In unified Germany, Jews and non-Jews alike continue to struggle with what Caroline Pearce calls the ‘dialectic of normality,’ i.e., the desire for normalization that is irreconcilable with the dual burden of Holocaust crimes and present continuity of anti-Semitism. While Pearce and others deplore the instrumentalization of the Holocaust by Jews and non-Jews alike, a number of recent German films express variations of this dialectic. Filmmakers Michael Verhoeven, Malte Ludin, Robert Thalheim, Dani Levy and Oliver Hirschbiegel demonstrate how searching for justice requires a continued effort of revealing the truth about the past while conceding that there are limits to understanding it.

Michael Haneke’s Oscar-nominated film Das weiße Band (2009)\(^1\) demonstrates that in their search for a normal identity each new German post-war generation is confronted anew with Saul Friedländer’s conclusion that ‘a nation that committed these crimes is not so normal after all.’\(^2\) The German desire for a ‘normalized’ national identity continues to clash with the need to remember the crimes of the Holocaust and even has intensified since unification. According to Caroline Pearce, this ‘dialectic of normality’\(^3\) is compounded by many forms of Holocaust instrumentalization such as the German government’s use of references to the Holocaust as justification for the intervention in Kosovo, or as means for improving Germany’s international image as well as the interests of German businesses abroad, to name but a few.\(^4\) Jewish critics like Maxim Biller and Henryk Broder frequently contend that non-Jewish Germans are flaunting their Holocaust trauma in a questionable attempt to bolster German national identity.\(^5\) Michael Kimmelman of The New York Times draws the same conclusion in his report on the educational use of the new Holocaust-cartoon The Search which chronicles the lives of young Jews in Nazi Germany: ‘Germans still seem to grapple almost eagerly with their own historic guilt and shame.’\(^6\) Yet, Y. Michal Bodemann levels his charges against Jews in the U.S. and Israel who, he opines, continue viewing ‘Holocaust commemoration as a negative civil religion’\(^7\) and who deny the existence of a new Jewish diaspora in Germany and Europe. Ostensibly, historian Dan Diner’s 1986 verdict
that the Holocaust had forged a ‘negative symbiosis’ on Germans and Jews after 1945 still stands today. 

Ending the silence about crimes and complicity in World War II and the Holocaust and beginning an open dialogue about the Nazi era was undoubtedly one of the major achievements of the rebellious German student movement of 1968. Along with the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial (1963-5) and the publication of Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich’s ground-breaking sociological study on the collective German *Inability to Mourn* the loss of the beloved ‘Führer,’ the events of that pivotal year are seen as the main impetus that compelled the German nation to engage in a public discourse on ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung.’ In the aftermath of the student protests West Germans set off working through their past, and in so doing established a myriad of memorials and changed history textbooks as well as school curricula. Scholars and ordinary Germans seem to disagree, however, about the extent to which the West German population attempted to come to terms with its past. Although breaking the silence about the Holocaust was part of the protesters’ main goals, the student movement initially did very little to compel the majority of West German families to uncover ‘de[n] Leichenberg im Keller.’ Arguably the students’ aggressive public outrage and, in some cases, their self-righteousness may well have been partly responsible for the continuation of the silence in the private sphere, thus allowing the nation to avoid any honest discussion about personal responsibilities. The more recent ‘victim debate’ in Germany, which found its most controversial expression in Martin Walser’s Peace Prize speech in October 1998, proved symptomatic of the problematic relationship many Germans have with the memory of World War II and the Holocaust even after several decades of improved Holocaust education and public commemoration.

German Jews, too, continue to struggle with the legacy of the past. Some Jewish European scholars agree with Y. Michal Bodemann’s more positive assessment of a significant revival of public interest in Jewish affairs in what he calls a ‘Judaizing milieu’: ‘[…] this revival – whatever one may think of it – is unthinkable without what I would describe as a Judaizing milieu: a broad periphery of non-Jews interested in or fascinated by Jewish traditions and religion.’ However, scholars in Israel and the U.S. are instead more prone to citing surveys that indicate a general lack of knowledge about the Holocaust and