



Bruno Ganz as Adolf Hitler.

**Surrealistic**  
Down in the bunker with Hitler.

NEWMARKET FILMS, 2004

**DOWNFALL:** Directed by Oliver Hirshbiegel. Written and produced by Bernd Eichinger, based on *Inside Hitler's Bunker* by Joachim Fest and *Until the Final Hour* by Traudl Junge and Melissa Muller. Cinematography, Rainer Klausmann. Edited by Hans Funck. Music, Stephan Zacharias. Production design, Bernd Lepel. Costumes, Claudia Bobsin. Starring Bruno Ganz. With Alexandra Maria Lara, Juliane Kohler, Corinna Harfouch, Ulrich Matthes, Also, Heino Ferch, Christian Berkel, Thomas Kretschmann, Ulrich Noethen, Gotz Otto, Andre Hennicke and Donevan Gunia. Newmarket Films, 2004. R. 148 minutes. **2004 Academy Award nomination for foreign language film.**

**D**ownfall creates a memorable, claustrophobic impression of what took place in Adolf Hitler's bunker 60 feet below the German Chancellery in Berlin, 1945, as Russia's Red Army approached the city center. As a medium, film offers us vivid images that embody historical figures, and we observe realistic reenactments of events, complete with the rich and pedestrian details of daily life. Film grants immediacy to long ago events and turns the famous or infamous into participants. Here Swiss actor Bruno Ganz (*Wings of Desire*) indelibly characterizes Adolf Hitler, making him personally repulsive, shallow and needy, and yet expressing his vulnerability and rare kindness.

Image and performance tempt us to identify with the movie's sympathetic characters and to recognize as human the machinations of those Nazis who spent the last days of the Third Reich trying to save their own skin (or their reputations).

Should movie audiences see such monsters as human even briefly? Artistic freedom says yes; we are all flawed. Should the filmmakers or audience extend sympathy to the historic murderers who embraced Nazism and the Final Solution? No. We can and should see portrayals such as this, yet we must never forget the monumental culpability of the criminal Nazi regime nor forgive its participants for the evil they did to millions of people.

Under the right conditions each of us can behave monstrously. Murderers reflect human nature's shadow side. But being human also means resisting such impulses. In *Downfall*, the state has marshaled its paranoid power impulses against those perceived as enemies. For the ones who implemented Nazism's policies of genocide, there is no clean place to stand. For those who watched, going along to get along demands a price be paid.

*Downfall* is an excellent war film set amid the battered ruins of Berlin and its scattered

battles. As the Allies closed in on the citadel of power, Hitler and his generals in the gray-walled bunker knew they would receive no mercy from the Russians, who would reach the city before the other armies. Hitler's terminal madness — a pathetic attempt to hold onto the remnants of his empire — speaks to the times, as does the relentless, haphazard murder of German citizens by fervent SS in the streets. Inside the bunker and outside mirrored the same pathology. Both were trapped between the pincers of advancing armies.

The story is narrated by Traudl Junge (Alexandra Maria Lara), Hitler's secretary from late 1942 until April 1945. She took his last statement and testimonial. Junge herself speaks in a documentary segment near the end of the film. She does not ask for forgiveness nor understanding, although she reminds us she was just 22 when her Fuehrer selected her. Junge acknowledges that she could have learned what was going on if she had wanted to know. In our heavily mediated culture it's hard to believe one could live in wartime Germany and not know, especially someone in her privileged position. Junge gives us the key to the puzzle: You know something is wrong, but you don't know what, exactly. And you don't ask.

Eva Braun (Juliane Kohler) expresses disappointment when she's unable to persuade her husband to spare the life of her sbrother-in-law, Herman Fegelein (Thomas Kretschmann). Minister of the Interior Heinrich Himmler (Ulrich Noethen) sees his boss has lost his mind and starts negotiating with Supreme Allied Commander Dwight Eisenhower for surrender terms. Hitler entrusts his personal aide, Otto (Gotz Otto), with disposing of his and Eva's bodies by fire following their suicides. Otto also fires the bodies of Hitler's malefic, influential Minister of Propaganda, Josef Goebbels (Ulrich Matthes), and his icy, party loyalist wife Magda (Corinna Harfouch), a murderer herself. We first meet 13-year-old Peter Granz (Donevan Gunia) as a Hitler Youth pinched on the cheek by the Fuehrer. Peter makes several quick appearances in the film, including one very near the end.

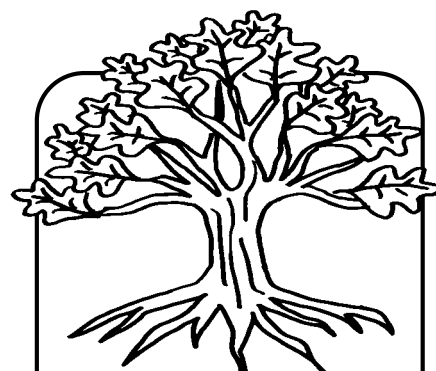
Complex, morally complicated and riveting, *Downfall* is compelling filmmaking. Opens at the Bijou Friday with my highest recommendations. **EW**

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**Don't Just Stay Home**  
Cinema Sensibilities on Disability

**Hollywood Dearest**

Thursday, April 21, 7-9 pm, 175 LAW  
PANEL DISCUSSION:  
Access Issues in the Cinema

THREE FILMS:  
"The Scary Lewis Yell-a-thon"  
DIRECTORS: Donna Nudd,  
Diane Wilkins

"Mayor of the West Side"  
DIRECTOR: Kelli English

"Annie Dearest:  
The Real Miracle Worker"  
DIRECTORS: Terry Galloway, Donna  
Nudd, Diane Wilkins

**LOUD, PROUD AND FEMALE**

Friday, April 22, 7-9:30 pm, 175 LAW  
PANEL DISCUSSION:  
Film Making and Representation  
in the Media

FOUR FILMS:  
"Independent Little Cuss"  
DIRECTOR: Jeff Patterson

"Loud, Proud, and Prosperous"  
DIRECTOR: Dana Vion

"Beyond Disability: The Fe Fe Stories"  
DIRECTOR: Salome Chasnoff

Clips from "Birds of a Feather"  
DIRECTOR: BJo Ashwill

**Not Dead Yet**

Saturday, April 23  
7-9 pm, DIVA, 110 West Broadway

"Film Talk" at DIVA  
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Come speak out about

- Terri Schiavo
- "Million Dollar Baby"
- Death with Dignity
- Who Says What Kind of Life is Worth Living?

For a complete list of panel contacts, topics, and films:  
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Saturday, April 23

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