

FACE TIME WITH HITLER

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1

Published in spring 1932, Heinrich Hoffmann's photo album *Hitler wie ihn keiner kennt* (The Hitler nobody knows) transformed Hitler's private life into a matter of public concern. It did not simply showcase the ordinariness of Hitler's existence beyond noisy party rallies and agitated performances, it also silenced rumors about his lifestyle and emphasized his fitness for governing. The book's release date was well chosen, its pictures of Hitler in the mountains hiking, picnicking, or simply relaxing meant to reignite a political campaign presently in disarray.¹ To see Hitler resting his hand on a child's shoulder or enjoying moments of pause amid spectacular landscapes privileged moral authenticity over strategic action; it was to witness an empathetic human who was much more electable than political opponents on the Left and hesitant middle-class voters may have assumed. To learn from Baldur von Schirach's preface about Hitler's vegetarianism and his resistance to both alcohol and tobacco, and to see him easily navigating the divide between the political and the intimate, was to situate the aspiring chancellor as a true embodiment of a future cleansed from the vices of Weimar political culture. Hoffmann's images unlocked the private as a space seemingly void of political conflict, only to convert it into a stage whose apparent ordinariness served eminently political purposes after all.

Hitler's success in 1933 hardly depended on Hoffmann's public relations campaign of 1932. Yet *Hitler wie ihn keiner kennt* certainly brought a preview

of coming (fatal) attractions, a blueprint for coupling technological media to political causes without precedent in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history. *Hitler wie ihn keiner kennt* ran through various reprints and sold more than 400,000 copies over the next ten years. It was complemented by similar volumes such as *Jugend um Hitler* (Youth around Hitler, 1934), *Hitler in seinen Bergen* (Hitler in his mountains, 1935), and *Hitler abseits vom Alltag* (Hitler away from it all, 1937), each selling more than 200,000 copies and outflanking the distribution of photo albums featuring Hitler's role as statesman and commander in chief. It inspired the transformation of Hitler's image into a commodity of first rank, a desirable icon circulating as postcard, wall image, and collectable trading card. It also converted Hoffmann's studio from a local photographer's shop to a full-fledged industrial operation, an image factory that systematically capitalized on Hoffmann's unique access to Hitler and his relative monopoly over the mechanical reproduction of the Führer's face and body.² Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, photographic images of Hitler as a private individual—his love for children, dogs, and the mountains; his need to relax from rigorous work without declining into mere idleness; his eagerness to read books, newspapers, maps, and architectural blueprints—became the stuff of his subjects' dreams. These images vitally enhanced the Nazi choreography of political life, helped brand Hitler's persona, and energized a profitable culture of photographic reproduction that seemed to collapse given boundaries between professionals and amateurs, image makers and spectators.

If scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s was quick to identify (and thereby denounce) aesthetic strategies peculiar to fascism and national socialism, more measured perspectives have prevailed since the 1990s. Rather than seeing Nazi film, architecture, and painting as embodiments of fascist aesthetics, we focus on how aesthetics operated under conditions of fascism, that is, how fascism managed to massage minds and engineer politically useful emotions with the aid of aesthetic materials whose visual appearance may have been unique neither to the 1930s nor to the stages of totalitarian power. Not all products of Nazi film studios, nor even a majority, incorporated the choreography of mass movements, the rituals of messianic leadership and collective submission, infamously captured by Leni Riefenstahl. Monumentalist sculptures à la Arno Breker and neoclassical designs by Paul Troost may have structured how Nazi politics wanted the individual to perceive and navigate public space, but neither Breker's nor Troost's styles were exclusive to the Nazi state, and both were potently present in contemporary democratic societies

too. If up until the 1980s Riefenstahl, Breker, and Troost provided signature examples of what Walter Benjamin called the fascist aestheticization of the political,³ the culturalist turns of the 1990s brought out the heterogeneity at the core of Nazi culture while highlighting many other aspects of art, culture, visual perception, mass media, and aesthetic experience during the 1930s and early 1940s. The notion of fascist aesthetics not only has lost both historical and systematic specificity, it also no longer illuminates the mingling of politics and the aesthetic, of advanced media culture and the representation of power during other periods.

The life and afterlife of Nazi photography, of photographs taken, circulated, and viewed under German fascism, relate oddly to these changes in perspective and evaluation. To be sure, Hoffmann's own visual style of the 1920s and 1930s, when showing Hitler not as a seemingly private citizen but as a statesman molding the body politic like clay, approximated what Riefenstahl's films, Breker's sculptures, or Troost's architecture aspired to accomplish. Although not initially intended for publication, Hoffmann's famous 1927 series of Hitler probing different rhetorical poses sought, as I have argued elsewhere, "to define the political as a self-referential space of ongoing motion in which mesmerizing surface designs, strategic self-performances, and desensitized forms of seeing undid the legacies of bourgeois culture and public debate."⁴ In showing Hitler in different postures of leadership, Hoffmann's camera hoped no less than to eliminate some of the dominant binaries of bourgeois life, such as that between authenticity and dissimulation. It invited viewers to become—true to Ernst Jünger's writing on photography and culture—experts in cool conduct.⁵ Rather than simply documenting what has often been read as a self-revelatory freak show, Hoffmann's images coupled photographic reproduction to the cause of political mobilization. These images engaged different rhetorics of representation to do away with rhetoric altogether and, like Riefenstahl in the 1930s, recast the real as image, the image as real.

And yet, just as all of Hoffmann's photography between the 1920s and mid-1940s cannot be reduced to a single style, mode, or aspiration, nor can photography under German fascism be described more generally as existing in the singular. There is no particularly fascist way of capturing the world as photographic image; of cropping the image and situating certain elements outside the frame; of triangulating the relationship between photographer, photographed, and viewed; of depicting bodies and objects. With the advent of lightweight cameras in the 1920s, photography became a widespread prac-

tice taking many forms. Most of the pictures taken, exchanged, and collected in albums during the 1930s and 1940s, by professionals, hobbyists, and amateurs alike, are commonly indistinguishable, whether in form or even content, from what Germans may have been picturing on either side of the Nazi time. To speak of Nazi photography, of fascist photography, would mislead even more than would identifying a uniquely fascist language of filmmaking, public art, and architecture. Accordingly, the critical discourse about photographic images during the Nazi period emphasizes questions that are often different from those familiar from other art forms and mass media. On the one hand, much writing has concerned the role of amateur and professional photographers in capturing wartime atrocities and genocidal activities, probing degrees of culpability and complicity: How did taking and viewing photographic images, it has been asked, desensitize the perceptions of those committing or witnessing the crimes of national socialism?⁶ In perhaps the most rigorous inquiry yet, Georges Didi-Huberman's *Images malgré tout* (2003) extends this line of inquiry to those rare images concentration camp prisoners took to document the horrors of Auschwitz.⁷ By learning to look at these images, argues Didi-Huberman, we do justice to photographic acts of resistance and reclaim what was previously declared incommunicable, ineffable, and unrepresentable about camp atrocities. On the other hand, scholars have also devised frameworks to address the massive photographic archive left by amateurs and hobbyists in capturing and commemorating scenes seemingly devoid of politics altogether.⁸ Some of this work remains haunted by an older assumption: no picture of ordinariness, of nonpolitical intimacy, taken during fascism can ever be viewed as unpolitical or innocent. But as other recent scholarship argues, rather than leaping directly from the Nazis enjoying their everyday lives to what precisely is *not* shown in the images themselves, we should refocus our gaze on what the image visibly displays. Although many amateur photographers were of course Nazis, the world as viewed and arrested by means of their cameras cannot be reduced to a mere chimera whose sole purpose was to make people *not see* the violence and death Nazis committed in the real world.⁹

Hoffmann's pictures of Hitler in domestic settings are usually read as highly calculated invitations to look away, to forget what fascism was all about. By endowing Hitler's persona with human qualities so as to make people blind to his true nature, they made the political beyond the frame all the more compelling. As the argument runs, whatever we see in them is meant to eclipse what exists beyond the photographic frame, to vacate a

space for even more effective operations of propaganda and power; whatever they show leaves no later grounds for viewing them at all, other than to fetishize the icons of Nazi power. By pretending to show something the viewers did not know, Hoffmann's Hitler images deactivated the very possibility of knowledge. They obscured the truth of fascism. No look at what they frame, however rigorous, will ever restore that truth; it will always make us look at the monstrous without seeing it for what it was.

When we abandon a merely representational understanding of photographic imaging and engage these images on their own ground, we find far more in Hoffmann's images of Hitler during the 1930s than critics and historians typically assume. For Hoffmann's images offer no less than a manual of how to think about, see, and circulate photographic images as something that exceeds the representational; a visual set of instructions teaching viewers not to burden photographs with traditional truth claims; a laboratory collapsing presumed differences between the real and the image by redefining a camera's mechanical gaze as the truth and essence of organic vision. Hoffmann's images are deeply paradoxical. They not only train viewers to embrace photographic vision and practice as basic principles of what it means to live in and perceive Nazi Germany, but also seek to persuade the viewer that photography at heart has very little to say and communicate in the first place. While showing Hitler off the beaten track, Hoffmann's images want their viewers to understand that there is nothing to understand when it comes to photography. Far more than simply glorifying Hitler as an honorable and empathetic man, they envision photography as a pervasive modern technology whose principle purpose is to take hold of the everyday, independent of what any individual picture might really be about. Similar to the tweets, Instagram messages, and Facebook communications of our own time, Hoffmann's Hitler—a medium embodying its own message—wants to teach us that we need not read images because, in essence, photographic images are all about doing rather than representing; their task is to shape, transform, and be part of the world rather than merely to picture it.

2

In the early years of the Nazi movement, Hitler was said to base his impact primarily on the aura of his voice and refused any effort to circulate photographic portraits in the public. According to Heinrich Hoffmann's biography, in autumn 1922 Hitler requested \$30,000 to have his picture taken and

printed in national and international newspapers.¹⁰ In the preface to Hoffmann's *Hitler wie ihn keiner kennt*, Baldur von Schirach described Hitler's early camera shyness as a sign of the agitator's moral authenticity, his refusal to buy into the putative degeneracy of Weimar consumer culture: "To be popular means: to be photographed a lot. Adolf Hitler has always resisted becoming an object of photography. In particular twelve years ago, when his name emerged for the first time from the darkness of anonymity, he was a declared enemy of the camera. Back then, the whole world's illustrated press tried to obtain a picture of the Führer. Without success. In spite of all kinds of monetary offers, Hitler categorically refused to have his picture taken for the sake of reproduction."¹¹ At once the metaphorical and physical organ of the putatively disenfranchised, Hitler's voice was to serve as the movement's principal medium, not least of all because it seemed to escape the very traps modern technology had set for acts of human communication.

Little of Hitler's reticence about cameras remained when Hoffmann, with *Hitler wie ihn keiner kennt*, embarked on a whole sequence of coffee-table books positioning Hitler as Nazi Germany's foremost object of photography. Hoffmann's images of Hitler's private side have been much discussed, most often perhaps for what they do not show, or conversely, for reconstructing Hitler's circles and hidden levels of access, influence, and command. In what follows, however, I identify four tropes that emerge if Hoffmann's images are viewed at much closer range and our eyes peruse their visual surfaces. It transpires that the effort to *read* these images is deeply paradoxical, given that Hoffmann's photography intends no less than to exceed and displace reading. And yet, whether they feature Hitler's hands, his role as a reader, his unceasing alertness, or his transformation of the privacy of trains and cars into a public stage, all such tropes allegorize how photography can or should move photographers and viewers alike beyond traditional notions of the image. As they present Hitler's sight as a medium to propagate a world in which photographic perception and image making may reign triumphant, all four tropes define the very act of taking pictures as a technique of inhabiting the present. They provide interfaces to the matter of the nation.

Hands. Although rarely the single focus of any particular picture, Hitler's hands figure prominently in the entire series of photo books. They are folded across each other in postures of attentive listening; hold or rest with great care and deliberation on books, newspapers, architectural drawings, and maps; arch over a chair's armrest in gestures of simultaneous relaxation and alertness; lift binoculars to the Führer's eyes in order to fortify his gaze;

sign scraps of paper autograph hunters present to Hitler during car rides through the countryside; and most of all, touch upon the shoulders, cheeks, and heads of children as they cross his path in the crowd or are chaperoned by their parents to meet Hitler one-on-one. To touch one hand with the other, French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty once argued, reveals to us the two dimensions of what he called the flesh: the fact that bodies are both vehicles of (tactile) experience and objects to be touched by others. And yet, “when I press my two hands together, it is not a matter of two sensations felt together as one perceives two objects placed side by side, but of an ambiguous arrangement in which the two hands can alternate in the role of ‘touching’ and ‘touched.’”¹² In Hoffmann’s images, Hitler’s hands reveal little of this ambiguity. Hitler’s hands touch upon his subjects, but such touching in the larger choreography of Hoffmann’s images is designed as a one-way street, maintaining distances however proximate Hitler’s body may be. Here the hand’s touch enchants, energizes, fascinates, commands, arrests, and moves the one being touched, but it does so without ever collapsing the difference, on the side of the toucher, between “touching” and “touched,” that is, without ever situating Hitler as the one recognizing the various dimensions of his own flesh. Hitler’s hands touch, but they never define him as an object of touch, nor do they ever serve Hitler as vehicles of haptic experience. They disseminate rather than grasp; they radiate outward rather than absorb or appropriate the world.

In *Jugend um Hitler* (1934), Hoffmann presents the viewer with a young woman, eager to catch the Führer’s autograph as his automobile passes by (figure 5.1). Her face is in the center of the picture; her hands hold a notepad. Typical of Hoffmann’s casual style of framing, referencing an amateur’s lack of compositional control to create a sense of documentary authenticity, the image barely shows Hitler’s hand at all, relegates it to a small area at the lower left. And yet this hand completely dominates the picture. It reaches into the frame, clasping a pen between thumb and finger. About to leave a mark on the paper, Hitler’s hand is in full command of the woman’s eyes, riveting her attention to what is about to happen. Hitler’s hand is a sight that fascinates, a unique presence that governs space even before it touches upon objects and imparts their singular meaning. It not only animates and seizes the woman’s look. It structures and thereby “holds” the entire image, at once defining and transgressing the boundary between the visible and the out-of-frame. Although the woman may have managed to halt the car’s movement to gather a handwritten trophy, it is Hitler’s hand that arrests viewers and thus precisely



5.1 “Ein Autogramm, bitte!” (*Jugend um Hitler*, 1934).

succeeds in deeply affecting her, in moving the viewer. The pen in Hitler’s hand is no different than a finger ready to press a camera’s shutter release. It is poised to transform the world into an image, to divide space into zones of visibility and what resides off-frame, all the while defining images—the page of the notepad awaiting the Führer’s lasting inscription—as belonging to the very world they capture. As indexical traces of the real, they have a power that energizes reality itself.

Reading. The sheer number of Hoffmann’s images showing Hitler as an avid reader is astounding. None of them, however, depicts Hitler with what he required in order to read in the first place—namely, reading glasses—as though the visibility of such devices would question the intensity of his acts of reading, the display of sophistication and intellectual curiosity meant to correct images of Hitler as no more than a shrill agitator ill-suited for the demands of great politics. One of the most famous shows him in civilian clothes turning away from a newspaper and looking directly into the camera, a rather unusual smile—slightly forced—on his face, arms resting on legs as he sits in the grass in some indistinct outdoor location (figure 5.2).



5.2 “Erholung.
Abgeschieden von Lärm
und Unruhe der Städte
ruht hier der Führer auf
den großen Wiesen in der
Nähe seines Häuschens
von den Strapazen des
Kampfes aus. Dabei liest
er dann die gegnerischen
Zeitungen und freut sich
über die Märchen, die
sie über ihn verbreiten:
Sektgelage, jüdische
Freundinnen, Luxusvilla,
französische Gelder . . .”
*(Hitler wie ihn keiner
kennt, 1932).*

As so often, Hoffmann’s choices of grain and focus obscure what exactly Hitler might be reading; here, as elsewhere, lines of text fuse into solid gray blocks on paper. The caption adds a curious twist. While presenting Hitler in a moment of relaxation and solitude away from the cities’ turmoil and his political duties, it identifies his reading material as an enemy newspaper whose “fairy tales” about his persona—“Champagne orgies, Jewish girl friends, luxury mansions, French money . . .”—visibly elicit his amusement. Viewers can glean nothing of this from the image itself. The illegibility of the text in the picture opens up ample space for signification, while Hitler’s missing glasses make viewers wonder what exactly produced the amusement in the first place.

Hoffmann’s photographs of Hitler as reader, especially when capturing him in natural environments, recall and rework a long pictorial tradition in which reading was encoded as spiritual communication—initially with God, then later as literary exaltation. Reading subtracted the reader from the confines of space and time. It operated as a technique of disembodiment, of unbound absorption. As it connected the subject to something transcendent and invisible, the act of reading divested readers of self-awareness, intentionality, and instrumental reason, of doing something in the first place or being

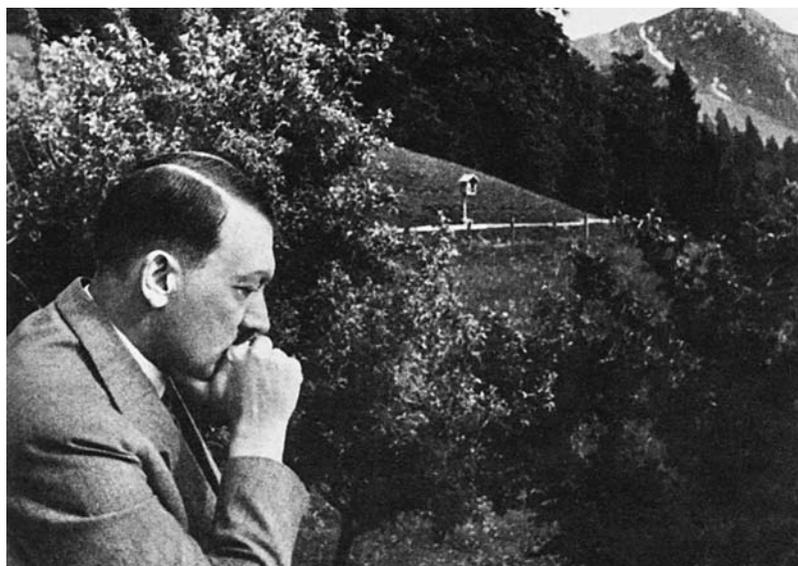
viewed by others in this (non)doing. Although Hoffmann's images work hard to continue this tradition, showcasing moments of absorption as a condition for the possibility of benevolent leadership, they invariably achieve something quite different. Books and newspapers in Hitler's hands mostly figure as mechanisms of embodiment: they situate Hitler in, rather than evacuate him from, the materiality, temporality, and relationality of spatial environments. Here, to read is not to interface the divine or purely poetic or to transport the reading subject to a certain state of obliviousness and unconsciousness, ceding self-awareness and willfulness. It is to anchor the reader's—Hitler's—body in space, to showcase his wondrous ability to inhabit spaces of apparent quiet and solitude amid the busy routines of political leadership, to refuel what it takes to be present rather than immerse himself in what exceeds visibility and tangibility. Hitler's books and newspapers, in Hoffmann's photographs, are objects of the world that enable readers to relish the physical pleasures of holding their covers, turning their pages, sensing their touch, and smelling their scent. Like photographs themselves, they do not lead their users to other worlds altogether but by their physical imprints insert different times and places into the viewer's space. No photograph ever shows Hitler looking at photographs, not simply because self-reflexive gestures would have thwarted the authenticity of the amateur snapshot, but perhaps because Hitler always already reads texts as if they are photographic reproductions, as images that live in the world as much as index it.

Idleness. Hoffmann's famous 1927 images of Hitler probing rhetorical poses tried to counter photography's association with death, its logic of turning fleeting presents into corpses, by turning it on its head. In the name of engineering a viewer whose body could be subsumed coldly to the task of total mobilization, Hoffmann's camera pictured Hitler as a speaker poised to push against and break the frame; a body that could not be contained by the fixity of mechanical images; a presence that eliminated death from reproduction, inscribed temporal flows and dynamics in still images, and thus, in its effort to move and mobilize the viewer, animated photography to become film. In Hoffmann's photographs from the 1930s, little remains of the Hitler whose arms, hands, limbs, and entire torso had once vehemently pounded against the cell of his reproduction. In most of the images gathered in Hoffmann's coffee-table books, to be sure, Hitler's gaze typically fixes on something outside the frame, his physical posture symbolizing his visionary powers. While serving as an object to be looked at, he is rarely shown reciprocating other

gazes. Most commonly, he directs existing networks of gazes to what only another picture—hence, an anticipated future—could fully reveal. In addition, he is frequently captured in trains and cars, mobile interfaces rendering his image for crowds of attentive onlookers. On the other hand, pictures rarely show Hitler’s body itself in motion, midstride, capturing attention through physical activity as a kinesthetic attraction. In contrast to the 1927 series, Hoffmann’s Hitler of the 1930s is a man of calm and composure, no longer rubbing against the frame and trying to beat photography at its own game. He is, in other words, all photograph, compliant with, assimilating to, and embodying what photography as a medium can do best.

Not one of Hoffmann’s pictures, even those showing Hitler as a vacationer in “his” mountains in *Hitler in seinen Bergen*, ever presents him simply as being idle, as a slacker, as languid, or in poses of absentmindedness. On the contrary, repose comes with a sharpening of attention, with being alert, thoughtful, and receptive. The Führer’s body is never subtracted from the world but situated more firmly in its physical surrounds, recentering things around him. Although Hoffmann’s prefaces typically emphasize Hitler’s need for stretches of empty time, slowness, and absorption amid the demands of political campaigning and caring for the nation, the images themselves showcase empty time as a time of heightened presence, not of drift but of utter focus and responsiveness. Hitler, the viewer learns, is always “on.” Nothing can possibly escape his gaze and awareness.

In one picture, his head tilts downward, right hand holding the chin, eyes fixed on the ground (figure 5.3). The unusual composition has four planes of representation: Hitler in the immediate foreground on the left; some bushes and trees in the midground opening a view onto the background’s meadow, trees, and—somewhat surprisingly—a little shrine along a road; and finally a mountain rising majestically in the far background on the right. This is no posture of absentmindedness or absorptive introspection. The image’s horizontal spread, planar recession, and perspectival construction suggest something quite other: beyond Hitler’s features, screening the contents of his inner eye, lies a mindscape projected onto various planes of visibility. Rather than capturing Hitler in a moment of precarious nonengagement, then, the image actually constructs him as a powerful *metteur-en-scène*. He becomes a godlike conjurer who understands how to translate inner visions into physical realities. He potently directs the very structure of the viewer’s looking.



5.3 *Hitler in seinen Bergen, 1935.*

In another photograph, Hitler appears on the terrace of his mountain home watching a boy whose eyes are glued to a telescope, seeing what escapes our own (and Hitler's) view (figure 5.4). Hitler's half-open mouth suggests that he is speaking to his young visitor. The slightly bent posture indicates some urgency, as if encouraging or instructing the boy in the proper use of this technology of vision. In a curiously disjunctive triangle of looks linking Hitler, the boy, and the viewer, with no one's gaze ever reciprocating the other, the photograph places Hitler in all his leisurely repose as the central choreographer of the visible, of a visual field structuring the very modes of possible perception.

In Hitler's universe, these two photographs suggest, visual media are never merely tools for capturing the world in representation. Rather, they produce and provide an entire infrastructure of human existence, a comprehensive environment for, and elemental condition of, being in the world. For Hitler, with idleness this world would implode. It would radically deflate what holds Nazi society together. In Hitler's (re)engineering of the world—as one made *by* and *for* different acts, practices, technologies, and techniques of looking—there is no outside.



5.4 “Wie schön ist die Aussicht vom Haus Wachenfeld” (*Hitler in seinen Bergen*, 1935).

Vehicles. In the early Nazi years, radio was to governance what Twitter is to twenty-first-century political campaigns: it provided a sense of instant connectivity, of seemingly unmediated presence, that cuts across existing boundaries of public and private, the intimate and the political.¹³ This archetype of modern communication technologies was at once succeeded and completed by Hitler’s use of airplanes during the campaigns in the early 1930s. Before television’s mass arrival, yet not so removed from Instagram and other social media of today, air travel propelled Hitler’s image speedily around the country, networking distant constituencies into the unified nation.¹⁴ If radios inserted the immediacy of Hitler’s voice into the home’s interior, airplanes mobilized Hitler’s body into ubiquitous visibility. What both media accomplished jointly, however, was to make political leadership seem inevitable and indisputable. So, far from simply re-presenting images and sounds of Hitler to the crowds, they used the capacity of modern media for building worlds and infrastructures to shape, move, and arrest these very crowds in space and time.

In Hoffmann’s photo albums, for good reasons, neither radios nor airplanes really move center stage. The former eluded easy photographic repro-

duction: neither invisible sonic waves nor sound's ability to collapse spatial distance could fit the framing power of photographic images. The latter, on the other hand, still the wondrous spectacle of advanced technology, could scarcely feature Hitler's humble and empathetic side in the way to which Hoffmann's snapshot aesthetic aspired. Yet modern transportation is not entirely foreign to Hoffmann's images of the 1930s. Hitler repeatedly travels the countryside in his Mercedes convertible, dispensing his autograph like a marquee movie star. While the images themselves may not have been deliberately staged, with crowd control and security measures, they each show Hitler's car as a technology of emotional mobilization: a medium powerful enough to wrest individuals from the crowds amassed along the road, a technology allowing Hitler's subjects to meet the Führer in close proximity, a tool wondrously collapsing the very distance and abstraction often associated with modern technological culture. Often, Hitler's car itself barely enters the image; it is present solely through a glimpse of the metallic body. Eliciting affects as a camera does, Hitler's cars articulate the crowd through the very boundaries of the visible; they define the condition for the possibility of seeing (Hitler) without necessarily belonging to the visual field itself. Hoffmann's images of trains, in contrast, show Hitler typically greeting his subjects through a compartment's half-open window. If disparities of height and power are emphasized, they never obviate the staging of the intimate encounters.

Hoffmann's train windows served as interfaces long before the advent of computer screens; they offer a shared boundary between different systems, a material space of interaction where different realities, worlds, and components can touch upon each other. They confer the privilege of face time with Hitler, not simply presenting the Führer as image to the crowd, an object of the look, but reconstituting what we understand as image in the first place, redefining images as meeting grounds of tactile transactions that far exceed the mere exigencies of re-presentation.

In so doing, Hoffmann's cars and trains inscribe the putatively private with what planes and radio were meant to do for public space. Indeed, by tackling the organization of public and private space-time from different ends, they each deliver a powerful reminder: even at its most intimate and private, Nazi visual culture aspired to lodge the public in the private, the private in the public, not simply by flooding its subjects with unprecedented numbers of mechanically reproduced images but also by emancipating image making and viewing from traditional protocols of representation, mak-

ing them far more than merely media of optical capture and reception. Hoffmann's images of Hitler as private citizen are not *about* Hitler. They explore the conditions of what it might mean to be *in* the image with Hitler. His images were technologies that generate rather than merely depict spaces of wondrous encounters and affective transfers.

3

In his 1933 treatise *Staat, Bewegung, Volk* (State, Movement, People), Nazi legal theorist Carl Schmitt argued that traditional concepts of the image as a vehicle for representing something would not suffice to theorize how the Nazi movement had come to embody leadership in the figure of Adolf Hitler. "Our concept [of leadership] neither requires nor sustains the notion of a mediating image or representative likeness. It originates neither in baroque allegories and representations nor in Descartes's *idée générale*. It is a concept of immediate present and real presence."¹⁵ Hitler, Schmitt intimated, did not simply represent, focus, or serve as an analogue or metaphor of his people, nor was it possible to consider his public image, his body and face, as a symbol, reflection, or projection of what German fascism was all about. Any of this, in Schmitt's assessment, would have continuously enslaved the Nazi era to the legacy of bourgeois culture and political romanticism. True leadership, instead, did without ideas of mediation and representation. It was utterly nonmetaphorical. It collapsed what exile Ernst Kantorowicz would later call the king's two bodies—the body natural and the body politic—into one,¹⁶ presenting Hitler as embodiment of the people, and the people's ongoing movement and mobilization as the energy center of political unity. Hitler was Germany as much as Germany was Hitler. Although his image, in mechanically reproduced forms, penetrated each and every corner of the land, it assumed no less than the qualities of an icon, presenting in material and haptic form what drove and held the nation together, thereby eclipsing bourgeois democracy's frail dedication to imaging rather than doing, mediating and negotiating rather than rendering present.

How much were Hoffmann's 1930s images of Hitler in private a paradoxical attempt to translate Schmitt's philosophy into practice? Although they clearly do not hide their basis in technological reproducibility, Hoffmann's pictures sought no less than to present Hitler as a leader of immediate presentness and real presence, a post-bourgeois politician who no longer appeals to former rhetorics of representation, mediation, and symbolism. To gather

youth around him and to bless them with his touch; to refuse the lures of idleness and to embody unfailing alertness 24/7; to use modern vehicles to stage his presence for astonished onlookers—all this eclipsed what images as much as political leaders had once stood for. Hoffmann's images dreamed the dream of no longer being mere images, of remaking themselves into objects that directly acted on and in the world, that empowered and channeled touch, presence, mobility, and movement rather than merely offering ocular and highly mediated interactions with the world. Following Schmitt's understanding of fascism as a fundamental attack on the bourgeois concept of the image, these photographs described a key field of political meaning ordered around their onslaught against the representational and the mediated. Even at their seemingly most private, they unfolded a political mission that many photographs of Hitler in public places, increasingly clichéd and ubiquitous, were no longer able to accomplish.

But rather than turn Hoffmann's images of the unknown Hitler into a mere philosophical issue, a profoundly paradoxical assault on the nature of the image, I conclude this essay by reading photographs of Hitler's hands, his alertness, his relation to printed matter and modern vehicles of transport, in more historical terms: as a concerted effort to train viewers to become photographers in their own right, to define photography as the primary lens for perceiving and inhabiting the realities of Nazi Germany. Seeking to roll back Weimar's modernist forays into *Neues Sehen*, Joseph Goebbels opened the 1933 photography fair in Berlin with the following words:

The photographic image is a visible expression of the height of our culture; we must recognize the value of photography not only for artistic life, but most of all also for the practical existential struggle in its full extent and therefore place photography and the graphic arts into the service of the German issue. We believe in the camera's objectivity and are skeptical about what is mediated through our sense of hearing or written letters. We stand at the threshold of an era which raises unprecedented demands through its community of faith. The human of today—in particular those Germans who were betrayed million-times in all areas of life during those fourteen horrendous years—has begun to be skeptical about news and opinion communicated to them through the ear or the medium of written words. He wants to see things for himself, and given the elevated state of the photographic arts and the illustrated press he has a right to do so. . . . Our modern artificial eye, the camera, has become a faithful witness of

our new times. . . . The experience of the individual has become the experience of the *Volk*, and this through the camera alone. . . . In this way, photography fulfills an important political mission these days, to which every German should contribute who owns a camera.¹⁷

Since the advent of lightweight cameras in the second half of the 1920s, amateur photography in Germany had really taken off, hugely multiplying the number of people eager to capture family snapshots, assemble their images in curated photo albums, take cameras to public events, and document their travels through the countryside. To be sure, the first years of Nazi rule witnessed tremendous conflicts among photo clubs and amateur organizations as they struggled over who could best represent what Goebbels called the new times.¹⁸ Moreover, Nazi authorities sought with alacrity to regulate the taking and circulation of photographic images, notably those of political leaders and party rallies, thereby constraining the desire of amateurs to capture exactly the pictures that “court” photographers such as Hoffmann circulated so proudly. Germans may have demanded the right to look at photographs of things political, but in face of comprehensive legislation they could not take most of them on their own. At the same time, whether or not one needed proper accreditation to direct one’s camera at Hitler and his ilk, Goebbels’s 1933 speech left little doubt that even amateur photography—the family snapshot, the private moments of detached leisure—served the movement and nation as vigorously as Hoffmann’s ever-growing monopoly over reproductions of Hitler’s official image. To train one’s camera at the new times; to retrain the eye for modern technologies of vision; to allow the presumed objectivity of photographic indexicality to raise individual sight to the level of collective unity; to learn how to frame the real without the mediation of concepts, words, and sounds—all would be no less vital for enrolling the individual in the mission of the nation than would generating reproductions showing Hitler or other Nazi leaders in action. In capturing the familiar and producing memento mori of passing realities, amateur photography could not only picture everyday scenes under the sign of Nazi rule. Its mission exceeded the representational. As it situated common users as both subjects *and* objects of technological reproducibility, photographic practice mobilized the people, engineered affects, and embedded the individual as a picture-taking subject in the community of the *Volk*, independent of the actual content of individual images, frames, and perspectives. To be a good Nazi, in Goebbels’s eyes, was to allow photography to permeate all aspects

of existence. It was to see the world through a camera's viewfinder, not in order to distance oneself from the visible, but rather to experience the camera's technological logic as a medium for absorbing the particular into the movement of the whole.

Ten years after Goebbels had envisioned photographic practice as an ideal tool for aligning the individual's experience with the national community, Wolfgang Liebeneiner's wartime feature film, *Großstadtmelodie* (*Melody of a Great City*, 1943), illustrated this political mission paradigmatically (figure 5.5). Ravaged by aerial bombardments and other tolls of war, few may have remembered Goebbels's upbeat vision of 1933, let alone be eager to capture the ruins of everyday life with help of a camera. But the film tells the story of Renate Heiberg (Hilde Krahl), a skilled photographer who leaves the Bavarian countryside for Berlin to become a successful photojournalist. Her zeal for picturing what eludes routine ways of looking initially thwarts her career. Berlin's agitated newspaper editors and readers, she learns, have no time for those patiently aiming their camera at the unseen, the forgotten, the unnoticed. Yet, sticking to her guns while adapting to the tempos, rhythms, and demands of the urban metropolis, she ultimately triumphs as a female photographer in a world mostly dominated by men, taking pictures at public events and capturing decisive moments amid Berlin's restless street life, as well as producing poetic vignettes of everyday activities that escape the artificial eye of her colleagues. If Liebeneiner's film initially enters Berlin as if emulating the legacy of the Weimar avant-garde and *Neues Sehen*—the canted angles, unusual camera locations, moving perspectives, and montage sequences are all quite striking—Heiberg's camera teaches something quite different. It celebrates the power of photography to picture the city—its speed, its mobility and agitation, and the indefatigable activities of its citizens—as a defining environment of life in Germany circa 1943, a quasi-natural habitat charged with poetic energy and unifying force.

Unlike most Nazi entertainment films, whether of the 1930s or 1940s, *Melody of a Great City* explicitly cites political actualities. We hear people greeting each other with "Heil Hitler." We follow Heiberg to political rallies and to a concert of Wagner's music, conducted by no less than Wilhelm Furtwängler. We witness Heiberg taking pictures of architectural landmarks and monumental public art à la Breker, a close-up of her head superimposed onto the objects of her view as she peeks through the viewfinder of her state-of-the-art lightweight camera. In one shot, we even see half of a swastika painted on the tail of an airplane, an icon not really visible in any other feature film



5.5 Stills from *Großstadtmelodie* (dir. Wolfgang Liebeneiner, 1943).

produced in Goebbels's "ministry of illusion."¹⁹ What we do *not* see, though, is any trace of war and aerial bombing, of military mobilization and civilian sacrifice. A one-second shot toward the end gives this absence a weak narrative motivation: a rally for the annexation of Austria locates the film's action *ahead* of World War II. Such temporal displacement hardly masks the film's effort at spatial reordering, however. It celebrates cameras as tools of intense looking, hyperattentive framing, physical mobility, and integrating even seemingly forgotten aspects into the larger picture—all at the cost of *not* allowing us to see what no filmmaker, photographer, actor, or spectator in 1943 Berlin could have escaped. No single image of Heiberg's as captured by Liebeneiner "lies" in any strict sense of the world, even if photographs can be said *not* to tell the truth in the first place.²⁰

Photography, as presented by Liebeneiner, cannot but be true, not because it produces images that reveal what spectators may believe or know to be true, but because in essence it is not about representing the real at all. Rather, it depicts the ceaseless efforts involved in seeing the world through a camera's viewfinder. Heiberg's most important accomplishment is not to explore new ways of looking at the real and thereby disclose new insights about the texture of the everyday. Instead, she redefines the world as one produced by and for the camera's modern artificial eye, in which photographic reproduction—its presumed objectivity and indexicality—can collapse the space between the individual and the collective and thereby precisely collapse the very kind of intersubjectivity that permits a lie to be called a lie. True to Goebbels's call of 1933, Heiberg's images are all about doing, not representing. They are about sealing off the visible from the discursive, about evacuating reading altogether from the visible world. They elevate the experience of the individual to the experience of the Volk, and in this way they define the world made by cameras and their photographers, whether in 1938 or 1943, as the shared environment of all experience.

Hoffmann's private pictures, far from merely branding Hitler's nonpolitical side as a site of political and economic utility, offered a medium and manual to turn Germans into Renate Heibergs. Their purpose was not simply to soften and popularize the image of the Führer. It was to train viewers to fancy themselves as photographers in their own right; to reframe the world as if seen through a camera's viewfinder; to embrace photographic practice as a medium of social and political integration, embedding an individual's perspective and action within the fabrics of the whole nation; not simply to *map*, but to *produce* the visible world with the help of modern technology.



5.6 “Auch die Jüngsten wollen ihr Hitlerbild haben” (*Hitler wie ihn keiner kennt*, 1932).

As much as they publicized Hitler as the principal sight/site of visual consumption during the Nazi era, Hoffmann’s albums promoted photography as a powerful medium for building worlds and thereby redrawing the line between the private and the public, the intimate and the political altogether.

Hoffmann’s images emulated and modeled the rhetoric of amateur photography, of how individual “*Knipser*” (amateur photographers) in particular since the second half of the 1920s had increasingly come to document their lives with the help of snapshots and even to center private activities around the presence of a camera and photographer. As importantly, Hoffmann’s images—with their stress on postures of focused alertness; on the pleasures of seemingly unmediated, yet framed looking; on acts of visual transport and wondrous experiences of being touched by the presence of the Führer—sought to shape attitudes and modes of perception that corresponded deeply with how photographic cameras were believed to change the modern subject’s being in, and impact on, the world. Although Hoffmann himself surely had no desire to give up on his monopoly to deliver Hitler in the form of a mechanical reproduction, his private images of the Führer aspired to no less than retraining the human sensorium. Their ambition was to enlist the value of photography, of a camera’s artificial eye, for the sake of mobilizing

the nation; their task was to propagate photography as a mode of action and sensory perception, as a shared form of practice. If properly pursued by each and every German, that practice could do at least as much to consolidate the national community as the experience at a party rally, the formation of the crowd through architectural projects, or the militarization of society at all levels of social interaction. Although the concept of fascist aesthetics may have lost both its descriptive and its critical purchase, Hoffmann's work thus remains emblematic. By means of the above reading we can better understand not only what photography did and aspired to do under conditions of Nazi rule, but also the uncanny echoes today between how fascism and our own image-driven times embed technological media in processes of physical and affective mobilization.

Notes

- 1 On the branding of the private and domestic aspects of Hitler's persona during and after the 1932 election campaign, see Despina Stratigakos, *Hitler at Home* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 149–60.
- 2 On Hoffmann's role as Hitler's photographer, see Rudolf Herz, *Hoffmann und Hitler: Fotografie als Medium des Führer-Mythos* (Munich: Klinkhardt and Biermann, 1994); on the adulation of Hitler's body in general and his face in particular, see Claudia Schmölders, *Hitler's Face: The Biography of an Image*, trans. Adrian Daub (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).
- 3 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," in *Selected Writings, Vol. 4: 1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 251–83; also Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," in *Under the Sign of Saturn: Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), 73–105.
- 4 Lutz Koepnick, "Face/Off: Hitler and Weimar Political Photography," in *Visual Culture in Twentieth-Century Germany: Text as Spectacle*, ed. Gail Finney (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 216.
- 5 Ernst Jünger, "Photography and the 'Second Consciousness': An Excerpt from 'On Pain,'" trans. Joel Agee, in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913–1940*, ed. Christopher Phillips (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art/Aperture, 1989), 207–10; Helmut Lethen, *Cool Conduct: The Culture of Distance in Weimar Germany*, trans. Don Reneau (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Brigitte Werneburg, "Die veränderte Welt: Der gefährliche anstelle des entscheidenden Augenblicks: Ernst Jüngers Überlegungen zur Fotografie," *Fotogeschichte* 51 (1994): 51–67.
- 6 See in particular Bernd Hüppauf, "Emptying the Gaze: Framing Violence through the Viewfinder," *New German Critique* 72 (1997): 3–44.

- 7 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images malgré tout* (Paris: Les Edition de Minuit, 2003). See also Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); and Lutz Koepnick, "Photographs and Memories," *South Central Review* 21, no. 1 (spring 2004): 94–129.
- 8 For the history of amateur photography, see Timm Starl, *Knipser: Die Bildgeschichte der privaten Fotografie in Deutschland und Österreich von 1880 bis 1980* (Munich: Koehler and Amelang, 1995); Rolf Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen: Fotografie im NS-Staat* (Hamburg: Philo Fine Arts, 2003); Frances Guerin, *Through Amateur Eyes: Film and Photography in Nazi Germany* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Maiken Umbach, "Selfhood, Place, and Ideology in German Photo Albums, 1933–1945," *Central European History* 48 (2015): 335–65.
- 9 Guerin, *Through Amateur Eyes*, 11–12.
- 10 Heinrich Hoffmann, *Hitler Was My Friend*, trans. R. H. Stevens (London: Burke, 1955), 42.
- 11 Heinrich Hoffmann, *Hitler wie ihn keiner kennt: 100 Bilddokumente aus dem Leben des Führers* (Berlin: Zeitgeschichte-Verlag, 1941), xi.
- 12 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 93.
- 13 See, among many others, David Bathrick, "Making a National Family with the Radio: The Nazi Wunschkonzert," *Modernism/Modernity* 4, no. 1 (January 1997): 115–27.
- 14 See, among others, Peter Fritzsche, *A Nation of Fliers: German Aviation and the Popular Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 133–220.
- 15 Carl Schmitt, *Staat, Bewegung, Volk: Die Dreigliederung der politischen Einheit* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1933), 42.
- 16 Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958).
- 17 Joseph Goebbels, "Eröffnungsrede 'Die Kamera': Ausstellung für Fotografie Druck und Reproduktion, Berlin 1933," reprinted in Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen*, 319–20.
- 18 Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen*, 117–41.
- 19 Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).
- 20 Martin Jay, "Can Photographs Lie? Reflections on a Perennial Anxiety," *Critical Studies* 2 (2016): 6–19.