

Between History and Melodrama: Authenticity in TeamWorx's 'Event Movies' on the National Socialist Past

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The TV production company teamWorx is one of Germany's most successful and high-profile. Its big-budget 'Event Movies' regularly attract record-breaking viewing figures, earn numerous international awards and cause a great deal of discussion and debate. The company was founded in 1998 by producers Nico Hofmann (chairman of the board), Ariane Krampe and Wolf Bauer, and is a subsidiary company of UFA Film & TV Produktion. It produces a range of TV series, TV films and cinematic features but is best known for its so-called 'Event Movies'. According to its own press release, teamWorx is "europaweit Marktführer im Bereich Event-Produktionen" ("11 Jahre teamWorx" [2]) ["Europe-wide market leader in event productions"]. The aim of an Event Movie, according to Hofmann, is to capture the public's imagination and keep Germany talking for several days. They do indeed create a great deal of debate, both publicly and privately, including numerous column inches in a wide range of newspapers and magazines. As well as their impressive viewing figures, teamWorx's Event Movies have also gained a number of prizes at TV awards and have been sold to numerous countries around the world ("11 Jahre teamWorx"). These Event Movies concentrate mostly on historical subjects, in fact almost exclusively on twentieth-century German history. Films by teamWorx address the history of the GDR (see *Die Mauer—Berlin '61* [2005] and *Das Wunder von Berlin* [2008]) and German terrorism (see *Mogadischu* [2008]); a number of films portray the life of historical personages, such as *Der Mann aus der Pfalz* (2009) on Helmut Kohl, and the docudrama *Dutschke* (2010) on the student leader. Alongside these features, teamWorx has also produced a small number of non-historical Event Movies, including the disaster movies *Tornado: Der Zorn des Himmels* (2006) for Pro 7 and *Vulkan* (2009) for RTL. These two-parters depict the imagined effects of a tornado hitting Berlin and a volcanic eruption in Germany's Eifel region respectively, making ample use of computer-generated imagery.

This article will focus on Event Movies teamWorx has produced dealing with the National Socialist past. Its first film on this topic was *Stauffenberg*, broadcast in the anniversary year of 2004, which provides an in-depth dramatised account of the events of 20 July 1944. The film details the general's assassination attempt on Hitler, the implementation of Operation Valkyrie and finally the execution of

Stauffenberg and his fellow conspirators. Perhaps one of teamWorx's best-known Event Movies, and one which typifies the company's combination of history and melodrama, is the two-parter *Dresden*, which simultaneously depicts the Allied bombing of the city in February 1945 and a love story between the German nurse Anna Mauth and British bomber pilot Robert Newman. Also broadcast in 2006 was *Nicht alle waren Mörder*, whose plot is based on the memoirs of the Jewish actor Michael Degen. Degen survived the Second World War by going underground in Berlin with his mother and being hidden by a series of sympathetic citizens. The final Event Movie to be dealt with is *Die Flucht* (2007), a two-parter portraying the plight of expellees from the East at the end of the Second World War, focusing on the character of Lena Gräfin von Mahlenberg, who is forced to leave her family home in East Prussia during the final stages of the war. In early 2011 teamWorx broadcast several other Event Movies on the subject of (or taking place during) the Third Reich, including *The Sinking of the Laconia*, a co-production with the BBC for which Alan Bleasdale provided the script. This two-parter recounts the story of the British vessel, torpedoed by a German U-Boot whose captain subsequently undertook a rescue effort to save civilians. Also broadcast was *Hindenburg*, a two-part production for RTL, reliving the 1937 airship disaster in spectacular detail and finally *Schicksalsjahre*, based on the 2004 autobiographical novel *Vom Glück nur ein Schatten* by Uwe-Karsten Heye. Although these newer films share many similarities with teamWorx's previous Event Movies, this article will focus solely on the aforementioned Event Movies broadcast between 2004 and 2007.

Critics and commentators in Germany have long acknowledged the importance of teamWorx's Event Movies in Germany's media landscape. More recently, however, the company's contribution to historical debates has also been recognised by British commentators in a number of significant journal articles and edited volumes. Take for example Paul Cooke ("*Dresden*"), David Crew, as well as Paul Cooke and Marc Silberman's edited volume *Screening War*, which features analyses of many teamWorx Event Movies. This article therefore represents an important step in dealing with such a wide range of Event Movies and detailing in depth the attitudes of the teamWorx film-makers. Although the main focus of teamWorx's Event Movies is the more difficult periods in Germany's past, and although the company is driven by an explicit desire to help the German population come to terms with these difficult periods, their TV films are designed to be entertaining and to attract as wide an audience as possible and they do this, in part, by borrowing devices from mass-market, melodramatic productions. This article intends to investigate authenticity claims in teamWorx's four Event Movies on the National Socialist past, question how this authenticity is attempted, how this concept of authenticity is affected by the melodramatic elements of the films and finally how this juxtaposition can help or hinder efforts to come to terms with the Nazi past.

Ever since its first Event Movie, *Der Tunnel* (2001)—based on a real-life attempt to bring a number of people into West Germany via a tunnel underneath the Berlin Wall—, teamWorx has been recognised as delivering earnest attempts to come to terms with the past in film (Rosenbach 152). Since then, teamWorx's name

has been synonymous with historical productions. Hofmann has claimed: “nichts ist spannender als Geschichte” (“Exzellenz-Wettbewerb”) [“nothing is more exciting than history”], and his company has been celebrated for its ability to approach the past and to open it up anew to the German public (Schlink). Hofmann sees the past as a rich seam of storytelling just waiting to be mined and, importantly, is also aware of the power of film to deal with this past; whether through illuminating hitherto unexplored facets of German resistance or colourfully illustrating the GDR past to those who have only read about it in books (“Für uns”). A focus on information and education regarding the history portrayed is reinforced by screening related documentaries after the broadcast of each film, by distributing DVDs of certain Event Movies to schools along with a special educational pack and by providing online resources surrounding each Event Movie, which feature background information, eye-witness reports and a platform for comments and feedback (Raff 292). Hofmann has made it clear that the Event Movies are to play an important role in coming to terms with the past, specifically by breaking taboos and encouraging debate on the issues involved, which is especially true regarding films on the National Socialist past. He refers to these Event Movies as providing a kind of national psychoanalysis: engendering debate and allowing the public to discuss issues that were previously taboo (Hofmann, Personal interview). Integral to teamWorx’s approach is that history is presented ‘authentically’: in the many interviews and the promotional material surrounding the Event Movies, Hofmann and other film-makers and producers remark that authenticity is key to the presentation of history in teamWorx’s films.

Specific examples of how teamWorx attempts authenticity in its Event Movies will be discussed later in conjunction with the films themselves, but first it is necessary to ask whether it is possible to recreate the past authentically in a mass market TV Event, or indeed in any kind of film production at all. Geoffrey Hartmann has described authenticity as “an illustrious superstition” (65)—suggesting something never quite achievable—and this is especially true with regard to film, which traditionally has had a difficult relationship with the concept of historical authenticity. If even historical memory cannot be said to be truly authentic—as any memory of past experiences is unavoidably affected and modified by events which occur in the interim (Lummis 120)—then how could an artificial (re-)construction of the past ever hope to be? A further issue, particularly surrounding large historical events, which surely include the Third Reich and the Second World War, is that there exists such a spectrum of experience that no one person’s memories could be said to give the authentic view of its totality. This is a significant problem regarding memory of the Holocaust, where it is said the truest, most authentic witnesses are those who died; those who survived were unrepresentative and therefore did not have access to the range of experience required for authentic Holocaust memory (Hartmann 86). If authentic historical memory can be seen to be a questionable concept, then an authentic vision of history on film could be regarded as impossible. This is illustrated by the paradox of historical film: film is arguably the closest medium to

reality, in that it mimics the way in which the viewer experiences real life, compared to how a reader would approach a history book, having to imagine events and characters. Conversely, this is also the main problem with historical film, that it is forced to reconstruct historical fact in a purely imaginary way. Furthermore, the great number of people involved in artistic decisions about the film compound further the artificiality; even if a film is based on one person's memoirs, the fact that a film is inevitably the product of many people's creative concepts suggests it is actually far away from an authentic portrayal of how things really were. This problem is summarised by Robert A. Rosenstone's rhetorical question: "Can we really represent the past, factually or fictionally, as it was, or do we always present only some version of the way it possibly was or may have been?" (135). As well as these general difficulties, the National Socialist past represents a more specific hurdle to on-screen portrayal, in that there appears to be an innate contradiction between the demands of a genre production, such as the prime-time Event Movie, and the demands of 'serious' history, a qualifier which can most definitely be applied to the Nazi past as a time of horrific crimes and terrible suffering. Several demands of the genre—such as positive characters for identification, a black and white distinction between good and evil and the importance of an uplifting, conclusive ending—sit at odds with historical fact. During the time of the Third Reich, such simplistic dichotomies or neat conclusions would have been completely impossible. An example of the problems associated with using prime-time television to deal with sensitive historical issues is the US-American mini-series *Holocaust*, broadcast in 1978 (and in Germany in 1979), which received a great deal of criticism for trivialising the issue of the Holocaust through the use of some of the generic conventions of melodrama. A further problem is that authenticity in material terms—such as realistic locations, props and costumes—can actually act against the viewer's understanding of history. These material aspects give the film an air of authenticity which prevents the viewer from questioning the version of events presented, or even from understanding that only one version of events has been shown, thereby obscuring the fact that an authentic representation of events in film is an impossibility (Insdorf 12).

Let us now turn to teamWorx's Event Movies on the National Socialist past, examining how the company claims its productions depict 'authentic' history through a variety of filmic and extra-filmic devices and questioning these claims, with particular reference to the problems of authenticity in historical film. teamWorx first claims authenticity through the use of real stories as sources for its films. *Stauffenberg* is based on the well-known historical figure of Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg and much was made of the film's adherence to biographical fact and existing accounts of 20 July 1944. *Nicht alle waren Mörder*, based on the memoirs of Michael Degen, remains strikingly close to the source text. Even *Die Flucht*, whose main narrative is fictional, takes elements from historical fact; the central character of Lena is purportedly based on Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, (Wessel). Furthermore, according to Hofmann, each one of the supporting characters in the film was based on one real-life biography, or a composite of several, on which the film's

researchers worked tirelessly (Hofmann, Personal interview). *Dresden* represents an exception to this trend, in that its implausible love story is entirely fictitious, although of course the bombing attack, which provides the backdrop to the film, was a real historical event, and much of the preamble to the attack on the British side, featuring Sir Arthur ‘Bomber’ Harris of the British Bomber Command, is based on historical record. Similarly, the Jewish character Simon Goldberg bears striking similarity to Victor Klemperer, who survived the attack on Dresden (Habel). There have even been suggestions, not least from Sascha Schwengel, one of the film’s producers, that there is an historical precedent for the characters of Anna and Robert, quoting a real-life German nurse and British pilot couple that met during the war and later settled in Cologne (“Movie About Dresden”). Claiming the films are based on real figures and events supposedly helps to reinforce the idea of their authenticity. One problem with this approach is that the viewer may extend the implication of this authenticity to assume everything seen in the film actually happened. No distinction is therefore made between events and characters based on historical record and those completely fabricated by the film-makers.

In addition, teamWorx makes claims to historical accuracy by pointing towards the large amount of research undertaken by the film-makers before shooting, something repeated in many of the promotional interviews surrounding the productions. In researching *Stauffenberg*, for example, director Jo Baier reportedly made new discoveries with regard to Stauffenberg’s biography, so that the character in his film was supposedly the most accurate portrayal of the man to date (“Aufstand”). Baier and the research team on *Stauffenberg* were praised for their attention to detail and for the preparation they undertook (Conrad; Hegenauer). Similarly, Sebastian Koch, who played the film’s title role, visited the Stauffenberg family to help him prepare to portray the historical figure (Conrad). Regarding *Die Flucht*, director Kai Wessel confirmed the large amount of research undertaken, particularly during the writing of the script, so that all the events that befall the characters on their trek could be backed up by historical sources (Wessel). Further supporting claims of historical authenticity is the well-documented use of historical advisers, including the renowned historian Peter Steinbach of the German Resistance Memorial Centre, on *Stauffenberg* and *Die Flucht*. British historian Richard Overy acted as adviser on *Dresden*, confirming the accuracy of the historical details regarding the British bombing campaign. He was further impressed by the film-makers’ attention to detail, leading him to claim: “The film production team have gone to huge effort to make sure they provide a convincing historical picture” (“*Dresden: The Making of*”). Besides involving historians as advisers, in *Dresden* a number of eyewitnesses, people who had lived through the bombing of the city, were present both as extras during the bombing scenes and as authenticity advisers. At various stages of production, even during the editing of the film, this group of between twenty and thirty survivors was asked for their input regarding their own experiences of the bombings (Hofmann, Personal interview). Finally, during the filming of *Nicht alle waren Mörder* Michael Degen himself worked with the production team. For

some, proof that the film had remained faithful to his original memoirs and managed to recreate this period authentically was Degen's praise for the film and for Baier as director. Degen says of the director: "Er ist gründlich, er recherchiert ganz genau [. . .] und ich glaube, dass er die Figuren sehr, sehr gut erfasst hat" ["He is thorough, his research very precise [. . .] and I believe he has captured the characters very well"]. There is, however, an innate problem in claiming authenticity through the use of eye-witnesses. As detailed above, there are as many 'authentic' versions of history as there are people who lived through this history. So although one particular version of events may have corresponded to one person's memories and experiences, this cannot be extended to the whole population and there is no way this could be described as providing the ultimate authentic experience. This was reflected by the comments of certain viewers, who claimed the films did not correspond to what they remembered in numerous ways (Reents).

In addition to the research undertaken before production, teamWorx also claims that the material elements of film-making—the locations, props and costumes, amongst other devices—are integral to providing an authentic picture of history. Much was made, for example, of the fact that Baier was allowed to film the scene depicting Stauffenberg's execution at the 'original location'—the Bendlerblock in Berlin—, a privilege denied to Bryan Singer's *Valkyrie* (Deißner). Similarly, much of *Dresden* was filmed in the city itself. The crew blocked off large areas of the Old Town for filming and was even allowed inside the Frauenkirche, which was being rebuilt at the time ("*Dresden: The Making of*"). For *Die Flucht*, the scenes of the trek from East Prussia were filmed during the winter in Lithuania, providing impressive images of vast snowy expanses, and causing one reviewer to claim: "Der authentische Drehort hilft dem Realismus" (Freitag) ["the authentic shooting location helps the realism"]. On *Nicht alle waren Mörder*, the set designers tried to recreate wartime Berlin "so authentisch wie möglich" ("*Nicht alle waren Mörder: The Making of*") ["as authentically as possible"] and the camera was used to create an "authentischer, naturalistischer Look" ["authentic, naturalistic look"]. Similar attention to detail was shown in making *Dresden*, where the costumes were reportedly authentic, down to the smallest detail and where the wardrobe team spent hours giving the costumes a worn-in look ("*Dresden: The Making of*"). Each Event Movie features at least one scene that showcases the period costumes, hairstyles and make-up, allowing the viewer to remark upon the film-makers' efforts to create a visual authenticity. Both *Dresden* and *Die Flucht* contain a ballroom scene, featuring period dress, music and stage dressing. *Nicht alle waren Mörder*'s train station scene similarly includes numerous extras, all decked out in period dress. This Event Movie's making-of documentary details how a Polish train station was transformed into the wartime Berlin station for the film.

In the pursuit of authenticity, in *Die Flucht* Wessel was reticent to use computer-animated imagery, particularly for the scenes of the expellees trekking across the frozen wastelands of East Prussia, which was reproduced in painstaking detail, in order to achieve a more authentic performance from the cast members (Wessel). Hofmann even went so far as to claim that due to the conditions on set matching

the harsh realities of the actual period, they could feel what it must have been like back then (“*Die Flucht: The Making of*”). This is an extremely bold claim, since to recreate such conditions would clearly have been impossible. Similarly, *Dresden*’s director Roland Suso Richter attempted to create an authentic atmosphere during the bombing scenes by playing recorded bombing sounds to the cast through an enormous speaker system, leading him to claim that their resulting performances made their fear almost palpable (Hanfeld). One final effect that attempts to create a sense of historical authenticity is the use of period film footage, mostly from newsreels, edited into the film. This features briefly at the beginning of *Stauffenberg* but repeatedly in *Dresden*, which uses stock footage of pre-war Dresden along with newsreel footage from both Germany and the Allies at numerous points within the film, to show daily life in pre-war Dresden, to depict the bombing raids from the British point of view and to show the destruction of the city. The function of this technique is to remind the viewer of the reality of the historical event they are witnessing and furthermore suggests that what will take place during the rest of the film should similarly be understood as historical document. Critics have commented that certain films attempt to recreate historical images familiar to (German) viewers, in order to suggest the authenticity of the depiction of the period. Susanne Vees-Gulani notes the similarities between some of *Dresden*’s images and picture postcards of the city or photographic records of the destruction. *Die Flucht* similarly contains several long shots of the refugees on the ice, which bear similarities to the small number of available photographs showing flight and expulsion. According to David F. Crew, these visual references “help to establish the film’s claim to authenticity and give some parts of *Dresden* the feel of a documentary” (126). Further cementing the film’s basis in reality is *Dresden*’s final sequence, which uses documentary footage shot at the re-dedication of the Frauenkirche in 2005. As the film cuts between close-ups of random faces in the crowd, the viewer is forced to assume these people lived through the event and a voiceover from Anna, laid over these images, connects the suffering the viewer has witnessed over the last three hours to present-day reality.

There are a number of problematic aspects to these Event Movies’ understanding and portrayals of authenticity. Firstly there is a suggestion that teamWorx constantly reinforces the authenticity of their productions in various interviews and promotional sources in order to attract viewers. In contemporary Germany, where historical television and film is extremely popular, *authenticity* is a buzzword, suggesting quality. Paul Cooke (“*Dresden*”) further suggests that teamWorx’s German perspective offers “a shocking air of authenticity not available to a Hollywood production” (283). This concept of authenticity is potentially one of the reasons why teamWorx’s Event Movies have enjoyed such success abroad. A further problem with the blanket claim to authenticity is the lack of acknowledgement that certain aspects of the films have been invented. Since everything in the film is to be understood as similarly authentic, the fictional love stories are placed on the same level as the rest of the suffering depicted, which is based on real historical accounts. *Dresden* for example, does not distinguish between the reality of the bombing war

and the fiction of the love story, asking the viewer to empathise with the latter at the same time as the former seems tasteless. Presenting everything in the film as ‘authentic’ suggests that it should be understood as gospel truth and any ideological slant given to the debates by the film-makers is underplayed. In this way, ideological messages can be communicated without the viewer’s knowledge, which could be dangerous for the audience’s understanding of history.

The question that poses itself is how these reported attempts at providing authentic history through filmic and extra-filmic devices are affected by their juxtaposition with aspects of genre productions existing predominantly for the purpose of entertainment. The use of the genre of melodrama runs through nearly all of teamWorx’s Event Movies, and, for some, stands in direct contrast to the serious history being offered. It cannot be denied that certain aspects of entertainment films are indispensable for a TV movie in the prime-time evening slot; indeed, it is the explicit task of historical film to add “movement, colour, sound and drama to the past” (Rosenstone 37). This slot is also traditionally aimed at a predominantly female audience, which would explain the use of melodrama, traditionally considered a woman’s genre. Melodrama has been defined as “a popular romance[] that depict[s] a virtuous individual (usually a woman) [. . .] victimized by repressive and inequitable social circumstances” (Schatz 222), simultaneously requiring “sensational situations with exaggerated power to affect the plot actors and [. . .] also [. . .] acute conflict” (Neale and Smith 186–87). These definitions can be applied, to a greater or lesser extent, to all four of the Event Movies, although *Dresden* and *Die Flucht* are most easily identifiable as melodramas. Both feature classic melodramatic elements such as the love triangle, which revolves around the idea of forbidden love. In *Dresden*, Anna is caught between her fiancé Alexander, a doctor at the hospital in which she works—who is very correct and emotionally withdrawn—and the mysterious, passionate British bomber pilot Robert. Similarly, in *Die Flucht*, Lena falls in love with the mysterious, passionate French prisoner of war, Francois, eventually rejecting her very correct and emotionally withdrawn fiancé, Heinrich Graf von Gernstorff. Much of the tension is reduced to issues of family: both Anna and Lena must decide between a fiancé chosen for them by their family and a man of whom this family disapproves. Both films use their respective historical catastrophes as an engine for the female protagonists to be able to break away from their overbearing families, particularly in the case of Lena, who is shackled by 600 years of German aristocratic heritage. The importance of the love triangle as a narrative device in the teamWorx canon cannot be ignored. It provides a basis for many of the Event Movies, most notably *Die Luftbrücke* (2005) and *Die Sturmflut* (2006), both of which bear an uncanny narrative resemblance to *Dresden* (Segler). Similarly, the trope of the single mother as protagonist has been repeated in many TV Event Movies: in *Die Flucht* and *Nicht alle waren Mörder* but also *Die Luftbrücke*, *Die Sturmflut* and even the what-if thriller *Die Grenze* (2010). This foregrounds familial relationships against the backdrop of historical events, something which has proven so successful for teamWorx and suggests that

the use of these tropes in their Event Movies has less to do with the desire to portray authentic history than with placing a tried-and-tested formula against a new historical backdrop as a method of attracting viewers.

Both *Dresden* and *Die Flucht*, as two-parters, also feature a cliffhanger, a device usually found at the end of a daily soap or telenovela. In *Dresden* both the love story and bombing narratives are set up for the second part: Robert reveals to Anna that he is a bomber pilot, not a spy, after which she runs away. In the next scene, at British bomber command, it is finally revealed that Dresden has been chosen as the target for the attack. At the end of the first part of *Die Flucht*, the Soviets arrive at the Mahlenberg estate, Lena realises her daughter is missing and the trek westwards begins in earnest. Although arguably a vital necessity for any multi-part production to secure an audience for the subsequent parts of the film, the use of the cliffhanger with such sensitive historical matters could be seen to be in bad taste: deliberately giving the viewer a small taste of a juicy historical titbit, promising there will be more tomorrow, can seem to exploit historical suffering. *Dresden*'s final scene in bomber command reminds the viewer that the city will be bombed the next day and not to miss the amazing spectacle. Similarly the final scene of *Die Flucht*'s first part depicts the arrival of the Russian army: tanks, grenades, shootings and suicide at the end of part one suggest there will be more of the same in part two.

There are several further elements of melodrama that exist in all four films. Coincidence and chance are used to drive the narrative, another specific convention of melodrama (King 182). The most noticeable example of this is perhaps in *Dresden*, in which Anna and Robert manage to find each other amidst the chaos of the bombing. This is used too in *Nicht alle waren Mörder*, where Anna and Michael avoid capture and injury by several strokes of good fortune. Although it could be argued that the story of any Jewish survivors would require a great deal of good luck, there are several examples in the film which are not detailed in Degen's memoirs, such as how they avoid being crushed in a telephone box during a bombing raid because Michael happens to fall over, which seems included solely in order to heighten the audience's sense of suspense. Furthermore the use of well-known German television stars is a ploy used by teamWorx to bring in larger audiences, guaranteed to tune in because of a big name. Maria Furtwängler, star of the Hannover version of Germany's long-running crime series *Tatort* was, according to Wessel, a major reason for the success of *Die Flucht* (Wessel). Similarly Felicitas Woll, up until that point best known for her starring role in the youth drama series *Berlin, Berlin*, was integral in bringing a younger audience to *Dresden*. Nadja Uhl and Sebastian Koch, both well-known television and cinema actors, undoubtedly helped the success of *Nicht alle waren Mörder* and *Stauffenberg* respectively.

There is a preponderance of women as the films' central characters, conforming to the characterisation of melodrama as a woman's genre and establishing figures with which a predominantly female audience can identify. This is taken to extremes in *Nicht alle waren Mörder*, which is almost solely populated by women. When men are present they are either ineffectual, such as the alcoholic Erwin Redlich and

the hen-pecked Herr Teuber, or represent a threat, as do the shadowy men of the Gestapo or the Russian soldiers who arrive at the end of the film. In *Die Flucht*, Lena is unquestionably in charge and the lack of men is constantly discussed, as is underlined by Lena's father's assertion: "Es ist die Stunde der Frauen" (*Die Flucht*) ["It's the hour of the women"]. The exception here is *Stauffenberg*, which has a male lead and in which women are sidelined. However, here there are still elements of melodrama. Throughout the film, Stauffenberg's relationship with his wife is privileged, including a scene of Stauffenberg's proposal at the opera in Bayreuth and later a scene in which he says goodbye to his children and he and his wife argue about his mission. Importantly, these are examples of the few invented scenes within the film, for which there is no direct proof in his biography (Graf von Stauffenberg). Perhaps they were included to bring out an emotional sense of history, or as Baier reported, to humanise Stauffenberg (Agde).

However, these melodramatic elements, for some, trivialise the serious history teamWorx is attempting to deal with. The fictional characters and implausible plot twists could potentially negate the educational effect attempted by efforts to create an authentic portrait of a specific history. How is the viewer supposed to believe the intricacies of Stauffenberg's biography, which teamWorx researched intensively, when these sit next to invented scenes of his familial relationships? Similarly, how is the viewer supposed to trust the history lesson espoused by *Dresden* when they are asked to focus on a hackneyed, clichéd and completely fabricated love story? This problem was noted by certain critics, including Joachim Güntner who wrote that *Dresden* "durchtränkt alle Kunde von Historie und Inferno mit dem klebrigen Herzblut der Seifenoper" ["saturates all the facts of history and the inferno with the sticky sweetness of soap opera"]. This is indeed a recurring theme in responses to teamWorx's Event Movies. Many reviewers have criticised Hofmann for turning German history into a soap opera (Klingenmaier). *Nicht alle waren Mörder* was similarly accused of prioritising aesthetics over history, critic René Martens claiming the attractive cast and locations detract from the serious story being told. One reviewer compared *Die Flucht*'s story of forbidden love to trashy German daily soap *Verbotene Liebe* (Decker, "Frau Gräfin"). Crew similarly suggested *Dresden* could be understood as "history light" (129).

It could be suggested that teamWorx's Event Movies are representative of contemporary efforts to come to terms with the Nazi past and furthermore, that these melodramatic elements can help viewers understand and relate to the historical issues involved. In today's Germany, film and television have taken over from historians and history books as the main way in which the history of the Third Reich is transmitted to the public (Baron 6). This is now achieved primarily through entertainment products. Most of the successful and popular documentaries of recent years conform to the concept of *Histotainment*—a combination of history and entertainment—including computer-generated imagery and dramatic reconstructions. Omnipresent TV historian Guido Knopp provides the most noticeable examples of this genre. He has made documentaries on most aspects of the Nazi past

over the last twenty years, such as *Holokaust* (2000), *Die große Flucht* (2001), *Die Stunde der Offiziere* (2004) and *Das Drama von Dresden* (2005). In addition, there are a number of Event Movies, conforming to teamWorx's definition, made by other production companies, such as *Neger, Neger Schornsteinfeger* (2006) by Aspekt Telefilm-Produktion or the two-parter *Die Gustloff* (2008) by UFA Film & TV Produktion. The large number of such productions, and the successes they enjoy, suggest that this way of approaching history is becoming dominant. This is reinforced by Hannah Pilarczyk's review of *Dresden* in the *taz*, suggesting the Event Movie was "[eine] Nagelprobe für das ZDF und die Produktionsfirma teamWorx, ob man einen so kontroversen und sensiblen Stoff fiktionalisieren kann, ohne ihn der politischen Instrumentalisierung preis zu geben" ["a litmus test for ZDF and the production company teamWorx as to whether such controversial and sensitive material could be fictionalised without leading to political instrumentalisation"], a test which, according to her, was passed, thus opening the way for further historical, melodramatic productions.

Integral to this shift in the way history is mediated is the generational shift in German society. Those who experienced the Third Reich first-hand are passing away and so there is a need to preserve this memory in narrative form. The recording of authentic experiences and memories is an important part of memory in a society. Although these films are second-hand memory products, they retain a sense of validity, since the only way to preserve these memories is to commit them to a narrative form, which may lose a sense of authentic memory but retains some relation to authentic history. This shift from authentic experience and memory to written narratives and recorded memories corresponds to Jan Assmann's shift from communicative to cultural memory. Assmann's work was on the study of ancient societies, although many commentators have applied it to memory of the National Socialist past. Communicative memory, in which memory is transmitted directly from person to person, fades after a certain period of time into cultural memory. This cultural memory differs from familial and generational memory in that it requires props to keep it alive. Props can be books, monuments, even rituals, and entertainment films certainly qualify as cultural memory props (A. Assmann 35), suggesting these are merely a necessary step in the process of remembering the National Socialist past.

The emotionalisation of history, represented by teamWorx's melodramatic Event Movies, can also play an important function in coming to terms with the past. According to Hofmann (Personal interview), there is no contradiction between using an emotional style and telling real-life history. Indeed the emotionalisation of history allows the viewers to open themselves up to the story and be truly affected by it. Hofmann's entry point into any story is the emotional core of the historical event, through which the event itself can begin to be understood (Eckert and Hüber; Bückmann). Focusing on one character's personal story and their emotional development during the dark period of the Third Reich allows the viewer to forge a personal link with the character and use it as a way of comprehending this era of history. As is often remarked regarding films on the Holocaust, the suffering

of six million people is unimaginable, the suffering of one person is not (Insdorf 6). Emotionalisation and the use of conventions from entertainment films—such as popular stars, suspense and spectacular images—serve a further purpose, namely that of securing a large number and wide cross-section of viewers. What is notable about the Event Movies is that they regularly attract record-breaking viewing figures (*Dresden* and *Die Flucht* received 12.68 million and 13.55 million respectively), figures unthinkable for an ordinary documentary film.

It has furthermore been argued that films should perhaps be allowed to break with realism in order to have viewers experience an historical event anew and perhaps in more detail (Baron 5). Certain fictional, melodramatic scenes are perhaps the price that is paid for opening up the subject to an extremely wide audience. A final argument for a way in which these mass-market productions can help come to terms with the Nazi past is provided by historian Alison Landsberg, who argues that films which simplify subject matter and alter or invent characters and incidents are not poor history but can perform a vital function in recreating the feel of the past for the spectator. These films can provide what Landsberg terms ‘prosthetic memories’, memories that “bridge the temporal chasms that separate individuals from the meaningful and potentially interpellative events of the past. It has become possible to have an intimate relationship to memories of events through which one did not live” (148). The perfect example of how these prosthetic memories work can be understood through use of the genre of heritage cinema on the National Socialist past. German heritage features are similar to their better-known British and French counterparts, in that they “transform the past into an object of consumption” and “present the texture of the past as a source of visual attractions and aural pleasures” (Koepnick 50). Take, for example, the extended ballroom sequences in *Dresden* and *Die Flucht*, which take place in opulent surroundings, featuring sumptuous period dress and a rich musical soundtrack. Allowing the audience to experience the past in this way, using so-called prosthetic memory, the viewer not only gets a feel for the era but utilises this to empathise with the characters. In this way, teamWorx’s Event Movies, through their glossy aesthetics and melodramatic plot devices, can draw in contemporary viewers and create a link between them and history.

It could also be argued that some of the melodramatic devices within the Event Movies do not necessarily work against the authenticity and serious history teamWorx is trying to convey. Take, for example, the use of women as central and supporting characters in the Event Movies. This conforms to the demands of the melodrama but also reflects the realities of daily life during the last stages of the war, when the majority of men would have been drafted to fight. Furthermore, by exploring historical themes through the optic of the family and one woman’s struggle to break away from the dominance of her parents, as in *Dresden* and *Die Flucht*, these films provide models for how Germany is able to break free of its own history, learn from the mistakes of the past and become democratic within an international and specifically European frame. These Event Movies similarly represent a trend in the personalisation and individualisation of history, conforming to the

depoliticisation of memory in post-unification Germany and the recent shift from cold hard facts to human interest and emotion (Schmitz 5-6). The heart-wrenching, real-life stories of individual Germans are simultaneously perfect material for this new emotional and personal approach to history and also conform to the demands of a (melo)dramatic TV Movie.

In the Event Movies on the National Socialist past, teamWorx attempts to combine history and entertainment. The company wants to provide well-researched and authentically-presented history in an emotional and entertaining style. This is an incredibly tall order, especially when dealing with such a sensitive subject as National Socialism, and it is no surprise that it is not always successful. *Dresden* was criticised heavily and its mix of clichéd melodramatic love story and the horrific atrocities of the bombing was seen to be in bad taste (Decker, “Schuld und Schwester”). Conversely, *Stauffenberg* was criticised in some quarters for being too authentic and lacking any sense of drama or excitement (Schirmmacher), proving it is practically impossible to create a balance between these two extremes that pleases everyone. However, it is important to remember that these Event Movies, due to their nature as events, received large viewing figures and undoubtedly caused debate on their subjects in newspapers, magazines and in public discourse. Hofmann tirelessly maintains that his Event Movies are able to both attract viewers and simultaneously make a contribution to historical discourse, as was the case, he argues, with *Stauffenberg*, which received an audience of around eight million and also sparked a debate in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on the representation of *Stauffenberg* (Butzek 23). Hofmann similarly maintains that *Dresden* has had an effect on public memory in Germany, quoting instances of three generations of one family gathering in front of the television to watch the Event Movie and subsequently being able to discuss the grandparents’ experiences of the Third Reich for the first time (Hofmann, Personal interview). There is no denying the column inches created after the broadcast of each Event Movie. Despite a number of problematic aspects related to the constant claims to authenticity, it certainly seems that, for better or for worse, coming to terms with the Nazi past is being played out between history and melodrama.

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