The Obersalzberg Complex
The Photographs of Walter Frentz and Andreas Mühe
by Hans Georg Hiller von Gaertringen und Matthias Struch

"This is how Germany could be, if the war hadn't happened, and if the Jews weren't gassed. Then Germany would be like the word Neckarauen." Christian Kracht: Faserland, 1995. - "Heil Hitler You Fetishists." Martin Kippenberger, 1984.

A man is standing in the mountains, pissing into the landscape. He is urinating into the "most beautiful German Alpine landscape there is" (Andreas Mühe). And, to clear up any misunderstandings right away, it's not Adolf Hitler. Even though he and all the others, his people, still haunt the Obersalzberg. It's not him-and yet, what are those ghostly lights there on the mountain? What flickers in Andreas Mühe's photographs?

The photographer went to the Obersalzberg at the age of thirty-one, put young men in Nazi uniforms or had them pose nude, put makeup on them, positioned them in the landscape by the Watzmann, in front of the Göll massif with the Scharitzkehlalm, on the Mooslahnerkopf and in the studio, made them act, created poses, and took pictures of them. He had young women fitted with traditional braided hairstyles from the Berchtesgaden region and photographed their heads from behind. He assembled tables and chairs like those on the terrace of Hitler's Berghof, crawled around in the countryside, found remnants from that era and people who found remnants from that era, and then also photographed these things. The result is a collection of strange photographs that stand out not only due to their brilliance, sharpness, and an unusual light.

At first glance, Mühe's Obersalzberg cycle takes the viewer on detours and down misleading paths. The subjects bring to mind associations that lead away from Mühe's approach: Nazi chic and concentration camp pornography, fetishism and homoeroticism, pissing games and darkrooms, Naziploitation, etc. Are we in the Czech Republic, where uniform books on the Third Reich are being produced, or merely at a casting call for Quentin Tarantino's "Inglourious Basterds"?

However, Mühe's depictions alone resist superficial interpretations, and fetishism and pop culture in particular can quickly be discarded as lenses through which to view these works. The pictures don't even seem to break any taboos, since at second glance they leave room for analysis and critical discussion.

The range of possible associations in Andreas Mühe's Obersalzberg complex is greater than its frame of reference. At its core are the photographs of one man: Walter Frentz, Adolf Hitler's cameraman. The color photographs he took during the Third Reich, particularly those from the Obersalzberg, were Mühe's point of departure. They accompanied him as he climbed up the mountain for the first time in 2010. Mühe brought the pictures to the place where they were created. And he did something with them.

- The Führer's Cameraman

Today, Walter Frentz (1907-2004) is known primarily due to his close relationship to Adolf Hitler and the film recordings and color photographs that he created in this context. From September 1939 to April 1945, he was responsible for the film recordings of the Führer in the Deutsche Wochenschau, a weekly newsreel, and provided images for approximately thirty percent of all the editions of this propaganda instrument of the Third Reich, which for a time was extremely effective. After Germany's invasion of Poland, he became part of Hitler's retinue, and he worked at the Führer's headquarters from January 1940 until the end of April 1945. Wherever Hitler went, his cameraman went with him. In addition, Frentz received special commissions, including many from Hitler himself; he documented the Atlantic Wall, filmed the production of the V-2 rockets at the Dora-Mittelbau concentration camp and the rocket tests at the SS military training area "Heidelager." Even before 1939 he rendered exemplary service to the Nazi regime. A passionate kayaker and amateur moviemaker, he went on to master the handheld camera, and his abilities as a creative cameraman made him a major contributor to Leni Riefenstahl's film productions at the Nazi rallies and the 1936 Olympics.

In addition to his work in film, Frentz also took photographs, most of them uncommissioned and for his own enjoyment. There are thousands of photographs from the period between 1933 and 1945, in black and white and in color. Many of them depict Hitler as a congenial private citizen, as well as his entourage, Eva Braun, and his German shepherd Blondi. Frentz also received commissions from Hitler and Albert Speer: color portraits of the Nazi elite and classified images of armament projects.

In 1945 his great career came to an end. From this point on, he made cultural and industrial films, toured West Germany as a public speaker, and gave slide presentations about cities, landscapes, and architecture. Later he was discovered by historians as a contemporary witness. His attitude toward his former employer remained consistently positive, and the same held true for his role in the propaganda efforts and his photographs. Frentz then occupied himself as the custodian of his images, sold them to the subjects themselves, to their relatives, to right-wing publishers as well as serious editors and photo services. He made a great deal of money from them. His photographs can now be found in nearly every illustrated publication on Nazism. Walter Frentz played a nearly unparalleled role in shaping the visual memory of the Third Reich.

Andreas Mühe was also familiar with Frentz's photographs, without being conscious of who took them. Later, though, he encountered these pictures again. In 2006 a book about Walter Frentz was published that offered the first comprehensive portrayal of the cameraman and photographer. Here Mühe found color photographs from the period between 1940 and 1944 that show Hitler at his private retreat, the Obersalzberg-another important point of departure for Mühe. Long before the Obersalzberg project, he began to investigate the semi-private

retreats of the powerful. He photographed the offices of West German Chancellors Konrad Adenauer and Helmut Schmidt; the thatched-roof cottage of Erich Honecker's successor as the leader of East Germany, Egon Krenz; and the cookie-cutter single-family homes of the East German Communist Party community in the forest near Wandlitz, north of Berlin.

- The Nazification of a Landscape -
the Obersalzberg in Photographs from 1933 to 1945

A popular recreation area among the wealthy in Munich since the beginning of the twentieth century, the Obersalzberg was also a retreat for Adolf Hitler beginning in the 1920s. Even though the only places that he regularly visited there were his house, which he christened the "Berghof," and a teahouse a few hundred yards away, which he visited on his daily afternoon walks, to this day the entire area around the Obersalzberg seems contaminated from its use by the Nazis. The Obersalzberg was their refuge, and somehow it doesn't seem to have changed since then. The myth that was forced upon the mountain hasn't been expunged, despite all attempts to do so.

This is due in no small part to the photographs that were taken here. Thousands of Nazi propaganda photos made the mountain landscape around Berchtesgaden a compelling backdrop for Hitler's figure. It surrounds him, underscores his significance: the mountains are sublime, and so is the Führer. The mountains became a part of the iconography of the Nazi regime, which appropriated the mountain landscape around Berchtesgaden not only as a residence, but also for its propaganda.

The Nazification of images of the Obersalzberg landscape can be traced above all to the work of two photographers: Hitler's "personal photographer" Heinrich Hoffmann and Walter Frentz. Despite, or perhaps because of, his flagrant lack ofphotographic originality, Hoffmann, the proprietor of a photographic shop in Munich, enjoyed Hitler's favor beginning in the early 1920s, and from that time on he had a monopoly on the public image of the Führer. The mountain landscape around Berchtesgaden became an established part of Hoffmann's glorification of Hitler from 1932 on. His photo book "Hitler wie ihn keiner kennt" was followed three years later by "Hitler in seinen Bergen" and finally "Hitler abseits vom Alltag" in 1937. In his books, which sold millions of copies, Hoffmann made use of the ability of the mountain landscape to confer significance, even though this was merely a rehashing of the living room Alpine romanticism of the late nineteenth century. His unimaginative photographic formulas-Hitler hiking through an Alpine meadow, Hitler sprawled in front of the backdrop of the Watzmann-conveyed the desired message. Not yet a glorifying detachment, such pictures were a sign of his down-to-earth nature and relatability to the common man: even the Führer goes hiking. Beginning in 1935, parallel to Hitler's actual distancing of himself from the populace and his followers through ever larger restricted areas on the Obersalzberg, Hoffmann increasingly stylized Hitler into a lonely

heroic figure amid the mountains. From this point on, Hoffmann's mountain photos show Hitler "in contemplation and open to impressions of nature, proud and self-confident, not subordinate to nature, but equal to it," as Hoffmann's biographer Rudolf Herz writes (Rudolf Herz: Hoffmann & Hitler: Fotografie als Medium des Führer-Mythos. Munich, 1994). The exploitation and politicization of the landscape was well under way.

Hoffmann's black-and-white photographs remained influential for many decades. Today, however, they are all but forgotten. Around the year 2000, color photographs from the Third Reich by a hitherto unknown photographer repeatedly appeared in "Der Spiegel," and thus Walter Frentz also gained recognition as a source for the collective visual memory in photography. Even though his photographs were sold via the Ullstein photo service beginning in the nineteen-seventies, only now did he surpass Hoffmann's prominence. His photographs, which were used in magazines, books, and television documentaries, have since defined the public image of the Obersalzberg in the Nazi era. The virtual reconstruction of a journey to the Berghof in Bryan Singer's Stauffenberg film "Valkyrie" (2008) probably wouldn't have been possible without Frentz's photographs.

Frentz witnessed the Obersalzberg only during the war, but this isn't visible in his pictures. Unlike Hoffmann, who only traveled there for a few days at a time from Munich, Frentz often stayed for weeks. As a member of Hitler's staff, he was on call, sometimes took part in the Führer's meals and tea breaks, and was also invited to major festivities. Most of the time, nothing relevant to the Wochenschau took place at the Berghof. What's more, Hitler's diminishing military success and advancing Parkinson's disease made him increasingly reluctant to appear in front of the camera.

From late 1941 on, the Obersalzberg appeared less frequently in the Wochenschau, even though Hitler continued to retreat there. The militaristic Wolf's Lair made for better pictures during the war. Apparently it was important to avoid any impression that Hitler was on vacation while announcements of soldiers killed in action became ever more frequent. Still, Frentz's presence at the Berghof was required, and he spent the uneventful days and weeks with Hitler's permanent staff or assisted Eva Braun with her amateur films. He also devoted himself to his second great hobby: photography. As part of the entourage, he accompanied Hitler on his walks at a respectful distance. Particularly from 1942 to 1944, these strolls provided material for numerous color photographs in which Frentz worked on his self-imposed photographic assignment: Hitler from the front, Hitler from behind, Hitler from the side, always the center of the composition, always master of the situation. Frentz knew how to manipulate the gaze of the viewer. Just as Adolf Menzel depicted Frederick the Great with the brush, Frentz venerated Hitler with the camera. The Upper Bavarian landscape served as a romantic backdrop laden with meaning, a formula that Frentz had seen in Hoffmann's photographs, but also subtly

refined; its solemn and eternal nature certified the elevation of a man to the "greatest commander of all time" and the founder of the "Thousand-Year Reich."

However, despite all this stylization, Frentz often didn't have time to take a well-executed photo. Many of his pictures seem half-hearted and hastily arranged. In general, he seems torn between event-based reportage and atmospheric pictures. Despite all his visible efforts to create a style, many of his photographs remain snapshots rather than skillfully or intentionally staged scenes. Hitler wasn't an extra who would allow himself to be moved around by Frentz until everything was just right. Frentz was always particularly successful when photographing still lifes: the deserted terrace of the Berghof in the evening, a desk lamp in the Wolf's Lair. Still, Hitler's daily routine of the same walks along the same paths offered Frentz enough opportunities to refine his repertoire of motifs. Over several years, this resulted in many hundreds of photographs in which he captured the Berghof mainly as an idyll.

The subjects didn't change much: Hitler, the guests, the living quarters and conferenc rooms, the terrace, tairs, walks, two benches along the path, the German shepherd Blondi, and Eva Braun. It never rained; the sky was always blue. The landscape was never more than decoration.

- The Later Influence of the Photographs-
the Obersalzberg in Photography after 1945

For a long time after 1945, there was no distanced, demystifying analysis of the Obersalzberg, including in photography. There was nothing to contrast with the Nazi images that haunted the general consciousness besides the triumphant photos taken after the Allied victory by the American war correspondent Lee Miller in early May 1945, who photographed the Berghof in flames as a symbol of the downfall of a criminal regime. It also took a long time before the realization set in that these photos from the Nazis' propaganda efforts are not neutral documentary photography.

The Nazi photographers and the American GIs were followed by camera-toting visitors to the Obersalzberg as part of the "unspoken tourism of the beaten path" (Ulrich Chaussy) that this mystified place now attracted. After the Bavarian government removed one authentic piece of remains after another, former Nazis, amateur historians, and tourists now have to look harder to find remnants of the Berghof, the famous terrace, the teahouse. The landscape has gone from something of secondary importance to the main attraction; the terrace doesn't exist anymore, but the view is still there: the Hoher Göll, the Watzmann, the Untersberg. Every stair in the forest, every remnant of a concrete foundation is a potential source of trembling and speculation about its former use: Was this the foundation of the garage? The remains of the teahouse? Or even an entrance to an underground bunker?

While the use of images from this place in the pre-digital era was limited to postcards and often poorly made brochures, the Internet

brought with it a significant advance in professionalism. Websites such as "thirdreichruins.com" and "alpenfestung.com" are examples of this type of approach. Historical and present-day photographs are placed side by side, thus providing an orientation. Above all, what struck Andreas Mühe about this place was the Finns and Americans who prowl around in search of traces and remains: a special kind of archaeology. These remnants still possess a dubious attraction to this day.

- An Attempt at Denazification

The first serious book about the history of the Obersalzberg in the twentieth century was published in 1995. For "Nachbar Hitler," the journalist Ulrich Chaussy collaborated with the photographer Christoph Püschner (born in 1958), who, according to the dust jacket text, repeatedly took trips to spend time "on the mountain" beginning in 1988 (Ulrich Chaussy and Christoph Püschner: Nachbar Hitler: Führerkult und Heimatzerstörung am Obersalzberg. Berlin, 1997). Püschner's photographs are in black and white, and their subject isn't the past of this place, but its present: the conquest of the mountain by international tourism. He consciously keeps his critical journalistic photography distanced and demystifying, without a trace of ceremony. He emphasizes the banal aspects of the place: visitors from all over the world in all-weather gear crawl around in the underbrush, stand in the elevator to the Kehlstein, point their oversized video cameras at the Eagle's Nest, aimlessly tramp across the grounds. It becomes clear how pathetic and arbitrary the remains are that the tourists see there, how sensationalist and meaningless their visit is, and how little concrete information they gain.

- Little Nazis, Big Mountain-
the Obersalzberg Landscapes of Andreas Mühe

Beginning in 2010, Andreas Mühe continued to develop his theme on the Obersalzberg: the retreats of the powerful. As in his photos of the office of Helmut Schmidt or the garden of Egon Krenz, he is once again interested in decorum, and in bringing the background to the fore. In these photos, however, the landscape plays a crucial role, and he adds consciously staged scenes, which he had previously only used in portraits. Mühe photographed many of the places that he had seen in Frentz's pictures. Little has changed since then. The buildings have mostly been stripped of their Nazi nomenclature, but the natural scenery remains largely unchanged: a timeless landscape that allows the photographer to capture it as it was in 1942. Mühe never chooses the same perspective or the same composition as Frentz. He isn't interested in a precise visual comparison of the past and the present.

Still, his landscapes on the Obersalzberg serve a referential purpose, not just as motifs. When Mühe puts models in Nazi uniforms and also bases his color palette on Frentz's Agfa color tones, the references become explicit. The reenactment of historical events

in a manner that is authentic as possible takes place on three levels: motifs, subject matter, and style. In the end, however, the differences between Mühe and Frentz are greater than their similarities. While in Frentz's photographs it's the human subject-usually Hitler-who determines the scale and is the focus of the picture, and the landscape only serves as a frame, Mühe takes the opposite approach: the human subject is reduced, and the landscape is enlarged. Whereas Frentz was spontaneous, Mühe makes elaborate preparations for his pictures. While Frentz was obliged to snap his photos before the Führer disappeared into his teahouse, Mühe is able to prepare every image at his leisure. In this place, Mühe isn't afraid of pathos and grandeur. He celebrates these landscapes with a force and scale that are nearly unparalleled in the German pictorial tradition. These pictures are reminiscent not of German Romanticism, but of the vast, powerful spaces of American landscape painting and photography.

The break within these carefully composed pictures is made by the small, uniformed figures who stand in the landscape, their legs strangely astride. One might find that the concept of having these retro Nazis mark their territory like dogs is too simplistic to illustrate the primitive appropriation of this magnificent landscape by a band of thieves. However, the reversal in the hierarchy of significance restores the landscape's honor, even with the help of the imagery of the Nazi era.

- And the Curtain Never Falls.
Three Tousand Nazis and No End in Sight

While Mühe manages in a way to rehabilitate the landscape through his investigation of Walter Frentz's Nazi imagery from the Obersalzberg, he pursues a different goal in his handling of another of Frentz's subjects, in which he once again makes use of reenactment as an artistic tool: the portrait.

It began with a dead man. And a traditional use of photography: pictures as memorial media. Hitler himself is said to have given the impetus for one of the most bizarre series of pictures of the Third Reich: Frentz's color portraits. This gallery of heroes began in 1942 upon the death of Armaments Minister Fritz Todt in a plane crash. Frentz had previously taken a color portrait of him. Now he was to take portraits of all the elite figures of the Reich and other guests at the Führer's headquarters to preserve them for posterity. These were soon joined by the bearers of the Knight's Cross after the medal ceremony. Nearly every high-ranking official, nearly everyone from Hitler's entourage, nearly every allied politician and important military officer took his place in front of the typical curtain and was photographed by Frentz in color-even the dog. Sometimes the curtain was reddish brown, then olive green; it nearly always hung in folds.

Ultimately, over three tousand likenesses were captured on diapositives in Frentz's mobile photo studio; the photographer once again only had a few seconds or minutes to take each picture. The resulting images are friendly portraits of war criminals,

mass-murderers, and behind-the-scenes perpetrators, but also secretaries, cooks, and the custodian of the Berghof. Many of the subjects died not long after they were photographed, and many went on murdering. After 1945, some of them were hanged, beheaded, shot, or took their own lives, while others were taken prisoner. Most of them survived, many of them undisturbed by the judicial system, and quite a few ordered prints from Frentz. The echo of these pictures poses an eternal question about the portrait: is it possible to determine the character of a person, his actions, his deeds, from his face?

At first, the portraits were not intended to be made public. After 1945, they gradually became available to a wider audience. Today they are among the most fundamental illustrative materials from the Third Reich and are an important tool for furnishing costumes for films on the Nazi era, for painters of pewter figurines, or for organizers of historical war games around the world. What's more, with the help of the Internet, they lead a varied and sometimes bizarre life of their own in the market for military artifacts and memorabilia; even cups printed with Frentz's portraits can be ordered in the United States.

Mühe has taken on Frentz's cabinet of horrors and its ability to gloss over the guilt of its subjects. He put young men in Nazi uniforms and contemporary civilian clothing, positioned them in front of a curtain with folds as in Frentz's pictures, and photographed them. This resulted in new, remarkably clean, and often good-looking examples of SS Sturmbannführer, infantry majors, field marshals, and civil servants. Mühe is not interested in the individuals whom Frentz photographed, but in the types, postures, costumes, and symbolism of medals and party badges. In this sense, he creates collages.

Frentz's images of the Nazi elite are so striking that his authorship is always recognizable. This is the point from which Mühe departs, and yet his goal is not a precise translation of the original pictures. The longer you look at Mühe's pictures, the less they have to do with Frentz. Much about them is different, beginning with the composition: more curtain, less figure, resulting in an emphasis on the background, an emphasis on the staged aspects. Mühe's pictures are fictions, reenactments, and they don't aim to be anything else. For example, the man in the leather coat and sunglasses isn't among Frentz's portraits, and instead is seen walking with Himmler and Hitler from the Berghof to the teahouse in April 1944.

Whether the viewer is familiar with Frentz's portraits or not, Mühe's costumed retro Nazis are not only reminiscent of the Nazi era. They also call to mind images of modern-day, conspicuously good-looking actors playing Nazi roles, whether Sebastian Koch as Albert Speer ("Speer and Hitler: The Devil's Architect," 2005), Götz Otto as Otto Günsche ("Downfall," 2004), or Benjamin Sadler as the "good" General Hans Speidel ("Rommel," 2011). Mühe uses uniforms from the costume purveyor Theaterkunst, which provided most of the Nazi uniforms worn in films in Germany over the past several decades, from "The Devil's General" (1955) to "Inglourious Basterds" (2009). Historical accuracy

interests Mühe only to a limited extent. Uniform nerds and fanatics for historical detail are not his target group. He's not concerned by the fact that the field marshal is too young for this rank, or that the double-breasted suit that the civilian is wearing is too big. The logical discrepancies in the decorative medals or the absence of ribbon bars are not important to him.

Upon comparing Mühe's photographs to Frentz's work, the difference between the latter's approach-which was also staged, but whose aim was documentary-and Mühe's artistic photography becomes clear. Mühe's staged photographs are reenactments not only of the Nazi era, but also of Frentz's pictures. Mühe is only interested in their authenticity insofar as they provide one of the pictorial formulas which later fictional representations of the Nazi era worked so hard to recreate.

Mühe relies on one kind of visual authenticity and simulates another that is based on staged pictures from the recent past. When Mühe takes photographs like Frentz, his pictures also recapitulate the fictional pictures, the countless staged and reenacted scenes, and direct the viewer's gaze to the point at which such representations have since arrived in Germany: somehow, these Nazis also look good. The surface is usually clean, smooth, and polished, and not much takes place beneath it. Without context, the subjects are merely nice young men in historical uniforms-a fact that Mühe himself also makes clear for his pictures. But the risk of misunderstanding them is great, and the edge on which he balances is narrow. Mühe's Nazis are not evil. He photographs people he knows, friends. There is a relationship between the model and the photographer. This, too, means that his Nazis somehow remain innocent and good.

Frentz's portraits also have an astonishing ability to create the appearance of innocence: the SS murderer doesn't look into the camera any differently than the cook. This banality of the faces irritates the viewer. The crimes remain inside them without any external traces. The serial nature of the pictures outweighs the individuals themselves. The uniforms and the curtain become a leveling principle. Mühe draws attention to this minimization of guilt and places another quality, and therefore recognition, alongside it: the minimization of guilt through the staging of scenes. Mühe uses the combination of the visual authenticity of Frentz's pictures and the later visual constructions in movies to demonstrate the possibility, but also the questionable nature and problems, of all kinds of staged scenes, of fictionalizations. And, of course, this also raises questions about his own strategies for staging scenes.

- Carnival in Uniforms with a Spotlight and a Camera

Dictatorships love staged scenes, and they love pictures of them, since they are the only means of carrying the self-confidence of these scenes out into the world. This is true of both large and small scenes. There is probably no more common subject in photography than the portrait that calls out: I'm here. These also include the

commemorative pictures that-despite the prohibition against photographing executions-show soldiers with Jews who had been shot to death, or next to hanged partisans, or by a pit full of bodies.

The mania and the rage with which the Nazis staged scenes have been sufficiently analyzed, and the "beautiful illusion of the Third Reich" (Peter Reichel: Der schöne Schein des Dritten Reiches: Faszination und Gewalt in Faschismus. Frankfurt, 1993) has been described many times before. Mühe makes this the subject of his pictures in a superficial, heavily exaggerated, and glaring manner. He allows himself absurdities-a carnival celebration in uniforms with a spotlight-and psychologizes by also capturing narcissism in his pictures. He even has Frentz himself appear. With his actors, Mühe stages a photo shoot in which an SS Brigadeführer in a white gala uniform and a swastika armband is being photographed by an air force officer in a blue uniform; the latter represents Frentz, who was officially a member of the Luftwaffe.

There are numerous photographs by Heinrich Hoffmann that show Hitler together with Frentz filming Hitler. In some of them, it isn't even Hitler who is the focus of the picture, but the cameraman. In a reversal of roles, film recordings made by Frentz for the Deutsche Wochenschau show the photographer Hoffmann at work: walking with Hitler, taking pictures. The photographer photographs the cameraman, who films the photographer photographing the cameraman.

- Gestures of Subordination, Gestures of Rebellion

Andreas Mühe regards his subjects with the gaze and the staging experience of a portraitist of the establishment in reunified Germany. He has taken portraits of art collectors, writers, politicians. The first pictures in which he focused thematically on the Nazi era were fashion photographs that he took in 2004 in Prora on the island of Rügen. The allusions in these pictures still point in various directions. Like the paintings of Neo Rauch or Norbert Bisky, they call to mind vague associations with propaganda from various totalitarian systems of the twentieth century. As in the works of these painters, Mühe is interested in empty poses, ritualized postures: marching, training, posing. From this point on, this interest in poses, which he indicates as such by staging exaggerated scenes-using artificial light, for example-continues throughout his work. Around 2009 he begins with isolated pictures of human poses in the studio-first young girls seen from the back, wearing a dirndl or nothing but tights. The dark studio backdrop is loaded with symbolism in combination with the pose: the blackness emphasizes its sinister and menacing aspects. In search of poses that on the one hand are loaded with meaning, but on the other hand are universal, the historical artifacts once again become interesting: since 2012, Mühe has extracted characters from photographs by Frentz and reenacted their poses in the studio with an actor. Instead of the protagonists of these photos, he chooses the subordinates who followed orders. Mühe finds examples of this type in many of Frentz's photographs: they stand reverently before their

Führer, from the lowly SS adjutant Fritz Darges to the Commander-in-Chief of the German Navy, Karl Dönitz.

First, Mühe frames these found elements in Frentz's pictures with colored tape, thus setting them free and removing them from their historical pictorial context as cutouts. Then he photographs an actor, for example, in an SS uniform and in the same pose as Fritz Darges, from the same perspective as in Frentz's picture, but with a deliberately unnatural spotlight that emphasizes the artificiality of the reenactment-including deep shadows fraught with meaning. The black background, the light, and the absence of the figure's counterpart make it possible to concentrate on the pose as a pose. At the same time, they expand the range of possible associations.
The point of reference of the posture, which shifts between a turning-toward and a turning-away, becomes puzzling. The subject's gaze points into an unknown darkness. The narrative elements are reduced to a minimum. In their place, other aspects come to the fore, such as the style, the cut, and the material of the uniform with its stitched SS runes on the collar, the matte gray sheen of the jacket, the subtly gleaming red stripe on the pant seam, the black, shining shoes.

This highlighting of uniform fashion goes even further in another picture in which Mühe adapts an SS bodyguard with a walking stick who is seen following Hitler and Himmler in a photograph by Frentz from April 1944. Mühe's photograph of the actor-who, unlike the original, smiles nonchalantly-turns the SS man in sunglasses into a model: in a long, fitted leather coat with gloves and boots, he poses as if on a catwalk (including a corresponding gesture with one arm akimbo). This raises the question of where the charisma of these two figures primarily comes from-their posture or their uniform? This is the question Mühe is pursuing when he photographs the first model once again, this time nude, in the continuation of an experiment. The pose is unchanged, and its gesture of obedience remains basically the same. However, the nude subject radiates a power restrained by self-control, something held back and introverted. Without the uniform, he has been further reduced to his inherent qualities. At this stage, the Nazi era as a reference has largely disappeared from view; even today, some employees assume a similar posture when face-to-face with their boss. Even the short military haircut with gelled hair has lost its relation to the Nazi era since the early two-thousands; this hairstyle has become far too fashionable as an anti-hippie ideal of beauty.

The thirteen men from the artist's circle of friends, whom he unites in a group portrait, sport similar haircuts. The festive appearance of the men standing in a semicircle, the serious mood, the expectant facial expressions-all of these things might be reminiscent of a choir rehearsal or an award ceremony in sports if these men weren't nude, and if they weren't holding uniform caps in their hands. And if there weren't a man in the middle who appears to be challenging an imaginary adversary to a show of strength. The gesture becomes understandable once the viewer takes into account the picture to which Mühe is referring. Painstakingly, if not exactly consistent in every

detail, Mühe has arranged the men into a tableau vivant in the style of Frentz. Their poses are similar to the ones in a picture of military officers at a medal ceremony in 1944, the majority of them from the Luftwaffe, standing in a semicircle before Hitler. Even Frentz's picture is staged, with the tacit participation of all those present. The reverence for the commander-in-chief that emanates from their faces couldn't have been entirely authentic in light of the hopeless position the Luftwaffe found itself in around the end of the war. Perhaps the gesture of the man in the middle of Mühe's picture is at its core a reference to the falseness of the historical situation. But he does this using the body language of the present.

- Mühe meets Frentz

Mühe's use of Frentz's pictures follows an analytical approach: cutting up, reducing the subject matter, setting elements free, replacing, and concentrating. The artistic distillation brings out something that is indirectly and unintentionally present in Frentz's work and only becomes visible when viewing it in its entirety. But the analysis must be applied to Frentz. He didn't have a strict photographic concept. Such an investigation of his work becomes interesting once one notices the repetitions in his pictures: his views of the same subjects, his photos and film recordings of them, are all similar; he repeats established photographic formulas. If the numerous photographs of the arrivals of Hitler's visitors at the Berghof and in the courtyard of the Reich Chancellery or of the medal ceremonies for the bearers of the Knight's Cross were all hung side-by-side, the result would be a series of the same pictures repeated over and over. Frentz saw and photographed the table on the terrace of the Berghof in the same manner as the wooden table under the trees at the Wolf's Lair or Hitler's parents' living room table, an "essence of German Gemütlichkeit" (Andreas Mühe). Thus, Frentz's pictures are not only the object of the analysis; rather, they themselves provide the means for it. They reveal the staging and manipulation. The things that are left out and hidden from view are also interesting.

From 1939 to 1945, Frentz took thousands of photographs on his way to battlefields across Europe. Some show the destruction, and a few show wounded soldiers; there are occasional glimpses of cemeteries, and only a single dead person. But Frentz couldn't claim to have a naïve view. He knew the orders given by the man whom he preferred to photograph bathed in warm light on pleasant summer evenings-at the latest in the summer of 1941, when he accompanied Heinrich Himmler as a cameraman on a short visit to Minsk. There he filmed a mass shooting that Himmler had arranged to attend. Decades later, Frentz remembered the moment when "some farmers" were unloaded from trucks and then shot by the SS. During the filming of a movie about the V-2 rockets (also known as the A4) in 1944, he photographed concentration camp prisoners manufacturing this fearsome weapon.

Mühe, who also follows Frentz's omissions, chooses not to allow the horror to become more concrete and direct. He doesn't put his

actors in prisoner costumes, and thereby avoids the risk of obscenity that such reenactments entail.

- Doctrine and Posture

Mühe's view of the Third Reich was shaped early on. He spent the first ten years of his life in East Germany. There children were taught in kindergarten that Ernst Thälmann was good, what happened in concentration camps, and the name of the local volunteer soldier in the International Brigades in Spain. Pupils knew the story of the little trumpeter who had fallen in the fight for the good cause, sang a sad song about him, and in the first grade were initiated into the Pioneer Organization at one of the countless anti-fascist memorial sites. In this country, you either became an antifascist or a Nazi, since these were the only two possibilities that existed. While the former seemed logical and was what was expected, people were deeply afraid of the latter. Nazi symbolism was utterly taboo, and any use of it outside of the official context of history and art was prohibited.

Mühe grew up in the nineteen-eighties, when everyone who traveled through the country and heard the calls of "Sieg Heil" on train rides or in football stadiums, or saw young people performing the Nazi salute, could recognize the partial failure of the anti-fascist East German educational concept and the growing trend of neo-Nazism. Officially, this movement never existed in East Germany; the system didn't allow it to exist. At the age of eleven, Mühe then experienced the implosion of the authoritarian East German social system, followed by the questioning and abandonment of the previous certainties and positions. But the anti-fascist influences must have left their mark on him.

As a photographer, Mühe began to investigate the Nazi era in 2004, at the age of twenty-five. He took fashion photographs in front of the backdrop of the colossal Prora resort complex on the island of Rügen. A few years later, he chose the indoor pool of the Olympic Village from 1936 in Elstal for a photo shoot. Here, too, he portrays young men in the context of Nazi architecture, and perhaps even beyond this, since Prora and Elstal were both non-places in East Germany, military restricted areas. At first glance, the poses in these pictures appear indifferent; the political is barely present, and if at all, then as a game.

With Obersalzberg, Mühe's investigation of the Nazi era, the images it produced, and the continued lives of these pictures has achieved a new quality. What was previously a game has become serious, and the groping and experimenting has become a conscious approach which shows the process behind it and the unfinished aspects, rather than hiding them. Yet he makes room for uncertainties and doubts, and doesn't show off with false confidence. Even Mühe has more questions for these pictures than answers. Nonetheless, his handling of the historical images is self-assured. He is conscious of their implications. In 1983, Hartmut Bitomsky and Heiner Mühlenbrock pointed out a particular problem in dealing with images from the Nazi era in their

film essay "Deutschlandbilder": the images-in this case film images-were used as documents. They were used to show what Nazism was, while also being obliged to "speak against themselves." However, their origins, their relation to Nazism-both in terms of subject matter and formal aspects-as well as the details of their production and their function as material for propaganda, were largely ignored. Today we don't seem to have come much further. The Nazi images are still among us, are used to show us how it really was, without admitting that this isn't actually possible. In the meantime, the staged pictures have taken their place alongside the supposedly authentic or documentary material. Here the problem becomes even more apparent: it's not Hitler, but the actor Bruno Ganz we see raging in the bunker. The belief in the pictures, both in the reenacted ones and in the originals, has reached a dubious level, despite attempts to enlighten and analyze. Art may be a more suitable way to grapple with this legacy.

Mühe has also taken on this problem using the tools of the artist. The consistency with which he follows his approach, as well as the results, are singular in the realm of photography. In painting and sculpture, the artistic investigation of Nazi symbols and aesthetics began early on, and is associated with names such as Tübke, Mattheuer, and Heisig in East Germany, Beuys, Polke, Baselitz, Kiefer, Roth, Oehlen, Kippenberger, and Merz in West Germany, as well as Bisky and Rauch after reunification. Photography, on the other hand, has until now largely avoided a direct artistic investigation of the Nazi images, aside from a few exceptions such as Günther Förg or the American artist Collier Schorr. In this context, its serial character makes photography more suspect of mere affirmation than painting, which by nature is further removed from its subjects. Now Andreas Mühe has exposed himself to this risk with the Obersalzberg complex. He doesn't need to worry. After all, it's possible that someday one of his Obersalzberg pictures will hang alongside Gerhard Richter's "Onkel Rudi" (1964). Mühe's investigation continues.