Malte Ludin’s family was deeply embroiled in Germany’s history of perpetration. He was born in 1942 in Bratislava, which at the time was known to the Germans as Preßburg. As the son of Hanns Ludin, a successful Nazi diplomat, his family «aryanized» a villa in 1941, legally but unethically taking it from the Slovakian Jews who were living there. Ludin examines his upbringing in the shadow of his father’s war crimes, as well as his family’s guilt by implication in his 2004 documentary 2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß. The film is his means of dealing with the past, of rewriting its terms and engaging it in dialogue. But how does a filmmaker confront both his family and German history at the same time? Ludin uses filmic strategies to cut into the past, turning the ostensibly complete and closed narrative into which he was thrown and with which he was presented into a tendentious debate. He transforms his own memories and unanswered questions into newly opened wounds.

From 1970 to 1974 Ludin studied at the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (the dffb), and since that time he has been an independent author, filmmaker and producer. By 1979 he had already begun to write about how film should engage the past, publishing a critical essay on Joachim Fest and Christian Herrendoerfer’s film Hitler – eine Karriere (1977), which had been released 2 years earlier. Fest and Herrendoerfer’s film was a composite: it consisted mainly of footage filmed by the Nazis, thus reproducing and redistributing a large amount of wartime material with the intention of examining why ordinary Germans had been so enamored of Hitler. In their film Hitler is depicted as having been widely idolized and as having enjoyed the popularity of a rock star. The film itself drew on and imitated National Socialist propaganda films and its directors even added enhanced sound effects to amplify the impressions made by the images.1 Some of their choices

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could have been interpreted as ironic or as an attempt at what Eric Santner affirmatively describes as a homeopathic remedy for Germany’s past ills, but there was little evidence, either in the comments made by the producers or in the film’s reception, that would have made such claims convincing.2

Remarking on the editing of Hitler – eine Karriere Anton Kaes observes: «By using shot/countershot, [Fest and Herrendoerfer] established the union between the Führer and the people as both pseudo-religious and erotic: masses of women listen raptly at the dictator’s feet as he exhausts himself, fulfilling their libidinous, ecstatic desire to submit themselves» (6). Through their editing the filmmakers aimed to recreate the erotic and quasi-erotic attachments many held for the Führer. Objections to the deliberate awakening of those problematic erotic investments were widespread, and numerous critiques reiterated this position vis-à-vis the film’s harmonizing depiction of its subject and his spectators, of Hitler and the German public. The editing was not intended to be dialectical, but it instead emphasized the process of identification and the feeling of adulation, all of which made their work little different, in the eyes of critics, from Leni Riefenstahl’s Nazi era films. Ludin added his voice to the critiques, asserting that despite the passage of three decades, the film advanced Nazi lies. His essay takes Fest and Herrendoerfer to task on many fronts. He asks, for example, why the filmmakers didn’t include other material or information that might have been retrieved in the course of their film-archival research. If one depicts a speech by the Führer, shouldn’t one show, using captions or other types of commentary, the violence that underlies such a speech? And, instead of enhancing the images with special effects, shouldn’t one try to rend those images from their sounds, sundering the false impressions created by Joseph Goebbels? («Nazi-Lügen» 48 – 49).

Ludin’s analysis of the film squares with that of his contemporary Wim Wenders. The two filmmakers are of the same generation: Ludin was born in 1942 and Wenders in 1945. In a critical essay on the film titled «That’s Entertainment: Hitler,» Wenders writes, «in no other country have images and language been abused so unscrupulously as here, never before and nowhere else have they been debased so deeply as vehicles to transmit lies. And now a film comes along which, with an incomprehensible thoughtlessness, wants to sell exactly those images as the heart of the matter and as «documentary footage» (128). Wenders offsets the term «documentary footage» (Dokumentaraufnahmen) with quotation marks, already indicating his awareness that documentary is a contested category, that is, that Nazi propaganda films such as Triumph des Willens (1935) and Der ewige Jude (1940) had already done much to undermine the form’s privileged claim on
representing reality. More important, perhaps, was that the film was, from Wenders’s perspective, a monologue; it was one-sided, and it depicted the Führer from the standpoint of his visionary manipulation of the masses. It should instead have been turned into a dialogue, one in which the filmmakers disrupt rather than reproduce the legacy of the Nazi past. Wenders asserts that a filmmaker has a responsibility to «stop the flow of these images» (129) and a film of this sort should sit across the table from that era’s self-understanding and reject its authority. Why, as a filmmaker, would one permit his or her film to remain subordinate to the Nazis’ vision? Wenders’s language of interruption is a valuable tool for thinking about Ludin’s essay. Ludin likewise views *Hitler – eine Karriere* as doctrinaire, asking why it depicts Hitler as a star and a superman who, with a bit more luck and without having been caught unawares by the unfortunate Russian winter, might have succeeded? Why, he wonders, do these directors show the German ecstasy but not the subsequent hangover, sublimity without debasement, dominance without resistance, and order without injustice? («Nazi-Lügen» 50).

The major metaphor that guides Ludin’s film-formal critique has to do with the process of cutting into documentary material. Behind his argument, in other words, is a vision regarding the work and meaning of film editing. The central question running throughout both his and Wenders’s critical essays is how one turns monologic footage such as that of the Führer’s famous speeches, which were always intended to function as hermetically sealed showcases of sound and image, into dialogical depictions? How does a filmmaker tear into an aesthetic whole and permit a contemporary, critical perspective to enter into dialogue with history? Parallel questions arise for Ludin when he confronts his personal, familial past in *2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß*. He seeks to become a filmic interlocutor, intervening into both the cinema-historical images and into his family’s self-understanding of their father’s wartime deeds. The past is a wound that his film aims to reopen.

The facts of the matter could be more or less agreed upon: Hanns Ludin, Malte’s father, was the highest-ranking representative of Germany in Slovakia from 1941 to 1945. He was a diplomat «first class» (*Gesandter I. Klasse*) who oversaw the deportation of large numbers of Slovakian Jews. Raul Hilberg documents that over 57,000 Jewish prisoners were deported on Ludin’s authority during the period from March to October of 1942 (785). Ultimately Hanns Ludin was executed for his crimes, and this history, from his involvement with the Nazi party, through the Night of the Long Knives, his service in Slovakia, and his postwar execution, becomes Malte Ludin’s cinematic subject. Seen from a filmic perspective and in light of Malte Ludin’s remarks about Fest and Herrendoerfer’s film, the need to take control by
editing together – or by cutting into – his family’s narrative was analogous to the project of disrupting the Führer’s self-serving orations. Carrying both a cinematic legacy as well as a number of familial conflicts specific to the second generation into his film necessitated a varied approach; the many voices that echo throughout the documentary, specifically those of his mother, his siblings, and even the ghostly, reverberating words of his late father, form a polyphonic narrative. These multiple voices call for multiple modes of intrusion, and the choices he makes in cutting his film reflect the diverse wounds Hanns Ludin imposed on members of the family. When Malte Ludin asserted that Hitler – eine Karriere was a «surrogate film» that failed to sunder the past, or to draw attention to debasement, resistance, and injustice, he was likely thinking in Oedipal terms about his own history. Even his choice of the word «surrogate» (Surrogat) is revealing: Hitler – eine Karriere is not an Ersatz film, that is, it is not a fake one, but it is rather one that stands in for another film and for another filmmaker as though it were that earlier project’s deputy. The film’s real director was Goebbels, who had, after all, been responsible for the original footage. Fest and Herrendoerfer’s work serves as a deputy, representing Goebbels’s aims, and Ludin criticizes it as though it had been the story of his own father, who was himself a deputy – a surrogate – of the Third Reich.

The concept of cutting into the past – of conceiving of film editing in terms of divisive incisions – is particularly significant insofar as German wartime crimes are frequently understood as inheritable wounds. Erin McGlothlin writes about legacies of perpetration as «a brand of perpetually present guilt that eludes resolution» (26), and her description is extraordinarily apt where 2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß is concerned. She observes that the inheritance of perpetrator guilt, akin to the mark of Cain («the sign of an unresolved criminal past»), may be bequeathed to the children of perpetrators. The legacy of German perpetration, however, «does not, as with Cain, take the form of an external stigma that immediately distinguishes [perpetrators’] children visually. Rather, their inherited mark is figured as hereditary, an internal genetic flaw that is passed down from perpetrator parent to child, an identification that signifies how the child is bound to the parent’s criminal legacy» (26). Alexandra Senfft, Hanns Ludin’s granddaughter, describes the impact her grandfather’s crimes had on her mother, Erika, alighting, similar to McGlothlin, on the image of a «mark» or «sign»: «Mein Großvater ist aktiv an einem industriellen Massenmord beteiligt, dem größten aller Menschheitsverbrechen, und das in einem Milieu, das die Judenvernichtung zu jenem Zeitpunkt für selbstverständlich hält. Meine Mutter, noch keine zehn Jahre alt und vollkommen unschuldig, ist durch diese
Entwicklungen bereits fürs Leben gezeichnet» (80–81). In attempting to render the invisible past visible, Malte Ludin uses his film to engage in a familial archaeology.

Many Germans were already familiar with Malte Ludin’s father, Hanns, from his appearance in Ernst von Salomon’s Der Fragebogen (1951).4 Von Salomon’s book, which became a bestseller, was a response to denazification, and its framework is based on a denazification questionnaire distributed by the Allied military government. Von Salomon answers the inquiries in an overly elaborate way that, through its excesses, parodies the naïve perspective on culpability adopted by the Allies. It pokes fun at the process, but it also provides a detailed account of how von Salomon saw his own Nazi ideology develop over the course of his career, including the time he spent as a filmmaker during the war and as a prisoner afterward. As an unusually nuanced narrative concerning its author’s somewhat marginal complicity, the story avoids assigning guilt in black and white terms, which may have been the basis for its warm German reception. Toward the end of Der Fragebogen, von Salomon finds himself in POW camps, first at Natternberg and then at Plattling, where he encounters and becomes friends with his fellow prisoner Hanns Ludin. Throughout this last section of von Salomon’s book, the internment is depicted as an act of vindictiveness guided by contempt. The Germans, in particular Ludin, come off as more cultured than their captors. Richard Herzinger describes the dignified, even noble figure cut by Ludin in von Salomon’s account: «Ludin erscheint […] als ein, wenn auch verführt, so doch grundeehrlicher, gläubiger Mensch, der sich der Verantwortung für seine Taten nicht entziehen will, aber jede wohlfeile Reue ablehnt. […] Wenn sich Ludin auch keinerlei SchuldbeKenntnis abfordernd läßt, so stellt er sich in Salomons Darstellung doch mit Würde seiner Verantwortung» (92).

Hanns Ludin was executed in 1947 in Bratislava as a war criminal. He had been a lieutenant general (an Obergruppenführer) in the SA, but in von Salomon’s book he is depicted more as a committed representative of the Reich and Führer than as a committed anti-Semite. Von Salomon reports, for example, that when Ludin, while working as an ambassador, received the message that the Slovakian Jews were not settled elsewhere as arranged but instead were deported to extermination camps he exclaimed: «Das ischt [sic] eine bodenlose Sauerei!» (635–36).5 He also provides insight into Ludin’s commitment to Hitler. Although one should treat the words of von Salomon’s book with appropriate skepticism, Ludin is purported to have maintained that what he had done was in the interest of the German people and in the service of a greater ideal. In Der Fragebogen Ludin is quoted explaining himself: «Ich beugte mich, nicht, weil ich [Hitlers] Gewalt fürchtete, sondern weil ich
wirklich glaubte, er habe recht, und da, wo ich recht habe, müsse ich um größerer Dinge und Zusammenhänge willen, die ich nicht übersah, mich fügen» (661). Germans, in other words, may have known Hanns Ludin as someone who purportedly acted freely, and as someone who was unapologetically willing to defend his actions to the end. He is not presented as an anti-Semite, but instead as a paragon of stalwart German masculinity, who chose not to recant. His last words are said to have been «Long live Germany!» (Es lebe Deutschland!). 6

All of this clearly had consequences for his children, not only because of the sense of responsibility they might have had toward the victims – their familial mark of Cain – but also because of the space that had been taken up by nationalism in their father’s heart. Ludin’s statements about his fealty to Germany during and after the war seem predicated on an affective relationship that may have, in the minds of his family, eclipsed his bond with them. According to von Salomon, Hanns Ludin said: «Ich konnte mir das Volk, dem ich zugehörte, nicht aussuchen, es war da, alles war da mit allen Fehlern und Schwächen. Wenn ich schuldig wurde, wenn wir alle schuldig wurden, so wurden wir aus Liebe schuldig» (662). He was, in this way, a believer, and he was not afraid to stand up for his actions. He even passed up an opportunity to escape the POW camp and avoid his inevitable sentence. As von Salomon, together with other POWs, was working on a stage production of Faust in Plattling, von Salomon offered Ludin a way out: the two men looked similar enough that Ludin could be released with von Salomon’s papers in hand, and von Salomon, who wanted in any event to stay and complete the production, would later indicate that there had been a mix-up and, according to plan, would protest that he himself had been not released at the proper time (667). Ludin declined von Salomon’s offer. It must have been difficult for Malte Ludin and the other siblings to read this widespread, bestselling account of their father declining a last chance to see his children again. And although Der Fragebogen depicts Hanns Ludin as longing now and then to be reunited with his family, he is, in von Salomon’s story, far more preoccupied with speaking about and assessing his postwar convictions about his homeland.

Hanns Ludin’s attachment to Hitler and Germany cast a long shadow over his family. At one point in 2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß Malte Ludin includes original sound recordings of his father speaking of the «Glück [s]eines Lebens» as his devotion to the cause of Germany’s freedom. When he subsequently refers to «Das Glück unserer Kinder» in his political speeches, he speaks not about his family, but rather in general terms about Germany’s impending glory. Malte Ludin underscores how alienating this was to him and his siblings by cutting from his father’s orations to testimonials in which his
sisters detail their conflicted childhood memories. Hanns Ludin’s love for Germany had, as a young man, driven him into the Reichswehr and also earned him a prison sentence for aiding Hitler in 1930. Moreover, he felt that Hitler had, with a god-like grace, saved his life after the Night of the Long Knives in 1934; although many party members were executed, Ludin recalled that Hitler had «sentenced» (verurteilte) him to continue living (661). Ludin owed his survival to Hitler’s mercy, and his strong investment in the Führer and the fatherland takes the form of a preoccupation that appears to have exceeded his attachment to his family. Early on in 2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß, Malte Ludin informs the viewer that he had long wanted to make this film, but that he could not do so while his mother Erla (née Erla von Jordan), who died in 1997, was still alive; the archaeological unearthing of incriminating material would have been too divisive, too painful. Alexandra Tacke sums up that in the course of the film, «60 Jahre nach Kriegsende öffnet Malte Ludin endlich den Deckel, versammelt sich und seine Verwandten, Schwestern, Schwager, Neffen und Nichten um die «Kummerkiste» und konfrontiert sie mit ihrem Inhalt, bricht das Schweigen und verletzt dadurch ein Tabu der Familie» (192). The Ludin family is large: Malte was the second youngest of six children. Relying on earlier interview footage for his mother’s contribution, Ludin begins, subsequent to her death, to explore the dimensions of familial guilt and responsibility. He interviews his surviving sisters Ellen and Andrea, as well as his father’s most ardent defender, Barbara, who was born in 1935. Barbara is the oldest living sister. Malte’s brother, Tilman, passed away in 1999, a year after Erika, the eldest sibling, died by her own hand. Arguably, Malte’s disputation with his father is not only on behalf of the murdered Jews, but also on behalf of Erika, who can, owing to feelings of guilt and a legacy of perpetration, be counted among his father’s victims. She apparently suffered from depression, abused alcohol, and spoke frequently of suicide, now and again burdening her own children with threats that she would harm herself. At age 65, in 1998, she finally succeeded, nearly boiling herself to death in the bathtub, and subsequently dying of self-inflicted burns in the hospital.

Akin to many Holocaust documentaries, this one begins in an archive. Immediately following a short clip of a conversation between Malte and his sister, in which Barbara defends, in front of Malte and the camera, her right to remember her father as she wants to, the film opens onto a corridor full of records and files, a signal that things are about to be unearthed. We are then shown color photographs of a party rally – a Nazi Reichsparteitag in 1937 – and the strangeness of the color photographs is matched by the strangeness of the trombone sounds that Malte Ludin has chosen to accompany those images.
in which his father appears, sounds that do not ramp up the drama, but which can be said to undermine it insofar as they can be described as comic. The color in the photographs has a double edge: it inspires a sensation of heightened reality and the images appear to leap out at the viewer, but that same color also makes these images seem unreal. Because the preponderance of images from the Second World War are in black and white, the color images strike us as otherworldly, and this is likely why Ludin opens with them. It is as if he knew his father—a criminal who was executed when he was a toddler—only in the unreal space of a dream. The black and white or sepia pictures that are later integrated into the film create a sense of normalcy, even of nostalgia, but these color images signal one of the film’s chief dilemmas: how does the filmmaker come to terms with a remembrance that hardly seems real? His exploration of his father’s culpability begins with «archival» images—that is, images of archives—intercut with images of his father that recall Triumph des Willens. Then, Ludin’s title pops out from the base of a shelving unit in the form of graphic text; the words 2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß slip out, as if by their own will, from their hiding place. They are text that refuses to be contained (Fig. 1).

Ludin’s title speaks volumes. It will be generally recognized as a reference to Godard’s 1967 new wave film 2 or 3 Things I Know About Her (2 ou 3 choses que je sais d’elle). Despite the fact that Godard’s film is famously known as an essay film, and is thus by implication directly associated with the voice of its cinematic auteur, it is a conscious attempt to be anti-monological: Godard’s film has a hybrid form, and the self-conscious legacy of the cinema essay, or the essay film, which developed and expanded throughout the 1950s and 60s, underscores a coupling of elements essential to documentary, autobiography, and fiction, producing something synthetic or a polyphony. Timothy Corrigan observes that Godard’s film was made «just after the period when Godard begins consistently to describe himself as a film essayist» (52). The form and its history are particularly appropriate to a film that cannot establish certain knowledge of its subject. An essay film such as this might be disputed as a documentary; it is not objective and is closer in style to probing
investigative journalism than it is to the purely observational style associated with archetypes of documentary filmmaking such as films made by Frederick Wiseman. Ludin’s self-positioning can be viewed as a deliberately deconstructive stance in relation to a genre that is, owing to Riefenstahl and others, extraordinarily contested in the German tradition. In Godard’s film, the director approaches his subject—a French woman who makes her living doing childcare for prostitutes—just as Ludin approaches the memory of his father in imaginative bits and pieces and through the eyes of others. Godard’s film explores a woman’s life in contemporary Paris, examining how it was bound together with the city’s economy and even with the contemporaneous war in Vietnam. Corrigan remarks: «In Godard’s fictional documentary […] the Paris of 2 or 3 Things I Know about Her becomes the doubled ‘her’ of the city and the character Juliette Janson […]» (52). Along similar lines, in Ludin’s film familial and national histories are wrapped up in one another, and the same observation can be applied to its titular pronoun «ihm,» which refers as much to the director’s father as it does to the German nation and to its history of perpetration.

As a director and a son Malte Ludin sets out to determine what kind of person his father was, and his pursuit of an enigmatic patriarch recalls a passage from von Salomon’s Der Fragebogen in which Hanns Ludin recollects his impression of Hitler: «Ich habe das Maß für [Hitler] noch nicht gefunden. […] Manchmal habe ich ihn für ein Genie gehalten, manchmal wußte ich nicht, ob wir nicht doch von einem Wahnsinnigen geführt wurden. Manchmal hielt ich ihn für dämonisch, manchmal für krankhaft. Aber das ist alles nicht richtig, nicht richtig ist auch dein Ausdruck ‘lemurenhaft’» (661). Hanns Ludin, however, protests too much: he proceeds to describe Hitler in terms that are truly lemur-like (‘lemurenhaft’), adding, «Wenn ich versuche, ein gültiges Wort für ihn zu finden, so ist es das, er sei ‘abseitig’ gewesen, ein Mensch, der das Licht nicht vertrug, ein Mensch im Schatten kommend und aus dem Schatten sprechend, und alles, was ans Licht wollte, auch wieder in den Schatten drängend» (661–62). In Roman myth, the lemurs were shades or spirits of the restless and malignant dead, and they may have been on Ludin’s mind at the time of his internment in Plattling because in the second installment of Goethe’s Faust drama, a version or portion of which the POWs were in the process of producing, a chorus of lemurs in the service of Mephistopheles dig Faust’s grave. The scene is climactic; it is bound up with the final fate of Goethe’s most famous character, who, not incidentally, has committed to a pact with the devil. Hanns Ludin, grappling with the debt he owed to Hitler and his lingering investment in the idea of the fatherland, now saw Hitler as someone who spoke to him from out of the shadows. How
different is all this from the opaque, elusive image Malte Ludin had of his own father? More important, perhaps, than the influence of the French new wave, which has indeed had a longstanding impact on filmmaking at the dffb, is the reference in Ludin’s title to this uncertain knowledge. Owing to the many obscurities and willful occlusions – the parts of the past that remain in the shadows – his access to the truth about his father remains so obstructed that he cannot positively lay claim to having even two or three pieces of information.

And what are these two or three «things»? Perhaps that part of the title refers to the key family members confronted in the film including his mother, his siblings – particularly Barbara, generally referred to as Barbel – and, to some extent, through documents and pictures, Hanns Ludin himself. Most discussions of *2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß* begin with Barbel. Nearly every account starts with her slip of the tongue during the first interview, the shots with which Ludin begins. In the film’s initial moments she is being questioned by her younger brother about her attitude toward her father, and she remarks: «Mein Recht ist es, meinen Vater […] zu sehen, wie ich ihn sehen will, oder, wie ich ihn sehe, nicht wie ich ihn sehen will, wie ich ihn sehe.» She appears conscious – as the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein might also have been, had he made a similar slip – that there is, or rather that there ought to be, no difference between seeing something and seeing something as one wants to see it. If I truly believe, in other words, that the sky is blue, then it makes no sense to speak of the matter in terms of my beliefs; it is blue. Similarly Barbel recognizes that to want to see Hanns Ludin one way rather than another admits the possibility that things could be otherwise – it suggests doubt. Barbel thus catches herself, and Ludin begins his film with a slip of the tongue and a self-correction (an *oder* followed by a *nicht*). She seems to be in dialogue with herself, and no effort is required on her brother’s part to contradict or undermine her.

At a later point in the film Malte visits Barbel in what may be her own art studio. The two of them have a set-to in front of a bulletin board on which a page has been clipped from the newspaper, one that features a reproduction of Caravaggio’s *Amor Vincit Omnia* (*Love Conquers All*, 1601–02) (Fig. 2). The painting depicts a winged personification of Amor treading over items associated with a variety of mortal undertakings including a violin, armor, compasses, and manuscripts. Amor, with his eagle-like wings, tramples them all just as Barbel’s loving devotion to her father allows her to run roughshod over historical fact. Her niece Alexandra summarizes Barbel’s devotion to her father and her assumption of the role of the eldest sibling in her memoir, writing that after the deaths of Erla and Erika, «hat nun Barbel bei den Ludins die Rolle der ‹Stammsältesten› inne und sie spielt sie mit natürlicher Eleganz
und Entschlossenheit. Sie ist in den Fußstapfen Eralas getreten und kämpft um
das Andenken ihrer Eltern» (335). Barbel strongly believes that her father did
not know what was happening to the deported Jews, which is a claim the film
roundly rejects. Malte Ludin juxtaposes any claims of this sort with footage of
written documentation, typically bearing his father’s signature, containing
words such as «totale Lösung» and «Liquidation.» He does not let Barbel’s
claims stand, and the conversation between them is edited into a relatively fast-
paced struggle, recorded with a handheld camera. Short exchanges are
separated by jump cuts, which indicate the director’s openness about the
fact that his film is a construction; the sequence would not be mistaken for
unedited footage. Malte, because he cannot look at the matter objectively,
exhibits no pretense of objectivity.

Fig. 2: From 2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß (2004). Directed by Malte Ludin.

A number of Barbel’s responses to Malte’s questions are shocking: she
normalizes the fact that the Jews were shot in large numbers (massenhaft
getötet) by referring to them as «partisans,» and saying «well, that’s war»
(«Das ist eben Krieg, Maltechen»). Her diminutive use of her brother’s name,
«little Malte,» makes light of his overall project as well. She condescends, as
would a derisive older sister, mocking him when he asks whether she feels any
shame. She describes his question as «albern» and then ventriloquizes what is
apparently the position of a foolish person who would engage in her brother’s
project of self-flagellation. She mockingly intones, «Ich schäme mich so» in a
sarcastic singsong voice. Her defenses are overwhelming: she diminishes her
brother’s excavation of the past, and she engages in a soft form of Holocaust
denial insofar as she describes the murdered Jews as partisans. The sequence
reveals the many mechanisms by which she has come to regard her father’s
choices as normal and to defend herself against the painful incursion of the
truth. As a consequence, and as a means of disrupting her otherwise coherent
story of the past, Ludin edits rapidly. The result is a somewhat frenetic portrait of an older sister who would do anything not to tarnish her father.

In certain respects Ludin is engaged in an act of deliberate cinematic decomposition where the women in this film are concerned. Erla, Ellen, Barbara, and Andrea are all quite composed, and Ludin sometimes depicts them – particularly his mother Erla and his sister Barbara – as they would not want to be seen. For viewers familiar with the probing interviews in Ray Müller’s 1993 documentary *Die Macht der Bilder: Leni Riefenstahl*, Erla’s appearance, diction and self-control may recall Riefenstahl’s, who was only three years older. In old photographs Erla can be seen at the beach in an athletic posture and with an outfit that recalls Riefenstahl’s signature style in *Der heilige Berg* (1926). In Müller’s documentary Riefenstahl, controlled and elegant, is confronted, sometimes indirectly, through editing that puts her in dialogue with earlier statements, diary entries, and undisputed facts. Erla seems similarly composed, and her son had to strategize to undercut the control she asserts. In order to do this he relies on the integration of older footage taken from an interview with Erla conducted for a television film entitled *Die Frau seines Führers* (1978) with more recent footage: an interview the director himself filmed in the 1990s, when Erla was 91 years old.

In the 1978 interview Malte Ludin’s mother looks dignified. She conforms to the image of an officer’s widow who is still more or less impressed with her husband. She explains that Hanns Ludin made his choices out of conviction and never for the sake of his career. In the interview she seems candid, but disconcertingly unrepentant. She explains that after the Night of the Long Knives, her husband despaired, having just seen his friends executed, and she adds that if she had it to do over again, she would have encouraged him to hang in there (*durchhalten*), indicating that she would have used the idiom, «wo gehobelt wird, fallen Späne.» Oddly enough, this is precisely the expression reportedly used by her husband in *Der Fragebogen* when he explains to von Salomon that the idea for which he fought was right, but that many sacrifices had to be made. Hanns Ludin uses the phrase with some reservations, calling it *ein verfluchter Satz* (647), but the fact that his wife uses it in a similar context over thirty years later might indicate either that her husband has residual influence – she was, most likely, a reader of *Der Fragebogen* – or that her worldview, shared with her husband, remains largely unaltered, petrified since those days. Senfft writes about her grandmother Erla’s attitude:

Meine Großmutter hat ihre sechs Kinder im Glauben an den guten Nationalsozialisten erzogen; sie hat ihnen beigebracht, nur seine guten Seiten zu sehen, und ein guter Mensch kann keine Verbrechen begehen. Alles, was in das makellose Bild nicht passte, durfte nicht sein, wurde verschwiegen, wegdiskutiert, schöngeredet.
Die Täter, das waren die vulgären Nazis, nicht wir, das können wir gar nicht sein, denn wir sind gebildet und kultiviert. (14)

In the older interview, Erla also recounts meeting a woman who told her, for the first time, about Auschwitz, and how the Jews were being gassed there. She remembers not really understanding what was meant, and when she later inquired about it she was told that Auschwitz was a *Rüstungsbetrieb*. She and her husband believed this, and, upon being told it was an armaments factory, she considered the matter settled. With the addition of an audio effect – one that was presumably applied by Ludin, rather than by Christian Geissler, who was responsible for the 1978 film – her comment, «it was settled» (『es war erledigt』) echoes in postmemorial repetition. It indicates that phrases of this sort resonated for Ludin and his family insofar as he was stuck, for his lifetime, with dubious explanations.

Fig. 3: From *2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß* (2004). Directed by Malte Ludin.

As Ludin indicated, he waited for his mother to die before making this film, and his later interview with her is shot with what appears to be a hidden camera. She no longer looks as she once did; she is now wrinkled and blemished with age. He surrounds the image with a wide black margin, which has the effect of placing her at the end of a long tunnel – an attempt, perhaps, to take some distance from her. It also recalls the mediation involved in preparing this image; it de-naturalizes the shot. In the space of the portrait’s wide margin, he asserts the truth. It was a year before her death, he explains, that his mother told him something she apparently hadn’t before: a story about a thug from the SA, whom Hanns Ludin protected. This is, Malte Ludin makes clear, the story of the manslaughter of Hermann Stern, which his father helped to conceal. It happened on March 25, 1933 in Creglingen. During the course of a Pogrom, Stern was beaten and died. Ludin’s mother places the event during *Kristallnacht*, which she does not call by that name, rather preferring to say that it took place on November 9, 1938. Ludin corrects her errors in the image’s margins, in what may be his own handwriting (Fig. 3). Shown in fragments, she is at times only a talking and somewhat aged mouth at the top of
the screen. Depicting her in this unflattering way is a means of exerting authority, as a director, over his mother – she appears here neither whole, nor as she would have wanted to appear. He fills in the information for her, undercutting that which he believes to be lies and self-deceptions with the facts of the matter.

Malte Ludin’s willingness to subject his mother to scrutiny and to undermine her worldview corresponds, to some extent, with a well-known conversation between Fassbinder and his mother in the 1978 film Deutschland im Herbst. Ludin was clearly impacted by the French new wave, but because he was, like Fassbinder, a member of the generation of filmmakers born during or near the end of the war, his decision can also be understood in terms of New German Cinema and its specific, critical disposition toward the past. In Fassbinder’s sequence, the most well known in that omnibus film, the director can be seen yelling at his own mother across the table, accusing her of not having reconstructed her views, even decades after the war. Following a fair amount of give and take, some of which was likely prepared in advance insofar as his mother comes off as a very game participant, she remarks that, given the turbulence of the times and particularly the actions of the RAF, it would be best to have an authoritarian ruler, one who is good, kind, and orderly. With his fist pounding the table, Fassbinder looks Germany’s past, in the person of his mother, in the eye and says «no.» It is in this way tempting to see the common threads as based in generational conflict, and to look at matters in terms of how German filmmakers born in the 1940s see their parents’ generation. On the other hand, Ludin’s camera angle, which suggests a hidden camera, also finds a parallel in Shoah, specifically in Claude Lanzmann’s famous hidden camera interview with the notorious SS squad leader and Treblinka perpetrator Franz Suchomel. In that interview, akin to Ludin’s interview with his mother, Lanzmann makes clear that he is presenting the testimony of someone who is reluctant to provide it, and that only through concealing the camera could the interviewer elicit new information. Attending to the two different possible modes of reading Ludin’s stylized interruption – whether it is in the mode of New German Cinema and thus about German generational conflict, or in that of Lanzmann’s Shoah and thus specifically about perpetrators – highlights an ambivalence in the filmmaker’s own orientation. Malte Ludin, on the one hand, sees his mother as a passive participant, perhaps as Fassbinder saw his mother, yet he is, on the other hand, also willing to entertain the possibility that she could be presented as a true accomplice.

The sequences that involve Barbel and Erla constitute two attempts to know something about Hanns Ludin, but where, one wonders, is Hann's
own voice in all this? He appears in photographs throughout the film – in color and in black and white – and his voice is heard several times in original recordings, ones in which he orates about the fate of Germany. At one point, however, the son takes the opportunity to deliberately disrupt his father’s sentences, using the occasion to intervene and thereby recast the past. The filmmaker himself reads aloud from a document, written by his father shortly before his execution, and Malte, in ventriloquizing his father’s voice, provides what could be referred to as testimonial performance: he enacts, stages, and appropriates the persona of the perpetrator in order to re-contextualize it for purposes of his documentary. Strictly speaking this is not «testimonial performance» insofar as it is not Hanns speaking his personal testimony, but it is instead something along the lines of «testimonial re-performance.»

Obviously there is a simple explanation for Malte’s decision: his father cannot read his own letter for the camera because he is dead. The decision, however, to perform his father’s sentences himself provides Malte Ludin with an opening to engage in indirect dialogue with his father. His tone is somewhat languid as he reads the opening sentence: «Der Herr Staatsanwalt will mir offenbar den Beweis ermöglichen, dass ich anständig sterben kann. Diesen Beweis werde ich, falls nötig, mit Bestimmtheit erbringen.» The camera then, in the following sentence, cuts to a corridor, presumably the one down which Hanns Ludin strode to his death, and, as it progresses along the hall, we hear Malte speaking his father’s words, saying that what he did was in the name of his children and «in the interest of the Slovakian people.» Here, at his father’s egregious exclusion of his true victims, Malte Ludin draws air in through his teeth and interjects a distressed and despondent, «ui, ui, ui.» He then stumbles over his father’s denial of his own guilt, «Nein, ich kann mich nicht schuldig erklären.» His father is engaged in a rationalization, similar to many of those made by Adolf Eichmann, that he acted according to orders, and Ludin attempts a number of different emphases to give the sentence a sense he can comprehend. He stresses the words «nicht schuldig» and then the word «kann,» but neither seems to enable him to make real sense of what he is reading. His staged interruption is a disruption in his father’s speaking body – first through dissolving his father’s speech into non-language («ui, ui, ui»), and then by breaking off and rejecting it. The performance is only a half-embodiment along the lines of Manfred Zapatka’s performance in Das Himmler-Projekt (2000), in which the actor reads the text of a speech by a perpetrator but is unwilling, perhaps for reasons of good taste, to create the illusion that he is that perpetrator. Zapatka and the film’s director, Romuald Karmakar, prefer to leave those illusions to Hollywood-style films. Here, Malte Ludin does not want to create the illusion of his father’s presence; he is
much more concerned with his personal relationship to his father’s words and the extent to which his re-articulation of them can be an opportunity for reassessment and reconstruction.

A final editorial interruption comes when Ludin puts two of his subjects into confrontation with one another, at the point at which Ludin closely examines his family’s aryanization of a Jewish home. The villa in which the family lived had been appropriated from the Jewish family of a Slovakian brewer named Stein. Juraj Štern, who had lived as a child in a neighboring household, is interviewed as surrogate for the Stein family. Štern’s account of those times is edited in parallel with Barbel’s testimony. When he was a three- or four-year-old child, Štern explains, his family home was also taken, and he had to hide in a stable to avoid arrest and deportation. He concealed himself in a feeding trough, and, covered in hay, he was entirely alone apart from the brief visits of a farmer, who came to bring him food and to reprimand him not to cry or scream.13 Following this period of torment, Štern explains to Ludin, he developed a substantial stutter that he did not overcome until he was 18 years old. He lost the power of speech and, quite deliberately, Ludin at that moment cuts to Barbel, who is recounting her joyful memories of singing in the Ludin household. She and her siblings had a voice, which was, for so long and as a consequence of trauma, denied to Štern. Claude Lanzmann, in Shoah, rarely directly intercuts testimonies with one another, preferring to allow his subjects to recount uninterrupted versions of their stories, but he has described Shoah as a place of meeting in terms that apply to this sequence: «Nobody meets anyone in Shoah […] but there is a corroboration in spite of this – I make them meet. They don’t meet actually, but the film is a place of meeting» (84). Ludin’s intercutting is more direct and aggressive. It undermines Barbel’s self-satisfied account, and indicates his willingness to use editing to turn his family’s testimony against them. Barbel, at a later point, says that she is participating in the film, which she was reluctant to do, on behalf of Erla, her father, and their deceased siblings. Conspicuously absent from her explanation are the victims, and for this reason Malte is sure to include in his film Štern, along with the poet Tuvia Rübner, whose family was among those deported from Bratislava. The victims’ voices cut through, interrupt, and contradict the family’s coherent story.

Each one of these interruptions – the jump cutting in his sister’s interviews, the juxtaposition of older and newer testimony from his mother, the re-performance of his father’s letter, and the indirect interactions between Barbel and Juraj Štern – constitutes a filmic strategy deliberately meant to cut into the past. Malte Ludin obstructs and revises in order to weave his own, new narrative, disregarding his family’s desire to keep matters neat and tidy. But
there is yet another means of viewing Ludin’s work as that of a self-reflexive filmmaker, whose project stands in a history of German disputations with the past. The final shot of the film lands upon Hanns Ludin’s grave marker in a cemetery in Bratislava on which the initials «H. E. L.» are written (Fig. 4). Ending in this way surely echoes Wolfgang Staudte’s 1946 Die Mörder sind unter uns, the DEFA film meant to confront the problem of perpetrators who seamlessly reintegrated themselves as industrialists in postwar Germany. By fighting back and weeding them out, ordinary Germans – particularly eastern Germans in the Soviet occupied zone, who, for the most part, understood themselves as victims of the war – were meant to move forward and rebuild. Staudte’s film ends with an image similar to the final one in Ludin’s film, a single cross marking a grave and meant to demand the remembrance of the martyred dead.¹⁴

Fig. 4: From 2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß (2004). Directed by Malte Ludin.

Malte Ludin was familiar with Staudte’s film. He had written about Staudte, and his book-length biography, Wolfgang Staudte, details, one after the next, Staudte’s films. The connection between the final images is thus hard to overlook. The cross over Hanns Ludin’s grave bears his initials, and the Old Norse name it resembles, «Hel,» is related to the word Hell (Hölle) as well as to the verb verhehlen, referring to that which is concealed. It cannot remain so: the restless dead have done their work and the past has been unearthed. In writing about Die Mörder sind unter uns Ludin observes that the psychically wounded doctor at that film’s center, Hans Mertens, has «genau die Gemütsverfassung eines Großteils der Deutschen nach dem Krieg,» whose numbers include the disappointed or betrayed supporters of Hitler, the Flüchtlinge and Vertriebene, and the soldiers returning to civil society. For them, he writes, «waren Hitler und der Krieg kein von Menschen herausgefordertes Unheil, sondern eine von bösen Mächten verursachte Katastrophe, sie selbst deren
Opfer. Sie vermieden es, sich der einigen Vergangenheit zu stellen, sie schwiegen und verschwiegen.» To this description, which could have been a sketch of his family dynamics, Ludin adds, «Regungen der Reue oder Beschämung, so es sie gab, wurden unterdrückt. Sie kannten kein Mitgefühl für die Millionen Toten, die sie durch die Wahl Hitlers, durch das Erdulden seiner Herrschaft, die Teilnahme an seinem Krieg mitverantworteten, keine Scham angesichts des mit deutscher Gründlichkeit und bürokratischer Konsequenz durchgeführten Völkermordes» (Staudte 36). How awful it must have been for Ludin to read in von Salomon’s book about his father’s lack of repentance and about his stubborn «Es lebe Deutschland!» In his description of Staudte’s film, one readily discerns the urge to awaken feelings of remorse or shame (Reue oder Beschämung). Here, in 2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß Ludin gets to present his own adaptation of Die Mörder sind unter uns, not as a feature film with closure and a satisfying ending, but rather as a personal story, with all the messiness such stories entail. From start to finish, the author-filmmaker struggles against the tendency to deliberately or inadvertently make yet another surrogate film about the past. He attempts instead to tear apart a familial narrative and to enact a cinemahistorical interruption.

Notes

1 Kaes observes that Fest and Herrendoerfer «took clips from the propaganda films, synchronized them with sound effects (boot heels clicking, bombs exploding in stereo), enhanced the visual quality of the images, and edited them according to modern conventions» (6).
3 Luhmann interprets the film along these lines. See esp. 121–26.
4 Malte Ludin references von Salomon’s famous book only once in 2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß, referring to it not by its title, but only indirectly as an «in der Nachkriegszeit vielgelesenes Buch.»
5 The «ischt,» described as «die Mundart seiner badischen Heimat,» is as it appears in von Salomon’s account (635).
6 This is widely repeated and is also mentioned in von Salomon (668). Senfft adds more detail: «Der Anwalt sagt, kurz vor seinem Tod habe Hanns ihm noch zugerufen: ‘Doktor, grüßen Sie mir meine liebe Frau.’ Der anwesende Bischof indes will gehört haben, dass seine letzten Worte lauteten: ‘Es lebe Deutschland.’ Wahrscheinlich hat er beides gesagt» (44–45).
7 Hanns Ludin’s story, as von Salomon writes it, is as follows: «Ich wurde mit einer Reihe anderer SA-Führer auf offener Straße durch die entgegenkommende Kolonne des Führers angehalten. Wir mussten in einer Reihe antreten, und der Führer ging von
einem zum andern, jeden betrachtend, mit einem Blick, den ich zum ersten Male so empfand, wie er mir immer geschildert wurde, ohne dass ich beistimmen konnte, mit einem Blick, den ich nun auch als ‹magisch› empfand. Hitler sagte kein Wort. Nur, als er bei mir angekommen war, sagte er, ohne Betonung und gleichsam in Gedanken verloren: ‹Ludin›, – und ich wusste nicht, ob ich damit zum Tode oder zum Leben verurteilt war... Ich war zum Leben verurteilt» (661). Additional background is also provided by Senfft (61).

8 Senfft’s memoir processes her mother’s death in relation to the Nazi past. She talks specifically about that incident (9–16) as well as about the impact of her uncle Malte’s film (335–36).

9 The term «observational» is a reference to Bill Nichols’s «observational mode.» See esp. 38–44.

10 For more on this see Erin McGlothlin’s contribution to this special issue.

11 Noah Shenker uses the term «testimonial performance,» although he applies it to documentary performances in which subjects speak their own testimony, rather than that of another (44).

12 For more on this film, see Michael D. Richardson’s contribution to this special issue.

13 Stern’s story is recounted in Kurlansky (121).

14 On this film, its management of the past, and its leveling of differences between the victims, see Kapczynski (75–117).

Works Cited


