentary film *Swastika* which famously caused riots at the Cannes Film Festival

---

<sup>8</sup> This idea of a "persistent currency of Nazi aesthetics," as Koepnick calls it, is propounded amongst others by Rentschler who claimed that "the Third Reich granted a preview of postmodern attractions." Lutz Koepnick: *Walter Benjamin and the Aesthetics of Power*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999, p. 2. Eric Rentschler: *The Ministry of Illusion. Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 223.

<sup>9</sup> Ian Kershaw: *The Hitler Myth: Image and Reality in the Third Reich*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1987, p. 72.

and was banned in Germany,<sup>10</sup> and which had also engaged in re-soundings of the home movies – albeit of a very different kind, as we shall see. Significantly, Mora’s film is not mentioned at all in Howard’s which spuriously claims to “give voice to conversations that have remained silent for over sixty years.”<sup>11</sup>

Mora’s compilation film consists of colour clips of home movies taken at Hitler’s Berghof hideaway combined with clips from various Nazi propaganda films and newsreels, as well as with Allied footage from the end of the war. The accompanying soundtrack is a medley that includes original soundtracks, Wagner, sounds of crowds cheering and heil-ing, contemporary German and English songs, as well as re-enacted soundtrack for the home movie sections. However, the status of the sound is always pointedly and disorientatingly unclear: it is impossible to distinguish fabricated from “original” sound. The intention of this patchwork documentary was to show the Nazis as they “wished to be seen,”<sup>12</sup> while simultaneously casting that self-image in devastating relief by intercutting it with other footage of, for example, concentration camps and a bombed-out Berlin, or by creating a sonic disruption to accompany the images. The purpose of the inclusion of the home movies was to show the “human” side of Hitler, but only in a very specific sense: as the opening titles proclaim, “[i]f human features are lacking in the image of him that is passed on to posterity, if he is dehumanised and shown only as a devil, any future Hitler may not be recognised, simply because he is a human being.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, while showing him to be human, Mora’s compilation documentary could not be accused of *humanizing* Hitler. Rather, in its jarring visual juxtapositions, and in its addition of recreated but emphatically pseudo-synchronous sound to the film, Mora’s film reveals not the almost spiritual simplicity Nazi propaganda emphasized in its portrayals of its leader, but rather a pathetic, ridiculous ordinariness at the heart of the Hitler home movies, while simultaneously showing the disproportionate devastation that this ordinariness could unleash.

Mora’s film opens almost without images, in the darkness of outer space, moving slowly through a cosmos containing only tiny pricks of light but full of echoing, unintelligible, yet clearly human noise, eventually zooming into first Earth, then Europe, Germany, and finally Berlin, passing on its path through the eye of a rotating Swastika. To the initial inchoate and imageless sound (presumably intended to suggest some undeletable cosmic trace of historical noise), consisting at its most decipherable of a mixture of Nazi marching music, what sound like human screams, and the roar of crowds chanting “heil!”, images eventually accrue. However, the importance of (albeit cacophonous) noise is suggested at the film’s outset. The suggestion in the first moments of the film seems to be that raw historical noise is

<sup>10</sup> See [http://www.acmi.net.au/oz\\_swastika.aspx](http://www.acmi.net.au/oz_swastika.aspx) (last accessed 12.07. 2013).

<sup>11</sup> [23:39-44]

<sup>12</sup> William T. Murphy: Swastika. In: *The History Teacher* 7/3 (1974), p. 475-77, here p. 476.

<sup>13</sup> Swastika. Directed by Philippe Mora. Produced by Sanford Liebeson and David Puttnam. 1974. Visual Programme Systems Ltd.

not as susceptible to the falseness that besets the image. But actually, as Mora's sound experiments in the film show, his contention is not that sound cannot be manipulated in the manner of images, rather that it can be used subversively to unveil deceptions at the visual level. Even though the meaningfulness and authenticity of both sound and image are subsequently called into question by the film which at times shows sight and sound in a seeming match, at others placing them in ridiculous counterpoint, and at others again, matching them but in a manner that deliberately reveals nothing at all except an alienating as opposed to intimate mundanity, sound in Mora's film acts as a great undeceiver. It is namely through sound additions, albeit not of true but rather manipulated sound, that the film's images of private Hitler are exposed for what they are: part of a benign-seeming public persona carefully crafted by the Nazis propaganda machinery. While Kracauer argued that the separation of image and text was "ein sehr wichtiges und ausgiebig gebrauchtes Mittel"<sup>14</sup> in Nazi propaganda, and that "[d]ie Nazis wußten, daß [...] die kontrapunktische Beziehung von Bild und verbaler Aussage vermutlich das Gewicht des Bildes verstärken und es zu einem stärkeren emotionalen Stimulus machen würde,"<sup>15</sup> it is by a similar means, ironically, that Mora robs Hitler's home movies of their emotion appeal and thereby of their propaganda potential: The slight disjunctions and disharmonies of sight and sound in *Swastika* is disorientating; the ensuing counterpoint has an alienating effect on the Berghof footage, divesting it of its seductive familiarity.

Although radically different from Howard's in ideological terms, Mora film also approached the addition of sound to the silent Hitler home movies by using lip-readers whose transcriptions were then re-voiced by actors. But where Howard takes sound seriously, seeing it as an ultimate repository of historical truth, Mora plays with sound, using it to lampoon Nazis in their leisure moments, thereby preventing any risk of sympathy with the devil, while also forcing us to question ideas of historical authenticity and meaning in the context of the home movie and of sound recordings. For example, in Mora's sequences incorporating Berghof footage, much of the re-sounding could not possibly have been the result of serious transcription by lip-readers, particularly, for instance, the re-sounded footsteps. When anyone moves, a furious clicking worthy of tap dancers begins. Indeed, in some scenes, the only sound is that of feet, and in their overwhelming but meaningless rapping, an indecipherable stream of footfall Morse code,<sup>16</sup> they make ludicrous both the accompanying images as well as the evidentiary value that is often attributed to sound in documentary film.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, neither the maddening mountain wind

<sup>14</sup> Siegfried Kracauer: *Von Caligari zu Hitler. Eine psychologische Geschichte des deutschen Films*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1979, p.327-28.

<sup>15</sup> Kracauer: *Von Caligari zu Hitler*, p. 328.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, 30:22-31:00.

<sup>17</sup> As has often been pointed out, sound plays a crucial role in creating or deconstructing the aura of truth in documentary film: "Sound recorded on location normally carries a special type of authority. We think of it as evidential material, a trace of the physical

audible in all terrace footage nor Blondi's annoying off-screen barking<sup>18</sup> can have been the result of tireless lip-reading, for whatever about reading the visible lips of subjects shown on camera, transcribing things that took place out of shot is a simple, and deliberately introduced impossibility. So the film both pursues the idea of retrieving an original and somehow devastatingly revealing and ultimately intimate soundtrack, while gesturing at the ultimate futility of the desire for full and true retrieval with its concomitant and dangerous promise of total historical exegesis, and access to the subject.

With regard to sound's second function in Mora's film, namely the introduction of humour, the effect is far from trivializing: if anything, the humour of hearing and seeing Eva loudly kissing a bunny rabbit and encouraging it to look into the camera<sup>19</sup> deepens the awfulness of the footage with which such moments are intercut and in which this banality, the editing suggests, is intimately implicated: shots of Hitler with a series of children at the Berghof, for example, alternate with scenes of starving children in a ghetto and with a particularly nauseating sequence showing a woman who appears to be pregnant having her stomach kicked by a German.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the film's final sequences showing corpses at Belsen being pushed into mass graves and of a devastated Berlin suddenly segue into Noel Coward's satirical and devastatingly funny "Don't Let's Be Beastly to the Germans," which closes the film with a terrible counterpoint. The song itself deliberately couples the saccharine and appalling, as in the lines "Let's be sweet to them / And day by day repeat to them / That sterilization simply isn't done."

Despite Mora's provocative use of image and sound, which no doubt prompted the riotous reaction in Cannes, the amateur footage that he discovered at the archives in Washington was itself far from controversial, at least not in the way we might expect of Hitler's home movies. In a 2009 interview Mora admitted that his first viewing of the contents of the cans was deflating: "we would have loved it if they were all having black magic orgies and Satanic rituals, but instead it really [was] just

---

world captured by microphone. What we hear is what was there to be heard at the moment of recording. Sound that comes from a different source, on the other hand, is indicative of the creative intervention of the filmmaker. It draws our attention not to the event recorded but to the way that event is shaped through the filmmaking process." Carl Lewis, Vinicius Navarro and Louise Spence: *Sounds*. In: Vinicius Navarro and Louise Spence (eds.): *Crafting Truth. Documentary Form and Meaning*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011, p. 239-63, here p. 241.

<sup>18</sup> See for example at 1:31:46-1:32:14.

<sup>19</sup> [31:38] In this case, interestingly, sound and image are not obviously working counter-harmoniously; rather the sound seems fastened firmly back onto its image, as though at times the best antidote to Nazi propaganda is, like it, to sever the word-image link, at others to re-establish it. However, it should be noted that the smacking of Eva's lips, although matched to the images shown, has an effect like that of the footfall described above – it speaks, but only with a ridiculousness that divests it of its potential appeal.

<sup>20</sup> [50:12]

excruciatingly middleclass and boring.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed the silent colour footage, most of which was shot by Eva Braun on the 16mm hand-held camera that Hitler had given her on her twenty-fourth birthday, shows, at its most exciting, Hitler relaxing with friends and colleagues at the Berghof, walking about the terrace, looking a little stiffly formal at times, at others playful, at others again slightly pensive.

Before returning to the question of the original reels’ content, its banality, political aesthetical position, and putative historical value, let us turn briefly to the posthumous recreation of what we might call “serious historical sound”<sup>22</sup> to accompany Hitler’s home movies for Howard’s 2006 documentary. The question of the function and possibilities of sound in documentary and amateur film – and the films discussed here are a hybrid of both – is a complex and important one, as soundtracks play a crucial role in documentary’s uneasy relationship with authenticity. Despite the popular perception that sound in documentaries (and more so in amateur film) is generally more authentic, untouched and real,<sup>23</sup> as Jeffrey Ruoff has pointed out, even in the most strictly observational modes, a certain “mise-en-scène of speech, a trimming of the materiality [of sound] in favour of clarity” is usually inevitable.<sup>24</sup> While such interventions may be perceived as a “betrayal of the conventions of synchronous sound,”<sup>25</sup> as Rabiger notes, “you often have to provide what is appropriate and not what was present. To be true in spirit, you reconstruct some sound during postproduction.”<sup>26</sup> Despite the complexity of sound recordings’ relationship to authenticity in the documentary genre, the Howard film refuses to see its own recreated soundtrack for Hitler’s home movies as anything other than the simple and unmodified true sonic trace of the past, offering the audience an absolute historical experience of Hitler in his private moments.

The question of authentic sound in the context of history on film is not, of course, merely an issue in the documentary genre. Recent criticism of Daniel Day-

<sup>21</sup> David Wroe: 1970s Film on Private Hitler Rediscovered. In: The Local. Germany’s News in English, 13.11.2009. <http://www.thelocal.de/national/20091113-23237.html> (last accessed 26.11. 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Meaning a soundtrack presented as the intact sonic record of the past as it really was, as opposed to the deliberately problematic, disorientating and heavily-orchestrated pseudo-sound of Mora’s film.

<sup>23</sup> As Sadowski puts it, “a poor-quality amateur sound recording [is] perceived as truer and more authentic than an impeccably produced dramatized reconstruction of the complete event, which looks disappointingly inauthentic and fake to a viewer anxious to know about the facts as they actually happened.” Piotr Sadowski: *From Interaction to Symbol: A Systems View of the Evolution of Signs and Communication*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2009, p. 150.

<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey Ruoff: *Conventions of Sound in Documentary*. In: *Cinema Journal* 32/3 (1993), p. 24-40, here p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> Ruoff: *Conventions of Sound*, p. 31.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Rabiger: *Directing the Documentary*. 5th ed. Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2009, p. 192.



Lewis' "thin, reedy" and "scratchy"<sup>27</sup> voice in Spielberg's *Lincoln* (2012) demonstrates that the impulse to give 'true' voice to famous historical figures may be compelling, but is nevertheless a difficult business, made no easier if those figures lived and died long before the advent of audio recordings. But while audiences clearly expected something more suitably sonorous than Day-Lewis's revoicing of Lincoln, one Lincoln expert described the recreation as "as near as we are going to come," and as "uncanny and [...] chilling,"<sup>28</sup> the very oddness of the intonation apparently simultaneously invoking audience reactions of in- and hyper-credulity. How Hitler should sound when portrayed on screen is also a matter to which, historically, great significance has been attached. Here one particular original sound recording has played an important role, informing, for example, Bruno Ganz's interpretation of the decrepit Hitler of the final days of the war in *Der Untergang* (2004), a performance which was lauded for having achieved what was perceived as a previously unthinkable degree of historical accuracy and intimacy (as though these were the same thing). The recording in question, allegedly the only known one in which Hitler can be heard speaking in a "normal" tone of voice, is an eleven-minute tape made secretly in 1942 in Finland. Basing his performance on this unguarded speech, Ganz purportedly gives us Hitler's private and somehow more 'real' voice than the public voice of so many well-known public appearances. The 'authenticity' of Ganz's performance, and the supposed concomitant accuracy and historical value of the film as such, were repeatedly linked to the actor's uncanny mimicry of that fetishized natural-voice recording, with Ian Kershaw claiming that "[o]f all the screen depictions [...] even by famous actors such as Alec Guinness or Anthony Hopkins, this is the only one which to me is compelling. [...] Ganz has Hitler's voice to near perfection. It is chillingly authentic."<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, here it is the voice rather than the image that is made into a privileged site of historical truth, deemed capable of the uncanny reanimation of the dead Hitler as he really was.

This same Finnish recording, which has become a kind of stock guarantor of Hitler-authenticity, was used by the actors who dubbed Hitler's voice back into the home-movie footage for Howard's documentary, as the documentary itself is at pains to point out.<sup>30</sup> The sense of a primarily sonic authenticity in Howard's

<sup>27</sup> Anita Singh: Daniel Day-Lewis faces criticism for giving a voice to Abraham Lincoln. In: The Telegraph, 09.11.2012.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/film-news/9668370/Daniel-Day-Lewis-faces-criticism-for-giving-a-voice-to-Abraham-Lincoln.html> (last accessed 26.11.2012).

<sup>28</sup> Daniel Day-Lewis' 'Lincoln' voice historically accurate? In: CBS News 9.11. 2012. [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-505266\\_162-57547527/daniel-day-lewis-lincoln-voice-historically-accurate/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-505266_162-57547527/daniel-day-lewis-lincoln-voice-historically-accurate/) (last accessed 26.11.2012).

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Paul Cooke: *Der Untergang* (2004). Victims, Perpetrators and the Continuing Fascination of Fascism. In: Helmut Schmitz (ed.): *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present*. Amsterdam: Rodopi. 2007, p. 247-62, here p. 258.

<sup>30</sup> [27:40-45]

documentary is further underlined by the foregroundedly ‘scientific’ method of voice-recovery both employed by and featured in the film. Untroubled by Coates question about what retrieved sound actually achieves for the historian, the producers of the 2006 documentary commissioned a group of experts to recreate ‘original’ voices to match what they considered to be the most riveting moments of silent footage of Hitler from the eight cans Mora had found. Explanation, testing and demonstration of the voice-retrieval and recreation process takes almost a quarter of the whole documentary,<sup>31</sup> a surprising amount of screen time perhaps, but vital because the crux of the film is that it is purporting to excavate intact the true sound of the past, an intactness that underwrites the film’s promise of an unprecedented level of historical access and truth. Using what is described by the voiceover as “a revolutionary new forensic technique that combines the latest computer software with an age-old skill,”<sup>32</sup> sound was recreated using a system called ALR (automated lip-reading). While Mora too had employed lip-readers in the 1970s to decipher what people in these reels were saying, and had provided subtitles indicating the content of their speech,<sup>33</sup> the ALR technique used by Howard’s documentary – its acronym arguably endowing it with an air of particular scientificity – gives the impression of a greater facticity. As the documentary explains, the ALR process involves using a “jog shuttle” to zoom in on and map the individual minute movements of the speakers’ faces, and even neck muscles, tracking every tiny movement frame by frame. Specially developed computer software then allows these physical shapes to be linked with particular sounds. Once Hitler’s words were retrieved by this process, they were played back in a computer-synthesized voice and checked against the independent findings of human lip-readers. As these words lacked a certain air of genuineness because the voice was not Hitler’s own, for authenticity’s sake (whatever that might mean in this context), they were then redubbed by actors using the Finnish recording of Hitler’s ‘natural’ voice. This redubbing moment, which involved a cast of actors and a Hollywood voice director, Robert Rietti, is perhaps the point at which the problematic nature of this restoration process and the documentary itself becomes most obvious, since it proposes to achieve authenticity by way of artificiality, but all the while refusing to engage with the issues raised by that artificiality. Presumably this is because the idea of artifice is not compatible with the documentary’s central and rather simplistic concept of historical truth, nor with its aims: an absolute and authentic historical experience of Hitler as he actually was. Artificiality in non-fiction film is, of course, not in itself

---

<sup>31</sup> [19:39-31:33]

<sup>32</sup> [1:25-51]

<sup>33</sup> It is important to note that this redubbed content is not necessarily accurate, or even intended to be so. For example, at one point, Eva Braun in high-heels and a swimsuit, her back to the camera, proceeds towards a wall on the Berghof terrace. She is holding in her arms, Stasi, her yapping Scotch terrier, and – her face all the while turned away from us – is lip-read and redubbed to utter the immortal lines “komm hierher Stasi – stör nicht deinen Führer.” [22:17-22]

problematic, nor is reflection within documentary films on their own artifice anything new. However, the issues that such an approach raises are elided by Howard's documentary, which, ignoring the very questions it raises, focuses unquestioningly on the scientific techniques involved in its sound recreation process and seeks to underscore the idea of their infallibility by the insertion, amongst other things, of images of a man working at an ultra-modern computer console. In this sense, the film is neither "traditional" nor "new performative" in the sense of Bruzzi's definitions, but a peculiar hybrid: while it is emphatically not reflexive since it does not really "acknowledg[e] the construction and artificiality" inevitably involved in non-fiction film, equally and oppositely, it makes no attempt to "hide the modes of production"<sup>34</sup> as a traditional documentary might be expected to, making the method of sound retrieval into the documentary's second subject. A strange hybrid of these two, it shows the processes of artificial voice production, but simultaneously suggests that this technique gives us access to an unconstructed, unmediated, absolute historical truth.

Even if we concede that ALR is valuable, its combination of technology and human lip-reading allowing transcriptions of an accuracy hitherto impossible, the precise value to history of adding sound to silent amateur film footage of happy holidays at the Berghof is a matter not addressed by Howard. Yet given the sheer banality of much of what Eva Braun recorded with her 16mm Agfa-Movex, it is a rather pressing one. A list of key-words provided by the Spielberg Film and Video Archive at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum for approximately four hours of these films reveals something of their content: for a 32-minute reel from around 1940 entitled "Eva Braun & family vacation; Hitler at Berghof," for example, the following descriptors are amongst those offered: airports, airplanes, beach, boat, bridges, buildings, children, dog, flowers, luggage, mountains, pilot, snow, statues, town, trucks, winter and women. Of thirty-five items listed, only six proper names of prominent Nazis strike one as potentially historically relevant, but these only feature briefly in the very last section of this half-hour film. In its description of this more "significant" final section, the Spielberg archive lists a number of Nazi functionaries, all of whom are engaged in a series of entirely routine actions such as "greet[ing] Hitler," "sitting on the terrace stone wall," "sitting on a wooden bench," "sitting on upholstered benches," "holding [a] handkerchief in the air," and "walking in the mountains."<sup>35</sup>

Despite the less than riveting visual content in what is one of the more interesting sequences of the reels, Howard's documentary is in absolutely no doubt about the immeasurable added value that sound will bring, possibly in the conviction that what the figures were saying couldn't possibly be as banal as what they appeared to be doing. While the silent images, the voiceover claims, previously "serve[d] only to

<sup>34</sup> Stella Bruzzi: *New Documentary*. 2nd edn. New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 186.

<sup>35</sup> [http://resources.ushmm.org/film/display/detail.php?file\\_num=1844](http://resources.ushmm.org/film/display/detail.php?file_num=1844). Story RG-60.0940, Tape 908 (last accessed 26.11.2012).

tantalize us” because “we can see the private man but we cannot hear him,”<sup>36</sup> the ALR-retrieved voices, the commentator breathlessly announces, give us at long last (again Mora’s work of some twenty years earlier is forgotten) “a glimpse of the man behind the image”<sup>37</sup> and (slightly more worryingly) “proof” that “he is a human being as we are.”<sup>38</sup> And, getting closer to what is arguably the real motivation for the film, the voiceover adds that we can now, at long last, “examine the intimacy of Adolf and Eva’s relationship”<sup>39</sup>: For, here in this amateur footage Hitler, it is suggested, was caught off guard, and his “carefully constructed public image,” which emphatically did not include his mistress, “was discarded.”<sup>40</sup>

Hitler’s relationship with women seems to be at the root of much of the attention paid to Hitler’s home movies, and it is primarily to this aspect of Hitler’s private life that, we are promised, sound will give us a hitherto impossible degree of unrestricted access through reanimation of his dead voice. Indeed, Hitler’s relationships with women have been analysed at length in such recent publications as *Hitler’s Women* (Guido Knopp, 2003), *The Women who knew Hitler: The Private Life of Adolf Hitler* (Ian Sayer and Douglas Botting, 2004), and *The Women In Hitler’s Life* (Robert Arndt, 2010), not to mention the dramatically titled *The Devil’s Mistress: The Diary of Eva Braun, the Woman Who Lived and Died With Hitler* (Alison Leslie Gold, 1997). According to McDonough, this surge in interest in Hitler trivia is a relatively recent phenomenon, going hand-in-hand with a general (and in his view welcome) shift in the tenor of the German debate on Nazi Germany post 1989, one that no longer looks “at the past through a moral framework.”<sup>41</sup> However, McDonough notes, with some dismay, that “the ‘Hitler industry’ grows daily, fuelled by television programmes debating every aspect of Hitler’s private life. There are also far too many books produced [sic] which unashamedly attempt to appeal to the mass market and end up trivialising the Nazi era. The ‘Hitler industry’ has now extended to the Internet, with equally worrying consequences.”<sup>42</sup> It is undoubtedly true that there is an insatiable appetite for Hitler trivia with which the many media channels seem barely able to keep pace. Such is the interest that the History Channel was jokingly redubbed the Hitler Channel because, as David Bathrick has noted, “footage of Hitler’s Germany [...] [was] estimated by some to comprise 10 per cent of its programming,” helping, ironically enough, to “ensure in the name of history continued iconic status of its leading actor for years to come.”<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> [1:14-20]

<sup>37</sup> [31:30]

<sup>38</sup> [36:00]

<sup>39</sup> [31:40]

<sup>40</sup> [12:32-39]

<sup>41</sup> Frank McDonough: *Hitler and the Rise of the Nazi Party*. Harlow: Pearson, 2003, p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> McDonough: *Hitler*, p. 13.

<sup>43</sup> David Bathrick: *Cinematic Remaskings of Hitler. From Riefenstahl to Chaplin*. In: Klaus Berghahn and Jost Hermand (eds.): *Unmasking Hitler. Cultural Representations of Hitler*

However, public taste for Hitler's private life is not, as McDonough would suggest, a new phenomenon, or purely the product of a modern culture industry that endlessly regurgitates a standardized form of salacious private detail about famous people, and that has a somewhat pornographic, not to say vaguely medical, interest in any detail, no matter how boring, as long as it is as up-close and personal as possible. Already in 1936, Wilhelm Brückner had published "Der Führer in seinem Privatleben," a short article that formed part of the text of a book entitled *Adolf Hitler: Bilder aus dem Leben des Führers* produced in its millions by Altona Tobacco Company and designed to be populated by photographs of Hitler which could be ordered by mail in exchange for cigarette coupons. Interestingly, Brückner's contribution is also devoted to Hitler in his leisure moments at the Berghof. However, at least in Brückner's account, he is certainly not dallying there with any mistress. Rather, he devotes his leisure time in the mountains, when not engaged in important discussions about the war, to such elevating and lofty pursuits as listening to opera, reading, feeding birds, greeting adoring fans, and patting the odd blonde-haired child and Blondi on the head in an avuncular fashion. In Brückner's text it is not Eva Braun who keeps the Führer awake at night at the Berghof and who occupies his mind and heart; rather it is "die ständige politische Arbeit [und] die Sorge um Deutschland. Mit dieser Sorge legt sich der Führer spät in der Nacht zur Ruhe, mit dieser Sorge erwacht er am frühen Morgen."<sup>44</sup> The photographs designed to accompany Brückner's idealized textual image of holidaying Hitler, which were provided by Hitler's personal photographer Heinrich Hoffmann, included ones similar to that in fig. 1 below. All were images that, although designed to be consumed as private and natural, demonstrate just how staged, in fact, the whole private Berghof idyll was: as carefully orchestrated and designed for public consumption as anything Riefenstahl ever shot.

---

from the Weimar Republic to the Present. Bern: Peter Lang, 2007, p. 147-64, here p. 150.

<sup>44</sup> Wilhelm Brückner: Der Führer in seinem Privatleben. In: Adolf Hitler. Bilder aus dem Leben des Führers. Hamburg: Cigaretten/Bilderdienst Altona/Bahrenfeld, 1936, p. 35-43, here p. 35.



*Fig. 1: Postcard image of Hitler on terrace of his Obersalzberg holiday home, entitled "Blick von der Terasse Haus Wachenfeld nach Berchtesgaden," © Heinrich Hoffmann/AKG*

As Strathausen has shown, these intimate collectible snapshots deliberately reference, among other things, the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich:



*Fig. 2: "Wayfarer above a Sea of Fog" (circa 1818) © AKG*

Hardly the private and candid snapshots the title of Brückner's text from the Altona cigarette book might lead us to expect, the seemingly natural effect of these images

of Hitler “in seinem Privatleben” is artificially achieved and with precise propaganda intentions in mind. As Strathausen suggests, these images formed part of an “attempt to mythologize Hitler’s private life at the Obersalzberg and to inspire fantasies about his clandestine genius.”<sup>45</sup> In short, the public was encouraged to fill the pages of the Altona album with what they were invited to *imagine* were unguarded and intimate snapshots of their leader behind the scenes and as he really was, but which were actually entirely staged. The same can be said of the uncannily similar “natural” poses in the Berghof home movies that Howard resurrects and that Mora lampoons.<sup>46</sup>



Fig. 3: Still from Berghof home movies of Hitler and Braun on terrace<sup>47</sup>

The fact that we find the same stylization at work in the home movies is perhaps unsurprising since, as Görtemaker and others have pointed out, Eva was not, in reality, as amateur a filmmaker and photographer as she seemed.<sup>48</sup> Rather than a naive bystander, innocently and artlessly capturing reality at the Berghof on a shaky camera, she was, in fact, an important part and active cog in the propaganda machinery surrounding Hitler, even, or perhaps especially, in his private moments at the Berghof. So, while Howard’s documentary claims that the Berghof was strictly private territory, “the only place where Hitler and his friends could really relax, where the carefully constructed public image was discarded,”<sup>49</sup> this was precisely

<sup>45</sup> Carsten Strathausen: *The Image as Abyss. The Mountain Film and the Cinematic Sublime*. In: Kenneth S. Calhoon (ed.): *Peripheral Visions. The Hidden Stages of Weimar Cinema*. Detroit: Wayne State, 2001, p. 171-89, here p. 171.

<sup>46</sup> [19:37]

<sup>47</sup> This shot is reused by both Howard [10:45] and Mora [33:07].

<sup>48</sup> Heike Görtemaker: *Eva Braun. Leben mit Hitler*. Munich: C.H. Beck, 2010.

<sup>49</sup> [12:27-49]

where some of the most contrived propaganda imagery was created, including by members of this most intimate sphere. Although her presence at the Berghof was a strict secret, many of Eva's photographs were published at the time: they were sold for a reported 20,000 Reichsmark to Hoffmann, her erstwhile boss, and then brought to the mass German market, including via such publications as the *Altona* album.<sup>50</sup> As Görtemaker reminds us, Braun was a semi-professional who had learned "bei Hoffmann den Umgang mit der Kamera und das Entwickeln von Bildern."<sup>51</sup>

So, while Guerin has categorized Eva's footage as amateur film because, amongst other things, "her footage often includes sudden changes in film speed, repetitions, out-of-focus shorts, obstructions of a frame by an intruding head or hand, and the shaky uncertain motions of a hand-held camera,"<sup>52</sup> we cannot really claim that these are, in fact, home movies in the sense of raw, artless, uncut and indiscriminating moving, and eventually speaking, images of Hitler, out of the limelight and as he actually was. If, according to Jenkins' typology, home movies are generally expected to be for private exhibition, lacking any viable channel of public distribution, most often documentaries of domestic and family life, and perceived to be technically flawed and of marginal interest beyond the immediate family,<sup>53</sup> then Eva's footage falls somewhat outside the frame on all counts. However, the attraction of seeing them as home movies is clear. According to Szczelkun, amateur film is conventionally, if perhaps naively, associated with "authenticity (being less mediated); nostalgia and emotion; the personal and intimate; spontaneity and immediacy; [and] a direct relation with its subject (lack of illusion)."<sup>54</sup> Yet, while this footage of the Berghof may seem to allow us access to Hitler's private life in all its dreadful uncut banality, much of this footage, depending on how it is presented and re-cut, feeds precisely the same myth-making processes in which Brückner was engaged in his introduction to the *Altona* book – and that was the intention. In many of the scenes shot by Eva, as in the Brückner text, Hitler is shown as serious, even amidst the frivolity of his friends enjoying their free time at the Berghof. He is portrayed as nature- and child-loving, but, just as Brückner had it, even in his private thoughts ever preoccupied with the war, or as Howard's documentary suggests, so attentive to matters of war that this eventually took its toll physically.<sup>55</sup> Thus the Howard documentary dangerously manages to

<sup>50</sup> Görtemaker: Eva Braun, p. 202.

<sup>51</sup> Görtemaker: Eva Braun, p. 19.

<sup>52</sup> Frances Guerin: *Through Amateur Eyes. Film and Photography in Nazi Germany*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012, p. 218.

<sup>53</sup> Henry Jenkins: *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press, 2006, p. 142.

<sup>54</sup> Stefan Szczelkun: *Amateur Film / Home Movies / Underground Film*. [http://www.stefan-szczelkun.org.uk/phd206.htm#\\_edn1](http://www.stefan-szczelkun.org.uk/phd206.htm#_edn1) (last accessed 26.11. 2012).

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, the sequence at 42:15-25 in which Hitler examines what is presumably an aerial photograph on the terrace, using a magnifying glass. He complains of a sore arm, which is interpreted as potential evidence of Parkinson's, but equally suggests that



perpetuate the allure of authenticity in the footage, replicating (now with added sound) the same operations as the Nazi propaganda it regurgitates and in which the original home movies were from the outset always already implicated.

The 2006 documentary may claim that, in these private films, behind the everyday domesticated ordinariness, “the dark heart of the Nazi dream is never far away,”<sup>56</sup> but it doesn’t actually reveal that “dark heart” in its “resurrection” of the home movies. Part of the redubbed footage shows, for example, Himmler talking to Reinhard Heydrich and Karl Wolff, both of whom were key figures in the *Final Solution*. At one point Himmler, his voice retrieved from oblivion by ALR, mentions that he is so busy with his many “projects,” which, we are invited to assume (given who he is and who his interlocutors are) is a euphemism for the vast logistical issues involved in exterminating millions of people.<sup>57</sup> Yet, ultimately we only have Himmler intoning the word “projects.” In other words, the use of ALR to lift the muteness that Guerin argues shrouds the reality behind these images in “obscurity and silence,”<sup>58</sup> changes their substance not one whit. What is revealed by Himmler’s mention of “projects” that we do not already know and understand better from other sources? In reality, it may be argued, Howard offers us nothing more than the frisson of hearing *that* term issue – or appear to – from *that* mouth. So, while the project suggests that its exploration of the re-introduction of sound and conversation to Hitler’s home movies sought a retrieval of crucial new historical information, no additional information on the historical moment or its characters appears to be gained by making them talk. Therefore, the real motivation can only be the sheer prurience of contemporary spectators, their fascination with private Hitler. (And indeed, one of Howards’ talking heads briefly concedes this very point, announcing that “these little glimpses into his private life are really quite fascinating for anyone who is fascinated by the whole story of Hitler.”<sup>59</sup>)

Such ‘thrills’ as the Himmler moment are accompanied by other ultimately unrevealing thrills in the form of footage of scantily clad sunbathers, or Braun performing gymnastics in a bathing suit. In one scene, Hitler flirts outrageously through the camera with the filmmaker, Braun, and, unfortunately but crucially, since we too find ourselves on the other side of that aperture with her, also with us. He asks her coquettishly, “Why are you filming an old man? It is I who should be filming you.”<sup>60</sup> And his question prompts us to ask the same of the viewer: why the interest in this? These sequences reveal no more nor less than Himmler’s

---

his dedication to the war cause, even during vacations, is wearing him out. Or, as Goebbels liked to style him, he is “a man toiling for his people while others slept [...] sacrific[ing] all personal happiness [...] for his people.” In Kershaw: *The Hitler Myth*, p. 72.

<sup>56</sup> [37:11-13]

<sup>57</sup> [37:30]

<sup>58</sup> Frances Guerin: *Through Amateur Eyes*, p. 248.

<sup>59</sup> [35:06-12]

<sup>60</sup> [32:08]

ventriloquized utterance of the word “projects.” While for Mora such moments are exposed as the benign face of horror by their proximity to footage of the suffering unfolding beyond the Berghof idyll, of which this pleasure is shown merely to be the obverse side. But without the juxtapositions (both visual and audio) offered by Mora – blatant interventions into the original material as opposed to an undifferentiated recycling – the moments lose any such meaning, and this is the problem haunting Howard’s documentary. Their only value then can lie in their intimacy: the fixation on Hitler’s private life, whether in the form of forged diaries or Braun’s home movies, merely engages in what Rentschler calls “fetishistic abandon,” which imagines and hopes that private information quite literally “might bring [us] closer to the Nazi leader.”<sup>61</sup> And as Rosenfeld warns, this “fascination [...] is relentlessly unhistorical and hence an easy trigger for fantasies of the most extreme kind.”<sup>62</sup>

Howard’s 2006 documentary, innocently or disingenuously, portrays the restoring of sound to the mute amateur Berghof footage in an uncritically positive way. Far from seeing its regurgitation of the footage as fuelling dangerous unhistorical fantasies, or as the further promulgation of a stylized portraiture already at work in the original reels, what we are being presented with here, we are told, is “not an act,”<sup>63</sup> but proof that Hitler’s public persona was not his private one: “The private voice was not allowed to appear [in public]. What was important was the public voice, which had a different aura.”<sup>64</sup> This separation of Hitler into Hitler public – “how history remembers him,”<sup>65</sup> as the voiceover at the start of the documentary informs us – and Hitler private suggests that we see the public face of Hitler as a construct, a chimera, an act involving, according to dubbing expert Rietti speaking in the 2006 documentary, Hitler’s visibly “entering character.”<sup>66</sup> As Rietti declares, “this was all a performance. It wasn’t him.”<sup>67</sup> There was, in short, no such person as the demonic Hitler we witness at the Nuremberg Rallies. The real person behind the oratorical mask is rather, the documentary seems to suggest, high up on the Berghof, and perfectly capable of “speaking in a reasonable way.”<sup>68</sup>

To scrutinize this fascination with Hitler’s voice further, and the drive to re-sound the reels, we need to ask with Doane “[i]n what does the pleasure of hearing consist? Beyond the added effect of ‘realism’ which sound gives to cinema, beyond

<sup>61</sup> Eric Rentschler: *The Fascination of a Fake: The Hitler Diaries*. In: *New German Critique* 90 (Fall 2003), p. 177-92, here p. 181. Guerin incidentally also comes to this conclusion, but, again, she bases the capacity of the Hitler home movies to act as a site of audience projections on their silence – “[t]he muteness of the amateur images invites us to see ourselves therein.” Guerin: *Through Amateur Eyes*, p. 248. However, this article suggests, even their re-population with sound makes them no less a space for fantasies.

<sup>62</sup> Alvin Rosenfeld: *Imagining Hitler*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, p. xvi.

<sup>63</sup> [29:50]

<sup>64</sup> [6:24-32]

<sup>65</sup> [00:24]

<sup>66</sup> [30:41-43]

<sup>67</sup> [30:52-55]

<sup>68</sup> [29:00-26]

its supplement of meaning anchored by intelligible dialogue, what is the specificity of the pleasure of hearing a voice?”<sup>69</sup> She notes that the body in film is, necessarily “fantasmic,” but that “[t]he addition of sound to the cinema introduces the possibility of re-presenting a fuller (and organically unified) body.” The desire for a fuller body, which is expressed as a “demand for life-like representation” is actually, Doane argues, “a desire for presence.” “As soon as sound is detached from its source, no longer anchored by a represented body,”<sup>70</sup> the effect in film is potentially uncanny.<sup>71</sup> A voice firmly and seemingly unproblematically anchored back into a filmed body, as in the 2006 restoration, holds “at bay the potential trauma of dispersal, dismemberment, difference.” By “closing the gap between voice and body [...], vision and hearing work together in manufacturing the ‘hallucination’ of a fully sensory world,” by which Doane presumably means also a fully sensible (comprehensible) world. But this is not the only effect: “the voice [...] manifests [the body’s] inner lining [...] display[ing] what is inaccessible to the image, what exceeds the visible: the ‘inner life’ of the character.”<sup>72</sup> Doane argues, “[t]he voice [...] is the privileged mark of interiority, turning the body ‘inside out.’”<sup>73</sup> So, the fascination with Hitler’s voice is in a way actually a fascination with his innards. But, what of it? Is it not at precisely this level that one body is exactly, or mostly, just like another? At this level, he is just another man, just like us. And, if we get this far inside what Thomas Mann called the “Bruder Hitler”<sup>74</sup> phenomenon, where precisely does that leave us?

If when the amateur reels were first discovered at the Berghof, to quote the 2006 documentary’s inaccurate claim, “no one cared much about Hitler’s home movies or understood their importance” because “the films were silent,”<sup>75</sup> what is it that we

<sup>69</sup> Mary Ann Doane: *The Voice in Cinema. The Articulation of Body and Space*. In: *Cinema/Sound* 60 (1980), p. 33-50, here p. 43.

<sup>70</sup> Doane: *The Voice in Cinema*, p. 33; 35; 40.

<sup>71</sup> For Chion, the disembodied voice, the *acousmètre*, is endowed with “omniscience and omnipotence.” See Michel Chion: *The Voice in Cinema*. Trans. by Claudia Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 27. Here I argue that the reembodied voice has two diametrically opposed effects: in Mora’s version, the reembodied voice disrupt Nazi mythmaking about “private Hitler,” in Howard’s case, the voice is reembodied in such a way that reasserts that mythmaking process.

<sup>72</sup> Doane: *The Voice in Cinema*, p. 45; 46.

<sup>73</sup> Doane: *The Voice in Cinema*, p. 41.

<sup>74</sup> The essay “Bruder Hitler” was first published in English in 1939 in *Esquire* under the title “That Man is My Brother.” In it Thomas Mann asked “[c]ould the German exile community simply disavow the Nazi phenomenon as some aberration, irredeemably ‘other’ to the German culture and humanistic tradition they took themselves to represent? Or did history and that same humanism now demand of them the unspeakable task of confronting ‘all that is human’ by recognizing themselves – one German to another [...] – in Hitler?” Quoted in Barbara McCloskey: *Cartographies of Exile*. In: Alexander Stephan (ed.): *Exile and Otherness. New Approaches to the Experience of the Nazi Refugees*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005, p. 135-52, here p. 145.

<sup>75</sup> [3:52-4:11]

understand now after their recirculation with added sound, which invites us “further inside private Hitler” than ever? Although this re-sounding claims to make the reels more real, thereby extending our knowledge of the historical subject in some important yet unspecified way, what the process actually does is make us into amateurs in the very literal sense that Eva was – namely lovers. Getting this far into Hitler enthralls us to the man. As Wim Wenders put it in a critique of Joachim Fest’s documentary *Hitler – A Career*, “[t]he film is so fascinated by its object, by its importance, in which it takes part, [...] that the object again and again takes control of the film, becoming its secret narrator,” and now, with Howard, an audible narrator too. Revisiting Hitler’s home movies in the way that Howard’s documentary does, furnishing them with sound, circulating the results as astonishing historical revelations, means that we have “[b]lindly [...] stepped into all the traps that a much more clever god from on high set [...] forty years ago.”<sup>76</sup> According to J.P. Stern, Hitler’s main achievement lay in the fact that he managed to bring “a conception of personal authenticity into the public sphere [...]. What he does is to translate the notions of genuineness and sincerity [...] from the private [...] into the sphere of public affairs. [...] Politics, in the scheme Hitler evolved, is personalized.”<sup>77</sup> In the home movies as recirculated by Howard, this action is being performed proleptically, casting Hitler into the future intact in his chosen persona of both world leader and average private person. This duality was, according to Saul Friedländer “the true source of [his] spell.”<sup>78</sup> While Thomas Mann had argued in his essay on “Bruder Hitler” that “better, more productive, more honest, more constructive than hatred is recognition, acceptance, the readiness to make oneself one with [what] is deserving of our hate,” he also noted that by entering so into the spirit, if not, with Doane, into the very viscera of Hitler through Eva’s Agfa Movex, now with glorious sound, “we run the risk, morally speaking, of forgetting how to say no.”<sup>79</sup> And, while the makers of the 2006 documentary might claim, to quote Joachim Fest, that “this film does not manipulate our history, [i]t does not transfigure, [i]t explains,”<sup>80</sup> in fact what Howard’s documentary does is give a voice and legacy into the future to the powerful and dangerous idea that Nazis are just like us. In doing so it fulfils precisely the role that Hitler had envisaged all along for amateur footage as a medium. The addition of sound only further reinforces this allure of Nazi normality with its pictures of tea-drinking relaxing Nazis, now more

<sup>76</sup> Wim Wenders: *That’s Entertainment: Hitler* (1977). In: Richard W. McCormick and Alison Guenther-Pal (eds.): *German Essays on Film*. New York: Continuum, 2004, p. 209-14, here p. 213.

<sup>77</sup> J. P. Stern: *Hitler. The Führer and the People*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975, p. 24.

<sup>78</sup> Saul Friedländer: *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*. Quoted in Rentschler: *The Fascination of a Fake*, p. 185.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas Mann: *That Man is My Brother*. In: McCloskey: *Cartographies of Exile*, p. 145.

<sup>80</sup> Joachim Fest quotes in Wenders: *That’s Entertainment*, p. 209.

authentic but also more innocuous than ever because replete with reassuringly banal tea-time sounds.

Mora's soundtrack seems to recognize the danger of such over-familiarity. This danger is averted by his editing of Berghof footage with footage of the horrors of the period and by his introduction a soundtrack that distances and alienates rather than encourages us to approach and join in. The endlessly tapping feet, howling wind, and manic giggling of the ladies in Mora's documentary have a sinister effect, holding no danger of over-identification, unlike the 2006 redubbing of Hitler telling a simple story to a child<sup>81</sup> or commenting on Braun's preference for Hollywood movies.<sup>82</sup>

*Rachel MagShamhráin lectures at the German Department, University College Cork.*

---

<sup>81</sup> [32:56-33:00]

<sup>82</sup> [34:40]