

by Liat Benhabib

“Watching my movie gave them the courage to look into their connections to the Nazi horrors. No German can escape this; it’s an inseparable part of our society.”
 Film director Malte Ludin, Germany

Hans Ludin was no ordinary German soldier, but the story of his family is typical. Hans’ son Malte was five years old when his father was executed in 1947 for war crimes. In his film, *2 or 3 Things I Know About Him* (85 min., Germany, 2005), Malte Ludin attempts to confront the family’s memory and especially his father’s smiling image, through testimony and archival materials. “For years, I struggled with myself. I knew that my mother wouldn’t agree to the film, and I was aware of my sisters’ stance, though I didn’t imagine how extreme it could be. But I’m a filmmaker: making films is my way of understanding the world and myself,” said Ludin in a telephone interview from Berlin.

“2 or 3 Things I Know About Him”



Hans Ludin, an enthusiastic National Socialist, joined the ranks of the SA in the 1920s. In 1941, he was appointed Nazi Germany’s ambassador to Slovakia, and moved his family to Bratislava. Ludin personally signed the deportation orders for approximately 70,000 Slovak Jews, thus taking part in their murder.

After his mother’s death, Malte opened a chest in the attic containing the family legacy: newspaper clippings, letters, photographs and documents belonging to Hans, all of which present an entirely different picture from the one his sisters clung to so desperately. Ludin had interviewed his mother before her death, and later approached his sisters with great sensitivity and patience.

Despite this, when he confronted his older sister Barbel with the bitter truth about their father, she stopped speaking to him. Ellen, his other sister, reveals the pain of recognition of her father’s crimes: “In my mind, I understand that I am the daughter of a perpetrator, but this is not what I feel in my heart.”

However, Ludin does not let up. In a particularly jarring sequence, he juxtaposes his sisters’ innocent childhood memories with close-ups of the document calling for the deportation of the Jews of Slovakia signed by his father, cutting to the testimony of a member of the Stern family who had been the Ludins’ neighbors until the “cleansing orders.” Ludin interviews Holocaust survivors, including Israeli poet Tuvia Rübner, the only member of his family to survive.

Ludin’s film is a powerful personal testimony, as well as a reflection upon responsibility, memory and historical truth. “I am not naïve, a movie can’t change the world,” he admits. “However, at every screening I held in Germany, at least one or two people stood up to say that they identified with my stance in the film of being the ‘black sheep’ in the family; and that watching my movie gave them the courage to look into their connections to the Nazi horrors. No German can escape this; it’s an inseparable part of our society. German youth have many reminders of the Holocaust—memorials, days of remembrance—but I believe that knowing and understanding what happened is not enough. There has to be something else, something connected to the emotions. In my opinion, encouraging Holocaust awareness has to be accomplished through the heart as well.”

Malte Ludin and his wife Iva Švarcová, the film’s producer and a native of Slovakia, will screen *2 or 3 Things I Know About Him* in Israel to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The film will be shown at the Tel Aviv Cinematheque on 27 January 2008, and at Yad Vashem’s Visual Center and the Jerusalem Cinematheque the following day. The Goethe Institute, the Israeli German Society (IDG) and the Remembrance & Future Fund Germany are sponsoring Ludin and Švarcová’s visit.

“For a long time, making this film was hard for me, but it burned within me,” concludes Ludin. “It has already been screened in many countries, but the warmest and most empathetic reactions have come particularly from Jewish and Israeli audiences.”

News from the Visual Center by Liat Benhabib and Mimi Ash

Cinema as a Site of Memory

“Cinema as a Site of Memory” was the topic of a conference on 3 December jointly sponsored by the Visual Center at Yad Vashem and the Jerusalem Cinematheque. The conference, held as part of the ninth Jewish Film Festival, in honor of the tenth anniversary of the Cinematheque’s Joan Sourasky-Constantiner Holocaust Multimedia Research Center, examined film as a major influence on individual and collective memory.

Dr. Gideon Ofrit opened the conference with a philosophical perspective on perception and memory as expressed in Holocaust-related film. Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev explained the curatorial vision behind the films and other media featured in the permanent exhibit of Yad Vashem’s Holocaust History Museum. Video artist Michal Rovner presented her ideas on the relationship between form and content in her work at the museum’s entrance “Living Landscape,” and producer/director Noemy Schory delineated the process behind the production of the 110 historical films in the museum. Dr. Daniel Uziel and Dr. Yvonne Koslovsky-Golan surveyed films of various genres, from Nazi propaganda and documentation to later documentaries.

Additional speakers were Piotr Cywinski, Director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, and Robert Thalheim, director of the feature film, *And Along Came the Tourists* (Germany, 2007), which was screened at the end of the conference and followed by a discussion about the significance of using

Auschwitz as a film location. *And Along Came the Tourists* tells the story of Sven, a young German, who ends up at the Auschwitz museum in the course of his national service. Like Sven, the audience encounters the historical place and the present site of commemoration, the people who continue to visit, and those who are no longer with us.

New Collections of Rare Films

The Visual Center recently acquired 34 films from DEFA (*Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft*), the official East German film production company from 1946-1992. Although DEFA’s over 7,500 films exhibit depth, variety and a daring attempt to test the limits of censorship, they remain largely unknown among film enthusiasts worldwide. The Visual Center participated in the recent “Black + White ≠ Grey” DEFA Retrospective in Israel, which featured Academy-Award nominee *Jakob der Lügner* (Frank Beyer, 1975), *The Murderers are Among Us* (Wolfgang Staudte, 1946) and *The Second Track* (Joachim Kunert, 1962).

Five films produced by the Michlalah Jerusalem Womens’ College featuring rare survivor testimonies by Orthodox Jews concerning issues of religious observance have also been added to the Visual Center’s film collection.

Liat Benhabib is Director of Yad Vashem’s Visual Center, and Mimi Ash is Acquisitions and Projects Coordinator at the Visual Center.