

MODERNIST INTERPRETATIONS
OF THE TWELVE YEARS OF THE NAZI REGIME
VIA GERMAN FILM

By

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Abstract: Historically based films offer audiences a way to connect with the past that invites the viewers to develop an emotional understanding of the events and time periods. One topic, which has been represented in film, is Nazi Germany and World War II. Eight German films released in 1997 to 2013 are examined through textual analysis and through the lenses of narrative theory and cultivation analysis. Throughout the eight films, there are changes in how the characters, the use of stereotypes, gender and gender roles have been presented, and how the topic has been dealt with. These changes could influence how the Nazi regime and World War II are remembered by viewers who have no direct connect to that historical time. These changes, and their possible effects, are significant findings, as they could influence how the events and memories of the Nazi regime are preserved. This is also important because films are filling a gap of both preserving and transferring memories for continuing generations. These films will continue to become of greater importance, as the people who experienced the Nazis and World War II are dying and, thus, time is silencing their voices. Films offer a way to both preserve what happened and emotionally connect these past memories with a new audience.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Historically based films, a mainstay of the cinema since its inception in the early 1900s, offer audiences a way to connect with the past that invites the viewers to develop an emotional understanding of the events and time periods. This historical perspective has the power to influence an audience especially with regards to war and wartime activities (Velvel, 2004, p. 15). For instance, the rise of Nazism and World War II fought in its wake were a part of the American movie-going experience even before the United States entered the war. *To Be or Not to Be* and *Casablanca* were among the most praised and memorable productions to offer fictional yet supposedly realistic perspectives of Nazi Germany and its regime. But they were merely the best of the scores of narrative films made in United States or Britain before and during the war. Hollywood, of course, continues to depict World War II and the Nazis—From *Saving Private Ryan* to *Inglorious Basterds* [sic] (2009)—in a particularly 21st century way of addressing the source material through humor, and other conventions.

One might look to contemporary German film to gauge how today's Germans themselves perceive Nazism and World War II, but doing so presented its own cultural, political or economic challenges. After World War II ended, Germany dealt with its Nazi past through many institutions, but for a variety of political and cultural reasons, film was not one of major avenues for this discussion (Herf, 1997, p. 160). One of the earliest films was the East German film *Rotation* (1949). Produced by the state-sanctioned DEFA, the film depicts how the apolitical stance of two parents caused them to fall into the Nazi party while their son has more hope because he embraced all that is East Germany (Kicklighter, 2013). German filmmakers in the East and West produced movies about the Nazis and World War II before the wall fell in 1989, with some gaining international recognition (Fiedler, 2006, p 130, 131). The reunification of Germany in October of 1990 should have brought an onslaught of films that re-evaluate World War II and possible reinterpretations of what it meant to be a Nazi or supportive of the regime because of the two different views offered from both East and West Germany, but this did not happen. Germany has always had a difficult time in interpreting its perspective to mass audience because of laws expressly prohibiting references to Nazism and its symbols outside educational settings (including filmmaking), lingering guilt among German filmmakers—some of whom experienced war first hand—and the mindset of positive reconstruction (Fiedler, 2006, p. 126, 138).

However a recent decade of German-made films about the Nazi regime allows the non-German audience not only to learn how the country views its Nazi

past but also see how that perspective has evolved as witnesses to Nazism and the war itself die out. This thesis seeks to examine how modern German films present fictionalized historical narratives of this devastating era, how they have changed over time, and what they tell audiences about national memory and identification to history through these fictionalized presentations. Eight productions, from *The Harmonists* (1996) to the miniseries *Unsere Mütter, Unsere Väter* (2013) offer significant themes and insights how German filmmakers see the history of Nazism and World War II. Film is being used as the medium to examine this subject because its popularity—especially documentary and historical genres—has continued to grow with each new generation of film viewers (Lees, 2003). Beyond its visual and spoken elements, film has preserved stories, cultural views, and historical events in a way that can be shared across generations. Filmmakers use film to convey their ideologies based on their own particular cultures (Rosen & Thelen, 2000, p. 31). Film is a form of art that imitates life. This imitation, or mimesis, offers a reflection of a culture. This reflection, through art, can cause a culture to both criticize its norms and understand its past. Through the use of mimesis—via film—Germany has reflected on its past and how that past fits into the present. Historically based films offer audiences a way to connect with the past that invites the viewers to develop an emotional understanding of the events and time periods.

Two theories will aid my textual analysis of the films chosen: cultivation analysis and narrative theory. These theories are important because both offer a lens that examines how narratives are told and how those narratives can shape

views and memories of both the past and the effect they might have on identity. George Gerbner developed cultivation analysis and applied this lens to aid in understanding how television could affect its viewers and their beliefs concerning what society was like (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Gerbner also thought that the higher the usage among viewers, the more their worldview could be molded.

Narrative theory adds to the lens of cultivation analysis, as it aids in examining how stories are told, past on and, thus, remembered (Smith & Watson, 2001; Duffy, 2009). With the added lens of narrative theory, the films can be examined on how they are creating, and cultivating, a screen memory that could shape future views of the Nazis, World War II, and how both of these historical times aid in shaping modern identity.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

German film has always been a popular subject among film scholars perhaps because the German film industry has been so prolific. In order to understand the shift in portrayals of the Nazis and World War II, it is important to examine German film history. The areas examined include German identity, memory, and the importance of screen memory. The literature came from different fields; thus, offering different approaches and views of German films about World War II. German film's rich and long history begins in 1895 with the Skladanovsky brothers' Bioscop [*sic*] of different film shots (Kracauer, 1969, p. 15). However, it already had a strong start before it was ever used as Nazi propaganda. Evidence of the roots were seen with the series of films based on the character of Stuart Webbs, who was

a detective with much of the same feel as Sherlock Holmes, which started with *Die Geheimnisvolle Villa (The Villa of Mysteries, 1914)* (Kracauer, 1969, p. 19; Hesse, 1996, p. 142-143).

In his book *From Cagliari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, Siegfried Kracauer (1969) separated his work into the different time periods of German film history. However, there was one motion picture that helped to put German film on the international stage: *Das Cabinet des Dr. Cagliari (1920)*. This film not only showcased German storytelling, but it also showed how German filming technique had developed (Kracauer, 1969, p. 76). These filming techniques would continue to influence German film. Moving beyond this film, Kracauer examined German films that were made up until Hitler came to power in 1933. Kracauer began to see some patterns emerge from each era, which dealt with dark memories of World War I, how it affected the Germans' view of their own culture, and the foreshadowing events of Hitler. He made this claim of foreshadowing based on the characters in the films and how—in the time just before Hitler—the German films were mostly about a protagonist that would be the savior of a country in need. Hitler seemed to fill this role that German films had shown, as he portrayed himself as the savior of Germany and German identity even though he would take both down a dark path (Kracauer, 1969, p. 272).

The concept of identity can change depending on varying things such as culture, time period, and history. For the German people, identity has come in different forms such as East Germans vs. West Germans, Nazi vs. Wehrmacht soldier,

Jew vs. German, and what it has meant when these lines blur. One book that looked at identity in German film, and different film styles, is *Screening the East: Heimat, Memory and Nostalgia in German Film (Screening the East)* by Nick Hodgkin. Hodgkin (2011) explored how nostalgia played on memory, and its interpretations, in German films. He attempts to show how, through different genres, German memory seemed to flux and shift (Hodgkin, 2011, n.p.). Beyond these shifts, Hodgkin also explored the different representations between the Nazi officer and the Wehrmacht soldier. One major difference between these different soldiers, in film, is how they look. The Nazi officer is presented as a hyper-masculine figure, whereas the Wehrmacht soldier looks weaker and smaller than the Nazi officer (Hodgkin, 2011, n.p.). This difference could have been a way to show that the average soldier was just as much a victim of the Nazis as all others (Hodgkin, 2011, n.p.). Although Hodgkin explored this issue of identity, he did not fully look at how it played into the roll of German memory of World War II and how these representations continue to affect this memory.

This presentation of the *good* soldier is not just confined to films about the Nazis. This is also seen in films that wrestle with the time of East Germany and the Stasi. Owen Evans (2010) examines how this representation continues to show a redeemable soldier who is only following orders in "Redeeming the demon? The legacy of the Stasi in *Das Leben der Anderen*." In his examination, he looks at how the lead protagonist, a Stasi, is cast in a redeeming light, as the protagonist attempted to save those he was watching. Through giving the protagonist this

redeeming quality, it shows the audience how this is not a bad person, but just someone following orders (Evans, 2010). This avenue, which German films use, to help a nation heal and somehow forgive the average soldier, both in the time of World War II and during Germany division of east and West (Evans, 2010). However, it still remains to be seen how much of Germany's cultural memory has forgiven these soldiers and accepted its past.

Along with the challenges of shifting identity, there could also be the issue of a shifting, and changing, memory between the different generations. Brad Prager (2010) explores this shifting memory in "Play it again, Traude: The Transgenerational Transfer of Wounds in Chris Kraus's *Vier Minuten*." Prager (2010) calls this phenomena screen memory. This idea, according to Prager (2010, p. 116), is when a film stands in for an actual experience of an event that the audience who has no personally experience with the time period. This screen memory could allow audiences to emotionally connect with events and stories from the past, even if those stories were fictional. Due to screen memory, the German national memory of World War II could see affects through, and from, fiction.

Another piece in this screen memory is how resistance toward the Nazis has been portrayed on the national stage of film. David Levin (1998) looked at how resistance was shown in three German films in his article "Are we victims yet? Resistance and community in *The White Rose*, *Five Last Days*, and *The Nasty Girl*." In examining these three different films, Levin (1998) looked at how resistance, both during the time of the Nazis and after, was remembered through this screen

memory. The first two films—*The White Rose* and *Sophie Scholl: The Last Days*—are two different narratives of the same events: the White Rose Society and the death of the Scholl siblings. However, so Levin, these two films portray very different accounts of this story. Although there was a difference in these two films, Levin only grazed over that fact and, rather, focused on how both films show a resistance toward the Nazis from German citizens. He continued with this focus as he looked at the last film, which was *The Nasty Girl*. Unlike the first two films, this one portrays how a young woman resisted her community's desire to keep quiet about its Nazi past through researching that very topic. As Levin (1998) examined and compared these films he found that although German films would show Germany as a victim of the Nazis, these three looked at the strength that some German people had to stand up against a rising force.

German resistance, toward the Nazis has become a screen memory through many different films, and some of those focus on The White Rose Society. However, these screen memories could reshape the view of these events compared to what actually took place. Rutschmann (2007) explores this dynamic in the article "The White Rose in Film and History." What Rutschmann (2007) examines is how the film depiction of The White Rose Society compares to the documented events. Through this comparison, Rutschmann seemed to find that film, although close to what happened, did take creative liberty with how this story was told (2007). One way that it was changed, was that it was dramatized and the main protagonists were given more details to their lives than what fact could actually prove (Rutschmann,

2007). Although Rutschmann sees this difference, the researcher does not fully explore how this difference—between film and historical events—could possibly affect how Germans remember the events and resistance of The White Rose Society.

Although film, many times, takes liberty when it comes to historical events, sometimes this has happened less. One reason that it has happened less, in some cases, was because the subject was still living at the time and, therefore, able to be involved in the filming process. This was the case with the film *The Nasty Girl*, as the main protagonist—Anna Rosmus—was still living. In her article “From Reality to Fiction: Anna Rosmus as the “Nasty Girl,”” Rosmus (2000) compared, and told, her story of resistance through research and how it was adapted for film. Throughout her retelling of events, Rosmus highlighted how the filmmakers wished to stay as close to the historical events as possible. Another important point that Rosmus focused on was how her town reacted, both to the original events and the film. In both cases—the events and the film—Rosmus’ town did not want to remember its past (Rosmus, 2000). One way that her town tried to forget its role in Nazi Germany was to try and steer Rosmus away from her research through not answering questions and making access to documents hard to gain, when she first tried to find out its role in Nazi Germany (Rosmus, 2000). When the film, *The Nasty Girl*, was being filmed, and when it was released, there was not much local support for it, even though names of both people and places were changed: people still did not want to remember; however, people slowly started to warm toward the film (Rosmus, 2000). Although Rosmus (2000) told her story of both the historical events and how

they were filmed, she rarely touched on why the town did not want to remember, and preserve those memories, to film due to not wanting to face the town's Nazi history and part in World War II.

Resistance toward the Nazis has not been the only theme in these German films. Researchers have also explored the idea of shared trauma. This trauma, from World War II, also affected the German people and how they identified as German. Palfreyman (2010) explored how this trauma has been shared, through film, in "Links and Chains: Trauma between the Generations in the Heimat Mode." Heimat Mode is characterized through the use of landscapes, happy, ideal endings, and it is a form of escapism (Palfreyman, 2010, p. 145). Throughout this article, Palfreyman examines how films, about World War II, have served as a way to transfer memories of trauma between the generation that experienced it and the ones that have come after. This remembrance of trauma has been one way for Germany, as a country, to come to terms with its past and try to understand how it fits into what it means to be German (Palfreyman, 2010, p. 162, 163).

Another film looks at the experience of German women immediately after the war end. This film is *Anonyma: Eine Frau in Berlin*. Pöttsch (2012) examines this film in his article "Rearticulating the Experience of War in *Anonyma: Eine Frau in Berlin*." Both the film and Pöttsch's article look at how German women were affected at the ending of the war (Pöttsch, 2012). However, this film does not use multiple different stories; rather, it tells the story of one woman's experience in such a way that it encompassed what multiple women experienced. Throughout his

article, Pötzsch (2012) examines the narrative of how this story is told and how it might be used to understand the German past. However, Pötzsch (2012) did not fully develop these ideas, as he focused more on an analysis of the characters.

Not all of the films about World War II homogenize the events and trauma of it. However, some films have done just that in some ways. Cormican (2010) explored this topic in “Normalization and the Ethics of Holocaust Representation in Vilsmaier's *Leo und Claire* and *Comedian Harmonists*.” Through exploring the characters and narration in these films, Cormican (2010) found that although film has been used to reflect on World War II, it has also allowed for the memories of those events to be sanitized. This sanitation could cause the audience to believe that World War II, although horrific, was not the horror that it was made out to be (Cormican, 2010). Through fictionalization, some parts of the real, horrific impact of World War II has been lost (Cormican, 2010).

Fiction has offered the German people, and film industry, a way to wrestle with what happened with the Nazis and World War II. Many of the articles in *Screening War: Perspectives on German Suffering* examine how fiction has been a safe place for Germans to discuss World War II, as it has not been largely discussed in daily life outside of films (Cook & Silberman, 2010, p. 4). Many of these articles also examined how film has helped Germans come to terms with the trauma of World War II (Cook & Silberman, 2010, p. 8; Bergfelder, 2010, p. 123).

Although much of the previous literature on film depictions of World War II has examined the portrayal of characters, events, and some ideas of screen memory, many articles stopped short of examining how these different areas could have affected German national memory, culture, and identity. Along with this shortcoming, much of the previous literature also has gaps in explanations and use of theory, explanations of methodology, and comparisons between films.

A majority of the previous literature lacks statements about what theory was being used as a lens to examine its films. This raises questions about what framework the researchers were using to analyze these films. Without knowing what theory was being applied, the readers might be challenged in relating the findings to daily life. Also, this lack of theory causes challenges for future researchers, as without the knowledge of what theory was used it becomes difficult to build on the previous research and literature.

Another gap, in the previous literature, is the lack of methodology, and an explanation of the methodology. Once again, this lacking area could create difficulties for future researchers, as without this information these previous findings become difficult to replicate, expand on, and even understand how the previous researchers came to their conclusions.

Beyond the above-mentioned gaps, the previous literature also rarely compares individual films to one another. This lack of comparison means that cultural changes might have been missed. This lack could also lead to close readings

of one film not being balanced, as there might not be a way to apply the same approach, of a close reading, to another film. It has the ability of creating a gap in understanding how different films portray the events of World War II differently.

The researcher plans to explore this topic, in order to add to the previous literature and assist in filling the gaps that still exist within the research. Expanding on this topic, will aid in adding to the understanding of how film could be reshaping a cultural memory and national identity.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

THEORIES

Film has the ability to cultivate an image of the past. George Gerbner developed cultivation analysis through the 1970s and 1980s, which focused on how television affected its viewers (Baran & Davis, 2012). Throughout his work, Gerbner found that television could affect its viewers and their view of the world (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). As Gerbner continued to research the affects of television viewing habits, he found what he called the Mean World Syndrome. The Mean World Syndrome was when television viewers began to believe that the world was a meaner, crime-ridden, place than it actually was. To measure this affect, Gerbner broke viewers into categories based on how much they viewed television. What was discovered was that the Mean World Syndrome was higher in those that were considered high users (Gerbner & Gross, 1976).

In his later research, Gerbner continued to develop cultivation analysis, and how narratives inform culture. Gerbner (1998) examined this in his article “Telling Stories, or how do We Know What We Know? The Story of Cultural Indicators and the Cultural Environment Movement.” In this work, he (1998) continued to expand on the idea that television, and its usage, has an effect on how people relate to their culture and remember their cultural history.

Although Gerbner’s cultivation analysis focused on the use and affect of television, it can be applied to film as well. Film, although different, can share many similarities with television, as they are two types of the same media. Therefore, the researcher will apply cultivation analysis to the films that will be studied in order to understand how these films could have affected a culture’s view of history and its memory of those same events.

Along with cultivation analysis, the researcher will also apply narrative theory, with a focus on life narrative, to these films. Narrative theory, and life narrative theory focuses in on how a life story has been told (Smith & Watson, 2001). According to Smith and Watson (2001), life narrative theory can offer a lens to understand how these narratives are constructed and told, even when they veer slightly from the hard facts.

Narrative theory would pair well with cultivation analysis for these films, as one would be a lens for how the narratives, although fiction, were constructed, and the other would offer a lens on the effects of these structures on national memory and the German culture. In order to apply these theories to the studied films, the

researcher will also examine the previous literature, throughout the research process, with these two lenses. Along with this continued re-evaluation of the literature, the researcher will conduct a close reading of multiple German films about World War II. The close readings, of these individual films, will be compared and contrasted. Along with examining the films, the researcher will also examine how the cultural views might have changed during, and shortly after, the release time of each film through examining both news articles and the pop culture of the times. The information that the researcher gathers will be compared and contrasted to the close readings.

DESIGN

This thesis will explore, and add to, the understanding of how perceptions of World War II have changed through modern German filmmakers perceptions of the event. Through looking at this change in perception, stereotypes, gender roles, and memory transference—via screen memory—will be examined for possible effect on people's personal views of this historical event. This screen memory is when a film is standing in—normally fictional—for a memory of an actual event, and having this visual, and emotional, image aids in connecting with an audience in order to cause them to feel as if the memory, or experience, is their own—i.e. memory transference (1, 2010, p. 166).

The films to be examined in this thesis are listed below in the timeline table

1. These particular films were chosen for different reasons. Firstly, German directors made each of the films. This detail was key, as it offers a look into a German interpretation and shifting view of memories of this time. Secondly, the timeline spans over ten years, which allows for an examination of how changes in the different themes have occurred, if at all. Lastly, many of the films are well known and offer a sampling of the type of films from the different release years.

In order to explore this topic, multiple research questions will be used. These research questions are:

- 1) How have the narrative, themes, and images changed over time, if at all, and how have these changes affected cultural memory via screen memory?

This first research question will be explored through comparing and contrasting the different films and their different themes and the presentation of those themes.

- 2) How are perceived differences between high-ranking Nazi officers and the common German Wehrmacht soldier portrayed in the films, and how do these differences affect the audiences' identification with the characters?
- 3) As seen in the listed films, how could the past shape national memory?

These differences, in how characters are represented, could have an effect on how both the characters and events are viewed (Hodgin, 2011). Due to this possible influence, an audience could see the average Wehrmacht soldier as a type of victim because he was only following orders. Another aspect to this research question that the researcher will investigate will be why there was a difference in how these characters are shown and if there was a cultural reason for this difference.

In order to examine this subject, these will use a textual analysis approach. This approach is being used for multiple reasons. The materials being researched are films and, therefore, textual analysis is applicable as the themes to be examined are both overt and latent. Also, textual analysis has been applied in past literature in order to examine films that address the Nazis and World War II. The films to be examined will be categorized through the use of a linear timeline that starts with the earliest film and goes to the most recent film. These films date from the early 1990s through the late 2000s, which are listed in the timeline table 1. This

timeline will mark each year a film, which is being examined, was released. If there are coinciding years, then the films will be grouped, on the timeline, for that year. Through using a linear timeline, any changes in how World War II was presented will be tracked, compared, and contrasted against the different films.

Along with examining how the stories have changed and evolved through the years, the narrative of the films will also be examined and any differences found will be explored. Some themes, throughout all of the listed films, to be examined are how stereotypes influence the films presentations of characters, power, gender and gender roles, and aid in the films plots and development. This examination will help to understand how the narratives of the protagonists and antagonists were being presented. These presentations will also be examined, from a narrative lens, in order to see if there are any changes in how the characters were presented in order to draw an audience into the films and to cause any emotional identification with one character over another.

In order to examine these films thoroughly, they will be viewed multiple times. Then, notes on themes throughout the films, and from each viewing, will be compared to uncover emerging themes. Although this approach of textual analysis may have a weak point, as it does not involve German citizens that have viewed the films, the insights from a textual analysis could still show changes and shifts throughout the different films.

Timeline Table 1. Analyzing Modern-Day German Films

Year	Film (English translation)	Director	Synopsis
1997	The Harmonists	Joseph Vilsmaier (born 1939)	Based on true story of the Comedic Harmonists, a popular group before Nazis banned their performances in Germany
2001	<i>Nirgendwo in Afrika</i> (<i>Nowhere in Africa</i>)	Caroline Link (b. 1946)	Based on real story of a family living in Africa before war breaks out; director by woman
2003	Rosenstraße	Margarethe von Trotta (b. 1942)	Fictional story based on real protests staged by Protestant wives of jailed Jewish husbands
2003	<i>Das Wunder von Bern</i> (<i>The Miracle of Bern</i>)	Sonke Wortmann (b. 1959)	Fictional story about father and son loosely based on Germany's actual 1954 World Cup victory
2004	<i>Der Untergang</i> (<i>Downfall</i>)	Oliver Hirschbiegel (b. 1957)	Fictionalized version of the Nazi regime before the fall of Berlin
2005	<i>Sophie Scholl: Die Letzten Tage</i> (<i>Sophie Scholl: The Last Days</i>)	Marc Rothemund (b. 1968)	The last days of Sophie Scholl, the iconic activist in the White Rose non-violent resistance group.
2006	<i>Vier Minuten</i> (<i>Four Minutes</i>)	Chris Kraus (b. 1963)	Fictional story of a piano teacher and female inmate whose traumas cross generations
2007	<i>Mein Führer</i> (<i>My Fuhrer</i>)	Dani Levy (b. 1957 in Switzerland)	A fictional comedy about a Jewish actor who "helps" Hitler overcome stage fright after a breakdown
2013	<i>Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter</i> (<i>Generation War</i>)	Philipp Kadelbach (b. 1974)	A three-part television series that follows the accounts of five fictionalized characters during World War II.

SUMMARY

World War II obviously had a profound impact on the German view of nationality and what it means to identify as German. But how it is being remembered is constantly evolving. One factor is that fewer people who experienced World War II are still living. This distance from the events could mean that stories, and memories, are being lost or changed—especially from those whose experiences have not been recorded. However, German films have the ability to preserve these memories through fictional retellings of World War II.

Although German films about the Nazi regime and World War II are being examined by scholars, , the majority of the research stops short of comparing how the films have changed and what those effects, of screen memory, could possibly be causing (Prager, 2010, p. 116). Because of these gaps, this researcher will investigate this topic in order to help add to the understanding of this topic, how it has possibly been affecting a cultural and national memory, and how the presentations in film have changed throughout the years.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

THE FILMS OF THE NAZI REGIME

The German films examined here offer multiple different angles to historical events, even when historical events are fictionalized. In spite of not being completely true stories, these films still have the ability to emotional connect with the viewers and cause them to empathize, or even identify, with the characters and their stories. Each offers a different aspect of the Nazi regime, World War II, and the Holocaust.

The Harmonists (1997) is based on the actual story of the music group. The group first formed in 1927 when Harry Frommermann, one of the main protagonists, placed an ad for singers. The group consisted of three Germans and

three Jewish-Germans, which would cause the group to be banned by the Nazis in 1934. After being disbanded, the former members reform the group into two separate parts (both using the same name) with one operating within Nazi Germany and outside of it; however, neither group had the same success as before (Vilsmaier, 1997).

Where *The Harmonists* focused on the beginnings of the Nazi Regime, and the experience of being in Germany, *Nirgendwo in Afrika's* (*Nowhere in Africa*, 2001) story focused on a German-Jewish family that fled Germany near the beginning of Hitler's rise to power. The film's main opening was dated for January 1938. At this point, Walter Redlich, the husband, had already left Germany to establish a place for his wife, Jettel, and daughter, Regina, in Africa. Walter, Jettel, and Regina were the only ones of their families to leave Germany. The contrasts of lifestyles between Germany and Africa were foreshadowed early on in the film when Walter told Jettel to bring netting, a refrigerator, and oil lamps over their china and other finer clothes and items. The cultural, climate and other factors did not make the adjustment easy for them; however, after some time Africa became home to Regina as she integrated into parts of the culture easiest. The family also found help adjusting in Owuor, the cook who works on the farm. Owuor played a key role in helping the Redlich's adjust and survive through their time in Africa. After World War II ended, Walter and his family return to Germany as he is asked to serve as a judge. They were the only ones of their family to survive the war (Link, 2001).

Next, *Das Wunder von Bern* (*The Miracle of Bern*, 2003) follows the fictional story of one German family and their challenges to re-integrate their family after the father, Richard Lubanski, returned from being a Russian prisoner of war.

Intertwined with this family's story is the true story of Germany's national soccer team, and their chance at the world cup in Bern in 1954. Upon the father's return, he meets Matthias, the son who he had never met. The family also struggles to readjust, as the father took a hard, and stereotypical German, approach to handling the three children that later caused the oldest, Bruno, to leave. Running parallel to their story is the story of the National soccer team and its star Helmut Rahn, who is often referred to as the boss. Matthias was Rahn's bag boy and Rahn also affectionately thinks of him as his lucky charm. Rahn states that whenever he is at games the team would win, which they do at the world cup (Wortmann, 2003).

Der Untergang (*Downfall*, 2004) takes a different approach to this topic. It focuses on Hitler, the Nazis, and the last events before the fall of Berlin. The film opened in 1942 with young women walking through the woods to an undisclosed location to interview for the position of Hitler's secretary. After this point, the film continues its focus on Hitler, his officers, and the events leading to the eventual fall of Berlin (Hirschbiegel, 2004).

Vier Minuten (*Four Minutes*, 2006) is set roughly sixty years after World War II. It examines both the effects of World War II and how trauma can be shared. The film opens with shots of a correctional center, which the Nazis also used. The two main characters, Gertrud 'Traude' Krüger and Jenny von Loeben, are brought

together through Krüger's piano lessons at the correctional center, which she has been teaching for more than 60 years (Kraus, 2006). The film continues to follow how, through each other and sharing their traumatic experiences, Krüger and Jenny can heal and Jenny gets her four minutes to perform at a piano competition (Kraus, 2006).

Sophie Scholl: Die Letzten Tage (Sophie Scholl: The Last Days, 2005) tells the story of the Scholl siblings and the White Rose Society. Sophie and her brother, Hans, were members of the White Rose, an anti-Nazi resistance movement that was centered at their university in Munich. Sophie and Hans were brought in for questioning after they threw pamphlets off a school walkway, although no one saw them in the act. Although the film is about both the Scholl siblings and the White Rose Society, its focus is on Sophie, her experience and trauma, and the events leading up to her execution (Rothemund, 2005).

Mein Führer (My Fuhrer, 2007) applies a humorous approach to Hitler and the Nazis. It does this through following the main character, Adolf Grünbaum—a Jewish acting teacher—who was recruited to help bring Hitler back from being demoralized and losing all hope (Levy, 2007). Grünbaum works Hitler through different acting techniques, including having him behave like a dog. The storyline revolves around Hitler's impending speech and how his closest officers want to hide the state of Germany, and the war, from him. In the end, Grünbaum is under the platform from which Hitler speaks and is actually the one to give the speech as the

Führer lost his voice. However, he goes off script and makes a fool of Hitler, a choice that would cost him his life (Levy, 2007).

The past can affect future generations and how they understand what happened. *Rosenstraße (2003)* tells the intertwining stories of Ruth, the family she has now, and Lena Fisher, an Aryan woman who was married to a Jewish man in 1943. The film's opening scenes are set in the year 2000 after Ruth's husband died. Her daughter, Hannah, tries to understand why her mother suddenly is imposing Jewish traditions on the family. Hannah's search leads her to Lena Fisher. She approaches Lena under the guise of investigation intermarriages during Nazi Germany. Through her talks with Lena, Hannah begins to learn how her mother's past was tied to this ninety-year-old woman and the Rosenstraße protest (Trotta, 2003).

Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter (Generation War, 2013) offers a different lens of Nazi Germany and World War II. The miniseries follows the fictional story of five friends and how World War II changed each of their lives. Each of the five characters is German, with Viktor being Jewish as well. The series begins in Berlin in 1941. As the war unfolds, each of the characters plays a role in it; Charlotte serves as a nurse, Wilhelm and Friedhelm serve in the army, Greta becomes involved with a Nazi officer to both save her boyfriend, Viktor, and launch a singing career that is later cut short, and Viktor tries to evade the Nazis (Kadelbach, 2013).

Emerging Themes

The above-mentioned films all contribute to the idea of national memory. Though each has its own distinct scenarios, the films share common themes that reinforce this notion. These themes, either positive or negative, are responsible as both a reflection on the past as well as a persuasion technique to attract audiences.

Stereotypes

Power and stereotypes can be seen in almost all of the films, however these elements stand out greatly in *The Harmonists*, *Mein Führer*, *Downfall*, and *Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter*. The depiction of power and stereotypes varies between the films. With the *Harmonists*, power and stereotypes are portrayed mainly through the main characters of Frommermann and Biberti. These two characters exhibit the stereotypes of the strong, good, commanding, German (Biberti) and the weaker, quieter Jew (Frommermann). These stereotypes play out even in the fact that it is Biberti who is the bass singer (Vilsmaier, 1997). These characters also display a power struggle, enforced by their stereotypes, where Erna is concerned due to how they both struggle over her. At times the stereotypes in *The Harmonists* are obvious, and others they are more hidden although still woven into almost every aspect of the characters. One example of this is the fact that it is Biberti who is the bass singer (Vilsmaier, 1997). This seemingly small element to this character only shows how deeply the stereotype of a German male as strong and powerful is; Whereas, Frommermann is depicted as physically weaker and of a quiet demeanor. However,

Frommermann's own strength is seen in how he holds the musical group together, how he finally stands up to Biberti—although the group does not stay in New York but returns to Germany—and in how he responds to the notice before the performance that the group is being disbanded immediately following the performance (Vilsmaier, 1997). In the end, these two characters, and their displayed stereotypes, come to a kind of balance between their different types of strengths. Another example of this can be seen in the ending scenes, as there is an understanding that passes between the two characters about each other and possibly even the future. Another symbolic example of this balance, is that Erna chooses to go with Frommermann in the end.

Sharing in Frommermann's quiet strength is Grünbaum, the main protagonist in *Mein Führer*. The change in *Mein Führer*, in contrast to *The Harmonists*, is how Grünbaum's quiet type of strength is presented as the type needed to possess actual power. The Nazi officers, and Hitler himself, still embody the stereotypical strong, aggressive, and outspoken version of strength that is associated with a strong German, but their use of this stereotype only worked to make these characters appear foolish (Levy, 2007). This switch puts Grünbaum in control of the narrative plot, from how Hitler is coached to speak, to delivering Hitler's speech, as the Führer had strained his voice. Comparatively, it is the quieter strength, which is also seen in Frommermann, which allows Grünbaum to have power over the Nazi officers—via Hitler's favor—Hitler, and the delivery of the speech. However, even though Grünbaum's character plays against the stereotypes through using them to gain control and, thus, power, he is unable to live past the end

of the narrative (Levy, 2007). This narrative presentation allows an audience to both entertain feelings of identification with the good protagonist while being at ease with possible pity for Hitler's character, as he is humanized through looking the fool and being weak, like the nightmare from which Grünbaum comforts him (Duffy, 2009; Levy, 2007).

Mein Führer used Grünbaum's anti-stereotype of strength in order to show both the character's power and the lack of power of the Nazis and Hitler. Although the norm is that their strength is powerful and equals control, not all films flip the stereotypes. Both *Der Untergang* and *Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter* use the motifs of traditional stereotypes and images of power. These films show how loss of power and lack of adhering to stereotypes are linked. Wilhelm, one of the main protagonists in *Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter*, is a Nazi soldier and officer, although he is presented as distanced from being a Nazi officer and more of an average soldier (Kadelbach, 2013). For Wilhelm, power comes from operating within the stereotype of the strong German and committed Nazi. The moment he deserts his command, Wilhelm loses all control of his fate (Kadelbach, 2013). Through shifting Wilhelm's position, the film series offers a narrative image that allows the audience to connect with the characters, as they are humanized, and offers an emotional connection to a fictionalized presentation of history (Duffy, 2009; Smith & Watson, 2001). Through this, cultivation could effect how the audience relates to, and identifies with, both the presented fictionalized story and history due to multiple factors with one being the exposure level, as this series consists of three films (Gerbner & Gross 1976; Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli & Morgan, 1980).

These same stereotypes are at work in *Der Untergang*; however, at the same time that the stereotypes allow Hitler and the Nazis power, it also is one cause of loss of control of their fate. Even as the war was coming apart, Hitler and his close Nazi circle refused to believe that their power and control were unraveling as Berlin was being attacked (Hirschbiegel, 2004). The depictions, throughout *Der Untergang*, play into the perceived stereotypes of how Hitler and Nazi officers behaved. One example is how Hitler becomes enraged at his officers, in a meeting when they begin to show doubt in the ability to defend the city and win the war (Hirschbiegel, 2004). This behavior and imagery only exacerbates the cultural image and stereotypes of the Nazis, but through doing so it magnified their flawed views, beliefs, and moral characters, which allows the viewers to find an emotional and moral balance from identifying with these characters in the narrative (Duffy, 2009).

Although the usage of stereotypes are both for plot and character convenience and make the material more approachable to an audience, the main Jewish characters in *The Harmonists* and *Mein Führer* work against the image of the weaker Jewish character even while exhibiting the stereotype. Both Frommermann and Grünbaum do this through their reserved, and possibly less threatening, characteristics and appearance that allows them to turn the stereotypical German characters' strengths against those same characters. In doing so, these characters challenge the accepted norms and expose the audience to something other than a Jewish character who has no control over their lives and, thus, challenges the culturally cultivated image and narratives that are normally accepted (Gerbner, 1998; Gerbner & Gross 1976). Through television, these images, can be cultivated

more rapidly because as viewers have more access to the films and, thus, there is the ability for repeat exposure to the material. This possible repeat exposure could shape not only how audiences view history but also how it shapes current memory and identity.

The concept of the *good* soldier, who was not directly associated with the Nazis or their SS officers, has been cultivated into the cultural mindset in order to allow soldiers to be accepted back into society following World War II (Cooke & Silberman, 2010, p. 2, 4). These concepts are still depicted in *Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter* and *Das Wunder von Bern*.

The idea of the *good* soldier can be seen in the characters of Wilhelm and Charlotte in *Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter*. As stated above, Wilhelm has a command; however, he is depicted as only following orders from his commanding officers. This distance allows the audience to accept his character as one who is caught in between his conscious and both the Nazis and the war (Kadelbach, 2013). Later with Wilhelm's choice to desert his troops and, thus, the Nazis, he embodies the idea that many soldiers were good, moral people who did not agree with Nazi actions but felt they had little choice other than to follow orders. Therefore, Wilhelm's narrative was redeemed in the audiences' perspective and separated from being another horrible Nazi (Duffy, 2009; Smith & Watson, 2001).

Charlotte is also able to redeem herself and show how she was just another Nazi follower. Although only a field nurse, she began to question her Nazi views, the party itself, and the war after betraying another nurse who was Jewish (Kadelbach,

2013). Through Charlotte, the audience can separate the two groups of Nazis and the Germans who were unaware of the full effects of what the Nazi group was using its power to accomplish. This separation, like with Wilhelm, perpetuates the idea that the average soldier did not agree with or even fully understand what the Nazis were doing and in having this separation the audience is able to experience these fictionalized memories without experiencing the full force of guilt that this event was allowed to happen (Gerbner, 1998; Duffy, 2009).

Robert Lubanski, the character of the father in *Das Wunder von Bern*, also models the concept of the *good* soldier. His character showcases the struggles that faced returning soldiers (Wortmann, 2003). The image that Lubanski fills plays into the motif that in order to reflect on this past, these stereotypes are needed to allow audiences an emotionally approachable presentation of the past so that it might be understood and worked through (Duffy, 2009; Gerbner, 1998).

These depictions of stereotypical roles only aid in cultivating a mental image of these standards in a culture. Although this area is not always a direct presentation of violence—although it can stem from it—the concept of Mean World Syndrome can be applied. Gerbner’s Mean World Syndrome is when an audience exposed to a large volume of an image (i.e. violence on television) begins to see the actual world through that lens (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). The stereotypes also offered, and were mainly used as, a plot convenience due to how they could allow for less dimensional characters within the films. This usage would also be comfortable to an audience, as it plays into commonly held views and by doing so makes the presentation of both

the Nazis and World War II less emotionally, and cognitively, threatening. This less threatening presentation allows audiences to experience a narrative in a form that examines, begins to heal, and move beyond the past event (Duffy, 2009).

Female roles and gender roles

Gender and the prescribed gender roles run throughout the films and are both reinforced and, challenged, at times by the very same characters who help to reinforce the gender roles. The films that stand out in this theme are *Rosenstraße*, *Sophie Scholl: Die Letzten Tage*, *Nirgendwo in Afrika*, and *Vier Minuten*.

The main female characters in *Rosenstraße*—Lena, Ruth, and Hannah—fulfill some of norms of gender roles while challenging them through their strength of character. In the beginning of the film, Ruth must fill the role of a strong matriarch after her husband's death. It is this death that also causes Hannah to begin digging into Ruth's past in Nazi Germany (Trotta, 2003). Through this action, Hannah challenged her role as the obedient Jewish daughter that, when told to leave a topic alone, would do as told. It is Hannah's refusal to leave the past alone that uncovers both her mother's history and Lena's role in it (Trotta, 2003). Hannah also challenges her familial role through the act of being engaged, and eventually marrying, to a non-Jewish man.

Lena's character challenges the given gender role norms through being one of the leading women in both locating her husband, and those of other women, and

aiding in the protest, which would later lead to the release of the German women's Jewish husbands. However, in these acts of challenging her role, she also fulfills it because of the facts that the protest was centered on keeping a family together along with the fact that she felt the need to take in and protect the young Ruth, who would not have made it without her (Trotta, 2003). Lena's narrative, and gender role, also factors into telling the narrative of *Rosenstraße* because of how the focus continued to be on family, although she embodies the idea of the strong, German woman who would continue to carry on with her life regardless.

This prescribed cultural gender role of being a strong German woman while focusing on family can also be detected into Sophie's character in *Sophie Scholl: Die Letzten Tage*. One pivotal way in which Sophie fills this gender norm is through her continued concern about how her arrest would affect the rest of her family (Rothemund, 2005). However, she does not always stay within the confines of her gender role, as Sophie has a hand in both creating and distributing the pamphlets from The White Rose Society. Through these pamphlets she works against the gender norm of not opposing the males who hold authority over her, be they her brother or governmental officials. The film itself challenges Sophie's would-be gender role, as its focus remains mainly on her and rarely deviates to the male characters, as even the male Nazi characters take a secondary role to her narrative experience.

This type of unmoving focus draws the audience into emotionally identifying with Sophie's character and aids in the viewers' emotional identification with this

character. This identification gives the audience a space to reflect on both how Nazis handle resistance along with the shown fact that there were young Germans who did not agree with or follow the Nazi party, thus creating a avenue for the audience to both reject the Nazis while embracing a German identity that resisted the terror of Nazism (Rothmund, 2005; Duffy, 2009).

In the film *Nirgendwo in Afrika*, we can see that the characters of Jettel and Regina challenge traditional female gender roles as well. Although Jettel, the mother, first conforms to her stereotypical gender role, while she is still in Germany and before fully accepting relocating to Africa, she later takes on a strong, non-conformist role when she embraces Africa as her new home (Link, 2001). Jettel's character develops from playing a supporting role to managing the farm when her husband serves in the British army. Although she wishes for it in the beginning, Jettel later opposes returning to Germany when her husband first brings up the topic; however, she later attempts to go back into her former role and follows him, with their daughter Regina, back to Germany.

Regina also does not conform to the stereotypical gender role for a German daughter. She states later in the film that she hardly remembers Germany, as she is a young child when her family flees to Africa (Link, 2001). Regina is also the first one of her family to begin to embrace African culture. These roles, which both Jettel and Regina fill, show how parts of identity are influenced through the different roles one accepts or denies. Both characters exhibit the ideals and imagery of a strong German woman and although their Jewish heritage is the cause of their fleeing from

Germany, although their Jewish heritage becomes a second thought as the female characters take on strong roles.

In *Vier Minuten*, Traude Krüger fills the role of the older, wiser, and more experience matriarch, while Jenny is the one who has something to learn from her. Jenny's character is mainly seen as only being degenerate and criminal by most of the other characters. Krüger even sees her as only projecting this image at first (Kraus, 2006). Jenny also plays into these stereotypical roles in the beginning through being distant from everyone around her, as well as holding anger toward her family that she does not address.

Krüger's character falls into the stereotypical gender role for an older woman. As these two characters' paths intertwine, Krüger becomes a type of guide for Jenny, while Jenny offers her a new way to re-examine the past. Krüger also fits into the standard role through the unmoving views and opinions on the type of music Jenny continually attempts to play and refers to it multiple times as negro-music (Kraus, 2006). However, as their story progresses Krüger bends on her views of Jenny's music and Jenny begins attempting to break out of her culturally assigned image and role. In these attempts to break from their roles, Krüger begins to re-evaluate her Nazi past and the death of her lover, while Jenny's future looks slightly brighter as she sees a possible path toward healing and a way out of her prescribed role as only being a criminal (Kraus, 2006).

Through the use of both Krüger's and Jenny's characters and gender roles, viewers are presented with a narrative and image that causes the effects of trauma,

and the trauma from Nazi Germany, to be re-examined and, thus, allows for healing to begin through the re-telling of this trauma (Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, & Morgan, 1980; Duffy, 2009).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This examination of the above German films about the Nazi regime and World War II reveals how films serve as a cultural screen memory, could aid in reconciliation with the past, and how stereotypes continue to be a storytelling technique in films (Prager, 2010, p. 116).

By examining the eight films as a whole, the analysis traces an evolution in how the directors present character development and the depiction of topics and events. Also, there are variations in how stereotypes, roles, and even a type of Heimat Mode—a reflectionist approach that creates a fictional ideal of what history looked like and it normally has a focus on landscape as well—are used to tell the narratives. These variations could influence how the Nazi regime and World War II are remembered by viewers who have no direct connect to that historical time. These changes, and their possible effects, are significant findings, as they could influence how the events and memories of the Nazi regime are preserved as well.

This is also important because films are filling a gap of both preserving and transferring memories for continuing generations. These film adaptations will continue to become of greater importance, as the people who experienced the Nazis and World War II are dying and, thus, time is silencing their voices. Films offer a way to both preserve what happened and emotionally connect these past memories with a new audience.

Through a cross examination of *The Harmonists*, *Nirgendwo in Afrika*, and *Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter*, changes in how stereotypes are used and presented as a narrative tool are found. In *The Harmonists*, the stereotypes are highly overt from how Biberti is portrayed and presented as the stereotypical idea of a strong German male—larger physical build, sings bass, is blonde, in control, etc.—whereas, Frommermann is presented in a way that plays into the traditional stereotype of Jews being weaker and not always in control. With Frommermann, this is seen from his physical build to the position he sings in the group, and even in how he rarely stands up to Biberti. In comparison, *Nirgendwo in Afrika* presents the stereotype of the strong German; however, in doing so it also strengthens the image of the Jewish characters as they are German-Jewish. Then in *Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter*, the main German characters present images, and characters, that although strong also show weakness through both emotions and a lack of control of their environment and what will happen to them personally.

The motion pictures also use the convention of gender roles in order to both share their fictionalized narrative and develop the plots in these films. These gender roles are seen in multiple films. For example, in *Rosenstraße* the female characters both play into the stereotype of being strong matriarchal, and German, women while at the same time challenging some gender role stereotypes such as the daughter needing to follow the elder family member's wishes, which Hannah does not as she searches for answers about her mother's past.

Some films, like *Das Wunder von Bern*, use a variation of Heimat Mode within the narrative plots. With *Das Wunder von Bern*, this usage appears in how the father, who is a returning POW, is first unable to fulfill the needed role for his family. However, as the story progresses, he begins to return, and find, who he is as a German man and father and this eventually leads him to become the ideal figure for his family. This can be seen as a variation on the idea of Heimat Mode, as it plays into the ideal image of a family and future.

Clearly, these films, and their evolving depictions, could have an influence on how audiences not only remember the past, through fictionalized films, but also on how they understand this influence on cultural identity and memory; as memory changes through time, the past influences how memory and, thus, identity is molded (Fiedler, 2006, p. 143). The continuous shifts could shape and mold what it means to be part of a culture (i.e. to identify as German). These effects on memory and

identity come through the fact that these narratives are both aiding in understanding of what happened in the past and viewers are being repeatedly exposed to the same general concepts, stereotypes, and images and, therefore, the repeated exposure could cultivate an image of how the past looked (Duffy, 2009; Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, 1998).

This research also aids in adding to both cultivation analysis and narrative theory. It does this through showing how cultivation analysis is not just confined to only being applied to television and quantitative research, as it can serve as a useful lens for both films and qualitative approaches. Also, through the use of cultivation analysis, both overt and latent imagery emerges from the films that shows that stereotypes are still an essential element in how narratives are constructed and retold.

Along with adding to cultivation analysis, narrative theory is also expanded on, as it shows, through the research, that narrative theory is relevant to motion pictures as films are a way of preserving the past, relating it to the audience, and allowing for understanding and reconciliation of national memory. Through how these narratives—via film—present the past, it aids a generation of viewers who have no emotional or personal connection to this time to understand, and relate to, how the Nazi past and World War II shape the current culture and national memory.

These films are able to have an emotional affect on the audience as well. This effect is caused by how the films topics are presented, as they are emotionally taxing on a viewer. This emotional drain is comes from the construction of the narratives. It causes the viewers to emotionally identify with the characters and, by doing that, their narrative experience. However, it is this same emotional connection that makes the past come to life and seem realistic to an audience. Therefore, even with the emotional strain these films put on an audience they are effective in making an emotional connection between the viewer and a past possible that, at times, seems distant and not relatable.

Lastly, in order to continue to understand films' influence on identity and memory, more research is needed. Some possible future research could continue to examine how films' presentations are shifting and changing, compare and contrast how other cultures continue to present the Nazis and World War II compared to the German perspective, and examine other films from different eras. Also, in order for greater understanding of films' influence on memory a researcher might implement both textual analysis and other qualitative methods such as focus groups. Through continuing to expand the research and, thus, the body of knowledge, a better understanding of how representations, screen memory, and its influence on cultural identity can be better understood.

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