



THE NEW YORKER

THE FRONT ROW

« [Heil, Hynkel](#) | [Main](#) | [Water Music](#) »

APRIL 15, 2010

HEAL HITLER

Posted by Richard Brody

The Swiss director Dani Levy delivered, in his 1993 comedy “[Ohne Mich](#)” (“Without Me”), the funniest Jewish joke I’ve ever heard, so when his comedy “My Führer”—in which Joseph Goebbels recruits a Jewish actor, in 1944, to raise the spirits of a depressed Hitler—came out here last year, I put aside my misgivings and watched. The results were not good; nonetheless, since the subject of the week around here, thanks to [Amy Davidson’s post](#), is the [comic representation of Hitler](#), I thought it would be worthwhile to look at the [interview with Levy](#) by Louis Lewitan that appeared several weeks ago in *Die Zeit*. Levy tells Lewitan that humor “is a light that one turns on in a taboo-ized space. That is a function of humor that has always interested me, and that’s why comedy actually belongs in the realm of redemption. In a perfect world, humor would have no redemptive function. In any case it has a good effect on the psyche, because I don’t get depressed, but rather, make bad movies.” Asked about Jewish humor, he responded:

It’s a humor that’s based on the absurdity and the ambivalence of the soul. It has a lot to do with weakness, with inconsequentiality, but also, as a result, with the way people circumvent authority. Jewish humor is always a call to subversion, which is why it’s so beloved; it comes from below and not from above. It is not at all a ruler’s humor, but is rather the humor of people who have to defend themselves.