

The Pop-Icon Hitler as a Trope of Critical Reflection on Media Society

The World's Most Recognisable Face

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Abstract

Countless representations in different media and genres through several decades make Hitler one of the most productive icons on a global scale. The analysis of this icon seems of fundamental theoretical interest as its original semantics as the embodiment of evil challenges common notions of icon work between collaborative iconolatry, on the one hand, and adversarial iconoclasm, on the other. However, the range of different significances to be found in contemporary Hitler representations suggests that the icon serves to work through issues of the respective context in which it is used. I will argue that, interestingly, especially representations claiming to do justice to history and to the historical person Hitler might be problematized and seen as part of a "remembrance industry", while pop-cultural, often humorous representations of the icon establish a critical meta-level allowing audiences to reflect on certain phenomena in contemporary media society.

Keywords icon, Hitler, culture of remembrance, Hipster Hitler, Timur Vermes

Countless representations in different media and genres through several decades make Adolf Hitler one of the most productive icons on a global scale, and he is arguably regarded as the most famous and infamous German in history. At the same time, the range of differences in the significance with which this icon is filled in diverse contexts is astonishing, and its meaning can almost seem to have become arbitrary. While Hitler in Western culture “in the post-religious age has replaced the devil as a symbol of evil” (Deutscher 2014, see also Erk 2012: 52f.), some examples for the reception of the icon in an Asian context hint at a somewhat positive perception, namely as a strong sovereign (see for instance Heeger 2012). But even within Western culture one can distinguish between different images of Hitler and a certain transformation of the icon’s meaning over time.

The perception of Hitler in different nations and generations seems related to the degree of which they were involved in the events of World War II (see Erk 2012: 21, Deutscher 2014). While in Germany there has been an extensive and complex process of remembering and working through guilt and shame, now the attitude to the issues of the past seems much more laid back. Outside of Germany, the clichés of the evil German and demonic Hitler have gradually been dismissed. Films such as Quentin Tarantino’s *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) mark that new and more nuanced perspectives towards the past have been established. Yet, the old stereotypes can be revitalized as seen during the Euro crisis, when the German chancellor Angela Merkel was compared to Hitler because of her politics of saving. Seemingly the comparison with Hitler remains an inevitable, yet mostly annoying component of political rhetoric and in many other contexts, even if it is increasingly criticized as is satirically done by Godwin’s Rule of Nazi Analogies for internet users.

As one of the most remarkable tendencies in this matter can be regarded the frequent use of the former “Führer” for purely amusing purposes which has even led to the notion of “Hitlertainment”, which is the title of an edition of the German magazine for political debate “The European” in October 2014. Indeed, as pop-cultural icon and commercial star Hitler has started a “second carrier” (Erk 2012: 11). The icon is not only used to advertise for Honda-PKWs in Taiwan (Bolten 2007: 127), aftershave and shaving foam in Turkey, but in 2008 also for the first time in the German context by the re-

spectable hat-seller Weber. Commercials with Hitler must be said to be most efficient and low-cost, as the icon generates a maximum of attention at a minimum of costs. Thus, Hitler has become a brand which creates considerable profit.

“Hitler only breeds more Hitler”, sounds the resigned conclusion of Daniel Erk (Erk 2012: 17) who collected representations of and references to Hitler in contemporary, different media and genres through several years on his “Hitlerblog”. But what exactly is it, that keeps the obsession with Hitler going, an icon which by some is considered the “biggest pop star of all times” (Erk 2014)? Does the Hitler icon symbolize the ultimate breaking of taboos and therefore seem indispensable in a society which has broken so many former taboos and, at the same time, is obsessed by scandals and taboo-breaking? To approach these questions, in this article, I will look at some pop-cultural representations of Hitler in diverse contexts, media and genres asking in which ways the use of the icon can be interpreted. Using examples from both the German and other contexts, the transnational perspective in my analysis will enable me to ask, whether national differences in the perception of the icon still might be observed. Generally, the use of the Hitler icon is complex and seems to follow two opposing basic trends: On the one hand, a discourse occupied with the reflection of the historical events under the NS-regime seems to more and more abandon the notion of Hitler as the personalized embodiment of evil. Instead, evil is less found in the person and more in a certain systemic structure. This implies the assumption that given certain circumstances similar incidences may occur in other societies or contexts. On the other hand, the development of the commercialized media society and an aestheticization of evil (see Agger 2013: 35) lead to a holding on to and even an intensification of the notion of Hitler as the overpowering mass murderer and the personalized evil. I will argue that, interestingly, especially representations claiming to do justice to history and to the historical person Hitler are being problematized by critical observers and seen as part of a “remembrance industry”, while pop-cultural, often humorous representations of the icon are often more likely to be able to establish a critical meta-level concerning former Hitler representations and, more general, a mirror directed towards certain phenomena in contemporary media society.

The Ambivalent Representation of the Icon Between Collaborative Iconolatry and Adversial Iconoclasm

Visually, the Hitler icon is highly stylized and very easy to replicate by the simplest means, in this way there lies a high semiotic economy in the use of the icon because of its “visual singularity and semantic efficiency” (Hirt 2013: 573). The most minimalistic form is a smiley with the hinting of a moustache, but usually also with the dark hair style and side parting. One doesn’t even need to add the brown uniform and the swastika armband. However easily performed, representations of Hitler challenge prevalent notions of icon work as collaborative iconolatry on the one hand and adversial iconoclasm on the other. In this regard, Hitler can’t be paralleled with other human icons such as Marilyn Monroe or Pele which are less contradictory and complex.

Still in the same way as other human icons, Hitler and the Nazis aspired to become icons, but they became it in another way than they intended. While Hitler tried to stage himself as the renovator and savior of Germany, his reputation is based on quite the opposite. Yet, he remains a very significant icon. The icon is complex in its meaning and has different meanings for different audiences. Left aside right-wing extremists or neo-Nazis and concentrating on the main Western reception of the icon, a disturbing latent fascination by certain “fascistic” or totalitarian attitudes towards life, society and aesthetics can be observed, as it was already done by Susan Sontag in her famous essay “Fascinating Fascism” (1974). Here, the obsession with Hitler might also be seen, among others, in relation to the contemporary interest in the evil in a more aesthetic and less moral way. In popular media and genres, evil functions as the “other” which gives the spectator a necessary break from the boring daily grind (see Agger 2013: 35f.).

However, while the spectator usually aspires to melting together with the icon, in the case of Hitler this process seems for most cases ambivalent. Hardly any icon has been abused, humiliated and lampooned to the extent that has the Hitler icon. A significant part of the icon work is directed against the iconisation as such: for instance Hitler humor in films such as Dani Levy’s *My Führer – The Really Truest Truth about Adolf Hitler* (2006), Tarantino’s *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), and the trailer to the planned German animated film *Adolf – the Movie* on the basis of Walter Moers’ cartoon

around the character of “Adolf, the Nazi pig” parody the monumentalism, gigantism and the elevation of the Nazis and of Hitler. In these representations, Hitler is symbolically diminished and debased, as he is shown in degrading and infantilizing poses and situations – for instance at the toilet, in the bath tub, as a baby and sometimes partly undressed. However, these iconoclastic manipulations are apparently not able to destroy the icon, as it is continually used in many contexts. Indeed, the quasi-cultic status of the icon seems impossible to break one significant explanation of which might to be found in the inconceivably terrible historical events Hitler is related to.

A short look at one example of the above-mentioned films can show in which way the iconoclastic manipulations in humorous Hitler representations, paradoxically contribute to the vitality of the icon. In the trailer of *Adolf – the Movie*, Hitler is seen undressed and exposed from the hip downward and in degrading and intimate situations. He is shown taken a bath with Hitlerized rubber ducks, Hitler pictures on the wall (versions of the famous photographs which show Hitler posing as charismatic orator), and signs with the capital “A” on toilet paper and towels. Because of this serialization of the icon, the gesture of iconoclasm becomes paradoxical as it performs at the same time the destruction and the regeneration or even duplication of the icon. This representation is a good analogy of how in the commercialized media society as a whole, the content is fed in the circuit of products and information in different forms. In this way, the *Adolf*-film is advertised for through Hitler merchandise such as a little Hitler figurine, the song “I’m Sitting in My Bunker”, including versions in German, English and French which are accessible on YouTube. There even exists a “Downfall”-version of the song consisting of a video with scenes from the film (in German: *Der Untergang*) from 2005 cut in a way that they play together with the musical rhythm and the vocals of the song.

In this way, despite of numerous continuously renewed acts of iconoclasm, the Hitler icon is reconstructed and revitalized. One could even claim that the Hitler icon has come to symbolize the act of iconoclasm itself which is elevated or even sacralized. Thus, iconoclasm which can be seen as one type of taboo-breaking, for its part, becomes a more abstract icon of the commercialized media society.

The Evolution of the Icon

From the “Icon of Power” to the “Pop-Icon”

An intensive interest in the political figure and private person Adolf Hitler has always been present on a transnational scale. Historians, writers and psychologists have investigated all details of his life and death. Many biographies have been written about Hitler, amongst them the most famous ones by Ian Kershaw and Joachim Fest. In German culture, the engagement with Hitler has certainly been the most complex compared to other national contexts. While in decades, there seemed to rule an “unexpressed picture taboo” (Margit Fröhlich cit. after Orich / Strzelczyk 2011: 301) which only bit by bit has been broken, today Germans have caught up and seem to represent Hitler and laugh about him almost as unburdened as for instance Americans have ever since the “Führer” came to power with classics such as Charlie Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator* (1940) or Walt Disney’s *The Fuhrer’s Face* (1942). “Hitler humor” has become a genre in his own right and is considered “a potent, twofold vehicle seemingly allowing Germans, on the one hand, to work continuously through their nation’s guilt and, on the other, to find comic relief from the burden of the past by experiencing it in a carefree, amusing format” (Orich 2011: 295).

Transnationally, the evolution of the Hitler icon and the general overexposure of the icon seem related to new tendencies in the memory culture since 1989 with a pluralisation of perspectives. Different practices of remembering such as historiography, memorial, memory art or memory talk are positioned side by side without privileging one above the other. Also, it is acknowledged, that different generations (eye witnesses, their children and grandchildren) have different approaches to the past. And finally the heritage of the Holocaust becomes more and more universalized and the perspectives on memory are gradually globalized (see for instance Assmann 2006 and 2013).

However, in the historical discourse of the last decades there can be observed a kind of tabloidization and the unfolding of a “remembrance industry” (Orich / Strzelczyk 2011: 294 / 295). While in several decades after World War II there ruled silence and trauma, under the revolt of the 68-generation, the silence of the parents’ generation was criticized. But in the 80ies and more so from the 90ies on the audience was supplied and even filled up with docu-

mentaries and books which in a popular style depicted and retold the events under the Third Reich. These popular styled historical TV programs, often docudramas, a blend of authentic historical material and scenes where events are re-enacted, are in Germany associated with the name of the historian Guido Knopp. His productions and their intense focus on the person of Hitler with titles such as "Hitler's elites", "Hitler's doctors" and "Hitler's women" have invited much mockery. For critiques these documentaries represent a "Vergangenheitsbewältigung lite", a far to easy and entertaining way of dealing with the German past.

Likewise, the epic film *The Downfall* which among others aimed at giving a nuanced image of Hitler was highly criticized. The film depicts the last ten days of the Third Reich with its main focus on Hitler and his closest subordinates. Based on the book with the same title of the highly respected historian Joachim Fest (2002) and the memoirs of Hitler's private secretary Traudl Junge (2002), the film's claim for both historiographical expertise and the authority of authenticity couldn't be more severe taken the genre of the feature film into consideration. Yet, it was criticized that the melodramatic ton of the film distorted the historical truth humanizing and even sympathizing with Hitler and highlighting the victim role of the Germans while remaining silent in regard to the Holocaust. One of the most known critiques of the film, Wim Wenders, criticized for instance that the camera respectfully turns away when Hitler dies and doesn't show directly "that the pig is finally dead" (Wenders 2004: 63, my translation). In this manner, as he claims, the picture taboo is restored. At the same time, the deaths of many other ordinary people and soldiers are shown without reserve. Thus, the film not only demonstrates the charisma which Hitler had for his contemporaries, but, according to Wenders, participates in restoring it.

The case of the *The Downfall* seems symptomatic of how attempts to de-demonize and to create a realistic representation of Hitler seem difficult to obtain and in high risk of being mocked. The internet community has reacted to the film with the creation of the "Downfall-Meme" using as filmic material the famous scene in which Hitler outbursts in a rage attack when meeting with his generals and realizing that the war has been lost. In the meme the scene is supplied by new subtitles giving it another, funny meaning. Hitler is commenting on contemporary, mostly trivial phenomena

such as that twitter is down or even ranging about the parodic “Downfall-Meme” itself. The Downfall-Meme conducts a live of its own and even was turned into a video where Hitler dances Gangnam Style and additionally in another version of Psy’s second hit “Mother Führer Gentleman”.

The digital recycling of the *Downfall* scene illustrates the evolution of the Hitler icon which Stefan Hirt traces in his large volume *Adolf Hitler in American Culture* and characterizes as the transformation from the “icon of power” to the “pop icon” (Hirt 2013: 571) gradually being emptied of content. Hirt considers this tendency as “maybe not a forgetting of history but the reduction of history to icons, slogans, and banal clichés in an attention- and novelty-hungry Internet culture” (Hirt 2013: 571). Here “iconicity” is driven to the extent that the icon becomes “its own context” (571f.). However, if it would be true, that the original historical context does not matter anymore, why use Hitler in the first place? In the following, the analysis of two pop-cultural representations of Hitler will try to approach some answers to this question.

“The Ultimate Irony”: Hipster Hitler

One of the most known recent internet phenomena related to Hitler is “Hipster Hitler” or “Adolf Hipster”, a character in a web comic registered as “www.hipsterhitler.com” on August 22, 2010. The fundamental idea is based on the combination of two icons: the Hipster and Hitler. The Hipster Hitler character is a typical internet phenomenon of the Web 2.0 which gains vitality and diversity through the engagement of a fan community. In this way, at the user generated site “reddit” images were posted with fans posing in “Hipster Hitler costumes” wearing nerd glasses, the Hitler hair style including moustache and a white thematic T-shirt.

The stories on the “Hipster Hitler” web site are very formulaic. Hipster Hitler wears a different thematic T-shirts in very episode. The messages on the T-shirt fit to the respective story and represent ironic clashes of the Hitler and the Hipster context, in this way, functioning as *mise en abyme*. The language of Hipster Hitler is interspersed with German words, often very long compound nouns of military origin. Mostly, Hipster Hitler is shown in conversation with other Nazi leaders such as Goebbels, Göring and the film maker Leni Riefenstahl.

The first entry is titled “Ironic Invasion”. It is paradigmatic for the basic semiotic structure of the small comic stories presented respectively on one web page all having Hipster Hitler as their center. The combination of the two icons, the Hipster and Hitler, is mirrored in the title, as “invasion” evokes the Nazi context and “irony” the culture of the Hipster. The playful alliteration of the title mirrors the alliteration in the name of the central character. Also, it hints at pop culture as rather occupied by surfaces and style and less by content and in-depth reflections. The historical background of Hitler introduced in the web comic consists in the most known and not contested information about him: including for instance that he was the leader of the Third Reich, which attacked other countries, used NS-propaganda and identified with racist ideas, namely anti-Semitism. In this way, the icon is highly reduced and trivialized. Readers, even those with little historical knowledge, don’t learn anything new about Hitler. Rather, known content is recycled and novelty and comic punch lines are achieved by the unusual combination of the two different historical and cultural contexts. While in the Nazi context, all is about ruling an empire, oppressing minorities and winning a war, in the Hipster culture it is about gaining attention in the right way. The implied parallelization between these two contexts might lead to the conclusion that the struggle for attention is a new kind of war which can be read as critic of irony culture and commercialized media society. In concrete, the punch lines of the stories are mostly directed against the figure of the hipster, his nerdy engagement for organic food and the environment which is only defeated by his interest for his own appearances and for being unique. Especially the focus on surfaces, instead of content and substance is a recurrent motif in the episodes. For instance, when, in the episode “Speech”, Goebbels wants to show Hipster Hitler his draft for the first speech to the German people he has written on a type writer, Hipster Hitler comments on the typeface and not on the content. In another, this time animated, episode with no title, Goebbels and Hipster Hitler discuss the sales figures of the last edition of *Mein Kampf*. Hipster Hitler comments on his swastika armband in terms of a certain clothing style and on the color of the used ink.

In another story, “Triumph”, the ironic and reflective play with surfaces is taken to a higher level. Hipster Hitler wears a T-shirt with the text: “Triumph of the Chill” referring to the famous Nazi propa-

ganda film on the occasion of the Olympics held in Berlin in 1936, *Triumph of the Will*. The substitution of the word “will” by “chill” alludes ironically to the tendency of relaxation and doing nothing in the Hipster culture. In the comic, Hipster Hitler discusses with Riefenstahl about how the propaganda film should be shot. He wishes a close up on the SS uniform, while Riefenstahl advises against doing so, because of the black color of the SS uniforms and the skull on the cap suggesting: “Don’t you think it looks a bit like the embodiment of pure evil?” Uttered in this specific contemporary context, this at first side extremely banal statement becomes reflective, ironical and in this way original: To begin with, it represents the most common notion of the Nazis and of Hitler in Western culture. This in itself can also be read as the stylistic device of minimalism and of irony – as the evident is stated. However, by deducing the trivial statement from the semiotics of the clothes, that means surfaces and not the terrible crimes which the Nazis committed, it establishes a surprising connection between the historical and the contemporary pop-cultural context. Still, the all too straight forward and in this way ironic causality between the semiotics of the clothing and the characteristic of the people wearing the clothing is reflected on a higher level as Hipster Hitler answers: “And since we are the good guys, it’s the ultimate irony.” In this way, irony culture again is being targeted, as in this discursive context everything can be reversed in its own opposite – even the evidently evil.

Beyond Irony

Timur Vermes’ *Look Who’s Back* (2012)

In 2012, the book *Er ist wieder da*, in English *Look Who’s Back* (2014), became a bestseller in Germany, was translated into many languages, and a filmatized version is announced for 2015. The publishing house of the book, Eichborn, is specialising mainly in somewhat out of the box and humorous literature and, as could be said, in the topic of Hitler. For likewise at Eichborn, the comic series by Walter Moers on Hitler were published, and the title of Vermes’ book seems to refer to their titles: *Adolf. Äch bin wieder da!* [Adolf. I’m Back!] (1998) and *Adolf, Teil 2. Äch bin schon wieder da!* [Adolf, Part 2. I’m Back Again Already] (1999). In this way, Vermes’ book is placed in the context of the ironical and pop-cultural reception of Hitler. Not least, Moers was the first one in Germany to call Hitler “one of the

biggest German pop icons" (see the German Wikipedia article on the character of Moer's Hitler comics "Adolf, the Nazi pig").

In many ways, the reader might get the impression, that Vermes' book is part of the pop-cultural and commercial use of the icon. On the book cover, Hitler's image is depicted in the known Pop Art-inspired minimalistic form with the same stylized hair style as for instance "Hipster Hitler". The moustache consists of the words of the title. Another remarkable detail in this regard is that the novel on the cover in its full title is called *Lock Who's Back – the Novel* in the same 'pop cult' way as the announced animated film on the basis of Moers' comics is called *Adolf – the Movie*. The chapter numeration and the first capital letter of the chapters are set in Gothic types and the page numeration in an old styled writing. Thus, the context of the Third Reich seems to be evoked or cited without any critical distance. This strategy is pursued even further, when in the novel Hitler appears in the role of the narrator and the text in this way invites the identification with the "Führer". The reader meets the narrator-protagonist in the summer of 2011, when he suddenly appears out of nothing or risen from the death, on an open ground in the middle of Berlin. He starts to orient himself in this, to him, new time with the goal of regaining the power in Germany and reestablishing the Third Reich.

The environment of Hitler is astonished and some of the people he meets are even thrilled about his resemblance with the 'original' and the impression of the authentic that he emanates: "one could think, you're it" (cited from the German edition, 24, my translation). Everyone believes him to be a Hitler impersonator and some mistake him for another actor playing the role of Hitler in a known TV comedy show (123). Hitler is hired by the TV production company "Flashlight" which places him in a comedy show immediately after a Turkish comedian who makes fun of foreigners. This comedian can be said to represent the opposite of Hitler, and the placing of the two side by side seems to highlight the arbitrariness, the anything-goes in nowadays media circus. Hitler's demagogic speeches in the TV show are being (mis-)understood as comedic performances, and soon he becomes a TV star. Nevertheless, public discussion arises about the question whether he really is a Nazi or not. In the end, the fact that he is being badly beaten up by skinheads increases his popularity even more and advances his carrier.

Probably the most intriguing aspect of the novel is the way in which it is related, namely by Hitler himself. For much of the first part of the novel, this I-perspective of Hitler is used to, to some extent in time-critical way, portray the present German society, whereas most attention is given to certain tendencies of the media. Clearly, the outside gaze of Hitler is used to alienate and exoticize the domestic. In this way, Hitler stumbles on an advertising leaflet the text of which is entirely incomprehensible to him (18). When Hitler makes the acquaintance of a kiosk owner who harbors him in the first difficult time of his return, he is given the opportunity to get to know more facets of contemporary media society. When he listens to the radio, he hears “an infernal noise often interrupted by stupefying, completely incomprehensible babble. The content didn’t change as it continued, only the frequency of the alteration between bluster and babble increased” (32). With more astonishment, Hitler comments on the variety of nowadays newspapers, being puzzled by the presence of foreign, namely Turkish newspapers. Yet, he praises the big types of the tabloid newspaper “Bild” as an excellent propaganda move which “not even the avid Goebbels had thought of” (39). When Hitler watches TV for the first time, he only seems to find cooking shows and trivial reality TV (73ff.): “I saw a cook chopping vegetables. I couldn’t believe it: Such a progressive technique was developed and used to accompany a ridiculous cook?” (72). Summarizing his first experiences with the new media, Hitler talks of “mumbo jumbo radio and cooking TV” (75). Watching news broadcasts, Hitler has severe difficulties to follow the program as all kind of different information is faded up on screen simultaneously distracting the attention from the essential. The program is interrupted by adverts in which an alleged diversity is easily revealed as the repetition of the same: “adverts in which shop to buy the cheapest holiday trips, presented in absolutely identical ways by a large number of shops” (78).

Clearly, the point of view of Hitler is used to criticize certain media phenomena in a quite convincing way. Yet, when Hitler ponders on the tabloid press as an effective means of propaganda referring to Goebbels at the same time, the reader is reminded of what position as a whole he actually is made to sympathize with. In addition, Hitler’s archaic rhetorical style, in places much inspired by *Mein Kampf*, contributes to establish a perspective which creates

ambiguity and provocation. On the one hand, the reader will identify with Hitler's attempts to orientate himself in the new circumstance and his experiences of strangeness. On the other hand, the xenophobia and nationally aggressive great power visions which break through, from time to time, in the discourse of the narrator, function as reminders of the fact that his perspective is deeply contaminated. Thus an indissoluble ambivalence is created in the novel's point of view.

As Vermes has stated about his novel: "Confronted with the 'I' perspective, the reader is deprived of the possibility of avoiding. He is not only an observer, he is forced to take sides. He is finding himself in a head, he never wanted to be in, and he realizes, that, surprisingly, one can stand it quite well in there" (Das Gupta 2012). In this way, the reader is constantly misled and getting trapped in Hitler's world outlook and has to emancipate himself actively from this point of view. Also in Moers' comic a "first-person narrator invites identification". Thomas Jung's observation concerning the reader's positioning as a consequence of this might as well apply to Vermes' novel: "In this moment of doubled identification the reader has no choice but to become Hitler. That is the banality of evil – or of the *Hitler in us*" (Jung 2005: 257). To Vermes the vital in the Hitler perspective is "the sneaking crossover from reason to insanity". Being confronted with the demur, whether it is acceptable to laugh about Hitler, Vermes states: "the amusing is what makes it interesting. The amusing always signals to us: Now, nothing can happen to you, now there are only jokes to be expected. And I use this unsuspectingness of the reader, I always serve these situations with an addendum which is indigestible" (Das Gupta 2012).

If the reader nonetheless may remain in doubt whether the novel is to be understood as ironical, pop-cultural playing around with the icon, then the next to last phrase of the novel might be seen as a relatively strong statement, that it is to be regarded as exactly the opposite, namely a critic of tendencies to trivialize the historical role of Hitler in the sign of pop-culture. On the advertising material to start his career as a writer and a TV star, the narrator finds the phrase: "Not everything was bad" (396), reminding us that the use of Hitler as harmless toy might entail historical amnesia. In this way, the criticism which was directed against the book that it would play the historical events down (see Fiedler 2013), does not seem to

encounter the intention of the book, which is to focus critically on the use of the Hitler icon in the present media society. Nevertheless, given the circumstance of Vermes' publication in a context which not least commercially rides on the wave of Hitlertainment, the impression left is a bit double edged. As one critique has put it: "The high share of the audience in the novel apparently has similar reasons as the real commercial success of the book" (Fiedler 2013).

Conclusion

The pop-cultural use and overexposure of the Hitler icon is a phenomenon which by many is observed not without concern. While Erk interprets this tendency, by referring to Hannah Arendt's famous dictum, as a "banalisation of evil" (Erk 2012), Thomas Jung sees in the use of the Hitler icon "merely an imitation of a posture of rebellion that has corrupted itself with the knowledge of its own commercialization" (Jung 2005: 256). The most positive outlook on the pop-cultural use of the icon is expressed by Hirt: "While it may provide the ground for investments, it tends toward a playful relation to its own surface-corpus. As such, it is primarily entertaining and less subversive. It is more ironic and pastiche-like and leaves the properties of the icon intact" (Hirt 575). This evaluation is certainly true for "Hipster Hitler" were critical investments are possible, but not equally performed in all comic episodes. In Vermes' novel, the attempt to criticize the somewhat careless consumption of the icon in pop culture can be said to partly being overpowered by the independent existence of the icon – here, life, once again, seems to imitate art. Life goes on, at so will the use of the Hitler icon. As long as its historical context, at least to some degree, is present in collective memory, it will give the opportunity for critical investments. As the analysed examples have shown, these investments are mostly directed towards the present and not towards the past. The Hitler icon, as has been shown, today, among other things, represents a very effective tool for the critical reflection of the media society.

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