

**HITLER'S INTERVIEWS**  
**The Dictator and the Journalists**  
**by Lutz Hachmeister**

Sample translation (pp. 7-39) by Sharon Howe



**LUTZ HACHMEISTER**

**HITLERS  
INTERVIEWS**

**DER DIKTATOR  
UND DIE JOURNALISTEN**

Kiepenheuer  
& Witsch

Non-fiction/History

384 pages, Publication date: November 2024

Foreign rights with: Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch GmbH & Co. KG  
<https://www.kiwi-verlag.de/verlag/rights>

## Prologue: Letting Hitler talk

*“My whole life has been one long act of persuasion”.*

Adolf Hitler, 18 January 1942, in the “Wolf’s Lair”

*I speak, therefore I am:* that maxim was central to Adolf Hitler’s existence. To have banned him from speaking would have been tantamount to banning him from breathing. And that went for all modes of discourse. His ceaseless verbosity, his persistent monologuing in every conceivable communicative situation, the “waterfall of words”, as his exiled first biographer, Rudolf Olden, put it in 1935 – all this had already struck Hitler observers from early on. And it applied whatever the setting, be it his appearances at mass rallies, his midday and evening “table talks” to a captive or enthusiastic audience, or indeed his hundred-plus interviews with foreign journalists, many of which are examined in this book. When these interviews are sorted according to the reporters’ country of origin, however, a clear picture emerges of Hitler’s strategic and instrumental priorities: the exchanges with Anglo-American journalists predominate, at around sixty or so, followed by a total of seventeen with Italian and eight with French interviewers.

The Hitler interviews<sup>1</sup> fall quite distinctly into three phases: the early phase of the “Bavarian Mussolini” up to his arrest in 1923 and subsequent imprisonment in Landsberg; the phase

---

<sup>1</sup> A detailed list of the interviews researched for this book can be found on p. 337 ff.

from 1930 to 1933, when power became a serious possibility for the Nazi movement; and the dictatorial phase as head of state and commander-in-chief of the German armed forces.

The well-informed US journalist John Gunther, writing in 1936, was among the earliest to identify Hitler's inexhaustible rhetoric as a key factor in his rise to power. "He talked himself to power. The strange thing is that Hitler is a bad speaker. He screeches; his mannerisms are awkward; his voice breaks at every peroration; he never knows when to stop. Goebbels is a far more subtle and accomplished orator. Yet Hitler, whose magnetism across the table is almost nil, can arouse an audience, especially a big audience, to frenzy. He knows, of course, all the tricks."

For all his rhetorical tricks, Hitler didn't like journalists questioning him – not even reporters from Italy, Germany's fascist model and ally, let alone representatives of democratic media-capitalist institutions which he saw as being universally controlled by the "global Jewish conspiracy". Even as a declared racial ideologue, he could hardly demand proof of the interviewers' Aryan credentials, so that, genealogically speaking, he never knew exactly who he was dealing with; moreover, he was unwilling to be interrupted during his declamations and therefore had no time for the kind of dialogue that makes for an interesting interview. Add to that the fact that he couldn't be sure how the foreign media organs would comment on and frame the interviews within their wider coverage of the Nazi regime. When his advisors, especially the long-time "Nazi foreign press chief" Ernst Sedgwick "Putzi" Hanfstaengl, badgered him into taking part in interviews with foreigners in the interests of improving his image, he insisted that the key points of Nazi ideology first formulated in 1920 be repeatedly raised, and used the opportunity to broadcast whatever tactical and strategic topics and blatant lies he deemed important at the time.

Eventually, then, this self-appointed media and propaganda expert came to realise the news value of such interviews from a propaganda perspective. Moreover, he began increasingly to demand a fee, at least up until 1933, in order to boost the perpetually low Party funds. With the expansion of his sphere of influence from 1930 onwards, Hitler – a control freak like all dictators, sect leaders and autocrats – together with “Putzi” Hanfstaengl (whom he was to dump in 1937) and the media specialists and mediators who succeeded him, learned to prepare thoroughly for his encounters with foreign journalists, to insist on questions being submitted in advance, to dictate the main thrust of the interview and, of course, to retain the final authorisation rights to the text. And it usually (if not always) paid off: Hitler almost invariably maintained the upper hand. Even so, he never felt comfortable during these meetings.

As for the interviewer and the relevant media organisations, their role was a very different one. For them, Hitler was a trophy; securing an interview with the Führer was a scoop in itself, regardless of structure and content. Most journalists were ill-prepared for Hitler: biographically, strategically and in terms of political substance. Usually, they just let their headstrong interviewee talk for the sake of an instant headline. And, as time went on, in different political Hitler incarnations: initially, he was the “Bavarian Mussolini”, the clown-like figure with the Chaplin moustache, the Austrian house painter with the strangely obscure biography; then, after the national success of the Nazi party in the 1930 election, the strident exponent of *völkisch* rights; and, astonishingly, for a while after the Nazi takeover, the Hindenburg-style statesman with Prussian military airs. As soon as the Nazis began to be credited with a realistic chance of power in Germany, a constant stream of foreign journalists came knocking at Hitler’s door. In his autobiography, the prominent US

correspondent Hans V. Kaltenborn describes a significant and in many ways typical meeting at Hitler's mountain retreat, the Berghof, in August 1932:

Louis Lochner, then Associated Press correspondent in Germany, and I had both asked for an interview with der Führer. Quite unexpectedly my Harvard classmate Ernst Hanfstaengl, then Hitler's liaison officer for the foreign press, telephoned me that the Führer would see us the next day in his Berchtesgaden home. We knew about his tendency to orate at newspapermen and we came prepared with a series of questions to which we were determined to get answers.

Hitler had no love for foreign newsmen. He greeted us in a perfunctory and hostile manner. The interview took place on the porch of his charming chalet in the Bavarian Alps near the Austrian frontier. It was a lovely spot and we sat on the porch that dominated a beautiful view of the mountains. It was a warm summer morning and canary birds were chirping merrily in cages that hung all over the porch. In these surroundings Adolf Hitler began to talk with frowning face as if he were haranguing a crowd. I purposely irritated him with my first question: "Why does your anti-Semitism make no distinction between the Jews that flooded into Germany during the postwar period and the many fine Jewish families that have been German for generations?" "All Jews are foreigners," he shouted back. "Who are you to ask me how I deal with foreigners. You Americans admit no foreigner unless he has good money, good physique, and good morals. Who are you to talk about who should be

allowed in Germany?" That got us off on the tone which dominated the entire interview.<sup>2</sup>

To Lochner's and Kaltenborn's dismay, Hanfstaengl had also invited the Hearst Press correspondent Karl von Wiegand to the meeting unannounced. Wiegand managed to wangle a fifteen-minute exclusive interview with Hitler, although afterwards he too concluded: "This man is a hopeless case. It gets worse every time I see him. I couldn't get anything out of him. When you ask him a question, he gives a speech. This whole visit has been a waste of time." All three US journalists had their photograph taken with Hitler (see front cover of this book); Wiegand subsequently conducted further interviews with the "Führer".

There are dozens of similarly evocative accounts by correspondents of their encounters with Hitler. But there are no tape recordings of them (the technology of the time alone precluded that), nor even detailed shorthand notes. All we have are the versions printed in the relevant press organs, so the exact wording needs to be treated with a degree of scepticism, particularly in the early phase of Hitler interviews up to 1923. After that, the source material improved thanks to accompanying correspondence, archive material, and Nazi-authorized versions in the Party newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter*.

From the outset, the overwhelming majority of interviews were with foreign journalists; there are hardly any domestic ones to be found. There are several reasons for this. For one thing, democratic quality newspapers such as the *Frankfurter Zeitung* or the *Berliner Tageblatt* had no interest in the *völkisch* sophistry of this provincial politician who, until

---

<sup>2</sup> See Hans V. Kaltenborn: *Fifty Fabulous Years. 1900-1950* (New York, 1950); also, by the same author, "An Interview with Hitler, August 17, 1932" in *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (1967).

1933, likewise declined to meet journalists from the “Jewish papers”, as he called them. After that, they were no longer of any relevance to him anyway. Besides, the Nazi Party had its own central organ in the shape of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, to which Hitler contributed willingly and often from 1921 onwards; this led him to change his job description from “painter” to “columnist”, even before composing *Mein Kampf*. Unsurprisingly, the longest domestic interview to be found was conducted by the newspaper owned by Hitler’s own press chief, Otto Dietrich.<sup>3</sup>

One of the rare interviews Hitler gave with a German paper had taken place back in autumn 1922. The paper in question was the Nuremberg- and Munich-based tabloid *8-Uhr-Blatt*, and it commanded considerable international attention. The French nationalist newspaper *L’Action Française*, for one, responded with an article of 12 November 1922 in which the “Mussolini bavarois” was presented as “Dr Hittler”. The tipping point of this foreign media interest in Hitler was undoubtedly Mussolini’s “March on Rome” at the end of October 1922.<sup>4</sup> This early interview was already quite typical in terms of its unapologetic tone. In a report of 12 November 1922, the Berlin edition of the Hungarian daily *Pester Lloyd* summed up the encounter as follows:

---

<sup>3</sup> Hitler interview with the *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung* of 16 August 1932, reproduced in Max Domarus, *Hitler: Speeches and Proclamations 1932-1945: The Chronicle of a Dictatorship*, Vol. I, trans Mary Fran Gilbert and Chris Wilcox, Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc. Wauconda, 1990; also in *Völkischer Beobachter* (VB) No. 230, 17 August 1932; in his biography of Otto Dietrich, Stefan Krings attributes the interview to Theodor Reismann-Grone, publisher of the RWZ and father-in-law of Dietrich, who had arranged the meeting.

<sup>4</sup> After the fascist “March on Rome”, the ex-socialist Mussolini had been appointed head of a coalition government of the Italian Right by King Victor Emanuel III; he was sworn in as Prime Minister on 31 October 1922. From then on, Hitler was regarded for some time by the German and international press as a carbon copy of Mussolini, including in his interview policy – see: “Schmussolini. Ein amerikanisches Interview Hitlers”, in *Vorwärts*, 21 August 1928. See also the joke reproduced by Hans-Jochen Gamm in *Der Flüsterwitz im Dritten Reich* (1936): “Rumour had it in Germany that, on his first visit to Italy, Hitler greeted his Italian colleague with the words ‘Ave, imperator!’, to which Mussolini replied ‘Ave, imitator!’”

The Bavarian Mussolini.

(Telegram by Pester Lloyd.)

Berlin, 11 November.

Noteworthy in connection with the arrest of Roßbach<sup>5</sup> and the machinations of the Bavarian fascist leader Hirtler (sic) is a report filed by a special correspondent of the Munich *Acht-Uhr-Blatt* on a visit to Hirtler. According to the report, this Bavarian Mussolini was a former poster artist. A tall man in his mid-thirties, he appears nervous and distracted. He speaks in disjointed sentences and makes constant use of rhetoric. His agenda is one of blatant antisemitism. In reply to the interviewer's first question, he began by stating that he had no intention of organising a putsch. He wanted to build a state on an entirely social foundation, but on the one true foundation that the Jew would never understand. He was fighting the world-corrupting nonsense of Marxism, and the entire German republic because it had become Judaised, just like the Wilhelmine monarchy before it. Jesus had been of Germanic origin, whereas Pope Alexander VI, Kaiser Wilhelm II and King Edward VII were all Jews, the latter because his mother, Queen Victoria, was reputed to have had a relationship with her medical attendant, a man named Wolf.

---

<sup>5</sup> The Freikorps leader Gerhard Roßbach (1893-1967) had been arrested for rebellion against the democratic Weimar system on 11 November 1922 under the "Law for the Protection of the Republic". Roßbach was also the eponymous hero of a nationalist essayistic novel by Arnolt Bronnen published by Rowohlt in 1930. On Roßbach and on the ideology and body politics of the Freikorps, see Klaus Theweleit's classic *Male Fantasies 1 + 2*, University of Minnesota Press, 1987.





Adolf Hitler set great store by his propaganda specialists and media assistants (he is pictured here with propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels and Reich press chief Otto Dietrich), who were however fierce rivals and indulged in countless petty jealousies. Otto Dietrich, whom Goebbels appointed as state secretary in his Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (RMVP) in 1938, attempted for example to carve out an independent “Press Ministry” for himself from the RMVP – albeit unsuccessfully. One thing Goebbels and Dietrich did agree on was that Hitler interviews with foreign correspondents were ultimately a waste of time.

On 4 June 1942, the Nazi leader descended on the commander-in-chief of the Finnish army, Marshall Carl Gustav Emil Mannerheim, on the occasion of the latter’s seventy-fifth birthday. This flying visit, which took place at Immola airport in southeast Finland, would not have been particularly memorable had the sound technician Thor Damen, an employee of the Finnish public broadcasting company Yleisradio, not illicitly recorded eleven minutes of the conversation between Hitler and Mannerheim in the railway carriage, until Hitler’s SS escort intervened. This tape recording has survived and is available on various web portals. The Hitler-Mannerheim interview is said to be the only existing “private” tape recording of the dictator to date, even if the content – the state of military policy in the Russo-Finnish war

and Finland's indirect loyalty to the Axis powers – was not exactly private. If the elderly Mannerheim managed initially to get in a few polite remarks on the progress of the war, Hitler soon talked him under the table as usual, with statistics on Soviet tank production and the interesting revelation that he would like to have attacked France as early as autumn 1939, but the weather had been unfavourable.

This tape recording gives us a good idea of Hitler's tone of voice when addressing foreign journalists. That said, he also began his speeches to the masses in a deliberately quieter tone before working himself up to a rhetorical frenzy. Apart from the volume, therefore, the Mannerheim interview was no different from Hitler's ritual mode of communication. Foreign correspondents may well have been deceived, however, by the quality of his voice which, though at times coloured by a soft Bavarian-Austrian lilt, was invariably threatening. One of the core arguments of this book is that there is basically no difference between Hitler's beer hall speeches, public addresses, diplomatic negotiations, "table talks" and more intimate interview situations. They are, in essence, only situative variants – some more calculated than others – of the same sterile persuasive discourse.

The "table talks at the Führer headquarters" (1941/42), recorded by stenographers,<sup>6</sup> are a case in point. They epitomise the *völkische* ramblings of a man devoid of any philosophical grounding and incapable of self-irony or dialectical thinking. In March 1942, for example, Hitler concludes that there is no harm in the word *Führer* continuing to be used in job titles such as *Oberführer* (senior colonel), or indeed *Straßenbahnführer* (tram driver) or *Zugführer* (train driver); if he should have a successor one day, however, it would have to be changed,

---

<sup>6</sup> For a dedicated critical appraisal of the wording and transmission history of Hitler's table talks, see Mikael Nilsson, *Hitler Redux. The Incredible History of Hitler's So-Called Table Talks* (2021). There is little doubt, however, that this was broadly typical of Hitler's choice of topics and bizarre excursions.

and the term *Führer* “elevated to a position of exclusivity”. That same month, after reading Reichsleiter Philipp Bouhler’s biography of Napoleon, he informed his entourage that Napoleon Bonaparte failed not least because “his officers were not up to the job. One couldn’t help but blame him for choosing inferior staff.”<sup>7</sup>

On another occasion (May 1942), Hitler opined on German honey production (his father was an amateur beekeeper): “Over supper, the boss pointed out that ten times more honey could be produced in Germany than beekeepers were currently making. One should always remember that, in antiquity and the Middle Ages, honey was the main sweetening agent and was even used to sweeten wine. The following June, he held forth on the “unusually large number of mentally ill people in Finland”, which could be due to the northern lights, or perhaps to “the strong tendency of the Finns towards religious introspection”. Wherever he may have got this idea from, it gave him an opportunity to bring up the Jews again: after all, he argued, religious people who, in the isolation of a long winter, sought ultimate clarity in their religious notions with the aid of the Bible must necessarily become mentally stunted because they were forced “to impose a meaning on this vile Jewish concoction where there was none. As a result, they positively dug themselves into some random line of reasoning and, unless they were exceptionally resilient, ended up descending into religious mania.”

After hijacking the German Workers’ Party (DAP) in 1919/20 by rising up the ranks from army instruction officer to propaganda chief and finally to party chairman in Munich, Hitler quickly cemented his undisputed success as a missionary-style orator. Before long, he was packing out beer halls such as the Sterneckerbräu, Hofbräuhaus or Kindel-Keller, often with

---

<sup>7</sup> Hitler criticised Napoleon’s nepotism; this was something he himself avoided. Given the company of morphine addicts, severe alcoholics, obscurantists and bar-room brawlers he surrounded himself with, his remark demonstrates a very limited capacity for self-reflection.

audiences of over 2000. In 1920 alone, he gave around ninety such speeches. He recognised his own unique selling point and hired a professional trainer to hone his gestures and facial expressions. On 3 February 1921, he made his first appearance at Circus Krone, before an audience of 3500; this was one of the first mass rallies of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), the new party to emerge from the DAP. That year, Hitler spoke at Circus Krone a total of seven times, addressing audiences of up to 7000 (on 25 August).

In his 2021 post-doctoral thesis on US correspondents in the Nazi state<sup>8</sup>, the historian Norman Domeier argued that, without the Hitler interviews, “the rise of the ‘Führer’ and the Nazi movement would have been almost unthinkable in the mass media societies of the 20th century”. Against this, it is perfectly reasonable to contend that Hitler would probably still have come to power even if he hadn't granted foreign correspondents a single exclusive interview.

Hitler's media biography falls within a period of radical upheaval that saw the birth and spread of cinema, radio, illustrated magazine culture, political posters and neon advertisements. Even more significant, however, was the growing interconnection, from the end of the 19th century onwards, between advertising, PR, early forms of political marketing, “group psychology”, and propaganda. It was Gustave Le Bon who had set the tone for this with his *Psychologies des foules* (1895) and his discovery of the “group mind”:  
“The masses have never thirsted after truth. They turn aside from evidence that is not to their taste, preferring to deify error, if error seduce them. Whoever can supply them with illusions is easily their master; whoever attempts to destroy their illusions is always their

---

<sup>8</sup> Norman Domeier: *Global Public and Dictatorship: American Correspondents in the Third Reich*, Wallstein Verlag, 2024.

victim.” Hitler remained stuck in this dichotomy between (masculine) “leader” and seduceable (feminine) “crowd” all his life.<sup>9</sup> And the whole thing was further fuelled by the widespread overestimation of the role of propaganda (alongside “military psychology”) in the First World War, culminating in the powerful catchphrase “undefeated in the field” that was spread by the Supreme Army Command and later by all representatives of right-wing nationalism.<sup>10</sup>

Strangely, although no Hitler analyst has been able to avoid an examination of the man as performer, there is as yet no work consistently linking his overall repertoire of communicative signals to the concrete manifestations of Nazi propaganda. On one hand, there are numerous studies devoted to Hitler’s rhetoric, his “political symbolism” and self-dramatisation, his attire, his physiognomy, his library and even his facial hair, and on the other, there are books about the development of Nazi media control, the *Gleichschaltung* or “coordination” of public life, the electoral campaigns in the run-up to 1933 (“Hitler over Germany”), or the use of foreign propaganda. By contrast, the Hitler interviews – covering as they do a period of over twenty years – reflect very clearly the close connection between Hitler’s propaganda concept and the corresponding agenda, technique, strategy and tactics

---

<sup>9</sup> Le Bon’s *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* begins rather obscurely for the modern reader: “My earlier work was devoted to the analysis of the racial soul. Here, we propose to examine the soul of the crowd”. The chapter summaries of the book do contain some topics that still sound contemporary, however: “The disappearance at present in progress of general beliefs, and the extreme diffusion of the newspaper press, have for result that opinions are nowadays more and more changeable—Why the opinions of crowds tend on the majority of subjects towards indifferences—Governments now powerless to direct opinion as they formerly did.” On the impact of the book, see Helmut König’s instructive epilogue to the German version, 16th edition (2011). There is no evidence that Hitler absorbed Le Bon’s essay to any great degree – in contrast to Mussolini.

<sup>10</sup> See now also Gerd Krumeich: *Als Hitler den Ersten Weltkrieg gewann. Die Nazis und die Deutschen 1921-1940* (“When Hitler Won the First World War. The Nazis and the Germans 1921-1940”). Krumeich himself describes the title of his book as a “provocation”: “To date there is no history of the Weimar Republic that deals consistently with the trauma of losing the war.”

of the Nazi apparatus as a whole. In short, they show us a Hitler less separate from Goebbels & co. than we are used to seeing.

Hitler prided himself on his helpmates in the field of propaganda and media control. Here, for example, is what he said in February 1942 about the Aryanising bully and head of the Nazi publishing house Max Amann (1891-1957), who had been one of his superiors during the First World War: "As for Amann, all I can say is: he is a genius. The greatest pressman in the world. Although he avoids the limelight, Rothermere and Beaverbrook are small fry next to him." As manager of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, Amann had already "used soldierly discipline to get the best out of every member of staff".

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler took pains to convey his views on the key role of the press as an educational institution; he even attributes his own uncompromising racial ideology to his earlier reading of the Vienna newspapers. These passages are among the most illuminating of his rambling manifesto. At first, Hitler wrote, he had been in awe of the Vienna "world press", marvelling at "the scope of what they offered their readers and the objectivity of individual articles" as well as the "exalted tone" of the writing. But then he had discovered that the purportedly quality newspapers were controlled by Jewish capital and Jewish minds: "We must study this vile Jewish technique of emptying garbage pails full of the vilest slanders and defamations from hundreds and hundreds of sources at once, suddenly and as if by magic, on the clean garments of honorable men, if we are fully to appreciate the entire menace represented by these scoundrels of the press." From here on in, *Mein Kampf* resorts to wild invective against "the press" in general, referring to "spiritual robber barons", "rabble", "pack", and "drivel about so-called freedom of the press". The latter, Hitler argued, posed the deadliest threat to any state. Freedom of the press was, namely, nothing more

than the freedom of individual subjects to do as they wished and act in their own interests – even if they ran counter to those of the state.

Since the Nazi regime could not do without the press entirely, however, the only solution was to enforce *Gleichschaltung* and the subordination of the journalist's art to the directives of dictatorship and the alleged "will of the people". It had not been easy at first, Hitler remarks, to impress upon the profession that it too was there to serve society as a whole. It had to be constantly pointed out to the press that it was acting against its own interests by contradicting itself. If, for example, twelve newspapers in a particular city gave a different account of the same incident, then the reader was bound to conclude that none of them were true. As a result, Hitler warned in one of his "table talks" at the "Wolf's Lair" on the evening of 15 April 1942, the press lost control of public opinion and ended up completely out of step with it.

Hitler saw himself as a notable propaganda expert and specialist in all matters of the press – right down to the smallest detail. That much is clear from the table talks. In his view, for instance, the *Leipziger Illustrierte* needed to revitalise its content in order to compete with American and British magazines; the *Deutsche Illustrierte*, meanwhile, could be dispensed with; in peacetime, a Sunday newspaper should be introduced for the peasantry alongside the prestige paper *Das Reich*, complete with a serial "for the wenches". Most dangerous of all, according to Hitler the media economics expert, were the "Jewish-owned advertising agencies", which enabled the Jews to "totally ruin a major daily newspaper by blocking adverts". His ambitions for "wired broadcasting", on the other hand, which was to transmit radio signals across the entire telephone network, were blocked by Goebbels. "Wired

wireless! I gave the order for it to be done. The propaganda ministry axed it because the Postmaster General said the technology wasn't ready yet!"

As a media figure, Hitler needed go-betweens and aides. One of the lesser-known mediators of the early Hitler interviews was the retired Rear Admiral Waldemar Vollerthun, a supporter of Alfred Tirpitz, head of the imperial navy. Vollerthun (1869-1929), who had been stationed off Cameroon as a young lieutenant and worked, among other roles, in the intelligence department of the Berlin imperial naval office, had had his heyday during the First World War, as a leading strategist at the naval base in Tsingtau, China. He was one of the initially rudderless and subsequently politically active figures of the army and navy command who, after 1918, sought to create links between Wilhelmine ideology, *Freikorps* paramilitaries, far-right secret societies and Hitler, the new *völkisch* tribune of the people. In the 1920s, Vollerthun, who had previously written the memoir *The Battle for Tsingtau*, was foreign affairs editor of the right-wing paper *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten (MNN)* and had also engaged in political journalism with a *völkisch* agenda. He made his home on Munich's Theresienwiese available for Hitler's meetings with foreign journalists, and was particularly keen to forge a Hitler-Tirpitz alliance. In November 1922, Vollerthun wrote to Tirpitz that Hitler had "spent many hours as a guest in my home" and characterised the Nazi leader in the following terms: "His antisemitism is not destructive, but constructive; it is not about eradicating Jews, but putting them in their place." As such, Vollerthun was a prototypical example of Hitler's early right-wing monarchist supporters. He used the *MNN* chiefly as a vehicle to print German translations of the interviews he engineered.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> On the publishing activities of Tirpitz's circle, see Sebastian Rojek: *Versunkene Hoffnungen. Die Deutsche Marine im Umgang mit Erwartungen und Enttäuschungen 1871-1930* (2017).



While Hitler soon came to see the purpose of such mediation efforts, he still wasn't fully on board. At one of his evening table talks on 6 July 1942, he launched into a rant about his long-time foreign press advisor Hanfstaengl, who had long since fallen out of favour and escaped to the UK. Although organising interviews with the foreign press (and supplying them with articles authored by Hitler) had proved financially lucrative, "Putzi" was, he complained, more of a businessman than a politician, and "only had an eye to financial success". When Hitler instructed him, for example, to "get an article out to the entire world press by the fastest possible route", Hanfstaengl had wasted precious time trying to extract as much money from the deal as he could. In the end, the Führer had given him an earful: "Hanfstaengl, stop driving me mad with your penny pinching! What matters to me is that the article is read all over the world tomorrow: financial considerations are the least of my worries!"

The whole evening was taken up with further anecdotes about Hanfstaengl. This son of the upper middle classes, who will feature in more detail later in this book, had essentially come to Hitler as accidentally as Hitler himself had come to the German Workers' Party. His former Harvard classmate Truman Smith<sup>12</sup>, who was working for the US embassy in Berlin at the time and viewed Hitler as a "marvellous demagogue", had sent Hanfstaengl to one of his speeches in Munich as an observer. Promptly convinced by Hitler's gift for oratory and broadly sympathetic to his ideology, "Putzi" subsequently became the chief mediator of

---

<sup>12</sup> Truman Smith (1893-1970) was a battalion commander of the US 4th Infantry Regiment in the French battles of the First World War and, from 1920 to 1924, deputy US military attaché in Berlin, where he served again in that capacity from 1939 to 1945. A declared opponent of Roosevelt, he escorted Charles Lindbergh on his five trips to Germany to inspect the German air force and aviation industry. His critics accused him of being too close to Lindbergh; his apologists praised his reporting on German rearmament. On Smith's mission to observe the Hitler movement in Munich, see Henry G. Gole, *Exposing the Third Reich. Colonel Truman Smith in Hitler's Germany* (2013).

Hitler's foreign press contacts – until that task was assumed by Goebbels and the Reich Chancellery.



After 1945, the Nazi foreign press chief Ernst Franz Sedgwick Hanfstaengl (1887-1975) sought to portray himself as a harmless piano virtuoso and entertainer to Hitler. In truth, the professional art dealer and Harvard graduate exerted a considerable influence on Nazi foreign propaganda. No one arranged more Hitler interviews than Hanfstaengl – known by friend and foe alike simply as “Putzi”. Hanfstaengl, who fled the Nazi Reich in 1937 following an intrigue by Göring and Goebbels and ended up in the USA as an advisor to Roosevelt, published his florid memoirs (*Unheard Witness*) in 1957 jointly with the publicist Brian Connell; the German version did not appear until 1970, under the title “Between the White House and the Brown House”.

The Hitler interview conducted by Pierre John Huss, the Luxembourg-born US correspondent of the Hearst Group, around the time of the Saar referendum<sup>13</sup> in January 1935, can be regarded as paradigmatic of the Führer's meticulously prepared encounters with foreign journalists after 1933, in that the Nazi media strategists did a better job of planning and controlling it than the journalist himself. For this reason, it is worth examining it here as an introductory case study.

The officials responsible for arranging this interview were Dr Karl Bömer, then press chief of the NSDAP Office of Foreign Affairs under Alfred Rosenberg, and Hitler's much-valued undersecretary Dr Hans Thomsen from the Reich Chancellery. To obtain it, Huss (1901-1966) had first approached the newspaper science scholar and Nazi propagandist Bömer, whom he knew personally from the latter's lectureship in the USA. On 14 December 1934, Thomsen, to whom the anglophile "Charly" Bömer had forwarded the request, reported back that the "Führer and Reich Chancellor" had given his consent in principle; Bömer then contacted the Reich Chancellery again at the beginning of the following January, announcing: "I will travel with Huss to the Saar myself on the evening of 10th, and return on the morning of 14th. In the meantime, Huss will have completed his report and will add the interview with the Führer to it and send it straight to New York and the German press."

At the request of his loyal advisor Bömer, Huss had submitted six questions ahead of time and in writing, including, for example: "Rumour has it that, following the Saar referendum, a new reorganisation and purge is to be carried out within the NSDAP; that a new campaign

---

<sup>13</sup> The Saar referendum of 1935 took place on 30 January of that year. 90.7 per cent of the electorate voted for the Saar region to be part of the German Reich. In April 1919, it was settled in the Treaty of Versailles that the Saar should be separated from the Reich under a League of Nations mandate for a period of fifteen years with the option of a subsequent plebiscite. During this phase, the Saar was economically and politically dependent on France. The Nazi regime had used all available propaganda tools to secure the outcome of the referendum.

against the Catholic Church and a new approach to the Protestant Church question are imminent; and that the Party leadership in general is to be tightened up. How much of this is true?" Bömer blocked these sensitive questions in advance: the Röhm Putsch of June 1934 and its fallout in the foreign press ("Night of the Long Knives") were still fresh in people's minds.<sup>14</sup> He occupied Huss as best he could in the Saar, arranging meetings with Nazi officials such as the Gauleiter and commissioner for the Saar region Josef Bürckel. That way Bömer was able to ensure a favourable report on the "propriety" of the Saar referendum before the Hitler interview itself.



When journalists still looked like diplomats: the Luxembourg-born Pierre J. Huss (1901-1966), correspondent for the newspapers of the Hearst Group, described his encounters with Hitler in elaborate detail. He was often suspected by his colleagues of cosying up excessively to the Nazi bigwigs. In 1945, he was able to return to his native Luxembourg with the victorious Allied troops. Hitler preferred to be interviewed by correspondents with German ancestry or at least German-sounding names: Huss, Knickerbocker, Lochner, Viereck, Kaltenborn, Wiegand or Delmer.

---

<sup>14</sup> A few weeks before the Röhm putsch, Hitler had been interviewed by the head of the Berlin bureau of the Associated Press, Louis P. Lochner; on this occasion, Lochner, who was well connected in Nazi circles, managed to get in the observation: "It is claimed, for example, that one of your most prominent members of staff is seeking to thwart (your) measures." Hitler answered prophetically that he "had not surrounded himself with losers, but with real men. (...) When such a group of powerful personalities comes together, a certain amount of friction is inevitable. But not a single one of my followers has ever tried to impose his will on me. On the contrary, they have shown an admirable readiness to submit to my wishes." (Quoted from the German version of the interview in the *Völkischer Beobachter* of 23 March 1934).

When Huss finally came face to face with Hitler on the Obersalzberg, his final pre-submitted question opened the floodgates for one of his interviewee's customary diatribes: "Herr Reichskanzler, have you anything to say after your great success in the Saar referendum that might be of particular interest to the American people?" At that point the referendum had not yet taken place, but Huss had anticipated its predictable outcome. Hitler then used this opportunity to send out a message – which was also circulated via the official Nazi-run German intelligence agency (DNB) – that he had "only one request" of the US population: "What millions of American citizens will have heard and read about the Saar over the past years and months is the opposite of what this free and open election shows. I would be glad if this could be recognised so that in future people will no longer believe a word of what is being put about by a profession of international well-poisoners and agitators of our emigrants. Just as they have lied about the Saar, so they are lying about Germany and thus deceiving practically the whole world." The "American people" should, he added, come to Germany themselves where possible in order to see what a state that had the support of "the overwhelming majority of a nation" looked like.

Hitler also used the Huss interview to give a further assurance that, following the return of the Saar region to Germany, he would be making "no further territorial claims on France": "I do this in order to help bring peace to Europe through this greatest of sacrifices." This was of course a barefaced lie: as a revanchist, Hitler had no intention of surrendering Alsace-Lorraine to the French – in fact the strategists of the western campaign even considered annexing the whole of Burgundy, as a former "territory of the Reich". Either way, France was

to be broken up, according to plans in which Hans Globke – later to become head of the Chancellery under Konrad Adenauer – played a prominent role.<sup>15</sup>

Pierre J. Huss retells the story of his encounter with Hitler on the Obersalzberg in his book *Heil! and Farewell!*, written in 1942 after his return to the USA. This account is much embellished and peppered with reflections on Hitler's psychology, without going into any detail about the background to the interview. At one point, Huss describes taking a walk in deep snow with the "Nazi leader" and his "large Hungarian dog"; Hitler had asked Huss to make a snowball and throw it into the air: "Hitler pulled out an automatic weapon and fired unerringly at my snowball. A fraction of a second after the shot rang out, the snowball exploded in the air, blown apart by the bullet. I must have looked a bit sceptical, as Hitler then invited me to throw another. He fired with a leisurely air and, it seemed to me, almost without taking aim, but once again the snowball was blasted to bits." Afterwards, Hitler had told him: "I think I can safely say that I am currently one of the few all-round connoisseurs of firearms in the world." Whether one believes such episodes or not, Huss did at least make time in 1942 to present Hitler to his Anglo-American public essentially as the die-hard fanatic that he was. On the other hand, he gives no hint of the fact that it was Hitler and his PR team who had the last word when it came to the initiation and authorisation of such interviews, especially when they were circulated in German translation through the intelligence service and the *Völkischer Beobachter*.

The phenomenon of Hitler as Führer is a well-rehearsed one, yet neither research into his family background nor sophisticated psychopathological analyses have yielded any useful

---

<sup>15</sup> See Peter Schöttler "Eine Art 'Generalplan West'. Die Stuckart-Denkschrift vom 14. Juni 1940 und die Planungen für eine neue deutsch-französische Grenze im Zweiten Weltkrieg", in *Sozial.Geschichte*, 18 (2003), Issue 3.

explanation of it. Even journalists of the time realised that, for all his convoluted family history with its various Hiedlers, Hüttlers and Schicklgrubers, Hitler cannot have been the only child of the Waldviertel region of Lower Austria with an authoritarian father and a strong mother fixation. In 1934, John Gunther and his colleague Marcel Fodor, a writer for the *Manchester Guardian*, travelled to the Lower Austrian village of Spital to track down relatives (cousins and aunts) of the Nazi leader, but they failed to get much out of them and their research ended in disappointment. They looked at a few childhood photos of Adolf and his mother when she was nearing the end of her life. They also learnt that his mother had been a housemaid of Hitler's father's second wife. "And what does that prove?" Gunther asked. "To tell the truth – absolutely nothing", Fodor conceded.

Adolf Hitler is without doubt the most intensively researched and widely interpreted head of state, far more so than other dictators, war-mongering monarchs and autocrats such as Napoleon Bonaparte, Mao Tse-tung, Stalin, Franco or Mussolini. This of course has to do with his unique brand of state terrorism and unconditional destructive will; the fact that his rule was exercised over, and through the medium of, a Western or Central European "civilised nation"; the apparent enigma of his political career from 1919 onwards; and, finally, the comparatively good source material. Anyone who cares to do so can now find information on almost every car journey or flight Hitler ever took, on his speeches and appearances as a matter of course, and also on the domestic and foreign policy situation informing his "decision-making process" at any one time. In 2016, Harald Sandner, a logistics manager by trade, published a four-volume, multi-thousand-page work entitled *Hitler – das Itinerar* in which virtually every ascertainable journey or encounter of Hitler's life from cradle to grave is indeed recorded, including every trip to the doctor or dentist. And back in the 1960s, Max Domarus (1911-1992), a teacher and archivist from Würzburg who worked

principally for the nobility, had also edited a four-volume set entitled *Hitler: Speeches und Proclamations 1932-1945: The Chronicle of a Dictatorship*, which was long used – particularly outside Germany – as a standard reference work, despite various rather obscure annotations by the self-styled “German contemporary” Domarus.

Historical scholarship in Germany has always followed this trend at a discreet distance, being traditionally suspicious of documentary Hitler collections. Nor have its own editions ever been fully definitive, as is readily demonstrated by the extracts from Hitler interviews reproduced in the source volume of the Leibniz Institute for Contemporary History (IfZ).<sup>16</sup> The renowned historian Eberhard Jäckel was particularly unlucky in this respect: for his otherwise perfectly serviceable volume *Adolf Hitler. Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen 1905 – 1924*, he had been conned into acquiring fake documents from the forger Konrad Kujau, so keen was he to provide an exhaustive survey of Hitler’s early writings. To this day, the nonfiction market continues to equate Hitler with the Nazi regime as a whole in the interests of posthumous branding and sales promotion. There are books such as *Hitler in Los Angeles*, for example, which is actually about the Nazi influence on Hollywood (Hitler himself never visited the city). Another work on the subject of German music from 1919 to 1945 is, predictably, entitled *Hitler at the Opera*.

In principle, Rudolf Olden – a political leader writer at the *Berliner Tageblatt* until his emigration in 1933 – had already established all the main facts about Hitler’s rise to power

---

<sup>16</sup> The existing volume published by the Leibniz Institute for Contemporary History (*Hitler: Reden, Schriften, Anordnungen 1925-1933*) essentially only contains Hitler’s answers from the relevant interviews, together with a general summary of the subject matter. In January 2024, the IfZ announced a new, long-term project spread over seven years that will see the publication of Hitler’s speeches, writings and proclamations from the period from 1933 to 1945. See: <https://www.ifz-muenchen.de/forschung/ea/forschung/edition-der-reden-adolf-hitlers-von-1933-bis-1945> (retrieved 14. 5. 2024).



and personality in the first comprehensive Hitler biography (published in Amsterdam).<sup>17</sup> He highlighted in particular the childlike cruelty of the Nazi leader's temperament: "There is a state known to psychology as infantilism, sometimes called infantile regression. This does not mean that the intellect has suffered; it does not refer to the weak-mindedness of senility. But impulse and reaction – the soul of the adult – have remained child-like and barbaric, or relapsed into the childhood stage. This is the phenomenon with which we are here concerned, in National Socialist Germany as in Hitler himself." And in his 1938 book *Hitler is No Fool* (published under the pseudonym Karl Billinger), the German social scientist Paul Massing, a strong supporter of the Communist Party, made it clear to American readers that Hitler would stick unswervingly to the agenda he had developed back in the early 1920s, namely Jewish persecution and the pursuit of Germanic rule in Europe.

When it comes to Hitler biographies, the past few decades seem to have seen an increasingly inverse relationship between number of pages and factual content. In essence, the early biographies by exiles such as Olden and Konrad Heiden had already said everything there was to say about the Nazi dictator, at least in terms of his personality, his strategy and his destructive intentions (which he had also freely expressed in the early interviews). It was of course only to be expected after 1945 that reflections would follow on his various military strategies, along with analyses of his voters, his financial and industrial sponsors, and his relationship with his inner circle, but the established Hitler image has remained basically the same. Leaving aside the early Anglo-American standard works by Allan Bullock or John Toland, authors working in a competitive academic environment – and for a nonfiction

---

<sup>17</sup> For example, Hitler's ability to appeal to different sectors of the electorate at once with the concept of "National Socialism". Despite this, Hitler systematically rid himself of the anti-capitalist and social revolutionary elements among his party following by neutralising or murdering them, as in the case of the economic theoretician Gottfried Feder, the Strasser brothers and Röhm's Storm Troopers.

market eager for anything Hitler-related – have found themselves compelled to come up with ever bolder theories to explain the true motives of the man from Braunau.

A new Hitler mania was stirred up in 1973 by the publicist Joachim C. Fest, who was granted special leave by the broadcasting corporation NDR for his work on the Hitler complex, only to switch later to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, where he became culture editor. Fest lamented the fact that there was no up-to-date Hitler biography by a German writer at the time. He wasn't keen on researching the original sources, preferring instead to indulge in longwinded stylistic hyperbole. For him, the key question was as follows: "History records no phenomenon like him. Ought we to call him 'great'? No one evoked so much rejoicing, hysteria, and expectation of salvation as he; no one so much hate." And at the end of his introduction, Fest writes:

If Hitler had succumbed to an assassination or an accident at the end of 1938, few would hesitate to call him one of the greatest of German statesmen, the consummator of Germany's history. The aggressive speeches and *Mein Kampf*, the anti-Semitism and the design for world dominion, would presumably have fallen into oblivion, dismissed as the man's youthful fantasies, and only occasionally would critics remind an irritated nation of them. Six and one-half years separated Hitler from such renown. Granted, only premature death could have given him that, for by nature he was headed toward destruction and did not make an exception of himself.

Can we call him great?

This led, predictably, to furious attacks by Neo-Marxists, who regarded Hitler as a mere embodiment of the overarching interests of industrial capitalism. Completely fruitless clashes then ensued between "intentionalists", who focused more on Hitler and his agenda,

and “structuralists”, who gave more weight to the social, economic or cultural background. These came to an end of sorts with Ian Kershaw’s comprehensive Hitler biography of 1998, even though Kershaw, as a disciple of the “structuralist” Hans Mommsen, hadn’t actually meant to write a Hitler biography. The Hitler biography industry continued unabated, however, with all kinds of new theories springing up.

The respected historian Peter Longerich sought to distance himself on one hand from the approach (meanwhile redefined as structuralist) of the Kershaw biography – and hence from the image of a “weak dictator” attributed to Mommsen – and, on the other hand, from Fest: “...what we are dealing with is no more or less than the history of a nobody.”

It took Wolfram Pyta 846 pages to produce another portrait of Hitler the artist, in both an aesthetic and a political sense. It had been a long lonely toil: “The present study is the fruit of seven years of persistently interrupted research. It was not born of a collaborative, large-scale research project, nor could it draw on the assistance of third-party-funded project staff, and may appear somewhat old-fashioned in that respect. The author has spent years brooding over it in the self-chosen isolation of his ‘writer’s den’.”

In 2019, Brandon Simms ventured to produce a “global biography” of Hitler based on the theory “that Hitler’s primary concern throughout his career was not with the Soviet Union and Bolshevism, but Anglo-America and global capitalism”, and “that his attitude to the German people, even after the ‘purging’ of Jews and other ‘undesirables’, was highly ambivalent and consistently driven by a sense of inferiority vis-à-vis the ‘Anglo-American’ world.”

Some time before, the former history editor at *Die Zeit*, Volker Ullrich, had made another attempt to “take stock of the ‘Hitler phenomenon’ and define his place in history” in two

volumes (2013/18) running to around 2000 pages. Readers who prefer a somewhat slimmer volume can always reach for the long forgotten and out-of-print 160-page biography by Helmut Heiber (1960) to find all the key facts about Adolf Hitler and his supporters.<sup>18</sup>

Interviews have been part of the standard repertoire of professional journalism since the 19th century. The generally acknowledged pioneer of the journalistic interview was the Scottish-born publisher James Gordon Bennett (1795-1872), the founder and editor of the popular newspaper *New York Herald* who interviewed the US president Martin van Buren in 1839. Some press scholars also cite the anti-slavery champion Horace Greeley, whose interview with the Mormon prophet Brigham Young, printed in the *New York Tribune* in 1859, is regarded as the first in the world to use the now customary question-and-answer format.<sup>19</sup>

Interview formats are as varied as the discipline itself and its associated roles. In general, they can be analysed according to the famous (slightly modified) model of communication devised by the US political scientist Harold Dwight Lasswell: “Who says what, in what channel, to whom, and with what effect?” (and when?). They can take the form of transcribed research interviews which are not intended for publication, brief interrogations on topical subjects, lengthier, more expansive biographical conversations with artists and pop stars, factual interviews with scientists about their research results or confessional interviews of a scandalous nature. The latter category is exemplified by the most spectacular

---

<sup>18</sup> One reason for the accumulation of Hitler biographies was that a series of in-depth historiographical studies had meanwhile been published on topics such as the “decision-making process” leading to the Holocaust, the interplay between bourgeois bureaucracy and justice, or the development of the military and industrial elites in the Weimar Republic and in the Nazi state.

<sup>19</sup> See George Turnbull, “Some Notes on the History of the Interview”, in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 13 (3), March 1936. For a decent anthology of the history of journalistic interviews, see Christopher Silvester, *The Penguin Book of Interviews. An Anthology from 1858 to the Present Day* (1993).

(TV) interview of the past few decades: the one between BBC journalist Martin Bashir and Lady Diana Spencer. In this case, it later turned out that Bashir had used unfair means to extract this confession from the princess about her marriage with Prince Charles. Here, as so often, it was not quite clear who was using whom.<sup>20</sup>

Nor should we forget, for that matter, that an interview may – far more often than is publicly assumed – be deliberately contrived in order to broadcast a particular message. This can take the form of a “push interview”, which is initiated by the interviewee, or a “pull interview”, instigated by the media organisation. In terms of interrogation technique, the boundaries between these exchanges and those conducted in the criminal justice system or social science research are fluid, whereby the formal training in the latter fields – such as good cop, bad cop-style interviews in the case of the police – is presumably more structured than at schools of journalism.

Often, there are mutually reinforcing celebrity effects at play between interviewers and interviewees: truly powerful political leaders can often choose which journalist they want to be interviewed by<sup>21</sup>, while for star journalists – people like Barbara Walters, Walter Cronkite or Christiane Amanpour in the USA or Jean-Pierre Elkabbach, Christine Ockrent or Patrick Poivre d’Arvor (“PPDA”) in France – the list of dictators, heads of state or high-profile terrorists they have met is a standard component of their professional biography. “When big names talk, they talk to the BBC” runs a memorable advertising slogan of the renowned BBC

---

<sup>20</sup> See also the recent Netflix film *Scoop* (2024), about the BBC interview between Emily Maitlis and Prince Andrew on his involvement in the network of sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein.

<sup>21</sup> For example, the German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer deliberately chose the Europe correspondent of the US provincial newspaper *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (John P. Leacacos) in 1949 in order to launch his idea of rearming West Germany.

programme *Hardtalk*. Hugh Hefner's macho magazine *Playboy* used meaty interviews<sup>22</sup> to enhance its image; Andy Warhol published the magazine *Interview*; and films such as *Interview* (Steve Buscemi, 2007), *Frost/Nixon* (Ron Howard, 2008) or *The Interview* (Evan Goldberg, 2014) play out in entertaining format the ways in which conversations with famous figures are mediated and conducted.

Examples from the German-speaking world include the *Spiegel* interviews, Günter Gaus' minutely prepared philosophical-cum-biographical interviews for the TV series *Zur Person*, André Müller's intrusive psychologising, as featured in various quality newspapers, or Roger Willemsen's quickfire Q&As on the Premiere (now Sky Deutschland) talk show *0137*, subsequently published in book form with the striking title "To the limit: Interviews with assassins, bank robbers, murders, political prisoners, car thieves, death row inmates and victims of violence."<sup>23</sup> It is relatively rare for a journalist to admit to having conducted a disastrous interview, which makes the French essayist Emmanuel Carrère's piece on "How I completely botched my interview with Catherine Deneuve"<sup>24</sup> all the more interesting: apparently, he ran out of things to say to her, and she was similarly unanimated by the conversation.

---

<sup>22</sup> One of the most famous examples of this was the *Playboy* interview with the Canadian media guru Marshall McLuhan (March 1969 issue) in which, among other things, he talked about the radio communication techniques of Hitler's speeches, arguing that, even if Hitler hadn't existed, another demagogue would have used the radio to retribalise the Germans. Of greater relevance to today's communication landscape are McLuhan's observations, plainly expressed in this interview, on the shock effect of sudden advances in communication technology on social cohesion, leading initially to confusion and excitement and ushering in a new, technology-based tribal culture.

<sup>23</sup> According to this measure of journalistic success, potentially scandalous interviews with the likes of Charles Manson, Lady Di, Muhammad Ali or writers such as Michel Houellebecq are justified by the desired impact and the logic of celebrity.

<sup>24</sup> In his book *97,196 Words: Essays* (2019)

The journalistic interviews with Hitler<sup>25</sup> have seen a resurgence of interest in the 21st century; in 2019, the French historian Eric Branca published an edited collection of sixteen such interviews complete with notes and introduction. These were not, however, as forgotten as the title (*Les entretiens oubliés d'Hitler 1923-1940*) suggests. Wolfgang Schieder, for one, refers to a number of the Nazi dictator's conversations with Italian journalists in his work on relations between Hitler and Mussolini. Other interviews with foreign reporters are also mentioned in many Hitler biographies. Back in 2007, the *Guardian* included George Sylvester Viereck's Hitler interview (1923/32) – which is examined in more detail in the next chapter of this book – in its booklet series “Great interviews of the 20th century”. And in October 2019, staff at the Danish newspaper *Århus Stiftstidende* rediscovered an early interview of November 1922 in its archives in which Hitler asked the interviewer (whose exact identity is still unknown) right at the start: “Are you a Jew?” Moreover, when asked about the Jewish question, he had replied quoting the Prussian statesman Bernard von Bülow: “Und willst du nicht mein Bruder sein, dann schlag' ich dir den Schädel ein” (literally:

---

<sup>25</sup> In January 1945, a report on a meeting of the Hungarian Chief of General Staff Janos Voeroes with Hitler and his remaining entourage in the Berlin Führer bunker appeared in US newspapers under the title “Interview with Hitler”. Voeroes had visited the Führer bunker on 20 September 1944 and described the Nazi dictator's shattered physical and mental state to a Moscow AP correspondent. Voeroes: “I would rather have fought in a battle than live through what happened there (in the bunker)” (see e.g. *Townsville Daily Bulletin* of 19 January 1945). Other Hitler interviews were conducted by publicists or chancers who subsequently published them in books without explicitly identifying them as such; see for example the book by the prominent American racial theorist and eugenicist Lothrop Stoddard, *Into the Darkness: An Uncensored Report from Inside the Third Reich at War* (2011). Stoddard spent four months travelling around Nazi Germany in 1940 as a correspondent for the North American Newspaper Alliance, during which he conducted interviews with Hitler, Joseph Goebbels and Heinrich Himmler. According to Stoddard, he had promised the Führer to keep the contents of their discussion of racial theory confidential. Earlier, in March 1923, the US journalist Ludwell Denny had written some interesting articles on the Nazi movement for the *Literary Digest* magazine based on a personal encounter with Hitler, without explicitly describing any of the texts as an “interview”; on this, see Michael Zalampas, *Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich in American Magazines, 1923-1939* (1989). In her 1940 book *These Men I Knew*, the British travel writer and novelist Rosita Forbes (1890-1967; *The Secret of the Sahara*) had given a detailed account of her conversations with Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin. In this respect, we find a blurring of boundaries between anecdotes, encounters and explicit interviews. See also Despina Stratigakos' *Hitler at Home* (2015), which references William George Fitzgerald's article on Hitler's Berghof residence in *Current History* (July 1936) and *Homes and Gardens* (November 1938).

“And if you will not be my brother, I will smash your skull in”). This conversation, which is said to have taken place at the NSDAP office, at that time located in Munich (Corneliusstrasse 12), is as obscure as all the early Hitler interviews, however; what was actually said can no longer be reconstructed. That Hitler made no secret of his rabid antisemitism on such occasions is certainly consistent though.

In 2014, the Canadian author Colin Castle published a biography of the journalist Lukin Johnston, a compatriot who was murdered on Göring’s orders following an interview with Hitler in November 1933. But this case too remains unresolved. In his essay on US correspondents in Nazi Berlin, the historian Norman Domeier not only researched their working conditions and biographies, but also looked in detail at their interview strategy. And the past few years have seen an increasing debate surrounding a joint interview by the two Catalan journalists Eugeni Xammar and Josep Pla which is alleged to have occurred in November 1923, hours before the Hitler-Ludendorff putsch (see Chapter 7).

In a wider context, the subject of this book has an obvious contemporary relevance given the widespread monopolisation of domestic and foreign media channels by dictators, autocrats, historical revisionists and populists of every hue. This applies as much to middle-class publishing institutions as it does to regulation-resistant social media platforms which are exposed to propaganda campaigns ranging through to diversionary tactics and attacks by “troll factories” dedicated to psychological warfare.

The debates around “useful idiots” in the established media, which consciously or unconsciously reinforce politically extreme attitudes by offering political bullies a “platform” or generally giving them more coverage – often with the feeble excuse of debunking them – have intensified following the electoral success of ideologically right-wing parties throughout



Europe. Communication historians have a ready-made example in the rise of the Le Pen clan in France, for example. There is already a wealth of material on the media-political careers of the prematurely deceased Austrian Freedom Party leader Jörg Haider (1950-2008) or the rather longer-lived Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi (1936-2023). In Germany, a circular discussion is currently raging over the appearance of representatives of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) in political talk shows or the “summer interviews” of the public broadcasting channels ARD and ZDF, whereby advocates of a normalised treatment of such figures are keen to point out that they are, after all, democratically elected, and that the fee-paying viewer (and AfD voter) has as much right to see them in these formats as in any other.

Such controversies over the amplifying effect of media exposure on initially fringe positions are not without precedent, however. Back in the early 1950s, the United States was divided over how to deal with the highly media-savvy senator Joseph McCarthy. His communist witch hunt, at first only of marginal interest, received a huge boost after a number of media outlets discovered him as the next political star of the Republican Party – even though the journalists and media companies concerned were vehemently opposed to his crude and clumsy interrogation methods.

“As everyone knows”, the publicist and sociologist Jens Bisky wrote in 2024, “96 per cent of all Weimar analogies are misleading or wrong”. The lacklustre German Chancellor Olaf Scholz can certainly be compared with the last SPD Chancellor of the Weimar Republic, Hermann Müller, at least in terms of his communication skills, or with Müller’s successor Heinrich Brüning (Centre Party). And some Weimar parallels undoubtedly suggest themselves, such as the lack of action and communication on the part of the bourgeois

establishment, coupled with the rise of a New-Right, historico-politically regressive movement that has a destructive – and taxpayer-funded – front organisation in parliament in the shape of the AfD. The fatigue, anger and loss of control felt by large sections of the population in the face of bewildering advances in cultural and communication technology are likewise reminiscent of the first German republic, as are antisemitic attacks, which are now being further fuelled by radical Islamic groups. At the same time, the Federal Republic is not subject to a generally accepted paramilitary regime, there is no Wilhelmine-style, socially instilled authoritarian justice system, and the Bundeswehr is not the Reichswehr.

The “Weimar reloaded” analogies<sup>26</sup> have their analytical limits, and it was not for nothing that – somewhat unexpectedly – millions of citizens took to the streets in 2024 because they had no appetite for another supine “national community” under the leadership of backward-looking thugs or assorted mourners of the “decline of the West”. Nor is the situation helped by the all-too easy recourse to hashtag antifascism (#Nazis-out) and constant comparisons with the rise of the NSDAP, Hitler or Goebbels, particularly since smart New Right activists naturally realise – and have done largely since 1945 – that any positive evocation of the original Nazi leaders is a tactical no-no, and that it is better to appropriate the more veiled terminology of passing Hitler admirers such as Martin Heidegger or Carl Schmitt.<sup>27</sup> In the book *Nie zweimal in denselben Fluss* (“Never twice into the same river”,

---

<sup>26</sup> See Gregor Mayntz, *Weimar reloaded? Warum es die Deutschen nicht schaffen, den Anfängen zu wehren, und was ihnen nun zu tun bleibt* (“ Weimar reloaded? Why the Germans failed to defend themselves against the beginnings and what remains to be done now”), 2019.

<sup>27</sup> For far-right “metapoliticians”, it is more expedient to cite scholarly or decisionist-sounding maxims such as Martin Heidegger’s “Sein des Seyns”(“being of being”) or Carl Schmitt’s “völkerrechtliche Großraumordnung mit Interventionsverbot für raumfremde Mächte” (roughly translated: “a geopolitical order prohibiting intervention by foreign powers”) than to refer directly to the writings or speeches of Hitler and Goebbels. See also Patrick Bahners’ *Die Wiederkehr. Die AfD und der neue deutsche Nationalismus* (“The Comeback. The AfD and the new German nationalism”), 2023.

2023, 6th edition) – a reproduction of an interview with the Thuringian AfD leader Björn Höcke, including pages of scholarly references to Heidegger and Nietzsche, Höcke disingenuously asserts: “I reject all violence in the current culture war, which should be played out on a purely intellectual level”. Besides, for all the cross-references, there is no discernible international *völkisch* movement: even the increasingly hopeful French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen (Rassemblement National), as well as Giorgia Meloni, leader of the Italian post-fascist party Fratelli d’Italia and prime minister since October 2022, have recently distanced themselves from the AfD; when it comes to realpolitik, their interests – especially in an economic and EU context – are too different.

After re-reading Volker Ullrich’s Hitler biography, the US writer T.C. Boyle concluded in an interview for *Stern* magazine (February 2024) that there were “uncanny parallels” between Donald Trump and Hitler, since Trump (“a profoundly unscrupulous, morally corrupt megalomaniac”, “Trump is a fascist”) also uses fake news, propaganda and hatred of minorities to manipulate people to the point “that they even end up voting against their own interests”. It is true that, during his first US presidency, Trump was already in an even better position than the Nazi dictator – thanks to social media – to shun “legacy media” such as CNN, the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*, while pouring vitriol on the already threatened journalists of these elite publishing institutions. But here too, the differences are clear: Trump is a rich kid, an obscure real estate investor, a reality TV show host with no enthusiasm for international military interventions. Hitler was, in biographical terms alone, none of these things.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> On the fundamental impossibility of interviewing boorish navel-gazers and journalist-haters such as Donald Trump, see Federico Finchelstein: “Trump’s NPR interview shows the danger of interviewing him”, in *The Washington Post*, 20 January 2022.

Nevertheless, T.C. Boyle's points about strategic communication, about defining the enemy, and about political marketing via stereotyping and oversimplification are undoubtedly correct. Almost all dictators, autocrats, sect and religious leaders throughout history have achieved their rise and rule by means of communication control regimes, historical revisionism, "bread and circuses", and a more or less sophisticated psychological study of their actual and potential followers. And they have done so using the media tools of the time, be they commemorations, gestures, slogans, marches or demonstrations (in the literal sense). Hitler's interviews were likewise part of such an overarching strategy, making use of the formats of modern journalism. Only this persuasive strategy was ultimately undermined by military realpolitik, or the limits of belief in any kind of propaganda – if the claim "undefeated in the field" was untrue after the First World War, it certainly was after the Second.

On 18 July 1942, after one of his customary rants about the harms of smoking (it was, he claimed, "the wrath of the Red Man against the White Man, vengeance for having been given hard liquor"), it occurred to Hitler himself that an interview with a foreign correspondent might be useful after all. Over supper at the Führer's "Werewolf" headquarters in Vinnytsia, Ukraine, the conversation turned to the "second front" that Stalin had long been demanding from the Western Allies. Hitler wanted to make a public statement on the subject and had come to realise – albeit far too late – the strategic value of interviews: an interview about the problems of the eastern campaign might be more useful than a public address. Making speeches without a plausible reason was risky: intelligent people would always find something to criticise. In an interview, you could "say the bare essentials in a few subclauses without drawing too much attention to them". According to his stenographers' notes, he intended to formulate his remarks on the "second front" in such

a way as to give the English “a cold shower”. Nor would he, in order not to jeopardise the object of the interview, “state that he did not currently believe in the establishment of a ‘second front’. Instead, he would explain that it befitted the rigour and thoroughness of the German military to be prepared for all eventualities, including that of a ‘second front’.”

Hitler agreed with Reich press chief Dr Dietrich that the interview should be granted to a foreign correspondent who had been particularly supportive of Germany’s PR campaign so far. “Whether the country they represented was large or small, allied or neutral, was irrelevant; after all – as the Reich press chief quite rightly said – the interview would be printed in all the world’s newspapers in any event.” Such an interview never came to pass, however, as there were no journalists left by then who were willing to be thus summoned by Hitler.<sup>29</sup>

*They Wanted War*: such was the title of the *New York Times* correspondent Otto D. Tolischus’ memoir – published in 1938 – of his time in Nazi Berlin. For such was, in a nutshell, the story of National Socialism, of Hitler, his executors, “combatant administrators”, technocrats, lawyers and military – and indeed of many of his followers, even if the appetite for war in 1939 couldn’t compare with the jingoism of 1914. And they got their war, too – one that Goebbels described in his speech of February 1943 at the Berlin Sportpalast as “more total and radical than anything that we can even imagine today”. This was the agenda from the outset: first putsch and civil war, then major military conflict.

In Hitler’s significant speech to the Reichstag on 11 December 1941, in which he declared war on the United States in the name of the German Reich and described both the US

---

<sup>29</sup> The only exception was a rather minor telephone interview in 1944 with the Swedish journalist Christer Jäderlund; for further details of this, see Chapter 7 of this book.

president Franklin D. Roosevelt and his indirect predecessor Woodrow Wilson as mentally unsound, he had declaimed: "I can say that, for me, the war has been unending since 1914. I have continued to fight from the moment I was able to speak again, and have been up and down the country, from place to place, from city to city, speaking over and over again and working, always with the sole aim of saving the German people from this fragmentation, shaking it out of its lethargy, rousing it from its sleep and making it whole again". He also announced quite openly that he didn't need any advisors in most fields, or indeed any experts at all: "For me, my head is good enough! I do not need a brain trust to assist me. If there truly needs to be a change somewhere, then it first has to take place in my brain and not in the brains of others, not even in the brains of experts." The Hitler interviewers might therefore have known that, whatever they asked him, and whatever the various interests of the publishing houses or individual journalists in question, they would encounter this kind of egomania and solipsism.

In the following chapters, we will analyse the Hitler interviews, for the most part chronologically, on a case-by-case basis, and in the relevant geopolitical context, before finally returning to the fundamental question of how much is to be gained from journalistic interviews with dictators and autocrats. Spoiler alert: very little.

[END OF SAMPLE]