

## **A Neo-Nazi in Auschwitz. A Psychoanalytic Reconstruction of a Documentary Film on Right-Wing Extremism**

*Hans-Dieter König*

**Key words:** Anti-Semitism, authoritarianism, depth-hermeneutics, Frankfurt School, hermeneutics, post-modernism, psychoanalysis as a method of qualitative research, right-wing extremism, theory of socialisation

**Abstract:** Depth hermeneutics—as developed by LORENZER within the framework of the Frankfurt School's program of critical social research—represents a methodological and systematic approach to psychoanalytic research. The new ways and means by which a neo-Nazi utilises his visit to the Auschwitz Memorial to arouse further anti-Semitism are to be investigated by means of a scene-by-scene interpretation of his filmed appearances—first as a good-mooded tourist, then as a volatile right-wing extremist, as competent expert, and as rebellious adolescent. The aim is to demonstrate how the meaning of these role plays develops within the tension between a manifest and a latent significance. The results of this process of interpretations form the basis for clarifying the question: what patterns of socialisation are used by this "yuppie-neo-Nazi" to fascinate particularly adolescents?? In conclusion, the way in which through his post-modern film-production the producer turns Auschwitz into a test-ground where the neo-Nazi can do "a merry dance on the volcano", is analysed

### **Table of Contents**

- [1. The Film and the Psychoanalytic Method of "Depth Hermeneutics"](#)
- [2. Reconstruction of the Film Sequences Arranged by Althans in Auschwitz](#)
  - [2.1 The tourist enjoying an outing](#)
  - [2.2 The neo-Nazi's indignant denial of industrial mass-murder](#)
  - [2.3 The expert who knows everything](#)
  - [2.4 The defiant adolescent](#)
  - [2.5 Between arrogance and shame. How the self-staged play of a neo-Nazi collapses and is reanimated](#)
  - [2.6 The relationship between manifest and latent meaning in Althans' self-enacted scenes](#)
- [3. Understanding the Resume of this Film According to the Theory of Socialisation](#)
  - [3.1 The authoritarian mode of socialisation](#)
  - [3.2 The consumer-oriented mode of socialisation](#)
  - [3.3 The mode of socialisation influenced by the media](#)
- [4. Dancing on a Volcano. Althans' Self-Staged Role Play, Produced by Bonengel in the Cultural Atmosphere of Post-Modernism](#)

[Acknowledgement](#)

[References](#)

[Author](#)

[Citation](#)

## 1. The Film and the Psychoanalytic Method of "Depth Hermeneutics"

No other German documentary film has attracted so much attention as the film *Occupation Neo-Nazi*. In this film Wilfried Bonengel intended to present an up-to-date picture of the neo-Nazi scene which has a world-wide media-network at its disposal and promulgates a new type of leader-image—as exemplified by Althans,<sup>1</sup> from Munich, who appears "in the guise of a modern yuppie" (Kölner Stadtanzeiger, Nov. 30th, 1993). Not only by his engaging and refined outward appearance but also by his eloquence and intelligence Althans makes a great impression socially. After the Jewish Central Advisory Board in Germany brought charges against the producers because the film glorified National Socialism (it was sponsored and financed by four Federal States of Germany), there arose vehement disputes within all political parties. Finally the film was taken up as a court issue. The prosecuting attorneys in Frankfurt prohibited the showing of the film and confiscated copies because its content "is void of any commentary whatsoever about Althans' neo-Nazi statements and contains no indication of a dissociation from his views" (FR, Dec. 8th, 1993); on the other hand, the prosecuting attorneys in Berlin ordered the case to be dismissed because in their view the film was a "critical-realistic portrayal of present-day neo-Nazi aspirations" and developed—"through artistic means, through the presentation of opposing views, and also outwardly through the choice of the title—a dissociation from the main figure, Althans" (FAZ, Dec. 24th, 1993). [1]

The film is neither to be examined as an illustration of one manifestation of political enlightenment which utterly fails in its intent, nor is it to serve as a psychological analysis of Althans' psychopathology. Rather, two different goals have been envisaged. On the one hand the film, with its theatrical portrayal of the doings of a neo-Nazi, is to be understood in its intention of diagnosing our current age as a symptom of a new historical awareness which has developed in recent years. On the other hand we are concerned with the methodological and methodical problem of analysing historical consciousness with the assistance of a hermeneutical method, though its analytical power and interpretative success have thus far been too little recognised by cultural studies. The treatment of this film thereby also serves as a methodical contribution towards the attempt to newly define the relationship between psychoanalysis and sociology. [2]

The history of industrial mass-murder, as symbolised by Auschwitz, is treated in this film in a new way; this is to be investigated through an interpretation of Althans' concrete appearances in Auschwitz, which build the main body and are the most vehemently debated part of the film (Part 2). The results of this new process of understanding constitute the basis for clarifying theoretically the question, what sort of a new model is this person standing before us in the form of a "yuppie-Nazi"? Here we are involved with the way this neo-Nazi attempts to

---

1 On 29.9.1995 the Berlin Regional Superior Court "sentenced Bela Althans to three and a half years imprisonment for racial discrimination and revilement of the State (FAZ 30.8.95, p.5). The Court substantiated its sentence on the basis of remarks made by the accused in the film "Occupation neo-Nazi", and included in the prison sentence the judicial decision of the Munich Regional Superior Court which "had sentenced Althans in Dec. 1994 to one and a half years imprisonment for circulation of video-films with neo-Nazistic contents" (ibid.).

fascinate his audience by taking recourse to typical modes of social adaptation (Part 3). To conclude, an investigation of the following points is to be undertaken: what influence does the producer have upon Althans' appearances in the course of the film, and, what is the nature of the historical consciousness in which the film has been produced and unfolds its effects (Part 4). [3]

The sequences in the film are studied by using a psychoanalytical method of cultural research developed within the framework of cultural studies in the Frankfurt School. ADORNO again and again made use of psychoanalysis as a method of research. For example, he utilised psychoanalysis for investigating the "authoritarian personality"—persons who are prone to anti-democratic agitation—as well as for investigating the techniques employed by the fascists in their anti-Semitic propaganda. Further, HORKHEIMER and ADORNO (1947) took psychoanalysis as a basis for analysing the culture industry, which, as he described it, manipulates individuals by appealing to their unconscious. However, ADORNO (1970) refused to interpret works of art psychoanalytically: as he pointed out in the initial pages of his "Ästhetische Theorie", psychoanalysis commits the mistake of analysing art as if it were nothing other than the interpretation of a patient's associations. He had three main objections to the way psychoanalysis was traditionally applied to art:

- First, psychoanalysis psychologises the work of art by putting it on a level with the artist's "daydreams" and thus considering it as belonging to his inner world;
- Second, psychoanalysis pathologises the work of art by equating it with the case history of a neurotic: works of art—just as a patient's statements—are seen as symptomatic phenomena resulting from repressed desires and thus manifesting particular psychopathological forms;
- Third, psychoanalysis overlooks the social meaning of a work of art; it ignores what "the product itself" means and that it has a collectively fascinating effect on the basis of its uniqueness. [4]

In retrospect we can say that ADORNO's criticism laid the foundation for LORENZER's (1986) psychoanalytical project of cultural research based on an understanding of FREUDian practise and theory illuminated by social science<sup>2</sup> (cf. LORENZER 1974, 1981). According to LORENZER, the traditional application of psychoanalysis is naïve because it ignores the methodological problem arising through its now being applied to a new field namely to the field of cultural research. The psychoanalytical concepts developed in and tailored to practical therapeutic experience cannot simply be transposed to cultural life, this being a completely different area of research. [5]

If we wish to develop the FREUDian theory systematically for the study of civilization—thus avoid subsuming straightaway the dramatic course of interaction arranged in a text or in a series of pictures under fragments of psychoanalytical

2 I have tried to answer the question how does depth hermeneutics correspond to the methodology and method developed by ADORNO (1957, 1969a, 1969b) for the field of cultural studies of the Frankfurt School, in KÖNIG 1996, 2000.

theory—then we are obliged to take up the quite advanced method of therapeutic psychoanalysis and develop it still further through our experience in the new area of research; subsequently, an independent theory of culture may be outlined. Accordingly, depth hermeneutics proceeds from the consideration that methodological steps are necessary for modifying the method of psychoanalytical hermeneutics—as developed in therapeutic practice and given the name "scenic understanding" (LORENZER 1970)—in such a way that in accordance with practical research in the field of cultural studies it becomes suited to make new discoveries there. [6]

Depth hermeneutics may be described as a psychoanalytic method of cultural research that opens up the narrative content of pictures and texts by examining their effect on the persons who have experienced them. Here we are concerned not only with natural protocol reports such as interviews or group discussions but also with artistic protocols such as literature, films, or other works of art. Analysis is directed towards conscious and unconscious impulses working into the life plans portrayed in such a text or series of pictures, as staged in the interaction between actors. It assumes an ambiguity in the way social acts take place; correspondingly, the meaning of interactions unfolds in the tension between a manifest and a latent significance. On the level of manifest significance, the actors interpret intentions and expectations, rules and norms in the medium of a system of collective symbols. On the level of latent significance, interaction comes to expression through unconscious motives which an individual has repressed in the course of his biography due to social pressure or which he has suppressed in a momentary crisis; however, the socially offensive impulses in a subject's life-plan do assert themselves effectively in behaviour, but behind his back. I want to illustrate this by referring to a FREUDian slip described by FREUD (1901) in his "Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens". Imagine now an employee who invites his colleagues to drink a glass of champagne to their superior ("Let's cheer to the boss!")—quite evidently with the intention of congratulating him. That would be the manifest meaning of this verbal action. To be sure, the Freudian slip committed by the employee contradicts his verbally articulated intention, he says "Let's jeer to the boss!" His words reveal what is going on between him and his boss on a latent level of meaning. It is possible that at the same time not only the employee's individual unconscious but also the social unconscious of the entire group of colleagues comes to expression in this Freudian slip. If the other employees proved to be embarrassed by this slip of the tongue, then it would be the personal unconscious of the one employee which manifests itself in the mistake, and if an interview were carried out, one might possibly determine that the employee is bound up in a conflict of authority with his boss which has grown so acute due to an unresolved infantile conflict with the father. If, on the other hand, the colleagues were to show sympathy for the employee and find malicious delight in the mistake, then we could infer that this involves the social unconscious within an organisation: through his Freudian slip, the employee verbalises something which his colleagues sense as well but themselves do not dare to express, since the irritable boss tolerates neither questions nor criticism. These hypothetical thoughts illustrate how depth hermeneutics systematically reconstructs the astonishing inconsistencies and contradictions which obtain in

scenes of interaction, and aspires thereby to uncover the latent meaning camouflaged by the manifest meaning. [7]

Let us ask: how can depth hermeneutics contribute to the development of a methodically controlled approach to the life plans that are held back on the level of latent significance and inaccessible to the subject's verbal reflections? To this we may answer as follows. Depth hermeneutics relies on group interpretations. Participants expose themselves to a text, for example, which is to be analysed, and the depth hermeneutical assumption is that in the group, too, interaction unfolds within the tension between a manifest and a latent meaning. Whereas the cognitive communication about the text's meaning is connected with the manifest level, the emotional understanding of the text is concerned with the latent level of meaning. What do we mean by this? The latent meaning of a quoted passage evades rational understanding; for this reason it is accessible only when the seminar participants let themselves in on the text emotionally. They take on—not only cognitively but also emotionally—the roles which the text offers. They are requested to let associations arise freely; this means that by engaging their imagination, the participants open up a quite practical approach to the vivid experience contained in the text. When they picture this interactive experience arranged in the text as a "scene" unfolding before their inner eye, they then sense "what the text is doing with them". On the basis of this way of experiencing the text, participants in the seminar bring forth the most diverse versions. The confusing scenes of interaction direct the interpreter's suspended attention to discontinuities and inconsistencies. They constitute key scenes because they open up access to a level of latent meaning. Therefore confusions are cognitive and affective reactions to scenes of interaction which are contradictory and inconsistent. As the confusing scenes of interaction serve to alienate or bewilder, they open up a new version which contradicts the versions arising from a simply routine process of text comprehension. [8]

Thus, to begin with, associations and confusions—based on the text and verbalised within the group—open the way for understanding how the interaction of the actors unfolds in its concrete pictorial-scenic form. The process of interpretation begins with the understanding of individual scenes: those that show a structural similarity even if they are to be found in a completely different nexus of action in the text. The scenes of interaction drawn into relation with one another are then grouped into various scenic complexes of action. These different scenic sequences are then compared and combined with one another until they are then welded into a single scenic configuration which illuminates the whole. The process of scenic interpretation may be considered as concluded when the manifest and also latent meaning of the scenically developed acts in the drama can be defined in a convincing and comprehensible way. [9]

In the attempt to gain a comprehension of the text, the participants may make use of theoretical suppositions instead of their own practical life experience, or vice versa; what matters most is that the process of scenic interpretation takes place in everyday language, for this alone is suited to grasp the interaction in its pictorial-scenic form. When the process of scenic interpretation has been

concluded, a second step is taken. This concerns the theoretical understanding of the case structure. Here, the theoretical foundations of psychoanalysis and cultural science provide insights which help us to standardise the case structure and to answer the question as to which general conclusions may be drawn from the reconstructed case study. Here I shall break off the description of the method<sup>3</sup> now, in order to proceed to the application of depth hermeneutics to the field of psychoanalytical media research. [10]

## **2. Reconstruction of the Film Sequences Arranged by Althans in Auschwitz**

28 years old, Althans appears in Auschwitz as a self-confident and nonchalant young man wearing a T-shirt, jeans, and sunglasses. He augments this personal façade by assuming various roles whose significance evolves in the tension between a manifest and a latent meaning, as we see below. [11]

### **2.1 The tourist enjoying an outing**

The first theatrical performance instigated by Althans in Auschwitz is given its form through the setting of barracks, observation towers and tall trees, among which we observe Althans wandering along in a good mood. As he arrives at the main gate, above which the infamous words are to be read : "Work liberates", he utters softly, "This is Auschwitz, the base camp" (AUST et al. 1995, p.27). He does not say this with any seriousness but rather in a casual and indifferent way. Thereby he signals his feelings that Auschwitz offers no reason for grief. Instead, he attempts to awaken the impression that there is really no difference between this former extermination camp and any other visitors' attraction. Through his cheerful, easy-going manner Althans emphasizes the fact that he is undertaking a guided tour, and consequently he heads straight for a newsstand, where he purchases a book—to be sure, not in order to acquire information about Auschwitz but rather to amuse himself. For, as he says, the book "will give me something to laugh about on the way back" (p.28). Thus, this is Althans' aim in Auschwitz: to be entertained—the same aim he strives towards with the American whom he meets there, who vehemently opposes his neo-Nazi slogans. [12]

"I'm just gonna leave now", he declares towards the end of his confrontation with the American (p.32), "I don't want to wait around here any longer". He adds apathetically, "I've got to scam—otherwise it'll turn my stomach here" (p.33). Although Althans has purposely taken up to visit this memorial, the victims of the holocaust do not exist for him. What he does or doesn't do there, only involves himself: he argues with the American only as long as it amuses him, and in the moment he gets fed up with the discussion he simply turns his back on him and leaves. In this way, too, he transmits to the movie-goers the message, "I'm here in Auschwitz 'just for fun'". [13]

---

3 The method is explicated in KÖNIG (1997, 2001, 2002).

The visit to Auschwitz begins as a tourist excursion and ends as such, too. For, after returning to Munich, Althans shows his comrades with pleasure the slides he has taken on his photo-safari. The extent to which he enjoys this is revealed by the joke he makes while describing proudly how he abandoned the official guided tour and went off to investigate things on his own. He discovered a swimming pool in the process, and this is for him concrete proof of the harmlessness of Auschwitz. He says, "Most certainly this wasn't for the prisoners so they could play water polo with crocodiles, as is assumed, but, well, so that they could go swimming in summer when it got hot" (p.35). The common view that Auschwitz was the "most atrocious extermination camp of all times" (p.37), is thus refuted by Althans' intimation here that it would indeed be absurd to think that the Jews had had to battle there like Roman gladiators for life or death against wild animals. He thereby ridicules Auschwitz by comparing it with a gag that could appear in the comic-world of GOSCINNY and UDERZO. The amusing content, however, only makes sense within the framework of the latter, for even though violence is everywhere in this fictional world, the gladiators escape with their lives through the last-minute intervention of Asterix and Obelisk, who give the Romans a beating they will never forget. Thus Althans' joke about water polo games with crocodiles gives once more a cynical picture of Auschwitz which he paints for himself, further jesting that here we have "a Disneyland for Eastern Europe" (p.32). [14]

We may summarise the manifest meaning of this role play involving tourists by saying that Althans desecrates the Auschwitz memorial through his playing the role of a tourist who does not take this place seriously but instead makes stupid, cynical jokes about it. Since each and every difference between a memorial centre and a tourist excursion destination is levelled out—the monstrosity of genocide stands on the same level as a banal comic book—the horror associated with Auschwitz vanishes. The viewer finds his attention directed instead to a person play-acting as a tourist having great fun in Auschwitz. [15]

Certain confusing elements open up an access to the latent meaning of the film:

- Upon Althans' discovery of the swimming pool it is at first disconcerting to accept his presupposition—expressed in words of delight—"that theoretically in the past, from this diving board here, prisoners were diving head-first into the water" (p.37). By declaring that the prisoners "theoretically" had been allowed to swim here, he admits that they did not do that in practice. In this way Althans reveals that he himself does not believe what he says but rather unravels an experiment in thought just for fun.
- Equally confusing is the joke Althans made while assuring the owner of the newsstand that he had returned the right amount of change. Althans tells the Pole that he doesn't have to count the change so meticulously and justifies this by jesting "That would be great—to be cheated here in Auschwitz!" (p.28). By saying this he intimates that such a swindle would actually be inconceivable at this memorial site. [16]

Both of these assumptions give evidence of the fact that Althans is quite well aware of Auschwitz's significance. But he is acting out the role of a tourist who discovers nothing in particular and is just having a good time. For he ignores the truth and aims at suppressing the feelings of grief connected with the commemoration of the holocaust victims. Thus, through his play-acting as a tourist, Althans succeeds in banishing the "monstrosity" embodied in Auschwitz (ADORNO 1967, p.85) to the latent level of the performance's meaning. In both assumptions the suppressed element resurfaces by means of the jokes which are rooted in them; this is particularly emphasised in the concrete picture involving the idea that the Jews could hardly have played water polo with crocodiles in the swimming pool. No matter how well Althans' joke here succeeds in ridiculing Auschwitz, what he rejects—the Nazi beasts who tortured their victims in the death cells until they were swallowed by the crematoriums—breaks through in the metaphor of man-eating crocodiles. [17]

## **2.2 The neo-Nazi's indignant denial of industrial mass-murder**

Althans stages another scene in the crematorium itself. As the sequence begins, we observe how the camera's eye glides along sinister and gloomy walls in the dimly lit gas chamber. A deathly silence dominates. Then the camera leads us into the room where the furnaces are located; here Althans starts speaking loudly with an American and reproaching him in fluent English. "You don't have the right to talk like this, because [here] I'm not one of those people whose forefathers are guilty of [committing] what they say has gone on here. That's right, my forefathers weren't guilty, that's right." (AUST et al. 1995, p.28). By breaking the silence prevailing in the crematorium, Althans infringes upon the ritual ceremony observed by the visitors, to commemorate the dead in silence. By shouting at those who are contemplatively reflecting on the enormity of this industrialised mass-murder, Althans not only attacks the visitors to the memorial site but also mocks the several hundred thousand Jews who were tortured, beaten and shot to death, gassed and cremated. [18]

In this barbaric scene, in which Althans—just like the skinheads who knock over Jewish gravestones—desecrates the site with the underlying aim of wiping out this memorial of the holocaust; and here its atrocious dimensions are mirrored in Althans' hate toward the Jews, disguised in his cool and calculated agitation. We observe a denial of the truth "that the practice of industrial genocide was a German affair" (BUDE 1992, p.8) as well as a denial of the moral responsibility for this, which the German people are bound to bear. Althans attempts to gloss over this by complaining about impossible conditions: about the taxes he has to pay which supposedly help to finance the spread of information about Auschwitz. As the American disgustedly objects to this complaint by remarking in effect that "people paid their lives [here]" and that "taxes don't matter" (p.29), Althans ignores not only the point of objection to his comparison of unlike elements but also begins a new attack without the slightest compunctions. Remonstrating with the American he says sarcastically

"People like you are telling me I'm a neo-Nazi only because I wonder [about things]. [...] You know, you're the [sort of] person who's able to burn people [only] because they have a different opinion. You are one of the people who are responsible for that" (p.29) [19]

Althans' thus accusing him of being a potential murderer renders the American absolutely speechless. [20]

Some of the visitors shout at Althans to stop. But these efforts are useless; they effect only the contrary. The neo-Nazi, dominating the scene, grows more and more heated and works himself into a storm of moral indignation, exclaiming that "millions of people go on tours here and see only dummies and false displays. I refuse to accept the lies being spread around here" (p.30). Neither the American nor any of the other visitors to the crematory are an equal match for Althans, and his crazy accusations lead to an utter confusion. For, in his complaint that only lies are being spread at Auschwitz, Althans (indirectly) accuses the Memorial's directors of something which he himself is similarly guilty of, namely of denying the Nazi atrocities. And, in his accusation that visitors there are only given a false picture, Althans reproaches the directors for doing the very same thing he has done: indeed, he reduces the crematory to nothing more than a stage for his appearance as a neo-Nazi. [21]

Thus, apparent is Althans' destruction of the atmosphere of silent contemplation in commemoration of the victims at Auschwitz. Because he plays the "big man" who puts himself above the ethical order of the world, who brusquely interrupts his listeners and serves them up with phony, rabble-rousing slogans presented as actual truth, he executes verbally the same kind of violence in Auschwitz with which the Jews were in fact exterminated. The scenes thus portray the scandalous stage-appearance of a neo-Nazi in Auschwitz, who—by denying the fact of industrial genocide—goes about mocking the victims and survivors of the holocaust. [22]

Conspicuous is Althans response to the visitors' emphatic reprimands: he says, "I'm not going to keep on taking the blame for things I haven't done" (p.29). His words seem strange, because of course—since Althans belongs to the 1989 generation—he cannot individually be judged guilty of any crime. The vehemence with which he defends his innocence arouses the suspicion that on a latent level of significance feelings of guilt do indeed weigh down on Althans, which he strives to combat. And thus it is, in fact. For, by explaining that his "forefathers" were not "guilty" of committing the crimes "supposedly" carried out in Auschwitz, he automatically turns into an accomplice of the aggressors with whom he proudly identifies himself, corresponding to his self-image as "orthodox Nazi". [23]

The theatricals Althans stages with his raging attacks in the crematory thereby become understandable: among the gas chamber and furnaces, he is directly confronted by the traces of all the atrocities committed by the Nazis, and precisely because of this Althans comes under pressure in two ways: First, the gas chamber and the furnaces place his ideology in question, stylising as it does

in a fully deluded way the German people as innocent victims of a world-wide Jewish conspiracy. Second, Althans' conscience is struck by the deathly silence pervading the crematory as well as by the solemnity of the visitors there, who are occupied with thoughts about the industrial mass-murder and its consequences. As mentioned, we are concerned here with guilt on an individual level, since Althans acquits the Nazis of their horrendous deeds. By insisting on his innocence (and this involves the manifest level of the scene's significance), Althans achieves two results:

- First, as an "accomplice" of the murderers of the Third Reich he succeeds in banishing to the latent level of significance the individual guilt-feelings which arise.
- Second, Althans discredits the subject of German collective guilt by insisting on his own personal innocence. For he utilises feelings of guilt to serve his aims of political agitation, in which he as a German rebels against having to share in the collective guilt which the German people took on through the industrial mass-murder—which he simply denies. Althans then frees himself from the moral pressure of having to ward off individual as well as collective guilt by flailing wildly about with strong verbal attacks against the visitors to the memorial site. This deliberate burst of anger reaches its climax in his imaginary fear of persecution, believing that the American would most like to burn him up. This complex of scenes reveals how Althans, by turning the real circumstances upside-down, wards off the gruesome idea that in Auschwitz more than a million people were gassed and cremated. He identifies himself with the innocent victims of the Nazi atrocities, and in the same sense he declares that the Jews are to take the blame—they, as agents of an insidious conspiracy, are the ones to assume responsibility. [24]

As a result, the grief towards the victims is rejected by means of a melancholically tainted self-pity, accordingly Althans takes up a role of being persecuted himself. He expresses this at the outset of the sequence in Auschwitz thus: "Look—I know all this almost exactly like one of the prisoners who used to be here" (p.27). In his anti-Semitic appearance in the crematory he shows his outrage—that the memorial site only seems to be a mock display, the holocaust only a lie, and the American a potential murderer. Here he gets so worked up in his role as a neo-Nazi persecuted by his enemies, that this scene becomes a way of taking revenge on those who have done wrong to him. [25]

### **2.3 The expert who knows everything**

When the other crematory visitors intervene in the dispute with the American, attempting to stop Althans by shouting "Shut up!" (p.29), the latter instigates a third scene. "Where is the smoke going? Where is the smoke going?", he repeatedly retorts to his critics (p.29). In this way he implies that the cremation of the Jews was technically not at all possible because of the lack of an appropriate construction for the release of smoke. One of the visitors asks him angrily if he has ever learned anything—to which Althans replies: "Of course I've

learned something. I *have* learned. How come the gas chamber has three doors?" (p.29). The furious reply, "It's outrageous, the way you're carrying on here!" leads Althans to the remark, "You don't even know how Cyclone-B works!" (p.29). He refers to the fact that hydrogen-cyanide turns bricks into a Prussian blue colour, and if that were so, why don't the gas chamber walls show any traces of this colour? [26]

No matter how aggravated the visitors become at Althans' behaviour, he proves to be master of the situation: he shows off as the expert with a great store of technical knowledge at his disposal and who puts opponents of lesser knowledge in their place. Althans, by referring to the indisputable architectural reality of the crematory as well as to physical laws and chemical formulae, bases his comments on architectural facts as well as on the authority of scientifically founded facts taken as irrefutable. In addition he upholds the viewpoint that his opponents only need to use their "common sense" to understand these facts. [27]

The manifest meaning of this role play involving technical understanding and expert knowledge is that Auschwitz is destroyed by the sophisticated use of technical-instrumental arguments. What is so confusing about the emphasis on "simple facts" and "common sense" in this role play? We grasp the meaning of this question as soon as we realise the discrepancies which Althans ignores in his role. For precisely in the moment the bewildered visitors begin to react at being confronted with the traces of monstrosities which completely go beyond the limits of their comprehension, Althans starts playing the expert who reduces the incomprehensibility of the holocaust to a few simple questions—so uncomplicated that anyone's "ordinary common sense" may answer them. In this way Althans succeeds in suppressing the feeling of horror arising at the thought of Auschwitz by banishing this monstrous chapter of history—which escapes all attempts at understanding—to the scene's latent level of significance. Thus it is possible for the manifest meaning of this role-play to dissolve itself into the weightlessness with which Althans reduces Auschwitz to a few technical questions capable of being solved quite simply by an expert. [28]

## 2.4 The defiant adolescent

The fourth role play is based on Althans' behaving like an adolescent. "It's totally irrational" to maintain that "I once went about such things in Bergen-Belsen," he exclaims (p.28), and these words of his signalise that he does know his way about and considers camps such as Auschwitz to be easily manageable "things" which only draw forth his weary smile. Moreover, in characterising Auschwitz as a "gigantic piece of bull-shit" (p.28), he carries on like an adolescent who refuses to be impressed with anything the adults wish to convey to him. Reverting to the subcultural jargon of adolescence, he rather undermines what the older generation holds as sacred, transforming it into excrement to be done away with. [29]

Adolescent-like is also the way he flies off the handle when one of the visitors demands that he leave the place at once. "Aren't you getting a bit fresh?" he replies aggressively and adds provocatively, "You should leave, if you've got

problems!" (p.29). Thus Althans takes up the role as adolescent rebelling against older people and having fun provoking them by infringing on their moral principles. He expresses emphatically, "I am a young man, and I'm not going to let myself be blamed any longer for things I haven't done" (p.29). [30]

The manifest meaning of this fourth role play is that Althans plays up this dispute in the crematory to a conflict of generations. Because he slips into the role of an adolescent who has his own opinion about Auschwitz, the older people appear as "those of yesteryear", living in the past and not worth taking seriously, still deeply moved as they are even fifty years after Auschwitz and the holocaust. By responding to the American's arguments with the words, "I'm not waiting around any longer, I want to get out of here—otherwise I'll get sick" (p.33), Althans expresses the younger generation's discontent as well; this generation is tired of repeatedly being lectured to, when it comes to the subject of Nazi atrocities. [31]

Nevertheless, Althans' remark about wanting to leave the place because he would otherwise grow ill, is conspicuous in its contradiction of the carefree, untroubled nature of the role he actually wishes to portray. Thereby it opens up an approach to the latent meaning of this scene. His remark, Auschwitz could turn his stomach, points to the effort it costs him to suppress all the feelings that arise there. Thus Althans is enraged at the visitors to the crematory and at the American in particular because they all bring an emotional affectedness to bear which he himself –on the basis of his play-acting an insolent, cool and unemotional adolescent—cannot afford to show. [32]

### **2.5 Between arrogance and shame. How the self-staged play of a neo-nazi collapses and is reanimated**

Althans' annoyance in this scene is a reaction as well to his second argument with the young American. After the vehement outburst within the crematory walls, Althans runs into him again, this time outside. In the course of this second verbal exchange Althans argues vehemently that in Auschwitz there weren't any Jews exterminated—"they all survived" and are now "taking money from Germany" to make "propaganda against us"—to which the American bitterly replies, "[So we're supposed to think it's] the great conspiracy of the Jews against the whole rest of the world. Is that right?" (p.31) Althans confirms this ironic remark in all seriousness, leading the irritated American to ask if he knows anything at all about "brainwashing". Althans nods and gives as an example the harm afflicted on the Germans through the Jewish influence of the media. As the American, unperturbed, counters with his conviction that Althans himself is suffering from brainwashing, the latter rejoins self-confidently, "I am from the country where humanism was born!" (p.31). In this manner Althans blatantly expresses his inability to feel any kind of shame in the face of the Nazi atrocities as well as of his anti-Jewish agitation and that instead, quite to the contrary, he is proud of being a German, even here in Auschwitz. [33]

Achieving nothing by argumentation, the American angrily requests the neo-Nazi to remove his sun-glasses—thus calling upon him to show his true face. He

implicitly reproaches the neo-Nazi for being able to carry on with his anti-Semitic agitation only because he hides behind the façade of his boastful conduct. Althans counters by saying that he couldn't fake so much arrogance with his eyes as the American, who of course feels himself as belonging to the "chosen people". For, as Althans adds with a sneer, "I know you're a Jew" (p.32). Once again Althans turns things upside-down: he denies his own self-infatuation and arrogance—evident in his remark about how proud he feels, even here in Auschwitz, about coming from the so-called "country of poets and thinkers"—by ascribing to the American these very same attributes and thus categorising him according to the anti-Semitic, prejudiced view that every Jew considers himself better than other, non-Jews. Now the American is to be exposed as a Jew and put into chains, just as it was in the "Third Reich". [34]

The manifest meaning of this film-sequence involves the vehement quarrels between the two opponents. The American injures the neo-Nazi's self-esteem by declaring his views to be the result of a persecution-mania and brainwashing, and Althans defends himself by citing his patriotism and by then proceeding to take the offensive again in his anti-Jewish outbursts (according to him, if anyone is to be ashamed of himself, it can only be this American, who is of course a Jew himself). [35]

It is strange to observe the consequences arising upon the removal of Althans' sunglasses in the subsequent film-sequence, in which the American has disappeared from the scene. Althans, now in front of the camera, wants to prove that he has no reason to hide behind anything at all, and so he takes off his sunglasses with a triumphant grin. But then his visage turns dark; he begins to scowl, his eyes dart restlessly here and there, and he scratches his left ear, ill at ease. Through his changing expressions he reveals his loss of composure in this situation. He grows uncertain first of all because the absence of the American now prevents him from playing the role of a heated neo-Nazi who is aggravated by his adversary, and second, because his modern-style façade falls away when he no longer conceals his eyes behind sunglasses. To be sure, he does succeed in taking off his glasses with a smile after the American disappears, but as the camera looks him in the eye for a long while, he is overcome with a sense of shame—a feeling which he attempted to cover up in Auschwitz with his arrogant behaviour. He tries to regain his self-composure by changing from English to German in declaring his annoyance at all the insects swarming about: "There's too many critters flying around here, it's revolting" (p.32); he thus transposes to these his anger about having lost his composure after removing the sunglasses. The extent of his rage against the American becomes evident as we observe him looking in the direction in which the American had just been standing and hear his following words, spoken with an ironical smile: "All these lice ought to be gassed". Looking into the camera with a broad grin, he adds: "These jumping lice ... they've got to be exterminated" (p.32). [36]

Althans moral indignation about the thought that the Nazis had gassed Jews in the crematory leads him to deny this, and yet he enjoys such a fantasy of extermination as appears in this scene: the idea of eradicating the American like

vermin—just as the Nazis went about doing in regard to the Jews. In addition, no matter how strongly he had earlier denied the industrial mass-murder, in the end he drops his mask and admits—with a grin after making an anti-Semitic joke—having acquired a taste for the genocide carried out through the use of pesticides. And, no matter how much this may horrify the film-viewers, Althans nevertheless succeeds thereby in repairing the façade of the cynical "big man" which crumbled after the sunglasses were taken off. [37]

### **2.6 The relationship between manifest and latent meaning in Althans' self-enacted scenes**

Summarising the direction in which the various scenes enacted by Althans lead, we may say: manifest is the message that Auschwitz is quite a pleasant place for a neo-Nazi to visit. On this manifest level of significance the point is to demonstrate that it is possible to put an end to the process of coming to terms with the past and thus to have no reason for ill feelings in Auschwitz. For indeed, as the scene shows, as a tourist one can spend a good time there, one can get upset morally about someone of a different opinion like the American Jew or just even do anything anti-Semitic, one can talk shop here, right on the spot, about the layout of the crematorium, like an adolescent one can let off steam against the older generation; as for the rest, one can relate proudly how good it is to be a German. The presuppositions lying at the base of Althans' jokes about Auschwitz, the feelings of guilt which arise upon his visit to the crematorium and which he tries to combat, his worry about getting sick due to his visit there, as well as the feeling of shame which overtakes him when his self-important appearance as a Jew-hating Nazi weakens and crumbles, all reveal the latent meaning behind these scenes. Because it is apparently no problem for Althans to have a good time in Auschwitz, and also because of the obstinacy with which, in his moral indignation as a Nazi, he holds up his insane accusations, the latent meaning is concealed. For we may infer that the monstrous degree of moral wrong puts him to great task in his renouncing the idea of industrial mass-murder and in warding off such emotions as would be triggered by looking face-to-face at the atrocities committed by the Nazis. [38]

### **3. Understanding the Resume of this Film According to the Theory of Socialisation**

After concluding this sketch of the scenes we face the task of understanding the theoretical background of the psychoanalytically interpreted results. The fact that Althans is a brilliant actor who, like Proteus, can change from one role to another—from a high-spirited tourist to a Jew-hating neo-Nazi or from an extremely well-informed expert to a recalcitrant adolescent—reveals that he manages his visit to the memorial site by assuming various roles. This "role-identification", according to Paul PARIN (1975), represents a "mechanism of adaptation" which relieves the ego of the "permanent confrontation with its environment" (p.485) by means of an "automatic, unconsciously driven adaptation" that allows "a relatively conflict-free way of dealing with quite specific social institutions" (p.488). Althans thus avoids the danger involved in his visit to the memorial (feelings of pity, shame, or guilt

might possibly arise) by also resorting to "role-identifications" which, as PARIN illustrated, function "like a manic mechanism [...] by means of which the ego rids itself of demands otherwise valid for the Superego" (p.506). [39]

Bearing the background in mind of these different role-identifications we may ask, what sort of neo-Nazi leader does Althans embody? And for this we must include a consideration of the social situation in which this right-wing extremist appears. Quite generally speaking, in line with BECK (1986), we may aver that the destruction of traditional certainties of faith and the liberation from a particular class-based social-moral milieu leads to an individualisation of personal life-circumstances and to a pluralisation of life-styles. On the basis of this we may no longer speak of a "social character" common to all members of the social order, as Erich FROMM (1936) did. Instead, the ramification of society into various subsystems—as for example Jürgen HABERMAS (1981) has conceptualised it—results in a diversification of role-possibilities which the individual takes up simultaneously and which serve his process of socialisation in various ways. Whereas in the hierarchically organised world of labour the practice is to solve conflicts in an authoritarian manner through submission to one's superiors and by transferring aggression to subordinates, here, on the other hand, in this film and media world, we observe the tendency to act out inner and outer conflicts through self-presentations in front of an audience; the revelation of secret details of private life in talk-shows or internet illustrate this. Moreover, in the consumer world one is also socialised into a readiness to appease subjective and interpersonal conflicts through the passive-receptive enjoyment of the goods and sources of entertainment offered by the culture-industry. [40]

The fact that Althans identifies with alternating roles shows that he controls perfectly the modes of social adjustment prevailing in various subsystems of society. As we see, he presents three forms of conflict management, in which personal as well as social conflicts are overcome on an automatic-unconscious level. [41]

### **3.1 The authoritarian mode of socialisation**

In identifying with the role of an enraged neo-Nazi, Althans makes use of the authoritarian mode of socialisation in solving conflicts—a modus which appeals above all to right-wing extremists. He exclaims that if his foster father, Zündel, "were to jump off a bridge somewhere, I'd be right there to jump off straight after him" (AUST et al. 1995, p.12), and these words exemplify his unconditional obedience to an idealised authority figure. We may add here as well his blind submissiveness to Hitler as shown by his glorification of the latter's book "Mein Kampf" as a political manifesto—Althans, namely, as an "orthodox Nazi", is still convinced of its absolute validity. The authoritarian desire to compel submissive behaviour among others is expressed in the enthusiastic way he describes his followers as being "an easy lump to knead—they do everything they're told to do", no matter if it's to "stand straight", "to repeat orders" or to "do" anything else (p.23). Further, the anti-Semitism evident not only in his derision of the victims and survivors of the holocaust but also in his agitation against the Jews

altogether, documents the authority-bound tendency of turning one's feelings of aggression towards the enemy of an admired authority-figure. [42]

The questions aroused in Althans when, while standing before the crematory furnaces, he starts talking shop about the architectural lay-out of the crematory and cites physical formulae, are interesting to him because he fills libidinally "everything of a technical nature, everything that can be utilised as a 'tool'"—just in the way ADORNO (1950) defines the manipulative personality (p.334f.). "In a kind of compulsive super-realism" this narcissistically disturbed authoritarian personality tends to consider his fellow men as objects which have to be "managed (and) manipulated" (p.334), and this appears most conspicuously in his behaviour towards the American, whom he compares to a jumping louse which ought to be gassed. For the manipulative type of personality described by ADORNO, compares as a matter of course his "enemies" with "vermin" (ibid.), because, like the organisers and technologists of the Third Reich, he does not hate the Jews personally but rather views them as disturbing objects needing to be "disposed of" "in a strictly legal way" through the construction of gas chambers (p.335). [43]

### 3.2 The consumer-oriented mode of socialisation

In assuming the role of a tourist enjoying himself, or of an adolescent who wears smart clothes, Althans employs a further, contrasting mode of social adjustment. THEWELEIT (1994) reports that the students who accompanied him in watching the film were of the opinion that Althans portrayed a "type" who can be seen "running around a few times in almost any German disco" or "standing about in every other bar" (p.157). This is precisely the reason why Althans has also been characterised as a "Yuppie type" (DER SPIEGEL, April 27th, 1992, p.110, DIE TAGESZEITUNG, Nov. 8th, 1993). Not only his casual way of dressing, his sunglasses, and his stylish, short haircut but also his nonchalance, good composure and winning smile all bring to expression that he is living an up-to-date life-style—one which may be understood as the consumer-oriented way of dealing with inner and outer conflicts, in the sense described by KÖNIG (1992, p.225ff.). Here a mode of socialisation is meant which first appeared on a mass scale after employees began to augment the value of their working power by displaying "good looks" and "a friendly mien" (cf. KRACAUER 1929, p.24f., who was the first to analyse this). In exchange for immersing themselves from head to toe in their work-place, concealing their aggressive impulses behind a friendly smile, the employees are compensated in their time off by the whole range of goods offered on a mass scale by the culture industry, which promises the fulfilment of the wishes it arouses. The authoritarian type, as described by ADORNO (1950), solves everyday conflicts by subjecting himself to superiors and then transposing to inferiors the aggression thereupon arising in him; in contrast, the consumption-oriented type solves his daily problems by appeasing them with consumer goods—precisely the process of repressive desublimation described by MARCUSE (1964).<sup>4</sup> The consumer-oriented mode of socialisation thus signifies that within

4 MARCUSE (1964) thinks that the repressive desublimation refers to a new version of the authoritative personality. This concept is not convincing. As I have tried to show (cf. KÖNIG

the framework of a liberalised moral code, sexuality is lived out to the extreme in just the same matter-of-course way as aggressiveness is concealed behind the permanently upheld façade of friendliness. [44]

Thus, Althans banishes the danger of being overcome with horror in Auschwitz by yielding to a consumer-oriented way of dealing with this memorial of the holocaust: taking up the role as a "New Wave Twen" (THEWELEIT 1994, p.157), he puts on a grin "as slippery as a fish" and proceeds to saunter casually through the buildings in a good mood, looking with pleasure at everything. In doing this he signals through gestures and mimicry that he is resolved to enjoy Auschwitz as a sightseeing tour. The fact that he purchases a book not for its information but rather for the entertainment it provides, likewise reveals a consumption-oriented conduct toward Auschwitz. The cynical joke, too, about the Jews' hardly having been able to play water-polo in the swimming pool with crocodiles, represents a further consumption-oriented way of solving conflicts, for in this case the pleasure in going to a swimming pool, the fun of a ball game, the detour to a zoo, as well as reading a comic book all serve as the standard by which the Memorial's value is measured. [45]

To be sure, Althans' consumer-oriented approach in solving problems is visible not only in connection with the inner conflicts which arise upon his visit to the memorial but also with the political question about the way Auschwitz should be dealt with. By disrespectfully sauntering through the grounds of this concentration camp and showing his ire at the visitors because of the shame and guilt they bring to bear, Althans offers an alternative to the strenuous way the older generation deals with Auschwitz—described by MITSCHERLICH and MITSCHERLICH (1967) as a neurotic solution by which the confrontation with the past, weighed down by feelings of shame and guilt, is avoided and subjected to *repression*. To be exact, if one were to agree with Althans in remodelling the past not coped with, which Auschwitz calls to mind, on the foundations of a *perverse* re-evaluation of all values, then one can get along with the memorial site in a consumption-oriented manner. The war generation was accustomed to only speak of Auschwitz hesitantly and with a sense of horror, it being the reminder of Nazi genocide. Now, Althans makes of the memorial a stage for acting out a grandiose, self-produced drama in which he triumphs over the very same past which has only heavily burdened many of his countrymen. The scenes portraying Althans' relaxed stroll through Auschwitz thus intimate that the best way of dealing with the holocaust is simply to avoid all painful and injurious confrontation with the theme, and Auschwitz itself one can take lightly—for, despite everything, one can have a good time there. [46]

### 3.3 The mode of socialisation influenced by the media

A third mode of socialisation is evident in the form in which Althans solves conflicts by making use of media-effects in his appearances in Auschwitz. Identifying first with the roles of tourist and neo-Nazi and then with those of expert

---

1992), the repressive desublimation can be described more pervasively by a consumer-oriented mode of socialisation.

and adolescent, Althans demonstrates cinematographically how one may deal with Auschwitz with the help of a whole range of defense-mechanisms (as denial, repression, projection, projective identification). Thus, assisted by the media, neo-Nazis such as Althans are able to externalise their "inner experiences and conflicts", acting them out "in the film-scene ... in endless repetitions" KLEINSPEHN 1995, p.40). [47]

This use of media for solving intrastructural conflicts allows even greater narcissistic satisfaction to arise in Althans, and through Bonengel's film he succeeds in igniting a political scandal. Specifically, Althans not only impresses the right-wing subculture but also gains public attention. No matter how obvious it becomes in the end—from the perspective of the Jewish Central Advisory Board in Germany—that legal steps must be taken in reaction to the provocative actions of this neo-Nazi leader in the film, Althans nevertheless emerges triumphant despite the subsequent charges of propagating without contradiction the Auschwitz lie as well as of glorifying national socialism. Through this he feels supported in his belief that he is indeed a dangerous right-wing extremist, just like he wants to be. In one of the film scenes he exclaims with a laugh, "That's my future—cameras in front of my nose and Jews on my back" (AUST et al. 1995, p.5). Undoubtedly Althans shows an incapacity for interaction with others; substituting for this is the success he enjoys in connection with the mode of media-communication. To wit, his filmed performances provide him a satisfaction of virtually coming into contact with people without having to communicate with them in fact. [48]

With the help of the media-world, Althans is able to act out his delusions of grandeur as well as his aggressive and perverse instinctive urges; also, he can achieve public recognition by his shocking actions in the film. Above and beyond, we must not fail to overlook the fact that he also is steered by the media in the way he solves the political problem of understanding Auschwitz. As we see during his visit to the Memorial, Althans tells jokes and saunters through the installation against the background of lovely summer weather and lush green trees and meadows—an inviting scenery, in which, however, no trace of the horror arising from the Nazi atrocities and dominating the death cells is to be felt. Thus, in its portrayal of a good-looking neo-Nazi leader's sightseeing tour, the media-influenced way of dealing with Auschwitz contributes to the demolition of the holocaust memorial—just as, for their part, the authoritarian and the consumption-oriented ways also do. [49]

#### **4. Dancing on a Volcano. Althans' Self-Staged Role Play, Produced by Bonengel in the Cultural Atmosphere of Post-Modernism**

Left open is the question, what kind of historical consciousness obtains in a political culture in which it is possible for Althans to trigger a public scandal? As a "yuppie Nazi" he is no doubt fascinating—among other reasons because his self-performance reflects the post-modern spirit of the age which has been evolving since the 1980s under the influence of the "progressively increasing spread of information and 'telematisation' in life through the use of electronic

communication-media and data-processing" (KEMPER 1988, p.8). At the same time, in line with LYOTARD (1982), we may understand the post-modern consciousness of the present age as a reflex against the great, meaningful stories of the "moderns" (e.g. the enlightening story about the emancipation of humanity, or history's story about a hermeneutics of meaning), which have lost their credibility in the face of uninhibited technological and industrial progress as well as in the face of the arms race among modern industrial nations—both of which perpetuate the global danger of atomic and ecological catastrophes. LYOTARD thus conceives post-modernism as a more enlightened consciousness than modernism; it no longer attributes any universal meaning to world affairs but rather is guided by "the insight into the plurality of, in the end, meaningless verbal games" which could open up "potentials of 'freedom' and 'justice'" through providing access to a whole variety of new, as yet unknown forms of life (LAUER 1988, p.198). As a result, the post-modern attitude towards life goes in the direction of "not mourning any further about the loss of meaning and orientation but rather of *taking the offensive* by propagating a colourful diversity of explications, models of interpretation, methods, techniques, theories, and life-forms" (KEMPER 1988, p.7f.). [50]

Bonengel, in enabling the neo-Nazi to perform as a "yuppie-Nazi" who restyles Auschwitz into a stage for theatrical experiments of varying content, succeeds not only in shocking the general public but also in capturing its fascination. For the film radiates a post-modern attitude toward life by destroying the "whole" and dissolving it into a "diversity of limited and heterogeneous verbal games which generalised standard strategies can no longer make demands on" (WELSCH 1988, p.27). The various scenes arranged by Althans glitter like four discourses which dismantle the Memorial of industrial mass-murder in a post-modern manner:

1. Because Althans stages his visit to Auschwitz as a tourist excursion, the producer is able to undermine the significance of the memorial site by means of a verbal game resulting in a good piece of entertainment that begins with the visit to a newsstand and ends with an evening where the neo-Nazi shows slides of his "sightseeing tour" to his followers.
2. Because Althans appears in the crematory as the expert who objectively investigates the technical installation, Bonengel succeeds in reducing the monstrosity of industrial genocide to the verbal game of emotion-free shop talk which disrespectfully questions something no longer capable of being analysed and coolly adheres to the knowledge of physical laws and brick-walled rooms.
3. Because Althans plays the role of an adolescent who obstinately revolts against the older visitors to the memorial and their attempt to put him in his place, Bonengel is able to transform the memorial into a backdrop for the verbal game in which a conflict between generations is carried out. Thus the neo-Nazi takes up the role as representative of the generation of "89ers" (as defined by LEGGEWIE (1995) among others), which is no longer concerned with "coming to terms with the past" but rather with a confrontation with the

older generation and its way of having dealt with the problem (LEGGEWIE 1995, p.47). Althans is presented as a member of one part of the younger generation, the one which—as described in the weekly paper DIE ZEIT (Aug. 19th, 1994, p.30)—"can't be bothered about the holocaust". Indeed, as the German association of history teachers ascertained, many students are "turned off" as soon as the subject of the extermination of the Jews comes up in class.

4. Under these circumstances Bonengel even succeeds in casting Althans' appearance as a neo-Nazi into a new discourse. More exactly, by declaring at the onset of the Auschwitz sequence that it is "completely crazy" to think that he had been looking after graves in Bergen-Belsen as part of the project "signs of atonement", Althans signals that he earlier believed—just as the majority of young people currently—that it makes sense to show a sign of atonement for the genocide perpetrated against the Jews. In this way Bonengel portrays Althans' political convictions as arising out of his stepping into adulthood, in the process of which the neo-Nazi has abandoned his childhood home and his parents' priggish, lower middle-class narrowness and has found the connection to a group of neo-Nazis—operating with their world-wide media-network. What actually proves to be provincial—i.e. the anti-modern recourse to nationalism and anti-Semitism—is transposed to the latent level of significance in a scene showing a modern right-wing extremist who speaks fluent English and calculates political action on an international level. [51]

Aided by the actions of a neo-Nazi in the production of his film, Bonengel shows how the meaning of the Auschwitz memorial dissolves into a series of diverse verbal games which involve 1) a tourist excursion, 2) the dry assessment of a technical installation, 3) a generation-conflict, and 4) the conduct of a neo-Nazi whose political activities are part of the international operations of the "New Right"; but we nevertheless may ask if the producer—together with the neo-Nazi—doesn't really misconstrue what ADORNO (1966) defines as the "new categorical imperative", namely, that "people ought to think and act in such a way that Auschwitz or anything similar cannot happen again" (p.358). [52]

Against the assumption that Bonengel has let himself in on a fatal coalition with Althans it has been objected that the producer only documents the self-staged scenes of a neo-Nazi who attempts to dismantle Auschwitz. The following facts render this objection invalid:

1. Quite obviously the film-production demands a working agreement between Bonengel and Althans. Against the producer's will, this working agreement turns into a fatal camaraderie with the neo-Nazi. Because Bonengel lets this right-wing extremist show him around Auschwitz in accompaniment of the cameraman who films the latter's actions, he turns the memorial into a test-ground for Althans—who can then prove that he is in fact an unscrupulous neo-Nazi. Also, in that Althans downgrades the crematory to a stage for his extremist agitation, it is the responsibility of producer and cameraman not only

to have seen about the right position of the spotlights for optimally illuminating the scene but also to take care that this film production and Althans' monstrous performance in it can create a public sensation. Thus, producer and cameraman are not altogether uninvolved; rather, they acquiesce to the consequence that the educational interest in shooting a film on the neo-Nazi scene falls prey to the specific interest in producing a film that promises to be successful because it will ignite a political scandal.

2. Producer and cameraman intend the film to be of educational value; nevertheless, because they create it in the mode of post-modernism, they inadvertently pave the way for the shocking scenes acted out by Althans. [53]

Here it is a problem of "transforming politics into aesthetics", as BENJAMIN (1936) defined it, which in turn shows two sides:

- Because the film dispenses with commentaries and allows Althans to assume the role of a moderator who comments on his own political actions, he acquires a position of superiority. His conflict with the American illustrates the degree to which the other actors fall into an inferior role, becoming no more than marionettes at the mercy of Althans' will alone. However, even though the American's arguments succeed in fully aggravating the neo-Nazi, Althans ends up as the victor, because the American's retorts dissipate under the impression made by the fact that this time, too, Althans has the last word. Whether he takes an airplane or a taxi, or is in Canada, Poland, or the new Federal States of Germany, ever and again there arises the picture of a politically active and engaged right-wing intellectual whose commentaries on the dubbed-in film sequences imply that he thinks over his political actions. Whether the camera records how he plows his way energetically through a crowd of pedestrians, a head taller than all of them, whether the camera is enraptured by his sympathetic smile, whether the camera's eye scans from close up his good-looking countenance, his blue eyes, his blond, short-cropped head of hair or is detained for a while by the tender observation of his left ear-lobe, time and again there arise splendid portrayals of Althans. This kind of aesthetic transformation of the neo-Nazi, which, moreover, is mirrored in the speech about the "yuppie-Nazi", poses a problem because it glosses over his arrogance and egocentricity, his cynical attitude and the maliciousness of his jokes; in all of these, the narcissistic and destructive impulses of his disturbed personality-structure is revealed.
- The producer also contributes to the destruction of the memorial through his way of staging the scenes in Auschwitz. Seeing tourists enjoying the warm summer weather while sauntering with tour guides across the grounds of the concentration camp—the trees, shrubbery, and fields a lush green, bathed in radiant sunlight—the movie-goers are incapable of sensing the gloomy hopelessness and pitiless cold suffered by the prisoners in Auschwitz, who were brutally locked up, tortured and killed. Moreover: when, as at the beginning of this film-sequence, children are shown happily playing hide-and-seek, movie-goers can develop no feelings of empathy for the hundreds of

thousands or even a million innocent human beings exterminated in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, where all life expired. [54]

Thus it becomes evident that Althans' personal and political interest in denying the industrial mass-murder of the Jews with the help of media-techniques in his film-performance, concurs with Bonengel's post-modern interest in fascinating movie-goers with shocking scenes. For Althans copes with Auschwitz in a kind of "playful cynicism", and he succeeds—quite in the sense of a post-modern attitude toward life—in this "joyful dance on a volcano" (KEMPER 1988, p.8). Bonengel—quite in line with Althans—arranges the setting of the memorial site as a tourist destination where souvenirs can be bought at the newsstand and photographs made harmlessly right in the gas chamber. This way of producing a film on Auschwitz thus amounts to an "aestheticising" of the concentration camp, veiling this site of horror in the way Alain Resnais, for example, portrayed it in *Night and Fog*. [55]

The audience experiences Althans' role as "yuppie-neo-Nazi" in different ways, depending on who is watching the film:

1. Those who are receptive to anti-Semitic agitation, such as members of right-wing subcultures, see a confirmation of their biased views: the barbaric appearances in which Althans desecrates and attempts to demolish Auschwitz impress above all adolescent extremists of the Right, leading them to an identification with the neo-Nazi leader—who suits them well with his youthful "outfit".
2. Those who taboo anti-Semitic attitudes (as was prevalent in the post-war age) and conceal them behind a philosemitism that "elevates everything Jewish above all else" (STERN 1992, p.181), are likewise receptive to this film-production. For it is precisely Althans' intent in Auschwitz to awaken a new anti-Semitism—with the help of this memorial of the monstrous riots set aflame by modern anti-Semitism: now, the rage is to be turned against the Jews who repeatedly remind us of the Nazi criminals, although many Germans wish only to forget them.
3. Although liberal movie-goers tend to view Bonengel's film critically, they may nevertheless be fascinated by this "yuppie-guy" and his film appearances. On the manifest level of significance, watching the film involves the acquisition of information on a "neo-Nazi" who acts in such a provocative and shocking way in Auschwitz; in contrast, on the latent level of significance, viewers in this category will probably enjoy this socially obnoxious behaviour and even live it out themselves briefly by way of a "trial-run" in identifying with Althans. In fact, as group discussions on the film with adolescents and students have shown (cf. KÖNIG 1995, 1995/1996), the confrontation with the holocaust not only triggers feelings of sadness and sympathy but also awakens fear and feelings of helplessness, which are frequently aggressively rejected.
4. On the other hand, those who view the film from the perspective of the victims and survivors of the holocaust show their indignance; in general they look at it from an ideologically-grounded critical distance. Or they allow the film to work

upon themselves through the intuitive practice of pictorial understanding in order to grasp the way this neo-Nazi leader goes about agitating and the way he makes use of his audience's emotions. [56]

Only this fourth target-group shows an immunity to Althans' film. The first two groups are open to it above all because of its anti-Semitic outbursts; the third group chiefly is in danger of succumbing to the lovely sheen of post-modernism connected with Althans' stage-actions under Bonengel's supervision. Now this more liberal fourth group can be fascinated by the shocking fact that Auschwitz is being dismantled. Even if these viewers do not combat the holocaust actively, the film hold up to them a seductive scenic world which can slip in and cover over the facts about Auschwitz and the horrifying reality of the past—for Althans' "dance on the volcano" addresses those who (as do the viewers in groups one and two) yearn for grass to grow on the entire holocaust, just as it does today on the grounds of the concentration camp, where children again play hide-and-seek. Although the film-scenes document a reality, they are so deceptive—because of their post-modern way of transforming politics into aesthetics—that they cover up the real meaning of Auschwitz. [57]

Thus, the post-modern, glittering views and scenes in Bonengel's film threaten to alienate viewers from the attempt—altogether unsuccessful up to now—to come to terms with the recent German past. Thus, through effects achieved by aesthetically designed settings, the film serves as a tool in the hand of such people as the conservative politician DREGGER or the historians HILLGRUBER and NOLTE, who attempt to minimize the holocaust (cf. DINER 1987) and, since the reunification of Germany, desire to put an end to the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis against the Jews in Europe. We may cite the way Chancellor KOHL celebrated this more than 15 years ago with world-wide attention (cf. HERZ 1996): by speaking to the Israelis in 1984 about "the merciful gift of being born later," he implied that he saw himself as a member of the younger generation, who has nothing further to do with the Nazi past. Similarly he staged an appearance at the military cemetery in Bitburg, assisted by President REAGAN, which attempted to convey that now, together with the friendship between Germans and Americans, it is possible for so much grass to have grown upon the graves of World War II-soldiers that the SS-troops under HITLER's command, invading the neighbouring countries and murdering the Jews, loom up simply as ordinary soldiers, just like the American GI's who sacrificed their lives on European battlefields for the sake of defending freedom and democracy [58]

### **Acknowledgement**

I would like to thank my friend Douglas URTON for the translation.

## References

- Adorno, Theodor W. (1950/1973). *Studien zum autoritären Charakter*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Adorno, Theodor W. (1957). *Soziologie und empirische Forschung*, GS Bd. 8 (pp.196-216). Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Adorno, Theodor W. (1966). *Negative Dialektik*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Adorno, Theodor W. (1967/1970). Erziehung nach Auschwitz. In Theodor W. Adorno, *Stichworte* (pp.85-101). Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Adorno, Theodor W. (1969a). *Einleitung zum "Positivismusstreit in der deutschen Soziologie"* (pp.280-353), GS Bd. 8. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Adorno, Theodor W. (1969b). *Gesellschaftstheorie und empirische Forschung*, GS Bd. 8 (pp.538-546). Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Adorno, Theodor W. (1970/1973). *Ästhetische Theorie*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Adorno, Theodor W. (1972/1979). *Soziologische Schriften I*, Gesammelte Schriften Band 8. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Aust, Oliver et al. (1995). *Protokoll der wichtigsten Sequenzen des Bonengel-Films "Beruf Neonazi"*. Typoskript.
- Beck, Ulrich (1986). *Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Benjamin, Walter (1936/1977). Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit. In Walter Benjamin, *Illuminationen* (pp.136-169). Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Bude, Heinz (1992). *Bilanz der Nachfolge. Die Bundesrepublik und der Nationalsozialismus*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Chasseguet-Smirgel, Janine (1984/1986). *Kreativität und Perversion*. Frankfurt a.M.: Nexus.
- Diner, Dan (1987). Zwischen Aporie und Apologie. Über Grenzen der Historisierbarkeit des Nationalsozialismus. In Dan Diner (Ed.), *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit* (pp.62-73). Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer.
- Freud, Sigmund (1901/1989). *Zur Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens*. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer.
- Fromm, Erich (1936). Theoretische Entwürfe über Autorität und Familie. Sozialpsychologischer Teil. In Max Horkheimer (Ed.), *Studien über Autorität und Familie. Forschungsberichte aus dem Institut für Sozialforschung* (pp.77-135), Paris: Alcan.
- Georg-Lauer, Jutta (1988). Das "postmoderne Wissen" und die Dissens-Theorie von Jean-Francois Lyotard. In Peter Kemper (Ed.), *"Postmoderne" oder Der Kampf um die Zukunft*, (pp.189-206). Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer.
- Herz, Thomas (1995). Die "Basiserzählung" und die NS-Vergangenheit. Zur Veränderung der politischen Kultur in Deutschland. In Lars Clausen (Ed.), *Gesellschaften im Umbruch. Verhandlungen des 27. Kongresses der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie in Halle an der Saale* (pp.91-109). Frankfurt a.M.: Campus.
- Horkheimer, Max & Adorno, Theodor W. (1947/1987). *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*. In Max Horkheimer, GS Bd. 5 (pp.11-290). Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer.
- Kemper, Peter (Ed.) (1988). *"Postmoderne" oder Der Kampf um die Zukunft*, Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer.
- Kernberg, Otto F. (1975/1983). *Borderline-Störungen und pathologischer Narzißmus*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Kleinspehn, Thomas (1995). Doch im Innern des Landes ... Inszenierung rechtsradikaler Politik und die (un)heimlichen Bilder. In Hans-Dieter König (Ed.), *Mediale Inszenierungen rechter Gewalt*, Psychosozial, 18. Jg., Nr. 61 (pp.27-41). Gießen: Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag.
- König, Hans-Dieter (1992). Autoritarismus und Konsumsteuerung. Zum Wandel der Konformismusproblematik in der fortgeschrittenen Industriegesellschaft. In Institut für Sozialforschung (Ed.), *Kritik und Utopie im Werk von Herbert Marcuse* (pp.217-246), Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.

- König, Hans-Dieter (1993). Die Methode der tiefenhermeneutischen Kultursoziologie. In Thomas Jung & Stefan Müller-Doohm (Eds.), *"Wirklichkeit" im Deutungsprozeß. Verstehen und Methoden in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften* (pp.190-222). Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.
- König, Hans-Dieter (1995). Die Holocaust-Überlebende und der grinsende Neonazi. Tiefenhermeneutische Rekonstruktion einer Szenensequenz aus dem Bonengel-Film *Beruf Neonazi*. In Hans-Dieter König (Ed.), *Mediale Inszenierungen rechter Gewalt*, Psychosozial, 18. Jg., Nr. 61 (pp.13-25). Gießen: Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag.
- König, Hans-Dieter (1995/1996). Wie Schüler "Beruf Neonazi" sehen. Zur Wirkung des Films bei GymnasiastInnen und Berufsschülern. Tiefenhermeneutische Medienwirkungsforschung I-III. *medien praktisch*, 4/95, 20-26; *medien praktisch*, 1/96, 36-40; *medien praktisch* 2/96, 52-56.
- König, Hans-Dieter (1996). Methodologie und Methode der tiefenhermeneutischen Kultursoziologie in der Perspektive von Adornos Verständnis kritischer Sozialforschung. In Hans-Dieter König (Ed.), *Neue Versuche, Becketts Endspiel zu verstehen. Sozialwissenschaftliches Interpretieren nach Adorno* (pp.314-387). Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- König, Hans-Dieter (1997). Tiefenhermeneutik als Methode kultursoziologischer Forschung. In [Ronald Hitzler](#) & Anke Honer (Eds.), *Sozialwissenschaftliche Hermeneutik* (pp.213-241). Leverkusen: Leske & Budrich.
- König, Hans-Dieter (2000a). Adornos psychoanalytische Kulturkritik und die Tiefenhermeneutik. Zugleich eine Sekundäranalyse des 24. Aphorismus der *Minima Moralia*. *Zeitschrift für kritische Theorie*, VI(10), 7-26.
- König, Hans-Dieter (2000 b). Tiefenhermeneutik. In Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardoff & Ines Steinke (Eds.), *Qualitative Forschung: Ein Handbuch* (pp.556-569). Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt.
- König, Hans-Dieter (2001). Tiefenhermeneutik als Methode psychoanalytischer Kulturforschung. In Heide Appelsmeyer & Elfriede Billmann-Mahecha (Eds.), *Kulturwissenschaft* (pp.168-194). Weilerswist: Velbrück.
- Kracauer, Siegfried (1929/1980). *Die Angestellten*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Leggewie, Claus (1995). *Die 89er. Portrait einer Generation*. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe.
- Lorenzer, Alfred (1970). *Spracherstörung und Rekonstruktion*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Lorenzer, Alfred (1974). *Die Wahrheit der psychoanalytischen Erkenntnis. Ein historisch-materialistischer Entwurf*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Lorenzer, Alfred (1981). *Das Konzil der Buchhalter. Die Zerstörung der Sinnlichkeit. Eine Religionskritik*. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer.
- Lorenzer, Alfred (1986). Tiefenhermeneutische Kulturanalyse. In Hans-Dieter König, Alfred Lorenzer, Heinz Lüdde, Soeren Nagbol, Ulrike Prokop, Gunzelin Schmid Noerr & Annelinge Eggert (Eds.), *Kultur-Analysen* (pp.11-98), Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer.
- Lyotard, Jean-Francois (1979/1982). *Das postmoderne Wissen. Ein Bericht*. Bremen.
- Marcuse, Herbert (1964/1972). *Der eindimensionale Mensch. Studien zur Ideologie der fortgeschrittenen Industriegesellschaft*. Neuwied, Berlin: Luchterhand.
- Mitscherlich, Alexander & Mitscherlich, Margarethe (1967). *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern. Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens*. München: Piper.
- Parin, Paul (1975). Das Ich und die Anpassungs-Mechanismen. *Psyche*, XXXI, 481-515.
- Richter, Horst Eberhard (1995): Flucht ins Autoritäre? Der Film "Beruf Neonazi" als Lehrstück. In Hans-Dieter König (Ed.), *Mediale Inszenierungen rechter Gewalt*, Psychosozial, 18. Jg., Nr. 61 (pp.43-46). Gießen: Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag.
- Stern, Frank (1992). Antisemitismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Zwischen Friedhofsschändungen "jüdischer Weltinterpretation" und "Kontingent-Juden". In Werner Bohleber & John S. Kafka (Eds.), *Antisemitismus* (pp.174-196). Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag.
- Theweleit, Klaus (1994). Jetzt geht's loo-ooos? Ein Gespräch mit Klaus Theweleit in der taz. In Frauke Meyer-Gosau & Wolfgang Emmerich (Eds.), *Gewalt, Faszination und Furcht. Jahrbuch für Literatur und Politik in Deutschland 1* (pp.150-170). Leipzig: Reclam.
- Welsch, W. (1988). 'Postmoderne'. Genealogie und Bedeutung eines umstrittenen Begriffs. In Peter Kemper (Ed.), *"Postmoderne" oder Der Kampf um die Zukunft* (pp.9-36), Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer.

## Author

*Hans-Dieter KÖNIG*, Prof. Dr. phil., teaches sociology and social psychology at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University in Frankfurt am Main and is a practising psychoanalyst in Dortmund. Main areas of research: psychoanalytical social and cultural studies; biography-research; theory of socialisation; methods of qualitative research.

Contact:

Hans-Dieter König  
Langendreerstr. 23a  
44892 Bochum  
Germany

Fax: 0234-284936

E-mail: [h.d.koenig@web.de](mailto:h.d.koenig@web.de)

## Citation

König, Hans-Dieter (2001). A Neo-Nazi in Auschwitz. A Psychoanalytic Reconstruction of a Documentary Film on Right-Wing Extremism [58 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 2(3), Art. 10, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0103109>.

Revised 3/2007