



NAZISPLOTTATION!

THE NAZI IMAGE IN LOW-BROW CINEMA AND CULTURE



EDITED BY DANIEL H. MAGILOW, KRISTIN T. VANDER LUGT AND ELIZABETH BRIDGES

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Introduction

Nazisploitation! The Nazi Image in Low-Brow Cinema and Culture

DANIEL H. MAGILOW

WHEN VINCENT CANBY OF *The New York Times* reviewed *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (1974) on November 30, 1975, he posed a question to his readers and future historians. ‘If it’s possible to reconstruct the interests, attitudes and values of a lost society from its garbage,’ Canby wrote, ‘then perhaps we should take a closer look at some of the junk that’s passing through our movie theaters these days. Would you want a future historian speculating about *your* life on the basis of a mossy old print of *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS*?’¹

The essays in the volume before you might have surprised Vincent Canby. On the basis of *Ilsa* and similar films, they carry out the wishes of the person who might have answered ‘yes’ to his rhetorical question. To the extent that one can speak of ‘canonical’ Nazi exploitation or ‘Nazisploitation’ films, *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* is a standard-bearer. The story centers on Ilsa, a well-endowed, sexually voracious commandante of a prisoner-of-war camp. Ilsa presides over sadistic medical experiments, and every night she rapes and executes the male prisoners who cannot satisfy her insatiable sexual appetites. During the opening credits, the film feebly attempts to shield itself from accusations that it exploits the memory of World War II and concentration camps by claiming an authentic basis in the true but fundamentally unrelated story of the war criminal Ilse Koch. The alleged crimes of Ilse Koch, the wife of Buchenwald commandant Karl Koch who was dubbed

the infamous ‘Bitch of Buchenwald’, reputedly included ordering lampshades made from the skin of tattooed prisoners and having ditch diggers beaten for looking at her after she paraded above them in a short skirt without underwear.² *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* is in fact even dedicated to the victims of the Nazi camps, as if its gratuitous memorial rhetoric could compensate for the wholesale desecration of historical memory that follows on-screen.

The aspects of *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* that presumably led Vincent Canby to call it ‘junk’ in fact represent the standard tropes, settings and narrative conceits of Nazisploitation cinema: sexually perverted, calculating and sadistic Nazi officers, prisoner-of-war and concentration camps, medical experimentation and prisoner rebellions. With its myriad continuity errors, profound tastelessness, and historical inaccuracy, *Ilsa* also typifies the genre’s technical sloppiness and arguable lack of artistic quality. In these films that conflate the history of World War II and the Holocaust or that invent new and fantastic histories altogether, Nazis are more caricature than character. In the logic of the Nazisploitation film, all Germans are Nazis, all Nazis are members of the SS, and all members of the SS are war criminals, medical experimenters and sexual sadists. If, to cite Jeffrey Shandler’s phrase, Nazis and the Holocaust have become the ‘master moral paradigm’ of evil, then the Nazis of Nazisploitation film embody this evil more than they represent specific historical personages.³

In its heyday in North America and Western Europe after the upheavals of 1968 and into the late 1970s, Nazisploitation emerged amidst the wave of low-budget exploitation films that, depending on their subject matter, have been retroactively categorized as blaxploitation, nunsploration, mexploitation, ‘mondo’ film, women-in-prison movies and the like.⁴ As film scholar Eric Schaefer defines it, the term ‘exploitation film’ derives from ‘the practice of exploitation, advertising or promotional techniques that went over and above typical posters, trailers and newspaper ads.’⁵ True to this strategy, Nazisploitation relied more on sensationalistic tag lines and sexually provocative marketing to lure audiences into theaters rather than on aesthetic quality or a compelling narrative that might ensure repeat viewings.

Marketing emphasized sexual content, usually with the help of large-breasted, leather-clad blonde women in provocative poses. To judge from film posters and taglines, movies such as *Ilsa She Wolf*



Figure 1 Poster for *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (1974).

of the SS or *Lager SSadis Kastrat Kommandantur* (*SS Experiment Love Camp*, 1976) appeared to be sex films. But more often than not, Nazisploitation titles resembled slasher films more than hardcore pornography. By one count, *Ilsa* includes only five specifically sexual scenes against 44 depictions of violence and torture.⁶ Be it for their sex or their violence, these films earned the scorn of censors around the world, most famously as banned films on the ‘video nasties’ list in the United Kingdom in the 1980s.⁷

Vincent Canby might have cringed at the idea that future historians would think about the mid-1970s on the basis of ‘trash’ such as *Ilsa*, *She Wolf of the SS*. Yet he could not entirely have foreseen an academic sensibility that increasingly bases its cultural histories not solely on ‘grand narratives’ or politicians’ grandiose pronouncements or high art films, but instead on surfaces, ruins, decay and ephemera. The German film critic Siegfried Kracauer, himself an exile and victim of Nazism, stressed in his influential *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* that we need to attend to such surfaces. According to Kracauer, these surfaces yield clues to mentalities and histories that official narratives may not.⁸ Accordingly, this volume explores these ‘trashy’ films. It traces their histories and genealogies, the ways their narrative formulas and character types merge sexuality and politics, and how these motifs have persisted into the present and continually been updated and reinvented. The following essays take Nazisploitation’s ‘shortcomings’ vis-à-vis more established forms of cinema as an opportunity to pose worthwhile but underexamined questions: Why should one read about films of dubious artistic or moral integrity? What can one gain by attending to films that callously misappropriate human suffering for cheap thrills and commercial gain? And what can these films tell us about the representation of sex and violence on film? Anyone who might have thought that these exaggerated images of Nazis, at once sadistic, nymphomaniac and fantastic, were relevant only to the world of *Ilsa* and the seedy Times Square grindhouses of the 1970s must recognize that that world is not lost at all. Indeed, to borrow the rhetoric of Nazisploitation movie posters, just when you thought it was dead...

Nazisploitation is back.

The Nazisploitation Renaissance

Back and better (or worse?) than ever, in fact. Although the genre never entirely died out in the 30+ years since its heyday in the 1970s, Nazisploitation cinema has in recent years experienced a noticeable renaissance. ‘Underground’ titles once available only as low-quality copies from independent distributors are increasingly sold on Amazon.com as deluxe DVD box sets with ‘all the trimmings’. The inclusion of ‘making-of’ segments, cast interviews, liner notes and other bonus features confers an added degree of prestige to films once considered the epitome of trash. The Nazisploitation revival reached an apotheosis of sorts in the commercial and critical success of Quentin Tarantino’s *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), whose very title plays on Enzo Castellari’s 1978 World War II ‘mission’ film *Quel maledetto treno blindato*, translated as *The Inglorious Bastards*.

But Tarantino is not alone. Marvel Productions and Paramount Pictures recently brought film audiences the summer blockbuster *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), which pits the titular superhero against Red Skull, a Nazi officer, weapons specialist, close confidant of Hitler and all-around supervillain whose ominous red skull mask gives an appropriately evil face to the Third Reich’s crimes. Keith J. Crocker, the proprietor of *Cinefear*, a distributor of hard-to-find and out-of-print films and videos, even wrote and directed the ‘neo-Nazisploitation’ film *Blitzkrieg: Escape from Stalag 69* (2008), a production that revisits the low budget feel of its 1970s antecedents.⁹ Nor is the renewed interest in Nazisploitation limited to North America. Thanks to digital video, editing software, streaming video and internet distribution, Nazisploitation films can now be distributed and consumed worldwide. Alongside the American production *Horrors of War* (2006), for instance, films such as British director Steve Barker’s *Outpost* (2007) and the Norwegian production *Død Snø* (*Dead Snow*, 2009) count among the burgeoning subgenre of ‘Nazi zombie’ films. In early 2011, trailers for the upcoming Finnish film *Iron Sky* spread across the internet and created a buzz for this science fiction-comedy. In director Timo Vuorensola’s science-fiction comedy, descendants of Nazis coordinate an attack from the secret base they established in 1945 on the dark side of the moon. There are even documentaries on Nazisploitation, notably Israeli director Ari Libsker’s *Stalagim* (*Stalags*, 2007) about pornographic Israeli pulp fiction in the 1960s. These

erotic graphic novels, well known to an entire generation of Israelis, feature stories of American and British pilots, downed and captured behind enemy lines, who endure torture at the hands of female SS guards in prisoner-of-war camps (the eponymous Stalags) before they eventually gain the upper hand and subsequently rape and murder their captors.¹⁰

Admittedly, Nazisploitation's early-twenty-first-century cinematic comeback often smirks ironically or condescendingly at its twentieth century antecedents. Rob Zombie's mock trailer for the as-yet-unmade film *Werewolf Women of the SS* appears between segments of the Quentin Tarantino/Robert Rodriguez co-production *Grindhouse* (2007), and it plainly acknowledges the genre's sensationalism, gore, and all-around trashiness from the perspective of a well-funded Hollywood production. Yet, where Nazisploitation was once taboo, today its motifs and narrative conceits have permeated big budget studio productions and mainstream popular culture as well. In 2009, for instance, English actress Kate Winslet won the Best Actress Oscar for her portrayal of Hanna Schmitz in the screen adaptation of German author Bernard Schlink's bestseller *The Reader*, which was also the February 1999 Oprah's Book Club selection. In a storyline reminiscent of Nazisploitation films, Winslet plays a former concentration camp guard and war criminal who seduces the fifteen-year old Michael Berg (played by David Kross and Ralph Fiennes) and helps him 'come of age' as a man. At the same time as mass media demonize female high school teachers for paedophilic liaisons with teenage boys, the official website for Oprah's Book Club still praised and normalized these elements of Schlink's novel by describing it as a 'love story of stunning power'.¹¹

Fantastic and ethically dubious appropriations of National Socialism, Hitler and the Third Reich have also found significant traction in other media beyond film. In the Xbox 360 version of the popular first-person shooter game *Call of Duty: World at War*, gamers can play a special 'Nazi Zombie mode' and kill (and subsequently re-kill) Nazis. By bringing back the Nazis so as cyclically to kill them anew, a new generation can symbolically reclaim the moral high ground that their grandparents' or even great-grandparents' generation first staked out as the 'good guys' in a 'just war'. Or through humor, contemporary audiences can ritually humiliate Hitler and Nazis, as in the widely circulated variants of the 'Hitler Meme', a clip from Oliver

Hirschbiegel's *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*, 2004). The literally hundreds of variants of this clip feature Adolf Hitler (Bruno Ganz) in a frothing rage with a variety of satiric subtitles. As a buffoonish, pathetic, and defeated Hitler rants in German about the loss of World War II, these viral videos use subtitles to re-imagine this anger as frustration with John McCain's choice of Sarah Palin as his vice-presidential candidate, Michael Jackson's death, Conan O'Brien's departure from *The Tonight Show*, Hitler's frustration at 'not killing Osama Bin Laden first' and any number of other 'lost causes'. One version even self-referentially depicts Hitler's rage when YouTube decided in April 2010 to remove these viral videos to avoid copyright infringement lawsuits from Constantin Film AG, the producers of *Downfall*.¹² Meanwhile, the animated TV series *Family Guy* and *South Park* attract controversy for their use of Nazi iconography, as when the former attracted attention for its October 19, 2008 episode in which characters wear SS uniforms adorned with 'McCain-Palin' campaign buttons. And all the while, new 'Nazi' phrases enter the popular lexicon, including 'Grammar Nazi' (an individual with an overly zealous or pedantic attitude to grammar and style) and 'Nazi Tourette's' (comedian Lewis Black's description of conservative commentator Glenn Beck's seemingly uncontrollable propensity to invoke Hitler and Nazis in analogies).¹³

Inappropriate Appropriations

For all of the current ubiquity of the Nazi image in both low-brow cinema and popular culture in the United States and beyond, Nazisploitation cinema has largely escaped the attention of film and Holocaust scholars, although not entirely.¹⁴ The reasons relate clearly to this genre's flagrant disregard for historical accuracy, pornographic and misogynistic tendencies, graphic violence, and all-around tastelessness and lack of ethical sensitivity to the twentieth-century's deadliest war and most notorious genocide. In *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, for instance, the noted film scholar Annette Insdorf states that her goal in writing this important history of Holocaust cinema is 'to explore the degree to which [Holocaust] films manifest artistic as well as moral integrity.'¹⁵ The only films Insdorf addresses that might qualify as Nazisploitation are avant-garde European works such as Liliana Cavani's *Il portiere di notte* (*The Night Porter*, 1974) or Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (*Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*,

1975). These films, which Marcus Stiglegger terms *sadiconazista*, an Italian neologism meaning ‘sadism with Nazis’, have elicited strongly polarized critical opinion. Detractors see them as pornography or pretentious ‘Euro-trash’, while proponents praise them as daring, taboo-breaking masterpieces that make sadomasochism, coprophagy and other forms of deviance into metaphors for fascism.¹⁶ *The Night Porter* scandalously imagined the relationship between a concentration camp officer and a prisoner (Dirk Bogarde and Charlotte Rampling) as sadomasochistic and thus ultimately pleasurable, while Pasolini’s film transposes the libertinism of the Marquis de Sade into the setting of the Nazi puppet state of Salò, in Northern Italy. These controversial films and other art-house features may periodically find their way into canonical histories of Holocaust film and stretch the boundaries of Nazisploitation beyond the ‘low-brow’. Yet films like *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* or Nazi zombie films remain relatively understudied.

A key reason that detractors ignore Nazisploitation films is that they violate a central taboo of Holocaust representation: they visualize and exaggerate atrocities in ways that claim to make them comprehensible, even as Holocaust survivors insist non-participants simply cannot comprehend them if they were not there. This taboo touches upon well-rehearsed debates about the propriety of representing the Third Reich’s crimes in film and in other media. Claims such as Theodor W. Adorno’s that ‘to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric’ helped establish the so-called *Bilderverbot*, a ‘ban on graven images’ vis-à-vis the Holocaust.¹⁷ A key feature of this debate about Holocaust representation is a false dichotomy between commercial films in a mimetic or ‘realistic’ mode on the one hand and more aesthetically self-conscious art films on the other. The debate reached a fever pitch in the mid-1990s, when French filmmaker Claude Lanzmann denounced Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993) as a film that tries to represent a horror whose negative sublimity defies representation altogether. In his own *Shoah* (1985), Lanzmann eschews altogether any reconstruction of events or the use of archival footage and relies instead on interviews with perpetrators, victims and bystanders. Although, as film scholar Miriam Hansen has shown, the ‘*Schindler’s List* versus *Shoah*’ binary is overblown,¹⁸ the Lanzmann/Spielberg debate points to a key structural dimension that undergirds thinking about Holocaust film, and that Nazisploitation cinema further exposes: the posited differences between ‘proper’ and ‘exploitative’ modes of representing the

traumatic Nazi past are not as great as one might believe. The claim that certain representations of violence and sex are ‘appropriate’ while others are ‘exploitative’ kitsch regularly provides a subterfuge for other agendas about how to remember the past. Such agendas might include, for instance, the desire to preserve the image of World War II as the war of a ‘greatest generation’ of American heroes. Or they might buttress the notion that the Holocaust is a sacred event that non-participants simply cannot understand.

As an object of study that instrumentalizes memory and history in such taboo-violating ways, Nazisploitation cinema has increasingly attracted scholarly interest as a ‘paracinematic’ form. Paracinema is the term that film theorist Jeffrey Sconce coined to refer to genres and fan cultures outside of ‘legitimate’ and ‘mainstream’ film.¹⁹ Nazisploitation’s putative ‘outsider’ status as a paracinematic form helps explain in part its appeal for fans and for scholars interested in canon formation. Yet the essays in *Nazisploitation!* do not seek to mimic fawning, uncritical fan cultures or rehabilitate a violent, misogynistic, and at times pornographic genre. Nor do they merely argue that, in spite of their ethical and aesthetic failings, these films still deserve inclusion within the canon of the great World War II and Holocaust films. Rather, by examining the diverse ways this taboo-breaking cinematic genre has, one might say, ‘inappropriately appropriated’ images of National Socialism, World War II and the Holocaust, the essays in *Nazisploitation!* aim to help us understand better the very composition of the canon in the first place. The ways these films depict Nazism and its atrocities draw attention to the very mechanisms of canon formation. They alert us to those spoken and unspoken rules and protocols that govern the production and reception of such films and whose violation results in stigma. Through scrutiny of films of different degrees of marginality, from underground pornographic Hungarian S&M Nazi bondage films all the way to fêted Academy Award nominees, these essays search for the implicit and explicit rules that determine how filmmakers are expected to represent traumatic pasts, how viewers are expected to understand them and how critics are expected to appraise them. *Nazisploitation!: The Nazi Image in Low-Brow Cinema and Culture* contributes to our understanding about how we think about Nazis, the Third Reich, World War II, and even the concept of ‘evil’ more generally. It does so not in spite of the fact that these films’ production values and dubious ethics often result in their

exclusion from discussions of Holocaust film. Indeed, it is precisely the history of this normative exclusion that invites us to reflect critically on the terms with which cinema and mass culture engage traumatic pasts. As the number of people with unmediated access to the original events declines, this project takes on added importance because soon the only access we have to the twentieth century's signature war and genocide will be through media. Of the many results that emerge from these investigations, one stands out: terms such as 'Nazisploitation' and 'mainstream Holocaust cinema' or 'art' are socially constructed. They say as much about particular political, cultural and ideological agendas at particular historical junctures than they do about the films themselves.

The Many Paths to Nazisploitation: Origins, Histories and Genealogies

The following essays reveal that we need to continue questioning the boundaries between 'inappropriate' and 'appropriate' cinematic modes because both 'serious mainstream' and 'exploitative underground' cinema about the Third Reich and its crimes share common historical antecedents. Consider, for instance, the following case study that links the US Army Signal Corps's concentration camp atrocity films to *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS*. In his autobiography *A Youth in Babylon: Confessions of a Trash-Film King*, the producer of *Ilsa*, David F. Friedman (1923–2011), recounts his work with the US Army Signal Corps in the mid-1940s. In the early postwar context, the Signal Corps was tasked with filming the newly liberated camps. The Allies used the Signal Corps's disturbing and now-iconic footage of emaciated survivors and bulldozers pushing piles of corpses into mass graves to convince American and British audiences of the value of their sacrifices, shame German citizens for the actions done in their name, and convict Nazi war criminals at the Nuremberg trials. Billy Wilder, Frank Capra, George Stevens and other important personalities of postwar American cinema created atrocity films and anti-German propaganda for the Signal Corps before creating many of the popular films with which audiences now associate them.²⁰ Unlike these more famous Army Signal Corps film makers, however, David F. Friedman remained in the United States, where he supervised movie theaters on army bases and instructed GIs and civilian employees in film production.²¹ Crucially, his work in the Signal Corps exposed him to this shocking atrocity footage.

After the war, Friedman eventually teamed up with the (in)famous producer and film promoter Howard W. ‘Kroger’ Babb. Using the standard *modus operandi* of exploitation film, they produced the documentary *Halfway to Hell* (1953). Friedman and Babb took shocking footage of bodies and executions and presented it within a documentary narrative framework that was, at least nominally, socially acceptable because of its staunch anti-Communist rhetoric. The film presents itself as a warning against the dangers of totalitarianism, a term that had morphed by the early-1950s to mean Communism rather than Nazism. Babb had successfully used such tactics many times before. To the extent that the film has a plot, it serves primarily as scaffolding for shocking spectacles, as was often the case in later exploitation films.²² As Friedman notes in his autobiography, *Halfway to Hell* was somewhat disingenuously marketed as a political warning when it primarily afforded an excuse to ‘poke viewers in the eye’ with shocking footage from World War II and the Holocaust. In fact, it borrowed entire sections of *Nazi Concentration Camps*.²³ Like this atrocity film, *Halfway to Hell*’s Buñuelian mission was to shock through sheer spectacle, not compelling narrative. It begins with an intertitle that frames the subsequent footage as proof of the evils of all forms of atheism and totalitarianism, whether Fascist, Nazi or Communist, just as postwar atrocity films opened with intertitles that explicitly stated the moral imperative that should motivate the screening and viewing of gruesome footage. Although Friedman himself continued to produce and market such films for the next two decades, few concerned Nazism or the Holocaust explicitly. But in 1968, he returned to Nazis. Friedman produced and played a bit part in *Love Camp 7*, an early moment of the late-60s/early-70s Nazisploitation craze. Five years later, he produced *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS*, which itself inspired several sequels and knockoffs.

In the broader history of Nazisploitation, the Signal Corps–Friedman–Babb–*Ilsa* nexus is but one example of the many foundational narratives. The essays in Part I of this volume, ‘Origins, Histories and Genealogies’, explore other back stories and in the process add temporal, linguistic and geographic breadth to the history of the Nazi image in low-brow cinema and culture. In ‘Cinema beyond Good and Evil?: Nazi Exploitation in the Cinema of the 1970s and its Heritage’ (Chapter 1), Marcus Stiglegger reflects on the central role television and cinema — rather than the historical profession writ

large — have played in creating popular images of Holocaust memory. Stiglegger shows that even though popular conceptions of the genocide depend heavily on films such as *Schindler's List* (1993) and *Holocaust: The Story of the Family Weiss* (1978), films of the 'sadiconazista cycle' have also played a key role. *Sadiconazista* refers to the fictional and not entirely reputable Nazi exploitation pulp literature and cinema between the 1960s and the 1980s. The films of the *sadiconazista* cycle were both 'arty' and controversial during their time, and they have subsequently proven highly influential in international cinema and popular culture up to the present. Stiglegger offers a typology of this important aspect of Nazisploitation and lays bare some of its narrative conceits and character types.

In their essays in Chapters 2 and 3, Michael D. Richardson and Alicia Kozma examine additional links between exploitation film and big-budget blockbusters. They consider the significant but often under-acknowledged traffic between North American Nazisploitation films, the *sadiconazista* cycle and contemporary mainstream cinema. Big-budget productions such as *The Reader* (2008), *Zwartboek* (*Black Book*, 2006), and the films of the *Indiana Jones* franchise (1981ff.) feature the characters and storylines that parallel antecedents such as *Ilsa*, *She Wolf of the SS* or *The Night Porter*. Figures such as Hanna Schmitz (Kate Winslet) in *The Reader* and Dr Elsa Schneider (Alison Doody) in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* are at least to a certain extent the cinematic *Doppelgänger* of *Ilsa*. Like *Ilsa*, they are both cunning, sexually deviant, and of course, blond. When these Hollywood or Hollywood-style films transfer these motifs into more reputable commercial contexts, the help legitimize the myths about sexuality and violence that the earlier films introduced. Richardson and Kozma show that, in many ways, there never was a Nazisploitation 'revival', because it never entirely disappeared.

The next essays in this first section (Chapters 4 and 5) by Elizabeth Bridges and James Ward seek the history of Nazisploitation in the vexing relationship of Nazis and science. It is a well-known and troubling fact that the Third Reich's scientists made important and even beneficial discoveries.²⁴ After the war the Office of Strategic Services, the precursor to the CIA, recognized these scientists' value and, as a part of the covert 'Project Paperclip' smuggled many into the United States to keep them out of Soviet hands. But at the same time as associations with Nazism tainted scientific legacies, they also

fueled film makers' imaginations. As Bridges and Ward show, the 'Nazi mad scientist' and 'Nazi medical experimenter' types form the basis of films such as *Shock Waves* (1977), about an army of genetically modified 'super soldiers', and *The Boys from Brazil* (1978), in which war criminals in South America try to clone the Führer and establish the basis for a Nazi revival. Alluding to the horrors of Dr Joseph Mengele's medical torture or Wernher von Braun's exploitation of slave labor in the V-2 rocketry program, Nazi science in such films is more than just a fantastic plot device. Through empirical science, it introduces the prospect of a Nazi afterlife. As early as the B-movie *Revenge of the Zombies* (1943), filmmakers were, through the figure of the mad Nazi scientist, already anticipating the ways the Nazi image could be appropriated to speak to very real concerns of the dawning atomic age, including genetic engineering, the politicization of science during the Cold War and the ethical dimensions of how and where we acquire knowledge.

Deviant Sexualities and Deviant Politics: Bitches, Whores and Dominatrices

Where these opening chapters point to some of the histories and genealogies of Nazisploitation, the essays in Part II, 'Bitches, Whores and Dominatrices', focus on how specific films code Nazis as perverted, sadomasochistic and decadent sexual beings and why these codings are significant. Robert von Dassanowsky's reading of Tinto Brass's *Salon Kitty* (1976) (Chapter 6), David Church's analysis of Agustín Villaronga's *Tras el cristal* (*In a Glass Cage*, 1986) (Chapter 7), Benedikt Eppenberger's history of *Eine Armee Gretchen* (*Fräuleins in Uniform*, 1972) (Chapter 8) and Elissa Mailänder's essay on *Il portiere di notte* (*The Night Porter*, 1974) all show that there is more than just sex and swastikas to the erotic appeal of Nazis that Susan Sontag dubbed 'fascinating Fascism' and that Klaus Theweleit linked to 'Male Fantasies'.²⁵ In these films, the conflation of fascism and sexuality serves multiple roles beyond simply fathoming the extent to which the Nazis degraded their victims in mind and body.

Perhaps most significantly, these films point to the crucial question of what it means to associate fascism with non-normative sexuality. The willingness of Nazisploitation to consider Nazism's erotic dimensions is in fact a key reason it has become so taboo. As counterintuitive

as it may sound, this issue predated not only the Nazisploitation craze, but also the Third Reich and even Nazism itself. In *Sex Drives: Fantasies of Fascism in Literary Modernism*, literary critic Laura Frost demonstrates the significance of fascist sexual imagery in modernist texts since the end of World War I. Frost's readings of D.H. Lawrence, Georges Bataille, Hans Bellmer, Sylvia Plath and others show that a false dichotomy has governed approaches to the intersections of fascism and eroticism. This dichotomy is the ostensible gulf between the private nature of the erotic and the public world of the political, or as Frost puts it, 'Fictions of eroticized fascism contradict the expectation that politics and fantasy are necessarily consistent.'²⁶ In other words, when modernist writers and later Nazisploitation filmmakers eroticized fascism, they exposed, and through hyperbole criticized, a trend still pervasive: the tendency to assume parallels and consistency between private sex lives and public political behavior.

And indeed, in the early 1930s, as the National Socialists publically denounced homosexuality, transvestism and other signature moments of interwar Germany's sexual liberalization, which movie audiences associate with Liza Minnelli's burlesque performances in *Cabaret* (1972), their opponents tried to discredit the movement with similar denouncements. They pointed out the known homosexuality and other 'perverted tendencies' of individual Nazis, notably SA leader Ernst Röhm.²⁷ Similarly, during World War II, the psychoanalyst Walter Langer speculated in his wartime report to the Office of Strategic Services, later released as *The Mind of Adolf Hitler*, that Adolf Hitler was a voyeur who might have engaged in homosexual activities and who also derived 'sexual gratification from the act of having a woman urinate or defecate on him.'²⁸ Indeed, the question 'Was Hitler gay?' still intrigues many pundits and observers while the question 'Why does it matter?' rarely, if ever, receives scrutiny.²⁹

Nazisploitation Today and Tomorrow: Heroes, Villains and the Undead

The essays in this book's final third, 'Heroes, Villains and the Undead', all speak to the present and future of Nazisploitation. As the number of people with unmediated relationships to World War II and the Holocaust shrinks and the hold of representational taboos weakens (or at least changes), new generations are producing and consuming new variations on the Nazisploitation theme. In their essays Jeff

Hayton and Craig This show how images of metastasized Nazi evil have spread well beyond cinema. In his analysis of the *Wolfenstein* franchise and other World War II and Nazi-themed first person shooter (FPS) games (Chapter 10), Hayton examines games with plots focusing on jackboot-wearing SS-men, mad scientists, Nazi zombies and other standard Nazisploitation types. The FPS allows gamers to go back in time, confront and kill icons of evil, and personally rewrite history. Nevertheless, even though the FPS empowers gamers as ‘Nazi killers’, this virtual environment is a problematic one. Games frequently take extreme liberties with history and make implicit and often wildly inaccurate claims about historical agency of the perpetrators, bystanders, victims and liberators of World War II and the Holocaust. Hayton shows that, as readily as these games depict all manner of Nazis, the Holocaust remains the ‘elephant in the room’, eerily present yet unacknowledged.

In Chapter 11, Craig This examines another lucrative popular medium that, like gaming, appeals strongly but not exclusively to younger audiences: comic books and graphic novels. Through a diachronic study of Marvel Comics’ Captain America, This shows how comic book Nazis have stood in for America’s ideological opponents at specific historical moments. When Captain America originated in the 1940s, Nazis were the enemies, but in the 1950s, for instance, Communists replaced Nazis. But after 9/11 and in an environment where nebulous terrorists cells threaten American supremacy more than antagonist nation states, Marvel Comics returned to Nazi-themed plots. Nazis offered Captain America’s readers what al-Qaeda could not: an iconic embodiment of evil in a recognizable uniform that an American hero could eliminate.

The final three essays return to film and powerfully illustrate the extent to which Nazisploitation revisits its own pasts in a wide range of contemporary film practices. The Norwegian Nazi zombie film *Død Snø* (*Dead Snow*) appeared in 2009 and soon attracted widespread attention on the independent film festival circuit. In ‘A Past that Refuses to Die: Nazi Zombie Film and the Legacy of Occupation’ (Chapter 12), Sven Jüngerkes and Christiane Wienand read this cult hit as a critique of the legacy of Germany’s occupation of Norway during World War II. Director Tommy Wirkola’s Nazi zombies symbolize a nation’s failure to acknowledge the full extent of their complicity with wartime occupiers. This unmastered past literally comes back from the dead

to undermine politically expedient myths of Norwegian national victimhood.

With its litany of references to zombie and slasher films, *Dead Snow* winks knowingly at cinephile audiences. But independent film is not the only cinematic space that revisits Nazisploitation. Much of the contemporary interest in Nazisploitation takes as a reference point Quentin Tarantino's critically acclaimed, box office hit *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), which teems with citations of 1960s and 1970s exploitation and war mission films. Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* highlights its director's ability, demonstrated in *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and the *Kill Bill* films (2003, 2004), to recombine the motifs and conceits of low-budget genre films and grindhouse fare. Tarantino unites a montage of cinematic references in a compelling, aesthetically nuanced work that, to borrow the film's final line, 'just might be [his] masterpiece.' Mimmi Woisnitza's essay (Chapter 13) examines the significance of this latest instance of Tarantino's borrowing and recycling. Woisnitza shows how *Inglourious Basterds* cites the different registers of earlier World War II exploitation films, including Nazi fetish, conspiracies, battle spectacles, disguises, subjugation, suspense and vengeance. Where many films inadvertently make fascism 'fascinating' through such elements, Woisnitza stresses that *Inglourious Basterds* uses them more critically, to draw attention to the taint behind any superficial attractiveness of Nazism.

In the volume's final essay (Chapter 14), Michael Fuchs returns to the seedy origins of Nazisploitation. He examines the recrudescence of explicit Nazi-themed sex in recent hardcore pornographic and BDSM films. Through analysis of the pornographic films *Dr. Mengele*, *Gestapo* and *Gestapo 2* from the Hungarian producer Mood Pictures, Fuchs shows how these recent Nazi sexploitation titles evoke questions about the boundaries between real and performed pain. He examines, for instance, the aporia film scholar Linda Williams pointed out over two decades ago in her ground-breaking work on pornography, whether sexual violence on-screen is a 'fictional depiction' or an 'enacted reality'.³⁰ Whether real or not, protracted on-screen sexual violence raises serious questions about pain, suffering and the voyeuristic pleasure derived from such viewing, all of which bear upon films well beyond the niche of bondage pornography.

By way of conclusion, it is worth stressing the obvious: the sheer volume of material that one could include in a book titled *Nazisploitation!*

The Nazi Image in Low-Brow Cinema and Culture invariably makes this essay collection incomplete. Additional research might consider Nazisploitation in different media contexts, on television, on the internet, in video game or in contemporary slang. Other studies might consider the use of Nazi tropes in humor, in political discourse and in varied national contexts. Still others might consider continued recurrence of Nazi imagery in different kinds of film. This volume is offered not as the last word on Nazisploitation, but as a scholarly intervention that might provoke further study. To this end, it concludes with a bibliography and filmography that can provide scholars with a solid basis for further intellectual work.

Notes

- 1 Vincent Canby, 'Now for a Look At Some Really Bad Movies', *The New York Times*, November 30, 1975, D13.,
- 2 'Conduct of the Ilse Koch War Crimes Trial', *S. Doc. No. 1775, Part 3*, 80th Cong., 2nd Sess. (1948).
- 3 Jeffrey Shandler, *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), xii.
- 4 Sabine Hake, 'Art and Exploitation: On the Fascist Imaginary in 1970s Italian Cinema', *Studies in European Cinema* 7, no. 1 (2010): 11–19.
- 5 Eric Schaefer, *'Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!' A History of Exploitation Films, 1919–1959* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 4.
- 6 Lynn Rapaport, 'Holocaust Pornography: Profaning the Sacred in *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS*', *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 22, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 59.
- 7 For a more thorough examination of the 'video nasty' controversy, see David Kerekes and David Slater, *See No Evil: Banned Films and Video Controversy* (Manchester, UK: Critical Vision, 2000).
- 8 Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947), 10.
- 9 Nathan Lee, 'Nazisploitation Making a Comeback' (review of *Blitzkrieg: Escape from Stalag 69*), *The New York Times*, August 15, 2008, accessed May 9, 2011, movies.nytimes.com/2008/08/15/movies/15blit.html.
- 10 Julia Anspach, Review of *Stalagim* (Stalags), *Journal of Jewish Identities* 1, no. 2 (July 2008): 154–6.
- 11 'The Reader by Bernhard Schlink,' accessed December 20, 2010, www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/The-Reader-by-Bernhard-Schlink. See also William Collins Donahue, *Holocaust as Fiction: Bernhard Schlink's 'Nazi' Novels and Films* (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2010).
- 12 Virginia Heffernan, 'The Hitler Meme', *The New York Times*, October 24, 2008.
- 13 The website Urban Dictionary defines these and dozens of other (mis) appropriations of 'Nazi' in contemporary slang. www.urbandictionary.com.
- 14 One notable work in this context is *Monsters in the Mirror: Representations of Nazism in Post-War Popular Culture*, edited by Sara Buttsworth and Maartje Abbenhuis (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2010).

- 15 Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), xv.
- 16 David Church analyzes the polarized reception in his article, 'Of Manias, Shit and Blood: The Reception of *Salò* as a "Sick Film"', *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 6, no. 2 (November 2009): 340–72.
- 17 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society', in *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1983), 34.
- 18 Miriam Hansen, 'Schindler's List is not Shoah: The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory,' *Critical Inquiry* 22, no. 2 (Winter 1996): 292–312.
- 19 Jeffrey Sconce, "Trashing" the Academy: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style," *Screen* 36, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 371–93.
- 20 Wilder, who later directed Marilyn Monroe in *The Seven-Year Itch* (1955) and *Some Like It Hot* (1959), directed *Death Mills* (1945) one year before he made *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946). Frank Capra made *Your Job in Germany* (1945), an anti-German propaganda film written by Theodore Geisel, better known as the children's author Dr Seuss. And George Stevens directed *Nazi Concentration Camps* (1945) before later turning his attention to far less spectacular (if no less memorable) films such as 1959's *The Diary of Anne Frank*.
- 21 David F. Friedman, *A Youth in Babylon: Confessions of a Trash-Film King* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1990), 14.
- 22 Schaefer, 86–8.
- 23 Friedman, 93.
- 24 For instance, Nazi scientists helped link smoking to cancer and developed the rockets that would later form the basis of the Apollo program. See Robert N. Proctor, *The Nazi War on Cancer* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000) and Michael J. Neufeld, *Von Braun: Dreamer of Space, Engineer of War* (New York: Knopf, 2007).
- 25 Susan Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism', in *Under the Sign of Saturn*, 73–105 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980). Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 2 vols., trans. Stephen Conway, Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, 1989).
- 26 Laura Frost, *Sex Drives: Fantasies of Fascism in Literary Modernism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 9–10.
- 27 'Der Stabschef des Braunen Hauses', *Vossische Zeitung*, Nr. 290, June 23, 1931. This article in the liberal *Vossische Zeitung* pointed out the irony of the National Socialists elevating the well-known homosexual Ernst Röhm to the position of Party Chief of Staff. The Nazis had vocally opposed the repeal of §175 (the paragraph of the German legal code that criminalized homosexuality and bestiality), but, 'Mit der Ernennung Röhm's zum Stabschef habe Hitler den Bock zum Gärtner gesetzt' ('With the designation of Röhm as Chief of Staff, Hitler has put the wolf in charge of the hen house'.)
- 28 Walter C. Langer, *The Mind of Adolf Hitler: The Secret Wartime Report* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), 149–50, 193.
- 29 'Gay Reichs', *The Daily Show*, accessed December 22, 2010, www.thedailyshow.com/watch/wed-july-28-2010/gay-reichs.
- 30 Linda R. Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'*, Expanded Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 201–2.

I

Origins, Histories and Genealogies

1

Cinema beyond Good and Evil? Nazi Exploitation in the Cinema of the 1970s and its Heritage

MARCUS STIGLEGER

Holocaust Cinema and the *Sadiconazista* Cycle

TO REFLECT ON HISTORICAL, social and political events could be considered one possible ‘duty’ of the audiovisual media, in particular narrative television and cinema. The great success, as well as the influence, of TV programs and films such as *Holocaust* (1979)¹ and *Schindler’s List* (1993) on public opinion about historical events — especially in Germany — strongly suggests that the worldwide audience is more open to fictionalized history than to more challenging essayistic work such as Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* (1985). This realization invites the question: Has cinema reached the status of an historical archive for some audiences? If so, it would behoove film studies scholars to analyze the specific value of such representations, especially in the case of a phenomenon as significant as the Holocaust, which Lanzmann claims is not a suitable subject of fiction.² The findings of such an analysis, however, may well demonstrate that cinema trivializes rather than represents history.

Significantly, it was not historians who made the decisive contribution to the long-term establishment of the problematic term ‘Holocaust’

— and the crimes connected with it — in both the European and the North American collective consciousness and memory. Historians may have critically researched sources, documented their findings, published textbooks and produced documentaries on the topic, but when compared to the effect created by one television melodrama, a family saga set against the backdrop of vicious Nazi war crimes, suddenly historians' efforts seem to have little value other than to confirm the historical accuracy of the scenes of persecution and extermination of 'imaginary' figures. The four-part television miniseries *Holocaust*, followed by around 100 million viewers in the United States, was seen in West Germany one year later by an audience of 16 million. From a media-historic perspective, the television event *Holocaust* represents a decisive point in the social role of television as a medium of mass communication. German film scholar Knut Hickethier comments on the effects the series had on the formatting of public television as follows: 'The defining television event at the end of the 1970s was the transmission of the American series *Holocaust* [...] which showed the murder of European Jews by the Germans. In setting its focus not on social criticism and resolving the past, but rather on fictionalization and entertainment, this film marks a turning point [...]. The success was considerable, and uncontested. The series was accused of emotionalizing, trivializing and falsifying history.'³ In Germany, *Holocaust* left a lasting — one could almost say the first — and very deep impression, especially on the sons and daughters of the perpetrator generation. The fact that one can trace this shift in public consciousness back to a commercial television miniseries that intentionally slipped through the customary filter of distanced impartiality is an important indicator of a strong change in the social and media handling of history in general and the history of the Holocaust in particular. From then on, the mass extermination practised under the Nazi regime had a name that everyone knew.

The lasting effect of this phenomenon can still be seen today, especially in the many 'made-for-box-office' films of the 1980s that attempted to cash in on the success of *Holocaust*. The change in the televisual handling of this sensitive topic coincided with a general change in attitude towards the subject in cinema. Films were now produced purely on the basis of commercial and aesthetic considerations (dramaturgy, imagery, casting in conjunction with Hollywood's star system) as opposed to later and earlier attempts at very personal

accounts such as *Pasażerka* (*The Passenger*, 1962) by Andrzej Munk or *The Grey Zone* (2001) by Tim Blake Nelson. The fact that among these films were also productions that, by means of a complex narrative, left television far behind, can be seen in films such as Alan J. Pakula's *Sophie's Choice* (1982). However, these more demanding films also fueled the debate that today still questions the legitimacy of an 'artistic' processing of the Nazi genocide. According to literary scholar Matías Martínez, art cannot possibly ignore the largest crime of the twentieth century, yet at the same time such art is essentially impossible, '[...] because in the opinion of many, the Holocaust defies aesthetic portrayal, in a special, perhaps even unique, way.'⁴ In this respect Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* marks a turning point. Here, the questionable symbiosis between commercial and ethical production was widely acknowledged by both the public and by critics to have been a success. 'Unlike Marvin Chomsky and Gerald Green's *Holocaust*, the Hollywood film seemed, in the opinion of the critics, to have resolved the conflict between popular reception, aesthetic content and appropriate thematic.'⁵

Schindler's List can also be seen as a turning point in another respect. If one looks at the film as a social phenomenon (which it unquestionably was and still is), various modes of interpretation present themselves. First, one can speculate that *Schindler's List* marked a provisional climax of a trend that began in the 1970s with the miniseries *Holocaust*: little by little, a culture of remembrance, which attempted to find access to the events and atmosphere of Nazi terror by way of fictional film and always searched anew for defining methods of staging, established itself next to that of the immediate witnesses of the concentration camp terror, the victims and the perpetrators. Since the 1990s, however, as the witnesses now increasingly withdraw from public life, both new and old films need to be critically analyzed regarding intention and principle. Second, the arrival of *Schindler's List* made clear the importance of film as an archive, whose influence on identity formation (for contemporary Jews in this case) in present-day culture is ever growing. If we accept that film, as an archive, exists as a threshold between the cultural and the communicative consciousness, then only by way of critical reflection on the part of the viewer can film be taken seriously as an archive.

Beyond its status as cinematic archive and as a marker of a waning 'culture of remembrance', there is a third interesting aspect of

Schindler's List: especially in two sequences, Spielberg's direction refers directly to a cinematic tradition of presenting Nazi characters as a direct sexual threat to the Jewish victims. In fact, SS men were themselves threatened by harsh punishment if they committed such an act of *Rassenschande* ('racial disgrace') as the Nazis put it. Amon Goeth, played by the undeniably attractive and cultivated character actor Ralph Fiennes, appears in one scene practising his shooting skills. He randomly aims at resting people in the camp. With his naked chest, his breeches and boots, he presents this performance as a morning 'workout' or routine, included with his first cigarette. When he returns inside, his naked lover is unnerved, and he walks into the bathroom. Physical presence, uniform fetish and inhuman acts of random killing are presented here simultaneously. In a later sequence, Goeth walks into the basement flat of his beautiful Jewish housekeeper during a party. First he seems to adore her beauty — she is half naked, her breasts shimmer through her wet clothing — but his monologue transforms into a cynical parody of Shylock's defense speech in *The Merchant of Venice*. He provocatively asks her: 'Are these the eyes of a rat?' Although she seems frozen in fear and keeps quiet, he accuses her of trying to seduce him, and then he beats her. Both scenes maintain a certain sexual tension that adds to the violent threat. In both scenes Amon Goeth appears as an ambiguous and darkly attractive tyrant. Spielberg is well aware of the morbid appeal of ambiguous Nazi characters, for he often used them in his films before — especially in the *Indiana Jones* cycle (beginning in 1981). At the same time, he must have been aware that the sexually attractive yet cruel and cynical SS commander appears almost as a stereotype derived directly from the tradition of the Italian *sadiconazista* cycle of the 1970s. 'Sadiconazista' is a neologism referring to fictional Nazi exploitation pulp literature and cinema between the 1960s and the 1980s composed of the terms 'sadism,' 'con' (with) and 'Nazism'. Although marginal during these decades, the influence of *sadiconazista* stereotypes has proven highly influential in international cinema and pop culture up to today.⁶

From Arthouse Drama to Nazisploitation

The 1970s proved an extremely productive decade for many national cinemas: the seeds of former revolutionary years began to grow and brought forth astounding film productions in America (New

Hollywood), Germany (New German Cinema) and in Japan (New Wave), to name just a few. Together with this new progressive tendency and the simultaneous relaxing of censorship came an enormous wave of exploitation films, which began to push the boundaries of what can be portrayed in the interest of sensationalist entertainment. This exploitative trend did not shy away from the Holocaust theme: the pornographers Robert Lee Frost and Don Edmonds brought their own versions of *sadiconazista* to the cinema with the Canadian productions *Love Camp 7* (1968) and *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (1974). These films take a voyeuristic look into the concentration camp brothel and a pseudo-medical experimentation center. Although this exploitative use of Holocaust motifs caused some controversy, these films are still extremely successful in the form of home media.⁷ The *Ilsa* film, starring *Playboy* model Dyanne Thorne, even spawned a number of direct and indirect sequels.⁸

Italian cinema also experimented with the connections between sexuality, politics and history, albeit on an artistically more ambitious level: Gillo Pontecorvo's *Kapò* (1960) has as its subtext a love story between a very young Jewish inmate and an SS camp guard. Luchino Visconti includes multiple sexual elements in his period family drama *La caduta degli dei* (*The Damned*, 1969), which allegorically retells the story of the Krupp industrial empire during its cooperation with Nazi officials. This grand scale epic features child abuse, incest, rape and a homosexual orgy. In her psychodrama *Il portiere di notte* (*The Night Porter*, 1974), the former documentarian Liliana Cavani builds on work from her previous documentary series on the Third Reich and tells the story of the fatal reunion of an SS man (Dirk Bogarde) and his former victim (Charlotte Rampling) in the form of an *amour fou*, an unconditional 'crazy love' that has a long history in the conventions of European cinema. As the couple restarts the destructive relationship under now different circumstances, they end up on the execution list of a group of SS veterans, who wish to remove all witnesses to atrocities in order to erase the past and, in so doing, their own guilt. Cavani's film represents both the continuation of the Nazi mentality after the war as well as an attempt at a psycho-sexual adaptation of the concentration camp system. The depiction of the camp memories is stylized in a monochrome artificial atmosphere devoid of historical reconstruction. The interiors are more reminiscent of theatre stages and empty industrial buildings. In this way, Cavani refers to this past

more as a metaphor and avoids a simple restaging of historical events. In their memories, the protagonists virtually reconstruct their own past as a nightmare landscape of destructive sexuality.

Lina Wertmüller's *Pasqualino Settebellezze* (*Seven Beauties*, 1975) takes a more satirical slant: a Sicilian macho man falls into the hands of a female SS thug, who makes him her 'sex toy'. The film works with a multilayered narrative, a complex montage of timelines that interweave the protagonist's permanent struggle for survival. The concentration camp is only the final stage in a twisted narration reminiscent of the picaresque novel tradition. From this perspective Wertmüller's direction unfolds a bitter satire on the desperate human will to survive, with the concentration camp as the place of ultimate threat and degradation. Holocaust survivor Bruno Bettelheim pointed out that the satirical nature of the film, combined with the bizarrely sexualized depiction of the female commandant, distorts the historical archive of the real Holocaust: The camp appears here as a random existential borderline situation.⁹

Although Pier Paolo Pasolini's modernized Marquis de Sade adaptation *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (*Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, 1975) is a film about the fascist tendencies in Italy of the present day, it is still true — as Pasolini frequently stated — that in this apocalyptic scenario, the film-maker has constructed an oppressive microcosm of the concentration camp system, which was only *really* understood for the first time when the film was recently re-shown in European cinemas.¹⁰ Former censorship bans were lifted (e.g. in England, where the film had not been given a British Board of Film Classification [BBFC] rating before) and the film was available again on special edition DVDs in Italy, France, England and Germany. In the bonus materials, film-makers like Gaspar Noé and Catherine Breillat show appreciation for the film's huge influence on their own work, while film historians expand on the metaphorical quality of this nihilist manifest. In *Salò* the mechanisms of power and production have liberated themselves and run amok in the collapsing fascist puppet republic at Lake Garda, where Italian fascists were granted a miniature totalitarian state under Nazi rule during the end of the war. The scandalous success of these three films at the time of their release ultimately inspired the production of a series of concentration camp-themed sex films in Italy. Popular examples of these true *sadiconazista* or Nazisploitation films are: *Lager SSadis Kastrat Kommandantur* (*SS*

Experiment Camp, 1976), *Lager SS 5 — l'inferno delle donne (SS Camp 5 — Women's Hell*, 1976), *KZ 9 — lager di stermino (Women's Camp 119*, 1976), *La deportate della sezione special SS (Deported Women of the SS Special Section*, 1976), *L'ultima orgia della Gestapo (The Gestapo's Last Orgy*, 1977), *La casa private per le SS (SS Girls*, 1977), *La bestia in calore (The Beast in Heat*, 1977) and *La svastika nel ventre (Nazi Love Camp 27*, 1977).

Exploitation and Sadoomasochistic Fantasies

It seems evident that all the films mentioned above in one way or another develop a sadoomasochistic model based on the principles of totalitarian politics and hierarchies. At first sight they seem to take the simple (and wrong) equation of sadoomasochism and fascist politics as a given. This phenomenon of mingling politics and sadoomasochistic sexuality has been referred to as '*il sadiconazista*' in Italy, specifically in relation to the Italian pulp fiction of the 1960s, where sexuality, cruelty and fascist politics mingled in exploitative and pornographic entertainment fare in a way very similar to the equally popular 'Stalag' novels in Israel at that time. It seems useful to transfer this term to the filmic medium, especially as the exploitative films in the wake of *The Night Porter* excessively expanded on the unhistorical equation of sadoomasochism and totalitarian politics. This also marks the huge difference between the reflected arthouse films of Cavani, Wertmüller and Pasolini compared to the exploitation films of Sergio Garrone, Cesare Canevari, Bruno Mattei and Rino di Silvestro, which were produced immediately after the success of *Salò*. These exploitation films cash in on the same basic model but simply skip the reflective and metaphorical aspect of their forerunners.

The English term 'exploitation' already marks the technique of 'exploiting' a serious topic such as the Holocaust, the inquisition, the slavery system, prostitution or simply life in prison to reduce it to pure sexual or violent content.¹¹ Especially in the late 1960s, when the rules of censorship were handled more liberally worldwide, there came a wave of exploitation films, many of them combining sexuality and violence in a way that resulted in semi-sadoomasochistic psychodrama. In many cases we can find a commercially successful forerunner being copied afterwards on a cheaper production level. What happened to Cavani's and Pasolini's films in Italy can also be proven by the

witch hunter cycle following Michael Reeve's British production *The Witchfinder General* (1968) or the slave dramas copying Richard Fleischer's Southern melodrama *Mandingo* (1975). The financial success of both films resulted in respective cycles of witch-hunter- and slave-camp-themed exploitation films ripping off the basic standards and characters of the prototypes.

Between 1968 and 1982, certain film directors specialized in making exploitation films, and production companies focused on the ever-growing market, notably Fulvia and S.E.F.I. Cinematografica in Italy, Eurocine in France and Erwin C. Dietrich in Switzerland, to name but a few. All of them became involved in making women-in-prison movies, sometimes also dealing with *sadiconazista* elements. Most of the *sadiconazista* exploitation films were not shown in cinemas or on video in Germany due to censorship restrictions, but some of them turned up as main examples in the British 'video nasties' debate of the early 1980s, when violent films on videocassette were seized by the police and censored for two decades due to concerns about protecting juvenile viewers. Some titles are still banned in Great Britain, and it will come as no surprise that *sadiconazista* titles are among these.¹²

Phil Hardy takes Sergio Garrone's *SS Camp 5 — Women's Hell* as a stand-in for all the *sadiconazista* films of the time:

The box-office success of Liliana Cavani's picture about the pleasures of being tortured in a Nazi concentration camp, *The Night Porter* (1974) and, in America, the repulsively adolescent and racist torture-camp movies of Don Edmonds (*Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS*, 1974), triggered the nostalgic fantasies of explicit as well as crypto-fascists, spawning a filmic equivalent of the established literary porn sub-genre, '*il sadiconazista*'. Garrone contributed two filmic atrocities to this variation on the woman's prison movies, *Lager SSadis Kastrat Kommandantur (SS Experiment Camp)*, 1976) and the one from 1974 which simply exploits 'entertaining' thrills such as Jewish women being undressed and divided into prostitutes and victims of medical atrocities. There is the obligatory Nazi lesbian, a crude abortion scene and a hefty smattering of assorted tortures.¹³

This entry is remarkable because the simple categorizing of *sadiconazista* films as a subgenre of horror films suggests a certain perspective: These films may simply be seen as horrible fantasy. In any case, this

perspective does not prove to be very illuminating. There is more to this trend than that.

Nazisploitation and Pornography

In several reviews of the time, *sadiconazista* films were labeled pornographic. The term ‘pornographic’ is a problematic one, especially in this context on the borderline between exploitation and hard-core cinema. It seems more accurate to call most of the *sadiconazista* films ‘sexploitation’. The goal of these films is to entertain the viewer with a carnivalesque mixture of historical settings, some sadistic violence, moments of repulsion, and fetishistic use of costumes and simulated sex. Some of these elements also appear in the hard-core films of the 1970s (e.g. *Bordel SS*, 1978, by José Bénazéraf), which additionally feature non-simulated sex, while most *sadiconazista* films do not. In some countries, films like *Gestapo’s Last Orgy* were released in alternative versions featuring additional scenes of hard-core sex not shot originally for the respective movies. Hard-core director Joe D’Amato later released *Le bambole del Führer* (*The Führer’s Dolls*, 1995), a nearly plotless adult film with Nazi uniforms that nevertheless does not depict any atrocities or camp elements. But generally, the short cycle of Italian *sadiconazista* films between 1976 and 1978 work on the level of soft-core erotic entertainment.

In contrast, a high-art film like Pasolini’s *Salò* is actually closer to Susan Sontag’s definition of pornography as an aesthetic convention within the arts, which she outlined in her 1969 essay, ‘The Pornographic Imagination’. Films and novels ‘qualify as pornographic texts insofar as their theme is an all-engrossing sexual quest that annihilates every consideration of persons extraneous to their roles in the sexual dramaturgy, and the fulfillment of this quest is depicted graphically.’¹⁴ As in Georges Bataille’s transgressive prose (like ‘The Story of the Eye’), Sontag stresses that the truly obscene in artistic pornography will always show a certain connection to death. In this sense she points out the special meaning of sacred rituals, the rite of passage, and the sacrifice within pornographic contexts. Pornography therefore has a ritualistic structure, whereas sexploitation cinema only bears rudimentary traces of such elements.¹⁵

Concerning the exploitative *sadiconazista* phenomenon, one can state that these films neither carry a political message nor do they

represent real pornography or even violent pornography. Phil Hardy goes too far in his assumptions about the target audience ('explicit as well as crypto-fascists': see above). These films simply try to reduce their artistic forerunners — *Il portiere di notte*, *Seven Beauties*, *Salò* and Visconti's *The Damned* — to a sadomasochistic fantasy of entertainment created out of a purely imaginative destruction drive. Historical elements as well as true sadomasochistic dialectics are abused here and transformed for this aim.¹⁶

Susan Sontag has also reflected extensively on the fetishizing of Nazi symbolism and iconography in sadomasochistic rituals in her essay 'Fascinating Fascism II':

In pornographic literature, films and gadgetry throughout the world, especially in the United States, England, France, Japan, Scandinavia, Holland and Germany, the SS has become a referent of sexual adventurism. Much of the imagery of far-out sex has been placed under the sign of Nazism. Boots, leather, chains, Iron Crosses on gleaming torsos, swastikas, along with meat hooks and heavy motorcycles have become the secret and most lucrative paraphernalia of eroticism. [...] But why? Why has Nazi Germany, which was a sexually repressive society, become erotic?¹⁷

Sontag writes this — taking into consideration a military-themed book called 'SS Regalia' — to reflect further on the erotic attraction of the SS uniform. For an answer, one might consider what fashion historian Valerie Steele writes in her book *Fetish* (1996). Commenting on the well-known fact that military uniforms are treated as a sexual fetish, Steele states: 'Military uniforms are probably the most popular prototype for the fetishist uniform because they signify hierarchy (some command, others obey), as well as membership of what was traditionally an all-male group whose function involves the legitimate use of physical violence'.¹⁸

The uniform seems to be an abstraction of the martial in the form of fashion. It symbolizes belonging to an elite and embodies dominance and attraction. The black service tunic of the SS in particular can be seen as the ambitious attempt to combine eccentric chic, elitist elegance and death symbolism. But as Sontag remarks: '[...] uniforms are not the same thing as photographs of uniforms, which are erotic material, and photographs of SS uniforms are the units of a

particularly powerful and widespread sexual fantasy.¹⁹ Although her essay concerns a military antiques fact-book, this idea also applies to the appearance of SS uniforms in the cinema of the 1970s. In the context of entertainment, the presence of SS uniforms in narrative film has its own rules of reception, in contrast to the documentary, for example. Sontag suspects that the dramatic pathos of the SS uniform serves as the basis of this presumed effect: 'SS uniforms were stylish, well-cut, with a touch (but not too much) of eccentricity.'²⁰ Not only *sadiconazista* films refer to the dramatic effect of the SS uniform. There are also plenty of examples from different genres that have used its sexually charged appeal: *Star Wars* (1976) by George Lucas, Ken Russell's biopic *Mahler* (1976), Alan Parker's *Pink Floyd — The Wall* (1981), Richard Loncraine's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Richard III* (1995), Paul Verhoeven's science fiction satire *Starship Troopers* (1997) and the *Casablanca* parody *Barb Wire* (1995) by David Hogan, to name but a few.

The Typology of *sadiconazista*

The films connected to the *sadiconazista* trend can be divided by their motivations into various groups:

- a. Films that try to create some basic assumptions about fascist systems (e.g. *La caduta degli dei*, *Salò*).
- b. Films that choose the totalitarian compulsory system as a radical and frightening historical background, against which interpersonal obsessions are played out: e.g. in *The Night Porter*, Liliana Cavani tells the story of a passionate relationship merged with dominance and repression. This relationship is emotionally charged by the historical background, heavily loaded by the viewer's knowledge.
- c. Films that advance the totalitarian compulsory system as a dramaturgical justification to wallow in sadomasochistic excesses: Sergio Garrone, the veteran Italian director of *Lager SS 5*, has stated in an interview that it is only possible to justify the drastic nature of the pictured cruelty if one is basing it on that historical background (i.e., National Socialism).²¹

What all these films share is the connection between sexual contexts and stereotyped images of National Socialism. The relationship

between the executioner and the victim is sadomasochistically transfigured and transferred on to the level of sexual passion. The result is a de-politicizing and de-historicizing of National Socialism. It is therefore possible to turn the image of National Socialism into a plaything of pop aesthetics within the laws of pop culture. What is especially striking here is the annihilation of chronology in some of the works discussed: Lina Wertmüller's *Seven Beauties*, as well as Cavani's *The Night Porter* and her later film *Interno Berlinese* (*The Berlin Affair*, 1985), are told in intricate and convoluted flashbacks; the historical component is transferred to the subjective and therefore 'optional' world of the single protagonist's memory. Thus it reaches a nearly mythical quality that no longer allows the viewer to approach the phenomenon historically. The concentration camps in *Seven Beauties* and *The Night Porter* look like Dantesque limbos, filled with existential and sexual nightmares.

Yet, as far away as the exploitative scenarios of the *sadiconazista* cycle may be from the National Socialist reality, it may still be possible to recognize a sequence of standardized scenes based on historically documented situations. These scenes recur in all the thematically relevant films: the arrival of the concentration camp prisoners and the selection on the platform; the roll call on the open areas between the barracks; the actions in the brothel camps; the disastrous punishments and tortures (it is here that some critics observe the sadomasochistic appeal); executions; medical experiments; massacre. From a comparative study it is obvious that those elements appear as frequently in artistically ambitious films as they do in exploitative films. Thus, on the level of pure content and action, these films share more similarities than might first appear.

Case Study: *The Night Porter*

I would like to illustrate these three points by taking a closer look at Cavani's *The Night Porter*. When the young wife of a conductor, Lucia (Charlotte Rampling), recognizes the hotel night porter Max (Dirk Bogarde) as an SS officer who had enslaved her in the concentration camp, the incident breaks up her marriage. Her husband leaves for Frankfurt, and she rebounds with Max after some agitated doubts. Because some other former Nazis recognize in her a potentially threatening witness from the past, they demand that Max kill Lucia, an order

he refuses to follow. Instead, he withdraws with her to the loneliness of his small apartment, and they turn in isolation from the outer world. His former comrades besiege the house and threaten Lucia. After a time full of privation the as-good-as-dead couple leaves the apartment, and both are shot at dawn on a Danube bridge.

It seems that the lovers' path can lead only to their common death, following the tradition of *amour fou*. Both lovers in *The Night Porter* devote themselves to complete stylization (he in his fancy black uniform, she in her childlike dress). From this point on they live completely in their common past again. It is the place of death — a lonely steel bridge at dawn — that functions as the locus for a rite of passage. Cavani seems to suggest that there is a world for lovers, but it is not ours. It is also the camera that departs from the action, right at that moment. The place of action turns into something stage-like, the protagonists into small figures who fit right into the outlines of their surroundings. It seems less important to the director to develop a political microcosm than to design a plausible mechanism for an unconditional desire. Every step of the encounter between Max and Lucia takes the role of a key scene, and far more drastically than usual in the genre of melodrama. Many actions and incidents become allegorical and mythic. It is the desire that seems unconditional and, in the end, brings the surrender. It seems significant that even destructive acts of love serve as proof of their passion, the best example being the break-up of Lucia and her husband when she recognizes the hopelessness of her desire. Only one experience of pain seems appropriate when it comes to the intensity of her feelings: when Max enters the hotel room for the first time, he slaps Lucia in the face. Later they make love on a bathroom floor covered by broken glass, another metaphor for their frenzy.

When Max visits his former lover Bert, who is gay, the meeting culminates in a strange sort of ballet at the beginning of the film. Max — using a single haunting spotlight — aims it to cast light upon the silent gestures of the dancer who, though now old, still seems delicate and even somewhat youthful. Whereas Max acts like a spooky puppeteer surrounded by shadows, Bert dedicates his elegant gestures to him. This homoerotic ballet takes the same position as in a comparable scene in an erotic biopic about Friedrich Nietzsche that Cavani made in 1976, *Al di là del bene e del male* (*Beyond Good and Evil*) in which Nietzsche watches a homoerotic ballet. We also find here the clear

isolation of characters who can only embody their own cosmos. It is an isolation of characters based on the relativization of their social relationships; even in *The Night Porter*, these relationships are reduced to the pragmatic (mainly professional), and they lack an emotional ground that is then violently reclaimed within the *amour fou*. The relationship between Max and Bert is also affected by a vague gentle compassion that contrasts with the established circumstances and can therefore only flourish secretly. When those relationships come out in the open, a doomed chain reaction results. The film hints that Bert may shoot the couple simply out of jealousy.

Besides Cavani's *The Night Porter*, there are in fact very few films depicting sadomasochistic sexuality that manage to be so fatally convincing in creating such a microcosm. After its scandal is long forgotten, it may be the right time to re-discover this great and multi-layered melodrama, a film truly located 'beyond good and evil', for it focuses on the seemingly 'impossible' romantic relationship of hangman and victim. Or, as Max says in the middle of the film: 'Sane — insane — sane? Who's to judge?' An emblematic classic of the *sadiconazista* cycle, this film successfully walks the line between arthouse drama and Nazisploitation.

Continuation of the *sadiconazista* Trend

To sum up, it can be said that the Italian exploitation film of the 1970s is one that pursued and ratcheted up the stereotyping of images from National Socialism and the Holocaust, even if these films only got lukewarm support from the mainstream media and audiences. The Canadian film *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* became emblematic of the *sadiconazista* cycle as remembered today. More than any of the Italian exploitation films of that time, *Ilsa* delivers a trademark heroine embodied by the former nude model Dyanne Thorne. Later *Ilsa* became a series with several sequels, two official and one unofficial (*Ilsa, The Wicked Warden*, 1976, by Jess Franco), a fact that made *Ilsa* a persistent cult icon. It fulfils all the formerly described categories, has been released in a DVD boxed set, and its logos even appear on T-shirts. There is no debate as to whether *sadiconazista* stereotypes have left an impact, because they certainly have: even Steven Spielberg has evoked similar mechanisms in *Schindler's List* without directly referring to the *sadiconazista* cycle. Pure *sadiconazista* may be a curiosity of the

transgressive 1970s cinema, but the sexualization of the Nazi torturer has installed itself deeply within the contemporary and pop-cultural consciousness in Europe,²² Japan²³ and America²⁴. It has therefore also become a part of the historical archive. Ultimately the huge influence of the *sadiconazista* cycle is still visible in later productions like Paul Verhoeven's *Black Book* (2006) or even Robert Young's *Eichmann* (2007), where aspects of sexuality, sadomasochism and fascist politics again mingle, which the latter film obsessively seeks to prove, therefore changing a well-established idea about fascist characters. Eichmann (Thomas Kretschmann) was in no way the 'banality of evil' (Hannah Arendt). In 'fact' — as the film shows — he was involved in a sexualized frenzy and was seduced by a Hungarian baroness.

To conclude, I would like to use a polemic comment by Michel Foucault in 1976 about the *sadiconazista* phenomenon:

This is a massive misapprehension about history. Nazism was not brought about by the crazy folk of Eros in the twentieth century; instead it was brought about by bourgeois people, and by that I mean the nastiest, stiffest and most disgusting ones that one can imagine. Himmler was some sort of a farmer who married a nurse. One has to consider that the idea of the concentration camps resulted from the fantasies of the shared illusions of a nurse and a hen-breeder. Millions of people have been killed there, so I'm not saying that in order to devalue the accusations which have to be made against this operation, but rather to disenchant it from the erotic values one combines it with.²⁵

Or, as the German journalist Martin Büsser writes, 'occidental society has taken in de Sade to such a degree that they can only imagine it now as the last form of loose sexual freedom in the form of fascist tortures und murders. How poor is our supply on education!'²⁶

Notes

- 1 Peter Märthesheimer and Ivo Frenzel, eds, *Im Kreuzfeuer: Der Fernsehfilm Holocaust. Eine Nation ist betroffen* (Fischer: Frankfurt am Main, 1979); this book contains documents on the strong impact the series had, especially on the German public.
- 2 Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah* (Paris: Editions Fayard, 1985), 3ff.
- 3 Knut Hickethier, *Geschichte des deutschen Fernsehens* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1998), 355. My translation.
- 4 Matías Martínez, 'Authentizität als Künstlichkeit in Steven Spielbergs Film

- Schindler's List*, in 'Zur aktuellen Kinematographie des Holocaust. Das Kino als Archiv und Zeuge?' ed. Marcus Stiglegger and Alexander Jakob, special issue, *Augen-Blick: Marburger und Mainzer Hefte zur Medienwissenschaft* 36 (2004): 39. My translation.
- 5 Martinez, 'Authentizität als Künstlichkeit', 40. My translation.
 - 6 Marcus Stiglegger, *Sadiconazista. Faschismus und Sexualität im Film* (St. Augustin: Gardez! 1999).
 - 7 See, for example, the quote from Phil Hardy further down.
 - 8 *Ilsa, Harem Keeper of the Oil Sheiks* (1976) by Don Edmonds, *Ilsa, the Tigress of Siberia* (1977) by Jean LaFleur; and the unofficial sequel *Greta: Haus ohne Männer (Ilsa, the Wicked Warden, 1976)* by Jess Franco.
 - 9 Bruno Bettelheim, *Surviving and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979); the term 'existential borderline situation' refers to Karl Jaspers' idea of the 'Grenzsituation', a situation of extreme emotional affection that brings forth the basic instincts of the human being.
 - 10 See Enzo Siziliano, *Pasolini. Leben und Werk* (Munich: Heyne, 1994), 491–96.
 - 11 There are different definitions for the term 'exploitation', this referring to the handling of content in a sensationalist way, while — on the other hand — Eric Schaefer talks about marketing as the exploitative aspect of these films in *'Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!' A History of Exploitation Films 1919–1959* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).
 - 12 David Kerekes and David Slater, *See No Evil: Banned Films and Video Controversy* (Manchester, UK: Critical Vision, 2000). In 2005 *Lager SSadis Kastrat Kommandantur* was released uncut in Great Britain while *L'ultima orgia del III Reich* remains banned in the UK.
 - 13 Phil Hardy, *The Encyclopedia of Horror Movies: The Complete Film Reference* (London: Harper Collins, 1987), 315.
 - 14 Susan Sontag, 'The Pornographic Imagination', in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Picador, 2002), 35.
 - 15 Sontag, 'The Pornographic Imagination', 35–73; Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, translated by Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Urizen Books, 1977).
 - 16 It is important to note here that the US-Canadian productions *Love Camp 7* (1968) and *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (1974) predated the Italian *sadiconazista* cycle by several years and seem to be part of another discourse, namely that of the US-American wave of exploitation and pornography in the late 1960s and early 1970s.
 - 17 Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism', in *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Farrar, Straus Giroux, 1980), 101–2.
 - 18 Valerie Steele. *Fetish. Fashion, Sex, and Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 180.
 - 19 Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism', 99.
 - 20 Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism', 101–2.
 - 21 Hardy, *Encyclopedia of Horror Movies*, 315.
 - 22 *Sadiconazista* elements appear in German films by Jörg Buttgereit (*Der Todesking [The Death King]*, 1989), Christoph Schlingensief (*100 Jahre Adolf Hitler: Die letzte Stunde im Führerbunker [100 Years of Adolph Hitler]*, 1989) and Eckhart Schmidt (*Der Fan [Trance]*, 1982). France had its own share of real Nazi-exploitation in the 1970s like *Train special pour SS (Helltrain, 1977)* by Alain Payet. And in England a war film like *The Passage* (1979) by J. Lee Thompson models a decadent SS officer, *sadiconazista*-style.

- 23 For example, Norifumi Suzuki's *Dabide no hoshi* (*Star of David: Hunting for Beautiful Girls*, 1979) directly refers to *sadiconazista* in its fetishistic use of the swastika and the Star of David within the context of sexualized violence.
- 24 Exploitation films like *Blitzkrieg: Escape from Stalag 69* (2008) by Keith Crocker are still produced today, while postmodern arthouse films like *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) by Quentin Tarantino openly refer to the *sadiconazista* complex.
- 25 Michel Foucault, 'Sade, ein Sergeant des Sex. Interview mit Gérard Dupont', *Cinématographe*, 16 (Dec. 1975-Jan. 1976), in: *Von der Freundschaft als Lebensweise. Michel Foucault im Gespräch*, translated by Marianne Karbe and Walter Seitter (Berlin: Merve, 1984), 65. My translation.
- 26 Martin Büsser, *Lustmord — Mordlust. Das Sexualverbrechen als ästhetisches Sujet im 20. Jahrhundert* (Mainz: Ventil, 2000), 176. My translation.

2

Sexual Deviance and the Naked Body in Cinematic Representations of Nazis

MICHAEL D. RICHARDSON

WOULD LIKE TO START with two films and two female concentration camp officers: both are responsible for horrific deaths of their inmates, both are portrayed as highly sexual figures, frequently shown nude and engaged in intercourse. One beds and then castrates her male prisoners, while the other is a pedophile who seduces and abandons a sick teenage boy. Both are ultimately subjugated, in one way or another, by male heroes. By the films' respective ends, both protagonists are dead, neither having expressed remorse, or much remorse, for their crimes. It is here that the similarities end. Reviewers excoriated the first film, admittedly explicit in its depiction of sex and violence, as nauseatingly gory and excessively sleazy, while the other was widely — though not uniformly — praised, and it went on to secure an Oscar for its lead actress Kate Winslet.

Certainly the first film, Don Edmonds's 1974 sexploitation picture *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS*, did wallow in excess, with repeated and graphic scenes of torture, mutilation, rape and sexual perversion. The acting was wooden, the dialog stilted, and the overall result an accurate reflection of the film's low-budget nature. Loosely based on the real person of Ilsa Koch, the infamous wife of a commandant of Buchenwald and Majdanek, and featuring Dyanne Thorne as the buxom title character, the film depicted the depraved events at a

Nazi death camp in the final days of World War II. Determined to prove that women could withstand more pain than men, Ilsa conducts numerous gruesome and sadistic experiments on female prisoners. At night, she forces male inmates to sleep with her, castrating or killing them the next day when they fail to satisfy her libidinal needs. Ilsa's perversions are so extreme that a German general who inspects the camp orders it to be destroyed (though only after indulging in his own sexual fetishes the night before). Even so, only after Wolfe, a half-German, half-American, arrives and subjugates Ilsa sexually can the prisoners revolt and exact their revenge. The film was a cult classic that spawned several sequels — *Ilsa, Harem Keeper of the Oil Sheiks* (1976); *Ilsa, the Wicked Warden* (1977); and *Ilsa the Tigress of Siberia* (1977) — none of which matched the first for its outrageousness or success.

The Reader (2008), in contrast, was an adaptation of a successful and highly lauded novel of the same title by Bernhard Schlink, and featured A-list actors and production values typical of a Hollywood prestige piece. The film recounts the story of Michael Berg, a German lawyer who, as a teenager, had an affair with an older woman, Hanna Schmitz. Hanna disappears one day, leaving Michael heartbroken and bitter, only to re-emerge many years later as a defendant in a war crimes trial. Though she has apparently confessed to allowing 300 Jewish women to die in a burning church, Michael deduces that she is illiterate and has allowed herself to be blamed, lest her secret be discovered. Though Michael is silent about the secret during the trial, he later sends her recordings of books, so that she may learn to read and write in prison. The night before Hanna is to be freed, she commits suicide, leaving Michael a note and her life savings, asking him to donate it to the daughter of a survivor. Though the romance between the teenager Michael Berg and the former camp guard Hanna Schmitz is an integral part of their relationship and his emotional development (or lack thereof), the film's primary concern is a meditation on the nature of guilt and responsibility.

At first glance then, the comparison of the two films based on a narrow set of criteria seems a bit disingenuous. But what these films have in common goes beyond the sort of reductive description with which I began above, something that links many representations of the Nazi era, both high- and low-brow, namely a preoccupation with the eroticized images of Nazism. Certainly historians and critics have

covered well the erotic or libidinal component to the dynamics and appeal of Nazism. In his analysis of fascist propaganda, for example, Theodor Adorno uses Freud's conception of group psychology, which described the bond between leader and mass and among the members of a mass as libidinal in nature.¹ Explaining how Hitler's charismatic appeal could be understood in terms of these dynamics, Adorno argued that Hitler was aware of this libidinal source of mass formation, often ascribing specifically female, passive features to the participants at his rallies so as to bind himself further as fascist leader to the masses. Crucial here, however, is that the libidinal energy that links the fascist leader to the masses is kept on an unconscious level so as to divert its manifestations in a way suitable for political ends.² For Hitler, this meant shunning the traditional role of the loving father and replacing it with the threatening authority figure, hearkening back to the notion of the pre-Oedipal primal father, who functions as an object of identification for the masses. Narcissistic identification, understood as an act of devouring, plays a central role here, as the follower sees the beloved leader as part of the subject's own personality, 'a collective projection of himself, rather than the image of the father.'³ In modern society, people generally have to come to terms with the continuous failure to satisfy individually idealized ego demands; by making the leader into an idealized ego, the follower can love himself without restraint, and by being one of a number of individuals who have substituted the same object for their ego ideal, he can become part of a fascist community whose bonds with one another are strengthened by narcissism.

Other theorists have taken this analysis one step further by arguing that the appeal of Nazism is not only based on the sublimation of unconscious libidinal desire, but is also reflective of the 'irrational' nature⁴ or even pathological character of Hitler's supporters. In his seminal work on the *Freikorps*, Klaus Theweleit argues that it was not the sexual appeal of Hitler that brought men to Nazism, but rather their own predisposition to violence, stemming from a deep misogyny and fear of castration.⁵

Insight into the role of libidinal desire is certainly crucial to understanding both the appeal of Nazism and the persistence of eroticized representations of German fascism. However, what I am concerned with here are those eroticized representations of Hitler and Nazism for which this association of Nazism and sexuality is a non-essentialist one, that is to say, representations whose focus is not merely a critique

of the psychosexual dynamics of fascism, but which instead marshal erotic imagery in the service of an ostensible critique of Nazism on broader moral grounds. On a certain level we have to understand these associations as having very little to do with Hitler and the Nazis and very much to do with ideological intentions. Laura Frost argues that it is the notion of a culturally shared ideal of respectability central to the construction of a modern European national identity, an identity that requires the classification of certain sexual behaviors as deviant or abnormal.⁶ As Frost notes, such standards of sexual normality were central not only to the Nazis, but to their opponents as well — hence the mutual designation of one's opponent as homosexual or sexually deviant. In her analysis, this eroticization of fascism responds to specific discussions of the enemy that arose following World War I, whereby democracy was aligned with a respectful and non-violent heterosexuality, while those sexualities that did not adhere to this norm — sadomasochistic eroticism, or even male homosexuality — were designated as 'fascist'. In the present discussion, I would like to expand this argument further and investigate the extent to which it can be applied in the decades following World War II, indeed up until the present day. Nazism, though continually linked to 'deviant' forms of sexuality, also functions less as its own subject and more as a means for assertions about sexuality and normalcy as they define the dominant cultural context.⁷

What I contend is that not just Nazisploitation films but even mainstream films about Nazis share a certain logic whereby the judgment of Nazis as morally deficient for their perpetration of Holocaust atrocities extends into all other realms of their character and behavior, particularly as it concerns sexuality. To be a Nazi means to be engaged in a variety of sexual practices coded as deviant — incest, sadomasochism, paedophilia, homosexuality — with the morally good protagonist as unwilling victim. However, while the protagonist is a clear figure of identification for viewers, the films' treatment of the respective bodies of Nazis and their victims involves them in a more complicated relationship with this ostensibly immoral sexuality. Before facilitating the inevitable rejection of Nazi sexuality and reinforcement of the viewers' own moral superiority, these films thematically ally viewers with the abject and often naked victim, while visually allying them with the gaze of the Nazi perpetrator. This filmic logic affords viewers a double moment of vicarious enjoyment as both

initiators and recipients of a taboo sexual act. Both mainstream and exploitation genre films simultaneously release viewers from, and reinforce, sexual inhibitions, ultimately making highly conservative and regressive judgments about sexual norms, behavior and identity, particularly as it pertains to female sexuality.

The association of Nazism and Hitler with a perverse sexuality was present in the earliest critical reactions to the Third Reich. Some of this linkage was ostensibly based in fact, though without real corroboration — Hitler's possibly sexual relationship with his niece Geli Raubal, for example — some of it mere conjecture, such as Hitler's presumed monorchidism or lack of a second testicle. It often took the form of serious discourse, such as Rodney Colin's 1934 essay, 'Hitlerism as a Sex Problem', which argued that Germans turned to Hitler as the result of a mass, generational 'sex starvation', or Dr Walter C. Langer's psychoanalytic study of Hitler for the Office of Strategic Services, OSS, *The Mind of Adolf Hitler*, which concluded that Hitler had an extremely perverse sexual psychopathology.⁸ Accusations of homosexuality were, as George Mosse has noted, particularly widespread in anti-fascist discourse; despite the Nazis' persecution of homosexuals, anti-fascists often co-opted the Nazis' own language to argue that Nazi leadership was a clique of homosexuals, not 'real men' of the sort who fought the fascists in Spain.⁹

This linkage also took the form of high and low art: everything from the pornographic comic books known as Tijuana Bibles¹⁰ to popular film incorporated sexual elements deemed deviant — homosexuality, cross-dressing, sadism and masochism, coprophagia, urolagnia, rape, incest and pedophilia — and ascribed them to Hitler and the Nazis. In *The Great Dictator* (1941), Chaplin's Adenoid Hynkel may have been merely buffoonish, but more often than not, Hitler and the Nazis were alternately effeminate and flamboyant or monstrous sexual predators. Frequently, this found expression in a violent sort of sexuality. The climactic scene of Edward Dmytryk's 1943 film *Hitler's Children*, for example, involves a public flogging of the film's doomed heroine, Anna, publicity stills of which prominently feature this scene or other images of a Nazi with a whip terrorizing a young girl (who was also threatened earlier in the film with sterilization, should she not agree to a forced pregnancy).¹¹

The reality of the situation regarding National Socialist attitudes towards sexuality was much more complex. A significant element of

the Nazis' anti-Semitic propaganda involved the image of Jews as over-sexed monsters whose removal from German society was necessary to preserve racial purity, lest they corrupt Aryans with their deviant sexuality. For the Nazis, it was the Jews who were degenerate lechers. However, as Dagmar Herzog has noted, the corollary to this — that the Nazis simultaneously sought to restore sexual propriety to German culture and de-eroticize both the nude body and sexual intercourse, rendering it merely a cold act of reproduction for the service of the race — is far from accurate. While the Third Reich, via a racialization of sex and a heightened homophobia, represented a backlash against the liberal mores of the Weimar Republic, 'Nazism brought with it not only a redefinition but also a perpetuation, expansion and intensification of pre-existing liberalizing trends.' The goal was thus not to suppress sexuality, but to 'reinvent it as the privilege of non-disabled, heterosexual "Aryans".'¹² That is to say, at the same time that the Nazis demonized the Jews for their moral degeneracy, they celebrated and even encouraged heterosexual intercourse, not only in the service of reproduction, but for the sake of pleasure as well.

After the war, associations of Nazism with perverse sexual practices moved from the realm of anti-Nazi propaganda to understood truth. They found a significant place both in the analysis of Hitler's rise to power and in visual representations of the war and Nazism. Often this sexual element was relatively minor, designed primarily to increase a sense of menace, but, as temporal distance increased and social norms relaxed, the sexualized Nazi came to the forefront. A number of 'arthouse' films from the late 1960s and early 1970s — Liliana Cavani's *Il portiere di notte* (*The Night Porter*, 1974), Lena Wertmüller's *Pasqualino Settebellezze* (*Seven Beauties*, 1975), and Luchino Visconti's *La caduta degli dei* (*The Damned*, 1969) — take as their central conceit an imagination and investigation of fascism as a libidinal phenomenon, ostensibly from a critical standpoint. Saul Friedländer, in his *Reflections on Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*, addresses the larger problematic surrounding aesthetic representations of Nazism that explain and, in their explanation, replicate the attraction of Nazism and Hitler. Friedländer's analysis is thus useful not only for examining sexualized representations of Nazis but also for understanding the reactions to these representations. While his analysis was conceived as a response to a number of late 1970s representations of Hitler — specifically, Syberberg's *Hitler: ein Film aus Deutschland*

(*Hitler: A Film from Germany*, 1977), Speer's autobiography, George Steiner's novel *The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.*, as well as Italian films such as those mentioned above — what Friedländer is really trying to conceptualize is the general characteristic of such representations and their relationship to the object of their representation. The crux of his argument is that these representations (consciously or unconsciously) replicate the appeal of Nazism: serving simultaneously as explanation of Nazism's appeal (and in this respect they are instructive objects of study) and as a potentially dangerous remythologization and reactivation of Nazism.¹³ At the center of these representations is what he calls an aesthetic *frisson* (a moment of intense excitement, a shudder, an emotional thrill), created by the opposition between the harmony of kitsch and the constant evocation of themes of death and destruction: a desire aroused by the eroticization of the leader as an everyman close to everyone's heart and of a total power of destruction flung into nothingness.¹⁴

At the same time that respected filmmakers explored the sexual allure of Nazism, other filmmakers marshaled Nazi imagery for purely salacious ends. The exploitation genre arose out of a number of court rulings in the late 1950s and early 1960s which led to the gradual introduction of more nudity and explicit content to film. At first, these films featured only non-explicit sexual situations and soft-core nudity, often played strictly for laughs or presented as vaguely educational, but gradually, these films introduced highly explicit content and more serious themes of violence and degradation. These extreme, sexually motivated movies known as 'roughies' began to dominate the genre.¹⁵ It was perhaps inevitable that during the late 1960s and early 1970s the sub-genre of Nazisploitation films would emerge as well. Produced primarily in the United States and Italy, the numerous Nazi sexploitation films generally follow a similar premise: male and female prisoners are tortured and sexually abused, until finally the inmates take their revenge, usually in an equally gruesome fashion. There were two general archetypes for these films: *Love Camp 7* (1968), in which two female agents — who infiltrate a Nazi camp to rescue a Jewish scientist where prisoners are kept as sex slaves — are themselves degraded, whipped and humiliated, and ultimately make a violent and bloody escape; and *Salon Kitty* (1976), Tinto Brass's epic film about a Nazi commander who takes over a famous brothel and populates it with good Aryan women in order to spy on German military officers

and test their loyalty. Most of these films, particularly those produced in Italy, such as *La bestia in calore* (*The Beast in Heat*, 1977), *Elsa Fräulein SS* aka *Fräulein Kitty* (*Captive Women 4*, 1977), and *L'ultima orgia del III Reich* (*The Gestapo's Last Orgy*, 1977), included hard-core pornography, though they might be better classified as horror films, given the excessive and graphic violence that dominated the screen.

The primary purpose of these films was not social critique. Nevertheless, one can certainly read them, and other such instances of Nazi-themed pornography, with respect to their cultural and political contexts. For example, one of the more unexpected manifestations of Nazi-themed pornographic violence was the highly popular, but short-lived series of pocket books called *Stalag Fiction*, or *Stalags*, that appeared in Israel in the early 1960s just as the Eichmann trial began. These lurid tales of sex, violence and Nazis typically involved female SS officers, wearing boots and wielding whips, who would abuse British and American prisoners, until the prisoners would revolt and take their revenge by raping and killing the Nazi women. Given how profane such a treatment of the Holocaust is, one might be surprised to learn exactly how popular these works were, but in the context of this discussion, they become much more understandable. With Allied rather than Jewish prisoners as the subjects (indeed only a handful of the works mentioned Jews, and then only fleetingly), they afforded audiences enough distance to allow them to enjoy them as pornography that indulged in forbidden sexual fantasies, as well as revenge narratives that enabled readers to symbolically punish the Nazis.¹⁶

Indeed, one can view the entire genre of Nazisploitation films as a negotiation of the audience's relationship to the Holocaust, a relationship that grew more and more mediated as temporal distance increased. The same can be said for mainstream films about the Holocaust, although the erotic aspect is rarely foregrounded. When analyzing representations of Hitler and the Holocaust, there is hardly any question as to where the identification of the viewer should lie; these works tend to offer an uncomplicated understanding of the perpetrator-victim dynamic, a simplicity that is reflected, in the case of film, in its cinematography. All of the standard tricks are employed — the low angle shot of the Nazi, the soft-focus close-up on a trembling victim, the unity of the protagonist's perspective with that of the camera. Yet, while such films promote an identification with the victims, their presentation of the victims is often also highly sexualized;

the threat faced often comes not merely in the form of violence but sexual violence, and the viewer's identification is complicated by a simultaneous eroticized objectification of the victim.

One of the most striking examples of this phenomenon in relatively recent years is Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993). One half of this equation is the erotic charge ascribed to the Nazis, in this case to both Oskar Schindler, who, as the ultimate hero of the film, will renounce his role as perpetrator, and to the personification of Nazi evil and Schindler's antagonist, the sadistic SS officer Amon Goeth. Sara Horowitz argues that Spielberg's film reproduces two Nazi stereotypes: that of the strong, hypermasculine male Aryan, and that of the sexually alluring Jewish temptress.¹⁷ Goeth's violent nature and his sexual potency are intimately intertwined; scenes of violence are infused with a sexual charge, such as the scene in which Goeth, bare-chested, his mistress lying naked on his bed, steps out onto the balcony to fire randomly at Jews working down below. Schindler, too, early in the film, appears sexually aggressive, bedding a series of mistresses. Female prisoners in the film — and a good example is the maid Helen Hirsch — are frequently portrayed in a sexualized manner, such as when Goeth corners Helen as she stands clothed in 'an inexplicably wet shift which clings to her breasts.'¹⁸

Sven Kramer notes that while the early photos of liberated death camps had the naked victims, both dead and barely alive, as recurring tropes, this repeated exposure to nakedness had the intention of shocking the viewer, and, in the case of the German people, the intention of serving as a memento mori to remind them of the victims' and their own humanity. In the thoroughly de-eroticized context of emaciated bodies and decaying corpses, nudity was expunged of any sexuality. In Spielberg's film, it is ironically the living for whom nudity is reserved, while the dead, such as the victims of the ghetto liquidation, are presented clothed. As a result, this nudity is given an erotic charge, though one reserved for female prisoners. Commenting on the infamous shower scene, Kramer writes, 'The identification with the female victim is established by way of the sexualization of her body. That this occurs only with respect to female prisoners points to the film's masculine perspective. The women are eroticized not only for Schindler and Goeth: Spielberg offers the audience such images as well.'¹⁹

Even in films where sex plays but a minor role in the portrayed events we find a sort of leering portrayal of female victims. *Uprising*,

Jon Avnet's 2001 television mini-series about the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto revolt, includes a scene that does little to truly advance the plot and much to titillate the audience. When authorities detain Tova Altman, portrayed by a barely 18-year-old Leelee Sobieski, on suspicion of being a courier for the resistance, her captor conducts a strip search. Ostensibly included to show the danger that such actions risked, this extended scene is nonetheless shot from the perspective of the captor as he forces her to remove her clothing one article at a time until she is completely naked. The fact that the viewer never sees her completely naked body (thanks to an almost comical assortment of strategically placed objects — a chair, a desk lamp) only highlights the scene's erotic nature.

This tendency is not limited to filmic portrayals of Hitler and the Nazis. Ron Hansen's novel *Hitler's Niece* (1999) takes Hitler's alleged sexual relationship with Geli Raubal as its focal point. It is hard to say that the novel has an actual plot; while it ostensibly narrates, from Raubal's perspective, Hitler's rise to power from inauspicious beginnings, the culmination of these events in the rape and subsequent murder of Geli seems to drive even the smallest biographical details; one gets the sense that the 24 years of acquaintanceship that precede this moment are merely extended foreplay for a lurid and (one assumes) unintentionally comic sexual union. Ordered by Hitler to don his jackboots and strike the boots with his whip, Geli resists, but to no avail:

'His hand knifed between her thighs and found her vagina. She angrily squeezed her thighs tighter and fought off his hand with her own. Whining, he said, 'Won't you make me obey?'

She stropped the whip. 'Don't!'

He fell in a heap and held his head with his hands. 'Oh, you're right! I am a worm! I'm vermin!' Crouching at her feet, he started to masturbate, his head nodding up and down.'

After forcing her to urinate on him, Hitler concludes their encounter: 'We are lovers,' he said. 'And this is how we love.'²⁰

Even in Norman Mailer's final novel *The Castle in the Forest* (2007), an account of Hitler's childhood and early adolescent years, sex plays an integral part in the narrative of Hitler's development, though here it is the sexual exploits of his parents and siblings that receive the most attention.²¹

Certainly, the novel *The Reader*, as several critics have noted, is problematic on several levels, particularly with respect to its portrayal of Hanna's illiteracy, which both mitigates her guilt (at least in the eyes of Michael Berg) and serves as a metaphor for the German populace's ignorance of the true horrors of the Holocaust. Had Hanna been able to read the paper offering her a job in a factory, she would not have been compelled to serve as a camp guard; similarly, so the line of thinking goes, had Germans been able to 'read' the drastic social changes that accompanied the Nazi regime (i.e., the legal disenfranchisement of Jews, their disappearance from German towns and cities), they would have known better.²² The film version, which goes to even greater lengths to portray Hanna in a more sympathetic light, deliberately omits a visualization of her crimes from its various flashback sequences, in favor of sequences that trace the evolution of her reading skills.²³ Indeed, the film, against the protestations of the novelist Schlink, also leaves out how Hanna's struggle for literacy was combined with an effort to educate herself about the true horrors of the Nazi regime by using accounts of the Holocaust as some of her reading materials.²⁴

Although the novel did not shy from describing the sexual liaisons between Hanna and Michael, the film version of *The Reader*, by dint of its visual nature, presents their relationship in a much more erotic fashion. Despite the fact that the film takes place after the Holocaust, Hanna's status as Nazi seductress can be seen in her appearance and demeanor, particularly when she is shown in her 1950s-era tram conductor uniform. Even viewers unfamiliar with the novel are aware of Hanna's Nazi past; this is not the secret that drives the narrative. As a result, it is easy for audiences (and for Michael for that matter) to see Hanna as an Ilsa-like sexual aggressor. After all, it is Hanna who initiates sexual contact, pressuring Michael into stripping naked and approaching him from behind.

The category of victim in these films is often a more complex one than merely that of the unwilling captive. Often the victim is a semi-consensual participant in erotic relations, one who thus maintains a certain amount of agency via an assertion of sexuality. Both male heroes in *Ilsa* and *The Reader* willingly engage in intercourse. For Wolfe the German-American, it is of course out of necessity that he first has sex with Ilsa (lest she kill him on the spot), but his expressions and demeanor on that first night (and on subsequent nights, when he

not only has sex with Ilsa, but also engages in a threesome with her two subordinates) evinces clear enjoyment. For Michael Berg, Hanna's first advances — she surprises him from behind as he exits her bathtub — are clearly welcome, and he delights in their intimate relationship. In such cases, the protagonist is not portrayed, in the initial stages at least, as an asexual being, or one who resists the notion of sex, but quite the opposite: in most cases the protagonist willingly (and at times unwillingly) engages in sexual activity, only to be able to renounce it from a higher moral standpoint later on, allowing the viewer to vicariously both indulge in, then disavow this desire.

Indeed, the more ascetic or puritan perspective is viewed with equal suspicion, as was the case in Billy Wilder's 1948 film, *A Foreign Affair*. Andrea Slane, whose analysis of the use of eroticized images of fascism for conservative political discourse influences this essay, has described the love triangle between the somewhat jaded American Army captain John Lund, the one-time Nazi groupie and lounge singer Erika von Schlüchtow, played by Marlene Dietrich, and the uptight Nebraska congresswoman, aptly named Phoebe Frost. While the film concludes with Erika brought to justice and spurned by the newly patriotic Lund for the wholesome all-American Frost, it includes — as a necessary part of the plot's development — both the congresswoman's humiliation and her recognition, brought on by an overconsumption of alcohol, that she too is a creature of desire. Thus the conclusion of the film featuring the union of a captain responsible for re-education and the American congresswoman assures the viewer that this will be a productive union.²⁵

Michael Verhoeven's 2006 film *Zwartboek* (*Black Book*) is another recent example of this juxtaposition of images of Nazism and eroticism. The film narrates the exploits of a Dutch Jewish singer, Rachel Stein, who, following the massacre of her family in Nazi-occupied Holland, disguises herself and joins the resistance. Calling herself Ellis deVries, she infiltrates the local SD headquarters and begins a romance with its commander, Hauptsturmführer Ludwig Müntze. From the outset, Rachel is defined by her status as sex object, a status that she is willing to exploit or use to taunt the German occupiers, such as in an early scene when she flashes her legs while riding on the back of a bicycle. Her transformation is thus less a change in personality than a change in object preference. For instance, she dyes her brown hair blonde to better conform to an Aryan standard of beauty. Here too, the

viewer is implicated as voyeur: the film spares no detail in tracing her transformation, even including a scene in which Stein dyes her pubic hair. What perhaps differentiates *Black Book* from other films is that it doesn't simply follow the pattern of sexual conquest and renunciation of sexual desire. Rather, it presents the resistance fighter Ellis as a sexualized figure who can marshal eroticism in the service of the resistance. It is ostensibly Müntze's inner decency, as well as his love for Ellis, that motivates him to negotiate with the resistance. One could argue, however, that even though we understand the protagonist's motivation for her transformation into a figure who is a desirable sex object for the Nazis, the camera treats this transformation and the newly eroticized lead character as an object of attraction herself, so that we the viewers are equally enthralled by her sex appeal.

Both male and female Nazis get their comeuppance in these films, whether they be true villains, such as Amon Goeth, or repentant perpetrators like Müntze. However, the fate of the male Nazis is often a quick execution, while it is the females who bear the brunt of the retributive cruelty. In the 1977 Italian Nazi sexploitation film, *The Beast in Heat*, so named because of the genetically mutated half-man/half-beast created by a beautiful, yet evil SS officer doctor to torture and molest female prisoners, the male guards are shot, while the female doctor is thrown into the cage with the 'beast' so that she may be raped and mauled to death. In *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS*, Ilsa and her two female subordinates are stripped, raped and then killed, while the male guards are immediately executed. Even in *The Reader*, Hanna's death, though by her own hand in prison, seems to have been necessarily preceded by her humiliation, long imprisonment and emotional rejection by Michael.

The fact that the most evil or depraved antagonists are often women provides these films with an excuse for portraying violence against women, and their subjugation is integral to a just conclusion. The order that is established or, in most cases, re-established in the conclusions to these films is a very traditional gendered order, an order that even the Nazis themselves seem to respect. Promiscuous sexuality, particularly on the part of women, is replaced by more conventional, monogamous romantic pairings, or eschewed entirely in favor of a re-established patriarchal family. Thus Wolfe, whose ability to maintain an erection allows him to wear out not just Ilsa but her two subordinates as well, ends the film romantically paired with Rosette, the

only other prisoner to escape the camp. Michael Berg, though he has apparently led a dissolute life after the end of his affair, is reinscribed as a good father at the end of *The Reader*, taking his grown-up daughter to the church he and Hanna once visited. In *Schindler's List*, Oskar Schindler, once an unfaithful womanizer, re-establishes himself as a good husband and symbolic father. Even Indiana Jones and his father, at the end of *The Last Crusade* (1989) reject the Nazi sexpot with whom (as we find out in a comic, yet ultimately disturbing revelation, both men have had sexual relations) in favor of a father-son reconciliation.

It is this privileging of male-male relations over male-female ones that points to a crucial subtext to these films. As Lynn Rapaport notes with respect to *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS*, the real threat that Ilsa posed was not to the Allies, but to masculinity: as a sexually dominant woman whose purpose is to prove not Nazi superiority but female superiority, she threatens both Nazis and Allies alike. For a contemporary male audience in 1975, this no doubt resonated with their own fears regarding the upheaval of gender roles: 'Male fear of women with newly won social power surfaces in the form of an ultimately violent, sexually desirous female aggressor. Ilsa appears as a threat precisely because she has taken on traditional male characteristics of the very type that men in general, and prisoners in particular, were forced to give up.'²⁶ She dies not at the hands of Wolfe or a female prisoner who seeks revenge for her disfigurement, but at the hands of a fellow Nazi, whose orders are to destroy the entire camp, lest any evidence of her experiments regarding female superiority remain.

Ironically, one could argue, as Rapaport does, that it is the exploitation films that more persuasively portray the true horrors of the Holocaust. The over-the-top violence, brutal torture and callous disregard for human life that peppers these films still falls short when compared to the reality of the death camps and the Final Solution. However, unlike most mainstream films, these films do not shy away from the violence of this period, nor do they offer their viewers a chance to look away. Further, while most of these films end or offer resolution in the form of a heterosexual couple that inevitably survives the carnage, the brutal acts committed by the heroes of such films only confirm the need for extreme violence to restore social order. There is little sense that the world has been freed of torture and cruelty, only that this particular manifestation has been defeated. Further, despite the ubiquitous nudity, it is fair to ask to what extent these films can be described as erotic, save for those whose sexual preferences tend

towards the violent. The very excesses towards which exploitation films tend ultimately de-eroticize the victims in a way that more mainstream films, infatuated with the idea of a beautiful victim, do not.

What emerges from an analysis of this juxtaposition of Nazism and sexuality says much more about our relationship to sex than it does about the Nazis. The sadomasochism frequently portrayed on screen is performed simultaneously by the viewer, who occupies the position of the suffering victim and fetishizes the dominant Nazi. Having experienced this ersatz sex act, the viewer then rejects those desires and, in an act of self-abnegation, reasserts himself/herself as a morally pure figure who derives pleasure now from the punishment of sexual transgressors. It is thus Nazism itself that becomes a sort of screen memory for the viewer's own negotiation of sexual desire.

Notes

- 1 Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (London, 1922), 7, cited in Theodor Adorno, 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda', in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhart (London: Continuum, 1985), 122.
- 2 Adorno, 'Freudian Theory', 123.
- 3 Adorno, 'Freudian Theory', 125.
- 4 In her discussion of the intersection of Nazism and sex, Elizabeth Heinman notes that 'irrationality', as a character trait typically ascribed to women in discussions of the appeal of Nazism, was a reductive way of discussing female sexual desire. See Elizabeth D. Heinman, 'Sexuality and Nazism: The Doubly Unspeakable?' in *Sexuality and German Fascism*, ed. Dagmar Herzog (New York: Berghahn, 2005), 22–66.
- 5 See Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 2 vols, trans. Stephen Conway, Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, 1989).
- 6 Laura Frost, *Sex Drives: Fantasies of Fascism in Literary Modernism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 6.
- 7 This claim is at the heart of Andrea Slane's investigation of images of Nazism and their influence on debates about sexuality in American political discourse. See Andrea Slane, *A Not So Foreign Affair: Fascism, Sexuality, and the Cultural Rhetoric of American Democracy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).
- 8 It should be noted that Langer's report, was first published (with the phrase 'the secret wartime report') as a mass-market title at the height of the exploitation craze in the early 1970s. For an extensive discussion — and debunking — of many of the myths at the heart of the various sex-driven explanations of Hitler's pathology, see Ron Rosenbaum, *Explaining Hitler* (New York: Random House, 1988), especially chapter 8, 'The Dark Matter: The Sexual Fantasy of the Hitler Explainers', 135–52. Of the various attempts to use Freudian theory to construct a psychoanalytic portrait of Hitler, the most compelling, if not necessarily the most persuasive, is Robert

- Waite's *The Psychopathic God: Adolf Hitler* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).
- 9 George L. Mosse, *Confronting History: A Memoir* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 106.
 - 10 Tijuana Bibles were short, crudely drawn pornographic comic books produced in the United States beginning in the early 1920s. These tracts, sold surreptitiously until the early 1960s, depicted well-known cartoon characters, political figures or movie stars in a variety of sexual situations. See Bob Adelman, *Tijuana Bibles: Art and Wit in America's Forbidden Funnies, 1930s–1950s* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).
 - 11 Andrea Slane reads this threat of sterilization (which also briefly appears in the 1942 film *Once Upon a Honeymoon*, featuring Cary Grant and Ginger Rodgers as Americans mistaken for Jews and sent to a concentration camp) as a key aspect of the film's opposition between democratic and fascist ideals. But the outrage here is not about Anna's lack of control over her own body, but the potential loss of reproductive ability for democratic hopes. See Slane, 56–64.
 - 12 Dagmar Herzog, 'Hubris and Hypocrisy, Incitement and Disavowal: Sexuality and German Fascism', in *Sexuality and German Fascism*, 1–21, here 4.
 - 13 It is striking to note that even scholarly analyses that take a critical stance towards such films seem unable to avoid interjecting an erotic element into their own presentation. While it might be understandable from a marketing perspective that the DVD of *The Night Porter* uses the iconic image of a topless Charlotte Rampling, wearing the suspended pants and cap of an SS officer, her hands clad in long, black leather gloves, covering her breasts, the same image graces the cover of Kriss Ravetto's *The Unmasking of Fascist Aesthetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) and Laura Frost's *Sex Drives: Fantasies of Fascism in Literary Modernism*.
 - 14 This is a particularly important point — the portrayal of the sexualized nature of Nazis in part reflects an attempt to replicate their appeal — but it does not fully explain the larger dynamic at work, since mainstream films about Nazis and the Holocaust have, since this period, rarely a central or even tangential focus. See Saul Friedländer, *Reflections on Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 45–53.
 - 15 For a history of roughies, see Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford, *Sleazoid Express: A Mind-Twisting Tour Through the Grindhouse Cinema of Times Square* (New York: Fireside, 2002).
 - 16 Amit Pinchevsky and Roy Brand argue convincingly that the texts serve as fictional counterparts to the Eichmann trial, providing closure to the trauma unleashed but not resolved by the trial, writing that they exhibit three levels of correspondence with the trial and the collective trauma it evoked: 'as heroic contra-narrative to the story of destruction; as speculation on the inner working of Nazi mentality; and as intrusion of reality into fantasy. What was made explicit in the trial — the Holocaust — was implicit in the pulp; and vice-versa.' Amit Pinchevsky and Roy Brand, 'Holocaust Perversions: The Stalags Pulp Fiction and the Eichmann Trial', *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24, no. 5 (December 2007): 399. Ari Libsker's recent documentary, *Stalagim* (*Stalags*, 2008), similarly seeks to link the remembrance of German crimes and what he sees as a sexual obsession of Israeli society from the 1960s until the present day. See Julia Anspach, Review of *Stalagim* (*Stalags*), *Journal of Jewish Identities* 1, no. 2 (July 2008): 154–6. Interesting to note here is that the text that led to the end of the

- genre, *I Was Colonel Schultz's Private Bitch*, reversed the gender roles, making the victim female and the torturer male. This was the first of the Stalags actually to be banned.
- 17 Sara R. Horowitz, 'But is it Good for the Jews? Spielberg's Schindler and the Aesthetics of Atrocity', in Yosefa Loshitzky, *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 126ff.
 - 18 Horowitz, 'But is it Good for the Jews?' 127–8.
 - 19 Sven Kramer, 'Nacktheit in Holocaust-Fotos und -Filmen', in *Die Shoah im Bild*, ed. Sven Kramer (Munich: edition text + kritik, 2003), 237.
 - 20 Ron Hansen, *Hitler's Niece* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999). Though critics panned Hansen's prose, he received nearly universally high marks for the novel's ostensible accuracy, as detailed by the generous amount of praise that adorns the novel's back cover: The *New York Times Book Review* asserted that 'Hansen succeeds in conjuring Hitler as he probably was', while Daphne Merkin in *The New Yorker* wrote that 'Because of its mixture of historical detail and psychological nuance it rings true.' This assertion of truth, however uncertain that truth may be, is also at the heart of exploitation films. *Isa* begins with a disclaimer about how the film's events are entirely grounded in fact: truth is the defense against charges of exploitation.
 - 21 Mailer even won *Literary Review's* 'Bad Sex in Fiction Award' for 2007, for the passage that described Hitler's conception as a three-way interaction between Hitler's parents Alois and Klara, and the Devil. 'Norman Mailer wins Bad Sex in Fiction Award', *The New Zealand Herald*, November 28, 2007.
 - 22 See Cynthia Ozick, 'The Rights of History and the Rights of Imagination', *Commentary* (March 1999): 22–7.
 - 23 In a scathing piece written for *Slate*, Ron Rosenbaum recounts a conversation with the film's director Stephen Daldry at a screening, where Daldry indicated that he omitted such a scene, lest it give viewers an 'unbalanced' sense of Hanna's character. See Ron Rosenbaum, 'Don't Give an Oscar to *The Reader*', accessed June 15, 2010, www.slate.com/id/2210804/.
 - 24 Rosenbaum, 'Don't Give an Oscar to *The Reader*.'
 - 25 Slane, *A Not So Foreign Affair*, 232–47.
 - 26 Lynn Rapaport, 'Holocaust Pornography: Profaning the Sacred in *Isa*, *She Wolf of the SS*', *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 22, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 69. Rikke Schubart has a slightly more nuanced reading of *Isa* as a threat to the social order, arguing that the film is not a fantasy of sadism, but one of male masochism, an inversion of the typical horror film, in which a solitary female survives and defeats a male monster who threatens her with rape and murder. However, in this analysis, social order is still restored. Following Bataille, Schubart writes that 'the playful exploration of alternative sexual behavior (sadism, masochism, cannibalism) and the subversion of social order are acted out in the 'safe' setting of watching an exploitation movie.' See Rikke Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes: The Female Hero in Popular Cinema, 1970–2006* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007), 81.

3

Ilsa and Elsa: Nazisploitation, Mainstream Film and Cinematic Transference

ALICIA KOZMA

EXISTING ON THE CINEMATIC margins, exploitation films are traditionally defined by their perceived opposition to mainstream cinema. This definition has constructed a rigid dialectic that encompasses production, aesthetic, narrative and legitimacy. However, this rigidity belies the reciprocity of the narratives and characterizations that these cinematic categories share. Defined by adherence to ideas of classical Hollywood narrative, high production values and popular appeal, mainstream film finds its other in exploitation films, which have ‘[...] always lurked at the ambiguous boundaries of acceptability in terms of taste, style, and politics.’¹ Known for their low-budget aesthetics, sensationalist story lines primarily focused around vice and sin, and narratives that alternate between spectacle and monotony, exploitation films have consistently allowed for an alternative approach to cinematic construction and interpretation.² By creating a counter-cinematic space, exploitation films often delve into the troublesome waters of taste and emerge with legitimate social and intellectual questions. As Eric Schaefer writes, history has shown that ‘[T]he clash between the mainstream and exploitation industries created a series of discourses on sexuality, taste, mores, the nature of entertainment, and the function of motion pictures.’³ As these discourses grew into boundaries separating the two film

forms, exploitation cinema emerged as a valid cinematic space of difference.

One of the most difficult questions exploitation films have raised regards the nature of the relationship of the post-World War II generation to the reality of the Nazi regime. What exploitation films did to explore this evil can give us insight into the popular cinematic conceptions of Nazism and how film interacts with historical reality. Generically termed as Nazisploitation, the films that fall into this category are a hybrid of influences, ranging from sexploitation to women-in-prison films to art-house cinema. As a textual category Nazisploitation is loosely constructed through fluid boundaries and a variety of interpretations. Films labeled as such can be read variously as pornography, political statement, historical phenomena or pop art aesthetics.⁴ However, for all their multiple interpretations and conceptualizations, it is possible to locate the films that fall under this rubric as texts that played a critical role in establishing the visual and aesthetic design of cinematic Nazism in mainstream film.

The 1970s proved a high point of sorts for Nazisploitation cinema, producing a number of films strikingly similar in themes, narratives and characters. These films were not an anomaly. Previous to the decade, various iterations of exploitative material surrounding World War II and the Holocaust was available, including contemporaneous newsreel footage, Stalag fiction and cinema, and concentration camp literature like 1955's *The House of Dolls* by Ka-tzetnik 135633.⁵ Identified superficially by graphic displays of sexual violence, torture and physical and mental humiliation, Nazisploitation films of the 1970s such as Don Edmonds' *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (1974), Tinto Brass's *Salon Kitty* (1976) and Sergio Garrone's *SS Lager 5: L'inferno delle donne* (*SS Camp 5: Women's Hell*, 1977) develop generic tropes and an enduring aesthetic that is critical to the creation of cinematic Nazism. The translation of those images to mainstream film created powerful mythic images that have pushed past the margins of exploitation and made an indelible impact on film as a whole. The iconic images engrained by Nazisploitation films are gendered, bound in the costume of fetish and signaled through sexualized violence and a particular fascination with the body. A comparative analysis of selected filmic representations illuminates how these images have been translated from signifiers of the shocking in marginalized film into more traditional cinematic

spaces. It demonstrates the interrelationship between counter- and conventional cinema.

Analyzing the extent of cross-fertilization between exploitation and traditional cinema in terms of the Nazisploitation mythic image is critical. If traditional cinema can be classified as '[A]n economic and artistic institution that represents not just a body of films, but a particular mode of film production and its accompanying signifying practices', one must consider how Nazisploitation films of the 1970s affected those signifying practices.⁶ As Nazisploitation tropes moved into the mainstream, the cinematic portrayal of Nazism was loosened from historical specificity and aligned with generic filmic villainy, thereby devaluing the power and heinous nature of the images presented. To evaluate the impact of translating images from exploitation film to mainstream film, this essay examines the dialectical relationship between two pairs of female characters. Drawing from the films *Ilsa*, *She Wolf of the SS*, Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), Liliana Cavani's *Il portiere di notte* (*The Night Porter*, 1974) and Paul Verhoeven's *Black Book* (*Zwartboek*, 2006), a comparative analysis will demonstrate that the divide between conceptualizations of exploitation and mainstream film is, in many ways, a false dichotomy that too often discounts the reciprocal influence that the two film forms share. It is critical to understand, however, that this analysis does not presume that there can be only one type of Nazi representation, nor that all those associated with the Nazi party are interchangeable; history has certainly shown otherwise. What is at issue is redefining the overly structured relationship between exploitation and mainstream films. This redefinition allows us to comprehend the cultural role each has played in the other's construction.

Constructing Myth

Nazisploitation shares numerous similarities with the women-in-prison film in structure and content. Female protagonists and antagonists are endemic to both genres. More specifically, both genres concern the relationship between women in power and their subordinates. Be they female prison wardens or concentration camp commandants, women occupy positions of absolute power in both roles. Often these women are portrayed as sadists who abuse their power for amusement, sexual pleasure, or simply to maintain the inequitable imbalance between

subject and master. As such, both genres create female characters as the ultimate marginalized subject. They subjugate them through gender, sexual preference, victimization, isolation and torture.⁷

The combination of these power relations with the gender marginalization creates three stock characters: the victimizer, the pawn and the hero. Marsha Clowers defines these roles as '[T]he violent, sex-crazed victimizer who furthers the goals of a corrupt prison administration; the innocent victimized limpet who is used as a sexual pawn to incite the anger of other inmates; and the beautiful young heroine-to-be, wrongly imprisoned and in the pursuit of justice for herself and her peers.'⁸ Within these predefined roles, tensions are created and recreated constantly as plot devices, propelling the narrative forward. For example, the medical experiments that Nazis (read: victimizers) performed on the prisoners of war (read: victims) have left the latter mutilated and slowly dying. When a new group of prisoners is shipped into the camp and sees what awaits them, they band together and form a plan to escape (read: heroes). Unearthing the tropes shared among Nazisploitation films of the 1970s serves as a useful guide to examine how these images were created, and in turn transferred and transformed into mainstream representations.

Although not the first film released during the heyday of Nazisploitation, *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* has become the representative example of the genre in story, content and aesthetic. Ilsa (Dyanne Thorne) is a medical doctor and commandant of a Nazi POW camp. Officially, her role is to sterilize female POW's and prepare them to work in field brothels serving the German army. Unofficially, Ilsa uses female prisoners to conduct experiments on the limits of pain; she is convinced that women can withstand more pain than men. Concurrently, Ilsa also uses male POWs in the camp for personal experimentations in sexual satisfaction. When the prisoners she rapes fail to please her, she castrates them and takes their two symbols of masculinity: their pride and their genitals. Ilsa pursues her scientific curiosity through a series of vicious experiments. To test her theories on gender and pain, she has female prisoners subjected to a series of horrific experiments: they are boiled, trapped in high pressure chambers, whipped and cut, injected with syphilis and more, until their eventual deaths. Prisoners not chosen for Ilsa's experiments are forcibly sterilized using an electrified vaginal probe. As the prisoner

body count rises, the female POWs are motivated to escape, revolting against the guards and fleeing the camp.

Within *Ilsa*, we can see the basic narrative formula of the Nazisploitation films of the 1970s: the interplay between victimizer, victim and the requisite hero. *Ilsa* is the victimizer, the female POWs are the victims, and the mass of prisoners serve as the heroes. The film also contains examples of the structural tropes that are present in the roster of Nazisploitation films of the 1970s. First and foremost of these tropes is the attempt to historicize their sensationalism in the hope of legitimizing the films themselves.⁹ These attempts at historical legitimacy come in three main instances: the historical disclaimer, the portrayal of field brothels and the use of prisoner inspection scenes.

Many of the films, including *Ilsa* and *SS Camp Women's Hell*, open with a 'historical disclaimer', stating that the events and characters shown are composites of historical people and events, implying that the film should be read as a type of historical, representative discourse. Some films go so far as to incorporate into the film historical photos from camps, mass graves and emaciated POWs as historical disclaimers. The idea that these films are made and distributed as a type of historical document is reinforced by the fact that in a majority of these films Nazis are shown destroying camps and their inhabitants. They destroy the camps to try to conceal them from the Allies as they attempt to expunge their atrocities from the historical record. As such, these films legitimize themselves by claiming to expose a history of horrors that the Nazis attempted to hide.

The concept of field brothels also pervades the Nazisploitation films of the 1970s. Several films depict camp brothels and locate a substantial portion of the filmic action within them. Field brothels were a reality for estimated tens of thousands of female prisoners.¹⁰ As replicated in the films, a portion of inmates working in the historical brothels participated in them willingly as a means of survival. Elizabeth Heineman states '[I]n a life-threatening environment that offered only varieties of compulsion, some inmates were literally forced into the brothels. Others accepted the assignment with the hope that it would offer greater chances of survival than the alternatives.'¹¹ Additionally, a majority of the Nazisploitation films from the 1970s contain an inspection scene; female prisoners stand naked before camp guards for physical evaluation. Once evaluated, inspections move on to group shower scenes. Both set-ups offer moments for spectator pleasure,

as well as a type of education for the viewer in the horrors of camp life.¹² As with the representation of field brothels, inspection scenes offer a moment when history is interwoven into narrative. Both scenes ground the films' sensationalism in history, and thereby bolster the films' claims that they are more than just exploitation.

There is a special emphasis placed on the body in these films, an emphasis that displays the prisoners' bodies as 'curiosities, and novelties [...] rendering a luminal space of fantasy, indulgence and desire [...] the spectacles offered up by each allow spectators to indulge their imagination, free from personal consequences.'¹³ These spaces of fantasy are constructed through the tropes of medical experiments and repetitive sexual behaviors. Structured around the exposure of prisoners' bodies, torturous medical experiments are common in films like Sergio Garrone's *SS Experiment Love Camp (Lager SSadis Kastrat Kommandantur, 1976)*, and Luigi Batzella's *La bestia in calore (1977)*, translated both as *SS Hell Camp* and *The Best in Heat*. Repetitious sexual behaviors also offer an additional focus on the body, including lesbianism (between prison guards or forcibly between guards and prisoners), rape, prostitution, sexual humiliation and genital mutilation.

Lastly, and perhaps most enduringly, is the specific visual aesthetic these films created; an aesthetic located within a popular conception of the German woman, and one that is encompassed by Ilsa.¹⁴ Ilsa is a statuesque blonde with blue eyes, long red fingernails, and enormous breasts. The first time she appears on screen she is naked and copulating with an unknown man, and immediately thereafter follows an extended sequence of her taking a shower, the camera focusing on her breasts and buttocks. Indeed the audience is first introduced to Ilsa the woman, not Ilsa the Nazi, creating an initial association of pleasure between the viewer and Ilsa. This pleasure is muddied when the viewer is immediately confronted with Ilsa's first act of violence, her first display in uniform, and the knowledge that her sexual partner was a prisoner. Ilsa the Nazi dresses meticulously. She wears a white silk shirt unbuttoned to emphasize her cleavage, a red and black swastika armband, black leather belt and gun holster, black jodhpurs, knee-high black leather boots shined to a high gloss, black leather gloves and a black officer's hat.

What makes this image so compelling to contemporary audiences is that it is already a cliché: the sexually dominant, powerful and

authoritative female power figure interested in order, submission and pain. This image has not only become the standard image of German women in Nazisploitation films, but has also become the popular conception of the female German character. Susan Sontag recognized as much: 'Much of the imagery of far-out sex has been placed under the sign of Nazism. Boots, leather, Iron Crosses on gleaming torsos, swastikas, along with meat hooks and heavy motorcycles, have become the secret and most lucrative paraphernalia of eroticism. In the sex shops, the baths, the leather bars, the brothels, people are dragging out their gear.'¹⁵ This fashion-driven aesthetic, combined with the other tropes previously outlined, work together to create enduring myths of cinematic Nazism.

The Victimizers: Ilsa and Elsa

Ilsa is the definitive example of the victimizer archetype. Through her abuses of power, science and sexuality she represents the ultimate '[...] metaphor for transgressions of sexuality and morality.'¹⁶ She routinely abuses her power and the power of the Nazi regime to further her twisted scientific and sexual goals. As such, she becomes a mythic representation of the cinematic Nazi, coded both in terms of sexual fetish and historical horror. As an enduring image, the power to repulse and shock has become diluted through transference to mainstream film; the power of the mythic Ilsa/Nazi image is weakened, separated from the historical horrors from which it was born. We can see this process through a comparison of Ilsa to Dr Elsa Schneider (Alison Doody) in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), a character clearly constructed as a mainstream iteration of Ilsa.

Nazis have played an important role in the *Indiana Jones* films as the perennial antagonists. With Nazis the evil motivating force behind the adventures, Indiana (Harrison Ford) uses his particular brand of adventure archeology to keep ancient and powerful relics out of their hands. As the representative signifier of historical evil, the existence of the Nazis as the films' collective and symbolic antagonists immediately legitimizes Indiana's actions, which under different circumstances could be seen as ethically dubious archeology. However, their constant presence and the lack of contextualization around their specific historical actions serve to remove the Nazis from history, signifying them as '[...] interchangeable forces of darkness'.¹⁷ The films

ostensibly offer no differentiation between the Nazis or any other villains; they would all serve the same purpose, to act as Indiana's foil.¹⁸ When in *The Last Crusade* Indy realizes that Nazis kidnapped his father, he deadpans, 'Nazis; I hate these guys' with the same level of emotion he gave to the swarm of rats he had just battled in an underground crypt.¹⁹ They are an annoyance to his plans, something to work around, and nothing more. Indeed, the strongest criticism a character makes of the Nazis comes from Dr Henry Jones, Sr (Sean Connery), who calls them 'goose-stepping morons' for burning books.²⁰ This insult is a decidedly understated comment for a group that destroyed countries and murdered millions of innocent individuals, yet it is as far as any of the *Indiana Jones* films will go to place Nazis in a historical context.

What *The Last Crusade* is willing to do, however, is to translate for a mainstream audience the established character trope of Ilsa as victimizer into the form of Elsa, in the process creating a more palatable and sympathetic Nazi for a wider audience. The film first introduces Elsa as the elder Jones's research partner. Indy trusts her implicitly at first sight, and so does the audience. However, his instincts prove wrong when it is later revealed that Elsa, if not a Nazi herself, is at least working with the Nazis to find the Holy Grail. Yet it is not this duplicity but the character construction of Elsa that makes her so similar to Ilsa both in form and function. Apart from the similarity of their first names, there are aesthetic connections. Elsa has blonde hair and blue eyes, as does Ilsa. Both wear white, button-down silk shirts and black leather gloves. Both are highly educated and in professions traditionally the province of men. This comparison notably conflicts with some strains of Nazi philosophy that restricted women to traditional roles and that the '[...] man's world was the state, woman's the home, and the two world's complemented each other; women ought not attempt to penetrate the world of men.'²¹ For transgressing this ideology, both women are punished, fulfilling the prophecy of Nazi philosopher Alfred Rosenberg, who posited that it was both improper and dangerous for women to encroach on the world of men.²² Indeed, for transgressing into non-normative female occupations, both characters will be punished by death.

One of the most interesting transpositions of a generic trope is Elsa's undoing by an 'outsider', an American man, a direct link to both Ilsa and to the Nazisploitation films of the 1970s. Ilsa's downfall

is her lust for an American prisoner named Wolfe, who is portrayed as unmistakably American. His confidence in his abilities is a by-product of his belief in his own mythic American individualism and paternalistic pride. Two key scenes demonstrate this belief. When Wolfe first meets Ilsa, he stands proudly before her gaze, although the other male prisoners cower during her inspection. His overwhelming paternalism leads him to challenge her sexually; her status as Nazi commander and prison warden cannot subjugate her gender inequality in his eyes. An accompanying scene that codes Wolfe and his domination of Ilsa as uniquely American builds on this gender dynamic. During their first night together Ilsa's radio plays militaristic drum and fife music, which to American audiences evokes the Revolutionary War. This musical cue signals Wolfe's impending overthrow of the foreign ruler Ilsa, just as the early American colonists overthrew foreign British rule during the Revolution. Elsa is also defeated by an individualistic American, Indiana Jones, a more clearly established American mythic character.

These shared character traits and aesthetic designs link Ilsa and Elsa as cinematic *Doppelgänger*. They simultaneously subvert the imported tropes of Nazisploitation films in a mainstream context. The defeat of Nazis by foreign others is a common thread in the film of the 1970s. For example, the Nazis in *SS Camp Women's Hell* are taken down by a female Jamaican resistance fighter; in *SS Experiment Love Camp* they are undone by the Russians; and in *SS Hell Camp* they are destroyed by a group of occupied Italian villagers.

Perhaps the most important similarity between Ilsa and Elsa is their dedication to knowledge and achievement. The blinding commitment to achievement that Ilsa and Elsa share leads to ethical and moral compromise through their association with the Nazi party. However, Ilsa has unapologetically bound herself to Nazism and enjoys the physical and psychological torture that she can inflict under the Nazi banner. The outright torture that Ilsa perpetrates translates into Elsa's double-crossing, sterilizing the horror at the core to present a more palatable character for mainstream audiences. Elsa, then, is portrayed as a much more sympathetic figure, something more akin to the 'hooker with a heart of gold' stereotype; someone who appears to be bad or acts badly, but who is truly a good person. At numerous times in the film she expresses regret for double-crossing the Joneses, shows open contempt for her Nazi bedfellows, and objects to harming either Indy or his father. These actions undermine her connection with the

atrocities of Ilsa and the Nazis, painting her instead as a tolerable and misunderstood character.

These consistencies in characterization position Elsa as a mainstream iteration of Ilsa. However, because Spielberg takes care to divorce Elsa not only from Ilsa's horrific actions but also from an affinity for the Nazi party as a whole, the film excuses her association with the Reich. It whitewashes her participation and allows her a sense of redemption at the end of film. Although her motivations can be read as ambiguous, she does hand the wrong grail to Donovan (Julian Glover), killing him and allowing this act to serve as reparation. Indeed, Indiana mourns her death and forgives her free association with the Nazis. Looking at Elsa through the prism of Ilsa reveals how the trope of the Nazi victimizer has been translated into an ahistorical context devoid of the reality of the atrocities portrayed by Ilsa and her cohort in the films of the 1970s. Consequently, this historical disassociation creates the mainstream character of the sympathetic Nazi, one whose affiliation with the party and actions in its name are forgiven, or at the very least redeemed, through a demonstrated lack of ideological fervor for the Reich.

The Victims: Lucia and Ellis

Moving from the role of the victimizer to the role of the victim, one can trace a similar pattern. The victim in the Nazisploitation films of the 1970s motivated others to action focusing on a character whose mistreatment spurred rebellion, escape and even murderous retribution. This character is often a female prisoner who has been tortured through both sex and science, leaving her broken, scarred and slowly dying. For those slow to defend themselves, the victim offers a cautionary tale, an example of the fate that awaits them should they fail to act. An interesting example of the victim character in the cycle of films in the 1970s is Lucia Atheron (Charlotte Rampling) in *The Night Porter*.²³ Lucia is a concentration camp survivor who, thirteen years after the war has ended, encounters her former Nazi tormentor, 'Max' (Dirk Bogarde). Max hides in Vienna where he makes his living as an unassuming night porter at a hotel where Lucia and her American husband are staying. As Max and Lucia encounter one another, they replay their previous relationship. While in the camp, Max was Lucia's protector and tormenter, her lover and her rapist.

He dominated her sadistically yet could not suppress her control over him, creating a relationship of dominance and control that functioned from both perspectives. When the two meet in Vienna, they fall into the same sadomasochistic pattern, with the critical exception that this time Lucia enters into this relationship willingly. The relationship had both repulsed her and attracted her to Max, and is tightly bound up with her survival of the war. In many ways she echoes some of the other prisoner characters who worked in Nazi brothels to survive. The key difference between them and Lucia, however, is that Max exercises total physical, sexual and psychological control over her in their camp relationship. In their post-camp relationship, participation is equalized, and indeed, in later moments in the film part of Max's fear of being trapped in his apartment is the fear that Lucia will end her role in their game and leave him.

An interesting dynamic in their post-camp relationship is their ability to make the transition back into their old patterns, regardless of the changes of the intervening thirteen years. Once they re-establish their relationship, it is clear that these individuals cannot forget the past, and indeed the past so conditions their everyday lives that they cannot move into the future. As Teresa de Lauretis notes, 'In their obsessive repetition of past acts, which once defined their total worlds and now reflects their self-image, they live out a fantasy which is the only relationship they know, the only one their brutal world ever made possible for them to know.'²⁴ As if to intensify this fantasy, Max attempts to re-enact the closed-world boundaries of the camp. He seals Lucia and himself into his small apartment, again defining the physical world of their relationship by impenetrable walls.

Lucia's role as victim in the film is twofold: she was Max's victim during their camp relationship, and in the post-camp era, Max's Nazi contemporaries use her to force him into their twisted version of atonement for his war crimes. Lucia is first introduced as Max's victim via a prisoner inspection scene, an established Nazisploitation trope. Max weaves in and out of the naked prisoners with a film camera that captures the entire experience. It is here that he and the audience first see the camp version of Lucia, introduced with a double mediation between two cameras: Max's and Cavani's. Shortly thereafter their relationship begins, and Lucia's role as victim reinforces Max's power to the other prisoners and guards — an interesting inversion on the function of the trope. For example, Max manipulates Lucia into

performing cabaret for his fellow guards, and she appears to entertain her captors willingly. This scene produces arguably the most famous visual from the film, Lucia dressed in Nazi officer pants, black leather gloves, an officer's hat, and suspenders laid against her bare chest. It not only testifies to Max's total control over her, but it also links Cavani's film to other Nazisploitation films of the time. Although Lucia appears to participate willingly in this performance, the expression on her face when Max presents her with a severed head as a gift reveals her true repulsion towards both her captors and her participation in their world.

If during their camp relationship Lucia's victim role was inverted from the original trope, their post-camp relationship re-establishes the victim's original function as a motivator of action. While in hiding, Max has joined a group of former Nazi officers. They will not turn themselves in but they believe that the only way for them to live freely with a clean conscience is to undergo their own version of a war crimes trial. As such, each member of the group is presented with the atrocities he committed during the war, emerging from the process cleansed of their crimes. Max refuses to participate in this trial process, and by doing so invalidates the cleansing process of his fellow group members. To maintain some semblance of atonement, the men attempt to use Lucia's reappearance in Max's life to force him through the trial. What underpins this entire process is the group's inability truly to abandon Nazism. Several of them openly admit that if given the choice again to join the Nazis or to abstain, they would join with no regrets. Their commitment to Nazi tenets combined with the treatment of Lucia while in the camp presents a historically realistic portrayal of war and post-war Nazi life. Therefore, although *The Night Porter* is not as graphic in terms of torture and imprisonment as the other Nazisploitation films of the 1970s, it is perhaps the best example of the most disturbing trend in the films: the devotion to the conceptualization, real or imagined, of Nazism at all costs.

As with Ilsa and Elsa, we can find a contemporary version of the Lucia/victim character in Paul Verhoeven's 2006 *Black Book*. In the film Carice van Houten plays Rachel Stein, a Jewish woman who joins the Dutch resistance and takes on the pseudonym Ellis de Vries. Nazis have killed Ellis's family and she joins the resistance to seek revenge. Her assignment is to infiltrate Gestapo headquarters, which she does by acquiring a position as first the lover, and then the secretary, of SS

head Ludwig Müntze (Sebastian Koch). Through the course of her assignment Ellis begins to see the duplicitous nature of her comrades in the resistance. They engage in secret dealings with the Nazis for personal gain, exhibit anti-Semitism, and willingly sacrifice their own men to ensure their own personal safety. At the same time Ellis and Müntze fall in love, and as a result Müntze ceases to be defined by his Nazi associations and becomes a sympathetic character, transformed by his love for Ellis.

Ellis echoes Lucia in several key ways. Ellis was a cabaret singer before the war and, like Lucia, she entertains high-ranking Nazi officials with her songs. Both women are forced to undergo the obligatory inspection scene. Both women are fetishized by their lovers for their Jewish ethnicity and, most importantly, both women are used as pawns between powerful opposing sides. Ellis, like Lucia, serves multiple functions in her role as victim in multiple games: in one between the Dutch resistance and the Gestapo, in machinations between Müntze and fellow SS General Franken (Waldemar Kobus), and in the post-war struggle between those Dutch who cooperated with the Nazis and those who resisted. Like Lucia, her role highlights the depravity of many of the Nazis who surround her, as well as the compromised morality of members of the Dutch resistance. However, unlike Lucia and in a position closer to the whitewashing of the Nazi sympathies of Elsa in *Indiana Jones*, Ellis's role as a victim also humanizes and sanitizes representations of Nazism as displayed in the character of Müntze.

Müntze is a high-ranking officer in the Nazi army and the leader of the SS in the Netherlands. One can reasonably assume that, to achieve this position, Müntze espoused an adherence to the Nazi party and carried out orders beneficial to it. These actions, however, are never shown and only briefly alluded to. The members of the Dutch resistance in the film speak in generalities when referring to his crimes in the service of the Reich. The lack of specificity regarding his military actions, combined with his portrayal through the eyes of Ellis, establishes Müntze as a sympathetic character: loving, trusting and non-judgmental of Ellis's Jewishness. Although Müntze did not murder Ellis's family, in his role as head of the Gestapo the viewer can assume he has ordered the murder of many Jews, and can be seen as a type of executioner. He is, however, rehabilitated through his relationship with Ellis. As Marcus Stiglegger posits, 'The relationship between

executioner and victim is transfigured sadomasochism shifted to the level of sexual passion. The result is a de-politicization and de-historicization of the phenomenon of National Socialism.²⁵ Removing Müntze from politics and history constructs his character as level-headed, fair and open-minded. This is as distant from the Nazism represented by Ilsa and Max as possible; he is the kind-hearted Gestapo.

Indeed, when Müntze is executed, the viewer feels as if the hero has died rather than the villain. Even so, Müntze is never regretful of his actions; he does not apologize for his role in the war. Indeed, his only motivation for working towards a truce between the Gestapo and the resistance is the futility of continued hostility in the face of a quickly failing war. As with Elsa, Müntze could be any member of any army during any war; there is no direct association between him and the historical Gestapo. If the power in the Nazisploitation films of the 1970s lay in the ability to remind the viewers of one of the most atrocious and inhumane periods in contemporary history, then characters like Elsa and Müntze demonstrate mainstream cinema's ability to negate that power through the construction of ethically ambiguous, morally uncompromised and heroic Nazis.

The Heroes: Shosanna and The Basterds

If the mainstream construct of the Nazisploitation tropes of victimizers and victims has left us with a sympathetic and kind-hearted Nazi, Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) attempts to restore those characterizations to their original form. Although as a re-imagined history it is located firmly outside the historical chain of events of World War II, Tarantino's film maintains the legacy of the Third Reich in much the same vein as the Nazisploitation films of the 1970s. The film traces disparate stories that eventually converge in the definitive revenge fantasy in the final third of the film. Tarantino follows both Shosanna (Mélanie Laurent), a French Jew hiding in Berlin under the guise of a movie theater owner, and the Basterds, an all-Jewish covert military unit of American assassins who sweep through Germany murdering Nazis. Shosanna and the Basterds unknowingly come together in their coinciding plots to blow up Shosanna's theater while Hitler and the commanding members of the Reich attend a film premiere inside.

In their respective roles, the characters of Shosanna and the Basterds converge into a single representation of the Nazisploitation trope of the hero. They are victims brought to a point of raised conscious, stirring revolt among their fellow prisoners. The heroes of films like *Ilsa*, *SS Camp Women's Hell* and *SS Experiment Love Camp*, among others, were often nameless prisoners whose heroism is defined by the strength in their numbers, in their resolve and their search for revenge. They risk life and limb to save themselves and their fellow prisoners from torture, pain and eventual death by rising up and overthrowing their oppressors. Although Shosanna and the Basterds are not prisoners per se, through their vengeance they act in solidarity with the prisoners of the early films, not allowing Nazi force to go unpunished.

What sets Tarantino's film apart from the others that have drawn so heavily on the Nazisploitation tropes is the grounding of his Nazi characters in a historical context, which constructs them as historical representations. The film itself is built around retribution and revenge for the atrocities the Nazis have committed and, unlike *Indiana Jones* or *Black Book*, it doesn't create sympathetic or heroic Nazi characters. Colonel Hans Landa (Christoph Waltz) is as fervent in his zeal to aid the Reich as Ilsa or Max, and he remains unapologetic for his ideology and his actions. As the 'Jew Hunter', Landa embodies the victimizers and villains from the films on the 1970s, and the audience finds as much catharsis in his demise as it does in the demise of Ilsa and her contemporaries. Moving above and beyond that, Tarantino provides the ultimate release when the Basterds mow down the Nazi brass with machine guns, as Shosanna burns the theater around them. The film, like its predecessors in the 1970s, serves both as a reminder of the historical atrocities of the Nazi regime and the visceral pleasure in its destruction at the hands of its victims.

This examination of the translation from the aesthetic, structural and generic tropes of the Nazisploitation films of the 1970s to the world of mainstream film has demonstrated that the rigid boundaries between traditional cinema and the counter-cinema of exploitation are, in fact, more lax than either side may choose to believe. As such, the cross-pollination between the two film forms is not without its own important reverberations. Specifically, based on these comparisons, one can see that the construction of the aesthetic and characterization of the cinematic Nazi were fundamentally altered

through transference between traditional and counter-cinemas. This alteration divorces the cinematic Nazi from associated atrocities and undermines the power found in Nazisploitation images, a power of collective memory and traumatic catharsis. By utilizing established Nazisploitation tropes, mainstream compositions of Nazi images move from the specific to the general, aligning Nazism with generic villainy. If the Nazisploitation films of the 1970s lacked the style, taste, culture and formal construction of mainstream films, they excelled in foregrounding the heinous nature of the images on display, and the cathartic power they had for audiences.

Notes

- 1 Jeffrey Sconce, 'Introduction', in *Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, and Politics*, ed. Jeffrey Sconce (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 5.
- 2 Eric Schaefer, 'Exploitation Films: Teaching Sin in the Suburbs'. In *Cinema Journal* 47, no. 1 (2007): 94.
- 3 Eric Schaefer, 'Resisting Refinement: The Exploitation Film and Self-Censorship', *Film History* 6, no. 3 (1994): 294.
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- 5 Stalag fiction and cinema refer to a short-lived phase in Israeli fiction and cinema whose stories were a mix of pornography and concentration camp narrative.
- 6 Jeffrey Sconce, "'Trashing' the Academy: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style", *Screen* 36, no. 4 (1995): 381.
- 7 Susanna Danuta Walters, 'Caged Heat: The (R)evolution of Women-In-Prison Films', in *Reel Knockouts: Violent Women in the Movies*, eds Martha McCaughey and Neal King (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 106.
- 8 Marsha Clowers, 'Dykes, Gangs, and Danger: Debunking Popular Myths About Maximum-Security Life', *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (2001): 23.
- 9 This is not unlike the process that early exploiters like Dwain Esper used in order to circumvent moral and legal censors; for examples, claiming a sex hygiene film as an educational tool to excuse its nudity and frank sexual discussion.
- 10 Nanda Herbermann, *The Blessed Abyss: Inmate #6582 in Ravensbruck Concentration Prison for Women*, eds Hester Baer and Elizabeth R. Baer, trans. Hester Baer (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 34.
- 11 Elizabeth D. Heineman, 'Sexuality and Nazism: The Double Unspeakable?' *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1/2 (January/April 2002): 56–7.
- 12 The Steven Spielberg film *Schindler's List* (1993) uses similar shower scenes as a type of viewer education and remembrance.
- 13 Cynthia J. Miller, 'Exploring Cinema's Sordid Side: The Films of Sonny and Friedman', in *From the Arthouse to the Grindhouse: Highbrow and Lowbrow*

- Transgression in Cinema's First Century*, eds. John Kline and Robert G. Weiner (Plymouth, UK: The Scarecrow Press, 2010), 75–6.
- 14 It should be noted that the aesthetic and character construction of Ilsa brings to mind two other well-known figures: Ilsa Lund of *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942) and Ilsa Koch, the notorious 'Bitch of Buchenwald'. The association with Lund provides a cinematic grounding for a portion of the aesthetic of Edmond's Ilsa. Ilsa Koch, the wife of the commandant of the Buchenwald concentration camp, has earned a historical reputation for sexual torture and murder, providing a template for *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS*.
 - 15 Susan Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism' in *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), 85.
 - 16 Lynn Rapaport, 'Holocaust Pornography: Profaning the Sacred in *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS*', *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 22, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 61.
 - 17 Susan Aronstein, 'Not Exactly a Knight': Arthurian Narrative and Recuperative Politics in the 'Indiana Jones' Trilogy', *Cinema Journal* 34, no. 4 (Summer 1995): 17.
 - 18 This is reinforced in *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (Steven Spielberg, 2008) when the Nazis are replaced by Communists and aliens, to similar effect.
 - 19 *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, directed by Steven Spielberg (1989; Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2003), DVD.
 - 20 Ibid.
 - 21 Leila J. Rupp, 'Mother of the "Volk": The Image of Women in Nazi Ideology', *Signs* 3, no. 2 (Winter 1977): 363.
 - 22 Rupp, 'Mother of the "Volk"', 363.
 - 23 *The Night Porter*, like Brass's *Salon Kitty*, is Nazisploitation by way of the art house. Both films make an attempt at more traditional filmic aesthetics, as demonstrated by larger budgets, well-known actors and intricate sets.
 - 24 Teresa de Lauretis, 'Cavani's *Night Porter*: A Woman's Film?' *Film Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (1976/77): 37.
 - 25 Marcus Stiglegger, 'Sadiconazista: Stereotypisierung des Holocaust im Exploitationkino', translated by Kathrin Zeitz and Alicia Kozma, *Ikonen: Magazin für Kunst, Kultur und Lebensart* (January 2001), accessed December 30, 2009, ikonenmagazin.de/artikel/sadiconazista.htm.

4

Reproducing the Fourth Reich: Cloning, Nazisploitation and Revival of the Repressed

ELIZABETH BRIDGES

ALTHOUGH THE WORD 'CLONE' dates back to at least the early twentieth century, the term was first used in relation to human reproduction in 1963 by the British biologist J. B. S. Haldane.¹ As public awareness of and suspicion surrounding cloning increased over the following decade, the concept spawned an entire science fiction subgenre, which coincided with the heyday of 'canonical' Nazisploitation films such as *Love Camp 7* (1968), *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (1974) and *The Gestapo's Last Orgy* a.k.a. *SS Hell Camp* (1977). While Nazi-themed sexploitation films like these tend to dominate scholarly discussion on this topic, elements of Nazisploitation began to appear concurrently in other film subgenres. These included a mini-invasion of Nazi zombie films such as *Shock Waves* (1977), *Night of the SS Zombies* (1981) and *Zombie Lake* (1981); revenge fantasy war movies like *Hornets' Nest* (1970) and *Hell River* (1974) that inspired Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (2009); as well as a few outliers such as the Nazi-blaxploitation film *The Black Gestapo* (1975)² and the Nazi-biker film *Hell's Bloody Devils* (1970). The historical confluence of public speculation about cloning³ and the popularity of exploitation cinema — and Nazisploitation in particular — combined in the form of the Nazi clone narrative, a subset of the spate of 1970s clone-themed films such as *The Clones* (1973), *The*

Clonus Horror (1979, remade as *The Island* in 2005), *The Darker Side of Terror* (1979) and in a slightly different vein *The Stepford Wives* (1975, remade in 2004 under the same title).

In part, the link between clone stories and associations with Nazism finds its origins in the history of Nazi science. Specifically, the historical reality of Nazi eugenic practices makes a fictional Nazi cloning scenario seem apropos. Yet the appearance of these texts in the 1970s is also inextricably tied to that decade's unique cinematic and social realities. The first Nazi clone story appeared in 1961 with the Marvel Hitler-clone supervillain 'Hate-Monger',⁴ who was only referred to as such in later appearances, after the word 'clone' had gained traction in public discourse with Haldane's 1963 usage of the term. This comic character and storyline appeared most prominently in the late 1970s, again concurrent with the wave of Italian Nazisploitation films that Marcus Stiglegger terms *sadiconazista*.⁵ More prominently, the Hitler clone motif cropped up in the film *The Lucifer Complex*⁶ (1978), and there was even a Hitler clone-themed episode of TV's *Wonder Woman*, entitled 'Anschluss '77'.⁷ However, *The Boys from Brazil* (1978) remains far and away the best-known filmic example of this motif.⁸ The film starred respected A-list actors Gregory Peck and Lawrence Olivier and its director Franklin Schaffner was known for his work on *Planet of the Apes* (1968) and *Patton* (1970). Nevertheless, *The Boys from Brazil* incorporated aesthetic and narrative strategies that borrow heavily from genre film and B-movie sensibilities. Although I will discuss the debts the film owes to Nazisploitation in more detail below, it is worth noting here that, as Joan Hawkins has extensively discussed, the line between exploitation, art and mainstream cinema can be difficult to draw.⁹ The marketing and reception of *The Boys from Brazil* certainly blurred these lines, for instance, by borrowing a common marketing technique from exploitation cinema: a sensationalist trailer that overemphasized the film's relatively few violent and scary moments as though it were a horror film, when it could best be categorized as historical melodrama or science fiction.

Regardless of production values and star power, 1970s Nazi clone narratives featured aging Nazis who used genetic technologies to reboot the Third Reich. This and other aspects of the cloning trope, in particular those from *The Boys from Brazil*, have served as a paradigm for more recent Nazi sci-fi stories such as the comic book adaptation and Nazi/Kung Fu movie *Bulletproof Monk* (2003). Likewise, J. C.

Hutchins' popular *Seventh Son* podcast serial (2006–9) has resulted in a trilogy of print novels, the first of which was published in 2009. Yet while these texts traffic in the iconography of Nazism, they do so for reasons which differ from those of the typical 1970s Nazi sexploitation film. They also use these tropes to highlight or play on prevailing fears surrounding the possible use and abuse of very real, near-future genetic technologies. In the following, I situate the Nazi clone narrative within the Nazisploitation genre and in the historical context of the late 1970s, drawing parallels that point towards an explanation for these more recent revivals of the Nazi clone theme. Further, I show how the Hitler clone motif more visibly highlights an underlying aspect of many clone narratives, namely that fictional representations of cloning and genetic manipulation have become almost inexorably tied to associations with Nazism, whether directly or indirectly.

Nazisploitation and Genre

While 'classic' Nazisploitation films such as *Ilsa* invariably deal in sadomasochistic sexual imagery, the storylines of many such films also involve gross scientific abuses and cruel (usually sexual) experimentation perpetrated by Nazi characters. These narratives, typically set in concentration camps and/or Nazi brothels, feature a variety of humiliations and horrific tortures often heaped upon female inmates, and they formulaically build up to a climax in which Nazi perpetrators die quite gruesomely. To varying degrees, most of these Nazisploitation films follow the women-in-prison (WIP) model and rely on an exaggerated version of the facts of Nazi science to lend some small measure of historical credence to the wildly sadistic 'experiments' that fill the screen, as in the title card preceding *Ilsa*, which states: 'The film you are about to see is based upon documented fact. The atrocities shown were conducted as 'medical experiments' in special concentration camps throughout Hitler's Third Reich.' The cruelty of the experiments counterbalances the subsequent grisly revenge sequences and offers audiences a possible way to morally justify their own enjoyment of the hideous spectacles onscreen. The highly questionable nature of this appeal to 'historical accuracy' has been discussed more fully by Mikel Koven and Lynn Rapaport,¹⁰ who both include the apparent historical basis for some of the experiments depicted in this and other Nazi-sexploitation films. In short, the Nazi

sexploitation films vaguely refer to the Nazi use of human subjects in experiments involving techniques such as forced sterilization, exposure to extreme conditions such as heat or cold, and responses to extreme interrogation techniques,¹¹ and they intersperse these with invented tortures of a sexual nature.

These texts revive exaggerated Nazi stock characters and reprehensible deeds from a partly imagined past so that audiences can transgressively participate in and, at the same time, repudiate and ultimately reject the inhumane practices depicted onscreen. In so doing, they function analogously to Michel Foucault's 'repressive hypothesis'. Foucault describes this hypothesis vis-à-vis Christian confession, in which sinners must 'fully and deliberately' transform their deeds into discourse for the purpose of 'mastery and detachment' from those deeds.¹² The parallel stresses insistence on 'fully and deliberately' transforming deeds into discourse — in the case of the films, into unflinchingly explicit filmic re-enactments of supposed historical 'facts' — and thereby re-experiencing those deeds, with the moral intent of ridding oneself of the original transgression. However, as Foucault points out, the irony lies in the titillation that results from such explicit confession. With Nazisploitation, in its insistence on 'fully and deliberately' showing exaggerated Nazi transgressions in the most graphic detail possible, audiences simultaneously experience the thrill of those transgressive extremes and, as is often the case in exploitation cinema which encompasses a variety of 'body genres',¹³ the physical revulsion that can result from the extreme nature of these acts.

The 'money shot' of Nazisploitation comes when the perpetrators meet their gruesome comeuppance, which further draws the audience into an intricate mechanics of pleasure with the thinnest veneer of moral justification. While viewers are treated to a variety of transgressive titillations displayed 'fully and deliberately' onscreen, the fact is that these crimes are perpetrated by 'evil' characters, and particularly Nazis, the preferred cinematic embodiment of evil; viewers can detach themselves from these acts, compounded by the additional pleasure of a morally justifiable revenge of equal cruelty. The *Ilsa* title card displays this transaction in text form — literally converting deeds to discourse — in that it purports to reject the historical atrocities depicted in a film clearly aiming to titillate audiences. Mikel Koven calls this aspect of the film 'pseudo-justified horror' and 'historiographic

exploitation'.¹⁴ Audiences can, on some level, justify their enjoyment of the transgressions shown because, unlike the inhuman, ahistorical 'monsters' of 'slasher' or 'cannibal' exploitation films, Nazis in the end deserve whatever they get.

The Boys from Brazil (1978) and Nazi Science

Similar desires for historical revenge motivate Nazi clone narratives, at least in part. But these films also transcend this repetitive cycle of dubious pleasure and historical mimesis; they also engage questions unique to the cloning scenario, due in part to the role of science in the science fiction genre. While science figures only marginally in the sexploitation films, it plays a crucial part in science fiction, a genre also frequently devoted to historical speculation. In the context of cloning, this includes 'what-if' scenarios involving the cloning of everything from dinosaurs to historical figures such as Adolf Hitler.¹⁵ The 1978 film *The Boys from Brazil* details an investigation by renowned 'Nazi hunter' Ezra Lieberman (modeled closely on Simon Wiesenthal), who uncovers a sinister plot by Dr Josef Mengele, the so-called 'Angel of Death' of Auschwitz. Still living in a remote jungle region of Paraguay,¹⁶ Mengele plans to rekindle the Third Reich by cloning 94 new Hitlers, implanted *in vitro* in host mothers from countries throughout the world. When Mengele's cohorts learn that members of the Young Jewish Defenders¹⁷ have discovered their plan, the aging Nazis terminate the project. Against their wishes, Mengele continues it by setting out to create single-handedly family conditions similar to those experienced by Hitler himself; in other words, he kills the boys' fathers at a precise point in their childhoods. Lieberman pursues Mengele in an international cat-and-mouse game, hoping to stop the assassinations and obtain the list of potential Hitlers. The audience presumes he wishes to do this so that the Young Jewish Defenders can set about eliminating the would-be Hitlers, but in a twist at the end, Lieberman burns the only existing copy of the list, stating that no more innocent children should die.

One question taken up in *The Boys from Brazil* is the perennial false dichotomy of 'nature vs. nurture', a pertinent topic in the context of both cloning and the history of Nazism because, as Martha Kuhlman notes in an article discussing the cloning motif in TV's *The X-Files*, 'Following World War II, behavioral psychology was dominant partially

as a reaction against the racist ideology of the Nazis.¹⁸ In addition to cloning numerous baby Hitlers across the globe, the fictionalized Mengele in *The Boys from Brazil* attempts to equalize the ‘nurture’ experience of his young guinea pigs through the elimination of their fathers, and, he presumes, creating optimal conditions for the development of at least one new Führer among them. In the case of Nazi clones, and those of Hitler specifically, it is not so much a reincarnation as an artificially created identical twin. The identical twin can serve, suggests famed evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in relation to cloning more generally, as the perfect hypothetical laboratory for the nature/nurture question.¹⁹ *The Boys from Brazil* ambivalently answers this question when, in one of the final scenes, mini-Hitler Bobby Wheelock has the opportunity to sic his Doberman Pinschers on Lieberman at Mengele’s behest. He chooses instead to have them attack Mengele when he learns that Mengele has just dispatched his father, and the boy appears to enjoy watching his dogs maul the doctor.²⁰ In the logic of the film, even though they are exact copies of the Führer, the boys merely possess the potential to commit cruel acts, including the ambivalent motive ascribed to Bobby in response to his father’s death. Levin’s novel leaves the story open-ended. It closes with one of the Hitler clones drawing a picture of himself being admired by huge crowds, Führer style.²¹ Similarly, the film ends with Bobby eerily smiling as he develops pictures of Mengele’s bloody corpse following the dog attack.

Nazis and Zombies and Clones! Oh, My!

In a certain sense, all narratives that deal with Nazism revive Hitler and his troops in order to vanquish them again. However, stories set after World War II must develop strategies to literally revive Nazis, and beyond simple genre considerations, they must rely more heavily on depictions of science than would be the case in standard Nazisploitation fare. The murky history of Nazi scientific aims²² also allows audiences of these texts to suspend disbelief in the face of extrapolations from historical and scientific fact. These extrapolations range from the somewhat plausible (e.g. space flight,²³ cloning) to the more fantastic (e.g. zombie SS super-soldiers). In such texts, a mad scientist modeled on Josef Mengele typically plays a decisive role. For instance, a ‘Dr von Klemper’ runs the nefarious genetics lab that

produces a Hitler clone in the episode 'Anschluss '77' of TV's *Wonder Woman*. In *The Lucifer Complex* (1978), fanatical Nazi doctors work to duplicate and replace numerous world leaders with Nazi-controlled clones, and these lookalikes are led by none other than a clone of Hitler himself.²⁴

The clone plot, like the 'science' featured in Nazi sexploitation, does not necessarily play on actual historical fact, grisly though the details may be. Rather, it relies on believable rumors of nasty goings-on in Nazi labs, of the sort that generated the 'widespread and *plausible* word-of-mouth fear' described, for instance, in Holocaust survivor testimonies.²⁵ In other cases, depictions of the 'medical experimentation' may be 'composites' of historical reality — Jewish doctors working in the camp infirmaries, specious medical experimentation, sexual assaults on women prisoners — composites which 'for dramatic purposes', as the *Ilsa* title card reads, simplify the historical complexities of the Third Reich.²⁶

The notion of plausibility and whiffs of 'historical reality' fuel an audience's ability to suspend disbelief where depictions of Nazi scientific exploits are concerned. In the case of science fiction, as an expressly speculative genre, historicity becomes even more flexible, albeit in a different way, because it deals inherently with alternative timelines and 'what if?' scenarios.²⁷ Science fiction author Robert A. Heinlein defined the genre as 'realistic speculation about possible future events, based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on a thorough understanding of the nature and significance of the scientific method.'²⁸ With Mengele in particular as fictional antagonist, well known for his cruel and unethical experimentation on twins, the possibility of his fictional involvement with cloning certainly meets all the criteria of sci-fi extrapolation from real events.²⁹

In both theme and genre, the Nazi clone narrative shares significantly more with zombie scenarios than with the purportedly scientific motivation for the 'experiments' in the Nazi sexploitation films. In the sense that the clone narratives also feature aging male Nazis wishing to bring about a Fourth Reich through some alternative form of reproduction, they share much with the Nazi zombie invasion in *Shock Waves*, for example. As is often the case with zombies, scientific means, not supernatural ones, produce the new Nazis or revive old ones. As the commander of the *Totenkorps* (Peter Cushing) explains in *Shock Waves*,

they are 'neither dead, nor alive, but somewhere in between', and therefore, presumably, still functional well into the 1970s.³⁰ However, similarities between the clone and zombie narratives end where more specific genre considerations begin. Typically, the scientific basis for producing zombies is a minor focus, while the real interest for horror viewers lies in zombie mayhem rather than scientific accuracy. By contrast, science fiction audiences often criticize sci-fi texts in terms of the unbreakable 'rules' of the genre, which is to say, how accurately they do or do not adhere to or plausibly build on known scientific, historical and other 'real-world' concepts.³¹ As such, zombies tend to fall more into the realm of the fantastic, and thus represent 'an irruption of the inadmissible within the changeless, everyday legality' of natural (i.e. non-fantastic) experience.³² Clone narratives might be 'inadmissible' in the sense that one major philosophical objection to cloning concerns the 'unnatural' means of their (re)production, and attendant associations of unauthorized God-playing in the name of science. However, they must nevertheless conform to or at least hint at certain scientific concepts already in place in the real world. An example of such adherence to sci-fi genre rules comes in 'Anschluss '77'. Wonder Woman's alter ego, intelligence agent Diana Prince, discovers one of Dr Stern's medical texts about the abilities of lizards to regenerate their severed tails.³³ The audience is left to connect the dots between well-known biological facts concerning lizards and how such knowledge could contribute to the development of cloning. Diana's sidekick Agent Steve Trevor similarly refers to the fact that European and American scientists succeeded in cloning individual cells 'just last year'.³⁴ Even in a comic-based series featuring an Amazon heroine who wields a 'lasso of truth' and bullet-deflecting bracelets, certain real-world elements remain intact when the story intersects with actual scientific fact.

Another major point of departure between zombies and clones, aside from the genre-linked conventions of fantasy versus scientific realism, is their relationship to 'life'. In *Shock Waves* and the more recent Norwegian production *Død Snø* (*Dead Snow*, 2009), the Nazi zombies in question originated in the Nazi period, and as such literally revive a past that should by all rights remain dead. While other essays in this volume address aspects of the Nazi zombie phenomenon, it deserves mention here because of its stark contrast to the cloning scenario. Zombies, as fantastic characters, represent the more 'primitive' fears

associated with death, addressed by Sigmund Freud in his essay ‘The Uncanny’:

There is scarcely any other matter [...] upon which our thoughts and feelings have changed so little since the very earliest times [...]. Since almost all of us still think as savages do on this topic, it is no matter of surprise that the primitive fear of the dead is still so strong within us and always ready to come to the surface on the slightest provocation. Most likely our fear still implies the old belief that the dead man becomes the enemy of his survivor and seeks to carry him off to share his new life with him.³⁵

In contrast, the fear engendered by clones stems partly from the very real prospect that human cloning could eventually become commonplace. Instead of ‘living dead’, clones are simply living, breathing human beings who share identical genes with their ‘original’. And unlike zombies, which are technically already dead and can therefore be re-killed indiscriminately without moral equivocation, clones are human and therefore have rights, even the Hitler clones in *The Boys from Brazil*. Lieberman demonstrates this notion of clones as individuals when he chooses to burn the list that might be used to target them for death.

Nazisploitation and *The Boys from Brazil*

Considering the vast genre-linked differences between the ‘classics’ of the Nazisploitation genre, as well as the fantastic elements in the Nazi zombie films, can we even consider a film like *The Boys from Brazil* — with its award-winning cast and high production values — alongside *Ilsa* or *Shock Waves*? In other words, to what degree does *The Boys from Brazil* traffic in the iconography of Nazism to spur potentially lurid interest among viewers? The answer depends largely on how one defines Nazisploitation. If we view the ‘sploitation’ aspect of Nazisploitation exclusively in the context of transgressive sexuality ‘placed under the sign of Nazism’, as Susan Sontag terms it in her essay ‘Fascinating Fascism’, then entries from other genres (zombie movies, science fiction) have no place in the discussion.³⁶ However, in the tradition of exploitation cinema, virtually any ‘fascinating’³⁷ subject matter — sexual or otherwise — is exploitable through over-the-top sensationalism and

overstated advertising that appeals on a purely affective level. If we view *The Boys from Brazil*, and more specifically its trailer, through this lens, it becomes easier to examine the film in the context of Nazisploitation. Indeed, in his history of exploitation cinema, Eric Schaefer argues that a large part of the 'exploitation' derives from over-the-top marketing practices that often misrepresent the content of films by emphasizing only their most sensational aspects.³⁸

The most notable image in the *Boys from Brazil* trailer³⁹ is the repetition of one particular moment from the relatively brief Doberman attack at the end of the film. This low-angle shot of a vicious dog, lunging with teeth prominently bared, appears six times during the two-minute trailer, at least twice in negative exposure, giving the dog an eerie, demonic appearance. Yet, despite this sixfold emphasis, the trailer does not explain what, if anything, the dog has to do with the film. Other non sequiturs, such as a man rammed by a bull and a creepy jester puppet answering a phone, also figure in the trailer. It strongly emphasizes these inexplicable yet disturbing scenes from the film, but it also underscores other horror-inflected moments that pertain more directly to the plot. One sees, for instance, a backlit Mengele in a foreboding low-angle shot as he stands at the top of a darkened basement staircase and shuts the door. The trailer also features moments from several murders, unexplained flashlights piercing the darkness of a ransacked residence, and almost all startling 'jump-out' moments in the entire film. The voiceover declares ominously, 'We cannot tell you who the boys from Brazil are, only that they are not science fiction', and further, 'the time is the present, the people exist, and the threat is real.' Then as the trailer ends, the voice declares, 'Look for the boys from Brazil before they look for you.' Having seen this trailer, an otherwise uninformed viewer would know only that the film has something to do with Nazis in the present day, stars famous actors, and involves some combination of horror and science fiction (except that it is 'not science fiction' because, after all, 'the threat is real', whatever it may be).

Although many studios are guilty of showing only the most sensational moments of a film in the trailer and in some cases misleading audiences as to a film's nature or even genre, this is particularly true of exploitation cinema. This tendency is demonstrated in certain 'fake trailers' by famous cult directors, such as Rob Zombie, whose ad for the nonexistent *Werewolf Women of the SS* accompanies Quentin

Tarantino's *Grindhouse* (2007) double feature. Indeed, these invented trailers only slightly exaggerate the style of the original previews to which they are indebted.⁴⁰

Despite the misleading trailer to *The Boys from Brazil*, as a big-budget film with well-known stars and an award winning director, the film itself could never be mistaken for exploitation cinema. Yet at the dawn of the 1970s, prestige features began to lose money while genre-oriented and exploitation films far out-earned their budgets.⁴¹ Meanwhile, as the decade progressed, Hollywood became increasingly dominated by auteur directors like Francis Ford Coppola (*The Godfather*, 1972) and Martin Scorsese (*Taxi Driver*, 1976), who got their proverbial feet in the Hollywood door working for infamous exploitation producer/director Roger Corman. Similarly, Steven Spielberg (*Jaws*, 1975; *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, 1977) and William Friedkin (*The Exorcist*, 1973) got their start in the populist medium of television and would go on to reinvent genre cinema for the 1970s and beyond.⁴² In other words, the most lucrative filmmakers of the late 1970s came from 'low-brow' backgrounds and worked in popular idioms. Consequently, it made sense to try and cash in on this boom in genre and exploitation cinema, even with a 'serious' film. In any case, a film that asks, 'What if they tried to clone Hitler?' comes across as rather sensationalist. Such is the case despite any air of contemporaneous realism that the trailer emphasizes alongside its overstated horror elements.

Popular reception of the film, as evidenced by a prominent 1978 review in *Time*, seems to have recognized the filmmakers' motives. Richard Schickel's wittily titled assessment 'Cloning Around', suggests that the film takes itself far too seriously given the subject matter.⁴³ Relating *The Boys from Brazil* to exploitation cinema, he notes: '[I]n the end the self-conscious importance of the film produces a rather queasy feeling, for really this story is no more than a crude exploitation — decked out with our latest scientific finery — of what amounts to a penny dreadful fantasy.'⁴⁴ He then highlights an aspect common to all forms of Nazisploitation, both sexploitation and otherwise: namely that, in the 1970s as well as today, Nazis make the perfect cinema villains. Combined with the inherently theatrical elements of fascism, the over-the-top legacy of Nazis as perpetrators of some of the most extreme violence in history makes almost any cinematic fantasy about them seem on some level plausible. As Caroline Picart and David Frank sum up in *Frames of Evil: The Holocaust as Horror in American Film*,

‘Despite the variety of genres in which Holocaust and horror themes merge, the face of the monstrous after World War II, particularly for American audiences, is the face of the Nazi.’⁴⁵

Another aspect of exploitation cinema implicit in Schickel’s reference to the common denominator of permissible hatred towards Nazis is the mass affective appeal of both fascism and exploitation cinema. As Susan Sontag pointed out in her discussion of Leni Riefenstahl’s films and photography, fascist aesthetics evoke a strong affective response.⁴⁶ Ultimately, it is also the affective realm that is ‘exploited’ by exploitation cinema, a genre that utilizes sensationalism precisely to evoke a sensory experience of sexual excitement, fear, revulsion, wonder, horror, astonishment, or ideally some mix of these potent emotions, all of which register in very specific and undeniable bodily responses. Nazis, cinematic or real, have tended to evoke such strong reactions in viewers, and as such they make attractive cinematic subjects.

The Cloning Debate and the Nazi Uncanny

By discussing the contemporary cloning debate in the context of its relationship to Nazi Germany, I am not suggesting that Hitler’s rise in 1933 was the founding moment of eugenic thought and practice. However, as shown here, many contemporary treatments of cloning in popular culture and academic discourse feature Nazism as a point of reference. In that sense, cloning is inherently a German issue, or at least one that touches on Germany’s history. It is thus no wonder that American texts treating this topic might deal in Nazi iconography and historical references.

Contemporary critics of cloning and genetic engineering — particularly philosopher Jürgen Habermas,⁴⁷ and more recently Michael Sandel⁴⁸ — see the current trajectory of increasingly complex technologies (current processes like embryonic preimplantation diagnosis and sex selection, or near-future developments like human cloning and full-scale genetic manipulation) as a slippery slope leading almost inevitably to dangerous political and social misuses. Indeed, while many mainstream scientists, as well as philosophers like Peter Sloterdijk,⁴⁹ view cloning and genetic engineering as neutral or even positive, opponents charge that this understanding hinges on the same logic deployed under National Socialism to justify a spectrum of

practices that included both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ eugenics. And though perhaps the idea that Habermas calls ‘liberal eugenics’ is not directly motivated by racial concerns today, the conscious selection of the ‘fittest’ genes and/or embryos swings dangerously close to a tacit acceptance of something like the ideology promoted by the Nazis. As Dorothy Nelkin and M. Susan Lindee point out, eugenic thought reached its ‘ultimate expression in the eugenic policies of Nazi Germany’,⁵⁰ and it is therefore no wonder that pop culture must contend with this connection. And given the explosive terms of the real-world debate surrounding cloning and its relationship to past and possible future fascist aims, discussions of cloning can become heated and enter the affective realm rather quickly, even among sober philosophers.

With this contemporary debate and the sensational nature of Nazi depictions, the affective aspect of exploitation cinema functions doubly in relation to Nazisploitation texts that feature cloning. As Leni Riefenstahl made visible in *Triumph des Willens* (*Triumph of the Will*, 1935)⁵¹ Nazism itself relied heavily on the exploitation of emotion. Its popular appeal owed significantly to the theatrics of power that the Nazis employed through massive, carefully staged public events. Thus, due to the theatrical and emotionally exploitative elements always already present in Nazism’s self-representation, texts that engage the Nazi clone motif play on a vast network of visual memory to multiply the impact of their sensational aims. Typically, European and Anglo-American film audiences have had exposure to documentary footage of Nazi soldiers arranged in precise rows by the hundreds, or vast crowds at Nazi rallies shouting ‘Heil, Hitler!’ and presenting the Nazi salute in unison. For example, images like the cloned armies of Stormtroopers in *Star Wars* (1977) evoke this association and mesh well with popular History Channel footage of audiences at Nazi-staged mass events.

In a sense, then, Nazisploitation itself is redundant, an exploitation of exploitation, rendering a heightened version of the theatricality and uncanniness inherent within its very subject matter. Furthermore, the Nazi clone motif, as a product of post-World War II culture, presents a heightened version of elements already present in clone narratives more generally; in addition to Riefenstahl-inspired visual memory, clones evoke the more general uncanniness of Freud’s *Doppelgänger*, the return of the monster thought to be repressed: ‘When all is said

and done, the quality of uncanniness can only come from the fact of the “double” being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since surmounted — a stage, incidentally, at which it wore a more friendly aspect. The ‘double’ has become a thing of terror, just as, after the collapse of their religion, the gods turned into demons.⁵² The motif of the Hitler clone, as featured in *The Boys from Brazil* and ‘Anschluss ’77’, stages the return of a ‘monster’ thought to be vanquished. As with many texts dealing with the legacy of Nazism, the Hitler clone motif conveys the underlying theme of ‘never again’, though here the ‘again’ is quite literal.

Return of the Hitler Clones

In the case of the Hitler clone motif, the texts do not depict a nameless mass of blank-faced Stormtroopers, but rather a clone of the Führer himself. Presumably the cloned Hitler would have free will and, as in *The Boys from Brazil*, his maker could only create conditions in which he might fulfill his intended destiny. Yet the idea of an ‘intended destiny’ already limits certain aspects of the cloned individual’s life if we follow the reasoning of Jürgen Habermas in his 1998 *Süddeutsche Zeitung* article, ‘Sklavenherrschaft der Gene: Moralische Grenzen des Fortschritts’ (Enslavement of the gene: moral limits of progress). In this article, Habermas frequently refers to a ‘we’, whose genes are a product of *Schicksal* (fate) versus ‘they’, the products of genetic manipulation.⁵³ According to Habermas, ‘we’ have the opportunity to discover our own purpose and deal with basic questions of our own existence, whereas the clone, a product of someone else’s designs and intentions, does not fully have this opportunity. While we all possess certain inherited characteristics, Habermas reasons, these qualities were not determined by someone else, and we are therefore not subject to anyone else in the same way that the clone would be. In the case of the 94 mini-Hitlers in *The Boys from Brazil*, their intended purpose is determined by the fictionalized Josef Mengele. In a certain sense, then, the Hitler clones have some qualities in common with the Emperor’s Stormtroopers or the cloned babies of Aldous Huxley’s dystopic *Brave New World*. The real ‘Führer’ is Mengele.

The mad doctor who wishes to reboot the Third Reich through genetic manipulation (or other biotech interventions) appears in most Nazi clone narratives that I have come across so far. Besides

the fictionalized Mengele in *The Boys from Brazil*, we find Dr Stern in 'Anschluss '77' and Dr Vogel in *The Lucifer Complex* (1978). These latter two characters are based loosely on Mengele, and more recent incarnations of the Hitler clone motif continue to use this stock character. In the *Seventh Son* trilogy of podcast novels by J. C. Hutchins,⁵⁴ the ancient Dr Klaus Bregner continues his postwar work in the US in a secret underground genetics lab. He has developed a method of cloning and the ability to download memories into the new body, so he clones a younger version of himself and downloads his consciousness into it. He plans to place further copies of his consciousness into the bodies of various world leaders, and the seven 'inferior' subjects of his first cloning experiment unite to stop him. The 2003 film *Bulletproof Monk* features a nonagenarian Nazi in a wheelchair who uses improbable brain scan technology to locate an ancient Tibetan scroll that will give him back his youth. His regained youth will allow him to continue his experiments leading to a Fourth Reich. The 2003 Mexican film *El Clon de Hitler* tells the story of three Hitler daughters who clone the Führer, again in a bid to bring about a Fourth Reich.⁵⁵ In the 2010 novel *The Dragon Factory* by Jonathan Maberry, an evil scientist named Cyrus Jakoby, accompanied by his platinum blonde clone children and his German assistant Otto Wriths,⁵⁶ works to develop and disseminate a virus designed to wipe out all 'non-Aryan' people. Jakoby sees his work as a direct continuation of Mengele's.⁵⁷ These texts all reference Mengele and in some way utilize genetics to revive either Hitler or the mad scientist who serves as Hitler's stand-in. A common thread is the 'fountain of youth' device in which the aging Nazi is reborn through cloning or some other means. However preposterous, these stories address a serious possibility also discussed by contemporary philosophers and scientists, namely that Nazi-style eugenics may not stay dormant in the past.

As in Nazisploitation more generally, the Nazi clone motif saw its original heyday in the mid to late 1970s and has undergone something of a renaissance in the last few years. Why Nazi clones, and why now? In the 1970s, the idea of cloning had just reached public consciousness, and in the larger cultural sphere, questions of reproduction had become major concerns: abortion rights, the women's movement and shifts in traditional family structures such as rising divorce rates. Ambivalence surrounding the traditional family — and specifically the role of children and motherhood — found expression

in ‘devil child’ movies like *It’s Alive* (1974, remade in 2008 under the same title) and *The Omen* (1976, remade in 2006, also under the same title). *The Boys from Brazil* touches on this motif at certain moments, as in the final shots of ‘devil child’ Bobby Wheelock eerily absorbed in his grisly photography project. At the same time, awareness of the Holocaust and attendant questions concerning the proper carrying out of justice were just starting to enter the wider public consciousness. For instance, Simon Wiesenthal’s *The Sunflower* was first published in 1976. Meanwhile, public qualms surrounding the Vietnam War made Nazis an attractive, unambiguous enemy.

The resurgence of the Nazi clone in recent years has arisen out of similar circumstances. In a post-9/11 world in which the ‘enemy’ is a faceless terrorist network rather than a particular individual or army, the revival of an unambiguous enemy like the Nazis makes sense. With relatively few original Nazis still alive at this point, cloning serves the narrative twofold: as a ‘fountain of youth’ for reviving original Nazis as well as an efficient and historically and more or less scientifically plausible method of creating new ones. Yet, as the possibility of cloning moves closer to reality than mere sci-fi speculation, contemporary philosophical and scientific discussions of cloning acknowledge the potential abuses suggested by Nazi eugenics in the last century. Real-world developments such as controversies surrounding genetically modified food products have lent this topic an urgency it lacked in the 1970s. These texts extrapolate from current technologies in the tradition of science fiction, which has always served as a laboratory for exploring potential future consequences of current events. Although no Dr Mengele lurks in the jungles of South America plotting a revival of the Third Reich, as the trailer from *The Boys from Brazil* states, ‘the time is the present [...] and the threat is real’. Cloning poses challenges that we will have to address in the coming years. Even if the Hitler clone narrative presents a scientifically implausible worst-case scenario, historical precedent nonetheless requires us to take the warning seriously.

Notes

- 1 J. B. S. Haldane, ‘Biological Possibilities for the Human Species of the Next Ten-Thousand Years’, in *Man and His Future*, ed. Gordon Wolstenholme (New York: Little, Brown, 1963), 337–61. In the novel *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley also describes a process analogous to cloning.
- 2 Movie tagline: ‘Meet the New Master Race’. This film is premised on a

- fictionalized Black Panther-like group that goes to fascist extremes, to the point of adopting Nazi iconography and rhetoric.
- 3 For the purposes of this essay, ‘cloning’ will be defined as any deliberate human intervention that results in a genetic duplicate of an organism, human or otherwise. This definition encompasses all cloning techniques, from current to as yet untested theoretical technologies, real or fictional.
 - 4 Jack Kirby, *Fantastic Four* 1, no. 21 (December 1963), Marvel Comics.
 - 5 Marcus Stiglegger, *Sadiconazista: Faschismus und Sexualität im Film* (St. Augustin: Gardez!, 1999).
 - 6 Movie tagline: ‘The most terrifying plot ever imagined...takeover by clones!’ A group of Nazi doctors plot world domination by replacing world leaders with lookalike brainwashed clones. A lone UN employee (Robert Vaughn) learns of the plan and is the only one who can save the world. According to the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com), it was made in 1976 and was intended as a feature film but went directly to television in 1978.
 - 7 The episode relates to Wonder Woman’s history as a patriotic DC comic character who first appeared in the 1940s. We see her ‘memories’ in the form of flashbacks that may well consist of uncredited footage from *Triumph of the Will*. Another episode of possible Nazisploitation interest is the Season 1 episode ‘Fausta, the Nazi Wonder Woman’, a flashback episode wherein Wonder Woman battles an old World War II-era foe. Fausta has a distinctly Ilsa-like appearance and demeanor, and the episode includes an instance of Wonder Woman in rope/chain bondage administered by Fausta.
 - 8 Far more common than fictional representations of Hitler clones are references to this idea in debates regarding the ethics of cloning. An Internet search with the terms ‘cloning’ and ‘Hitler’ reveals numerous articles and informal forum posts in which arguments inevitably mention Hitler and vaguely reference the Nazi eugenics program. Often, the attendant question, ‘What if they cloned Hitler?’ comes up in this context.
 - 9 Joan Hawkins, *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 4.
 - 10 Mikel Koven, ‘The Film You Are About to See Is Based on Documented Fact’: Italian Nazi Sexploitation Cinema’, in *Alternative Europe: Eurotrash and Exploitation Cinema since 1945*, eds Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik (London: Wallflower, 2004), 27–30. See also Lynn Rapaport, ‘Holocaust Pornography: Profaning the Sacred in *Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS*’, *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 22, no. 1 (2003): 64–5.
 - 11 The realities of Nazi science were also addressed as part of the recent US Holocaust Museum exhibit ‘Deadly Medicine’, *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Website*, accessed 27 December 2010. www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/deadlymedicine/.
 - 12 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, An Introduction: Part I*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978), 23.
 - 13 Linda Williams, ‘Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess’, *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1991): 2.
 - 14 Koven, ‘“The Film You Are About to See”’, 25–6.
 - 15 Historians have addressed the ‘what-if’ question involving the Third Reich. For example, see Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made: Alternate Histories and the Memory of Nazism* (New York: Cambridge University Press,

- 2005).
- 16 In fact, Mengele *was* still alive and living in Paraguay at the time this film was made. He died in 1979.
 - 17 This group was probably modeled on the Jewish Defense League, a group particularly active in the late 1970s.
 - 18 Martha Kuhlman, 'The Uncanny Clone: *The X-Files*, Popular Culture, and Cloning', *Studies in Popular Culture* 26, no. 3 (2004): 78–9.
 - 19 Richard Dawkins, 'What's Wrong with Cloning?' *Clones and Clones: Facts and Fantasies about Human Cloning*, eds, Martha Nussbaum and Cass R. Sunstein (New York: Norton, 1998), 55.
 - 20 *The Boys from Brazil*, directed by Frank J. Schaffner (1978; USA: Lions Gate Entertainment, 2009), DVD.
 - 21 Ira Levin, *The Boys from Brazil* (New York: Random House, 1976), 312.
 - 22 I refer here to the 'murky' history of Nazi science in order to differentiate between real scientific advances that occurred under the Nazis (e.g., in rocketry, jet technology, radar technology, cryptography etc.) and unsubstantiated rumors of their involvement in more far-fetched goals, such as a Nazi atomic bomb and electromagnetic propulsion. In the arena of genetics, the idea of Nazi cloning makes for plausible science fiction based on the Nazi history of experimentation involving twins, sterilization and the infamous Lebensborn homes that served as a literal breeding ground for 'genetically pure' children of SS officers. See Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors* (New York: Basic Books, 1986) for details.
 - 23 At the time of this writing, a trailer for an as yet unfinished film *Iron Sky* can be viewed on YouTube. This Finnish/German/Australian production plays on one-time rumors of a would-be Nazi space program, most likely fueled by the very real advances in rocketry under Hitler. The premise is that a Nazi space programme continued in Antarctica after World War II and resulted in a Nazi base on the moon. Tagline: 'In 1945, the Nazis went to the moon. In 2018, they are coming back'.
 - 24 *The Lucifer Complex*, directed by Kenneth Hartford and David L. Hewitt (1978; USA: Miracle Pictures, 2005), DVD.
 - 25 Koven, "'The Film You Are About to See'", 27.
 - 26 *Ibid.*, 30.
 - 27 For an in-depth historical perspective on the value of what-if scenarios, see Gavriel Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made* (see note 15 above). See also Niall Ferguson, *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).
 - 28 Robert A. Heinlein, 'Science Fiction: Its Nature, Faults, and Virtues', in *Turning Points: Essays on the Art of Science Fiction*, ed. Damon Knight, 3-28 (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 9.
 - 29 Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*.
 - 30 *Shock Waves*, directed by Ken Wiederhorn (1977; USA: Image Entertainment, 2002), DVD.
 - 31 Orson Scott Card, *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books, 1990), 61. Renowned sci-fi author, critic and editor Orson Scott Card explains the need for 'rules' that carefully extrapolate from real-world, contemporary hard science in order to make a science fiction story plausible. According to him, once an author establishes the 'rulebook' for his or her speculative universe, rigorous adherence to these

- rules wins the trust of sci-fi audiences.
- 32 Roger Caillois, quoted in Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 26.
 - 33 *Wonder Woman*, 'Anschluss '77', Episode no. 20, Season 2, first broadcast September 23, 1977 by ABC, directed by Alan Crosland.
 - 34 The fictional Agent Trevor may well have been referring to the real discovery detailed in Kevin Struhl and R. W. Davis, 'Genetic Selections and the Cloning of Prokaryotic and Eukaryotic Genes', Symposium of Molecular and Cellular Biology, Los Angeles, UCLA, 1976.
 - 35 Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XVII (1917–1919)*, eds James Strachey et al. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 241–2.
 - 36 Susan Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism', in *Under the Sign of Saturn*, 73–105 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), 102.
 - 37 This is especially so if we consider the origin of 'fascination' which relates to spell-casting or enchantment, meant to transform people's perception and/or influence them in a particular direction, as in a love spell. Both exploitation cinema and fascism have this element to them, in that both attempt to 'cast a spell' on audiences by exciting the emotions.
 - 38 Eric Schaefer, *'Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!': A History of Exploitation Films, 1919–1959* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 111.
 - 39 The *Boys from Brazil* trailer is (as of January 14, 2011) viewable on the Turner Classic Movies website at www.tcm.com.
 - 40 *Grindhouse (Planet Terror and Death Proof)*, directed by Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez. (2007; USA: The Weinstein Company, 2007), DVD.
 - 41 Maitland McDonagh, 'The Exploitation Generation, Or: How Marginal Movies Came in from the Cold', in *The Last Great American Picture Show: New Hollywood Cinema in the 1970s*, eds, Thomas Elsassner, Alexander Horwath, and Noel King, 107–30 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2004), 107.
 - 42 *Ibid.*, 113–14.
 - 43 Richard Schickel, 'Cinema: Cloning Around', *Time*, October 9, 1978, 100–1.
 - 44 *Ibid.*, 101.
 - 45 Caroline Picart and David A. Frank, eds, *Frames of Evil: The Holocaust as Horror in American Film* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), 28.
 - 46 Susan Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism', 75–81.
 - 47 Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, trans. Hella Beister, Max Pensky and William Rehg (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).
 - 48 Michael J. Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
 - 49 Peter Sloterdijk, *Regeln für den Menschenpark: Ein Antwortschreiben zu Heideggers Brief über den Humanismus*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999.
 - 50 Susan M. Lindee and Dorothy Nelkin, *The DNA Mystique: The Gene as Cultural Icon* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1995), 32.
 - 51 *Triumph of the Will*, directed by Leni Riefenstahl (1934; USA: Synapse Films, 2006), DVD.
 - 52 Freud, 'The Uncanny', 236.
 - 53 Jürgen Habermas, 'Sklavenherrschaft der Gene. Moralische Grenzen des

- Fortschritts', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, January 17/18, 1998, 4.
- 54 J. C. Hutchins, 'Seventh Son: Deceit', Podcast. Episode 4: October 3, 2006, accessed December 27, 2010, www.7thsonnovel.com/7th-son-the-beta-version/7th-son-book-2/.
- 55 *El Clon de Hitler*, directed by Christian Gonzalez (2003; USA: DISTRIMAX Distribution, 2006), DVD.
- 56 Presumably he is named in reference to Eduard Wriaths, the chief doctor at Auschwitz.
- 57 Jonathan Maberry, *The Dragon Factory*, (New York: St. Martin's, 2010).

5

Utterly without Redeeming Social Value? 'Nazi Science' Beyond Exploitation Cinema¹

JAMES J. WARD

'I gave you a chance to save yourselves, but you have refused to take it. So be it. Now it is too late.'

'You mean to tell us these things have been underwater all these years?'

— Dialogue from *Shock Waves* (1977)

WHILE SO-CALLED 'EXPLOITATION' FILMS now qualify for serious scholarly study, films of this sort featuring villainous Nazis committing atrocities — 'Nazisploitation' for short — remain suspect in academic circles. Both the ahistoricity of these films and their sensationalistic, sometimes pornographic treatment of subject matter that remains painful and problematic to those still directly connected to it would seem to deny these films any claim to cinematic legitimacy. Here Nazi doctors and scientists, especially if they are 'mad', are much in evidence, second only to sneering SS officers who delight in inflicting punishment on helpless victims. Yet when they congregate with predictably appalling results, as in the Italian releases *SS Experiment Camp* (1976) and *SS Hell Camp* (1977), a positive reaction is guaranteed among a fan base somewhere, however obscure and self-referential it may be.² Any doubt about such an effect is erased by the enduring popularity of one of the 'classics' of its kind, 1974's *Ilsa, She Wolf of*

the SS, which made a career for actress Dyanne Thorne and inspired a string of cheaply made look-alikes.³ Thirty years later, Rob Zombie's faux trailer for *Werewolf Women of the SS*, which deliberately references the *Ilsa* series, was shown as part of the theatrical release of Robert Rodriguez's and Quentin Tarantino's *Grindhouse* (2007) and became even more highly regarded in some quarters than the featured double bill itself.⁴

As exploitation cinema has become a legitimate subject for research, the directors of films once deemed reprehensible, if not worse, have seen their reputations rehabilitated and their work gain currency. Thanks to contemporary technologies of reproduction and distribution, some of these directors now enjoy auteur status.⁵ But Nazi horror and its even more outré cousin, Nazi porn, still inhabit a kind of no-go zone for serious scholars.⁶ As a posting to an online product review site puts it, 'None of these films had any interest in being factually correct. The filmmakers were solely interested in making a few bucks by exploiting 1970s movie audiences' craving for weirder and wilder psycho-sexual delights. These films pushed the boundaries of bad taste to their lowest limit'.⁷ The only exceptions are cases in which a film has been protected by art-house associations established on its initial release, for example Tinto Brass's cinematographically impressive *Salon Kitty* (1976), which borrowed heavily from Luchino Visconti's *La caduta degli dei* (*The Damned*, 1969). Even auteurist works like Lars von Trier's *Zentropa* (1991) and Volker Schlöndorff's *Der Unhold* (*The Ogre*, 1996), both of which skirted the edges of Nazi horror, were also criticized on grounds more commonly applied to their poor relations on the sex-and-torture circuit. One recent commentary on *Zentropa* disparaged it for recycling 'debauched images of Nazi and fascist eroticism, surrealism and decadence'.⁸ We are also reminded that, in the background of von Trier's film, werewolves (the political kind) commit shadowy crimes, recalling 'primitive fears of supernatural beasts', and the protagonist finds himself entrapped in an 'erotic spectacle' from which the only escape is his own suicide.⁹

Generally lacking pretensions to cultural or ideological significance, Nazisploitation films are further stigmatized by their inevitable association with the Third Reich's worst crimes. The appearance of several of the most extreme of these films in digitally re-mastered DVD editions, complete with directorial interviews, outtakes and period publicity materials, has failed to earn them academic credibility. With no other

purpose than to produce a quick financial return, these films' transgressive character may satisfy jaded viewers and catch the attention of itinerant curiosity seekers, but they often lack sufficient historical and ideological substance to attract the interest of film scholars. Loaded with deviant behavior and puerile content (especially in their unedited versions), these films, Graeme Krautheim writes, 'are too elementary even to comprehend the social and cultural damage that they do [...]. Because the films' representations are so absurd and simplistic, they simply cannot withstand an aggressive academic interrogation'.¹⁰

Nazi Science

While less lurid than these early excursions into Nazi horror, recent films continue to link science with the Third Reich's imperialistic and genocidal objectives. The Sci-Fi Channel's *SS Dooms Trooper* (2006), a straight-to-television product, features an Incredible Hulk-like killing machine, while the DVD release *Horrors of War* (2006), a poor man's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), dispatches a squad of GIs behind enemy lines to locate a secret laboratory where the Nazis are building 'abnormally strong' super-soldiers. The low-budget British film *Outpost* (2008) offers a lesson in how unified field theory, or some variation thereof, could be used to create an army of SS soldiers who can de-materialize and re-materialize at will. Reportedly in the works is a film version of the 2005 novel by John Ringo and Tom Kratman, *Watch on the Rhine*, in which a present-day German government uses advanced bio-technology to rejuvenate the Waffen-SS in a last-ditch effort to repel an alien invasion. Also headed for production is *The Fourth Reich*, to be directed by Shaun Robert Smith, in which, deep in the French countryside, British forces discover the remains of a research facility where dead Germans were being re-animated to combat the advancing Allies. 2011 should see the release of *Iron Sky*, a digitally produced 'science fiction comedy' in which the Nazis went to the moon in 1945, and they live on its dark side as they prepare an invasion force that will return to conquer the earth seventy-three years later. The Norwegian horror spoof *Død Snø* (*Dead Snow*, 2009) is available on a Region 1 DVD release and in instant streaming from Netflix, so that North American viewers can see long-frozen SS-men thawing out — with no explanation offered — and harassing an unwitting group of medical school students. Joel Schumacher's *Blood Creek* (2009), which quickly

went to DVD, inserts an occultist Nazi scientist-turned-vampire into a West Virginia backwoods horror scenario, with the inevitable results. A recent (2008) installment of the popular video game *Call of Duty: World at War* includes an 'unlockable' mode where players must fight off a ferocious attack by Wehrmacht zombies. In fact, Nazis are proliferating in computer games, in YouTube postings, in Japanese anime and in iPod and iPhone apps even more rapidly than in films meant for theatrical release, a phenomenon that raises provocative questions about historicity, identification and agency.¹¹

Outside cinema studies, the subject of Nazi science is more soberly considered. Yet here too a note of suspicion lingers, as though research and experimentation conducted during the Third Reich cannot be comprehended by a purely objective analysis. Michael Neufeld's scrupulous recounting of Wernher von Braun's post-World War II career in the American rocket program is a case in point. For all the objectivity Neufeld brings to bear as a historian, he cannot exclude the whiff of Dr Strangelove that clings to his subject, an association that remains to be fully explicated.¹² In the same vein, the titles of such studies as Mark Walker's *Nazi Science: Myth, Truth, and the German Atomic Bomb* (Basic Books, 2001) and John Cornwell's *Hitler's Scientists: Science, War, and the Devil's Pact* (Viking, 2003) suggest how publishers believe they can market this subject matter to more than the standard historians' audience.¹³

This essay, however, does not focus on the successes or failures of scientific research during the Third Reich. The seemingly disposable B- (or lesser-) grade films made in the 1960s and 1970s can tell us instead how the Third Reich was remembered by audiences that should have been appalled by its crimes and were at the same time gripped by the fear of atomic weapons, with which former Nazis might somehow be involved. However total their defeat, the Nazis in these films remain a threat because the experiments they undertook seem to require continual vigilance to insure that others don't attempt them.¹⁴ Even so thoroughly Americanized a real-life Nazi scientist as Wernher von Braun, whose biography became a subject for the Hollywood treatment, was able to decontaminate his wartime past because he had made the 'right choice' in reassigning his talents after 1945.¹⁵ More than a hundred other German scientists who had worked on missile production during the war made the same choice, but none of them was as agile as von Braun in de-Nazifying himself by achieving

a celebrity status that served to wipe his record clean.¹⁶ Nor were the ballistic rocket experts the only German scientists who bartered their skills after 1945 in exchange for American exoneration of their services to the Hitler regime. The full record of these collaborations is still to be exposed, and some individual cases appear to veer perilously close to the kinds of behavior depicted in films showing 'Nazi science' at its worst.¹⁷

Other than the assumption that all Germans are Nazis at heart, Jeff Stone writes, 'the second most popular American stereotype about Germany after Nazism is the idea that Germany is the home of the world's worst mad scientists'.¹⁸ If that were not bad enough, there is another, even more disturbing element. 'Whereas the mad scientist is a tragic figure, with wild eyes and glasses askew', Beverly Crawford and James Martel write, 'the Nazi doctor is a figure of consummate evil who knows what he is doing and does it with disciplined and monomaniacal obsession. An important aspect of the particular sense of horror in films like *Frankenstein* is that the mad scientist is well intentioned but unwittingly creates evil. The Nazi scientist, however, has no such confusion. He knows he is committing evil and does so cold-bloodedly and brutally'.¹⁹ Nazism, science and 'cold-blooded' evil made for a heady mixture, especially in the febrile imaginations of bottom-feeding film makers who saw the chance to cash in on the public's fascination with swastika armbands, black leather overcoats, and 'secret weapons' that might — just might — have won the war.

Mention of the retro-cultural paraphernalia of fascism implies that films of this sort may still seem laughable and deserve being remaindered to one-of-a-kind video stores, online purveyors of the weird and the wacky, and the speciality market that caters to 'extreme' tastes. Yet a case can be made for these films' intrinsic merit, or what could be called their 'redeeming social value', to borrow from another genre — pornography — that remains contested among activists, academics, legislators and anyone else inclined to get into the mix.²⁰ Audience interest in movies about the Nazis shows no signs of abating. Whether in German productions like *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*, 2004) or American productions like *Valkyrie* (2008) and *IngLOURIOUS BASTERDS* (2009), the Third Reich continues to provide an inexhaustible reserve of narrative material, instantly recognizable characters, and extremes of behavior that few other historical experiences can match. Our lengthening distance

from the Nazi period seems to work in inverse proportion, so that Wehrmacht generals, SS officers, and scientists and engineers who contributed to the machinery of war and genocide grow ever more familiar, especially for audiences whose entire knowledge of those twelve years comes from movies, computer games and the History Channel.

Films like *Downfall* and *Valkyrie* require no great strain to legitimize themselves as serious efforts to depict and interpret important historical events. The same cannot be said of the mostly indistinguishable run of Nazisploitation films from the 1960s and 1970s, especially those that involve secret weapons, bio-engineered super-soldiers or such anachronistic devices as cryogenics, time travel and space exploration. These films' value resides not in their plots or their characterizations, both of which stretch credulity past the breaking point. Instead, what these films can tell us is why the Nazis, and in this instance Nazi scientists, continue to exercise so powerful a hold on our imagination and on our understanding of what took place in Europe between 1933 and 1945.²¹

Underwater Nazi Zombies

An example of how a low-budget, little-seen movie that exploits 'Nazi science' can carry historical and cultural ramifications that reach beyond its plot and the circumstances of its production is the 1977 US release *Shock Waves*. The film would appear to be another throwaway, with Waffen-SS soldiers re-engineered to fight as underwater zombies, over-familiar faces like Peter Cushing and John Carradine, and a female lead wearing a yellow bikini. But *Shock Waves* enjoys a cult reputation, both in the nano-category of 'Nazi zombie' films and more broadly in a tradition that goes back to such cringe-inducing oddities as *She Demons* (1958, with television star Irish 'Sheena, Queen of the Jungle' McCalla), the genre-defining *They Saved Hitler's Brain* (1963), and *The Frozen Dead* (1966, with one-time leading man Dana Andrews well along on his career's downward arc).

Unlike these predecessors, in which demented Nazi scientists conduct horrific experiments, *Shock Waves* benefits from the services of Peter Cushing. Cushing plays a one-time SS commander now living a hermit's existence on a seemingly deserted island off the Florida coast. With a career that spanned dozens of horror and science fiction

roles, Cushing possessed a singular ability to convey inner anguish as he went about building monsters, driving stakes into vampires, and delivering pedantic explanations of supernatural phenomena to uncomprehending listeners.²² The film also allows John Carradine an all-too-brief performance as a grizzled boat captain who manages to suggest that he knows more than he is prepared to reveal about the strange events — weird solar effects and a mysterious wreck — that precede his vessel's going aground and his own subsequent disappearance. Although Carradine and Cushing never appear together, there is an interesting role reversal in *Shock Waves*, in that Carradine played a renegade German scientist in the first ever 'Nazi zombie' movie, Monogram Pictures' 1943 *Revenge of the Zombies*.²³



Figure 5.1 The concrete ship *Sapona* off the Bimini Island group, used to excellent effect in *Shock Waves* (1977).

Shock Waves opens with a pre-credit introduction that looks familiar to anyone who has seen World War II newsreels. Over a photograph of German soldiers, a sepulchral voice intones:

Shortly before the start of World War II, the German High Command began a secret investigation into the powers of the supernatural. Ancient legend told of a race of warriors who used neither weapons nor shields and whose superhuman power came from within the earth itself. As Germany prepared for war, the SS secretly enlisted a

group of scientists to create an invincible soldier. It is known that the bodies of soldiers killed in battle were returned to a secret laboratory near Koblenz, where they were used in a variety of scientific experiments. It was rumored towards the end of the war that Allied forces met German squads that fought without weapons, killing only with their bare hands. No one knows who they were or what became of them. But one thing is certain. Of all the SS units, there was only one that the Allies never captured a single member of.

This is followed by a swastika-emblazoned main title and a brief sequence of credits, screened over a menacing electronic buzz-tone. A long shot shows a small dinghy drifting on the open sea. After a fishing boat rescues the dinghy's occupant, the voice of a dazed and sunburned young woman (Brooke Adams) sets up the framing story. Four people have booked a dive boat for a vacation off the Florida coast. After the strange atmospheric disturbance and a night-time collision with a 'ghost ship', the passengers find themselves on an uncharted island. With the boat's deckhand and cook, the captain (Carradine) having mysteriously drowned the night before, they make their way to a derelict resort hotel. A phonograph playing Beethoven is its only sign of habitation. The hotel's proprietor then reveals himself, first as a disembodied voice, next as a shadowy figure on a balcony. His message is simple: leave, and leave at once. Disregarding the warning, the group decides to spend the night. The following morning, the cook disappears. A confrontation with the inhospitable host (Cushing) follows.

Cushing's explanation of his presence on the island is straightforward enough, and even more chilling: 'We Germans developed a perfect weapon — a soldier', Cushing recounts, adding:

He was capable of fighting under any conditions, adapting to any environment or climate, equally at home in the Russian winter or on the African desert. They were the most vicious and bloodthirsty of all the SS divisions. The group under my command was designed for the water, to man submarines we should never have to service.... We created the perfect soldier from cheap hoodlums and thugs, and a good number of pathological murderers and sadists as well. We called them the *Totenkorps* — the death corps. Creatures more horrible than you can imagine. Not dead, not alive, but somewhere

in between. They were transported to any scene of battle and let loose. But problems arose. They could not be controlled. Their innate desire for violence made their behavior unpredictable and erratic. There were even incidents when they attacked their own soldiers. So they were withdrawn for further study. Then the war was drawing to an end. I was ordered to remove my group from possible capture. I took them to sea just before all our ports were closed. We roamed the oceans for weeks, awaiting orders that never came. The war was lost. Somewhere near this island I sent the ship and her cargo to the bottom. And here I have been ever since, in voluntary exile.

Cushing again instructs his visitors to leave and, more helpfully, tells them where they can find a boat that might still be seaworthy. While the group retrieves the boat, Cushing rushes to the edge of the island, searching for the SS-men he has just described. ‘*Ich bin hier* [I’m here]’, he shouts in German. ‘*Kommen Sie her! Mein Befehl* [Come here! That’s an order]’. The SS-men appear on the other side of a lagoon. Ignoring Cushing’s orders, they descend into the water. Cushing scrambles about in mounting desperation. When he pauses to splash water on his face, one of the SS-men reaches up and grabs him by the throat, confirming what he said about ‘their innate desire for violence’.

The remainder of the film depicts the group’s futile attempt to escape, their second night in the hotel, and their psychological disintegration in the face of the horrors they encounter. One by one, they are picked off by the SS-men who emerge and submerge at will and go about their business of killing with methodical determination. In the end, only Brooke Adams and Luke Halpin (the deckhand) are left alive. The two survivors discover the dive boat’s dinghy and make another escape attempt. Luke fends off one of the SS-killers, only to be dragged under by a second. Alone, Brooke drifts out to sea. In a brief coda, we see Brooke is in a hospital room, her face blistered, frantically writing down her recollections in an incomprehensible scrawl. The experience on the island has traumatized her, perhaps permanently.

Shock Waves eschews the familiar cinematic trope of the politically naïve scientist who witnesses his work perverted by the evil intentions of others. Rather, the scientists who engineered criminally insane super-soldiers in Koblenz shared the military and ideological imperatives of the regime they served. As Andreas Heinemann-Grüder observes, ‘The pressure on engineers to produce “revenge weapons” and “wonder

weapons” towards the end of the Second World War opened the way to projects which under normal conditions would have been considered technological charlatanism and brushed off as simply irresponsible’.²⁴ Even if he has second thoughts about the program, Cushing’s regrets are purely pragmatic. The SS-supermen proved defective as weapons, the equivalent of V-2 rockets that fell short of their targets or of experimental jet fighters that downed more German test pilots than Allied bombers. A reclusive fugitive, Cushing’s moral occlusion puts him in broad company. Had things worked out differently, he might have had a career like that of Wernher von Braun, or at least like those of thousands of Wehrmacht officers, Nazi bureaucrats, industrial managers, university teachers and scientific researchers who successfully reintegrated themselves into postwar society. Instead he drowns in a swamp, a victim of the same narrowly focused command mentality that led the Koblenz engineers to create SS super-soldiers in the first place. Nazi habits of mind, like Nazi zombies, die hard.

Cold War Anxieties and Projections

For a 30-year-old film rarely seen on television, *Shock Waves* has exhibited remarkable staying power. In part, the film’s effectiveness results from its marketable concept. Zombies have long been a proven money-maker ever since George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). Nazis add another bankable asset. But something else also helps explain the film’s impact. The eerie, synthesizer-generated score, the desolate, swampy environment and the drained colors all contribute to a pervasive negativism that sticks in the mind. This is a quality shared with a number of science fiction films from the 1950s and 1960s. English director Val Guest’s *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*, released in 1961, and blacklisted American director Joseph Losey’s *The Damned*, also made in 1961 but not released until 1963, are just two examples. While the former film excludes a final verdict on the planet’s future, its generally downbeat mood suggests little confidence that science, in the end, will come up with a humanity-sparing solution. *The Damned* is even more disillusioned by the alliance between science and government. It reflects its director’s dyspeptic attitude towards both, as well as his keen sense of how established certainties of class and education have become unhinged in a world of nuclear tests and arms races. Both films were made on relative shoestrings, a constraint

that recalls Vivian Sobchack's distinction, in discussing science fiction cinema, between 'big-budget optimism' and 'low-budget pessimism'. The technical limitations enforced on cheaply made films, Sobchack notes, resulted in images that were dark and ominous, reinforcing a sense of human finiteness and vulnerability. Technology and the political authority to which it was subservient were either impotent or themselves a threat; in either case, the future was clouded, if not entirely closed.²⁵

Mention of Joseph Losey also brings to mind the close connection between science fiction films of the 1950s and 1960s and the Cold War psychology of vulnerability and menace they reflected, a phenomenon familiar on both sides of the Atlantic. Discarding the confidence evident in films of earlier decades, British science fiction films made after the Second World War 'were predominantly deeply pessimistic and intended to frighten'.²⁶ Much the same could be said of American films from the same period, informed as they were by what M. Keith Booker calls the 'paranoia' that resulted not only from fear of the Soviet Union, but even more from America's increasing involvement in the global complexities of the Cold War.²⁷ Like the Americans, the Russians could capitalize on the expertise of German physicists and chemists, and fears that they might develop weapons against which the United States had few, if any, defenses were not confined to film makers and film audiences. In his new account of the origins of the nuclear arms race, Michael D. Gordin writes that the greatest concern was 'the German scientists and engineers who were recruited at war's end to work in Soviet industry. It was a commonplace during the Cold War, especially immediately after news of Soviet proliferation hit the West, that these German specialists were responsible for the speed of the Soviet achievement — even for there being a Soviet nuclear bomb at all'.²⁸ In another new study of the Cold War nuclear competition, Shane Maddock reinforces this conclusion. He notes that the top priority for American atomic weapons specialists in 1945 lay in preventing the Soviet capture of German nuclear physicists.²⁹

Worries over such matters reached the highest levels of the American defense and intelligence establishments and found expression in the exaggerated threat assessments the CIA produced well into the 1960s.³⁰ Nor was the Soviet nuclear stockpile the only cause for alarm. As soon as the Russians detonated their first bomb, government officials began worrying about the threat of 'nuclear sabotage' posed by Soviet agents

and Communist dupes who might smuggle suitcase-sized weapons on to American soil, the equivalent of today's terrorist 'sleepers'.³¹ In addition, the results of German experiments with biological, radiological and chemical weapons were also assumed to have passed into Soviet hands. Again, Western intelligence misreported the extent of the Soviet acquisitions. In fact, with the exception of the jet propulsion and ballistic missile programs, German experiments in developing 'secret' weapons were uncoordinated, poorly funded and vulnerable to the internecine conflicts that deepened as the Nazi state — never the unified monolith its propaganda made it out to be — came under increasing stress. Even if the effort had been a more systematic and sustained one, in the end it would have been too little and too late to reverse the outcome of the war.³²

In a new study of the Soviet space program, Asif Siddiqi confirms the importance the Russians attached to the hunt for German scientists and engineers in the first postwar months. At that point, there was little thought about space exploration. The Russians used rockets on the Eastern Front and in the final conquest of Berlin and they appreciated their battlefield value. Incorporating the advanced missile technology the Germans had developed promised to expand the Red Army's capability in rocket warfare. Scouring their occupation zone to recover as much as they could of 'the detritus of the German wartime rocket program', the Russians recruited hundreds of German scientists and technicians to work in Soviet laboratories and research institutes, in part by offering them generous terms of employment and agreeing to exempt them from the standard processes of 'de-Nazification'. Apparently, many of the Germans had little difficulty switching loyalties from one totalitarian regime to another. In the process, they helped fundamentally redirect the Soviet rocket program.³³ The result, the successful launch of the first orbital satellite in 1957, shattered Americans' confidence in the superiority of Western science and technology. After the shock of Sputnik, Americans might have been excused for wondering if the United States had come out second best in the race to secure the services of Hitler's most brilliant scientists.

Cold War anxieties explain part of the hold science fiction films of the era exercised on the imagination of their audiences. In addition, these films conveyed an impression of bleakness and existential ennui that eradicated any hope that science might somehow save us. Describing Terence Fisher's 'agreeably mundane' *Island of the*

Burning Doomed (1967), Chris Fujiwara comments: 'The proportion and balance in Fisher's framing and the movie's ability to light on something of interest from moment to moment imply an obsessive yet tender concern for a shrunken, demented world about to come to an end. The movie has that sour late-1960s mood of exhaustion and nerves at their limit, perfectly expressed in the recurrent situation of residents of an island off the coast of Britain gathering in the island's only pub to share desultory comments about the abnormal heat'.³⁴

With its washed-out colors, bleak locations and world-weary performances by John Carradine and Peter Cushing, *Shock Waves* leaves the same queasy feeling, so that Brooke Adams' retreat into catatonia seems an altogether reasonable choice to make after what she has experienced. A decade later, that 'sour late-1960s mood' was recreated in some of the most popular science fiction films Hollywood would ever make, as if the tension between the promise and the menace of science had to be re-established if the genre was to remain both narratively inventive and profitable. The obsessions of the Cold War may have been fast fading, and the Cold War itself would soon be consigned to history; but a numbing list of new threats was already being projected, with indestructible humanoid killing machines prominent among them. This increasingly pessimistic mood made itself apparent in the first *Terminator* (1984) and *Robocop* (1987) films. Theater screens were soon filled with what John Beard has called 'cheaper versions of apocalyptic futures and junk technology'.³⁵ The human race faced similarly grim prospects, although due to biochemical and extra-terrestrial rather than technological causes, in films like *Alien* (1979) and *Predator* (1987), which also generated lucrative (and eventually intersecting) franchises.³⁶ In this respect, the Cold War metaphors of infection and contagion gained a new lease on life, with not only science, but medicine, bio-engineering and the exploration of deep space also posing unanticipated menaces to the survival of the human race.³⁷

Political awareness of this kind, and intellectual and philosophical allusions in general, were probably beyond the makers of *Shock Waves*. They were more interested in nightmares, zombies, and the always reliable box-office draw of swastikas and SS uniforms. The film relies on an adept combination of locations, atmosphere and soundtrack for its impact. The plot does not convincingly explain why the SS-men are suddenly re-animated after thirty years of dormancy under the ocean.

The bizarre solar phenomenon seen at the start, where the screen tints a nauseous yellow-red, may have something to do with it, especially when the cook, with many years of marine experience, concedes that he has never seen anything similar. Before he disappears, Carradine's captain has a bit of seemingly out-of-place dialogue about 'a minor underwater disturbance, with the hot sky acting on the cold current coming from a mile down below'. Nor is it entirely clear just how many members of the *Totenkorps* have survived. There are at least six of them, but in a few frames eight are visible. While they appear to move about and kill independently, a trace of unit cohesion remains when they first emerge from the sea and later return to it.

Shooting exterior scenes in Miami's Matheson Hammock Park, director Ken Weiderhorn and cinematographer Reuben Trane used a location that concurrently looked like an inviting vacation resort and a place of menace and dread. The park afforded Caribbean island-like ocean vistas, beachfronts and lush vegetation on the one hand, viscous pools, thick, oily mud and sand, and dense tangles of mangrove roots on the other. The film-makers were also advantaged by the chance they had to film on the grounds of the once grand but subsequently derelict Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables and its equally run-down counterpart in Palm Beach. The Palm Beach Biltmore served as Peter Cushing's lair, with little set-dressing required other than the addition of the obligatory swastika banner.

Similarly convenient, as a fixed point to which the camera regularly returns, was the wreck of a World War I-era concrete-hulled freighter, which had run aground in the shallow waters off Bimini Island in the 1920s. Used for target practice by the navy and the air force during World War II, the wreck exhibits an otherworldly aspect, resembling a huge amphibian skeleton dropped from the sky or dredged up by an underwater convulsion. When he narrates the history of the *Totenkorps*, Cushing confirms that the wreck is the ship that transported them to the Western Hemisphere. Repeated long shots of the wreck across a glittering ocean are among the most effective in the film. They reinforce its mood of isolation and disorientation. Referring to the 'ghost ship' that caused the fateful collision at the start of the film, the well-lubricated cook concedes, 'The sea spits up what it can't keep down'.

Tapping into Nazi imagery, while hardly an original move, helps explain part of the durability *Shock Waves* has demonstrated. In an

essay that reaches beyond its ostensible subject, impressions of Nazis in American cinema, Lester Friedman writes:

Many films depict the fiendish plots of Nazi scientists either to kill vast amounts of people [...] or to conduct evil experiments [...] Modern-day Nazi plots hypothesize what might happen if Nazis survived in our contemporary world and we were, once again, forced to confront them [...] On deeper levels, the films represent a persistent fear not only that the Nazis have survived but that, under the right circumstances, it could all happen again. Representing more than mere elderly figures who escaped the destruction of the Third Reich, characters in these films personify the endurance of the Nazi philosophy in our own time.³⁸

While Friedman is primarily interested in major studio productions like *Marathon Man* (1976) and *The Boys from Brazil* (1978), his comments apply equally to *Shock Waves*, both in terms of a plot that resonates and a character — Peter Cushing's 'mere elderly figure' — who, when seen in this light, becomes truly terrifying. That Cushing meets the proverbial just end, drowned by one of his own SS-men, in no way diminishes the unrepentant evil he has expressed to his unwelcome visitors. Nor is he a solitary example, since the idea of German scientific, technological and military capabilities harnessed to Nazi ambitions for racial utopia and global domination has been one of the more venerable and influential themes in post-World War II science fiction and, more recently, 'alternative' history.³⁹ In fact, American fears of German science and technology forging ahead in a society and culture permeated with militaristic and imperialistic values were well-established long before the Nazis appeared on the scene and as a result would not altogether vanish once they departed.⁴⁰ Decades later, cinematic raw material can presumably still be found in these projections of German scientific superiority, two lost wars notwithstanding.

A Zombie Film Too Far?

For several years, a group of film-makers in the Netherlands have tried to attract funding for a film called *Worst Case Scenario*. Their idea, apparently, was to re-fight D-Day on Dutch beaches with an army of German zombie soldiers. To promote the project, two cleverly-made

trailers were posted on a website, and 500 DVD copies were also made available (unfortunately in PAL format only).⁴¹ One look at the trailers suggests that *Worst Case Scenario* would borrow heavily from the prototypical zombie soldiers in *Shock Waves*. One trailer contains footage of grotesquely deformed and maladroitly patched-back-together soldiers emerging from the ocean, in a zombie-like march that recalls the *Totenkorps*. In the second trailer, more disturbing than the first, the same zombie soldiers float over the heads of two children playing along a canal. The children's fascination with the balloon-borne monsters glues them to the spot, as, no doubt, it is supposed to do to us. Either way, Holland stands no chance.



Figure 5.2 A poster for the now abandoned *Worst Case Scenario* film project, to have been directed by Richard Raaphorst.

In 2009, director Richard Raaphorst announced that the *Worst Case Scenario* project had been cancelled. The search for financing had taken too long, investors had committed and then withdrawn, and the prospects for commercial success had evaporated. In an interview picked up by several websites, Raaphorst claimed that the market for zombie films was glutted and that *Worst Case Scenario* would have looked too much like other Nazi zombie films currently in circulation. From the wreckage of the project, however, Raaphorst proposes to make a prequel, set in 1945 and depicting some of the end-stage fighting in the German-Polish borderlands. If one or two examples of concept art can serve as a guide, the Wehrmacht has again been

reinforced by zombie soldiers, fighting in a film to be called *Army of Frankenstein*. ‘We are exploring the possibilities’, Raaphorst revealed, ‘of using a high, advanced, new and unknown technology to put it on film’.⁴² In other words, a secret weapon that just might win the war.

Despite the problems Richard Raaphorst has encountered, it is likely that Nazi zombies will continue to encumber our cinematic consciousness, and not only because of their historical and political associations. They do represent a ‘worst case scenario’, or the sum of our historically informed and culturally determined fears and projections. As Eva Kingsepp observes about the persistent attraction of Nazi themes — or, as she puts it, of ‘Naziness’ — in film, literature (especially graphic novels) and digital games, ‘The figure of the Nazi zombie might be seen as a symbol of our sometimes quite complicated relationship with the real Nazi Germany, as expressed through our popular culture’. This obsession is ‘rooted in the uncanny feeling that the Nazis are ‘us’, reflecting the dark side of ourselves and our society’, Kingsepp continues. ‘If the zombie in general is ‘us’, and the Nazis are “us”, as well, the Nazi zombie turns into a macabre reflection of ourselves as well as an expression of fear for what our own society might do to us on purpose, in the name of progress’.⁴³

National Socialism was uniquely destructive. From the first, it proclaimed a cult of death. Its propagandists made death heroic and promoted sacrifice and martyrdom as the highest virtues. In the end, nothing was left but death and destruction. Even when the war was lost, the Nazis ratcheted up the rate of killing and dying. More German soldiers died in the last year of the war than in the five years preceding; more German civilians died in bombing raids after the Luftwaffe no longer existed as an effective defense force than when it controlled the skies over Europe. In the killing centers, the practice of industrialized murder continued almost to the bitter end.⁴⁴ In this universe of mass death, German science, engineering and technology made their substantial contributions. Turned to nihilistic ends, the genius of German science and administration produced monstrous results. Is it at all surprising then that when the Nazis come back, they return as the most atavistic of all our monsters, as zombies?

Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this essay was presented at the fifth biennial *Film & History* conference on ‘Film and Science: Fictions, Documentaries, and Beyond’, Chicago, October 30–November 2, 2008. It has been substantially

- revised for publication here and has benefited from the suggestions of editors Elizabeth Bridges, Daniel H. Magilow and Kristin T. Vander Lugt
- 2 Marcus Stiglegger makes this argument in 'Beyond Good and Evil? Sadomasochism and Politics in the Cinema of the 1970s', trans. Kathrin Zeitz, *Ikonen: Magazin für Kunst, Kultur, und Lebensart*, February 9, 2007, accessed January 10, 2011, www.ikonenmagazin.de/artikel/Nightporter.htm.
 - 3 Two attempts to approach these films seriously are Simon Whitechapel, *Kampf Kulture: A History of Nazi Exploitation* (London: Creation Books, 2003) and Mikel J. Koven, "'The Film You Are About to See is Based on Fact": Italian Nazi Sexploitation Cinema', in *Alternative Europe: Eurotrash and Exploitation Cinema since 1945*, eds, Ernest Mathijis and Xavier Mendik, 19–31 (London: Wallflower Press, 2004). For a discussion of the market for such films, see Joan Hawkins, 'Sleaze Mania, Euro-Trash, and High Art: The Place of European Art Films in American Low Culture', *Film Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (Winter 1999/2000): 14–29. On exploitation films generally, see Jeffrey Sconce, ed., *Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007). Most recently, on Nazisploitation, see Julian Petley, 'Nazi Horrors: History, Myth, Exploitation', in *Horror Zone: The Cultural Experience of Contemporary Horror Cinema*, ed. Ian Conrich, 205–26 (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010). Unfortunately, *Monsters in the Mirror: Representations of Nazism in Popular Culture*, eds, Sara Buttsworth and Maartje Abbenhuis (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2010) only came to my attention after final revisions to this paper were completed.
 - 4 Zombie's masterstroke of bringing Sybil Danning out of retirement to play one of the SS officers helps to explain the reaction to *Werewolf Women*. Danning enjoys a cult reputation scarcely less impressive than that of Dyanne Thorne herself.
 - 5 On the transformative effect of academic legitimacy, when combined with digital technology, see Raiford Guins, 'Blood and Black Gloves on Shiny Discs: New Media, Old Tastes, and the Remediation of Italian Horror Films in the United States', in *International Horror*, eds, Steven Jay Schneider and Tony Williams, 15–32 (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2005).
 - 6 A recent attempt to repackage the two (on a budget of \$10,000), the Long Island-filmed *Blitzkrieg: Escape from Stalag 69*, appears to have fallen flat, except among hardcore devotees. See Nathan Lee, 'Nazisploitation Making a Comeback', *The New York Times*, August 15, 2008, E8.
 - 7 Chris Bickel, 'Sex, Swastikas, and Sadism: Nazi Sexploitation: An Overview and the Ten Best', November 10, 2005, accessed March 9, 2010, www.epinions.com/content_2323816580.
 - 8 Kriss Ravetto, *The Unmasking of Fascist Aesthetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 227.
 - 9 Rosalind Galt, *The New European Cinema: Redrawing the Map* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 195–202. The werewolves in *Zentropa* are members of the Nazi terrorist underground called into being by Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels when defeat became inevitable in early 1945. The Nazi werewolves experienced a brief, if misplaced, revival when spokesmen for the Bush administration raised the analogy to explain the post-Saddam Hussein insurgency in Iraq. See Christina von Hodenberg, 'Of German Fräuleins, Nazi Werewolves, and Iraqi Insurgents:

- The American Fascination with Hitler's Last Foray', *Central European History* 41, no. 1 (2008): 71–92.
- 10 Graeme Krautheim, 'Desecration Repackaged: Holocaust Exploitation and the Marketing of Novelty', *Cinephile* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2009), accessed February 12, 2010, cinophile.ca/archives/volume-5-no-1-far-from-hollywood-alternative-world-cinema/desecration-repackaged-holocaust-exploitation-and-the-marketing-of-novelty. In fact, Krautheim proceeds to subject several of the most notorious Nazisploitation films to precisely that kind of interrogation. For an opposing argument, see Jeffrey Sconce, 'Trashing' the Academy: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style', *Screen* 36, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 371–93.
 - 11 On the popularity of Nazi-themed computer games, see Eva Kingsepp, 'Immersive Historicity in World War II Digital Games', *HUMAN IT* 8, no. 2 (2006), 60–89, accessed April 14, 2009, etjanst.hb.se/bhs/ith//2-8/ek.pdf.
 - 12 Michael J. Neufeld, *Von Braun: Dreamer of Space, Engineer of War* (New York: Knopf, 2007). The association remains current; see Steve Coll's essay on American Cold War 'deterrence' strategy, 'The Cabinet of Dr Strangelove', review of *A Fiery Peace in a Cold War: Bernard Schriever and the Ultimate Weapon*, by Neil Sheehan *The New York Review of Books*, February 25, 2010, 28–30.
 - 13 Of an altogether different character are publications like Henry Stevens, *Hitler's Suppressed and Still-Secret Weapons, Science, and Technology* (Kempton, IL: Adventures Unlimited Press, 2007), which few historians would credit as serious scholarship.
 - 14 Cf. Daniel Dinello, *Technophobia! Science Fiction Visions of Posthuman Technology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 187–8.
 - 15 See, e.g. the discussion of von Braun's movie image in Christopher Frayling, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous? The Scientist and the Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 92–105. Even more critical of von Braun's carefully crafted American image is Wayne Biddle, *Dark Side of the Moon: Wernher von Braun, the Third Reich, and the Space Race* (New York: Norton, 2009).
 - 16 See Michael B. Petersen, *Missiles for the Fatherland: Peenemünde, National Socialism, and the V-2 Missile* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
 - 17 In November 2010 excerpts from a 600-page report by the United States government's Office of Special Investigations confirmed that following World War II German scientists were able to bargain their technical skills for exculpation of their previous political associations. See Eric Lichtblau, 'Secret Papers Detail U.S. Aid for Ex-Nazis', *The New York Times*, November 14, 2010, 1, 26.
 - 18 Jeff Stone, 'Germany in Film and Television (American) after World War II', in *Germany and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History*, ed. Thomas Adam, 338–9 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005).
 - 19 Beverly Crawford and James Martel, 'Representations of Germans and What Germans Represent: American Film Images and Public Perceptions in the Postwar Era', in *Transatlantic Images and Perceptions: Germany and America since 1776*, eds David E. Barclay and Elisabeth Glaser-Schmidt, 285–308 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 290.
 - 20 Henry Jenkins, 'So You Want to Teach Pornography?' in *More Dirty Looks: Gender, Pornography, and Power*, ed. Pamela Church Gibson, 1–7 (London: British Film Institute, 2004).

- 21 As noted in Mario Biagioli, 'Science, Modernity, and the "Final Solution"', in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'*, ed. Saul Friedlander, 185–205 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).
- 22 Cushing also had a distinct talent for conveying the claustrophobic nature of finding oneself trapped on an island in the company of unpleasant neighbors, which is essentially the plot of *Shock Waves*. See, for example, his performances as a pathologist in *Island of Terror* (1966) and as a physician who refuses to take his jacket off despite the 100-plus-degree temperatures in *Island of the Burning Doomed* (1967), both directed by Terence Fisher for Planet Films.
- 23 There are no Nazi zombies in *Revenge of the Zombies*, only zombies that have been created by Carradine's German-scientist-in-hiding — cut to Peter Cushing in *Shock Waves* — for the purpose of reinforcing Hitler's war machine now that the United States has entered the conflict. How the zombie soldiers were to be transported from the Louisiana bayous to Europe is not explained, one of the film's many plot lapses.
- 24 Andreas Heinemann-Grüder, "'Keinerlei Untergang': German Armaments Engineers during the Second World War and in the Service of the Victorious Powers', in *Science, Technology, and National Socialism*, eds Monika Renneberg and Mark Walker, 30–50 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 39.
- 25 Vivian Sobchack, 'Postfuturism', in *Liquid Metal: The Science Fiction Film Reader*, ed. Sean Redmond, 220–7 (London: Wallflower Press, 2001), 222.
- 26 Tony Shaw, *British Cinema and the Cold War: The State, Propaganda, and Consensus* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2001), 126.
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II

Bitches, Whores and Dominatrices

6

The Third Reich as Bordello and Pigsty: Between Neodecadence and Sexploitation in Tinto Brass's *Salon Kitty*

ROBERT VON DASSANOWSKY

IN 'SKIN GAMES', RAYMOND Durgnat's seminal article on the 1970s genre that he termed 'Eurodecadence', the author credits the permissiveness of the 'Swinging Sixties' as the root of the perversities in the following decade's cinema: 'Far from being a fountain of vitalism, Eros seemed polluted at the source. It represented a nostalgia that could never be fulfilled, that couldn't pre-empt aggression.'¹ He begins the cycle at the fall of censorship with Joseph Losey's filming of Harold Pinter's treatment of Robin Maugham's *The Servant* (1963). In Maugham's homoerotic novel, a young aristocratic gent becomes the passive 'slave' to his military-like butler 'master'. Durgnat finds confluence with Sartre's ego-psychology here, 'in which even innocuous activities like looking and naming (and even leaving people free) are forms of pressure. The main object of libido [...] is survival and safety, which regularly involve power.'² Appreciation for such a skewed look at sexual power politics grows with the liberations of the era and officially comes out in 1967 when philosopher Gilles Deleuze underscores the importance of Sacher-Masoch. The following year, revolt spreads from Chicago to Prague, and the world reels between

hedonism and political avowal. Meanwhile, the manifesto for what was to become the Eurodecadent School of the 1970s crystallizes in Luchino Visconti's script for *La caduta degli dei* (*The Damned*, 1969), a drawing-room version of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* (with helpings of *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*) as an intertext between sexual perversion and power in Nazi Germany.

In its analytical history, *The Damned* has been linked to everything from De Sade to Freud to Riefenstahl (by way of Susan Sontag's still influential misunderstanding of German Romanticism and its relationship with German nation building).³ It was understood in its own time as the sum total of sexual liberation and leftist antifascist filmmaking in Nazi drag. It prompted Durgnat to consider sexual perversity a 'strategy' by which to condemn heterosexuality as more adaptable to social corruption than the already marginalized homosexuality, and to regard the film as the starting point in a genre that, as Kriss Ravetto describes, would deny any hope of human salvation (with Pasolini's *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (*Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, 1976) as the culmination).⁴ From a pure cinematic historical perspective, *The Damned* mimicked the actual development of Nazism out of the hothouse sensuality and the social Darwinism of the Belle Époque. As a child of the privileged fin-de-siècle, Visconti was the perfect vessel from which to produce a seductive screen fascism that causes us to love the very thing that dominates us, as Foucault would have it. The director's hypnotically beautiful but uncomfortable personal mythology of selective aristocratic aesthetics framed by Marxism slammed the entire ruling class while he enjoyed decorating their elitist lives.

While it was the soft-core *Love Camp 7* (1968) that first dared to mix sexploitation and Nazism in an attempt to bring the long tradition of Nazi 'adventures' in men's pulp fiction to the screen, Visconti's trilogy on the German experience⁵ (*The Damned*; *Morte a Venezia* (*Death in Venice*, 1971); and *Ludwig*, 1972) influenced by Thomas Mann's conservative critical sympathy for Old Europe, inspired the 'high-art' cinematic tangents on the allegorized/sexualized theme of the totalitarian dystopia. Among these are Cavani's realizations of the extreme S/M options in *The Night Porter* (*Il portiere di notte*, 1974), *Beyond Good and Evil* (*Al di là del bene e del male*, 1977) and *The Berlin Affair* (1985); and Bertolucci's psychologically scarred everyman who climbs his way up the fascist social ladder in *Il conformista* (*The Conformist*, 1970); and the Left's symbolic victory in Europe, *1900* (1976). De Sica's tragic-elegiac

Holocaust poem *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini* (*Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, 1970) and Wertmüller's vitriolic Holocaust black comedy *Pasqualino Settebellezze* (*Seven Beauties*, 1975) take opposite approaches to victimization, while Barbet Schroeder sexualized punishments in *Maîtresse* (1976), and Pasolini offered a sexual/political endgame in his adaptation of De Sade in *Salò*. Hungarian director István Szabó developed his own trilogy on opportunism, sexuality and fascism in Central Europe in *Mephisto* (1981), *Oberst Redl* (*Colonel Redl*, 1985) and *Hanussen* (1988), which focused on Austro-Hungarian and German-Jewish cultures. These films were mirrored by a number of exploitation films that presented themselves within this trend. As Ravetto suggests, one might include *Cabaret* (1972) (and thus certainly Ingmar Bergman's late redux of the concept in *The Serpent's Egg*, (1977)) for its ambiguous evocation of all the above themes in a setting that showed that the musical film could be risky at the end of its popularity. In both films, however, it is the liberal (Weimar German 1919–33) world that promises the goods, and the degeneracy easily flows into Nazism.⁶

Tinto Brass's *Salon Kitty* (aka *Madam Kitty*, 1976),⁷ which preceded the director's notorious pornographic historical pastiche, *Caligula* (1979), is the crucial link between the original art-house or more 'critical' neodecadent⁸ genre and the hyperbolic degeneration of the Nazisploitation film. Influenced by the soft-core porn films from France and Italy, Brass displays some intent to create critical filmmaking. His narrative is based on a novel by Peter Norden and the real incident involving SS commander Walter Schellenberg's bugging of Kitty Schmidt's elite Berlin bordello, which catered to Nazi VIPs and foreign dignitaries.⁹ It is nevertheless subverted by the representations it criticizes. These aspects are performed in a way that parallels the fascist seduction. At the same time, it defines the trauma of Nazism with a cruel sexuality that differentiates it little from the Italian gore-horror films of roughly the same period, the *giallo*. Brass justifies the voyeuristic/taboo-breaking direction of his film as an exposé of the perversions of Nazism, but the central narrative is a melodramatic love story that simply allows for more nudity and sex. Grounded in a critical cinematic exploration that vacillates between and exchanges with exploitation paradigms, *Salon Kitty* is the link between the neodecadence genre and pure Nazisploitation.

This essay provides a close reading of how *Salon Kitty* constructs itself on the canon model of neodecadence, how it critically surpasses

the standard in some ways, and yet deconstructs its artistic/intellectual goals into disingenuous moralism and kitsch, which allows it to fall into the realm of such earlier sexploitation films as *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (1974). In its nervous collision between the fictionalization of the historical and the overt theatricality of the prurient, *Salon Kitty* has, however, more in common with Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) than the later Nazisploitation films it spawned. As in Tarantino's film, Tinto Brass's work is far more about using genre as a strategy than about Nazism itself. A short plot summary is required to sort out three different modes of neodecadence that *Salon Kitty* borrows from other films: the sexual 'depravity' linked with Nazism in *The Damned*; the cliché of sexual hedonism in the Weimar Republic (*Cabaret*; *The Serpent's Egg*), which is taken up and justified as the anti-bourgeois impulse by fascists, unmasking Nazi hypocrisy and sexual politics; and a burlesque of the most extreme filmic representations of fascism (*The Night Porter*; *Salò*), which plumbs the dehumanization and destruction of its victims.

Brass's film opens in 1939 with a cabaret show at Madam Kitty Kellermann's (Ingrid Thulin) bordello in which she performs a song reminiscent of Kurt Weill in half-man/half-woman drag that at once recalls but also heteronorms the impersonation of Dietrich by Helmut Berger at the start of *The Damned*. She punctuates her act with the lyrics, 'slip a little versa into your vice.' The counter-shots of audience faces imitate that of *Cabaret*, which referenced the grotesque expressionist portraits by Otto Dix and George Grosz. Also like *Cabaret*, *Salon Kitty* limits the musical performances, which comment on the action, to the stage.

SS officer Wallenberg (Helmut Berger) is ordered by his commander, the sanguine Biondo (John Steiner), a more attractive reincarnation of the ur-vampiric Nazi in Rossellini's seminal *Roma, città aperta* (*Rome, Open City*, 1945), to find twenty young, beautiful and intelligent, fervently National Socialist women from all social levels ('virgins or married') for a secret project. The clichéd plot device of using scientific experimentation and research to excuse sexual titillation immediately distances the work from its more serious neodecadent ambitions. The young women proceed through 'testing' phases, informed that they are to 'wage war for Hitler'. They are put to work in Madam Kitty's bordello with the excuse that her house must be racially 'sanitized'. Kitty has no idea that the house has been wired for sound

recording, that the women are SS agents, and that her house is being used to gain blackmail information from its VIP clients.

Wallenberg becomes fascinated with Margherita (Teresa Ann Savoy), an aristocratic young woman among the SS prostitutes/agents, but he doubts her commitment to National Socialism. Wallenberg insists that she 'must destroy herself' to become a true Nazi. A mildly sadomasochistic relationship evolves, somewhat revisiting Liliana Cavani's still controversial depiction of a relationship between an SS officer and concentration camp victim in *The Night Porter*,¹⁰ albeit without direct reference to the Holocaust or deeper psychological/gender role implications. Wallenberg attempts to humiliate and debase Margherita sexually, even involving his passively servile wife, but Margherita remains disinterested. One of the bordello's clients, Hans Reiter (Bekim Fehmiu), a *Luftwaffe* officer, falls in love with her. Smitten with him, Margherita covers for his anti-Nazi sentiments in her reports, not knowing that their conversations are recorded by the listening devices in her room. In a plot direction borrowed from Puccini's opera *Tosca*, Wallenberg confronts Margherita and implies that he can save or destroy Reiter, but he wants her as his mistress and 'accomplice'. She later learns from a Nazi officer that Hans was hanged for defeatism. Kitty covers up Margherita's murder of the officer. Claiming that her profession is in the service of freedom and joy, she is horrified to discover she has been used for Wallenberg's political gain. With the help of an Italian accomplice, Kitty arranges for Margherita to be wired, and on a visit to Wallenberg's house she records his triumphant ravings. She presents the tapes to Wallenberg's superior and accuses him of treason. The SS executes Wallenberg and Kitty celebrates as a bombing raid over Berlin smashes the windows of the bordello, signaling the fall of the Reich.

The heteronorming of decadence in the film, where heterosexual sex simultaneously represents love and violent oppressive debasement, is at the root of the film's reductive dualism. Ultimately it creates a clash between critical neodecadent pretensions and soft-core titillation. The very start of the film symbolically introduces this duality in the guise of Kitty's half-man/half-woman drag and the 'vice versa' lyric. With the exception of one sensationalist scene, Brass does not follow the stricter neodecadent ideology of repressed sexual deviation as symptomatic of fascism. Neither does he repudiate fascist sexual appeal. Rather, in an attempt to out-sexualize in a popular way the

films from which *Salon Kitty* derives, Brass aims the film at mainstream audiences. He allows them the visual desire of 'straight' sex demonized only by the cloak of Nazism. Like true neodecadent films, which 'reject the binary model that positions fascism as absolute evil and antifascists as absolute good, yet at the same time [...] embrace the image of evil as a seductive image',¹¹ Brass's protagonists are all prostitutes. Yet it is not their whoredom but only their Nazi collaboration that contaminates them and this impurity can be cleansed, as in Margherita's case. While the use of prostitutes in the context of fascism suggests a typical neodecadent metaphor for the seduction of evil and the feminization of the poisoned, there is no ambiguity here. Their whoredom is not at issue, just as the film's flirtation with the homoerotic nature of Nazism does not lead to an exploration of it as a deviancy linked to fascism as in true neodecadent films. Brass's film is homoerotic and homophobic at the same time, and implicated homosexuality is brought in as an *anticipated* signifier of neodecadence, a vignette of curiosity, even as comic relief, remaining separate from the narrative.

Wallenberg's search reveals young women who are firmly committed to National Socialism. One of the potential discoveries is shown in a science classroom situation, which queasily suggests the horrors of concentration camp experiments. Mixing sexual shock with horror film convention, Brass aligns the audience spectator's gaze with that of the Nazi students. In a coldly scientific manner, the students are shown two cadavers during instruction in racial biology. One body is that of a black man. The other is that of a German prostitute on her back, who attempted self-abortion. Her legs are stiffly bent in a sitting position, the remains of the fetus placed on her belly. The camera point-of-view (POV) here represents the female students, and it shifts back and forth to the large penis of the male corpse. Their hidden desire (visual montage) repudiates the scientist's near deification of the prostitute as superior to the black man (verbal), who is considered a 'beast'. Although the narrative shows how sexuality was used in the service of Nazism, it is already apparent at this early stage of the film that Brass underscores the sexual impulse as a natural resistance to Nazi racial doctrine to valorize his soft-core approach. The cut goes to a gruesomely bloody evisceration of pigs (the animal was used as a popular anti-Semitic image, e.g. *Judensau*), as male and female farmers bearing Nazi armbands laugh and flirt against the screams of the pigs in front of a blood-splattered wall displaying the concentration

camp slogan, 'Arbeit macht frei' (work makes you free). In this vulgar Holocaust metaphor, which also briefly recalls the sex and slaughter of the SA orgy in *The Damned*, innocents are clearly being slaughtered. However, the sound bridge of the pigs squealing over a parodistic re-vision of Visconti's aristocratic dining scene in *The Damned* (and again over the execution of Wallenberg at the end of the film) mixes the victim with the perpetrator in an unclear and nihilistic fashion. Are 'pigs' also killing the pigs?

The reduction of Nazism here to brutal animal torture recalls Roland Barthes's commentary on Pasolini's *Salò* — that fascism is 'too serious and too insidious a danger to be treated by simple analogy.'¹² Ravetto understands Pasolini's work less as an attempt to shock with the repressed (homo)sexual impulses in German culture, as Klaus Theweleit has observed,¹³ than as an attempt to break down the barrier between object and voyeur 'for their own disengaged (sadistic, supra-carnal pleasure)'. It 'draws the voyeur (the audience spectator linked with the voyeurs in the film) into the spotlight, thus dislodging him or her from his or her comfort zone.'¹⁴ Pasolini's strategy is to equate the act of voyeurism with violence and violation, making *Salò* unerotic and an example of a sexual economy 'in a power that transforms individuals into objects.'¹⁵ *Salon Kitty* presents itself as a shallow battle between Pasolini's agenda and the re-eroticization of fascism as fetish in other neodecadent films of the period (by Visconti, Bertolucci, Cavani, Fosse etc.). Brass's film associates the audience with the spectators at the bordello, but also with the SS voyeurs who use sex for control, repression, and death. In his own narrative construction, the director seems quite aware of the ironic strategy behind Pasolini's film and the general opposition between pure and impure in neodecadent films that re-present and mimic fascism(s). The fact that Nazism's symbolic fall is linked in *Salon Kitty* to the destruction of fascist control of the libertine (thus for Brass 'humanist') sexuality of Kitty and her (traditional) bordello, questions the concepts of pure and impure, and disturbs the partial presence of fascism in contemporary bourgeois moralism. Fascism *is turned into fetish* in Brass's film to the point of absurdity: the obvious use of Nazi racial biology to allow for sexual voyeurism; the sexual entertainment that attracts the Nazis as they 'attempt' to cleanse Germany of degeneracy; Wallenberg's superhero uniforms; the ambiguous and stagey homoeroticism among the SS, etc. In doing so, Brass creates a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation

effect) in which the audience spectators are made aware of an uncomfortable association with the Nazi voyeurs and their control strategies, but also of the discourse of the neodecadent film and its attempts to re-imagine sexualized fascism, giving the audience ‘hard-ons for Hitler, for the beautiful fascist machine’,¹⁶ and allowing them to mask their (pan)sexual voyeurism within the safety of historical/intellectual examination. Nevertheless, in liberating voyeurism and sexuality from Nazism with voyeurism and sexuality, Brass proclaims the victory of the erotic. He enshrines the depiction of sex as a weapon, reifying the ‘need’ for such a film while supporting the not-so-hidden agenda of satisfying audience desire with titillation. The opportunistic response of Margherita’s mother — ‘the most important thing is to be on the winning side!’ — is clearly the director’s indictment of the apparent moral glaciation of the bourgeoisie in the rise of Nazism. It also seems a fitting motto for Brass’s cinematic vacillation between the intentional exposure of the neodecadent film strategy and the simultaneous exploitation of it for box office success.

Like the subversive indication of the female students’ erotic fascination with the black man’s corpse, the film’s most thoughtfully critical moments emerge from its visual tableaux, not from its trite dialogue. These also particularly transmit the illusion of female agency in Nazi ideology. The first such sequence depicts a family viewing Riefenstahl’s *Triumph des Willens* (*Triumph of the Will*, 1935) from a cinema theatre balcony. The scene cuts rapidly between Hitler’s speech and the three members of a well-dressed bourgeois family (wife, husband and daughter). The wife, whom we come to know later as the SS prostitute Susan, slaps her young daughter across the face for interrupting her film viewing. As the husband attempts to dissuade his wife from her action, she slaps him too. When the masses in the film salute the Führer, she and other members of the audience stand and give the fascist salute, shouting ‘Heil Hitler’. As she stands, she blocks the projector’s beam which now throws the images of the Nazi film onto her body. This sequence provides metaphors on both the seductive fetish of Nazism in neodecadent film, and the death of the bourgeois family under Nazism, in which the female transfers patriarchal subservience to Hitlerian obedience. Susan is also overlaid with projected images of the Hitler Youth, equating her equally frenzied actions with the adulating and uncritical child. Another scene of female pseudo ‘empowerment’ within Nazism takes place in a dark public aquarium, where young

women dressed in BDM uniforms (*Bund Deutscher Mädel*, the League of German Girls, the female wing of the Hitler Youth) collide with a Jewish family. We see a little Jewish boy playing with a wind-up toy. A hard-faced young woman from the BDM group approaches the boy and crushes the toy with her shoe. The shot/counter-shot captures the boy's uncomprehending shock and the woman's cruel satisfaction. Both of these scenes rupture the concept of the woman as child nurturer or mother (the very essence of the Nazi female role) and suggest that under Nazism this female 'instinct' is only valid in an appropriate ideological/racial context.

The film's two central set pieces are sequences that take place in the large gymnasium/theatre halls that frame the search for the female test subjects. These sequences reflect the performance and sexuality at Kitty's bordello and counter the claustrophobic shots of the traditional German aristocracy at dinner. Art director Ken Adam reduces the Nazi monumental neoclassicism of Albert Speer to its most astringent values here with long, dull spaces, marble columns, flaming chrome torches and large but blinded windows that provide the backdrop for the dehumanized body cult of Nazism.¹⁷ The initial male athleticism and the subsequent sexual 'training' session of the women in this environment mimes the imagery of National Socialist visual arts in which voyeuristic images of bland female nudity and sexualized male warriors represent Nordic physical beauty.¹⁸ As Biondo discusses the Blitzkrieg with Wallenberg they walk through the gymnasium halls. They pass a regimented set of SS men fencing in ludicrously 'bottomless' garb, as well as naked gymnasts, swimmers, and wrestlers. These serve a dual purpose in the film, at once underscoring Nazism's classical Greco-Roman pretention and ironically citing Riefenstahl's inadvertent homoerotic depictions of Hitler Youth 'at play' in *Triumph*. They also create inroads for frontal male nudity in mainstream film. In retrospect it seems a rehearsal for the luridly hard-core treatment of ancient Rome in Brass's following film, *Caligula*. Nevertheless, this obvious homoerotic imagery in the power and vulnerability of the naked SS athletes is later dispelled by an overwhelming spectacle of heterosexual group sex.

Following the 'search' vignettes, the test women, now in uniform, assemble in the same hall and are asked to disrobe. Wallenberg informs them that they must not refuse the SS men any sex act in this training. The naked men are marched in to face them and with the

entry of drummers and a cymbalist, Biondo takes his place at a grand piano to play 'Wenn die SA und die SS aufmarschieren' (When the SA and the SS march on), which bridges into the non-diegetic male choral/orchestral version of the march. While the lyrics insist that the 'black [uniformed] SS and the brown [uniformed] SA' are 'followed by every German girl and are the most beautiful things in the world', they are here reduced to lewd commentary that debases the ideological 'heroicism' to pure lechery. The couples join each other in sex acts done in an athletic manner that evokes Nazi sport films. The filming of this performance by the SS further suggests that such duty to Nazism is used as a disguise for pornography, just as the 'critical' nature of Brass's film does somewhat the same for the audience spectator. A close lingering shot of the penis of an SS man in gymnastic exercise in the first sequence and another close shot of a startlingly large penis of an SS man through the legs of his female partner during the sexual training in the second sequence contribute to the notion of Nazism as a homoerotic phallocracy. Yet its blatancy clearly intends to call attention to the film's boldness in dealing with male nudity in cinema. Wallenberg, who explicitly ordered the exercise, appears uncomfortable with its actual implementation. At first he averts his eyes from the action. When he does look, he notices Margherita and becomes infatuated with her. Seeing the sex tableau through Wallenberg's POV links the audience spectator to him and creates a filmic bond through which viewers can understand the ease in associating themselves with the Nazi gaze. But it also dispels audience embarrassment or discomfort with the simulated sex. Indeed, the SS commander Biondo encourages the overly stern Wallenberg that it is important that he should 'have fun' with his mission, and thus also effectively releases audience spectators from a more serious examination of their own association with the Nazi sexploitation.

In the second level of the training, the director briefly moves away from audience titillation and towards an obliteration of spectatorial desire somewhat in the mode of Pasolini. The young women who have passed the previous test are put into viewing cells so that Wallenberg can monitor their reactions to bizarre sexual situations and measure their commitment to National Socialism. Accompanying Wallenberg is the degenerate looking Dr Schwab (Luciano Rossi), a dissipated, stone-faced man in a white lab coat sporting a Heinrich Himmler moustache and sunglasses, and Wallenberg's assistant Rauss

(Dan van Husen),¹⁹ whose bestial face and unintelligent conduct makes a mockery of the Nazi master race concept. As the audience peers into the cells and observes naked women seducing physically deformed men, performing oral sex on a traumatized concentration camp inmate and then punishing him with physical pain, being terrorized by aggressive lesbian advances, raped by a brutish 'gypsy', and having intercourse with a double leg amputee, the implication of the Nazi-framed voyeurism becomes clear. The spectator who might have tolerated the sexualization of Nazism on some level (even as visual pleasure) earlier in the film now recognizes it as a trap in which s/he has become complicit with Wallenberg's genocidal gaze. In other words, the price to pay for the soft-core sex of the film is visual subservience to 'scientific' cruelty and a dehumanization that suggests concentration camp experiments and genocide, a simulacrum of Pasolini's concept of fascist seduction and lethal exploitation in *Salò*. But here the melodramatic acting and Dr Schwab's appearance discount the veracity of the situation when they cross over into the kitsch conventions of the mad-scientist horror film.²⁰

Shifting the focus to Wallenberg's indoctrination of Margherita at his apartment, the dialogue plays with the concept of voyeurism and control, but also metafilmically suggests the debate regarding the reimagining of fascism in cinema and questions the authority of the previous sex experiment scenes. Wallenberg asks Margherita: 'What frightens you more, what you see or what you don't see?' Her reply, that nothing frightens her, may motivate Wallenberg's degradation of her, but despite the film's sometimes gratuitous depictions of deviant sex and dehumanization, Brass does not show us the ultimate political result of these narratives. Our revulsion, in fact, comes from what we 'don't see', what is only telegraphed: the signifying of the Holocaust.²¹ The (self-)objectification of women, the group sex performance and the experimentation scenes are certainly disturbing, but these scenes hardly approach the gruesome concentration camp imagery of Cavani's *The Night Porter*, Wertmüller's *Seven Beauties*, and of course the torture and killings in *Salò*. The scene in which the young Nazi woman crushes the Jewish boy's toy with her shoe overrides the film's overall Grand Guignol in both meaning and memorability. It demonstrates that Brass does at times understand the power of cinematic implication.

The film's comment on the ideological hypocrisy of Nazism's relationship with sexuality shifts *The Damned's* homoerotic re-enactment

of the 'Night of the Long Knives' in which inebriated SA men in partial undress and drag form a tableau of debauchery as they hypnotically sing the Hitler Youth song.²² Brass offers half-nude prostitutes (including women of color), uniformed officers, men wearing heavy make-up, and Kitty's homosexual bordello staff listening intently to Hitler's declaration of war on the radio and then singing the German national anthem. Given that Kitty's drag acts and decadent surroundings represent a 'freer' society in terms of the bourgeois commodification of sex than in the film's construction of Nazism, the images of this group 'debauchery' have the reverse effect of Visconti's shock interpretation of the SA orgy. Instead of underscoring perversion among the Party ranks, Brass signals an anarchic sub rosa rejection of the Nazi order. When Kitty performs again in black corset, gloves and garter belt, she echoes Helmut Berger's drag performance in *The Damned*,²³ one clearly inspired by *Der blaue Engel* (*Blue Angel*, 1930), with Marlene Dietrich as the anti-fascist German known for a sexual exoticism not allowed in Nazi German cinema. Further, once Kitty actively turns against Nazism, she appears in a version of Dietrich's trouser suits, recalling the Hollywood star's cross-dressing style of her 'good German' public image of the 1930s and 40s.

Kitty is subsequently forced to transfer her business to a villa chosen by Wallenberg and populated by the previously 'tested' women, now hardened members of the SS. What follows is a montage accompanied by burlesque music of the women being 'beautified' for their new role. The audience spectator is allowed to observe their naked bodies in baths, being made up, having their pubic hair trimmed, etc., as Kitty instructs them in their new roles. The whore 'drag', however, seems to re-humanize them from the bland automatons they have become through Nazism. Although reporting to Wallenberg as dutiful National Socialists, they are also forced to find a new hyper-sexualized (and thus more liberated?) persona. That Kitty has now become their actual commander is suggested by her *Cabaret*-influenced musical number (complete with a similar costume to the one worn by Liza Minnelli), in which she plays with a cane between her legs that her male dancers attempt to grasp and play with.

Kitty's gender-bending phallic performance is paralleled in two bordello scenes. These scenes extend and flip the transvestite theme to present the Nazi as degenerate feminized man. The first client, a hero of the Polish campaign, rejects his prostitute's attempt to discuss

the war, as it is 'too sacred' for discussion in a brothel (allowing for the separation of carnality from Nazism later in the film) and admonishes her for calling him by his military title. He subsequently removes his uniform to reveal women's panties. 'Call me Greta' he insists. Although played for laughs, the scene crystallizes the often contradictory directions of Brass's film. Kitty's duality in her transvestite performance at the start of the film now connects with a form of psychological resistance to Nazism. This schizophrenic sexual identity suggests an imprisoned man and the repression of pleasure by a dehumanized and dehumanizing warrior concept. In the second bordello scene, Susan (Rosemarie Lindt), who had so admired Hitler and the images of *Triumph of the Will* with her family in the cinema, now entertains a Nazi officer wearing nothing but a swastika armband on the leg of her black stocking, a reduction of Sontag's Nazi fetishism to its most minimal. In the darkened room, the scenes from *Triumph* are projected on her once again, this time flashing on the seductive expression of her heavily made-up face. The link between whoredom and acceptance of Nazism is inescapable, but now it can be understood in terms of the contradictory duality between which the entire film vacillates: 1) Nazism covering up the whoredom of the people with ideological euphemisms (true whoredom here is equated with Brass's *political* exploitation of the body); 2) Nazism accepting the willing whoredom of the people as counter-bourgeois social revolution and simply utilizing it for its own means (Wallenberg's sexual debasement tactics as power ploy). Brass compares the previous war-hero-in-panties ('Greta') sequence, which suggested the hiding of a sexual fetishism/deviance and its liberation in the 'free' world of the bordello, to the repercussions of repressing homosexuality for the sake of ideology, which not only ends disastrously when it is released, but also betrays the film's homophobia. It is not 'Greta' who is punished for flirting with heterosexual transvestitism, but the second officer who responds to the homosocial imagery from Riefenstahl's film. He gives Susan a large phallus-shaped bread loaf to hold between her legs for his oral attentions and pushes her into a manic episode after which she is taken away on a stretcher, foaming at the mouth. Following her disillusioned collapse, the officer is seen cowering on her bed in his underwear as the images from *Triumph of the Will* projecting on his terrified face no longer suggest the homoerotic, but homophobic. He suddenly comprehends his own transformation from ideological warrior to the

regime's target of destruction. Kitty admonishes all her girls to save themselves and get out while they still can, particularly Margherita, for whom she has shown motherly concern. 'This is a shit life of pigs', she cries, reconnecting with the earlier scene of the Nazi pig slaughter, as she impulsively rejects male objectification by biting off the top of the bread phallus and tearing the rest into pieces.

Here, Brass links Nazism's male homoeroticism to its ideology and crimes, whereas female bonding, even commodified as prostitution, is shown as healing. The anger against the phallocratic system that has come to control Kitty's world of limited female (sexual) empowerment sparks a cryptic war of female liberation. Margherita speaks of 'waking up from a nightmare' when she regains her physical self-awareness later in the film. Kitty insists her role as a madam is one for financial gain and 'above ideals'. When Susan (prior to her mouth-foaming collapse) accuses her of not being a National Socialist, Kitty replies that despite Susan's 'service' to the Reich, and the presence of a husband and child, she is nevertheless a whore. One might consider that Brass was aware of the women's movements at the time of the film's production, particularly in Europe, and played on quasi-feminist motivations. In another evocative scene, one of Kitty's women is discovered to be pregnant, and despite threats from Wallenberg against her condition (wholly unconvincing given that Nazism encouraged offspring of unmarried 'Aryan' parents and abortion was punishable by death), she repeatedly insists that the child belongs only to her. Such insistence registers ambiguously. It appears to test the true acceptability of unwed motherhood under Nazism as it also insists on female agency against Nazi policy. Ultimately the film's resolution is brought on by the female bond between Kitty and Margherita in a battle against the homosocial and unstable power alliance of Biondo and Wallenberg to free the bordello from Nazism and avenge the execution of Margherita's lover, the defeatist *Luftwaffe* officer Hans Reiter.

The love story of Margherita and Hans that intrudes late into the narrative in a cliché montage is exploited for all its soft-core possibilities. Hans's uniform and warrior role is equated with Margherita's body 'uniform' and role as prostitute 'for Hitler', as they both discover redemption beyond their military duties. Away from the trappings of the bordello, impromptu lovemaking in a train station washroom covered with obscene anti-Nazi graffiti becomes a symbol of opposition to their official lives and reclamation of their personal desires. Insisting that

he will fight against Hitler, Hans is subsequently executed (off-screen) and thus Nazism destroys the 'normal' (sexualized) bourgeois male/female relationship. This uncomfortable shift to mainstream heroic/moral representation, which demonstrates how easily Margherita can become good and remain aggressively sexual, is no doubt an effort to ground the 'battle of the whores' against the Nazis. It is constructed to allow Kitty to remain both a madam and a 'good woman' at the film's conclusion, but detaches her from representing non-Nazi German culture — and possibly the symbolic telescoping of postwar Germany as 'whore' to Allied occupation. The shift is also apparent in Margherita's actions when Wallenberg insists she become his 'private dream' and suggests he will have Hans killed if she does not. Her sexual objectification and passivity has now been transformed into active self-sacrifice to save the doomed Hans.

When one of the officers who utilizes Margherita's services tells her that Hans was hanged as a coward on a meat hook 'like a stuffed pig', she kills him, and the microcosmic battle that pits the bordello's true mission (sub/counterculture, tolerance, sexual self-realization) against the pig sty of Nazism (dehumanization, herding, breeding, slaughter) begins. Margherita recalls that Hans referred to Germany as a 'slaughterhouse' and blatantly tells Kitty, 'Tell him [Wallenberg] I killed that pig to avenge Hans.' With the discovery of the hidden transmitters and the help of an Italian resistance fighter and a mysterious man named Cliff (John Ireland in a bizarre bit of miscasting), who has silently haunted the bordello since the start of the film, Margherita is wired to record Wallenberg's comments. Kitty performs in a costume that resembles Marlene Dietrich's famous top hat outfit in *The Blue Angel*, in which the cabaret singer Lola Lola destroys the life of a patriarchal professor who weds her and loses his identity to her fame and sexual desires. Kitty's male dancers, dressed in shirt, tie and vest, but wearing can-can skirts with no undergarments, dance to Jacques Offenbach's *Galop infernal* from his operetta *Orphée aux enfers* (*Orpheus in the Underworld*), a direct reference to the same dance attempted by a line of drunken SA men wearing women's undergarments in *The Damned*. Visconti originally used the tune to underscore the pretense of Nazi cultural and racial laws, since Offenbach was of Jewish descent and his music officially banned. The operetta's very theme, a descent into the underworld from which the dead cannot be recovered, ironically frames the SA orgy and Germany's fate. In Brass's film, the use

of the same music to accompany the pansexual transvestism of the bordello's dancers is as much a volley against Nazi authority as it is an attempt to outdo both *The Damned* and *Cabaret* in sensationalist entertainment.

Margherita's final visit to Wallenberg is the film's most cartoonish sequence and it has strongly contributed to the reputation of *Salon Kitty* as a Nazisploitation film. Wallenberg presents himself as the Nazi *Übermensch* (superman) complete with a silver lamé SS superhero outfit, triumphantly ingesting cocaine and preening in front of mirrors. The conclusion moves in the opposite direction from *Salò* in intentionally contributing to the death of the neodecadent genre. While Pasolini's film ends with no possible redemption as he conflates all the horrors of fascist regimes in a coldly distanced ritual of torture, dismemberment and murder, *Salon Kitty* translates the Nazi mania for power and master race into a smutty fable of an impervious super-villain who can only be destroyed by his own kind. He ultimately appears to Margherita in yet another outlandish lamé outfit, this time in black with a long red and black cape — a mix of comic book arch-enemy, Dracula and Catholic cardinal. Wallenberg confesses to Margherita that he does not 'give a damn about National Socialism just like our leader', and that he uses it only to attain power, which he will achieve because he knows all the sexual secrets of Hitler's inner circle. Again there is a strong intertextual relationship between Berger's Wallenberg and his Martin von Essenbeck character in *The Damned*, who as a new SS officer admits that even he, the politically disinterested, depraved narcissist can 'understand' National Socialism. Further, Wallenberg admits his wife's grandfather was Jewish and boasts that Nazi idealism 'made criminals out of all of you [the Germans]' and that he will 'make a whore [Margherita] into the first lady of the Third Reich.'

Rather than mime the neodecadent genre's concept of depicting sexual repression, 'perversion' and sadomasochism as the roots of fascism, Brass's *Salon Kitty* claims the right to show sex and the erotic allure of the fascism that frames it by making carnality ultimately heroic. In Wallenberg's maniacal confession, Nazism is defined by conscious 'evil' motives that deny any other ontological or psychological explanation. This characterization simply emphasizes the monolithic and unnuanced arch-Hollywood image of fascism. Brass completes his voyeuristic Nazi epic by stripping the abuser Wallenberg down to complete and inescapable vulnerability. Yet he still references

several metafilmic levels of sexual/cinematic/Nazi exploitation when he shows Helmut Berger in full frontal nudity (with the exception of swastika wristbands) at his execution in the steam room where the character's power grab began.²⁴ In doing so, the director makes use of Berger's popularity at the time and his gay following from roles in Visconti's *The Damned* (1969), *Ludwig* (1972) and *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* (*Conversation Piece*, 1974). The final image also allowed Berger to reinforce his most popular film characterization of the decadent dandy in or out of the SS uniform, which ultimately fell to self-parody.

In his allohistorical *Inglourious Basterds*, Quentin Tarantino reverses Brass's deconstruction of the neodecadent film into elements of pure exploitation. He does so by elevating these elements into the realm of philosophical/moral discourse on the artificiality of historiographic cinema. Tinto Brass may not have been able or willing to more blatantly embellish or alter the course of history in a film that shatters several taboos in presenting Nazism in mainstream cinema, but given its reductive and highly referential nature, *Salon Kitty* already signaled the turning point between modernist and postmodernist film creation. It unabashedly feeds off the imagery of others, mythologizes its own crisis of reason, and points to the impossibility of representing an authentic historical experience.

Notes

This article expands on aspects first published in my 'Catch Hannibal at Mr. Ripley's Fight Club if You Can: From Eurodecadent Cinema to American Nationalist Allegory', *Film International* 5, no. 3 (2007): 19–22.

- 1 Raymond Durnat, 'Skin Games', *Film Comment* 17 (November/December 1981): 28–32.
- 2 Durnat, 'Skin Games', 29.
- 3 Susan Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism', in *Under the Sign of Saturn*, 73–105 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980).
- 4 Kriss Ravetto, *The Unmaking of Fascist Aesthetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
- 5 Although Hitler was Austrian and Visconti favored Austrian actors Helmut Berger and Romy Schneider, he understood the difference between the two cultures and found Austria far too Slavic-Latin to be included in his Greek tragedies of German culture.
- 6 The earliest text attempting to connect sexual perversion and Nazism is Samuel Igra's *Germany's National Vice* (London: Quality Press, 1945). Gerd Gemünden suggests that the phenomenon began in 1942 with the effeminate portrayal of Reinhard Heydrich in *Hangmen Also Die*: see 'Brecht in Hollywood: *Hangmen Also Die* and the Anti-Nazi Film', *The Drama Review* 43, no. 4 (1999): 65–76, while Ilan Avisar maintains that the first conscious

- linkage of Nazism and 'sexual deviance' is to be seen in Rossellini's *Roma, città aperta* (*Open City*) (1945). See Ilan Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 134–48.
- 7 *Salon Kitty* (a.k.a. *Madam Kitty*), Coralta Cinmatographica, Cinema Seven Film, and Les Productions Fox Europa, 1976, directed by Tinto Brass.
 - 8 Instead of Eurodecadence, Ravetto uses the term 'neodecadence' to suggest an earlier phase of decadent style and content in cinema. Here it represents the explosion 'of bourgeois moral models by examining the postwar fascination with sexualization and eroticism of fascism and Nazism, that is, popular culture's rendering of fascism and Nazism as sublime': (12). I will follow suit.
 - 9 See Walter Schellenberg, *The Labyrinth: Memoirs of Walter Schellenberg, Hitler's Chief of Counterintelligence*, trans. Louis Hagen (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000); Peter Norden, *Salon Kitty* (Munich: Südwest, 1970). On the subject of Brass' film see also Kate Hutchinson, 'Nazi Exploitation Films and the Sadiconazista Cycle: Swarthy Italians of the Third Reich', *Ultra Violet* 7 (2005): 27–33.
 - 10 The arguments pro and con regarding how much of this relationship came from a woman's point of view (Cavani) can be found in Teresa de Lauretis, 'Cavani's *Night Porter*: A Woman's Film?' *Film Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (1976/77): 35–8; Marguerite Waller, 'Signifying the Holocaust: Lilitiana Cavani's *Portiere di notte*', in *Feminisms in the Cinema*, eds Laura Pietropaolo and Ada Testaferrri, 206–19 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Chiara Bassi, 'Fathers and Daughters in the Camp: *The Night Porter* by Lilitiana Cavani', in *Gendered Contexts: New Perspectives in Italian Cultural Studies*, eds Laura Benedetti, Julia L. Hairston, and Sylvia M. Ross, 165–75 (New York: Peter Lang, 1996).
 - 11 Ravetto, 55.
 - 12 Roland Barthes, 'Pasolini-Sade', *Stanford Italian Review* (Fall 1984): 101.
 - 13 Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vol. 1 and 2, trans. Stephen Conway (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press, 1987).
 - 14 Ravetto, 124.
 - 15 Ravetto, 126.
 - 16 See Gilles Deleuze, *Chaosophy*, trans. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1995).
 - 17 Ken Adam was born in Germany to a bourgeois Jewish family forced into exile in Britain in 1934. His spectacular James Bond sets of the 1960s and 70s were obviously informed by Nazi architectural gigantism to evoke the egomaniacal presence and threat of the super-villain.
 - 18 I refer to genre paintings by such artists as Adolf Ziegler, Ivo Saliger and Paul Mathias Padua and the heroic/homoerotic male warrior statuary of Joseph Thorak and Arno Breker. See Peter Adam, *Art of the Third Reich* (New York, Abrams, 1992); Alexander Scobie, *Hitler's State Architecture: The Impact of Classical Antiquity* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990); Andrew Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993); Eric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).
 - 19 The character's name is a clear in-joke on a particular Hollywood war film

cliché in which the only German command spouted by Nazi characters seems to be 'raus, a contraction of the word *heraus* meaning 'get out' or 'outside'.

- 20 I refer here to Paul Morrissey's *Flesh for Frankenstein* (1973) and *Andy Warhol's Dracula* (1974) which reframed the traditional stories as a blend of the bloody *giallo* and the elegant neodecadent period film, complete with allegories on aristocratic self-destruction, fascist social Darwinism as monster creation, the sexualized Marxist worker as heroic/erotic counterpoint to the representation of degenerate bourgeois vampirism etc. The casting of the young German actor Udo Kier, who at the time resembled Helmut Berger in both visage and accented speech as Baron Frankenstein and Dracula, was an obvious intertext to *The Damned*, but this mix of telescoped Nazism, fetish sexuality and gory experimentation may have influenced Brass in *Salon Kitty*. While there are no decapitations, amputations, disembowelments or bloodsucking in Brass's film, Wallenberg's impatient 'scientific' interest and his arrogant patois with the detested assistants, Dr Schwab and Rauss, resemble the antagonistic relationships between Kier's characters and their lackeys.
- 21 See Waller.
- 22 This is the name given to the *Röhm-Putsch* in which Hitler purged his SA (storm troopers) and the Party of its social-revolutionary representatives in 1934. The song Visconti's SA men sing is *Es zittern die morschen Knochen* with the refrain 'Denn heute gehört uns Deutschland/und morgen die ganze Welt' ('For today Germany belongs to us/and tomorrow, the entire world').
- 23 Berger-as-Dietrich's *Lola Lola* has since become the most recognizable icon of fascist depravity in neodecadent film and of the cinematic Nazi fetish itself, but actually represents the character at his most libertine/hedonistic and apolitical incarnation.
- 24 This is a possible nod to the cyclical nature of Richard Wagner's opera tetralogy *The Ring of the Nibelungs*, one of the inspirations for Visconti in his creation of *The Damned*.

7

Revisiting the Cruel Apparatus: Disability, Queerness and Taste in *In a Glass Cage*

DAVID CHURCH

INSPIRED BY GEORGES BATAILLE'S account of fifteenth-century child murderer Gilles de Rais,¹ Agustín Villaronga's debut feature *Tras el cristal* (*In a Glass Cage*, 1986) stands as one of the most controversial examples of post-Franco Spanish cinema. This controversy arises from its depiction of the destructive relationship between Klaus (Günter Meisner), a former Nazi death camp doctor now confined to an iron lung after a suicide attempt, and Angelo (David Sust), a young nurse who, through deadly re-enactments from Klaus's wartime diary, forces the older man to confront his one-time penchant for pedophilia and murder. In tormenting the disabled Klaus and his family in the context of 1950s Spain, not simply out of vengeance but also desire, Angelo's sadomasochistic actions play out a recurring cycle of historical trauma. In this linkage of non-normative sexuality and fascism, the film is most reminiscent of European *sadiconazista* films like Liliana Cavani's *Il portiere di notte* (*The Night Porter*, 1974) and especially Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (*Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, 1975), two films to which critics have often compared it.² These two high-art films also helped spawn a prurient cycle of low-budget sexploitation films set during the Nazi era, though the latter are considerably less 'artworthy' than *In a Glass Cage*, and more clearly addressed to a voyeuristic heterosexual audience than the film under consideration

here.³ Yet within fan cultures devoted to cult films, *In a Glass Cage* still frequently appears on the periphery of the loosely imagined Nazisploitation mediascape that has gradually emerged in scattered countries over the past four decades through periodic eruptions of lurid, Nazi-related pop culture products, such as brief film cycles that dispersed this iconography through transnational distribution networks.⁴ Whether discussed in exploitation film fanzines or in online discussion board postings about Nazisploitation tropes in European genre cinema, *In a Glass Cage* has become notorious among cult film aficionados for its grim subject matter and unflinching depictions of brutality reverberating temporally and geographically outward from the Third Reich.

Though lacking the outré sleaziness associated with films like *La bestia in calore* (translated as both *The Beast in Heat* and *SS Hell Camp*, 1977) and *Casa privata per le SS* (*SS Girls*, 1977), *In a Glass Cage* nevertheless mobilizes a stronger level of visceral impact than most Nazisploitation films. At the same time, it maintains art film credentials that help broaden our scope of the media texts discursively located beneath the ‘Nazisploitation’ banner. Unlike the swastikas and bullwhips deployed for crude shock value in the Nazi sexploitation film, Villaronga’s film uses symbolism at a far more nuanced level, preventing the overall work from being denigrated as just another unfortunate piece of cinematic ‘trash’. Yet, if we simply reproduce the equation of Nazisploitation with low culture, while finding it easier to morally justify those viscerally potent art films that deal with overlapping subject matter, the very concept of ‘Nazisploitation’ remains safely consigned to a place of pre-existing cultural disrepute. If, however, we admit not only to the proximity but also the contamination between self-consciously ‘artworthy’ films and their more exploitative kin, we may find that our viewing pleasures remain suspect across the board, echoing the sadomasochistic dynamics at work in the Nazisploitation genre in general. Cleanly categorizable as neither ‘art’ nor ‘exploitation’ — yet polluted by the conflicting connotations of each term — *In a Glass Cage*’s cultural standing mirrors the partiality and abjection associated with the disabled body at its narrative core.

Of particular interest in this regard is how the film self-reflexively depicts Klaus’s disability as a metaphor for cinematic spectatorship itself. This aspect adds an additional aesthetic dimension to a film whose self-serious tone is already complicated by several familiar

horror tropes and a potentially exploitative fetishization of violence. Because Villaronga ‘gambles with bad taste, dispensing with *Salò*’s neutral severity by adding genre thrills which implicate the voyeuristic drives of the audience’,⁵ the crux of the film becomes not only the intersection of queerness and disability, but also the intersection of high and low culture. As a film capable of fulfilling overlapping desires for art and exploitation, particularly within its most prevalent reception context as a cult film, this potential queering of taste categories may open space to expand our understanding of how even ‘distasteful’ disability representations may enable a more fluid model of spectatorship than disability studies scholars often acknowledge. In this essay, I will briefly analyze the film and its reception before specifically discussing how taste and spectatorship relate to issues of queerness and disability.

Multiple Gazes, Tortures, Desires

In a Glass Cage opens with a series of juxtaposed gazes: between the eye of a still camera and its operator, as Klaus photographs a nude boy hanging by his wrists in a decrepit building, and the shaky, first-person point of view (POV) shot of an unknown person who watches as Klaus kills the boy and then, in an apparent culmination of guilt over this murder, ascends a spiral staircase to make his (failed) suicide leap from the roof above. As Joaquín Cánovas Belchí notes, this interplay of multiple and simultaneous gazes reflects the multiplicity of points of view through which Villaronga constructs his filmic discourse, opening the film to numerous interpretations.⁶ Donato Totaro observes, for example, that the first-person ‘I-camera’ shot that normally serves as a clichéd signifier of the killer’s assaultive gaze in 1980s slasher films is here used ambiguously, since this viewpoint has already revealed Klaus to be the murderer, not the prospective victim he will become by the film’s end.⁷ We only later learn that the unknown watcher was Angelo, who not only steals the diary that Klaus leaves near the boy’s body, but also hides the body so that Klaus’s murderous secrets will not be discovered. While the assaultive nature of Angelo’s initial POV shots may be confirmed by the murders he later commits, the sense of mystery generated in this opening prologue fits Carol J. Clover’s argument that ‘inasmuch as the vision of the subjective camera calls attention to what it cannot see — to dark corners and recesses of its

vision, and above all to the space, and what might be in it, just off-frame — it gives rise to the sense not of mastery but of vulnerability.⁸ As holder of the gaze (which we, too, temporarily occupy through his eyes), Angelo's own descent into moral darkness is signaled narratologically in this opening scene, foreshadowing the theme of childhood vulnerability that lingers throughout the film — and even coexists with his murderous impulses — stemming from the unexorcized trauma of sexual abuse.

The film's constant confusion of killer and victim, inaugurated by these multiple gazes in the prologue, destabilizes any coherent point of spectatorial identification. Angelo, for example, may fit the general horror trope that '[e]ven killers whose childhood is not immediately at issue and who display no overt gender confusion are often sexually disturbed'⁹ (as the film soon reveals). Yet Villaronga does not center this gender confusion in a single monstrous figure. Instead, he spreads gender ambiguity and moral responsibility for the gaze across the small cast of characters, almost all of whom gradually emerge as both victims and victimizers. This variability of sites and motives for identification breaks down Laura Mulvey's monolithic theory that spectatorship is based on an assumed split between masculine/active looking and feminine/passive objectification, supposedly enforced by the (heterosexual) male viewer's privileged position within the cinematic apparatus.¹⁰ I would argue, on the contrary, that cinematic spectatorship inherently engenders partial, overlapping, and even contradictory points of identification as the viewer's gaze shifts fluidly from one character to the next. In this sense, an assaultive gaze that proves 'unstable because its bearer is doomed' to eventually be 'punished and incapacitated'¹¹ can especially highlight how our own spectatorial state while viewing the film involves remaining 'punished and incapacitated' by our fascination, for as Totaro notes, 'the act of watching as an eroticized act is inscribed at every level in the film.'¹² As Marsha Kinder puts it, 'we are baffled by the contradictions in our own emotional reactions — by the emotional distance from the protagonists, yet the intensity of response to the violent excesses, in which they figure both as killer and victim; by the strong desire to close our eyes or leave the theater, yet the compulsion to stay and search for the causes of their murderous deeds.'¹³

Some time after the suicide attempt that has left Klaus paralyzed in an iron lung, Angelo enters the remote villa uninvited when Klaus's



Figure 7.1 Klaus (Günter Meisner), a former Nazi death camp doctor now confined to an iron lung after a suicide attempt in Agustín Villaronga's *In a Glass Cage* (1986).



Figure 7.2 Klaus's androgynous daughter Rena (Gisèle Echevarría) straddles the iron lung containing Angelo (David Sust) at the conclusion of Agustín Villaronga's *In a Glass Cage* (1986).

wife Griselda (Marisa Paredes) seeks a nurse after feeling isolated and burdened by caring for her emotionally withdrawn husband (even to the point of wishing him dead) amid their postwar exile from Germany. Tellingly, the maid Jornalera (Imma Colomer) exclaims that someone swept in ‘like the devil himself’, but, upon further pressing by Griselda, does not know whether it was a man or woman who entered, foreshadowing Angelo’s queerness. After Angelo threatens to reveal Klaus’s secret pedophilia to his wife, he is hired, much to Griselda’s disappointment, particularly after she later discovers that he was only posing as a nurse. Meanwhile, Klaus’s androgynous pre-teen daughter Rena (Gisèle Echevarría) is clearly attracted to Angelo, but Griselda prevents her from spending much time with him, and strikes her when she protests. Angelo begins sneaking in to visit Klaus at night, and in a perverse eroticization of a medical procedure, he opens the vacuum chamber of the iron lung, causing Klaus to begin asphyxiating, then slowly mounts him and performs chest compressions; starting to weep, Angelo briefly fellates Klaus and finally closes the chamber. Throughout the film, it becomes clear that Angelo had been the victim of Klaus’s pedophilia as a boy, and that this history of sexual abuse now taints his sexuality. He is trapped in a circle of lust and aggression with his one-time abuser. For Kinder, the film’s violence is ‘eroticized by being linked with forbidden desire’, namely ‘Angelo’s homoerotic desire for his patriarchal seducer’.¹⁴ But I would point out that this scene also situates Klaus’s disability as a locus of ‘forbidden desire’, given that disabled sex is a socially marginalized practice (consensual or not, as the case may be here), queerly unable to fit within the bounds of the heteronormative imaginary. In this case, homosexual desire and desire for a disabled person happen to overlap; though this overlap is perhaps not surprising because, historically speaking, homosexuality has itself often been medicalized as a mental disorder, suggesting that both Klaus and Angelo are implicated by the intersection of disability and queerness.

From its earliest scenes, then, the film conjoins disability and queerness to sadomasochism. In so doing, it evokes the familiar Nazisploitation theme that fascism is undergirded by a potentially fatal streak of sexual decadence. In its depiction of ‘the totalitarian compulsory system as a radical and frightening historical background, on which rather interpersonal obsessions are played out’, *In a Glass Cage* stands as a continuation of the *sadiconazista*, an Italian term

which Marcus Stiglegger describes as a genre of films that ‘develop a sadomasochistic model based on the principles of totalitarian politics and hierarchies.’ Importantly, *sadiconazista* titles range from self-reflexive art films like *Salò* and *The Night Porter* to the more depoliticized and dehistoricized Nazi sexploitation entries,¹⁵ thus proving a category more inclusive than the typically low-cultural connotations of the English term ‘Nazisploitation’. Whether self-reflexive or just excessive, these films all share a preoccupation with the sadomasochistic recognition of terror as fascist torturers (and we, as viewers) take pleasure in their victims’ returned gaze. On another night, for example, Angelo reads Klaus’s diary to him, reminding the older man of how he had initially felt nothing special about killing children by injecting gasoline into their hearts, because he had not yet discovered that ‘[h]orror, like sin, can become fascinating’. As the diary reveals, the returned gaze from Klaus’s terrified young victims preceding each killing proved both uncomfortable and pleasurable to behold; in a sense, his sadomasochistic recognition of the children’s terror could only be dispelled by turning toward sadism’s logical endpoint: murder. However, his persistent search for new victims — which continued even into his postwar exile, as the film’s prologue indicates — represents a sort of repetition compulsion continually leading back to this masochistic vision. After Klaus confides to Angelo that he does not know if he could kill again, Angelo offers to continue the killings to emulate Klaus. Angelo desires to be like this perverse father figure, to take his place and relegate the physically dependent Klaus to the role of child. ‘You’re the child now’, Angelo plainly says while disrobing and beginning to masturbate in Klaus’s face, meanwhile narrating memorized chunks of Klaus’s diary and insisting that Griselda be removed from the equation so that the two men can be together. In scenes like this, the repetition of trauma stems from the inscription of history not only in the diaries, but also in Klaus’s own body as a signifier of past crimes — his physical paralysis symbolizing a self-inflicted attempt to punish what we might consider the ‘moral paralysis’ that previously allowed him to self-justify the murders as a passive compulsion. The iron lung’s formidable presence also evokes the use of such machinery to prolong life in severe cases of childhood polio, suggesting that the emotional trauma he inflicted upon children like Angelo has ironically boomeranged back to him in physical form. It confines him as though he suffered a (corporeally

debilitating) childhood trauma himself. In this way, trauma ruptures what had once been an alignment between Klaus's physical authority (now denied him) and his symbolic authority as patriarch. After allowing Griselda to see how he has smeared semen on her husband's face, Angelo stalks her through the house and finally hangs her from a railing. He then places her body atop the iron lung for the night. Angelo tells the frightened Rena that her mother has left, and they go to bed together at her request, implying that the father role he increasingly inhabits includes even the possibility of symbolic incest, initiating her into the cycle of abuse. As Roberto Curti observes, one of the recurring themes in Villaronga's films is 'the moment when purity meets madness and monstrosity, becoming irreparably infected, and starting an irreversible mutation.'¹⁶ From this point, Rena begins playing along with Angelo's assumption of authority, as though it were a (sexual) role-playing game — albeit a game in which her imagined Aryan 'purity' is bodily and spiritually corrupted by the real effects of the Fatherland's racial violence.

With Griselda gone, Angelo fires the maid and begins redecorating the villa to evoke a death camp — he burns the furniture, repapers the walls, and hangs barbed wire mesh around the corridors — even at the cost of neglecting Klaus's cleanliness. Meanwhile, he lures a young gypsy boy back to the villa with offers of money (using the same lines Klaus had used on boys), orders the child to undress, recites one of Klaus's diary entries, and correspondingly injects gasoline from Klaus's iron lung into the boy's heart. Although Klaus watches the boy die, he later decides that he would rather have Angelo kill him than allow the murders to continue. Nevertheless, Angelo later kills another boy in another re-enactment from Klaus's diary. Rena, who has been locked in her room, escapes to alert the authorities, but Angelo catches her and allows her to watch as he reveals to Klaus that he was one of his young victims during the war. Angelo opens the iron lung and takes Klaus in his arms like a child, the younger man fatally re-enacting the seduction scenario from his own youth (as we see in flashbacks), with the roles now clearly reversed, forcing the gasping Klaus to fellate him until he chokes to death. Rena escapes again after witnessing her father's death, while Angelo forges a suicide note in which Klaus supposedly confesses to the recent murders. Rena returns to the villa some time later, dresses like a boy and slicks her hair down, then enters her father's room where Angelo now lies within the iron lung.

She kisses him, mounts the iron lung, and begins undressing — but the film ends with the image freezing, framed within the snow globe that had been sitting near the iron lung at the beginning of the film, suggesting the cold, insular cycle of violence continuing with Angelo and Rena now apparently playing the roles once respectively inhabited by Klaus and Angelo.¹⁷ These performances of identity thus queer the fragile boundaries of not only gender but also physical ability. They suggest how, in Robert McRuer's words, 'able-bodied identity and heterosexual identity are linked in their mutual impossibility and in their mutual incomprehensibility — they are incomprehensible in that each is an identity that is simultaneously the ground on which all identities supposedly rest and an impressive achievement that is always deferred and thus never really guaranteed.'¹⁸ Since Nazi identity was largely premised on the German body politic's supposed purity and vitality, homosexuality and disability stood as constant reminders of those impossible ideals — hence the need to systematically eradicate such apparent pollutants. For McRuer, the failings of any such able-bodied identity project suggest how (following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's discussion of the queer potentialities of gender performativity) disability is 'the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of bodily, mental or behavioral functioning aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically.'¹⁹ Yet, the film's ambiguous ending should not imply that the destabilization of gender or ability norms is a threat to be feared. Only in the most reductive reading does *In a Glass Cage* seem to replicate traditional stereotypes about disability and queerness as sources of monstrosity — from the image of the disabled person as freakish fiend, avenging cripple and sexual deviant; to the image of the homosexual as moral corrupter, pedophile and murderer.²⁰ Instead of reading disability or queerness as visual signifiers of individuals' moral flaws, the root of violence — as the film's political critique should make clear — can be located in the inescapable history of fascistic patriarchy. In this sense, victim-killers like Angelo are posited 'not as deviant individuals but as violent subjects who have been constructed by a perverted culture.'²¹ As in Nazisploitation films more generally, fascism's abandonment of democracy supposedly leads to sexual decadence, sadomasochism and rape. According to Julian Petley, this equation of fascism, violence and sexual deviance has a long history, from the Weimar-era opposition

press publishing scandalous rumors about prominent Nazis' sex lives to anti-German propaganda during World War I. Even as Nazisploitation films capitalize for prurient reasons on the conjunction of fascism and sadomasochism, they nevertheless contain an element of political criticism (which *In a Glass Cage* foregrounds) in fantasizing a dark sexual undercurrent beneath the Nazis' hyper-bourgeois emphasis on restraint and discipline.²²

Taste and Reception Contexts

Despite its unrelentingly grim subject matter, *In a Glass Cage* remains an aesthetically appealing work according to many of the traditional standards of artworthiness associated with European art cinema. It boasts distinctive cinematography, effectively stylish direction, and strong performances by noted actors like Paredes and Meisner. As *Variety* noted, this 'horrifying film about a sexual deviant who gets his kicks torturing and killing young boys [...] is, perversely, a well-made and probably seriously intentioned pic. Its very evident qualities only add to its power to disturb and shock.'²³ For example, its cold and dark visual palette, dominated by blues and grays (with the exception of bright red spots in several scenes of violence), suggests how nearly all the film's major characters exist in the realm of moral twilight; apart from Klaus' and Angelo's obvious crimes, Griselda had attempted to kill Klaus by turning off the power to his iron lung, while Rena eventually becomes complicit with Angelo's murder of her mother. Yet, the film also straddles the line between art and exploitation, particularly in its murder scenes. As several critics have noted, Angelo's drawn-out stalking and murder of Griselda is particularly reminiscent of Italian *gialli*, like the films of Dario Argento, 'primarily in their use of artificial light, primary colors, minimal electronic scores, and the open display of sexualized violence.'²⁴ More disturbing are the fetishized close-ups of Angelo caressing his young victims' bare bodies before killing them, the camera lingering over their death throes. As Stephen Thrower suggests, while these sequences bring 'traditional suspense [...] into play, the extreme situations overload the suspense mechanics in a way that makes conventional narrative pleasure hard to sustain.'²⁵

According to Cánovas Belchí, the Spanish critical reaction to such a deliberately shocking film was heated upon its release into a

marketplace dominated by American imports and Spanish literary adaptations. While it clearly treated a topic of relevance to Spain's fascist legacy, the film's depiction of this material was more confrontational in tone than most critics (appreciative and otherwise) were prepared for. Unlike the way some Spanish film-makers used the horror genre during the late-Franco era to conceal political critique by avoiding the high-cultural associations of domestically produced 'art cinema' (which the regime had sanctioned to prove its supposed liberalism on the international stage),²⁶ Villaronga had the political and creative freedom in the 1980s to bill his work as an art film, yet retain horrific, quasi-exploitative elements that sharpen its critique of fascism and Spain's complicity with the Holocaust — even to the point of bordering, for many Spanish viewers, on the unbearably intense. According to Kinder, Villaronga's foreign influences and references (e.g. *The Night Porter*, *Salò*, *Bataille*) even led some critics to 'dismiss the film as "not Spanish"'.²⁷ As one critic noted, for example, 'It is not a work of use within Spanish cinema. There is a wish to move away from the well-worn paths, which is not frequent. [...] There is risk and a true originality, without concessions, in his work.'²⁸

While most critics praised Villaronga as a promising new talent, they were divided over his ethical relationship to his subject matter, particularly whether the film did justice to its glance into the darkest corners of the human soul, and the film's apparent refusal to offer definitive value judgments about its themes of sexual perversion and initiation into evil.²⁹ In this respect, *In a Glass Cage* exhibits the sort of moral ambiguity and narrative openness often associated with art cinema, even if some critics accused Villaronga of retreating into style rather than facing the full implications of his subject matter, as if hiding his authorial intent within the gloomy *mise-en-scène* itself. It is also an ambiguity and openness made especially disquieting given the film's relation to the horror genre, which typically seeks narrative closure by dispelling monstrosity and reaffirming ideological 'normalcy'. Nevertheless, in *El Mundo's* December 1995 poll of the best films from Spain's first century of film-making (as selected by a jury of prominent Spanish directors, actors and critics), *In a Glass Cage* was one of the fifty most highly regarded titles.³⁰

Promoted as an art film, it played at several major film festivals outside Spain, including the Berlin Film Festival and the London Film Festival. It opened in the United States in 1989. American critical reactions resembled Spanish ones in that they acknowledged

Villaronga's directorial skill but sometimes took issue with the film's apparently unjustified or repellant representations of sexualized violence. For example, *The Washington Post's* Desson Howe claimed that 'this is little more than a stylistic, cynical exercise. [...] [W]hen the subject is the psychological dark side in man (or woman), there ought to be something insightful to mull over.'³¹ According to *The New York Times's* Stephen Holden, 'For all the elegance of the cinematography and the strength of the acting, the movie still feels more than a little exploitative in its references to the Holocaust and in its close-up violence. [...] Yet there's no question but that the film wants to be taken seriously and that its director is a flashy new talent.'³² *Variety* predicted that 'few people will see it. Where there is film and video censorship, it will certainly be banned on the grounds of child pornography, and even where it can be freely shown, it's hard to imagine an arthouse audience willing to sit through such a catalogue of horrors.'³³ The film was also shown at a handful of gay and lesbian film festivals, though not without some controversy, given its depiction of two gay men as homicidal pedophiles. When the Australian LGBTQ-themed Mardi Gras Film Festival applied to screen it in 1995, Australia's Office of Film and Literature Classification even banned it on the grounds that, despite being 'well-made' and showing the 'horrific consequences of wartime Nazi child abuse', these factors were 'outweighed by the gratuitous elements of the film and the pervasive relishing of child abuse and torture.'³⁴

Given its controversial blend of art and exploitation, capable of alienating most viewers, it is perhaps hardly surprising that *In a Glass Cage* has become a cult object revered by a select group of viewers with tastes attuned to the pleasures of both high and low culture — often within the same text. In this regard, it exemplifies the sort of art-horror films described by Joan Hawkins as blurring the distinctions between the aesthetic distance of high art and the visceral affect of low culture.³⁵ Although Totaro also links the film to Jeffrey Sconce's concept of 'paracinema',³⁶ or the ironic celebration of trash/exploitation films as a politicized reading strategy, I contend that, unlike most straightforwardly sleazy Nazisploitation films, the overall tone of *In a Glass Cage* is too dark to encourage that sort of tongue-in-cheek irony. Likewise, it does not seem open to the particular means of queering taste categories that can be found in camp reading strategies (which tend to overlap with paracinema). Rather, as I have

noted elsewhere, the film regularly appears on horror fans' lists of the so-called 'sickest' films ever made — a subculturally constructed corpus of films, often combining extreme violence with a self-serious tone, whose ability to deliver powerful levels of visceral affect helps form alternative aesthetic criteria that complicate appeals to bourgeois standards of artworthiness.³⁷ As such, if we conceive of viewers' taste-related pleasures as, like identification itself, consisting of multiple, overlapping and even contradictory valences of desire that a filmic text can partially fulfill, then art-horror films that encourage a viewer's simultaneous desire for the textual delights of high and low culture, without clearly occupying one pole or the other, could produce an especially queer space for desirous exercises of taste. Again, this differs from camp, with a tenor more attuned to the mutual appreciation of both art and exploitation, without simply folding one into a high-toned aestheticization of the other.

Disability, Masochism, and Spectatorship

This queering of taste is perhaps best represented by one of the film's most stylish traits: its metacinematic commentary on the nature of spectatorship. In addition to the interplay of gazes described above, the film explicitly frames Klaus's passive and masochistic viewing position as paralleling that of the film viewer. Early in the film, Angelo explains to Klaus that he can do everything (including describing a movie to keep him entertained) except think for him. Angelo then describes a strange scene he supposedly sees outside the window, in which an older man offers a cigarette to a boy and, seeming to be friends, the older man and boy leave together. In this way, Angelo narrates his own memory of being seduced by Klaus, as if it were a scene from a film, but Klaus can only listen to the flow of information controlled by Angelo. Shortly thereafter, Angelo mounts a mirror onto the iron lung above Klaus's face, angled so that the supine man can watch what is going on elsewhere in the room. Compelled to look through the mirror, Klaus's 'field of vision is constrained, and also strictly controlled',³⁸ much like our own position as viewers. At one point, the maid even notes that the machine with the mirror makes her nervous because '[i]t's like being at the movies'. In the child murder scenes, Angelo mounts the mirror so that Klaus, despite the older man's ambivalence about his continuing desire to kill, can still watch as Angelo does what he

physically cannot, as if projecting his sadistic fantasy into the mirror so that the child's fear can return as a painful spectacle. In this sense, the film fits Clover's argument that 'assaultive gazing in horror is by and large the minority position and that the real investment of the genre is in the reactive or introjective position, figured as both painful and feminine.'³⁹ It is less Klaus's sadism that is satisfied than his masochistic 'unpleasure' in 'intimately joining death' by identifying with the victim's mortal terror, as he explains to Angelo during his narration of past crimes. Unpleasure, in German *Unlust*, here refers to Freud's use of the word for the pleasure-in-pain of masochism. Indeed, Klaus's position echoes arguments by both Leo Bersani and Kaja Silverman that the exercise of sadism merely provides the best vantage point for a sadomasochistic identification with the object of one's torment.⁴⁰

In the tradition of high culture, these metacinematic moments would seem to distance the viewer aesthetically from the film because they remind us of our similar position of enforced passivity before the cinematic spectacle. However, as Steven Shaviro notes, our disempowered and masochistic abjection before the visceral affectivity of the cinematic image actually collapses the distance between spectator and spectacle. Our senses are bombarded, but the simulacral image — which is not a representation, but an affective event — vanishes before we can cognitively grasp and order its affects into a signifying system.⁴¹ Because the image's contents are simultaneously absent (in a literal sense) and more-than-present (in their physical effect upon us), 'distancing and alienation-effects', like these metacinematic moments, 'serve not to dispel but only to intensify the captivating power of cinematic spectacle.'⁴² Indeed, even as these moments encourage us to reflect upon our own spectatorship, in ways befitting high-cultural reading strategies, they also promote the disreputable pleasures of low culture by immediately giving way to eroticized close-ups of violence committed upon children. As Kinder notes, 'the reversibility of the matched gaze [between the viewer and Klaus] forces us spectators to confront our own emotional susceptibility to the eroticizing of the most hideous murders [...]. We see how murderers are constructed and recruited through spectatorship, by having witnessed or read the same violent representations that we are now watching.'⁴³ In these scenes, the taste distinctions between high art's self-reflexive distance and low culture's prurient viscosity are queered in the service of multiple spectatorial desires, including ostensibly aberrant ones. Touching on

Klaus's ambivalence over the horror of the victims arranged for his pleasure (but whose deaths he does not literally carry out), horror films often position us as (in Shaviro's words) 'overtly appalled by the violence [we] are compelled to see, yet there's a latent — secretly desirable — erotic thrill in the way these gory spectacles are being produced for [us]. [We] do not "identify" with the murderers, but [we] are transformed, even energized, by [our] involuntary participation.'⁴⁴ Still, as Shaviro continues, 'in horror films, we are complicitous with the monster precisely to the extent — and *only* to the extent — that the latter does not operate from a position of power, but is in its own right victimized and driven by a passive compulsion.'⁴⁵ In this way, we can read Angelo (perhaps more so than Klaus) as not wholly in power, because even as he steps into the role of murderous patriarch, he does so following a history of childhood sexual abuse which has chained his compulsive, murderous desires to those of his original abuser.

As Clover and Shaviro conclude, the viewer's masochistic submission to the power of the image — which also entails a fluid interplay of gendered viewing positions, freed from fixed identification with particular characters — is not solely confined to the horror genre, but also underlies cinematic spectatorship in general. It allows viewers to experience safely a multiplicity of pleasures that may permeate the entire viewing experience, and even exceed it altogether.⁴⁶ In this respect, even if Nazisploitation films often seem outwardly focused around sadism, the underlying pleasures they produce for viewers may actually be closer to masochistic (or at least sadomasochistic) thrills, as the medical-cum-visual apparatus deployed in *In a Glass Cage* reflexively illustrates. If an ever-shifting affectivity is ultimately more important than strong identifications with certain characters, then we cannot clearly differentiate between the sadistic pleasure of watching Nazi violence and the sadomasochistic thrill of watching these evildoers punished in the end. Just as we cannot ever fully identify with these characters, neither can we ever completely dis-identify with them. By complicating any easy condemnation of its fascist characters, this film thus elucidates a central tension of the Nazisploitation genre, which critics have too often avoided engaging, due to their own easy condemnation of such films on the grounds of taste. Importantly, though, *In a Glass Cage* uses a severe physical disability (quadriplegia) as a key element of its meta-commentary on spectatorship; but what are the implications of this metaphor?

Disability studies scholars often reject popular representations of disability as a metaphor, because such metaphors are typically used to address non-disabled people's anxieties about corporeality, while minimizing the complexities of people with disabilities' lived experiences.⁴⁷ I suggest, however, that this means of policing disability representations — resting upon simplistic assumptions that (non-disabled) viewers primarily identify with able-bodied characters — forecloses a fuller understanding of how our own bodies are solicited by the sensual appeal of cinematic images. The ultimately conservative forms of political correctness (arguing over 'positive' vs. 'negative' disability imagery) often implied in film criticism within disability studies largely derive from the social model of disability, which understands 'disability' as constructed through social, architectural and attitudinal barriers that disable individuals with corporeal impairments or bodily differences. Because this constructivist viewpoint tends to shift the site of disability away from the body itself and on to wider social inequalities, it thus proves inadequate for describing people like Klaus, who are primarily disabled by embodied states of severe mobility restriction or chronic illness. This dominant trend in disability studies film criticism also reflects what Shaviro sees as a phobic distrust of cinema's affective, embodied pleasures, in which the film theorist tries desperately to maintain an analytic distance from his/her threateningly seductive objects of study, thus reproducing the same power structures between subject and object that the theorist often wishes to challenge.⁴⁸ I contend that disability studies scholars who disavow the body's responses to the tactility of cinema indeed reproduce a Cartesian split. This split hypocritically treats the viewing body as an unruly object in need of distanced analysis, much like the disabled body is objectified by the medical gaze. In this respect, disability studies currently finds itself at a similar critical impasse as earlier liberation movements, much like feminist film criticism faced through the 1970s in the wake of the particular thread of Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis popularized by Mulvey.

In a Glass Cage, however, invites us to reconsider our embodied position as spectators, precisely because its disability narrative excites us viscerally, even against our will, by producing a queer space where traditional distinctions both within and between socially constructed categories of taste, gender, sexuality and physical ability anxiously blur. This blurring reveals their ultimate fragility. Klaus's disability is

clearly at the film's core, for his inability to retain his one-time patriarchal power (once he has invited Angelo into the household) enables the sadomasochistic relationship that follows — a relationship with which we are made complicit as shared viewers of the violence Angelo commits for Klaus's pleasure. Like Klaus, we are enveloped within a mechanical apparatus as viewers, but whose flow of images we cannot control, and thus over which we cannot exert mastery. Our visual fascination with these powerful images renders us passive, immobile and even in pain — all connotations shared with the disabled body — as our identifications and desires shift and recombine through the film's destabilized array of gazes and gender roles. My adoption of disability as a metaphor for cinematic spectatorship is not intended to minimize or essentialize the experiences of people with disabilities, but rather to point towards the fluidity between disabled and non-disabled positionalities, which the processes of spectatorship can produce. In this way, the disability-as-spectatorship metaphor can emphasize the cinematic image's power to rupture normative vision, not treating the image as merely representational and ideologically repressive — unlike disability studies scholars who already suspiciously regard the viewing body and its pleasures through the indirectly metaphoric lens of phobic, distanced analysis.⁴⁹

In saying this, I am not simply implying that we are all made disabled/queer by the act of spectatorship, since very real social inequalities exist for individuals who are 'out' as queer or disabled. McRuer observes that 'the question "aren't we all queer/disabled?" can be an attempt at containment' by able-bodied/heterosexual people, but he still argues that 'there are *moments* when we are all queer/disabled, and that *those disabled/queer moments are desirable*.'⁵⁰ In revealing a range of desires premised upon both queerness and disability, the metacinematic commentary provided by *In a Glass Cage* illustrates how these disabled/queer moments can potentially derive from seemingly 'negative' and 'distasteful' disability representation found in such unlikely places as Nazisploitation — for, in this particular film, the historical traumas created by fascism blur the lines between victims and killers, becoming imprinted upon the desiring body itself (disabled or not). It was, after all, a fellow doctor from the death camps who initially arranged for Klaus to receive the iron lung, the two men linked by their shared crimes; similarly, it is gasoline from that same iron lung that not only keeps Klaus alive

after the war, but also serves as a weapon of death when wielded by Angelo in replication of Klaus's wartime atrocities. In addition, as both homosexual and disabled, Klaus serves as a perverse reminder of a history of eugenics that ironically would have made him a more likely victim than executioner during the Holocaust, his medico-patriarchal authority as doctor now inverted to find him the reluctant object of medicalization gone perversely awry at the hands of his 'nurse'.⁵¹ This reversal for the cruel patriarch is especially poignant in the context of Villaronga's critique of Spanish fascism, for 'the fact that Franco lived long enough to become disabled, and for his infirmity to become for his critics interchangeable with his government, has left a particular legacy for Spanish discourse in terms of how bodies which depart from impossible but culturally reiterative physical norms are read and valorized.'⁵² If, as Shaviro argues, we should 'rid ourselves of the notion that we can somehow free ourselves from illusion (or from ideology) by recognizing and theorizing our own entrapment within it',⁵³ then *In a Glass Cage's* hermetically sealed world of sadomasochistic violence-in-desire signals the (disabled) body's centrality within the matrix of patriarchal power relations that it savagely critiques — a critique made all the more painful through our own complicity as viewers whose bodies cannot help but submit to the (un)pleasures of the film's queer/disabled engagement with the fatal limits of corporeality.

Notes

Many thanks to Alex Doty for his helpful insight during the research process, and to Joan Hawkins for her gracious feedback on an earlier draft of this essay.

- 1 This is according to director Agustín Villaronga. See the interview on the DVD for *In a Glass Cage*, Cult Epics, 2005. See also Georges Bataille, *The Trial of Gilles de Rais*, trans. Richard Robinson (Los Angeles: Amok Books, 1991).
- 2 See, for example, Bruce LaBruce, 'In a Glass Cage', *CineAction*, no. 67 (2005): 7; Stephen Thrower, 'Tras El Cristal', in *Eyeball Compendium*, ed. Stephen Thrower, 348–51 (Godalming, UK: FAB Press, 2003), 348; Marcus Stiglegger, 'In a Glass Cage (Tras el cristal)', in *100 European Horror Films*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider (London: British Film Institute, 2007), 120; and Donato Totaro, 'From Primitive to Modern Violence: Reflections in a Glass Cage', *Offscreen* 9, no. 12 (2005), accessed January 10, 2011, www.offscreen.com/biblio/phile/essays/glass_cage/.
- 3 On the Italian sexploitation cycle perhaps most often associated with Nazisploitation, see Mikel J. Koven, 'The Film You Are About to See is Based on Documented Fact': Italian Nazi Sexploitation Cinema', in *Alternative Europe: Eurotrash and Exploitation Cinema Since 1945*, eds Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik, 19–31 (London: Wallflower Press, 2004).
- 4 On the Nazisploitation mediascape more broadly, see Julian Petley, 'Nazi Horrors: History, Myth, Sexploitation', in *Horror Zone: The Cultural Experience*

- of *Contemporary Horror Cinema*, ed. Ian Conrich, 205–26 (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010). Spanish cinema has not produced a noticeable trend in Nazisploitation films (unlike Italy, for example), though Spanish exploitation director Jesús Franco did direct *Greta: Haus ohne Männer (Ilsa, the Wicked Warden, 1977)*, a US-Swiss-West German co-production marketed as an unofficial entry in the North American *Ilsa* series, starring Dyanne Thorne as a cruel Nazi camp commandant. Essentially a women-in-prison film (as are many other Nazisploitation titles) set in an unnamed Latin American jungle, Franco's film was primarily released under the titles *Greta: The Mad Butcher* and *Ilsa: The Wicked Warden*.
- 5 Thrower, 348.
 - 6 Joaquín Cánovas Belchí, 'Tras el cristal', in *Antología Crítica del Cine Español, 1906-1995: Flor en la Sombra*, ed. Julio Pérez Perucha, 875–7 (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra/Filmoteca Española, 1997), 876.
 - 7 Totaro, 'From Primitive to Modern Violence'.
 - 8 Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 187.
 - 9 *Ibid.*, 28.
 - 10 See Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* 16, vol. 3 (1975): 6–18.
 - 11 Clover, 189.
 - 12 Totaro, 'From Primitive to Modern Violence'.
 - 13 Marsha Kinder, *Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 190.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, 192.
 - 15 Marcus Stiglegger, 'Beyond Good and Evil? Sodomasochism and Politics in the Cinema of the 1970s', trans. Kathrin Zeitz, *Ikonen: Magazin für Kunst, Kultur, und Lebensart*, accessed January 10, 2011, www.ikonen-magazin.de/artikel/Nightporter.htm.
 - 16 Roberto Curti, 'Another Time, Another Place: The Horrific, the Fantastic, and the Fairy-Like in the Films of Agustín Villaronga', *Offscreen* 9, no. 12 (2005), accessed January 10, 2011. www.offscreen.com/biblio/phile/essays/another_time_another_place/.
 - 17 This image also evokes a more literal translation of the film's Spanish title, 'Behind the Glass'. Notably, the Spanish word *crystal* can also translate as 'lens', further suggesting the film's self-reflexive commentary on the framing of violence as cinematic spectacle. It is also notable that this film shares the 'cold' tonal temperature generally associated with the Nazisploitation cycle's lowbrow end, rather than the 'warmth' associated with other varieties of soft-core exploitation.
 - 18 Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 9.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, 156–7; emphasis in original.
 - 20 For a discussion of these images, see Martin F. Norden, *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994); and Harry M. Benshoff, *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997).
 - 21 Kinder, 196.
 - 22 Petley, 217–18.

- 23 'Tras El Cristal', *Variety*, March 5, 1986.
- 24 Stiglegger, 'In a Glass Cage (*Tras el cristal*)', 121. LaBruce also makes the *giallo* comparison (7), while Thrower emphasizes the film's willingness to break taboos about cinematically depicting child murder (349).
- 25 Thrower, 349.
- 26 See Andrew Willis, 'Spanish Horror and the Flight from 'Art' Cinema, 1967–73', in *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste*, eds, Mark Jancovich, Antonio Lázaro Reboll, Julian Stringer, and Andy Willis (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003), 71–83.
- 27 Kinder, 185.
- 28 Ángel A. Pérez Gómez, quoted in Cánovas Belchí, 877 (my translation); originally published in *Reseña*, no. 174, May 1987.
- 29 Cánovas Belchí, 876–7.
- 30 Bernard P.E. Bentley, *A Companion to Spanish Cinema* (Woodbridge, UK: Tamesis, 2008), 319–20.
- 31 Desson Howe, 'In a Glass Cage, Darkly', *The Washington Post*, February 19, 1993, 38.
- 32 Stephen Holden, 'Glass Cage: Torture, Murder, and Revenge', *The New York Times*, March 24, 1989, C13.
- 33 *Variety*, 'Tras El Cristal', March 5, 1986.
- 34 'In a Glass Cage', *Refused Classification: Film Censorship in Australia*, accessed January 10, 2011, www.refused-classification.com/Films_Inaglasscage.htm. The film remains banned in Australia to this day.
- 35 Joan Hawkins, *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 3–8. For example, the film was released on the Cult Epics DVD label in 2005, after previously only being available on poor-quality VHS bootlegs.
- 36 Totaro, 'From Primitive to Modern Violence'. See also Jeffrey Sconce, "'Trashing" the Academy: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style', *Screen* 36, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 371–93.
- 37 David Church, 'Of Manias, Shit, and Blood: The Reception of *Salò* as a "Sick Film"', *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 6, no. 2 (November 2009): 340–72.
- 38 Chris Gallant, 'Power, Paedophilia, Perdition: Agustín Villaronga's *Tras el cristal* (*In a Glass Cage*, 1986)', *Kinoeye: New Perspectives on European Film* 2, no. 17 (2002), accessed January 10, 2011, www.kinoeye.org/02/17/gallant17.php.
- 39 Clover, 211–12. As a supplanted patriarch, Klaus's feminization is made all the more apparent because disability is often figured in patriarchal culture as a feminizing trait due to its associations with passivity and disempowerment.
- 40 Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 42; and Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 266.
- 41 Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 24, 26.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 43.
- 43 Kinder, 189. Later, she notes how 'the reflexive scenes evoking cinematic spectatorship stress the passivity or physical immobility imposed on the

- viewer, a condition like political repression that only heightens the intensity of the violence and eroticism held in check' (195).
- 44 Shaviro, 50.
- 45 Ibid., 61.
- 46 Clover, 227; Shaviro, 56–65.
- 47 For example, see Carrie Sandahl, 'Ahhhh Freak Out! Metaphors of Disability and Femaleness in Performance', *Theatre Topics* 9, no. 1 (1999): 11–30.
- 48 Shaviro, 10–20.
- 49 Examples of this disability studies scholarship focused on filmic representation at the expense of the viewing body include Norden, *The Cinema of Isolation*; Ann Pointon and Chris Davies, eds, *Framed: Interrogating Disability in the Media* (London: British Film Institute, 1997); and Anthony Enns and Christopher R. Smit, eds, *Screening Disability: Essays on Cinema and Disability* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001).
- 50 McRuer, 157; emphasis in original.
- 51 On the Nazi euthanasia programs for people with disabilities (such as Action T4), see Suzanne E. Evans, *Forgotten Crimes: The Holocaust and People with Disabilities* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004).
- 52 Ryan Prout, 'Cryptic Triptych: (Re)Reading Disability in Spanish Film 1960-2003: *El cochecito*, *El jardín de las delicias*, and *Planta cuarta*', *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 12 (2008): 166.
- 53 Shaviro, 11.

8

Eine Armee Gretchen: Nazisploitation Made in Switzerland

BENEDIKT EPPENBERGER

IN 1972, SOME YEARS before exploitation cinema reached its nadir of depravity in the form of Nazisploitation movies, Swiss director/producer Erwin C. Dietrich¹ (b. 1930) made the movie *Eine Armee Gretchen* ('An Army of Gretchens', henceforth referred to as 'EAG').² While *EAG* influenced neither the growing wave of Nazisploitation movies nor built upon its precursors, the film nevertheless went on to establish itself firmly in the European canon of Nazisploitation movies made in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.³

Given exploitation cinema's chaotic methods of production and distribution, it is no wonder that its canon is composed of rather apocryphal movies. In general, Nazisploitation movies encompass those that use the fascination of Nazi imagery, ideology, symbols and artifacts to increase its commercial appeal.⁴ The large number of such works dilutes the precision of the term Nazisploitation and thus makes it of limited use for our discussion. In the strictest sense, Nazisploitation and *sadiconazista* movies⁵ typically include prison and concentration camp scenes with sadistic Nazis and degraded women. Most were produced between 1967 and 1980, typically in Italy and the United States.

A business based on generic hybridization, dissimulation and cheap speculation quickly turns history into trivial lore, which is difficult to

grasp and possibly best studied as a coherent connotative subsystem of the 'mongrel muse' cinema.⁶ Produced in 1972, *EAG* highlights some of these difficulties, even as it is itself a marginal and obscure title among better known Nazisploitation films. How does a movie enter and remain in this precarious canon? How is this casual mix of soft-core porn and a World War II action film transformed into a Nazisploitation movie? *EAG* will serve as a showcase of such a generic creation through this kind of bastardization.

First, *EAG*'s peculiarities must be addressed. The discussion will begin with a reading of the 1947 novel *Eine Armee Gretchen* (eventually translated in 1974 as *Gretchen in Uniform*) from which the film was adapted, followed by an examination of the film itself. Finally, I will demonstrate how this unique movie was promoted via lobby posters, distribution titles and video covers into the nascent canon of Nazisploitation film. I will show that *EAG*'s solitary position in European film-making as well as in the canon of Nazisploitation movies is the result of distributor actions and consumer reception. Yet, even in such a frame, *EAG* remains in many ways an alien intruder among typical Nazisploitation, which is precisely what makes this particular film worthy of discussion. While identified here as a stray movie, it nevertheless reveals the core of typical Nazisploitation 'ingredients': a dissident that ultimately supplies the key to the conformists' typology.

Are there points of contact between *EAG* and other precursors of the *sadiconazista* film? Three possible reference movies bear mentioning: 1. Sidney Lumet's *The Pawnbroker* (1964), the first US movie to represent explicitly the sexual relationships between female concentration camp inmates and SS prison guards; 2. Robert Lee Frost's *Love Camp 7* (1968), which was the first movie to exploit the camp setting in a sexual manner and served as a blueprint for later *sadiconazista* movies; 3. Luchino Visconti's *La caduta degli dei* (*The Damned*, 1969) which set the visual and thematic standard for Nazisploitation movies in terms of SS uniform fetishization and the interplay of homosexuality, decadence and doom. *EAG* itself was barely influenced by these early precursors of *sadiconazista* movies; yet it remains similarly remote from the typical Nazisploitation movie from the genre's heyday between 1975 and 1980.

While most Nazisploitation movies were created in countries such as Italy, France or the United States, *EAG* was made in Switzerland. Producer/director Erwin C. Dietrich, with his focus on mass-produced

budget movies in the 1960s and 1970s, was an outlier in a country whose movie output at that time was limited to representative big productions, auteur films, TV productions and genre films such as comedies and murder mysteries.⁷ A tradition of producing profit-oriented, low-budget sex, horror and war movies did not exist in Switzerland. In such an environment, a World War II action sex film like *EAG*, which furthermore presented the conflict from a German perspective, emerged as a puzzling maverick.

Beyond cultural and economic reasons, there are also political explanations for the film's production in Switzerland: until late into the 1970s, Switzerland tried to preserve its *Sonderfall* (special case) image as a World War II survivor that kept its proverbial hands clean. On the world stage, Switzerland presented itself as a small country ready to fight aggressors, a potential victim with hedgehog survival qualities that had successfully kept out the Nazis. However, the political left has attacked this myth since the 1970s. The resulting later caricature of Switzerland as a willing collaborator with Nazi Germany — for instance by hiding ill-gotten Nazi gold in numbered Swiss bank accounts — did not match the official Swiss position. Neither did the view presented by *EAG*, which was regarded as opportunistic, trashy and denigrating. Dietrich's reckless presentation of German women as horny female soldiers stood in loud and clear opposition to the ruling conception of history, that of both the right and the left. In its position as an outcast among Swiss movie productions, *EAG* could be safely ignored and, as such, it caused no further repercussions.⁸

The fact that *EAG* was also screened in West Germany in 1973 makes this Swiss production another considerable exception to typical Nazisploitation distribution patterns: none of the 'canonical' Nazisploitation films ever appeared on the big screen in West Germany. VHS distribution was likewise prohibited after the advent of home video technology. Yet these prohibitions never touched *EAG*, which again shows the film's atypical status.⁹

In this context, it is also exceptional that *EAG* is based on a bestselling novel. In most cases, Nazisploitation movies were not based on literary works, with the notable exception of Pasolini's *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (*Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, 1975). Such films were usually based on original scripts that mercilessly lifted from other movies such as *Il portiere di notte* (*The Night Porter*, 1974), which was seen as an intellectual treatment of the topic. Other later Nazisploitation movies

simply contented themselves with stringing together taboo-breaking scenes with little plot for maximum exploitative effect, again copied from art-house cinema. In contrast, the *EAG* was based on a bestselling novel published in Switzerland only two years after World War II.

The Book and its Author, Karl Heinz Helms-Liesenhoff

When director/producer Erwin C. Dietrich based his movie on Karl Heinz Helms-Liesenhoff's (1912–1981) novel *Eine Armee Gretchen*,¹⁰ he selected a book that had thrived commercially since its first printing in 1947. The movie's release caused the book to regain briefly a certain degree of popularity. Up to this point, the author and his novels had played no role in discussions of Nazisploitation and had never been critically scrutinized. However, this author's work, especially his so-called 'Gretchen trilogy',¹¹ certainly merit critical discussion. 1947 saw the publication of *Eine Armee Gretchen*, the author's first novel. It was published in Basel, where, according to his own testimony, the author had fled as a *Wehrmacht* deserter in 1944. He viewed *Eine Armee Gretchen* as his personal reckoning with the Nazi dictatorship and identified his personal involvement as an inspiration for his writing. Many passages of the novel are colored by realism, presumably based on insider knowledge. Barely two years after the war this book already nurtured the legend of an innocent German people ruined by Nazis.

At the center of *Eine Armee Gretchen* are the gynecologist and university professor Felix Coon and his two young daughters Eva and Marga.¹² Having resisted the Nazis from the beginning, and having declared numerous conscripted women unfit for service (without real medical justification), he and his family are subjected to collective punishment. Dr Felix Coon is sent to the Eastern front as an army doctor. Meanwhile, Eva and Marga are conscripted into a *Wehrmacht* women's auxiliary force popularly called 'Gretchen-Armee'. They personally experience the horrors of war. Coon, as a member of the educated bourgeoisie, is given ample space and evidence to proclaim his 'true German values' in contrast to the barbaric Nazis. His two daughters are put into even worse situations. As a *Flakhelferin* (anti-aircraft gun assistant) and a *Funklerin* (radio operator), they try to preserve their calm countenance and innocence in an atmosphere of violence, sexual permissiveness and cultural decay. Helms-Liesenhoff inserts an account of the female German soldiers of the 'Gretchen-Armee' into

the Coon family history. In best shock-reporting style, the author's indignation about the moral decline of German women results in page after page of detailed and shrill descriptions of those depravities, clearly meant to satisfy readers. The Coon family serves as a moral shield and ideal counter-example to absorb the blows of the speculative and exploitative effects of his writing style. The three ethereal and saint-like protagonists only serve to highlight further the abyss of depravity and perversion in and around the 'Gretchen-Armee' — in other words, the epitome of the exploitation formula.

The principal perpetrators in the story are men, but women are guilty too, especially women in uniform, or as the French title of the novel puts it, *Gretchen en uniforme*.¹³ Helms-Liesenhoff distinguishes between two types of female soldiers in the context of the Gretchen army. The first type consists of naïve, sex-starved women who seek out erotic adventures at the front where they are seduced by male Nazis: 'In the suburbs, the first bombs were already being dropped. One could hear and feel it clearly. The ground was trembling; the air was thick with noise. The young women stumbled down the stairs into the safety of the air raid shelters. The last ones were naked carrying bundles of their clothes under their arms. They breathed heavily; their hair streamed out in the wind; their young breasts found no rest, hindering their movements. Howls of terror mixed with laughter and giggling.'¹⁴

As well as the women who serve as naïve cannon fodder, willingly offering themselves to the men, Helms-Liesenhoff also describes a second type of women, the ideological hardliners. These women are loners, and they suffer from pathological sexual frustration, which they take out on victims in a sadistic manner. In that sense, they strongly resemble the stock character of the typical Nazisploitation movie, a sadomasochistic female warden. As Helms-Liesenhoff writes:

Yes, often did he find his way into her chamber in the evenings. She didn't go out much. And she had told him: 'No blabbering about love, Erik, no sentimentalities! I confess: I abandon myself to you, because you have class [in the German original, a double entendre for racial purity], because you possess a classic masculinity. Don't forget that we share a higher passion for our race, for a German future ... not merely ecstatic carnal satisfaction, Erik, it runs much deeper, but without commitment, without commitment! If something happens,

one should not lay a claim on the other, one should not want to try to bind the other ... but it should be understood ... Do you agree, Erik? These are my conditions ...' And the blond giant answered 'Yes, Grete, as you wish' and he took her almost as a matter of course, in an act as necessary for his survival as eating and drinking. And she yielded to him in a Teutonic rapture.¹⁵

Passages such as these are by no means exceptional. Clearly, Helms-Liesenhoff's descriptions of young, uniformed women who have sexual experiences during the chaos and collapse of Nazi Germany were of great interest to his audience, given that this one novel led to a trilogy dealing with the same topic.¹⁶

This mixture sent the author up the bestseller lists, mainly in France, but also in Germany and later in the English-speaking countries. Following up on this success, Helms-Liesenhoff pushed out two sequels in quick succession. One might think that the Swiss critics would have complained about the speculative liberties he took with Nazis and sex, and that they might have questioned his integrity and anti-fascist credentials. However, this notion would be wrong. In a review of *Eine Armee Gretchen*, the conservative daily newspaper *Der Bund* (Bern) wrote on May 12, 1948: 'Sensational as well as shocking in its blunt, sometimes even raw and brutal truth. It adds a new chapter to the tragedy of Germany, which has until now seldom been treated in such an acute and inexorable way.'¹⁷ Even the Swiss Jewish weekly *Israelitisches Wochenblatt für die Schweiz* (1948) was full of praise for the book: 'No historian of our history will in the future be able to ignore this unvarnished and sincere contemporary document or to pass by this terrible but necessary 'J'accuse'. The author's name will be long remembered.'¹⁸

Objections were, however, voiced in West Germany. Since the war's end in 1945, the suppression of the crimes committed during the Third Reich had been in full force in all parts of West German society. Neither the image of German women as sex-crazed collaborators nor Helms-Liesenhoff's account of the *Wehrmacht* as a willing Nazi instrument fit into the rising revisionist concept of West German politics. Discussions of the (in certain senses, sexual) popular attraction of National Socialism were discouraged. In contrast, Germans held on to the myth of the honorable *Wehrmacht*, as stubbornly upheld in numerous publications and feature films from the early 1950s to

the 1970s.¹⁹ The media supported these efforts, especially the West German weekly news magazine *Der Spiegel*, which reported on the success of Helms-Liesenhoff's *Gretchen* novels in at least two articles. The first dismissed the 'deserter Wehrmacht officer' Helms-Liesenhoff as an author of 'pornographic books' and who morally condemned the German people.²⁰ By manipulating Helms-Liesenhoff's arguments, the author himself was accused of being a hatemonger whose smutty and revanchist *Gretchen* novels were, tellingly, only available in French. The report further claims that neither a German nor an Austrian publisher would have been willing to print a German edition. However, *Der Spiegel* conveniently ignored the fact that the first *Gretchen* novel had already been in print since 1947 in German, having been published in Switzerland.

Only two weeks later, another article appeared in *Der Spiegel* titled 'Bare under the apron'.²¹ The article reported on a conference in Biberach, Germany, about 'the moral behavior of the German woman during the war and post-war years' as depicted in only three novels among which Helms-Liesenhoff's *Gretchen* books were included. By this time, with the books more widely available in their German edition, Helms-Liesenhoff's Swiss publisher traveled to Biberach to represent the author at the conference. As *Der Spiegel* reported:

[...] Schweingruber, the Swiss publisher [...], a narrow-chested man with rosy apple cheeks and tiny eyes, sat there with suspenders and rolled-up sleeves. He used to publish only trivial *Heimat* literature. Since the publication of Helms-Liesenhoff's *Eine Armee Gretchen* and *Die Demobilisierung der Gretchen-Armee*, he is in business. The United States of America is willing to publish the works with a print run of 500,000. (...) Interjection: 'What did your wife and mother say about Liesenhoff's books?' Schweingruber swept [the question] away with a brush of his hand: 'Shshst!' Not even he doubted the literary mediocrity of the books.²²

Helms-Liesenhoff was discredited and accused of cheaply exploiting the Nazi theme, an unfair depiction that collectively called all Germans Nazis. With the author's generalizations based on 'singular cases in exceptional situations', his construction of a 'German collective guilt' were said to be triggered by a faulty interpretation of historical facts and naked commercial interests. Helms-Liesenhoff was accused of

[...] rid[ing] on a National Socialist boom. The world's large anti-German resentments made those generalizations an easy sell. [...] One lady asked whether those embarrassing and bad books even merited discussion. Without uttering a word, lecturer Bäumle pointed outside. There, one could see the publisher Schweingruber getting into his oversized Hudson car.²³

The book *Eine Armee Gretchen* was received at the time as what is now termed Nazisploitation, and this long before the 1973 movie production, and, indeed, long before the word existed. The author was already under attack for combining Nazis and sex for financial gain, which is tantamount to 'Nazisploitation'. The public uproar in Germany about these commercial practices, however, was not caused by shame or sympathy with the victims of the National Socialist regime. In part, it targeted and labeled as trash any and all attempts to analyze or exploit the attraction for Germans of National Socialism, sex and violence, but mainly, the controversy arose because Germans simply did not want to be reminded of their recent past.

It may be considered an outgrowth of this attitude that 23 years later, *EAG*, the only potential Nazisploitation movie originally in German, had to be a Swiss and not a German production. In any case, it is a fact that a novel by an author, who engaged *avant la lettre* in Nazisploitation, could be published in Switzerland only two years after the end of the Second World War. Here, in this Alpine country spared from immediate war, a German author was allowed to publish his work even if he nakedly enriched his story of Nazi Germany's excesses with sex to increase sales.

The Movie and its Director, Erwin C. Dietrich

Twenty-six years after the first publication of *Eine Armee Gretchen*, the movie was released. Despite the appearance of many naked female *Wehrmacht* soldiers on screen, the film received little attention at first. In part, this silence is due to the fact that, on the one hand, producer/director Erwin C. Dietrich's longstanding career in the sex film industry had prepared him well to know what to show and how to avoid censorship. On the other hand, the cultural atmosphere in Europe after 1968 had grown more liberal. The Swiss production was, as mentioned, also released on the screens of neighboring West Germany in 1973, and serious critics dismissed it entirely. Only the

West German film journal *Filmdienst* wrote in a short review: ‘The story of female *Wehrmacht* support personnel in the Second World War is used as a topic for one of the usual sex movies: incarcerated prostitutes implore the SS *Reichsführer* to send them to the front, as even they have a right to a German man — we advise against [seeing this film].’²⁴

Several years after *EAG* left the big screen, the movie’s VHS release contextualized it for the first time among more ‘canonical’ Nazisploitation movies. *EAG* was seen as a *sadiconazista* film with an accordingly cynical and degrading slant. When Erwin C. Dietrich brought *EAG* to the cinema screens at the beginning of the 1970s, the wave of cheap Nazisploitation movies, mainly from Italy and the United States, had not yet arrived. Nazi *chic* became fashionable after 1968, and films like the ultra-low-budget US production *Love Camp 7* (1968), the Italian epic *La caduta degli dei* (*The Damned*, 1969), which combined breaking taboos with artistic pretension, and even the tremendously popular musical *Cabaret* (1972), had certainly paved the way. But these precursors to Nazisploitation, as well as increased public interest about the perversions of the Nazi regime, did not significantly influence Dietrich’s production. However, the Swiss producer, a fervent Catholic with a rather conservative world-view,²⁵ looked to other, more traditional examples, with the clear exception of the sex report subgenre.

In *EAG*’s year of production, 1972, Erwin C. Dietrich attained the peak of his success. After some lean years, during which he had tried to break through with *Heimat* films (sentimental films with local/regional, often Alpine settings) as well as murder mysteries, he finally achieved a roaring box office success in 1968 with the erotic movie *Die Nichten der Frau Oberst* (*Mrs. Colonel’s Nieces*).²⁶ Dietrich then set up a small but efficient genre movie production factory in the tradition of Roger Corman. However, he was mainly inspired by and oriented towards the West German market and its actors and movies. While Dietrich achieved some commercial success with his low-budget erotic interpretations of famous literary classics (*Robin Hood*, *The Three Musketeers*), it was his second erotic movie franchise that earned the most money. In form and content, he imitated the successful model of the West German unending series of ‘Sex Reports’, a more blatantly pornographic offspring of the sex education movies of the 1950s and early 1960s.²⁷

The *EAG* film follows the novel’s main events. In both versions, the protagonists are the war-weary German university gynecologist Dr

Felix Coon (Carl Möhner) and his two young daughters Eva (Karin Heske) and Marga (Elisabeth Felchner). While Helms-Liesenhoff had aspired to a serious tale about the fate of a conscripted family in a linear narrative, Dietrich's adaptation retains little of the novel's seriousness. The conversational tone and the ribald, sloppy, naïve humor used in this episodic movie trace their origin to the German sex report film, with its humorously uptight way of talking about sex, which became part of that genre's style. While this tone of voice already came across as inherently funny in the sex report films, the use of such a conversational tone in a World War II movie comes across as rather incongruous and provides one explanation for *EAG*'s 'campy' impression to modern viewers.

A further example of the movie's close connection to the German sex reports is the physical examination scene at the start of the movie. The staging of the examination of female prospective soldiers matches the mandatory visit to the doctor in many West German sex education and sex report movies, which provides an excuse for female characters to disrobe. The doctor's visit justifies the display of female full frontal nudity and a detailed test of their sexual organs. 'We are soldiers now and have to line up naked during the draft call-up,' explains one of the female *Wehrmacht* prospects with great sincerity. When one of the naked women, having passed the close examination, extends her arm in a Nazi salute and shouts 'Hurrah, I am fit for service!', the situation's irony can hardly be surpassed. This use of irony contrasts starkly with the cruel cynicism that is a stock feature of later Nazisploitation movies. It further evinces *EAG*'s status as atypical in comparison to other Nazisploitation films. Indeed, the roles of victim and perpetrator in *EAG* are less clear and drastic. Whereas the victims are completely helpless and at the mercy of a Nazi perpetrator and his sadistic, cynical actions in a *sadiconazista* movie, the attribution of victim and perpetrator roles is diffuse in *EAG*. Again, the influence of the West German sex reports with its ironic *Doppelmoral* (double standard) is evident, as the young women are portrayed simultaneously as both sex-driven seductresses as well as hapless victims — and these films supposedly warn against either danger. Like their modern 'report' sisters, the Gretchens in Dietrich's movie exemplify the changing values of the sexual revolution and thus stand in youthful opposition to authority — in this case, to the *Führer*, the Nazi party and the Fatherland — whose sexual prohibitions and requirements they repeatedly transgress and

ridicule: 'Here everything is blond and Aryan, especially in that one spot.' Later on, when the radio transmits utterances such as 'German men, have you done your duty?', the Gretchens take this literally: 'We too have a right to the German men. We volunteered for the Eastern front for special use in the war.' This 'anything goes' mockery finally results in a petition of the Gretchens to Field Marshal Göring, in which they openly demand to be used as sex soldiers on the Eastern front. In a standard Nazisploitation movie such frivolity would have hurt its generic and hence commercial value. Showing such unclear power relations and ironic refractions would have destroyed the intended exploitative effect more than any external appeal to morality.

The Gretchens' naïve desire falls back on them, when the young women are captured and have to be liberated in a commando action by the movie's true authority, namely the uptight, aristocratic and essentially fatherly doctor Coon. Again this protagonist's character contrasts starkly with Nazisploitation typecasting, in which doctors are associated almost reflexively with torture and cruel medical experiments in concentration camps. One may assume that with this personification of a dutiful 'good German' with an anti-Nazi heart, Dietrich felt inspired by West German war movies from the 1950s and 1960s such as *Die Brücke* (The Bridge, 1959), celebrating the good *Wehrmacht* officer as victim of the evil Nazi and SS demons.²⁸ Nazisploitation follows a totally different script: Germans appear nearly by definition as sadistic Nazis and concentration camp guards. There is little demand for inner strife within German soldiers or German gallantry heralded, for instance, in German films about Rommel's desert war.

The producers of Nazisploitation may have seen themselves as professional executors of their audiences' perverse desires, which thus limited their personal *auteur* role. On the other hand, *EAG* was Dietrich's personal pet project, as evidenced by the fact that with this film the producer-director is credited for the first time under his real name. For a long time, he had dreamed about making a war movie with tank battles and other big-budget trappings.²⁹ Basing his war movie on a popular literary work such as *EAG* increased its claim to seriousness, which appears to have been important to Dietrich, as he planned to reinvent himself as a respectable producer of mainstream films.³⁰ He also accepted Helms-Liesenhoff's ideological point of view, whose Gretchen novels were, as mentioned, his form of indictment against the Nazi system. This was important to Dietrich and also for

its success with Swiss as well as with West German audiences, his most important markets. Presumably his technique of mixing education, adventure and rehabilitation as well as sex scenes would open up his movie beyond his usual clientele to a more mainstream audience, sowing the seeds for a profitable future and increasing his reputation.

What Dietrich imagined a viable strategy for a commercially successful and serious movie turned into a unique bastard among a discredited movie genre, a strange and confusing combination of *membra disjecta* that today gives a fascinating picture of the particular situation given in 1973. The most spectacular scene of the movie illustrates this confusion well. After their liberation from strangely invisible Russians, a group of about thirty naked female *Wehrmacht* soldiers run across a minefield amidst a battle in progress. Like the naturists from the sex report films, the naked Gretchens hop through open nature, hampered only by frighteningly real mine explosions and forces fighting a war all around them.

The orgy featured in the third part of the movie, however, can be traced neither to the sex reports nor to the classic war movies. Analogous scenes in movies such as *La caduta degli dei* (*The Damned*, 1969) or — more likely, due to its popularity — Bob Fosse's *Cabaret* of 1972 may have served as inspiration. While orgies in these movies are indispensable elements in their plots and character psychology of violence, power and sex, *EAG*'s orgy is but a nod to less sinister sexploitation movie standards. Copying the setting of an unleashed *Götterdämmerung* à la Visconti with this naïve voyeuristic illustration results again in an unintended satiric effect. A striptease in front of a draped swastika flag and a cream gateau with chocolate swastikas is the moment where *EAG* comes closest to Nazisploitation, albeit with a decidedly campy flair.

Everything connected with both the person of Erwin C. Dietrich and his productions appears unimaginative and naïve. Nothing was ever intended to be revolutionary in any dimension, given Erwin C. Dietrich's character and standing. Nor does the avid boy scout and conservative Swiss entrepreneur fit into the role of a taboo breaker.³¹ Nevertheless, Dietrich's name and one of his most expensive productions are often used in the context of a most frowned-upon genre in the history of cinema. While *EAG* may appear as a surreal piece of *art brut*, which finally bamboozled its way into the canon of Nazisploitation, it stands to reason that this is not due to one person's

motivation or categorization but rather to the workings of an industry that bases its profits on fooling the expectations of its audiences. *EAG* may be an atypical Nazisploitation movie, but atypical exploitation it isn't, by a long shot.

The Making of a Nazisploitation Movie: Posters, Titles and VHS Covers

In 1972, Dietrich attached great importance to gritty action scenes in transposing Helms-Liesenhoff's novel to film.³² He focused on action scenes, as opposed to the sex or the Nazi sadism.³³ To increase the film's war movie credentials, the production of the action scenes was outsourced to Yugoslavia. There, Dietrich could make good use of the existing manpower, infrastructure and sets from other European and US war movies. He could produce spectacular and professional-looking war scenes for *EAG* at incredibly low cost. He also minimized the use of exploitative sales techniques. Never did the erotic elements on display in every scene transgress the prevailing norms of a robust cinema showcase one year after the 1971 releases of mainstream films like *Straw Dogs* or *Clockwork Orange*. The use of sadistic Nazis or tortured women in his movie would have been highly detrimental to his goal of joining the film-making establishment.

Dietrich promoted *EAG* in German-speaking countries with a relatively subdued marketing campaign, at least compared to those for his previous films. This uncommon equanimity starts with its German title *Eine Armee Gretchen* ('An Army of Gretchens'), which offered limited potential for exploitative or sexploitative marketing. It offers no obviously titillating verbal sex signals and the movie posters of 1973 used in West Germany, Switzerland and Austria included few exploitative signals.

They do not depict nudity, explicit posing or lurid situations. The poster's motif is rather plain and unspectacular. It even misses a key feature of nearly every exploitative movie poster: an inescapably smutty tag line. Instead, the movie explicitly refers to Helms-Liesenhoff's bestselling novel. In short: *EAG* was promoted in the German-speaking countries as a World War II movie with literary credentials. The fact that Dietrich had unscrupulously overstepped accepted mainstream marketing standards in the promotion of other sex films in his repertoire indicates that he deliberately chose to show discretion in promoting *EAG*.



Figure 8.1 Marketing posters for Erwin C. Dietrich's *Eine Armee Gretchen* (1972) in German-speaking countries.

For three years, *EAG* was positioned as a World War II action movie. When success continued to prove elusive, marketers systematically transformed *EAG* into a Nazisploitation movie. For instance, the distributors tried to cash in with new movie posters and new titles in the hope of riding the wave of Nazisploitation's success. It was thus assured that by 1976, the *annus mirabilis* of the *sadiconazista* movies, *EAG* — previously an outlier in this most notorious of genres — would become one of the genre's fixtures. Of course such marketing practices were not exceptional; the exploitation business has always fed on this sort of re-purposing. Indeed, the remarkable transformation of *EAG* from a relatively tame erotic World War II action spectacle into a Nazisploitation movie alongside such gruesome entries as *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (1974) and *SS Experiment Love Camp* (1976) serves to showcase this process.

The Italians paved the way. The original *EAG* launch poster from the Italian 'Prestige' distribution firm already included more (s) exploitative elements than the aforementioned poster used in the German-speaking countries. An Italian movie poster artist had created a kneeling Gretchen with a machine gun in her hand, and yet in the actual movie there is not a single shot of a woman holding a weapon. The Italians, with their long exploitation tradition, thought nothing of Dietrich's relative discretion, and their poster promised a hint of sex, violence and Nazism. The female soldier's blouse is open and only her shirttail covers her genitals, while a German imperial eagle centered on her breasts conceals her nipples. Despite all these signs, the Italian



Figure 8.2 Marketing posters for Erwin C. Dietrich's *Eine Armee Gretchen* (1972) in non-German speaking countries.

poster does not reveal any explicit nudity or hint at graphic sex scenes. With its emblematic swastika grasped in the talons of the imperial eagle, this movie poster became the prototype for nearly all *EAG* posters worldwide. The Italian distribution title *Fraulein in Uniforme* is much more sexually charged than the original German image.³⁴ The familiar untranslated word 'Fräulein' (which lacks its umlaut) is

much more sexploitatively marketable in international distribution, as it creates associations about Weimar decadence, postwar *Trümmer-Muttis* becoming alley cats and also World War II Gretchens. This title also points directly towards a well-known title from the Nazisploitation movie canon, *Elsa: Fräulein SS* (1977).

In Great Britain and Australia (the only place where the movie was marketed as a pornographic film with a sexually charged tag line: 'hot acts of unimagined love'), *EAG* was called *Fräuleins in Uniform*. The Canadian distributor Cinépix refined the title further and showed *EAG* as *Fräulein Without a Uniform* in the cinemas. On the Canadian movie poster, the central Gretchen's blouse was buttoned up to reveal only a hint of cleavage. The Gretchens wielding machine guns in the lower half of the poster were appropriated by the Canadian designers from a rare alternative Italian poster, which promoted the movie's action elements during the initial launch in 1973.

The 'without' in the title is found also on the French distribution movie poster titled *Gretchen sans uniforme*. In France, Helms-Liesenhoff's novel went through multiple editions, making the Gretchens well-known to wide audiences during the 1970s. Indeed, the factor of audience familiarity explains why the French distributor did not switch to 'Fräulein' but as a matter of course stayed with 'Gretchen'.

Since *EAG* clearly did not sell satisfactorily as a World War II action movie, even Dietrich himself tried to increase the sex appeal of his movie during the latter months of its original distribution phase. Already in the late autumn of 1973, he presented *EAG* again to the West German board of censorship FSK (*Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle der Filmwirtschaft*, or Voluntary Self Regulation of the Movie Industry), this time under the title *Blitzmädchen-Report* (Blitz Girls Report, a play on the well known 1970 sex report film *Schulmädchen-Report: Was Eltern nicht für möglich halten*, later released in the UK as *Confessions of a Sixth Form Girl*). Having failed to appeal as part of the World War II action genre, the movie was reclassified to fit within the broad range of the West German sex report movies (school girls', housewives', nurses' reports) and thus became a product among his sex movie range. Even stronger signals towards Nazisploitation and sexploitation were sent by West German distributor UFA when they marketed Dietrich's movie at the end of the 1970s on Super8 rolls in the West German market: *EAG* became *Eine Armee nackter Gretchen* ('An army of naked Gretchens'). The expanded subtitle for the individual characters' roles specified *Die*

Bräute des Führers (The Führer's brides) and *Nackt an die Front* (Naked to the front).

At the beginning of the 1980s, Dietrich's distributors were confronted with a starkly changed public discourse in West German society, triggered by the broadcast of Marvin Chomsky's TV series *Holocaust* (1978). Despite re-using the more discrete poster motif from the initial German cinema launch, the *EAG* VHS edition from UFA was put on the censorship index list in the issue of 28 June 1983, which caused massive advertising restrictions.³⁵ The perception of *EAG* was beginning to change not only from the perspective of consumers, but also from that of the censorship commission, and reclassification efforts of the distributors began to bear fruit. The censorship commission in particular targeted the film's multiple video editions (VHS, Betamax, Video 2000), which of course increased the movie's notoriety and thus its sales.

The video editions mark a new phase in the development of the 'Gretchens' on their way into the Nazisploitation movie canon. The best-known VHS edition of *EAG* is a very early one: the 1981 British VHS edition from the Derann Distribution Company. The cover uses the well-known kneeling Gretchen from the Italian poster and combines it with photos from another West German movie poster. Despite its tame cover and edited content, the Derann tape became part of the 'video nasty' discussion at the start of the 1980s in Great Britain.³⁶ While *EAG* was never officially classified as a 'video nasty', its cover is to be found in all the relevant fan-collections and editions.³⁷ This was a late but decisive step towards the adoption of *EAG* into the Nazisploitation movie canon.

Today, the movie's alternate title *She-Devils of the SS* appears frequently in references to the film on internet sites.³⁸ This title is quite revealing. Despite having been released under this title only in the relatively late Canadian CIC-VHS edition (1985), it remains the current preferred international title for *EAG*. The context is clear: This title, with its obvious reference to the Nazisploitation classic *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS*, signals loud and clear that *EAG* is a Nazisploitation movie. The frequent use of this originally marginal alternative title by the fan community is a testament to the widespread acceptance of *EAG* into the Nazisploitation canon. Apart from the *sadiconazista* precursors from the late 1960s, *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* was the formative Nazisploitation movie of the 1970s. And here the discussion comes

full circle: *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* was shown in France under the alternative title *Le SS était là ... les Gretchen aussi* (The SS was here ... the Gretchens also).

Notes

Acknowledgements to Daniel Stapfer, Jean-Claude Brunner and Hansmartin Siegrist.

- 1 For a detailed biography, see Benedikt Eppenberger and Daniel Stapfer, *Mädchen, Machos und Moneten: Die unglaubliche Geschichte des Schweizer Filmunternehmers Erwin C. Dietrich* (Zürich: Scharfe Stiefel, 2005).
- 2 The movie *Eine Armee Gretchen*, henceforth *EAG*, acquired the following English titles: *Fräuleins in Uniforms* (UK), *Fräulein Without a Uniform* (Canada) and *She-Devils of the SS* (US), further discussed below. The Code 0 (worldwide) DVD was released by Swiss distributor ABCDVD in 2003. The name Gretchen (in *EAG*) is the diminutive of Gretel or Grete, in turn the short form of Margaret. Up to the first half of the last century, in Germany Gretel or Gretchen used to be a very common girl's name. The name Gretel or Gretchen is forever associated with the eponymous Brothers' Grimm fairy tale *Hänsel and Gretel* and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's tragedy 'Faust', whose character Gretchen's weak defense against seduction, posing her 'Gretchenfrage' (Gretchen's question about her suitor's intentions), has become synonymous with the perils of being easily seduced.
- 3 On IMDB.com, *EAG* ranks 8th on the plot keyword 'Nazisploitation' and 14th on 'Nazi Exploitation', *International Movie Database*, accessed December 8, 2010, www.imdb.com/keyword/nazisploitation, www.imdb.com/keyword/nazi-exploitation/.
- 4 See in detail: Mikel J. Koven '“The Film You Are About to See is Based on Documented Fact”: Italian Nazi Sexploitation Cinema', in *Alternative Europe — Eurotrash and Exploitation Cinema since 1945*, eds, Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik, 19–31 (London: Wallflower Press, 2004).
- 5 This colloquial term, coined during the 1970s in Italy, offers multiple benefits: 1. The generic name already thematizes the typical contents of Nazisploitation (sadism and Nazis); 2. As a historical term, it situates the canon of Nazisploitation movies within a relatively fixed period of time; 3. Without the judgmental suffix — *ploitation*, art-house and experimental movies can be more easily included in the canon and evaluated in regard to their mutual influences. On *sadiconazista*, see Marcus Stiglegger, *Sadiconazista. Faschismus und Sexualität im Film* (St. Augustin: Gardez!, 1999).
- 6 To quote Raymond Durnat's coinage. Raymond Durnat, *Films and Feelings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967).
- 7 See in detail Hervé Dumont, *Histoire du cinéma suisse 1966–2000* (Lausanne: Cinémathèque Suisse, 2007).
- 8 All the movies Erwin C. Dietrich produced in this phase in Switzerland and West Germany were considered below the standards for review.
- 9 Eppenberger and Stapfer, 108.
- 10 Karl-Heinz Helms-Liesenhoff, *Eine Armee Gretchen* (Basel: Hans Schneider, 1947). Translated as *Gretchen in Uniform* by Peter Ross and Betty Ross (London: Futura Publications, 1974).
- 11 Karl-Heinz Helms-Liesenhoff, *Die Demobilisierung der Gretchen-Armee*

- (Grenchen: Spaten, 1948); Karl-Heinz Helms-Liesenhoff, *Die Hinterbliebenen* (Grenchen: Spaten, 1951).
- 12 Marga, short form of Margarete. See note 2.
 - 13 Karl-Heinz Helms-Liesenhoff, *Gretchen en Uniforme*. Trans. Denise Nast. Paris: R. Julliard, 1949.
 - 14 Helms-Liesenhoff, *Eine Armee Gretchen*, 46.
 - 15 *Ibid.*, 186.
 - 16 'Apart from a few exceptions (*La caduta degli dei* and Bertolucci's *1900*), the movie actions occur during the last months of the war in 1945; the apocalyptic clouds of defeat truly overshadow the scene and guarantee an atmosphere of total permissiveness.' In: Marcus Stiglegger, 'Sadiconazista — Stereotypisierung des Holocaust im Exploitationkino', *Cinegraph-Jahrestagung 'Cinematographie des Holocaust'* (Hamburg: Aby-Warburg-Haus, 2001).
 - 17 Review: 'Eine Armee Gretchen', *Der Bund*, May 12, 1948.
 - 18 Review: 'Eine Armee Gretchen', *Israelitisches Wochenblatt für die Schweiz*, April 4, 1948.
 - 19 The re-armament and integration of the Federal Republic of Germany into NATO in 1955 coincided with a wave of war movies with an underlying political message at the start of the 1950s. 'It looked like the foundation of the two Germanies in 1949 had pushed a switch, as all attempts at closing in with NS history in film in a moral, questioning or disturbing manner vanished abruptly. The fundamental morality was replaced by a defense from historical responsibility. The dilemma of uncertain relations of remembrance and existence resulted in movies directly in a willful consensus of integration.' Detlef Kannapin, *Dialektik der Bilder — Der Nationalsozialismus im deutschen Film. Ein Ost-West-Vergleich* (Berlin: Karl Dietz, 2005), 71. Since the early 1950s, a whole wave of war and anti-communist movies emerged, which at first subdued, then ever more offensively portrayed the Wehrmacht as a regular and 'clean' army. 'The war movies started out with the military resistance against Hitler, but then switched quickly to rehabilitating the West German military power, starting with the production of *Des Teufels General* (1955, Director: Helmut Käutner) [...] and the three *08/15* movies (1954/55).' Kannapin, *Dialektik der Bilder — Der Nationalsozialismus im deutschen Film. Ein Ost-West-Vergleich*, 21.
 - 20 'Einer der ganz wenigen,' *Der Spiegel*, June 22, 1950, 20.
 - 21 'Unter der Schürze nichts,' *Der Spiegel*, July 5, 1950, 8.
 - 22 *Ibid.*, 8.
 - 23 *Ibid.*, 8.
 - 24 Review: 'Eine Armee Gretchen', *Filmdienst*, May 18, 1973.
 - 25 Eppenberger, Stapfer, *Mädchen, Machos und Moneten — die unglaubliche Geschichte des Schweizer Filmunternehmers Erwin C. Dietrich*, 15.
 - 26 *Ibid.*, 62.
 - 27 See in detail: Jennifer Fay, 'The Schoolgirl Reports and the Guilty Pleasure of History', in *Alternative Europe — Eurotrash and Exploitation Cinema since 1945*, eds Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik (London: Wallflower Press, 2004). Annette Miersche, *Schulmädchen-Report — Der deutsche Sexfilm der 70er Jahre* (Berlin: Bertz, 2003).
 - 28 This view started in the two West German war movies *Canaris* (1954) and *Des Teufels General* (1955) which 'thematized the resistance against National

- Socialism as a uniquely military opposition against Hitler'. Kannapin, *Dialektik der Bilder — Der Nationalsozialismus im deutschen Film. Ein Ost-West-Vergleich*, 91. Both movies developed a positive attitude towards the military which was used as a contrast to the Nazi party members, the National Socialist policies and the National Socialist system. In American WWII movies, the Nazi villain is usually an intellectual aristocrat; in West German war movies of the 1950s, the members of the aristocracy are seen as positive counterparts to the petit bourgeois Nazis. See also: Georg Seesslen, *Tanz den Adolf Hitler — Faschismus in der populären Kultur* (Berlin: Edition Tiamat, 1994), 123.
- 29 Eppenberger, Stapfer, *Mädchen, Machos und Moneten — die unglaubliche Geschichte des Schweizer Filmunternehmers Erwin C. Dietrich*, 87.
 - 30 Ibid, 91.
 - 31 Ibid, 16.
 - 32 Ibid, 88.
 - 33 Ibid, 90.
 - 34 The Italian distribution title of EAG was based on the international title in Dietrich's distribution program: *Fräulein in Uniform*. To ease marketability the root *Fräulein* — mostly without the German umlaut — became the standard for most international titles of the Dietrich production.
 - 35 Eppenberger, Stapfer, *Mädchen, Machos und Moneten — die unglaubliche Geschichte des Schweizer Filmunternehmers Erwin C. Dietrich*, 90.
 - 36 EAG never totally curried favor with typical Nazisploitation movies to deny visually the peculiarities of EAG: on all movie and video posters, the Gretchens appear strong and active women. Never in their iconography were they transfigured into the suffering and tortured women so typical of the Nazisploitation mainstream. Neither was any attempt ever made to turn Gretchens into Ilsas (from *Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS*). Despite all the convergence, this specific difference was upheld.
 - 37 Allan Bryce, *Video Nasties 2 — Strike up the Banned: A pictorial Guide to Movies that bite!* (Liskeard, UK: Stray Cat Publishing, 2001). Relatively broad treatment is given to EAG in the two-part article on Nazisploitation movies in the Berlin special magazine 'Splating Image'. Alexander Witiko, 'Lick my Boots forever, Dog!', *Splating Image*, (June + September 1996). Recently in Georg Seeblen *Quentin Tarantino gegen die Nazis* (Berlin: Bertz + Fischer, 2009), 125.
 - 38 Please note the fact that *She-Devils of the SS* is also listed as an alternative title for the obscure US movie *The Cut-Throats* (1969).

9

Meshes of Power: The Concentration Camp as Pulp or Art House in Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter*

ELISSA MAILÄNDER

FOR A BRIEF PERIOD from the late 1960s to the late 1970s the Nazisploitation genre, which crossed the fashionable women-in-prison (WIP) genre with soft-core pornography and Nazi iconography, flourished in the United States and Europe. It was particularly popular in Italy, where it spurred countless productions, the so-called *sadiconazista* movies.¹ This essay examines a prominent work of that genre: in *Il portiere di notte* (*The Night Porter*, 1974), the director and screenwriter Liliana Cavani presented the relationship between a former camp guard and a survivor as a sexual-pathological obsession. The film provoked considerable outrage and criticism internationally, with some critics accusing Cavani of merely reducing the camp problematic to a relationship between two individuals. The sadomasochistic relationship between the SS officer and the camp inmate received criticism from both a visual as well as a moral standpoint. Of the allegorical framework of the film, Teresa de Lauretis contended that Cavani chose Nazism and the atrocities committed in the camps to investigate the dialectics of the male-female relationship in contemporary post-Nazi society.² Most problematic for a feminist reading is the subjectivity with which Cavani portrays a sensuous torturer.³

As in other *sadiconazista* films, the dramaturgy aims at a sensual reception, and though the SS serves as a referent for sexual *aventurisme*, *The Night Porter* claims a special role within the genre. The movie is not only about sex but also about Nazism. Indeed, Cavani's works belong to the category of self-conscious feminist *auteur* film-making with a political message. Through the sometimes clumsy reference to the Jewish genocide, *The Night Porter* is also a characteristic product of popular cinematographic culture prior to the 1978 television series *Holocaust*. The portrayal of the perpetrator-victim relationship as sexual drew hefty criticism, and critics accused her of trivializing National Socialism and its crimes. However, the relationship between perpetrators and victims that Cavani portrays is more complex than a sadomasochistic sexual passion. The camp is a place of sexual domination and humiliation where those in possession of power, namely the SS, can live out their displaced sexual fantasies. Michel Foucault's 'microphysics of power' and violence proves an effective analytical tool for the intracamp power dynamics depicted in *The Night Porter*. Foucault asserts that power be addressed not only as a question of legal or institutional legitimacy, but also as a microphysics that 'applies itself to immediate everyday life'.⁴ A closer analysis of the film shows that the sadomasochistic love game relates not to the period of the concentration camp, but rather exclusively to the film's main chronological setting, i.e. 1957. The decisive difference between the situations is that in their postwar relationship, the former SS officer and the inmate are equal partners with changing roles.

My engagement with the film is as a researcher who deals with the everyday history (*Alltagsgeschichte*) and power dynamics of the concentration camps. I analyze the representation of the concentration camp and its main perpetrators vis-à-vis the visualization of power, violence and sexuality. Of particular interest is the dynamic of power and the sadistic relationship between the camp guard, SS officer Max, and the camp prisoner, Lucia. However, it is misleading to reduce this movie simply to a sexual power game. Another important aspect concerns the role of the perpetrator in postwar European society. Themes of guilt and coming to terms with the perpetrator's past is also a *leitmotif* of this movie, in which a group of former Nazis seek legal and psychological help to deal with their fear of survivors who could introduce claims of their crimes. *The Night Porter*, in a departure from other *sadiconazista* films, discusses the question of coming to terms with

the past from the perpetrator's perspective. In addition, I examine Cavani's camp film within the broader context of *sadiconazista* movies, which ultimately raises the question of how to classify *The Night Porter* today: is it a *film d'auteur* or is it simply a B-movie? On the one hand, the film very poignantly and critically visualizes the perfidious game of domination and submission, and the asymmetrical relations of power inherent to the camp. But on the other hand, the movie has a strong voyeuristic and commercial orientation, despite its intrinsic political content.

Subject, Sex, Violence and the Ambivalent Power Game

Vienna 1957. Max Aldorfer (Dirk Bogarde) goes to work. He arrives at his destination, the *Hotel zur Oper*, where he reports for duty as a night porter. Max attends to his night shift with precision. He moves lithely in his dark, impeccably cut uniform, which lends him stateliness and authority. A small, elegantly dressed group enters the hotel lobby and the camera pans to a slender young woman (Charlotte Rampling) with pinned-up hair and an opulent black-sequined dress. Max gives the guests their room keys with a polite smile. As his gaze falls upon the young woman, his demeanor suddenly stiffens. He becomes visibly distraught and turns away in embarrassment. He gives the slender young woman her room key, and now she too notices him. Their gazes meet and the woman departs deliberately with her companion. The night porter stares rigidly ahead, visibly lost in his thoughts, at first completely failing to take notice of the new guests who are asking for their own room keys. They have to tear him out of his reverie. Max retires to the back from the lobby desk to fetch the keys, turns around once more, and he has already forgotten the room numbers. His agitation is palpable. Once he has collected himself he studies the guestbook; a colleague informs him that an American director, Mr Atherton, is there on concert tour. 'So', answers Max inattentively and drifts away once more.

In a brief flashback, we see a young girl whom we recognize as Lucia Atherton from the lobby. She is illuminated by a glaring light and recoils, frightened. The camera zooms in on a crowd wearing yellow Stars of David.⁵ The noise of film cameras is audible; apparently a hand-held camera is recording the scene. An SS officer in black uniform films the crowd and draws close to the girl. Max recalls

the scene, ever lost in his thoughts in the porter's lodge. Meanwhile, the unexpected encounter visibly affects the elegant Mrs Atherton. While her husband reads the newspaper in bed, she stands in the bathroom busied with her evening beauty routine. In her white lace nightgown, the woman appears fragile. Lucia Atherton blankly stares in the direction of the mirror. A second flashback returns us to the camp. Three men, one in a peaked cap and two in steel helmets, are in frontal view, concealed by a sea of naked torsos, which the viewer only sees from behind. The hand camera whirs as human beings groan. A steel helmet is now recognizable from the chest up; he is in charge of lighting. Now we can identify the cameraman: the man with the officer's hat is Max. Cut.

The chance encounter of former SS *Sturmbannführer* Max Aldorfer and camp survivor Lucia Atherton is horrifying and momentous for both. After the initial shock, they find themselves attracted to each other. Lucia decides to lengthen her stay in Vienna to follow her husband to Frankfurt only later. A sadomasochistic love affair develops between the erstwhile perpetrator and his victim. A subtle back-and-forth between these two timelines pervades the film's dramatic construction, which Marcus Stiglegger refers to as a 'drama of interlacing'.⁶ In sixteen flashbacks, both protagonists recall the camp period (1933–45). Three-quarters of the plot, however, plays out in postwar Vienna anno 1957. In the camp sequences, the film presents *Sturmbannführer* Max as a sadist who savors his power over Lucia and enjoys torture. In one of Lucia's flashbacks we see how Max, in full SS regalia — black uniform, jodhpurs, leather boots, red armband with swastika — aims at Lucia with his pistol and purposely misses with every shot. The unclothed and terrorized Lucia tries to shield herself from the bullets while simultaneously covering her naked body until she finally sinks to the ground and cowers there. The setting for the scene, presumably a sick bay, is clinical, eerie and bathed in a cold white light. This relationship does not involve sexual satisfaction; rather, in the Sadean sense, it is a libidinous game of terror and power.⁷ It also invokes the Batailleian understanding of sadism, whereby the relationship is not sexual-psychological, but rather existential-psychological, resting upon the principle of the radical destruction and humiliation of the Other.

Max had spotted the comely girl among the mass of naked human beings during their entry registration and soon thereafter he selected her as the target of his desire. The dialogue between two of the SS

veterans indicates that Max came from the Kaltenbrunner entourage,⁸ where he belonged to Section IVB4 and had ordered mass shootings in Hungary.⁹ A postwar conversation among his former colleagues indicates that Max excelled in ingenuity and imagination for violence and murder, and that he even enjoyed posing as a doctor in the concentration camp. With this exchange, Cavani characterizes Max as a demonic authority, a man responsible for the genocide of the Jews, an allusion to a horror not shown. She focuses exclusively on the relationship between the SS officer and the young inmate.

The viewer sees no sexual intercourse between Max and Lucia during the camp period. However, the director alludes to oral sex, bondage and domination, and these acts and the victims' suffering appear to give sexual pleasure to the perpetrator. In another memory of Lucia, Max 'doctors' her.



Figure 9 A flashback from Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* (1974) in which Max Altdorfer (Dirk Bogarde) 'examines' Lucia Atherton (Charlotte Rampling) as female prisoners observe. Here Cavani visualizes the eros of power and terror, as well as their voyeuristic appeal.

Again, Max wears his SS uniform, while Lucia, shaven and haggard, dons a prisoner's uniform and black silk stockings. Here Cavani visually contrasts the SS uniform as a symbol of terror and the black

stockings as a symbol of eroticism. Max gently disinfects a deep wound on her right upper arm — we do not know who inflicted it — and kisses her tenderly while shabby female prisoners observe the scene. His gestures denote truculence, but also strong sexual overtones, such as when he domineeringly spreads her legs.

In Cavani's film, the viewer cannot clearly discern the boundary between sex in the concentration camp as bartering and as a consensual sexual relationship. In addition, the camera frequently presents the perpetrator's perspective, thereby rendering the spectator a voyeur to the scene, just like the camp inmates who watched Max doctor Lucia. It is precisely this interplay that makes the film uncomfortable and that prompted so much criticism, earning it the label 'sodomasochistic.' However, if we step back and decode the power structures borne by such gestures, we might come to another conclusion.

In the camp scenes, most of these thought- or memory-worlds unambiguously belong to either Lucia or Max. In the two flashbacks where the memory is of undetermined origin, the association between Max and Lucia is marked by insurmountable coercion. For example, in a flashback that constitutes the first and exclusive camp sex scene, a *kapo* sodomizes a woman prisoner while other female prisoners, starved to a skeletal state, watch in a detached manner. Their stony gaze symbolise the process of decay in the camp and evoke the total self-abandonment of the so-called 'Muselmann.'¹⁰ Lucia, with cropped hair, lies apathetically on a bed and observes the scene motionlessly from up close. Max suddenly enters the room wearing an officer's cap and white doctor's coat. With gloved hands he turns Lucia's face slowly to the side and inspects her.

This scene has nothing ostensibly brutal to it at first, yet the banal hand motion is an exercise of power and dominance. Max, endowed with trappings of authority and terror, reduces Lucia to a mere object of study with these gestures. Finally, he forces her up and leads her, tottering with weakness, out of the room. In the flashback that immediately follows, Lucia is tied to a bed, frail and immobilized, while the uniformed Max towers above directly opposite her. He slowly inserts his index and middle fingers into her mouth, and moves them lightly in and out in a clearly sexualized manner.

Such relations of power and oppression are omnipresent in the film's gestures and costumes: like all the other prisoners, Lucia is shaven and haggard, and she remains passive and overwhelmed by what happens

to her. She offers a stark contrast to Max, who is commanding and threatening in his black uniform and doctor's smock. Similarly, the filthy prisoner barracks contrast with the bare and white-tiled sick bay, thereby conveying compulsion and domination. At no point does it become clear that the Lucia has fallen in love with Max in the concentration camp, something Stiglegger interprets but does not prove.¹¹ We can thus understand the camp situation and the perpetrator-victim relationship as a game based on an insurmountably asymmetrical power imbalance. The power rests solely with Max, who, as we have seen, also makes 'imaginative' use of it. Lucia has no arena in which to maneuver. Max's domination of Lucia is total and inescapable; she can only submit to him or suffer the consequences. Therefore, in the camp sequences, we cannot speak of a power *relationship*.

Max and Lucia's encounter in 1957, however, presents a different facet to the relationship. This new dynamic is sadomasochistic because it portrays a lustful game of power and domination in which both sides exercise free will. Lucia's decisions are deliberate — for example, when she follows Max into the apartment — but she too possesses a constitutive power over her own and Max's desire. Sadomasochism involves a dynamic game of power and powerlessness with boundary rules, though on certain preconditions. In a 1984 interview with Bob Gallagher and Alexander Wilson, Foucault stated:

The S/M game is very interesting because it is a strategic relation, but it is always fluid. Of course, there are roles, but everyone knows very well that those roles can be reversed. [. . .] Or, even when the roles are stabilized, you know very well that it is always a game. Either the rules are transgressed, or there is an agreement, either explicit or tacit, that makes [the participants] aware of certain boundaries. This strategic game as a source of bodily pleasure is very interesting. But I won't say that it is a reproduction, inside the erotic relationship, of the structure of power. It is an acting out of power structures by a strategic game that is able to give sexual pleasure or bodily pleasure.¹²

If one defines sadomasochism as an erotic game of the body and power, and if one further pursues the idea that its telltale sign and prerequisite lie in its voluntary nature, then Max's and Lucia's postwar relations can definitely be termed sadomasochistic. This game involves the whole body, which consequently places not only sexual intercourse

and genitalia at the center, but also invents new forms of *jouissance* and new possibilities of pleasure with unusual parts of the body. In that sense their love affair in 1957 can be defined as an erotic power game and in the Foucauldian sense an *ars erotica*.

In the camp, the perpetrator Max occupies an unambiguously dominant role, one that allows him to violate taboos and bestows upon him the power to torture and kill. The momentary suspension of right and protection defines this imbalanced power relationship. The relationship between perpetrators and victims in the camp is by definition antisocial, and, in the Foucauldian sense, not a sadomasochistic one.¹³ It instead involves the radical negation of the other and the self-aggrandizing cultivation of the self, especially with regard to seemingly incomprehensible violence. In addition, from the perpetrator's perspective, the surplus of violence, e.g. cruelty, appears constructive, an empowering form of self-cultivation. What makes this violence so ambivalent and corrupted is the fact that the roles of perpetrator and victim are intertwined in an intimate dynamic. The traumatic effect of this dynamic is the spiritual injury of being or, better, one's transformation into an accomplice in a sexual assault.¹⁴ Gaby Zipfel therefore coins the term 'libidinal coercion.'¹⁵ The dialectic of violence and lust is not only on the lived-out side of the violence by the perpetrator. Witness accounts of victims also give us a hint that experiencing an act of violence can be linked to pain and sexual pleasure. The most perfidious part of sexual violence is that it can, but does not have to, release sexual stimulation in the victim.

The actual *leitmotif* of the film rests in its power dynamics and the corruptive power relations. The oft-cited Salomé sequence — the only potentially sadomasochistic camp scene — shows not so much camp inmate Lucia's share in the guilt, in fact, as the perfidious, corrupting aspects of the concentration camp. In this scene, Max flashes back to a bare-chested Lucia who appears wearing nothing but suspenders and black men's trousers. She performs a lascivious cabaret act before a gathering of camp SS guards. A SS officer's cap with visor and facemask perches saucily atop her head. After the performance Max surprises her with a gift of a special sort: the head of a Kapo named Johannes. We learn in 1957 from a conversation between Max and a regular guest of the hotel, the Countess Stein, that Johannes allegedly tortured Lucia: 'She just asked me to have him transferred,' he relates,

'I don't know why. But suddenly the story of Salomé came into my head. I couldn't resist it, you see.'

Lucia, in contrast to Salomé, dances not to acquire the head of Johannes deliberately. Rather it is the sadistic manipulator and 'creator' Max who *makes* her a decapitating Salomé, thus his own private castrating *femme fatale* fantasy. Max is thus not only her protector, but also her personal tormentor and master, one who plays with Lucia — his 'little girl,' as he lovingly calls her in 1957 — as if she were a doll. The destructive aspect of the SS superiority over the prisoners is that it enmeshes them in the web of Nazi power and thereby forcibly turns them into co-perpetrators. Yet Lucia orders no murder.

In this instance, Cavani illustrates what Primo Levi called the 'grey zone'.¹⁶ She portrays the concentration camp as a universe 'beyond good and evil' in which a moral position seems almost impossible.¹⁷ Yet, subtle nuances exist: Lucia as the beloved of an SS is in a grey zone, but her existence is nevertheless determined by coercion. Mario, an Italian and former *Funktionshäftling*¹⁸ neatly encapsulates this problematic in a conversation with Max. Thanks to his cooking skills, Mario was assigned the role of camp cook and so survived. Max therefore labels him a collaborator but Mario rejects this accusation: 'Sometimes,' he says, 'to save one's skin there is no price too high. You can't compare me to you.' Again Cavani emphasizes the camp's asymmetrical power structures and the interlaced nature of the power system. Yet she also makes clear: from an ethical point of view, *kaapos* are not on the same level as SS guards, since their abuse of power is a derivative of the corrupt and perfidious camp system as a world of power and coercion.

However, it is misleading to reduce the film to the camp problematic alone, since more than half the plot is situated in contemporary Vienna and deals with the 1957 postwar perpetrator society.

The Night Porter as a psychological thriller

For the film's narrative, and for Max and Lucia, it is precisely postwar society (one could even speak of the postwar perpetrator community) that is relevant to the plot. Former NS functionaries have founded a self-help group, comprised of Gestapo man and lawyer Klaus; a

medical doctor named Hans Vogler, also known as the ‘Professor’; the dancer Bert; and two former SS men. The former SS comrades conduct self-administered inquiries in which Klaus determines the state of war crimes investigations. He goes to document centers and public prosecutors’ offices and destroys evidence. The professor, on the other hand, is responsible for his comrades’ emotional and psychological health. In both instances, the psychological and the juridical one, expungement and emancipation from past crimes are at stake.¹⁹ Here Cavani operates with stylistic instruments of the thriller genre. The SS veterans meet at regular intervals in the *Hotel zur Oper*, where Lucia and her husband are guests. It becomes a *huis clos* where her former perpetrators try to come to terms with the past.

Survivors are the main *raison d’être* for the secret meetings. The group of former perpetrators perceives them as dangerous because they can make legal accusations, as Klaus explains to Max: ‘Even if it says a thousand people on paper, ten thousand, it still makes less of an impression than one witness in flesh and blood, staring at you. That is why they are so dangerous, Max. My task is to seek them out, wherever they are, and to see to it that they are filed away.’ The concept ‘filed away’ is a bureaucratic euphemism for killing. Klaus pursues possible witnesses in war crimes proceedings and has them killed. But this course of action alone solves only one problem the survivors represent. They pose another problem, in that they cause psychological troubles for their former tormenters.

For this reason, the professor subjects every individual member of the SS veteran group to psychoanalysis. This shock therapy is a sort of catharsis because, Doctor Vogler notes, ‘The more shock value they have, the more effect they have.’ And ‘[o]nly eyewitnesses can provoke this. [...] Only once confronted with their accusation can we discover how far we are able to defend ourselves. [...] We must try to understand whether we are victims of guilt complexes or not. If so, we must be freed of them! A guilt complex is a disturbance of the psyche. A neurosis!’ These sessions are therapeutic because they force the perpetrators to face and overcome the fear of being identified and connected to their crimes. The perpetrators hereby appropriate Freudian-infused psychology to expunge the destructive feeling of guilt.

Klaus offers the legal perspective, while the professor offers a Freudian point of view. But both have the same desire: the physical and psychological expulsion of the witnesses and consequently the deletion

of evidence and of feelings of guilt. It is not only the old comrades who share this common language ('filed away') and viewpoint, but also accomplices and bystanders, for example the hotel guest, Countess von Stein. According to this logic, Lucia, a witness to Max's crimes, must be eliminated. The viewer learns that Klaus handled Max's case and traced only one survivor who could possibly testify against the former *Sturmbannführer*. This survivor happens to be Lucia. Max is the only one among the former SS men to balk at therapy and rejects it still more vehemently after his postwar encounters with Lucia. He also protects his former victim by concealing her from his comrades. The former comrades try to persuade Max to deliver and sacrifice his *protégé*. Yet he stubbornly continues to protect Lucia by hiding her in his home because he is engaged in a sadomasochistic relationship with her. In so doing, Max violates the rules of this intimate perpetrator group and becomes an outsider who is himself to be hunted.

For her part, Lucia draws closer to Max rather than follow her husband to Frankfurt as originally planned. Their actions breach not only the rules of the old comrades, but also those of postwar society in general, first and foremost fraternizing with former perpetrators. The Countess von Stein and other characters like the old work colleague, the janitor, the friend and the neighbor represent this perspective. Because Max refuses to turn in Lucia to the group of former camp functionaries, the two are seized. The Viennese population participates in the plot by the SS veterans against the couple and co-operates in the hunt for and starvation of the couple. Max, in a crucial sequence, explains himself to his comrades: 'If I choose to live like a — like a church mouse, I have a reason. I have a reason for working at night. It's the light. I have a sense of shame in the light.' Through his feelings of guilt and unconditional love for Lucia he acquires an at once tragic and rebellious streak, which makes him to some extent 'capable of being identified with.'²⁰ It is evident throughout the film, however, that his guilt feelings relate not to the victims in general, but rather specifically to Lucia. Furthermore, his love for her is clearly narcissistic. Lucia, who in the concentration camp scenes functions as a trope of female vulnerability, gains agency in 1957; within the sadomasochistic play she is audaciously strong and weak in tandem. She, too, acts not only against the rules of the perpetrator society, but also against her own community.

This *mésalliance* unites what does not belong together. Furthermore,

it casts shadows and guilt upon the perpetrator society because it disturbs the existing order and clear separation of perpetrators and survivors. Likewise the *amour fou*, as Stiglegger has called it, between Lucia and Max constitutes a danger for the representatives of postwar society. It also meets with a lack of understanding on the part of the victims and ultimately also of the audience. The camp experience binds Max and Lucia, but nevertheless separates them from one other, for Max has experienced the camp as a perpetrator, Lucia as a victim. Cavani demonstrates once again that the present cannot nullify this paradox through the *Liebestod* of her protagonists. At daybreak Max and Lucia, starved and exhausted, drive to the Danube, Lucia in a girlish dress that resembles one given to her by Max in the camp and the SS-Sturmbannführer in the black SS uniform which he has kept in his closet. During their passage over the bridge they are shot by their pursuers. This ending also serves to justify or excuse any pleasure during the course of their *mésalliance* since the lovers are punished in the end. In the act of joint execution at the hands of their persecutors, which they themselves provoke, Lucia and Max demonstrate the union of that which does not belong together, the victim and the perpetrator. In doing so the pair leaves all moral boundaries *and* societal conventions behind them.

The Night Porter as a B-movie

I entirely agree with Marcus Stiglegger's claim that the charge of a one-sided sexualization of fascism is based on a reductive reading of individual 'scenes of stimulation' in the film and that it is time to rediscover the multi-layered meanings within these types of films.²¹ Thus we must also concede that Cavani's *The Night Porter* indeed possesses characteristics of a B-movie. She explains in an interview that she shot the movie in 11 weeks, a short time for such a production, especially since funding ran out after only seven or eight weeks.²² Nevertheless, the production continued in Vienna during mid-January of 1973. Cavani and the screenwriter eventually found further financial support and hastily finished the film. However, small budget and time pressures are inherent to film-making and alone not a sufficient argument for the B-movie touch of Cavani's film. What makes the film a B-movie are its non-leading roles. If the relationship between the SS-man Max and the young camp inmate Lucia is a subtle psychological

drama, the postwar Austrian society and the 'Nazis' are dramaturgically underdeveloped and psychologically impoverished.

Cavani's film illustrates several emblematic representatives of Nazi power portrayed in a stereotyped way. The former Gestapo man and lawyer Klaus dresses in a highly connotated black leather coat, a politically and symbolically charged garment even during the Third Reich.²³ He also wears a monocle over his right eye, and has a dueling scar (*Schmiss*) of a student fraternity (*Burschenschaft*) at the left corner of his mouth.²⁴ These attributes project the martial image of a hard-boiled Gestapo man and member of the SS. The medical doctor Vogler, on the other hand, strikes us with his simple Bavarian loden coat and hat. However, his attire is deceptive, as Max greets him in the hotel foyer with a snappy position of attention, a boisterous sidestep and dashing halt. This gesture, too, denotes a military context and also links him to the SS *Kameradschaft*.

Finally, as already discussed, Max is identified by his former comrades as a member of the Kaltenbrunner entourage, and as an executioner of the 'Final Solution' thus responsible for the worst crimes.²⁵ His role-playing as a camp doctor alludes to camp medical experiments that, while not shown in the film, are Nazisploitation staples. Cavani's historical specificity with details around the character of Max seeks to underline both his credibility and demonic authority. In particular, his black SS uniform and insignia in the camp sequences are powerful symbols that evoke frightening power: through these Max is evil incarnate. Within the thriller the SS uniform guarantees a degree of historical authenticity, just like the fringe hairstyles, togas, sandals and helmets in the 'sword-and-sandal' films that Roland Barthes famously analyzed in *Mythologies*. The black SS-uniforms thus convey the illusion of a world without duplicity, as Paula Diehl states in reference to Barthes.²⁶ They signify which figures 'are' Nazis.

It is the black SS regalia rather than a *Wehrmacht* or simple police uniform that caught on in motion pictures after 1945 as an emblematic visualization of National Socialism and its destructive power. Stiglegger correctly notes that in the flashbacks, the tall, slender, uniformed SS men resemble lurking insects, and more precisely threatening hornets.²⁷ This black full dress was worn by the camp SS officers only for especially festive occasions, e.g. celebrations and Himmler visits; on their daily duty they wore the grey-green uniform of the Waffen-SS. Used in the 1930s by the *Leibstandarte* elite troop for military parades

all over Germany, this uniform had already promulgated an idealistic visual image of the SS in Nazi Germany's domestic media. The black uniform became the medium of visualization *par excellence* for the SS as the distinctive and stylized mark of power, terror and violence. Thus these SS visualizations fuse, in a powerful and efficient way, fact with fiction. The postwar film industry only continued this visual strategy by making the SS phantasmatic figures.

The Night Porter rehearses innumerable stereotypes that embody certain types of National Socialist evil or power acting in secret. On the one hand, we find National Socialist perpetrators, that is to say representatives of the National Socialist leadership elite. Foremost among these are the erstwhile Gestapo man Klaus and Professor Vogler. On the other hand, we encounter co-perpetrators and bystanders, members of the general public who later nonetheless energetically take part in the hunt for Lucia and Max as informers, henchmen and pursuers. All are bound by a tacit closing of the ranks, on the basis of a multifarious entanglement in the crimes of National Socialism and a mutual interpretation of the National Socialist past.

In the case of *The Night Porter*, Max serves as the figure on to which to project contemporary fantasies and pathologies, illustrated in particular through the thematic complex of sadomasochism. The powerful SS man in his black uniform embodies desires, fears and fantasies of the spectators. In this respect it is not surprising that the aura of the master race, the so-called *Herrenvolk*, crumbles once he removes his uniform. Cavani solves the problem quite cleverly by giving Max a porter's uniform and nocturnal postwar existence, which together confer on him a certain toughness and bat-like quality. Such colors again link him to a dark world, the world of bloodsuckers and nocturnal existence. However, at the very end of the film, trapped in his apartment with Lucia, Max wears a brown cardigan, and no longer seems so able and powerful as in the concentration camp or the hotel. This 'brown shirt' can be taken as indicative that even in his 'protector' role he remains a Nazi. In his civilian clothes, Max looks rather wan and neurotic, with a tendency toward hysteria. In fact, by 1957 it is actually Lucia who is the self-assured and self-aware agent.

The extent to which these detailed sequence analyses, however, apply to the historical reception by filmgoers is questionable. As emerged from interviews I conducted with former Italian filmgoers, the *sadiconazista* films in 1970s Italy were not shown in so-called erotic

movie theaters located near train stations, and thus didn't target those audiences explicitly seeking pornography. On the contrary, ordinary city theaters offered weekday matinee and evening showings during winter months. The audience was exclusively male, as Giancarlo C. from Sicily (born 1959) recalled in an interview: 'During the cold wintertime, when one anyhow can't do much, we academy boys would go to the evening showing at six o'clock, after homework and before dinner. For us these erotic films were great, because they showed a world alien and attractive to us boys, especially the heterosexual sadomasochism. The Nazism in itself did not really particularly apply to us. We wanted to see an erotic movie.'²⁸ What is striking, however, is that in 1970s Italy, a heterogeneous social group of Italian men shared the common experience of viewing *sadiconazista* movies in local movie theaters, long before videotapes made private consumption of such entertainment possible in the 1980s.

Giancarlo C. admits in his interview the voyeuristic pleasure of watching sex and violence films. It was the stereotyped portrayal of Nazism and its connection to sexual adventurism that made *sadiconazista* films popular among Italian males, in particular the depiction of sheer violence and sexual abuse. The opportunity to watch forbidden sadomasochistic sexuality made the film even more attractive to young schoolboys. The sexual sadism in *The Night Porter* was read in a traditional heterosexual manner: the man, Max, dominates the woman, Lucia. And precisely that attracted heavy criticism from feminist commentators. The marketing of the film still emphasizes exactly the same ingredients today: sadomasochism and the sexual decadence of the SS, as the film's North American distributor Criterion lists on its website.²⁹

It is undeniable that the suggestive, aesthetically self-conscious manner in which Cavani represents the power game, sexual abuse in the camp, and the postwar sadomasochistic relationship between Lucia and Max offered and still offers its audiences a source of illicit excitement. What Omer Bartov asserts for Israeli youth of the 1950s and 1960s, who were equally and yet differently fascinated by National Socialism, is also valuable for the Italian youth of the 1970s and 1980s: 'Nothing could be a greater taboo than deriving sexual pleasure from pornography in the context of the Holocaust: hence nothing could be as exciting.'³⁰ Italian *sadiconazista* movies were a kind of 'extra-curricular sexual education'³¹ for the adolescent Italian moviegoers, as it was for their Israeli counterparts. It was precisely those pulp

elements, the depiction of the sexually titillating and sadistic camp universe, that made *The Night Porter* popular and gave it cult status.

Finally, contemporary debates on sadomasochism and sexuality play a significant role for the interest in the *sadiconazista* genre and in particular in Cavani's *The Night Porter*. For the latter, it might also be of relevance — maybe not so much for the production but surely for the reception of the movie — that in August 1973 the media discussed a new concept to describe the psychological phenomenon wherein hostages express adulation for and emotional attachment to their captors. The criminologist and psychiatrist Nils Bejerot coined the term 'Stockholm Syndrome' in the wake of a bank robbery and hostage situation at the Norrmalmstorg in Stockholm. In terms of the film industry and of the typical plotline, the whole *sadiconazista* genre has also to be connected to the splatter film genre — in Italy as represented by filmmakers such as Lucio Fulci and Dario Argento — and Westerns, as well as to the then very popular erotic genre, e.g. the French erotic series *Emmanuelle* starting in 1973. It is in the light of these cultural and commercial realities that the appeal of such movies for a wide audience must be studied. It is first and foremost important to address and include the societal context of the 1970s because films of this period tell us much more about the society in which they were made than about the Holocaust.

Conclusion: Pulp Fiction Or Art House?

Liliana Cavani created a scandalous and at the same time subtle piece on concentration camps that does more than present the perversion and exploitation of the Holocaust for the sake of sensationalism. My essay illustrates how the director analyzed the grey zones and grappled with the ambiguous conflict of power. In an interview, Cavani stated that she had interviewed several women in northern Italy in 1965 who had been incarcerated in Nazis camps.³² It was this concrete encounter with former political and Jewish female prisoners that gave her the idea to do a film on a perpetrator-victim relationship. Even if Cavani aestheticizes and sexualizes bodily images of the SS and the camp prisoners, she does not display the killing and torture. Her cinematography is relatively reserved; the viewer never directly witnesses any violence or sex. However, the SS uniforms represent a fetishization of National Socialism.³³ As a psycho-thriller, the film has a strong

aspiration to entertain. But the film's subject matter and message also remain indisputably political. Lucia's and Max's *amour fou*, on which the critique of the film is mainly based, is surely the load-bearing plot of *The Night Porter*. Hence the role of perpetrators in postwar society, questions of survival, integrity and complicity, and the individual experience during the wartime past are also of great significance.

Amidst the controversy over her film, Cavani assumed the role of trailblazer, and polemical debates decisively determined the extremely hostile reception to her subsequent works. At issue here, and this must be emphasized once more, is a fictional film, a condensed and selective appropriation of National Socialist and camp symbolism. *The Night Porter* is not a historical account, even though Cavani had done some serious research on the camps. It enters into the debate surrounding visual memory and the representation of victims and perpetrators on multiple levels. Cinematic fiction can give viewers a remarkable and disturbingly accurate insight into the corrupt and repressive structure of the camp. Writers such as Roman Frister and Tadeusz Borowski have shown in their work that the fictional representation of the Holocaust, including the depiction of the camp universe beyond good and evil, helps us comprehend its horror and depravity often more effectively than autobiographical accounts.³⁴ This genre allows the telling of a Holocaust story without higher meaning or heroes. It finally makes it possible to describe and depict the illicit and the grey zones. 'What is most marketable about the Holocaust is its horror,' Bartov concludes in his remarkable essay on Ka-Tzetnik's oeuvre and how Israeli youth imagine the Holocaust, and hence, 'The more one concentrates on horror,' he continues, 'the more one is likely to appear to be engaged in a sincere attempt to expose "what actually happened."' ³⁵ Since the release of *The Night Porter*, historians have shown that victims and perpetrators became sexual partners during the Holocaust despite the racial laws.³⁶ Thus the question that we have to face is not only what such film narratives tell us about cultural imagination and societal fantasies, but also what happened in those grey zones where SS guards had an asymmetrical power over the camp inmates. From that point of view, we might also consider the fact that fiction, even pulp fiction, can sometimes more effectively illustrate the nature of sexuality and violence in the camps than survivors' memories or oral history testimonies. Cavani made an interesting thought experiment with her movie.

The question is whether *The Night Porter*, or any other camp movie, is an art house film *d'auteur* or a B-movie that deserves attention and should perhaps be viewed through a different lens. In popular (pulp) Holocaust prose or cinematic fiction, there is far greater nuance than merely asserting the stereotyped and sexualized representation of women, the obscenity of pornographic representation, and therefore the profaning of Holocaust memory. We need to consider, as Dagmar Herzog notes, 'what it might mean to extend and adapt our still only tentative understanding of such phenomena as pornography, voyeurism or exhibitionism [...] to such an area of inquiry as the ideological work of a culture more generally.'³⁷ It is precisely this cultural background and its social practices that scholars need to scrutinize from a sociocultural historical perspective. 'You know, it was a very different world,' Don Edmunds, the director of the 1974 sexploitation film *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* recalled in an interview with the sociologist Lynn Rapaport in July 2001. 'It was the end of the Vietnam [War], it had a sense of loose morality in that period of time. It was the love generation. It was just a different world.'³⁸ In 2003 Susan Sontag outlined the social implications of war imagery in her book *Regarding the Pain of Others*. She stated that the Vietnam War shifted not only the culture of war broadcasting, but also the consumption of violent imagery by the spectators. As such, they witnessed extreme violence that television cameras caught on a daily basis. This phenomenon introduced, so to speak, a 'new tele-intimacy with death and destruction'³⁹ and had an impact on the movie industry that should be linked to the *sadiconazista* genre.

Despite serious criticism, *The Night Porter* was received favourably by the cinephile public and it became a reference point for an entire generation. It remains popular in Italy, where Italian public television regularly broadcasts it during its late night programming. This paradox between rejection and adulation might surprise us, but it illustrates that *The Night Porter* enjoyed and still enjoys the status of a cult movie among a generation marked by the *sadiconazista* genre in the 1970s.

Notes

- 1 Marcus Stiglegger, *Sadiconazista. Faschismus und Sexualität im Film* (St. Augustin: Gardez! 1999); 'Beyond Good and Evil? Sadomasochism and Politics in the Cinema of the 1970s', trans. Kathrin Zeitz, *Ikonen: Magazin*

- für Kunst, Kultur, und Lebensart*, February 9, 2007, accessed January 10, 2011. www.ikonenmagazin.de/artikel/Nightporter.htm.
- 2 Teresa de Lauretis, 'Cavani's *Night Porter*: A Women's Film?' *Film Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (1976/77): 35–6; cf. Beverly Houston and Marsha Kinder, 'The *Night Porter* as a Daydream', *Literature/Film Quarterly* 3 (1975): 366–7.
 - 3 See Andrea Slane, 'Sexy Nazis and Daddy's Girls: Fascism and Sexuality in Films and Videos since the 1970s', in *War, Violence, and the Modern Condition*, ed. Bernd-Rüdiger Hüppauf, 148–64 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997); Marguerite Waller, 'Signifying the Holocaust: Liliana Cavani's *Portiere di Notte*', in *Feminisms in the Cinema*, eds Laura Pietropaolo and Ada Testaferri, 206–19 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Kriss Ravetto, *The Unmaking of Fascist Aesthetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
 - 4 Michel Foucault, 'Afterword', in *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, eds Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, 208–19 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 212.
 - 5 Cavani states in an interview that Lucia was supposed to be a political inmate, but the fact that she stands in a crowd of people with the yellow star links her visually to the Jewish inmates. On the other hand, we never see the yellow star or any other Jewish attribute on her.
 - 6 Stiglegger, *Sadiconazista*, 150.
 - 7 Sadism is a coinage of the Marquis de Sade and came into common parlance with Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia sexualis* (1886). Psychoanalysis expanded the concept of sadism beyond the perversion described by sex researchers by discerning within it countless veiled manifestations, especially those of an infantile nature, thus making it one of the foundational components of sexual life.
 - 8 After Heydrich's assassination in 1942, the Austrian-born SS-Obergruppenführer and Police General Dr Ernst Kaltenbrunner (1903–46) took over leadership of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (Reich Security Main Office). This Berlin-based SS intelligence and security service was charged with fighting all 'enemies of the Reich' inside and outside of its borders. See *Topography of Terror: Gestapo, SS and Reich Security Main Office on Wilhelm- and Prinz-Albrecht-Straße. A Documentation*, Catalogue (Berlin: Stiftung Topographie des Terrors, 2010).
 - 9 IVB4 was a division of the Reich Security Office that came to be known as the Bureau of Jewish Affairs. This Division was in charge of the administration of 'resources' and the logistical organization of the Holocaust. All orders for requisitions of trains and supplies went through IVB4.
 - 10 *Muselmann* (literally 'Muslim') was a derogatory term used among concentration camp inmates to refer to those suffering from complete apathy due to a combination of starvation and exhaustion. Some survivors and scholars argue that the term may stem from the *Muselmann's* inability to stand for any length of time due to the loss of leg muscle, thus spending much of the time in a prone position, recalling the position of the Muslim during prayers. The term was used mainly in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Its equivalent in the Majdanek camp was *Gamel* (derived from German *gammeln*, colloquial for 'rotting') and in the Stutthof *Krypel* (derived from German *Krüppel*, 'cripple'). See Primo Levi, *If This is a Man*, trans. Stuart Woolf (London: Bodley Head, 1966).
 - 11 Stiglegger, *Sadiconazista*, 33.

- 12 Cited in David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 86.
- 13 Jacques Sémelin, 'Analyser le massacre. Réflexions comparatives', *Questions de Recherches/Research in Question* 7 (2002): 28.
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- 15 Gaby Zipfel, 'Ausnahmезustand Krieg? Anmerkungen zu soldatischer Männlichkeit, sexueller Gewalt und militärischer Einhegung', in *Krieg und Geschlecht. Sexuelle Gewalt im Krieg und Sex-Zwangsarbeit in den NS-Konzentrationslagern*, eds Insa Eschebach and Regina Mühlhäuser, 55–74 (Berlin: Metropol, 2008), 68; Gaby Zipfel, "'Blood, Sperm and Tears": Sexuelle Gewalt in Kriegen', *Mittelweg* 36 10 (2001), accessed March 1, 2011, www.eurozine.com/articles/2001-11-29-zipfel-en.html.
- 16 Primo Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati* (Torino: Einaudi, 2003), 83–101.
- 17 See Jean Améry, *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne. Bewältigungsversuche eines Überwältigten* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1966).
- 18 The SS delegated to the so-called *Funktionshäftlinge* or *kapos* various tasks related to surveillance, control and administration. They formed the lowest level of the many-layered guard system and the tip of the inmate hierarchy. But this targeted delegation of power also served to divide the *Zwangsgemeinschaft* of the inmates and, according to the 'divide and conquer' principle, prevented potential alliances among the inmate groups and thus made it easier to keep the prisoners in check.
- 19 ODESSA, (from the German *Organisation der ehemaligen SS-Angehörigen*, 'Organization of Former SS Members'), is believed to have been an international network set up toward the end of WWII by a group of SS officers in order to avoid their capture and prosecution for war crimes. Several scholars have studied the organization's existence and provided details of its operations. In the realm of fiction, the Frederick Forsyth best-selling 1972 thriller *The Odessa File* brought the organization to popular attention. See Simon Wiesenthal, *The Murderers Among Us* (London: Heinemann, 1967).
- 20 Stiglegger, *Sadiconazista*, 116.
- 21 Stiglegger, *Sadiconazista*, 18.
- 22 Interview with Liliana Cavani on the DVD version of *The Night Porter*, Anchor Bay 2006.
- 23 Paula Diehl, *Macht — Mythos — Utopie. Die Körperbilder der SS-Männer* (Berlin: Akademie, 2005), 222–32.
- 24 The history of the German associations of student fraternities (*Burschenschaften*) goes back to the Middle Ages. During the nineteenth century they linked increasingly to nationalistic ideas. Among SS members in particular, many had been socialized in right-wing fraternities before they joined the Nazi party. In 1935/36, all *Burschenschaften* were dissolved by the Nazi government or transformed and fused with other student groups into so-called *Kameradschaften* (comradeships). See Christian Ingrao, *Croire et détruire. Les intellectuels dans la machine de guerre SS* (Paris: Fayard 2010).
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- 33 Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism', *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Picador, 1980), 73–105.
- 34 Roman Frister, *The Cap: The Price of a Life*, (New York: Grove Press, 1999) and Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen; and Other Stories* (New York: Viking, 1967).
- 35 Bartov, 'Kitsch and Sadism', 66.
- 36 See Robert Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell. Sexuelle Zwangsarbeit in nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2009); Regina Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen: Sexuelle Gewalttaten und intime Beziehungen deutscher Soldaten in der Sowjetunion, 1941–1945* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2010).
- 37 Dagmar Herzog, 'Hubris and Hypocrisy, Incitement and Disavowal: Sexuality and German Fascism', in *Sexuality and German Fascism*, ed. Dagmar Herzog, 1–21 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 5.
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III

Heroes, Villains and the Undead

10

Digital Nazis: Genre, History and the Displacement of Evil in First-Person Shooters

JEFF HAYTON

THE YEAR IS 1943. Desperate to win the war, the Nazis have turned to advanced weaponry, genetic experimentation, and the occult. Under the tutelage of mad scientist Wilhelm ‘Deathshead’ Strasse, they have harnessed electricity to mutate humans. By grafting metal onto flesh, they have created a new breed of fighting machine: the *Übersoldat*. Not content with their experiments in genetic perversion, the Nazis have also discovered the final resting place of tenth-century Germanic King Heinrich I. Under the direction of SS sorceress Marianne Blavatsky, they successfully reanimate the Teutonic knight and his skeletal denizens. Using futuristic weapons, hero U.S. Army Ranger William Blazkowicz must defeat ‘Deathshead’ and the Elite Guard of SS Paranormal — an all-female group of killers dressed head-to-toe in skintight leather and stilettos. In the climax, Blazkowicz vanquishes the undead Heinrich. As the screen fades to black, a disappointed Himmler watches the defeat of his dark knight from a nearby hilltop. Putting down his binoculars slowly, the *Reichsführer* turns to his attaché and informs him that it is time to return to Berlin. ‘This American...’ he mutters, ‘He has ruined everything!’

The above plot description sounds suspiciously like a trashy Nazisploitation movie variously appealing and offensive for its camp, gore and sexual titillation. But it is not a film. Rather, it is the storyline

behind the hit video game *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* (Gray Matter Studios/Activision), published to considerable acclaim and profit in 2001. In contrast to the condemnation and controversy incited by Nazisploitation films such as Sergio Garrone's *Lager SSadis Kastrat Kommandantur (SS Experiment Camp)* (1976) or Cesare Canevari's *L'ultima orgia del III Reich (The Gestapo's Last Orgy)*, 1976), video games mobilizing similar content have received media acclaim and found mainstream appeal. While the Don Edmonds sleaze-fest *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (1974) was literally run out of town for its imbrication of Nazism and pleasure ('When would the sadism cease being erotic and start sickening the viewer?'¹), *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* was a critics' choice and won the PC Action/Adventure Game of the Year by the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences.² By claiming historical authenticity — at the beginning of *Ilsa*, producer David F. Friedman (disguised as 'Herman Traeger') assures audiences that the on-screen depictions are based on 'documented fact' — both Nazisploitation films and video games marshal the past to legitimize spectacles of violence, domination and sexual perversion.³ In this chapter I explore what video games, especially the genre of first-person shooters (FPSs), have to tell us about the Nazi past.

The FPS is an exploitation genre *par excellence*: by encouraging violence to produce pleasure, FPSs traffic heavily in 'improper' content drawn from exploitation cinema.⁴ But can genre influence the way history is appropriated? In the following, I probe how the content and form of Nazisploitation films bleed into the gaming world and what this seepage means. Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska remind us that video games constantly 'borrow' from cinema, and exploring what these artifacts of popular culture tell us about history, collective knowledge and past experiences is important.⁵ As educators tout the possibilities of interactive learning — especially with regard to history — gaming has increasingly become a site of mass-schooling. But just because FPSs will never enter educational curricula due to their extreme violence, it does not follow that individuals are not learning from them at home.⁶

By examining how history and video game genres influence one another, I hope to bridge the scholarly gap in game studies between so-called narratologists and ludologists. In the last decade, ludologists have called for a new theoretical vocabulary to study video games.⁷ Often arguing that narratologists — scholars using theories

developed from film and literary criticism to explore video games⁸ — are attempting to ‘colonize’ game studies, ludologists insist that the interactive dimension to gaming fundamentally separates the medium from other genres and hence from other academic disciplines.⁹ While these claims deny cinematic audience participation and overstate video games’ autonomy from older narrative forms, scholars have now begun to explore the connections between these two extreme positions. Henry Jenkins, for example, suggests that games need to be examined ‘less as stories than as spaces ripe with narrative possibility.’¹⁰

But when the entertainment industry utilizes the past in its products to create historical worlds privileging fun, what history is being narrated? Moreover, whose? These are meaningful questions because the video game industry has an enormous capacity to draw themes and content from history, and thus narrate a compelling, mass-marketed vision of the past. In 2010, according to the Entertainment Software Association (ESA), 67 per cent of American households play computer or video games.¹¹ With US game revenues at \$10.5 billion in 2009 and globally approaching \$57 billion, the video game industry has an enormous capacity to shape our understandings of history.¹² These comments pertain especially to FPSs: the highly anticipated FPS *Halo 3* generated \$170 million in revenue *on its first day of sale*.¹³ The video game industry is big business; so big, in fact, that by 2020, an estimated 174 million Americans will have grown up with video games since their early childhood.¹⁴

With a capacity to reach millions, the need to explore more fully how these digital artifacts narrate the past is pressing. More to the point: what do these digital representations — with narrative content based in exploitation film staples (mutants, the undead, mad scientists) — tell us about Nazism? Ted Friedman writes convincingly that to play a video game, players become ‘teleliterate’, a process whereby they learn the ‘distinct semiotic structure’ of their activity.¹⁵ Part of learning how to play a particular game is thus learning an underlying ideological architecture. In this study I examine how two recent FPSs narrate Nazism: *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* and its sequel, titled simply *Wolfenstein* (Raven Software/Activision, 2009). FPSs consistently rank as one of the top game genres within the industry, and the *Wolfenstein* games typify how the genre represents history and digitally simulates Nazisploitation. Moreover, as descendents of the original Nazi-style

FPS *Wolfenstein 3-D* (Apogee/id Software, 1992), this examination seems doubly appropriate.

By paying particular attention to how new media ‘remediates’ Nazisploitation themes to a new audience, we can explore the movement of low-brow cinema culture into the mainstream. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin suggest that new forms of media can be said to ‘remediate’ older forms of media, and present them as ‘refashioned’ and ‘improved versions’.¹⁶ But in contrast to their cinematic brethren, the mass appeal of games gives this medium the potential to insinuate digital interpretations much further afield. The following discussion is divided into two sections. The first part examines the development of the *Wolfenstein* franchise and plot narratives before considering how FPSs narrate history generally, while the second half discusses how digital representations of Nazism displace fascist evil from the Holocaust onto reckless science and human experimentation. In so doing, I hope to elucidate some of the fascist worlds that video games imagine.

Origins, History and FPSs

One of the more interesting paradoxes about the *Wolfenstein* franchise over the past decades has been the contradiction between advances in video game technology that propel graphic content towards increased verisimilitude and plot narratives that venture further into the fantastic. The original *Wolfenstein* games — *Castle Wolfenstein* (MUSE Software, 1981) and *Beyond Castle Wolfenstein* (MUSE Software, 1984) — were developed by Silas Warner for the Apple II and hailed at the time for their deep gameplay.¹⁷ In the first game, players control a captured US private held in Castle Wolfenstein and must escape undetected after stealing the Nazis’ top secret war plans. In the sequel, players enter the *Führer’s* Berlin bunker, locate a bomb hidden in a closet by ‘The Underground’, plant it outside a conference room where Hitler is haranguing his generals, and quickly escape. These early *Wolfenstein* games emphasize stealth rather than the overkill associated with the later FPSs. They featured top-down views although characters were depicted upright. With limited ammunition but the ability to don captured uniforms and impersonate Nazi guards, players moved from screen to screen in the maze-like environments trying to avoid alarms and Nazi guards barking ‘*Halt!*’ or ‘*Kommen Sie!*’

Though MUSE Software soon entered bankruptcy, the *Wolfenstein* concept quickly found a new lease of life. In 1992, id Software released *Wolfenstein 3-D*. Inspired by the earlier games, id designed a world in which players wandered through a disorienting maze of rooms and corridors killing an endless stream of Nazis and eventually Hitler himself. Along the way, players defeated mutants created by Dr Schabbs and killed the mad scientist Otto Giftmacher ('poison-maker') before he could develop chemical weapons to poison the Allies. A prequel, *Spear of Destiny* (Apogee/id Software, 1992), quickly followed in which protagonist B. J. Blazkovicz returns to recapture the mythical Spear of Destiny, an artifact the Nazis are using to harness occult powers and raise the dead. *Wolfenstein 3-D*'s impact cannot be understated: Henry Lowood suggests that *Wolfenstein 3-D* revolutionized gaming and ushered in the 'modern-age' of video games.¹⁸ As the original FPSs, the *Wolfenstein* franchise garnered countless accolades and lead programmer John Carmack is a veritable super-star within the gaming industry; considered by some an 'auteur', he was inducted into the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences' Hall of Fame in 2001.¹⁹

First-person perspective revolutionized not only the gaming world, but also the digital depiction of Nazism. While top-down, two-dimensional or third-person perspective all keep players at a distance, a three-dimensional environment enables a more complete immersion in the digital world by creating a sense of embodiment within the game space. It enables players to experience the game through the protagonist's eyes and control every action.²⁰ While scholars debate the precise qualities of immersion, few deny that the first-person perspective is the most immersive.²¹ While playing FPSs, players' heartbeats increase. They flinch or duck their heads when shot at and their bodily movements correspond to on-screen motions.²²

In early FPSs, the drive for increased immersion resulted in the elevation of action at the expense of narrative: as Andrew Darley observes, plots in early FPSs can be characterized by their 'extraordinary poverty'.²³ While this remark may be overstated, it is nonetheless true that the first generation of FPSs were displays of excessive violence linked to a very thin narrative structure: much like exploitation films, action was the defining element. However, as computer processing power has increased, the narratives of more recent FPSs have become much more elaborate. In *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, protagonist Blazkovicz must defeat a bevy of occultists, undead soldiers and mad

scientists on his way towards stopping the Nazis. Players begin as prisoners of the Nazis, having been captured by Helga von Bulow, a committed occultist and head of SS Paranormal Division, while trying to infiltrate Castle Wolfenstein. Escaping prison, players rendezvous in a village below the keep with a member of the Kreisau Circle, an anti-Nazi resistance group. After clearing the catacombs underneath Wolfenstein of undead awakened by SS Paranormal's activities, Blazkowicz defeats the monster Olaric that von Bulow accidentally summoned.

Victorious, Blazkowicz is flown to the Baltic where he destroys a special V-2 rocket developed by 'Deathshead' to deliver an experimental germ warhead to London. Eager to learn more about the director of the SS 'Special Projects Division', Blazkowicz makes a horrific discovery: 'Deathshead' is fashioning an army of mutants, twisted by mechanical and electrical 'augmentation'. Chasing 'Deathshead' to his 'X-Labs' in Norway, Blazkowicz destroys the madman's proudest creation: the *Übersoldat*, a twisted monster of flesh encased in armor. Unable to capture 'Deathshead', players return to Castle Wolfenstein where SS Paranormal is about to raise Heinrich I. Fighting his way past the Elite Guard of SS Paranormal, Blazkowicz arrives too late to prevent Blavatsky from summoning the long-dead Saxon king: players can only win the game by destroying the dark knight.

In the most recent *Wolfenstein* game, Blazkowicz and his arch-nemesis 'Deathshead' are back for a return engagement. In the opening cinematic, players watch Blazkowicz sink the Nazi warship Tirpitz as it prepares to fire on London. Saved from death by a mysterious medallion found on the Tirpitz, players learn that the artifact belonged to an ancient occult group, the Thule. Smuggled into the fictional German city of Isenstadt, players must again join forces with the Kreisau Circle to stop the Nazis from harnessing the power of an alternative realm, the Black Sun dimension. Using the Thule medallion, Blazkowicz defeats the Nazi General Victor Zetta who was in charge of Isenstadt and mutated by the supernatural into a slug-like monster. With Zetta's death, 'Deathshead' assumes command, murders the leader of the Kreisau Circle, and prepares to attack London with a giant canon powered by Black Sun energy. As before, players must destroy countless biologically and mechanically 'augmented' mutants designed by 'Deathshead'. In the end, after destroying the portal to the alternative realm and escaping safely from a burning Zeppelin as it

plummets to the ground (but once more failing to kill 'Deathshead'), Blazkowicz is again victorious.

Trafficking tenuously in past actualities (Himmler's occult obsessions, the V-2 rocket program, the Thule Society), these games mobilize historical accuracy to legitimize their performance of pleasurable killing. More importantly, they simultaneously offer an ideological interpretation of the past. History, as narrated by video games, almost always involves conflict between nation states.²⁴ Whether in strategy, real-time or action-adventure games, state conflict is the engine driving gameplay. In the *Wolfenstein* games, the player is immersed in a world of war between intractable foes, an historical backdrop in which the protagonist (player) must move and fight. In contrast to other game genres that mobilize history, especially strategy games (such as Sid Meier's *Civilization* series or Microsoft's *Age of Empire* franchise) where players are in many respects global managers (hence the term 'God-games') manipulating every detail of the digital world, FPSs differ fundamentally because the first-person perspective depicts individual agency in history. In FPSs, players are encouraged to regard history as dependent upon individual action. Whereas players in 'God-games' remain aloof from daily life — they order and manage history from on high — FPSs are narrations of the individual navigating — and triumphing! — in turbulent times.

But like most FPSs, the plots in the *Wolfenstein* games shuttle Blazkowicz from mission to mission and thus deny players the freedom to choose which problem to solve first. Within the missions themselves, linear storylines force players to accomplish specific objectives in order to trigger the next sequence of events. Inability to do so results in mission failure and players must replay the level until they complete the objective. In this sense, history is iterative, it does not branch outward to offer a continuously expanding series of possibilities based upon prior decisions. Instead, history is a linear re-enactment of a single if abstracted path leading to Allied victory. Rather than offer a range of historical subjectivities and trajectories, history becomes a multitude of variables with a finite sum in which choice (in history) conforms to explain Allied victory.

The tension between a desire for total freedom of action and the necessity of story to make action meaningful, Rune Klevjer argues, is a paradox applicable to all FPSs.²⁵ The spatial and interactive restrictions employed to advance FPS plots — physical geography (e.g. doors

that will not open), cinematic cut-scenes — are emblematic of the fettered historical agency in FPSs. There is inconsistency then, when a non-player character (NPC) proclaims that, '[t]he fate of the free world now rests on your shoulders Agent Blazkowicz.' Recognizing this contradiction, game designers tried to incorporate more open-ended gameplay in *Wolfenstein* by introducing the city of Isenstadt as a central 'hub' that players can explore. However, these initiatives were merely cosmetic, as the story remains almost completely linear and the 'hub' only gives a 'thin illusion of open world gameplay' according to one disappointed reviewer.²⁶

This dissatisfaction gestures towards one of the major issues that Nazisploitation films highlight: the derivation of pleasure from images, indeed spectacles, of domination and restriction. But in relation to gaming, as Tanya Krzywinska suggests, there can be pleasure in being out of control.²⁷ While one key to immersion is the total control over point-of-view, restriction is equally critical. Sue Morris argues that the lack of narrative control is important in contributing to participants 'sense of being *in* that virtual space.'²⁸ Part of individualizing history and increasing digital realism is making players believe that they are not completely in control of their environments — as in real life — and thus FPSs revel in the fettered agency they extend to players. Since restriction immerses players more fully into the digital world, the dangers experienced by the protagonist on-screen are more pleasurable: according to Krzywinska, 'the particular form of restriction provided by the first-person mode heightens the illusion that it is the player, sitting in front of the screen, who is being attacked, rather than a virtual abstracted self.'²⁹ Andrew Darley terms this experience 'vicarious kinaesthesia', a concept meaning 'the impression of agency within an illusionistic space' that calls to mind Marx's celebrated axiom that 'men [sic] make their own (digital) history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under (programmed) circumstances existing already.'³⁰ By giving players the illusion of freedom, FPSs underwrite an historical system fundamentally rooted in the possibility of the individual triumphing over adversity.

Mad Science, Killing and the Displacement of Evil

But with their fantastic narratives and over-the-top imagery, do these games tell us *anything* about Nazism? In an article examining whether

recent video games can be said to exhibit hints of ‘fascinating fascism’ as developed by Susan Sontag in her seminal essay, Margit Grieb argues that games such as *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* only superficially wrestle with Nazism.³¹ According to Grieb, the use of the unbelievable — such as the *Übersoldat* — removes any need to confront seriously the depiction of Nazi ideology in these games: ‘Although [*Return to Castle*] *Wolfenstein* simulates a Nazi setting with accessories that contain historical references, these elements are defused, if not neutralized, through exaggeration, irony and artificiality.’³² In contrast to Sontag’s conclusions about Nazi aesthetics, Grieb suggests that these games have no lasting appeal, arguing that fascism’s ideology has become disengaged from aesthetics. While I agree with most of her conclusions, it is too easy simply to dismiss the fantastic as unrealistic and therefore rendering discussion unnecessary. Rather than brush aside these narratives, we must ask why narratives about Nazis and the fantastic endure. When stacked upon a genre framework that models history in a particular manner, can stories of mad scientists, mutants and the occult tell us *something* about how Nazism is represented in the popular imagination?

These are not idle reflections: as a recent *Game Informer* article indicates — ‘Real-life Insanity: *Wolfenstein*’s events are fictional, but are inspired by the reality of the Nazi regime’ — players and critics approach video games at a level of historicity that demands interrogation.³³ In this section I concentrate on three aspects of Nazism developed for players in the *Wolfenstein* games that lean heavily on exploitation-style dichotomies. By analyzing the relationship between civilians and the SS, the absence of Jews, and the figure of the mad scientist, we can begin to appreciate how certain images of Nazism are ‘remediated’ in the popular imagination. And while Grieb is certainly correct that these games use vague but familiar setting detail to draw in players (‘Because the Nazi S/M connection is so indelibly etched into the popular imaginary, it also serves to authenticate the setting.’³⁴), it is precisely these ‘vague but familiar’ details that need elucidation. Moreover, both *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* and *Wolfenstein* draw on conventional cinematic traditions — most notably the horror genre — to digitize Nazism into familiar terms. In turn, by elevating players to a position of moral superiority, these narratives fashion an interpretation of Nazism that is acceptable for mainstream appeal.

In her influential essay ‘Hands-On Horror’, Tanya Krzywinska

identifies a Manichean logic to most horror video games. While Krzywinska is predominantly interested in exploring the pleasures of being in and out of control, her observation that horror games are ‘structured at deep and surface levels according to the principles of a ‘Manichean’ moral duality’ applies equally (perhaps even more so) to FPSs.³⁵ The defining aspect of FPS gameplay (history) is the narration of war as a Manichean confrontation between a moral order of good threatened by evil. Nearly all FPSs use unequivocal foes as enemies, be they demons released from Hell or aliens intent on exterminating humanity. The use of World War II as the historical backdrop and Nazis as enemies thus provides a moral justification for killing. The Nazis are unredeemable adversaries who engage unequivocally in nefarious activities such as perverse genetic engineering and necromancy. These games are narrations of ‘them’ committing horrendous deeds rather than ‘us’, a binary that reiterates the righteousness of Allied victory and legitimizes the present by removing any possibility of moral repugnance on the part of players or the historical Allies. By painting the historic Allied victory with a black and white brush of moral authority, these games create a romantic throwback to the days when good triumphed over evil. The first-person perspective is instrumental here as players *must* assume the identity of the good hero. Indeed, FPSs that use questionable protagonists and adversaries often provoke outrage and have historically been less commercially successful.³⁶ The early *Wolfenstein* games continuously re-inscribe war as an uncomplicated crusade. The only NPCs players can encounter are Nazis, whom they must either kill immediately or avoid altogether.

In *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* the enemy is unmistakable: Nazis always appear in uniform. The few civilians one can encounter are harmless: either cowering women or disguised operatives from the Kreisau Circle who aid players. The moral order is so underwritten that if a civilian is killed, the game immediately ends in failure and players must restart the mission. Since the game cannot proceed unless players follow the ‘correct’ route by not killing civilians, moral choice is removed from history. In *Wolfenstein*, even this weak condemnation is removed: if players shoot civilians they encounter, such as secretaries working in the SS Headquarters, the bullets pass magically through them as they remain cowering but unharmed. As such, triumph is bereft of tragedy because history entails no individual sacrifice. War is heroic, masculine, mythologized and uncomplicated, as history

can only advance with the protagonist's survival. In FPSs, players die often, especially in the harder, later levels. But as others have written, dying has no tangible consequences: players merely restart the level, or else more ideally they load a game saved close to where they died ('save-die-restart'), a process provoking little thought about the consequences of dying and which instead elicits frustration at one's inability to advance beyond a certain point.³⁷ Players die a hundred times over the course of the game, but are essentially immortal — in contrast to enemies who are continually shot, slump over, lie still and eventually disappear. As Krzywinska observes, even the act of dying underwrites the Manichean moral economy since players never die (because they are good) while enemies die often (because they are evil).³⁸ As such, history only progresses with (good) players.

The distinctions between Nazis, Germans and the Kreisau Circle in *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* are thematically telling in terms of how these games narrate Nazism. Throughout the games, it is not the Germans who are adversaries but rather the Nazis or the SS. This important distinction mimics early postwar apologias from Nazis themselves who foisted blame on to their leaders ('the Hitler gang') and the SS.³⁹ But the introduction of civilians complicates the morally defined battlefield. In the early games, there were references to an 'Underground', an entity never developed beyond the game manual.⁴⁰ However, in the two recent games, the Kreisau Circle functions as a symbolic Other, a 'good Germany' juxtaposed against the evil Nazis. Borrowing the name and little else from the aristocratic plotters around Graf Helmuth James von Moltke, the Kreisau Circle in the *Wolfenstein* games is a populist underground fighting against fascist tyranny.⁴¹ As Blazkowicz finds success against the Nazis, the resistance leader Caroline Becker reports that volunteers are streaming in. Still, the introduction of the Kreisau Circle and other resistance groups does not upset the black-and-white confrontation of good against evil. As one reviewer complained — demanding more complexity and possibility — it was unfortunate that players cannot play the factions off against one another.⁴² As such, these games simplify Nazi occupation and elide motivation signaling alternative identities.

For it is not actually the Resistance that truly opposes the Nazis in these games but rather the Allies and Blazkowicz, foreign Others sent to free Germans from their oppressors. While the Resistance occasionally aids the player, the Kreisau Circle does not affect

gameplay (history). Nowhere is this dichotomy more evident than in a mission called ‘The Hospital’ in *Wolfenstein*. In the opening (and thus unavoidable) cut-scene, Blazkowicz approaches a nurse station in the foyer of a hospital occupied by the SS for experimental ‘augmentation’. The nurse leans in close and whispers that she was worried Blazkowicz would never make it, informing players that the Nazis are up to horrible things and that patients are disappearing. Suddenly, she is stabbed from behind by the ‘fruits’ of Nazi devilry: an invisible half-man, half-monster assassin. Dying, she cries out ‘Blazkowicz... help...me...’ The dichotomy between the Nazis and Germans introduces a historical revision absolving Germans of Nazism in the pursuit of narrative complexity. By continual reaffirming the German-Nazi split, a binary that recapitulates widespread postwar efforts of Germans to avoid responsibility for the Third Reich, the ‘Germans-as-victims’ narrative disturbingly complicates even further the categories of perpetrators and victims in these games.

For what is most scary about Nazism is that it could happen again. That the murder of millions could take place at the center of Western civilization is frightening, as is the understanding that it was not sadists who were the perpetrators of genocide as Nazisploitation films would have you believe. As Lester D. Friedman observes, in his study of Nazis in film, the greatest fear that Nazis provoke is the belief that it could happen again, that it could happen among ‘us’, that ‘we’ could become perpetrators or victims.⁴³ But the separation of Nazis from Germans and the SS from the Kreisau Circle works to eliminate any hint that such an occurrence might take place; and thus instead of representing how broad-based Nazi support was historically, these games fetishize the SS as the ultimate incarnation of evil, an unredeemable evil, but importantly an historical evil long gone except in films and digital nightmares. It is here where the unbelievable works to represent Nazism problematically, not by divorcing fascist ideology from aesthetics as Grieb suggests but by denying that ‘we’ can be evil.

And while the *Wolfenstein* games pit irrevocable foes against one another — the ‘good’ Allies versus the ‘evil’ Axis — the Nazis’ historical evil is curiously displaced. The use of Nazis as villains is acceptable because historically they killed millions: as James Campbell mentions, in an article exploring World War II FPSs as ludic simulations of World War II films, ‘slaughtering’ Nazis provides a ‘guilt-free form of catharsis.’⁴⁴ And yet, within the digital text, the Holocaust remains

unspoken and Jews intriguingly absent. While the Holocaust remains central to understanding National Socialism, the video game industry mostly sidesteps the representation of genocide: indeed, how can one depict the Holocaust digitally, especially in a *game* meant to be *fun*? As with many Nazisploitation films, the *Wolfenstein* games are mobilized by the Holocaust, but loath to mention it.⁴⁵ The absence of Jews is particularly startling because their very presence sustains the game's morality: not once depicted or referred to in the *Wolfenstein* franchise, Jews exist as silent haunting ghosts, for without the annihilation of the Jews, the Nazis are no different from the Allies. The reason why there are no FPSs about World War I is because the Nazis make World War II the 'good war'. As such, the Holocaust makes the violence in these FPSs acceptable: the Nazis are monsters (historically), they committed inhuman crimes (historically), and as such, have forfeited their right to live (digitally).

The absence of Jews is furthermore conspicuous because throughout the games there are mentions of victims. In the early *Wolfenstein* maze-games, players run through rooms with cages and pools of blood on the floor. In *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, the opening cut-scene shows a Nazi scientist electrocuting an Allied soldier. In *Wolfenstein*, the protagonist must rescue several bound and blindfolded prisoners from the Nazis with the implicit understanding that the captives have been or will be tortured (though no such torture is depicted graphically). But the Holocaust is never discussed. The silence surrounding the historical evil of the Nazis points to the limits of the medium in representing history: can (should?) genocide be entertainment? The answer is obviously no, but FPSs are doubly bound by the genre: in games where players kill thousands, how can murder be condemned? For it is not the Nazis who commit (digital) genocide in the *Wolfenstein* games, but rather the players.

For this reason, the *Wolfenstein* games elide the difficult issue of representing the Holocaust by displacing Nazi evil onto a familiar trope of horror films: the pursuit of forbidden knowledge in the occult and mad science. Consider Wilhelm 'Deathshead' Strasse, the arch-villain in these narratives of Nazism. In *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, while the occult plot and the mad science plot intertwine throughout the game, there is no question as to which evil presents the greater threat. During one cut-scene back at headquarters, British and American generals chuckle at the idea that the Nazis are resorting

to the occult to win the war. The Elite Guard of SS Paranormal (the only female adversaries in any of the games) is likewise denigrated by its association with the occult — players learn they are ‘reportedly bound together as part of a witch’s coven’ — with its connotations of hysteria and the irrational. *Wolfenstein* abandons the undead narrative for a more science-fiction plot, as ‘Deathshead’ uses science to tap forbidden knowledge from the Black Sun dimension. Personalizing World War II as FPSs are wont to do, ‘Deathshead’ is the ultimate symbol of evil, a disordering force that players must defeat to win the game (history).

The mad scientist has long been a staple of the horror genre.⁴⁶ As Andrew Tudor argues, mad scientists represented the dominant threat in horror films in the 1930s and 1940s.⁴⁷ In classic films following the Frankenstein paradigm, the sequence of events follow what Tudor classifies as a ‘knowledge narrative’: an expert or scientist dabbles (at times unwittingly) in a body of knowledge that exists between the known (life) and unknown (death) and (at times accidentally) unleashes the threat; the unstable threat is resisted and eventually removed, and order is restored to the (known) world.⁴⁸ In early cinematic treatments, science gone awry is a very real danger to humanity: according to Tudor, these films ‘postulate commitment to science as a central source of disorder, and their key protagonists are devoted to the pursuit of knowledge at the expense of humane values.’⁴⁹ The *Wolfenstein* games ‘remediate’ these traditional filmic narratives through ‘Deathshead’s’ perverse experimentations. In *Wolfenstein*, the attempt to use the power of the Black Sun must be eradicated by Blazkowicz. He smashes the portal to the alternative dimension and eliminates the (unknown) knowledge permanently. This ‘knowledge narrative’ posits a fundamental gulf between scientific and human interests. In early cinematic treatments, the figure of the scientist was a tortured character, not evil but misguided, an individual blinded by the pursuit of progress that (accidentally) unleashed monsters upon the world. As Tudor argues, the line between madness and genius in these films is thin: ‘science, however threatening, also has its potential for good.’⁵⁰

The *Wolfenstein* games forcefully reject this ambiguity. Since the Holocaust cannot be represented digitally, ‘Deathshead’ must represent the ultimate symbol of evil. Rather than digital barbed wire, yellow stars and mountains of shoes, Nazism’s inhumanity is shifted

to the perversion of the human body and the mechanical ‘augmentations’ that populate the digital world: in the figure of the Loper, a legless abomination that bounds after players on its hands trying to electrocute them; in the figure of the *Ungesehen*, ‘unseen’ assassins whose grafting transformation is so painful it drives them insane; in the *Übersoldat*, a tank-like humanoid that rumbles towards players shooting rocket launchers and chain guns. In no way can ‘Deathshead’ fall under the category of the banality of evil — nor can there be identification or redemption. History thus consists of the steady accumulation of knowledge (information) and power (guns) to help players to make sense of the digital world they inhabit. By giving players the confidence and tools to move within this virtual representation of the past, the *Wolfenstein* games divorce the historical wickedness of the Nazis from the Germans and shift it to ‘Deathshead’ and mad science. Nazism is evil; but for twisting humanity, not for genocide.

Gaming History

In my delineation of the *Wolfenstein* franchise, I have traced the mobilization of the past by the video game industry and have paid particular attention to the imbrications of history, exploitation and Nazism. Even as these games narrate the past they shape the embedded historical architecture with tropes drawn from exploitation cinema. History is a major organizing theme, and World War II compels FPSs to represent the past in certain ways. Privileging attackers as the movers of history, FPSs emphasize an uncomplicated battlefield of good versus evil. In these digital theaters of war, moral choice is strangely absent as players guide their avatars along a predestined path of honest righteousness. However, the privileging of a singular subjective perspective forces FPSs to mobilize traditional horror and exploitation themes to explain Nazi malevolence.

But what are the consequences of these decisions vis-à-vis our historical sensibilities? In a review of the Civil War era strategy game *Sid Meier’s Gettysburg!*, J. C. Herz pondered uneasily the ramifications of historical simulation. Questioning what happens when simulations become our way of understanding the past, Herz suggests that video games offer a past that may seem ‘more immediate, more meaningful, and more clear’ but whose underlying historical logic is oftentimes ‘complex and opaque’, and whose outcomes reflect the parameters of

the game.⁵¹ As a genre that encourages killing as entertainment, FPSs present a seemingly insoluble dilemma pointing to the very real limits in the isometric depiction of the Holocaust.

Herz's remarks reflect a long-standing tension within the video game industry about the relationship between history and entertainment. Asked about the role of history in guiding the creation of the award-winning real-time strategy *Age of Empires* franchise, lead designer Bruce Shelley responded, 'History gave us a framework upon which we could hang our game. We could pick and choose which interesting parts of history to include or discard.'⁵² Likewise, when asked about how considerations of historical accuracy impose limits on his acclaimed turn-based strategy games, Sid Meier, developer of the *Civilization* series, responded, 'We do some historical research but it is not the starting point for a game. [...] We try to capture the fundamental concepts but the mechanics are streamlined to make it playable.'⁵³ These ludic priorities similarly penetrate the historical architecture of FPSs: discussing the importance of realism in another World War II FPS, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* (Electronic Arts, 2002), producer Vince Zampella suggested, 'We are putting [our] focus into authenticity, not necessarily total realism. We want the game to be as enjoyable as possible, and try not to sacrifice fun at the expense of accurate physics or ballistics.'⁵⁴

Despite the push within the industry to make history 'more entertaining', these games nonetheless use historical realism to legitimize claims of authenticity, and the *Wolfenstein* games are no exception. Drew Markham, creative director at Gray Matter Studios, the developers of *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, was explicit about the level of historical accuracy going into the game: 'Before the maps were created, members of the team went to Europe and took hundreds of pictures of castles, paying close attention to the architectural details. We also have some excellent books full of blueprints, photos, and descriptions of Nazi installations. *All of the structures within Return to Castle Wolfenstein are inspired by what was actually there and used.*'⁵⁵ Elsewhere, commenting on the game's storyline — and using the exact wording that opened *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* — Markham explained that, 'The Nazis were fascinated by the occult. It is a *documented fact* that Hitler had his troops gather relics and ordered some of his top people to research dark magic. Our story builds on the foundation of *real events* that took place during World War II as the Third Reich became desperate to win the war — at any cost.'⁵⁶

The historical architecture deeply embedded in FPSs — even though obfuscated at times by the implausible and the grotesque — should not obscure the powerful narratives these games craft about history in general and Nazism more specifically: in Herz’s felicitous words, historical accuracy becomes ‘just another parameter, like volume, brightness and contrast.’⁵⁷ These points are significant for understanding how video game genres frame historical process and how popular understandings of history frame video games. In making these comments, I do not want to suggest that game designers should keep abreast of the most recent historical scholarship on Nazism, but rather to illustrate that games do in fact utilize history in specific manners, and as such shape history in critical ways. It is essential to draw attention to how exploitation themes are equated with Nazism and linger in the popular imagination. These themes persist because they are continuously ‘remediated’ for new audiences. Despite nods to historical realism, Markham is unequivocal about the heart of his game: ‘At the core, *Wolfenstein* is still about kicking in doors and mowing down scores of Nazi scum.’⁵⁸ But released into the public domain these digital commodities narrate pasts that are available for appropriation and depict Nazism in important ways: as Herz perceptively asked, ‘what happens when you start applying those algorithms to the past? [...] what happens when history becomes a game?’⁵⁹

Notes

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11

Captain America Lives Again and So Do the Nazis: Nazisploitation in Comics after 9/11

CRAIG THIS

THE ATTACKS OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, according to cultural historian Lynn Spigel, brought into question the proper role of entertainment during a time of national crisis, forcing ‘traditional forms of entertainment [...] to reinvent their place in U.S. life and culture.’¹ The comic book industry, in particular, needed to re-examine and re-invent itself. Unlike other entertainment media, comic books frequently revolve around the superhero battling villains and performing great feats to rescue everyday members of the community. Now superheroes had to compete with the appearance of ‘real heroes’, namely the first responders who rushed to the scenes of devastation unfolding on national television. The comic book industry embraced these first responders and marketed comic book mainstays such as Captain America and the Hulk alongside images of policemen and firemen in titles such as *Marvel Comics Heroes*.² Comic artists and writers also documented their responses to the tragedy in comic books and graphic novels such as *9-11: Artists Respond!* and *9-11: The World’s Finest Comic Book Writers and Artists Tell Stories to Remember*,³ but, in so doing, the comic book industry had to be careful in its portrayal of first responders so that it did not appear to exploit them. Nevertheless, after a while, the comic industry, like the entertainment industry in general, needed to get back to business after 9/11. But as Spigel notes,

'a profound state of confusion [existed] about what it was the public wanted.'⁴ When New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani called for the city to return to normal, the entertainment industry attempted to do just that.⁵

In the weeks following September 11, the return to normality in the entertainment industry, particularly television, emphasized history and historical documentaries. On September 15, 2001, for instance, ABC screened documentaries about Charles Lindbergh's solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean and the first moon landing.⁶ Spigel notes that television networks showed this 'triumphant' historical material because history provided messages of 'integrity and quality' that could be shown in the media instead of humor and violence, which could be considered inappropriate at the time.⁷ Further, in showing proud moments in US history, the media sought to help resuscitate national morale.

At this time and in subsequent months and years, Marvel Comics turned to the Nazis as a way to boost morale. They brought back the Third Reich as a coherent enemy that its most 'American' of heroes, Captain America, could defeat. In 2004, Marvel released *Captain America Lives Again*, in which Captain America fights to take back present day New York City after it has been captured and converted into a new Nazi capital. Marvel Comics not only revived and rewrote history, but in replacing al-Qaeda with the Nazis, it created a villain for American comic book readers that could be seen, fought, and ultimately defeated.

In post-9/11 comic books, Nazis served as al-Qaeda surrogates. The United States, embodied in Captain America, could fight back against a visible enemy, much as this character had done during his origins during World War II. Later, after the initial national fervor following 9/11 cooled, Marvel Comics reversed this traditional moral duality in the series *Civil War*. In this series, Marvel used Nazis to question the actions of the US government in the political wake of 9/11, with the Nazis as a quasi-ally of the US. In this instance, the Nazis switched roles, allowing Marvel to question the actions of the US government after 9/11 as it sought to restrict civil liberties in the interest of 'national security'. Although Captain America's roles in these series seemingly contradicted each other, both utilized historical associations and signifiers of Nazism to reaffirm American values of freedom and democracy. Thus, although this chapter does not wish to suggest that Marvel's post-9/11 use of Nazi imagery provides an example of

Nazisploitation in the 'classic' sense of the Nazi sexploitation film, these comics nonetheless 'exploited' the iconography of Nazism in a wider sense. Marvel used Nazis both to revive the ailing Captain America franchise and to address different concerns raised in the immediate crisis and later political wake of 9/11.

Nazis in Comic Books: The 'Good' Enemy from the 'Good War'

After 9/11, the revival of the Nazis as Captain America's enemy not only helped effect a return to normality more broadly, but also prepared its readers for what Marvel writer Mark Millar has called a 'cultural shift ... towards [a] more intelligent and adult approach to storytelling' that would accompany a reinvention of comic books in general and Captain America specifically.⁸ Using the Nazis in comic books as al-Qaeda proxies followed what film historian Mikel Koven calls the 'long standing tradition of exploitation' in other media, particularly the cinema.⁹ Exploitation films began around 1919 and have continued to the present. Eric Schaefer, a noted historian of exploitation cinema, delineates two periods in the history of exploitation films. A first period, from 1919 to the 1960s, derived in Schaefer's words 'from the practice of exploitation or promotional techniques that went over and above typical posters, trailers, and newspaper ads.'¹⁰ Since exploitation films lacked identifiable stars or conventional genres, they needed an extra source of appeal and so focused on forbidden topics, like sex, prostitution, vice, nudity, and other cultural taboos considered to be in bad taste. A second form of exploitation emerged in the US and in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s and typically centered on a specific subject, such as sex, race — and Nazis — and consequently these films were named for the subject they exploited, such as sexploitation, blaxploitation, Mexsploitation, nunsploitation, and of course, Nazisploitation.¹¹

The Nazisploitation films of the 1960s and 1970s took Nazis as a subject and reduced Nazi characters to their most base and accessible form, focusing on violence and including common visual references to Nazism. However, in these films, Nazi hatred and violence played out as sadomasochistic pornographic stories set in Nazi concentration camps, such as *Love Camp 7* (1968).¹² The movies used Nazi characters that were composites of the various historical Nazis, such as *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (1974), based loosely on Ilse Koch, the wife

of Buchenwald commandant, Karl Koch.¹³ The result was a stereotypically violent and hate-filled Nazi dressed in black Gestapo uniforms and the black, shiny boots — signifiers that made the film Nazi an easily recognizable ‘type.’ So, too, the use of Nazis as villains after 9/11 in the Captain America comic books provided readers with a recognizable villain dressed in the same familiar Nazi garb, contributing to stereotypical portrayals. The focus on Nazi violence, particularly against civilian non-combatants, echoed the 9/11 attacks on civilians in the World Trade Center. The use of Nazis in *Captain America Lives Again* also fit in well with the focus on history in the popular media following September 11.

Yet, as sociologist James Der Derian argues, the focus was not entirely on history, but rather on what he calls ‘exceptional ahistoricity’.¹⁴ Der Derian uses the term ‘ahistoricity’ to describe the approach of the US government and media (and to a great extent the American public) to place the September 11 attacks outside the judgment and context of US history. Der Derian argued that ahistoricity, as practiced by the US government and media, tended to overlook or ignore the historical cause-and-effect that led up to 9/11. Instead, through the lens of ahistoricity, he notes, the discourse surrounding the 9/11 attacks portrayed them as unprovoked, and unrelated to other historical events, such as American involvement in the Middle East that helped catalyze anti-American sentiment in some countries.

This ahistorical approach could also be noticed in the televised documentaries that appeared on network television following 9/11, which dealt with the first moon landing or Lindbergh’s flight of the Spirit of St. Louis. Der Derian contends that these historical events were held up as individual acts, representations of what the United States had done, again completely devoid of the social and political context. The triumphal tone was not marred by mention of the space race with the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s that led up to the US moon landing (or, for that matter, the Cold War that helped accelerate the space race). So too, argues Der Derian, government and media discourse instead depicted 9/11 as ‘an event completely and alien to any other horror that ever happened anywhere.’¹⁵ Typical examples include the remark by New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani that ‘this vicious, unprovoked attack on our City, and our Nation, demonstrates the depths of human cowardice and cruelty’,¹⁶ or President George W. Bush’s declaration that the ‘war on terror starts now.’¹⁷ In both cases,

these leaders emphasized that the United States had been attacked from seemingly out of nowhere and must immediately respond.

Political scientist Michael Rogin commented that by using the 9/11 attacks as a starting point for the 'war on terror', the United States replaced 'a real war with an imaginary war.'¹⁸ Instead of examining the attacks of September 11 within broader social, political and historical contexts, particularly America's complex relationships and interactions with the Middle East, the US government labeled the actions of September 11 as the starting point of a whole new sort of war, and in so doing a whole new sort of rhetoric. This 'imaginary war', a war on terror and terrorists, replaced a longstanding conflict that had already included the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center and the 1999 attack on the USS Cole, to name just a few of its component battles. By shifting the start date of this new war from 1991 to 2001, Lynn Spigel concludes, the US government could solidify American nationality focused on a new 'enemy' instead of encouraging 'any real engagement with Islam, the ethics of U.S. international policy, or consequences of the then impending US bomb strikes' on Afghanistan.¹⁹

In its comic books, Marvel paralleled the substitution of a real war with an imaginary war, which they did by using Nazis, rather than al-Qaeda, as villains. Nazis would serve as icons of evil to which audiences could easily relate. In media scholar Scott McCloud's words, audiences 'could connect the dots' and see that Marvel Comics was commenting on the emerging war on terror. As McCloud notes, comics achieve 'amplification through simplification'.²⁰ In a process similar to that of exploitation cinema, comic books simplify images to make them more easily identifiable: Captain America donned the red, white and blue, and the Nazis wore black Gestapo and SS uniforms, monocles and boots. One was good and the other was evil. Just as in the Nazisploitation films, Marvel Comics reduced Nazis to icons, to base forms of violence and destruction — an evil that must be defeated and an enemy that evokes no sense of moral ambiguity in audiences.

Simplifying the storyline to the traditional good-versus-evil dichotomy followed President Bush's comment in the January 29, 2002 State of the Union Address that 'an axis of evil' threatens 'the peace of the world.'²¹ More importantly, it aligned seamlessly with his comment, 'You are either with us or against us.'²² In the President's rhetoric, the battle between evil and good was black and white. For Marvel Comics

it was black versus red, white and blue. Marvel's use of Nazisploitation imagery that revolved around the presentation of familiar visual codes also corresponds to what Marshall McLuhan called the 'iconic grasp' of comic books.²³ Comic books provide simple characters and storylines, McLuhan stated, which allow a wide range of readers to participate fully by connecting the images to the meaning. Similarly, political scientist Jarrett Lovell notes that comics 'are dependent upon iconography to communicate ideology to a mass audience' and Marvel Comics used the iconography of Captain America and the Nazis to communicate the struggle between good and evil that also played out on the wider political arena through the Bush brand of black-and-white rhetoric.²⁴

Captain America's History of Nazisploitation

Marvel Comics' use of the Nazis as villains to depict a struggle between good and evil dates to the very beginnings of the Captain America character. He first appeared in Marvel predecessor Timely Comics' *Captain America Comics #1* (March 1941) with the iconic cover art showing Captain America punching Adolf Hitler in the jaw.²⁵ His creators, Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, observed that 'America's patriotic frenzy on the eve of World War II led to his creation.'²⁶ The United States, they argued, needed a 'noble figure' and super-patriot to combat the evil that existed in the world.²⁷ Captain America embodied the classic American ideals of liberty and justice, note sociologists Christopher Hayton and David Albright, 'so he instantly became a unique symbol of the values underpinning the Republic.'²⁸ While the presentation of Adolf Hitler and Nazis in *Captain America Comics* paralleled world events at the time, these images also helped form the stereotypical media Nazi that, as in later Nazisploitation cinema portrayals, coalesced around hateful and violent behaviours that the public already associated with the Nazis. In comics, however, these behaviors were taken to an often absurd extreme.

According to the *Marvel Comics Encyclopedia*, Captain America began as a US Army experiment performed on a 'young, would-be artist, Steve Rogers, who had attempted to enlist but had been turned away, classified 4-F, because of his physical frailty.'²⁹ Steve Rogers was then enrolled in Project Rebirth, which, under the guidance of one Dr Abraham Erskine, would create a battalion of 'supreme fighting

men, stronger and more resilient than normal soldiers.³⁰ As a result, Steve Rogers' body doubled in size, and his physique accelerated to 'the pinnacle of human perfection'.³¹ However, a Nazi sympathizer had infiltrated the secret test area and killed Dr Erskine, who had kept the Project Rebirth formula to himself. After the doctor died, only Steve Rogers remained. There would be no battalion of Captain Americas.³²

As is often the case with superhero origin narratives, Captain America represented the ordinary man transformed into a superhero. In this case, he was created specifically to fight Nazis, in contrast to a hero like Superman, who rather represented the stereotypical rugged individualism of the immigrant American, coming to the United States and succeeding through his work ethic.³³ Thus while Superman would fight for America and American values, Captain America represented America itself. When Steve Rogers donned the uniform, he was told: 'We're giving you an alter ego, a symbolic identity. When you don this uniform [...] you'll no longer be a private citizen. You'll be America herself. You'll be Captain America. You'll give this country a rallying point [...] And you'll give old Adolf something to think about.'³⁴

With the defeat of Hitler and the Nazis in 1945, Marvel Comics found that superheroes like Captain America, the Human Torch and Sub-Mariner, who had all battled Nazis, no longer had recognizable foes. Marvel could no longer so effectively exploit Nazis as relevant villains, so the company had Captain America fight gangsters, bank robbers and the like. However, in post-war culture, such antagonists did not hold readers' attention as effectively. Further, stories that seemed to glorify the violence and lifestyle of gangsters — in ways that parallel exploitation cinema — ran into greater problems in the form of Frederic Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* in 1954.³⁵ *Seduction of the Innocent* was a 400-page indictment of the comic book industry that raised concerns about the glorification of violence and drugs. It alleged that comics promoted promiscuity and condoned homosexuality. Wertham's book sparked a backlash against comic books that led to their banning and even burning in many municipalities. In the end, Marvel Comics and its rival DC Comics canceled most of their titles due to lost revenues. Many smaller presses either merged with others or failed altogether.

But Captain America found new life during The Red Scare of the early 1950s when Marvel Comics revived him as a 'Commie

Smasher'.³⁶ Building on the successful formula of tying Captain America's storylines to current events, Marvel billed Captain America as an opponent of Communists within the United States. No need to fight run-of-the-mill gangsters, robbers and thieves; here was a real-life menace just like the Nazis. However, the ensuing McCarthyism and the wave of fear that crept over the country in the early 1950s caused Captain America to disappear once again because the writers were not sure who Captain America should side with on the issue. The character had been created as a symbol of American freedom and independence, but did that mean he should side with Senator Joseph McCarthy, the majority of whose targets were falsely accused, as was discovered in the course of the hearings? In his actions as 'Commie Smasher', Captain America seemed to side with McCarthy, but it soon became clear that the writers needed to distance their superhero from McCarthyist tactics. With no clear strategy to redefine the Captain's role, Marvel Comics canceled the Captain America title in 1956.

With Marvel's rebirth in the 1960s through popular superhero titles such as *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *The Fantastic Four* and *The X-Men*, the company attempted once again to resurrect Captain America. Despite the fact that World War II had ended two decades before, Marvel Comics issued *Avengers #4* (1964) with Captain America again battling the Nazis. To explain how a superhero could 'come back' after almost twenty years, the story used a revisionist flashback to 1945 to show how Captain America had fallen into the sea and become frozen in an ice floe, which the Avengers discovered in *Avengers #4*. Having successfully used Nazis in a storyline that literally revived Captain America, Marvel Comics then once again distanced itself from Nazi themes and instead approached a more current topic, the Vietnam War. Again, like the threat of Communism (and later al-Qaeda), Vietnam offered no iconic enemy like the Nazis. Further, questions by Americans about the Cold War and why the United States was in Vietnam dampened potential enthusiasm for a Captain America fighting in Vietnam. The comic went on to feature a few storylines about the conflict, but for the most part, Captain America stayed apolitical during the Vietnam War. Unable to create a new villain for the Captain, Marvel Comics brought back the Nazis yet again.

To reintroduce Nazis into the 1960s and 1970s in a somewhat plausible manner, Marvel created more retroactive narratives to tell the story of Captain America and sidekick Bucky in their battles with

Red Skull, Captain America's most notorious Nazi enemy. Red Skull, who began life as the embittered European orphan Johann Schmidt, became the second most powerful man in the Third Reich at Adolf Hitler's insistence. At first, Hitler has Johann Schmidt dress in only a Gestapo uniform, but that does not create the element of fear and intimidation that Hitler had hoped for, so he has Johann Schmidt, now called Red Skull, don a lifelike red skull. By the war's end, Red Skull had survived Germany's fall and escaped unharmed. He went on to work on realizing Hitler's dream of world domination, which he feels he can only achieve through the death of his arch-nemesis Captain America.³⁷

However, despite Marvel's best attempts to keep the Captain America/Red Skull storyline going, this renewed bid at exploiting Nazis as villains in the 1960s and 1970s eventually ran its course as well. Repetitive stories of Red Skull attempting to take over the world became tedious. Unable to find other suitable villains for Captain America, in the early 1980s Marvel Comics once again reinvented Captain America, this time as the more morally ambiguous 'Nomad, a man without a country'.³⁸ However, he could just as easily have been called 'Captain America, a man without a villain'. Like other superheroes and their identification through arch-nemeses, such as Batman and the Joker, Superman and Lex Luthor, the Fantastic Four and Doctor Doom, Captain America required the Nazis as a defining foil. Without them his necessity as a hero proved questionable. Although the title continued to appear in the 1980s and 1990s, Captain America did not resonate with the American public and figuratively floated along in popular culture waiting for a moment to become relevant again. That moment came on September 11, 2001.

The attacks of September 11, 2001 affected the Marvel Comics universe more than the DC Comics universe. True, both firms had their headquarters in New York City and, as noted above, writers and artists from both firms participated in post-9/11 works, such as the well-known *Heroes*. Yet, for Marvel Comics, the attacks had truly hit home. Unlike DC, Marvel based many of its superheroes, like Spider-Man and the Fantastic Four, in the 'real' New York City, with their storylines playing out in that setting. DC Comics, on the other hand, created fictitious parallels like Gotham and Metropolis. So for Marvel, even more than for DC, the attacks on New York City were attacks not only

on the United States but also the home of the company's mainstay, its superheroes.

As such, media scholar Henry Jenkins has stated that after 9/11, 'the [superhero] characters became powerful vehicles for pondering America's place in the world' and how the United States should respond.³⁹ Since Captain America had been created to fight a real-life enemy, Adolf Hitler, it only seemed fitting that he should fight the new real-life enemy, al-Qaeda. Consequently, concludes Jenkins, Captain America 'was probably the superhero title most directly affected after 9/11.'⁴⁰ Jarrett Lovell agrees, stating that Captain America would be the one to fight the new enemy because Captain America fits the 'winner archetype' of a hero as set forth in sociologist Orrin Klapp's *Heroes, Villains, and Fools*.⁴¹ In this text, Klapp proposes two heroic types, the group servant and the winner. The group servant endorses social solidarity and helping other people at the cost of personal sacrifice, while the winner communicates the importance of getting one's demands met, beating all competitors, and being a champion.⁴² Throughout his history in comic books, Captain America had embodied the winner archetype: he constantly defeats the Nazis and rises up as a champion. Yet after September 11, as presented in the storylines, Captain America seemed reluctant to join the fight overseas in Afghanistan.

In *Captain America* Volume 1, No 4, June 2002, the Captain refuses an order to go to Kandahar, saying 'his responsibilities are at home helping the relief effort and battling hate crimes.'⁴³ At first, Captain America — originally created as a military fighting machine for his government — appears to disobey orders. However, as this storyline developed over a five-part series, eventually the Captain fights the terrorists and their leader Al-Tariq, in a heartland community called Centerville. (Al-Tariq's nationality or terrorist affiliation is never specifically identified.) In a nightmare invasion scenario worthy of the Cold War-era film *Red Dawn* (1984), terrorists have strewn the streets with land-mines, and hold hostages. Captain America confronts them by saying America doesn't attack children: 'Call them off. This is America — we don't make war on children.' Al-Tariq replies: 'No? Tell our children then, American — who sowed death [land-mines] in their fields, and left it for the innocent to harvest? Who took their hands? Their feet?'⁴⁴ Unlike many ahistorical media responses, these initial post-9/11 storylines attempted, at least to some degree, to situate the

'war on terror' within the historical and social contexts of the United States' involvement in the Middle East.

Marvel's rival DC, despite the distance of its superhero universe from the actual New York City setting, tackled these complex questions as well. Henry Jenkins notes that DC Comics used its popular teenaged, African-American character Static Shock to raise the question, '[if I] knew who was responsible, [I] would take the bastards out myself ... but should one attack a nation for the actions of a few individuals?'⁴⁵ Static Shock's sentiments echoed President Bush's call, just days after the 9/11 attacks, for Americans not to attack immigrants based on their appearance.⁴⁶ Yet, in his 'axis of evil' speech, Bush went on to contradict himself by focusing not on the actions of a few individuals, but the actions, as he defined them, of three countries, Iraq, Iran and North Korea. Henry Jenkins noted that DC Comics took President Bush's initial plea one step further by reminding Americans that the Justice League of America (JLA) and America is full of immigrants: Superman (Krypton), Martian Manhunter (Mars), Wonder Woman (Paradise Island), and Aquaman (Atlantis).⁴⁷

However, as media scholar Roopali Mukherjee points out, in the weeks following the attacks, a 'narrowly defined and hegemonic super-patriotism' emerged, which led to a 'series of vicious and violent attacks on 'Arab-looking' people ... and 'others' perceived by the untrained eyes to be suspect in the attack.'⁴⁸ In his essay, 'Step Aside Superman ... This is a Job for [Captain] America! Comic Books and Superheroes Post September 11', Jarret Lovell highlights this emerging super-patriotism in the United States — a land of immigrants, a land of foreigners, a land of others — when he argued that native-born Captain America, not Superman, should come to the aid of the United States in comic books. The questions Lovett ironically raises about Superman echo those made about recent immigrants to the United States: 'Who is this Superman? This outsider from a distant place? This man living among us in disguise? This being who masks his true identity and conceals his ulterior motive?'⁴⁹ Lovett use this ironic take on the Captain America/Superman dichotomy to question the attacks on the immigrants. After all, wasn't Superman the immigrant ideal made good in the United States? The foreigner who came to this country from another land and assimilated into US culture and promoted truth, justice and the American way?

Marvel Comics would eventually address these questions about

masked identities and concealed ulterior motives in the post-9/11 series *Civil War*. But before they could do so, Captain America first had to return to the Nazis. Using the Nazis as coherent, surrogate enemies in lieu of an amorphous organization of multinational terrorist cells, Marvel Comics could re-enact the attacks on New York City, letting Captain America and the United States win.

Captain America Lives Again!

Captain America Lives Again built on the themes of the 9/11 attacks. Instead of an enemy attacking New York City, Marvel Comics presented a revisionist history, with Nazis victorious in World War II and making New York City, now New Berlin, the capital of the German empire. As proxies for the terrorists, Nazis could be reduced to a composite of 'evil'. Further, their occupation of New York City provided an aestheticized, almost sanitized image of evil that contrasted with the messy, smoking ruins of the World Trade Center. As historian John Moser writes, the 'Nazis had an undeniable theatricality about them. Their rallies and torchlight parades were grand visual spectacles, their banners and uniforms eye-catching, their ambitions seemingly unlimited, their use of media unparalleled'⁵⁰ and New York City remade as New Berlin is a similar visual spectacle. The German *Reichsadler* (imperial eagle) sits atop many buildings and gives the city an unmistakable Nazi feel. Likewise, long, red swastika banners hang from buildings. Above the city, zeppelins criss-cross the sky, and standing apart from the civilians are the Nazis themselves, dressed in their recognizable black, SS-inspired uniforms and knee-high black boots. Watching over this tableau as the new *Führer* is Red Skull, Captain America's arch-enemy.

Red Skull fulfills the role of the villain and, as he did in the 1940s and beyond, helps define Captain America. As comic book scholar Peter Coogan states, 'Red Skull stands for Nazi ideology and anti-democratic values'⁵¹ and fits the definition of the 'enemy commander' super-villain.⁵² This archetype, writes Coogan in *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre*, 'has the resources of the state behind him and is in the position of legal authority within that society. He might be king, tyrant, dictator, absolute ruler or the true power behind the throne or military commander. Satan — John Milton's Satan from *Paradise Lost* — might be described as the very model of the enemy commander,' set as he was in strict opposition to God.⁵³ Likewise, Coogan notes

that the American media utilized Osama Bin Laden as the enemy commander opposed to President George Bush. This paradigm relates in turn to sociologist Zygmund Bauman's presentation of the conflict as a narrative of individual actors (Bin Laden versus Bush), focusing on differences between the actors themselves instead of the complex policies and ideologies of their respective countries and peoples.⁵⁴ By focusing on the main actors, playwright Martin Esslin writes, the world is experienced through a conflict between two personalities.⁵⁵ So it is with Captain America and Red Skull: a conflict of personalities, but iconic, over-the-top personalities. Captain America represents the American ideals of 'freedom and democracy' while Red Skull represents totalitarianism and tyranny.

Captain America Lives Again, like common examples from Nazisploitation cinema, focuses on Captain America and the Nazis as two-dimensional figures. Captain America is Klapp's winner archetype, while the Nazis are hopelessly inept and easily defeated. Although they snap to attention at the first sound of their commander's voice, they inevitably bungle their assigned tasks and thus prove no match for Captain America's mind or fighting prowess. The Nazis are a comforting enemy for the United States. Not only can Captain America easily defeat them, but they also allow the United States, as geographer Jason Dittmer argues, 'to return to a 'good war' [...] in which evil was defined in black and white terms, and America had returned to a simple narrative of freedom versus fascism.'⁵⁶

The Civil War

With the Nazis defeated and New Berlin again restored to its rightful identity as New York City, Marvel Comics turned its attention back to the war on terror and its impact on American life. In its series *Civil War* (2006–2007), Marvel once again used Nazis as villains and proxies for terrorists, meant to represent metaphorically events in the 'war on terror'. Psychologist Travis Langley summarized the seven-issue run of *Civil War* as a depiction of 'super-heroes battling super-heroes over whether or not to comply when newly passed legislation requires all super-powered persons in the United States to register with the federal government, thereby revealing their true identities to authorities.'⁵⁷ The storyline, Marvel admitted, 'was intentionally written as an allegory to current real-life issues like the Patriot Act,

the War on Terror, and the September 11 attacks.⁵⁸ Langely notes that the ‘community of super-heroes disagree over whether to support the [Superhero Registration Act] as a way of taking responsibility or to oppose [the act as a governmental] regulation of civil liberties.’⁵⁹ Captain America finds himself the leader of the faction that objects to the Superhero Registration Act as a governmental infringement. According to Langely, ‘[a]fter government agents pull weapons on Captain America merely for expressing reservations about hunting his fellow heroes, he becomes a fugitive and soon leads the anti-registration opposition.’⁶⁰

By siding with the faction that opposes the law, Captain America appears to oppose the actions of the US government. Mark Millar, author of the *Civil War*, argued that this was a way to question the validity of government actions such as wire-tapping, body searches, and the erosion of other civil liberties of the post-9/11 era.⁶¹ Such intrusions on civil liberties might be considered necessary by many Americans, and as philosopher Ronald Dworkin writes, ‘many Americans believe that [...] security policies are justified response to the terrorist threat [...] and the attacks on September 11 require “a new balance between liberty and security”.’⁶² Marvel played on this ‘new balance’ in the *Civil War*.

In the opening pages of the series, a reality-TV crew films superheroes attempting to do good, and the crew unwittingly provokes the villain Nitro into detonating the equivalent of a nuclear explosion outside an elementary school in Stamford, Connecticut. Hundreds are killed, including many children. The questions raised about the incident resemble those above regarding Superman — or Americans of Middle Eastern descent ‘profiled’ by their fellow citizens — who are these others? Why are they really here? How can we identify them? To answer these questions, the US government passes the Superhero Registration Act.⁶³

The Superhero Registration Act seeks to record the identities and whereabouts of all superheroes so that the United States government can track them. Tony Stark (Iron Man), despite some initial reservations, supports the act, while Steve Rogers (Captain America) opposes it. Captain America never directly explains his opposition, but his reservations about the infringement of civil liberties revolve around one of the oldest questions of political philosophy: is it better to be free or better to be safe?⁶⁴ The Superhero Registration Act follows the Hobbesian argument that to escape the chaotic state of nature,

citizens must cede certain rights to the government and submit to the sovereign.⁶⁵ However, the starting point for ordering this society — registering those who are in some way ‘different’ — is arbitrary, much like Nazi Germany’s registration of Jews, which is why Captain America fights against it. The Superhero Registration Act resembles elements of Nazi Germany.

As the storyline continues, Captain America eventually gives up the fight and surrenders to the government. As he is led in handcuffs up the steps of a New York City courthouse, he is assassinated by his former love, Sharon Carter. Clearly, it is an unexpected twist to the story — not only the assassination, but also the use of a former love interest as the assassin. Once again, though, the writers introduce Nazis as enemies as a way to sidestep having to question directly government tactics. It turns out that Sharon Carter is not acting independently, but rather is subject to mind control by Red Skull. If Nazis are responsible for the assassination of a Captain America, the leader of the anti-government faction, this narrative shows *de facto* Nazi support for the Registration Act, with the implication that the Nazis and the US government are on the same side on this issue.

Political scientist Andrew Norris concurs, arguing that when President Bush said, ‘You are either with us or against us’, he implied, paradoxically, that ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend.’⁶⁶ It followed then, according to Norris, that ‘in a struggle to rid the world of evil, one will end up with friends and clients like Pinochet, as the Bush administration’s alliance in its ‘war on terrorism’ with antidemocratic forces.’⁶⁷ Norris further argues that by the Bush administration’s dividing the world into distinct factions, the US government made itself the good and its opposition the evil. In the *Civil War* storyline, then, the writers highlight the error of Bush’s reasoning because, once the government became good and Captain America evil, the Nazi alignment with US government policies blurs moral lines. It thereby forced readers to take notice of what was going on in the United States and, potentially at least, to question the black-and-white portrayal of the US as an unquestionable ‘good guy’.

That was the goal, according to writer Mark Millar, when he resurrected Captain America and the Nazis.⁶⁸ Millar used the actions of the Nazis to raise questions about the actions of the government in its infringement of civil liberties. Of course, it only helped Millar make his point when critics, like comic book historian Mark White,

compared the actions of Tony Stark, who participated in the rounding-up of superheroes, to those of Adolf Hitler.⁶⁹

Captain America vs. the Nazis — No Longer Black and White

The exploitation of Nazi-related historical references and iconography by Marvel Comics after 9/11 took two different approaches. One approach was the feel-good narrative of *Captain America Lives Again*, where Nazis replaced al-Qaeda and allowed Captain America to defeat them in one action-packed issue of 32 pages. This approach provided a light-hearted moment for American comic book readers during heavy times. The other approach, as evidenced in *Civil War*, utilized this same set of historical references and images of Nazis to question the infringement of civil liberties in the United States after 9/11. This approach, particularly with the U.S. government arresting Captain America and the Nazis killing him, equated the Patriot Acts with Nazi policies. In so doing, it also raised questions about the war on terror and implications for civil liberties in the US.

The Nazis, then, have been deployed at various points throughout Captain America's existence as characters to highlight the values and ideals of Captain America and, by proxy, American society. However, in their most recent incarnation, the Nazis played another role in the pages of *Captain America*: to spark questions of values and ideals when the nature of the world changed. Bringing back Nazis as antagonists against Captain America may not have provided the answers to these questions, but at the very least it has sparked discussion among readers and critics. The United States, like Captain America, had evolved as a nation from 1941 to 2001. The black-and-white world of 1941, into which Captain America was first introduced, had been replaced sixty years later with a complex world filled mostly with shades of grey. Instead of trying to maintain the black-and-white dichotomy, Marvel's more recent, nuanced use of Nazi iconography went beyond the simple tropes of Nazisploitation to highlight the moral ambiguities of these more complex times.⁷⁰

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- 65 Ibid, 96.
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- 68 Millar, 'O Brave New World!', 110.
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12

A Past that Refuses to Die: Nazi Zombie Film and the Legacy of Occupation

SVEN JÜNGERKES AND CHRISTIANE WIENAND

‘The fact that life does need the service of history must be as clearly grasped as that an excess of history hurts it; this will be proved later.’

(Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, 1874)

‘Oh, fuck!’ (Martin, upon realizing his impending murder in the final scene of *Dead Snow*, 2009)

FEW HISTORICAL ERAS HAVE impacted media more than the twelve years of National Socialist terror in Germany and Europe between 1933 and 1945. The Nazis not only produced a vast amount of images and films of their own, but National Socialist iconography also shaped entire media genres.¹ There are numerous examples of the ways postwar film-makers have dealt with National Socialism: from the vast array of war documentaries on the History Channel, to Hollywood blockbusters, to eclectic exploitation cinema. It should therefore not amaze us that the genre of horror film, too, gravitated towards the iconography of National Socialism.² For the past fifty years, the small genre of the Nazi zombie film has appeared time and again as a subgenre within Nazisploitation. These films generate a discourse that can be read as a comment on Nietzsche’s statement cited above, namely that history can hurt.

There was a first period of this film genre in the 1970s and 1980s, a period in which films like *Shock Waves* (1977) by Ken Wiederhorn and *Night of the Zombies* (1981) by Joel M. Reed or the French production *Le lac des morts vivants* (*Zombie Lake*, 1981) by J. A. Laser, turned the very real terror under the Nazi regime into horror narratives.³ After the Nazi zombie had vanished from film screens for around two decades, two recently released films can be regarded as a revival of this genre, which is remarkable because — unlike low-budget predecessors — it uses rather high-quality special effects. Of note in this discussion are the successful British Direct-to-DVD production *Outpost* (2008) by Steve Barker and the Norwegian film *Død Snø* (*Dead Snow*, 2009).⁴

***Dead Snow* and the Presence of the Past**

This chapter focuses on the Nazi zombie film *Dead Snow* by the Norwegian director Tommy Wirkola, who also co-authored the script.⁵ The following discussion explores how *Dead Snow* provides genuine insights into the mechanisms used by Norwegian society to come to terms with its Nazi past. We argue that the Nazi zombie could be read as a negative, yet highly effective image of World War II-induced trauma in postwar societies.⁶ *Dead Snow* deals specifically with Norwegian society, which collaborated to a certain degree with the German occupiers during the 1940s. Only recently have Norwegians developed an increasing discourse about their collective Nazi past. The undead German soldiers in *Dead Snow* not only symbolize the trauma of a past not yet fully overcome, but they also literally embody it. Thus the Nazi zombies are the incarnation of a repressed past. As with other horror films, *Dead Snow* offers insights into a society from a popular cultural angle.⁷

Our underlying approach to explore the film is inspired by literary critics such as William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, who argue against an ‘intentional fallacy’.⁸ The Italian semiotician Umberto Eco argues along similar lines. In our interpretation, we apply Eco’s consideration that a text must be seen as a machine that generates interpretations. Once a ‘text’ (be it a written one or in the form of a film) is published, its meaning no longer consists of the intended meaning of the author only. Apart from the intended meaning of the author there is also a wide range of possible interpretations and meanings that arise from the cultural background of the consumer. Eco

accordingly writes: 'When a text is produced not for a single addressee but for a community of readers, the author knows that he or she will be interpreted not according to his or her intentions but according to a complex strategy of interactions which also involve the readers, along with their competence in language as a social treasury.'⁹ There is no intrinsic meaning in texts; all the interpreter can do is sense-making.¹⁰ Accordingly, we do not primarily ask for the author's — or in our case the director's — intentions, but our examination is based on a close reading of the film and on an exploration into its wider cultural traditions and frameworks. Based on a close analysis of the plot, the visual language, the music and intertextual references contained in *Død Snø*, we explore this film within the context of previous Nazi zombie films and within its historical context. We thereby refer to notions of collective memory constructions of national identity.

From the perspective of film history, the zombies in *Dead Snow* offer nothing original. Rather, *Dead Snow* is part of an intertextual referential system rooted in the identification of National Socialists with zombies.¹¹ A short look into history demonstrates that the association of zombies with German culture in general, and National Socialism in particular, makes sense in various respects. Already in the Wilhelmine Empire, the cult of the dead or fallen soldier was one of the constituent elements of German bourgeois culture.¹² This cult continued during the Weimar Republic¹³ and culminated in a heroic state cult of the dead soldier during the Third Reich.¹⁴ National Socialist ideology, according to which individuals were valued only for their usefulness to the National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft* (people's community), to which the individual owes unconditional obedience,¹⁵ also helped to establish a later combination of National Socialism with the popular cultural zombie myth.¹⁶

It is a characteristic feature of horror films, including *Dead Snow*, that these films evince a one-dimensional and transparent plot structure. However, this one-dimensionality should by no means be estimated as a deficit of the genre.¹⁷ Instead, we argue that this one-dimensionality reflects what the writer Dietmar Dath called a '*drastischer Blick*',¹⁸ a drastic gaze. With respect to horror and zombie film, Dath's idea refers to a specific and intense gaze of both the camera and the viewer, specifically on scenes of brutality and horror. This gaze serves to link the narrative to materiality and physicality. On the physical level, horror films are an attack on the viewer's stomach.¹⁹ In *Dead Snow*

the drastic gaze means a gaze at a bloody orgy of violence, pain and horror. Through the plot and the visual images, the film mirrors and transforms the bodily experiences of the film characters into a bodily experience for the viewer.

The plot of *Dead Snow* can be recapitulated quickly. The story is set in the snow-white Norwegian mountains, in the Øksfjord in Northern Norway. There, seven young medical students (three women and four men) gather in a lonely log cabin to spend the Easter holidays together. After arriving at their cabin, the students quickly realize that not everything is as they had imagined it. Sara, who owns the cabin and who wanted to travel there across the mountains on skis, is already missing when the others arrive. The place itself seems amiss. There is a latent atmosphere of fear and foreboding that befalls some of the students, yet being together in their group they overplay these sentiments. Apparently, something or someone surrounds the cabin, but neither the students nor the viewers know of it yet. While the students sit together drinking beer and playing games, a strange elderly wanderer appears out of the snowstorm. He warns the students that the area across which Sara was skiing had also been the place where a group of the most brutal German soldiers hid during the German occupation of Norway. The wanderer explains that the Germans used the Øksfjord as a major military base, and Nazi soldiers terrorized and robbed the locals in the surrounding mountain villages. One day, so the wanderer tells the students, the Norwegians in the Øksfjord region stood up against their occupiers and killed many German soldiers.²⁰ The Norwegians won back the gold and jewels that the Nazis had stolen. However, this was not the end of the story. The wanderer also knows that one group of German soldiers was able to outrun the Norwegians. This group was led by the brutal Oberst Herzog. Herzog and his soldiers escaped into the loneliness of the Norwegian mountains. They might have frozen to death there, but the wanderer tells the students that this could be never proven. From that time on, the area of the Øksfjord was cursed. The locals still tell stories of the soldiers coming out of the mountains again, looking for their plundered gold. The wanderer warns the students, who obviously give little credence to his story, and while he leaves the cabin as suddenly as he had appeared, the students continue their partying. In the following scene, the wanderer is brutally killed in his tent by an unspecified person.

Shortly thereafter, the students find a box full of gold and jewelry

in a hidden place in their cabin. The gold appears to be that which the Germans once had stolen from the locals, and the discovery of the gold somehow triggers the ensuing attack by the Nazi zombies. Therefore the catastrophe takes its course: suddenly Oberst Herzog and his undead soldiers appear at the cabin to reclaim their stolen treasure. The next victim is Kris, who is brutally killed while using the outhouse. Then a horde of Nazi zombies surrounds the remaining students as they sit in the cabin. Here begins the bloody slaughter that will finally end in the young students' vain battle of survival against the aggressive, bestial Nazi zombies. Due to the numerous filmic references and quotations from other horror films, this lethal end does not come unexpectedly for experienced horror film viewers.

Even though the plot of the film lacks some logic, the bloody battle and the killing scenes demonstrate that director Tommy Wirkola is well versed in the art of film-making: the shots of the landscape perfectly capture the grandeur of the Norwegian countryside, and the director unerringly and accurately stages the numerous splatter scenes. These scenes are mostly arranged around the effective contrast of blood-red, severed body parts of the students against the pure white snow, the innocent and untouched landscape of wintery Norway. While the blood of the students is red, in several scenes the blood of the Nazi zombies appears to be darker, almost black. The combination of these colors of blood-red, black, and white mirrors the colors of the swastika flag, which appears several times in the film, for instance in the bunker of the zombies or on Oberst Herzog's armband.

A Past that Refuses to Die

Within the narrative of *Dead Snow*, the often self-reflective and ironic structures of the (European-American) zombie and slasher genre and the bloody orgy of flesh and guts provide a precise exploration of the *Mythomotorik* (mythomotomics) of collective constructions of national identity.²¹ The Egyptologist Jan Assmann uses this term to describe a complex interplay of symbols and powerful historical narratives. According to Assmann, such a complex setting constitutes our interpretation of the past and also the structure of what we regard as a possible future. Apart from all genre-specific intertextual and intermedial references in *Dead Snow*, we contend that this rather simply structured film also contains a negative image of the remaining

traumatic and still untreated experiences of Norwegian society during Nazi occupation.

In April 1940, the German *Wehrmacht* attacked Norway to secure the Norwegian harbors, which were vital for shipping Swedish iron ore from Narvik to Germany. The Germans thereby pre-empted British and French forces from invading Norway for the same purposes. Until May 1945, Norway was under constant German occupation. The Germans installed a so-called *Reichskommissariat Norwegen* (Reich Commissariat for Norway), which ruled the country together with the *Wehrmacht*, the German police forces (SS) and a pro-German puppet regime, headed by Vidkun Quisling. The Norwegian royal family escaped to Great Britain.²²

After both the war and German occupation ended in May 1945, Norwegian society had to deal with its own Nazi history, a history that is located somewhere between resistance and collaboration. After the Germans had withdrawn, the Norwegians regarded their own society as virtually split into two parts. On the one side were those who backed the politician Vidkun Quisling and the fascist *Nasjonal Samling* (National Gathering or National Unification) party, which collaborated with the Germans during the occupation. Quisling and other party members were prosecuted after 1945, and they subsequently lost their civil rights, for instance their active and passive rights to vote.²³ On the other side were those who had been active members of the resistance. About 40,000 Norwegians participated in the armed resistance movement, which engaged in sabotage and attacks on the *Wehrmacht* and the police. The most widespread resistance activities were acts of civil disobedience. During the first decades after the Second World War, there was a national consensus that Norwegian society in general, apart from only a few (namely Quisling and his party members), had stood on this, the good side. This consensus was the basis of an evolving postwar national narrative according to which a large percentage of the Norwegian population confronted the German occupiers in a cold and hostile 'ice front', meaning that they had shown an icy and oppositional demeanor to their German occupiers.²⁴ For many citizens, Norwegian society during the occupation could be regarded as divided according to clear-cut and simple dichotomies of good versus evil, resistance versus collaboration, majority versus minority.

The actual grey zones between these two poles, grey zones in which the actual individual behavior of many Norwegians took place, were

for a long time ignored.²⁵ The grey zone to which many Norwegians had escaped during the German occupation only became part of the public and academic discourse on postwar Norway several decades later. In fact, a considerable number of Norwegians had been morally indifferent to the German occupiers. They focused instead on their own survival and therefore many Norwegians came to a reluctant understanding with the occupation. Many did not openly collaborate with the German occupiers, but they chose to or had to work together with the Germans on an economic basis. Those acts of economic collaboration were not legally punished after 1945. Meanwhile, other Norwegians actually profited from the disfranchisement and prosecution of their fellow Jewish countrymen, and enriched themselves with the property of their Jewish neighbors.

Similar to other European countries once occupied by Nazi Germany, Norwegians also took several decades until they could openly discuss and critically comment on these aspects of their own history.²⁶ From the early 1990s onwards, there has been an intense debate about the character of the occupation period and about the definition of notions such as ‘collaboration’ and ‘treason’.²⁷ Among other topics, Norwegians discuss whether it is morally or historically appropriate to classify retrospectively acts of alleged or actual collaboration as treason against the Norwegian fatherland.²⁸ Yet this debate seems to take place predominantly within the educated political public sphere, especially in historiography, the bourgeois media and in literature. Therefore it is mainly a discourse among Norwegian intellectuals and the bourgeoisie.

Against this background, *Dead Snow* can be seen as a pop-culture contribution to this ongoing debate, because the film transformed the National Socialist past into a popular contemporary topic in Norwegian youth and popular culture as a horror film that utilizes and adapts National Socialist *topoi*. From the angle of memory politics, director Tommy Wirkola addresses his own generation, which consists of the grandchildren of those Norwegians who experienced the German occupation. In a highly ironic way, the film criticizes the *Geschichtsvergessenheit* (historical amnesia) of the hedonist young generation, Wirkola’s own generation.²⁹ Using the metaphor of the Nazi zombies, Wirkola points at the dangers of a past with which society has not yet fully come to terms. This danger arises from the fact that the members of the postwar societies in Europe had experienced

the Second World War from highly diverging angles: as perpetrators, victims, bystanders, collaborators, profiteers etc. Postwar societies were therefore all marked by deep social fissures. In such situations, the need to come to terms with the past, in particular the Nazi past, was and is vital for restoring and maintaining peace and order within society. Whenever the past of the Nazi regime and of the Second World War erupts in whatever form in today's Europe, there is social, at times political, upheaval and in any case there are large public discussions taking place.

The fact that the film plays with historical consciousness and with Nazi visual iconography is already apparent in one of the film trailers.³⁰ The trailer shows black-and-white archival footage of World War II including battleships, paratroopers and Adolf Hitler surrounded by *Wehrmacht* officers, even though this material does not appear in the actual film. The same holds true for Ludwig van Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* from his Ninth Symphony, which provides musical accompaniment to the attacking Nazi zombies in the trailer.³¹

This reference to the music in *Dead Snow* brings in another key to understanding how the film functions. The choice of music suggests that Wirkola is conscious of the Norwegian past, something his protagonists fail to be: Wirkola, who wrote the lyrics of two songs used in the film, not only uses up-to-date Norwegian rock, punk and heavy metal songs, but he also employs Norwegian classical and folk music, including Edvard Grieg's famous Peer Gynt Suite and the song *Mil etter Mil*, Norway's contribution to the 1978 Eurovision Song Contest.³²

The film's iconography also emphasizes its play with historical consciousness: The film does not depict the zombies as either *Wehrmacht* soldiers or members of the SS *Einsatzgruppen*, the notorious 'task forces' that perpetrated Holocaust atrocities.³³ Historically, it is highly uncertain that SS *Einsatzgruppen* even made their way to the Øksfjord region, but in the film the Germans wear uniforms resembling those of the SS, and the wanderer refers to their actions as *Einsatz* (mission or task). Their leader has the rank of an *Oberst* (colonel), which was a *Wehrmacht* rank and not one of the SS or *Waffen-SS*.³⁴ Therefore the undead German soldiers appear as an amalgamation of those Germans who had been involved in the Third Reich's occupation efforts, and thus they are depicted as prototypical occupation soldiers. In fact, the Nazi zombies appear not only as those prototypes of the occupying forces, but also as a symbol of the entire National Socialist apparatus of

destruction, given their status as amalgamated characters of *Wehrmacht* soldiers, SS troops, murderers and monsters. The undead soldiers symbolize the amalgamated trauma of a repressed past with which society has not yet fully come to terms.

Nazi Zombies as Traumatic Reference

In this film the soldiers not only symbolize, but also embody the trauma of a past that literally refuses to die. The film itself shows that the Nazi zombies symbolize a repressed and forgotten memory of the collective Norwegian society, a memory that has been turned into rotting flesh.³⁵

Alongside his notion of mythomatorics, Jan Assmann has also coined the idea of a *Krypta der Erinnerung* (crypt of memory), in which traumatic memories latently outlast and prestructure the collective unconscious up to the present.³⁶ For Assmann, the psychoanalytical term 'encryption' refers to a deep traumatic experience that is not part of the conscious memory and therefore becomes inaccessible to reflection. However, the suppressed and encrypted memory remains a vital part of the collective memory, just waiting for the right time to erupt. The zombies become the personification of memory, a repressed, 'encrypted' memory, a trauma. Director Tommy Wirkola uses the Nazi zombies, who are neither dead nor alive, to personify this traumatic memory, showing that the past is neither gone nor consciously remembered.

In the film, these traumatic memories belong to a Norwegian society that had to cope with the German occupation largely through indifference or even an affirmative stance towards it. The Nazi zombies lurk for decades in the area of the Øksfjord. This region, the Finnmark, is a historically important region for Norwegian World War II and postwar history. It is the region where the German *Wehrmacht* exercised its brutal policy of *Verbrannte Erde* (Scorched Earth) in its withdrawal from Finland during the last months of the war. The fact that the *Wehrmacht* invaded the Finnmark left deep traumatic traces within Norwegian society, as this region had never been an arena of war before. At the end of the war the Germans had to fight against their former allies from Finland. The Finns, together with some Norwegian resistance forces, liberated Finland and then together with the Soviet Red Army pushed the German troops back out of the Norwegian

Finnmark. During their retreat, the Germans were ordered to leave nothing of value to the Soviets and to destroy the infrastructure.

In the present-day setting of the film, the defeated Germans have vanished from Norway. Yet, the undead Nazi zombies serve as memory fragments, vehicles or images of repression, which still subliminally impact the residents of the Øksfjord area. This is the message that the wanderer also seeks to tell the students, who obviously have neither any sense for nor any knowledge about the history of their own country. This is shown in the scene in which the wanderer tells the students about what was going on during German occupation. The students laugh about his strange appearance and about his stories. As with Assmann's description of the sudden re-emergence of collective memories and repressed experiences, the Nazi zombies break out of their crypt with a similar suddenness. In the film this crypt is a complex of bunkers, dug deeply into the *fjell* (mountains), and accidentally discovered by the student Vegard. When the zombies break out of their crypt, they encounter the students as representatives of a hedonist youth culture, loitering for fun. They represent a youth culture that is, at least in the beginning, completely defenseless against the re-emergence of history in the shape of the Nazi zombies.

Research on national identity constructions also supports the hypothesis that *Dead Snow*, aside from belonging to the genre of zombie or splatter film, is also a drama of Norwegian memory discourse. Sociologist Bernhard Giesen argues that constructions of national identity are constituted between the two poles of triumph and trauma. According to Giesen, the ways in which nations deal with their historical experience always happen against the background of either a euphoric highlight and collective delirium of national overestimation, or as a deep and profound national humiliation, which afterwards can be condensed to become a traumatic memory. Triumph and trauma are mutually exclusive. However, both poles subliminally remain present to shape the collective memory of a nation.³⁷

The film's plot mirrors the dichotomy of triumph and trauma as described by Giesen: the traumatic experience of murder and slaughter by the Nazi zombies is followed by a short-term triumph of the individual survivors. However, those who initially survive cannot, as with Norwegian society in its entirety, escape their own past. In the final scene, triumph and trauma cancel each other out; and the young hero Martin, the last of the group who has survived until almost

the end of the film, has to atone for his ahistorical way of living with death.³⁸ The constellation of characters in the film recapitulates the dichotomy of triumph and trauma. On the one hand there are the young protagonists who have no knowledge or consciousness about history, who live hedonistically in the present, and who have no sense for the ongoing impact of their country's past. On the other hand there is the wanderer who is highly conscious of the past and his country's history. He is made up of several well-known cultural bits and pieces, combining traits of the Old Testament prophets with the Fool of the Middle Ages, and other literary 'blind men who see'. These seers, under the guise of insanity or dementia, can tell the truth without being made liable for it.

The film sets young versus old, ratio and present versus myth and memory.³⁹ This dual structure is pried open by the Nazi zombies. Since *Dead Snow* is a horror film, the presence of the Nazi zombies must also be understood in a drastic, literal sense. These monsters are typical 'figures of the third' (*Figuren des Dritten*),⁴⁰ and as such 'agents of mediation, transgression and hybridization' that 'undermine traditional dualistic models of order.'⁴¹ The undead *Wehrmacht* soldiers combine the parallel presence and absence of the past in the sense of what is referred to as the '*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*' (the simultaneity of the unsimultaneous).⁴² At the beginning, the zombies are mostly uninvolved observers, but they later become the main agents who embody the difference of lost history and historical consciousness, and who finally overcome this difference when they merge past and present in scenes of orgiastic and bloody carnage.

Religious Symbolism in *Dead Snow*

The resurrection of the 'undead' memories as Nazi zombies at Easter is no mere coincidence. Easter commemorates Jesus's resurrection and, as in the film, its core component is remembrance. In traditional Catholicism, which upholds the doctrine of transubstantiation, the remembrance transforms into Christ's body during the consecration in a mass.⁴³ In this context, 'the word became flesh';⁴⁴ in the film the trauma became zombies.⁴⁵ Easter is the highest holiday of the ecclesiastical year and traditionally extends over three days. These three days can also be found in the plot of the film, albeit in a shortened manner and converted into the negative.

On 'Good Friday' the wanderer tells about and therefore creates space for the remembrance of the martyrdom of Norwegian civilians and the vengeful killing of the German soldiers during German occupation. 'Holy Saturday' is used for mourning the first students, Sara, Kris and Erlend.⁴⁶ The empty German bunker can furthermore be read as a reference to the empty tomb of Jesus and the message of the angels: in the narrative of the film this means that the Nazi zombies have risen. Meanwhile, the burning of the students' cabin simulates the Easter Fire,⁴⁷ which carries the light of salvation into the world, while in the film it only represents desperation, perdition and death. On Easter Sunday the church commemorates the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Once again, the film provides several religious references to this day: with the beginning of the Easter vigil, churches change the traditional liturgical colors from red or violet to Easter white.⁴⁸ The film as well arranges its orgies of slaughter within the color composition of blood red or violet on pure white. The religious symbolism that appears in *Dead Snow* ties in with our interpretation of a resurrected past, as symbolized by the resurrected Nazi zombies. The Nazi zombies and their re-emergence from the Norwegian *fjell* is a negative mirror image of the Easter narrative: the resurrected Christ brings about life, while the resurrected Nazi zombies bring about death. The death of the Redeemer results in redemption; the death of the German *Wehrmacht* soldiers results in their mutation into undead Nazi zombies, and therefore does not bring about redemption, but the contrary: the memory remains hidden, there is no dealing with the past, and so memory becomes traumatic.

The Tradition of Nazi Zombie Films

Dead Snow is not the first horror film that makes use of the Nazi zombie. The film is part of a small tradition of Nazi zombie films, yet contributes to the further development of the genre in terms of film-making and composition. The filmic representation of the undead Nazi zombies in *Dead Snow* emphasizes the traditional lines of the horror genre and zombie films. From the perspective of film history, the undead Nazi zombies, who appear as specific historical characters by wearing their decaying uniforms, become part of a highly disparate zombie and Nazi discourse. The film periodically refers to this discourse and even ironically reflects it, as when it references the

Indiana Jones films.⁴⁹ However, it also neglects typical elements of this genre, such as the usual infection cliché of classic zombie films. The production of the Nazi zombies is not explained apart from the fact that they seem to resurface, they do not need human flesh to survive, they appear to exercise free will, their actions follow a structure, and they seem to communicate, if only with each other.

In contrast to the US Nazi zombie film *Outpost* (2008), *Dead Snow* is far more comical, and also bloodier and more appealing from the perspective of film composition in general.⁵⁰ In terms of film-making, particularly special effects and film technique, *Dead Snow* also surpasses the Nazi zombies of the 1970s and early 1980s. These older films today appear as unintentionally funny. In terms of content, *Dead Snow* shares the most similarities with the French-Spanish co-production *Le lac des morts vivants* (*Zombie Lake*, 1981) by director J. A. Laser,⁵¹ which can be regarded as a direct predecessor of *Død Snø*. Both films share the themes of repressed memory of the Nazi occupation and a traumatic outburst of these memories as explicated above. As in the Norwegian mountains of *Død Snø*, in *Le lac des morts vivants* everything centers on the aftermath of the German occupation and the historical background of resistance and collaboration.⁵² However, *Le lac des morts vivants* lacks production value and therefore must be distinguished from the higher technical standards of *Død Snø*. It is clear that the French-Spanish co-production had to cope with a low budget: the visual effects are poor, the zombie masks look very cheap, and the actors' performances are amateurish.⁵³ The plot of the film itself lacks logic and opens up more questions than it answers. However, the film is staged in a tense manner, and what makes it interesting nevertheless is its subtext, which contains a subtle critique of the French resistance movement.

The film is set by the lake of a French village, to which a group of defeated German *Wehrmacht* soldiers had withdrawn, and were ambushed and finally killed by French resistance fighters. Among these German soldiers was Karl, who had saved the life of a French girl living in the village. Karl and the girl had a short relationship during which she became pregnant. When Karl is killed by the resistance fighters, his French girlfriend dies in the same instance because their fates are linked through the earlier exchange of a magical amulet. The Frenchmen who killed the German soldiers fear German revenge and therefore try to hide the dead Germans and sink them in the

lake.⁵⁴ The film reveals that the lake had been the meeting place of a magical cult since time immemorial. Its magical powers transform the dead Germans into undead zombies. Several years later the undead German soldiers are startled by some tourist girls bathing in the lake. The zombies kill some of the girls, leave the lake and make their way to the village where they kill several people. The undead German soldiers try to find and kill the resistance group's former leader, who in the meantime serves as the village mailman. It turns out that the undead German soldier Karl has a daughter, Helene, who still lives in the village. As he had done with her mother in life, Karl protects Helene from being killed. The villagers try to use Helene and the protection she receives from her father to lure the zombies into an old mill close to the lake where they seek to burn and thus finally destroy the undead soldiers. Unlike in *Dead Snow*, in which the students are killed, the French villagers successfully dispatch all the German soldiers, including Karl, who have to die a second time and are once again sunk into the lake.

It is not difficult to read the lake as a symbol of a repressed trauma, of guilt feelings locked away in the unconscious.⁵⁵ The idyllic scenery of the lake from which the zombies suddenly burst in order to satisfy their thirst for revenge mirrors wartime events, such as the plainclothes French resistance fighters who ambushed and killed the German soldiers. In both *Le lac des morts vivants* and *Dead Snow*, the attacking Nazi zombies bring the past back to the surface: in the French film to the surface of the village's lake; in *Dead Snow* to the surface of the snowy Norwegian landscape. Both the lake and the snow-covered mountains are depicted as innocent idylls, idylls that are subsequently destroyed in the course of the film.

The Young Generation and the Legacy of the Past

Dead Snow is the pop-culture expression of a young generation, represented by director Tommy Wirkola, and a critique of its own focus on the pleasures of the present. The film does not criticize the former collaborators during the occupation, nor does it glorify the former resistance fighters. Rather, it focuses on the third generation of Norwegians who have no personal responsibility for the past. Nevertheless, the film regards these young Norwegians as part of a national community of fate that transcends generations. Through the

young protagonists, the trendy film music, and the entire mise-en-scène, the film is addressed first and foremost to young Norwegians. They no longer have a direct connection to nor a consciousness of their country's history, but in the present this past catches up with them, and therefore they have no future. In her study of Norwegian postwar society, historian Susanne Maerz has intensively analyzed how Norway has sought to come to terms with the Nazi past and the Holocaust, and she demonstrates that this process has taken place on many levels and for many years. However, members of the third generation, the grandchildren of the collaborators and bystanders, have only recently shown increasing interest in the past and the history of their grandparents. In this sense, the film is also an expression of a recent phenomenon in post-war Europe: after the generation of children from the late 1960s onwards, it is now the grandchildren who have set out to explore the National Socialist past from their (third generation) perspective.⁵⁶

While the zombie film itself is an international phenomenon, this particular film is set in a very specific national setting. The consequential use of Norwegian music, in some cases by bands from the Finnmark region where the film is set, suggests that Wirkola intended this level of specificity with regard to Norway. It is therefore worthwhile and appropriate to explore *Dead Snow* in the context of national identity.

The difference of the past — the experiences of this past, and the workings of cultural memory — is a media-based process of historical construction. The fictional Nazi zombies highlight this difference of historical past and constructed social memory. They are the undead witnesses of a past that refuses to die. Therefore they exemplify the inherently mediated character of history and reality as discussed by sociologist Niklas Luhmann, who states 'whatever we know about our society, or indeed about the world in which we live, we know through the mass media.'⁵⁷ And sometimes – as suggested by Friedrich Nietzsche and proved by the dying film character Martin – sometimes, this knowledge is a lethal knowledge through and through.

Notes

- 1 See Frank Bösch, 'Film, NS-Vergangenheit und Geschichtswissenschaft von *Holocaust* zu *Der Untergang*', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* vol. 55 no. 1 (2007): 1–32.
- 2 So far, historiography has not yet fully estimated the value of horror films as historical sources for our understanding of the impact of National Socialism on postwar culture and society. However, future research can build upon books such as Caroline Joan Picart and David A. Frank, eds, *Frames of Evil: The Holocaust as Horror in American Film* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006). See also Brad Prager, 'The Haunted Screen (Again): The Historical Unconscious of Contemporary German Thrillers', in *Victims and Perpetrators: 1933–1945 and Beyond: (Re)Presenting the Past in Post-Unification Culture*, eds Laurel Cohen-Pfister and Dagmar Wienroder-Skinner, 296–315 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006).
- 3 Several scholars argue that during the last ten years there has been a renaissance of the genre of zombie film in general. See Julia Köhne, Ralph Kuschke and Arno Meteling, 'Einleitung', *Splatter Movies. Essays zum modernen Horrorfilm*, eds Julia Köhne, Ralph Kuschke and Arno Meteling, 9–16 (Berlin: Bertz und Fischer, 2006).
- 4 Information on the films was gathered from the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com). For the relationship of National Socialism and exploitation cinema see Marcus Stiglegger, *Sadiconazista: Faschismus und Sexualität im Film* (St. Augustin: Gardez!, 1999).
- 5 With his film *Wirkola* seeks to establish the genre of zombie film in Scandinavian film culture. See the interview with Wirkola at www.filmschoolrejects.com/features/exclusive-tommy-wirkola-talks-dead-snow.php (accessed 30 June 2010). Wirkola even attracted attention beyond Scandinavia: *The New York Times* reviewed the film on June 19, 2009.
- 6 An interpretation of the zombie as a film character that connotes the return of the repressed can also be found in Lars Koch, 'Die Wiederkehr des Verdrängten als Zombie: Zu einer vernachlässigten Ikone der filmischen Gegenwartskultur', *Trifolium* 7 (2008): 14–28.
- 7 A similar argument is made in the documentary film *The American Nightmare* (2000) by Adam Simon, which contains interviews with such big names of horror as Wes Craven, John Carpenter, David Cronenberg, George Romero and Tobe Hooper.
- 8 William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', *Sevane Review* 54 (1946): 468–88.
- 9 Umberto Eco, 'Between Author and Text', in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. Stefan Collini, 67–88 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 67.
- 10 See Karl E. Weick, *Sensemaking in Organizations*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999).
- 11 An early example of this identification, if not the first, is *Revenge of the Zombies* (1943), directed by Steve Sekely.
- 12 See Volker Ackermann, *Nationale Totenfeiern in Deutschland von Wilhelm I. bis Franz Josef Strauss: Eine Studie zur politischen Semiotik* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990) and Patrick Eiden, et al., eds, *Totenkulte: Kulturelle und literarische Grenzgänge zwischen Leben und Tod* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2006) and

- Monica Black, *Death in Berlin: From Weimar to Divided Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- 13 The incredible mass death of soldiers on the battlefields of the Western Front was reinterpreted after the First World War as a necessary precondition for the resurrection of a new Germany. See Bernd Hüppauf, 'Langemarck, Verdun and the Myth of a New Man in Germany', *War and Society* 6, no. 2 (1988): 70–103.
 - 14 See George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
 - 15 Recent research on the National Socialist Volksgemeinschaft is compiled in Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt, eds, *Volksgemeinschaft: Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2009). For English language readers see Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).
 - 16 Through contacts with Haitian culture in which the zombie plays a role as part of the voodoo religion, the zombie myth found its entry into American popular culture. There, the zombie quickly was connected to other ideas of the 'undead,' such as the golem or the vampire. See Peter Dendle, *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishers, 2001).
 - 17 For an insightful exploration of both low culture and avant-gardist horror film see Joan Hawkins, *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).
 - 18 See Dietmar Dath, *Die salzweißen Augen: Vierzehn Briefe über Drastik und Deutlichkeit* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), 19.
 - 19 The physicality and the bodily experience of horror film are explored in Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992). Beyond horror film, further examples for such connections of imagination and physicality are (action-) thriller and pornography. See also Linda Williams, 'Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess', *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1991): 2–13.
 - 20 This is of course highly fictional, but there was an armed Norwegian resistance movement and a wide variety of civil disobedience as described below.
 - 21 See Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, 5th ed. (Munich: Beck, 2007), 78–83.
 - 22 See for instance Richard Petrow, *The Bitter Years: The Invasion and Occupation of Denmark and Norway, April 1940–May 1945* (New York: Morrow, 1974).
 - 23 See Susanne Maerz, *Die langen Schatten der Besatzungszeit* (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag, 2008), 72–7.
 - 24 The ways Norwegian society dealt with the past, particularly the Holocaust and the German occupation, are analysed in Maerz, *Die langen Schatten*, and in Katharina Pohl, 'Eine unbehagliche Geschichte: Norwegische Vergangenheitsdebatten und der Holocaust', in *Geschichtspolitik und kollektives Gedächtnis. Erinnerungskulturen und Theorie und Praxis*, ed. Harald Schmid, 229–47 (Göttingen: Vand R Unipress, 2009). See also the volume edited by Robert Bohn, Christoph Cornelißen and Karl Christian Lammers, *Vergangensepolitik und Erinnerungskulturen im Schatten des Zweiten Weltkrieges: Deutschland und Skandinavien seit 1945* (Essen: Klartext, 2008).
 - 25 The notion of a grey zone in this sense was established by Holocaust survivor

- Primo Levi in Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Summit Books, 1988).
- 26 See Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1992); Stein Ugelvik Larsen and Bernt Hagtvet, eds, *Modern Europe after Fascism, 1943–1980s* (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, distributed by Columbia University Press, 1998).
- 27 See Christoph Dieckmann, Babette Quinkert and Thomas Sandkühler, eds, *Kooperation und Verbrechen: Formen der 'Kollaboration' im östlichen Europa* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003).
- 28 Such a form of action was against the legal principle that measures should not have retroactive effects ('nulla poena sine lege'), which was introduced by Anselm von Feuerbach. According to the European Convention on Human Rights (Art. 7, 2) the so-called Nuremberg clause determines the exception. According to this clause, an act is liable to prosecution even without an existing prescription if this act at its moment in time was 'liable to prosecution according to the general rules of law acknowledged by all civilized peoples.'
- 29 The notion of *Geschichtsvergessenheit*, which can hardly be translated in any other language, denotes a status of having lost the knowledge about the past and its interpretation in the form of history. See for instance Aleida Assmann and Ute Frevert, *Geschichtsvergessenheit, Geschichtsversessenheit* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1999).
- 30 See 'Død Snø — Dead Snow — 2nd Trailer,' accessed December 12, 2010, www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIx4pbOFOFg.
- 31 While the music of the German composer Ludwig van Beethoven is used to depict the attacking Nazi zombies, Wirkola uses the Romantic music of Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg (*In the Hall of the Mountain King*) for the mysterious opening scene of his film.
- 32 For example, songs by the Norwegian bands *Benea Reach*, *Animal Alpha*, *Cyaneed*, *The CC Cowboys* and *LA Lapplanders*.
- 33 *Einsatzgruppen* were regiments of soldiers who did not belong to the German *Wehrmacht* but to the SS. They were responsible for executing the Nazi regime of terror behind the frontlines. See Ronald Headland, *Messages of Murder: A Study of the Reports of the Einsatzgruppen of the Security Police and the Security Service, 1941–1943* (Rutherford, PA: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992) or Richard Rhodes, *Masters of Death: The SS-Einsatzgruppen and the Invention of the Holocaust* (New York: Knopf, 2002).
- 34 The rank of *Oberst* (colonel) is comparable to the rank of an *SS-Standartenführer*.
- 35 For the interrelation of memory and the body in religious terms see our remarks below.
- 36 Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 39, refers back to Sigmund Freud's idea of an encapsulation of traumas.
- 37 Bernhard Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2004).
- 38 Martin could be seen as a reversal of the 'final girl' motif as described in Clover's *Men Women and Chainsaws*.
- 39 We understand *ratio* here as rationality, specifically not believing in myths, for example that the students do not believe in the myth of the undead German soldiers told them by the wanderer.

- 40 For a detailed description of the idea of the 'figure of the third' see the program of the collaborative research project *Figur des Dritten* at the University of Konstanz (Germany), accessed December 12, 2010, www.uni-konstanz.de/figur3/.
- 41 See *ibid.*
- 42 For the influential German historian Reinhart Koselleck the idea of a simultaneity of the unsimultaneous constitutes one of three basic temporal modes of experience: see Reinhart Koselleck, 'Geschichte, Geschichten und formale Zeitstrukturen', in *Geschichte, Ereignisse, Erzählung*, eds Reinhart Koselleck and Wolf-Dieter Stempel, 211–22 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1973).
- 43 See Pierre-Marie Gy, 'Transsubstantiation', in *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, vol. 2 (Paris: Edition du Cerf, 2000), 1456–7; Ulrich Kühn, 'Abendmahl IV. Das Abendmahl in der ökumenischen Theologie der Gegenwart', in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* vol. 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977), 171–5.
- 44 John 1:14: 'The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.'
- 45 Traditional zombie films in which the undead nourish themselves from the flesh of living humans can therefore also be read as comments on the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation.
- 46 If we remain in the context of religious interpretation, then Kris and Erlend are punished with immediate death because they had pre-marital sex during the highest Christian holiday. The fact that the sex takes place in the outhouse and that Kris, the female character, finds her death in her own and in other people's excrement, would be interesting from a deep psychological point of view, but can only be mentioned here.
- 47 The Easter Fire is a bonfire that is lit before, at, or after Easter Sunday. It is the visual sign of the resurrection. Similar to water, fire also has an ambiguous meaning as it is both indispensable to life, yet used in abundance, it destroys life. See Bernhard von Issendorff, 'Vom Wasser und vom Feuer, vom Hasen und von Eiern', in *Verkündigung, Liturgie, Feier*, ed. Wolf Dietrich Berner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 31–2.
- 48 In Protestantism, the liturgical colors are violet or black. The Catholic Church used the liturgical color of violet from the Tridentium until Vatican II in 1962–65. For the liturgical colors and their historical developments see Angelus A. Häußling, 'Liturgische Farben: geschichtliche Entwicklung und römisch-katholische Kirche', in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* vol. 11 (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1983), 28–9 and Ernst Hofhansl, 'Liturgische Farben in den evangelischen Kirchen', in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 11 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1983), 29–30.
- 49 The motif of the Nazis and a treasure of gold is, for instance, a theme of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989). Wirkola also refers to *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), and even directly cites it when Erlend opens the treasure chest and says: 'Fortune and glory, kid.'
- 50 In *Outpost* the Nazi zombies appear as former SS soldiers who have been transformed into zombies due to medical experiments. The film shares less with zombie slasher films and more with esoteric films such as *The Keep* (1983) by Michael Mann.
- 51 This name is only a pseudonym. It is unknown who the actual director was. It might have been Jean Rollin, who became well known for his sex-vampire-films.
- 52 France was occupied by German military and administrative forces from

- May 1940 to December 1944. Historians estimate that between 220,000 and 400,000 (amounting to roughly 2 per cent of the population) were part of the active French resistance movement. During the liberation campaign in 1944 the resistance fighters supported British, American and exiled French forces in various ways. See for example Peter Davies, *France and the Second World War: Occupation, Collaboration, and Resistance* (New York: Routledge, 2001).
- 53 Markus Pöhlmann recently remarked that the zombie films produced during the Golden Age of zombie film (late 1960s to early 1980s) 'today can only deploy unintentional humor.' See Markus Pöhlmann, 'Planet Terror. Krieg und Bürgerkrieg im Zombiefilm seit 1968', *Mittelweg* 36 vol. 19, no. 3 (June/July 2010): 84.
- 54 Those kinds of revenge measures by Wehrmacht or SS soldiers actually took place, for instance in Oradour-sur-Glane; see Sarah Farmer, *Martyred Village: Commemorating the 1944 Massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
- 55 Support for this interpretation is also provided by the symbolic continuum of water, which not only is a mystical place, but is also required for ritual baths that serve symbolic cleansing, and for initiation rites such as Christian baptism. See Karl-Heinrich Bieritz, *Liturgik* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004).
- 56 Examples for this phenomenon are the book by Claudia Brunner and Uwe von Seltmann, *Schweigen die Täter, reden die Enkel* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2006) and projects by third-generation descendants of Holocaust survivors, such as the '3G' network: 3GNY, *A NYC-based Group for Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors*, website accessed 12 December 2010, www.3gnewyork.org.
- 57 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media: Cultural Memory in the Present*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 1.

13

Messing Up World War II-Exploitation: The Challenges of Role-Play in Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*

MIMMI WOISNITZA

WHEN ONLINE FILM CRITIC James Berardinelli celebrates *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) as 'one hell of an enjoyable ride' and Roger Ebert labels it 'a big, bold, audacious war movie', they allude to the pleasure of watching a film that employs the visual attractions of war — and particularly of World War II — such as gunfire and explosions. This visual attraction includes the aesthetics of Nazism and ethically provocative sights of victimhood, physical harm and desecrated bodies.¹ Other critics, in contrast, explicitly reject that kind of pleasure. Jens Jessen, who calls *Inglourious Basterds* a 'fantasy full of brutal frivolity', compares the way in which Tarantino's film uses its historical setting with the frame-narrative of a porno film: 'a pretence to get down to business.'² Manohla Dargis accuses Tarantino of being 'really only serious about his own films, not history.'³ The phenomenon under debate here can best be described by the term 'spectacle', which Eric Schaefer uses to define exploitation films, thus introducing a cinematic mode that has always been highly controversial.⁴ But how exactly is the economy of spectatorial pleasure organized in *Inglourious Basterds*? What is being exploited here, and to what end(s)? In the following,

I argue that Tarantino's film does not merely exploit World War II, but exposes different registers of World War II exploitation — Nazi fetish, conspiracy, war spectacles, disguise, subjugation, suspense and vengeance — to make its audiences aware of the actual contamination behind the attractiveness of Nazism. The destruction of the cinema, and the bunch of Nazis in it (including Hitler), does not therefore just represent a 'fantasy' of how the war could have ended, or even a dream about a historical reality or possibility. Rather, it is an attempt to dismantle the aesthetic appeal of that historical reality.

As Georg Seeßlen has shown, Tarantino's latest piece deliberately avoids any straightforward generic attribution. Rather, like many of his films, it is situated on the boundaries of specific genres.⁵ Seeßlen's account of *Inglourious Basterds* compiles the innumerable allusions to cinematic history that constitute the film as a movie about movies. In addition to Seeßlen's book, a number of internet fan forums have been created that decode the film's countless references.⁶ That said, it should be clarified that the movie references pointed out in this essay are not intended to be exhaustive but will be employed as analytical examples.

In *Inglourious Basterds*, two genres link up the excessive usage of spectacles with the subject matter of World War II, i.e. two cinematic modes of World War II exploitation. The title openly refers to Enzo Castellari's *Quel maledetto treno blindato* (1978), a 'dirty war movie' released in the United States as *The Inglorious Bastards*. Just like *The Dirty Dozen* (1967) and many less sophisticated offshoots, Castellari's film deviates from official propagandist views of US participation in World War II.⁷ The heroes do not represent handsome, well-mannered soldiers who reunite happily with their families after the war, but rather a bunch of filthy outlaws who start out on a semi-guerilla mission that they most likely will not survive.⁸ In these films, the heroic narrative becomes secondary, instead overshadowed by the ugliness of war, namely gunfire, explosions, injuries and deaths, as well as by a profound confusion of any kind of soldierly ethics. The second mode of World War II exploitation, which employs the aesthetics of Nazism as spectacles, are the Nazisploitation movies. The term refers to pulp literature or filmic works that make exploitative use of Nazi chic to signify superior power. As Susan Sontag has famously stressed, the Nazi aesthetic has long been invested with a pornographic appeal, especially in its pictorial representation: 'photographs of SS

uniforms are the units of a particularly powerful and widespread sexual fantasy.⁹ Marcus Stiglegger has coined the term *sadiconazista*. Taken from Italian pulp fiction literature ‘where sexuality, cruelty and politics mingled to an exploitative and pornographic entertainment fare,’ Stiglegger’s term refers to a cinematic trend in the 1970s when the two pornography directors Robert Lee Frost and Don Edmonds introduced movies that featured pornographic content in the context of concentration camps.¹⁰ This specification emphasizes the close connection between sexual imagery and Nazi aesthetics at the same time as it makes it possible to distinguish these highly problematic filmic accounts from art films such as Luchino Visconti’s *La caduta degli dei* (*The Damned*, 1969), Bernardo Bertolucci’s *Il conformista* (*The Conformist*, 1970), or Liliana Cavani’s *Il portiere di notte* (*The Night Porter*, 1974). These films investigate the relationship between Nazism and sexuality in cinematically and politically ambitious ways. Thus the application of the term Nazisploitation in the following discussion of *Inglourious Basterds* denotes a more general emphasis of the power status signified by Nazi aesthetics as played out in scenes of domination and subjugation, whereas *sadiconazista* indicates the particular blending of sexual imagery and Nazi fetish.

While World War II exploitation films clearly provide a reference point for *Inglourious Basterds*, Tarantino’s movie cannot be merely lumped into this category. Besides the standard of its production as a big-budget movie with an A-list cast, its spectacles do not clearly align it with any specific genre. Except for the showdown at the cinema, which invokes the burning fortress in *The Dirty Dozen*, the film does not provide any battlefield scenes, burning war equipment, or explosions that one might expect of a dirty war movie. Nor does it display explicit sex or even S/M scenes that would define it as a *sadiconazista* movie. Still, *Inglourious Basterds* evokes a certain proximity to exploitation productions, which is not surprising given Tarantino’s repeated declarations of having been a long-term and devoted exploitation fan.¹¹ Thus it seems more convincing to assume Tarantino’s motivation to be of a second order: *Inglourious Basterds* is first of all a movie about movies.¹² The question is, how does the film establish the entanglement of genres, if not through their respective visual spectacles? In what follows, I propose that Tarantino lets his *characters* do the work by playing out their roles against one another. These roles represent generic stereotypes, ranging from Spaghetti Western and gangster

movie heroes, to the slick Nazi villain, the beautiful female double agent, the melodramatic victim, and the stunning femme fatale.

Roles vs. Characters

Seeßlen emphasizes repeatedly how Tarantino plays with generic clichés in *Inglourious Basterds*, and he touches on the aspect of role-playing, yet without going into detail.¹³ Like other cinematic elements such as cinematography, sound and light, the style of acting is decisive for the establishment of genre, since it regulates 'the relationship of the character to the narrative circumstances.'¹⁴ *Inglourious Basterds* consciously displays and plays with the potential of role-play and acting on screen on four different levels. First of all, the choice of actors is of significance in that regard, since the *Inglourious Basterds* cast assembles a conspicuously wide range of manifold acting careers.¹⁵ Secondly, performance also matters significantly in terms of the plot: The film is *role-driven*, as Seeßlen has rightly observed.¹⁶ Instead of presenting full-bodied characters who develop over the course of a consistent storyline, the figures in *Inglourious Basterds* represent stereotypical roles, each with a respective generic range.¹⁷ Third, these figures, now considered *within* the plot, use specific forms of role-play to respond to the situations in which they find themselves. Disguise, deception, bluffing and outwitting are central motifs in *Inglourious Basterds*. Fourth and finally, the plot contains the actual screen performance of two of its characters in the movie scenes screened within the movie. It thereby reflects upon its own conditions of acting and reception. I see this incorporation of role-playing in *Inglourious Basterds* staged in what will be referred to in this essay as 'major role-play scenes'. The term is borrowed from Georg Seeßlen, for whom some scenes in the movie stand out and 'are so 'attuned' [in German 'gestimmt'] that the authority of the linear narration is suspended.'¹⁸ In the light of this definition, each of the film's five chapters entails at least one scene that prominently exposes the role-play of characters.

Inglourious Basterds features six of these role-play scenes: The first presents Hans Landa and Perrier LaPadite in a game of deception. The second major role-play scene introduces the Basterds' brutal ambush methods in a film-trailer fashion. In the third, Landa challenges Shosanna/Mimieux's disguise; and in the fourth a secret guerilla meeting turns into a role-play parlour game. The fifth role-play scene

takes place in the lobby of the movie theatre where Landa savours the Basterds' slapstick skit. The sixth features Raine and Utivich, who scar Landa after successfully deceiving him and thus pointedly put an end to his career as a professional deceiver. All role-play scenes are in sync with the five chapters of the movie, except for the sixth, which is technically part of chapter five but functions structurally as an epilogue. Before I discuss how role-play generates the generic montage of the film by referring to the individual role-play scenes, the film's casting has to be considered.

By employing a recognizable cast, the film provides a variety of generic associations depending on a viewer's cultural background. For a mainstream international audience, Brad Pitt's performance as guerilla-combatant Aldo Raine parodies Pitt's career as a genre actor, rather than a character actor, and thus allows him to shine as what he simply is: a brilliant comedian.¹⁹ The casting of Eli Roth for the part of Sgt Donny Donowitz, a.k.a. the 'Bear Jew', speaks to movie nerds who can link Donowitz's role to the relentlessly brutal horror films that Roth himself writes and directs.²⁰ The fact that Roth made the film within the film, *Nation's Pride*, underscores *Inglourious Basterds'* proximity to exploitation, as the pleasure of Roth's film derives solely from the spectacle of shootings that its hero literally triggers. Yet *Inglourious Basterds* also stars several renowned German-speaking actors and thereby opens up a field of cultural references from which the average American spectator is excluded. Daniel Brühl's image as the sympathetic 'boy hero' from young adult romances such as *Goodbye, Lenin!* (2003) and *Die fetten Jahre sind vorbei* (*The Edukators*, 2004)²¹ gives his role of the young sniper Frederik Zoller an ambivalent undercurrent, since at least German audiences know him from his roles as the nice, introverted guy next door.²² Til Schweiger has built his reputation acting in and directing a number of successful comedies in Germany,²³ even though he has pursued a Hollywood career in second-rate action films.²⁴ This unique background invests his role as the savage killing machine Hugo Stiglitz with a certain comic irony. Similarly, Diane Kruger's notorious performance as Helen in Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* (2004) and in Christian Carion's *Joyeux Noel* (*Merry Christmas*, 2005) predestined her role as the beautiful and brave double agent Bridget von Hammersmark. Sylvester Groth again appears as Joseph Goebbels, a part he already played in Dani Levy's *Mein Führer — Die wirklich*

wahrste Wahrheit über Adolf Hitler (*My Führer*, 2007). Martin Wuttke gives us Adolf Hitler, neither as an impersonation like Bruno Ganz in *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*, 2004) nor as a farce like Helge Schneider in Levy's film. Rather, he puts on the well-known Hitler face and acts out his Hitler as a role, thus disavowing any claim to historical authenticity. Wuttke's casting as Hitler also alludes to his performance of the tyrant in the stage production of Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (Volksbühne Berlin, Heiner Müller 1995), which invests his Hitler with a touch of Brechtian theatricality. Christoph Waltz and Mélanie Laurent were both widely unknown to international audiences before the release of *Inglourious Basterds*. Waltz's performance of the SS death squad leader Hans Landa can thus be seen as an 'empty projection surface' that comes out of nowhere.²⁵ But, just like Landa at the end of the movie, Waltz is branded. Especially since he received an Academy Award for *Inglourious Basterds*, he is likely to be typecast as Hans Landa.²⁶ The discovery of newcomer Laurent matches her role as the unexpected outsider. Laurent is convincing in her slightly restrained role as the Jewish fugitive 'Shosanna' and her disguise within the film 'Emmanuelle Mimieux'.²⁷ Hence the film playfully introduces its genre references through the actors who bring with them a role-archive that engages certain generic associations in spectators' cinematic memory, and Tarantino's plot takes up these generic references. As mentioned above, the plot is driven by the configurations of roles liberated from their generically defined context. By contrast, they represent a variety of genres. Unlike characters, the roles are not developed within a linear narrative. Rather, they are acted out against one another in the six major role-play scenes.

For the purposes of this war movie, the battlefield is better understood in generic rather than in military terms. Throughout the movie, warfare is strangely substituted by a thespian competition or, to put it differently, by a 'floating poker game, in which characters, many of whom have assumed false identities, take turns bluffing for their lives.'²⁸ According to their respective generic stereotypes, the different roles are also equipped with distinct ranges of representational modes that determine their acting style. Thus all figures face specific situations that demand them to act out roles within the plot in different manners. The confrontation is constituted not only along genre but also along gender lines: SS death squad officer Hans Landa, who relishes his power, clearly represents a Nazisploitation villain.

He performs deception purely for the sake of his own pleasure. His opponents, the dirty war movie heroes, are Aldo Raine and his Basterds. The Jewish/Native American guerilla army will have to evolve its repertoire of improvisation as a result of constantly and quickly changing circumstances that leave no time to plot in advance. They often come up with last-minute solutions that render them as stand-up or slapstick comedians. In the course of the events, however, a third genre from an independent and unexpected direction traverses the confrontation, which has been primarily male so far. Shosanna Dreyfus, survivor of her family's assassination by Hans Landa, incorporates the role of the avenger in the rape-revenge plot of the oppressed woman (and, in this case, also her black accomplice).²⁹ The different roles and their modes of role-playing manifest themselves in different subcategories such as clothing, linguistic proficiency and accents, as well as non-verbal forms of expression. Because these features have, in fact, a function on the diegetic level, they expose acting as *craft*; that is, they display the *making* of the role. The film shows the effort as well as the pleasure involved in an act of role-play by embedding it into a narrative context. It thus opens up a range of receptive reactions as it alludes to the potential risk inevitably involved in acting out a role: the discovery of its disguise, i.e. in theatrical terms, the destruction of the illusion.

Male Roles: (En)Acting Competition

In the first chapter, 'Once upon a time in occupied France...', which marks the film as a fairytale-like fiction and refers to Sergio Leone's paradigmatic Spaghetti Western *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968), the first of the movie's six role-play scenes draws the battle lines. Hans Landa reveals himself as the stereotypically cold-blooded Nazi when he coerces the French dairy farmer Perrier LaPadite to disclose the hideout of Shosanna's family.³⁰ His perverse combination of brutality and charm shows him to be the villain in a psychopath-thriller enhanced by the cliché of Nazi-chic. Hence Landa embodies the paradigmatic tormentor of Nazisploitation film. Moreover, his job to discover Jews hidden in German-occupied France allows him to showcase his polished eloquence by applying it to the manipulation of his opponents. His verbal dexterity encompasses not only fluency in several foreign languages, but also rhetorical techniques of persuasion as well as a distinct way of masking his face with a 'twinkling eye' and a

'giant grin'.³¹ Thus Landa's performance is oriented towards strategic deception that aims to distract his opponents, and at the same time maintain a perverse suspense for all parties involved in his 'poker game'.

As he interrogates LaPadite, Landa describes the object of his chase, 'the Jew', as a carrier of disease. It is, of course, ironic that the hackneyed anti-Semitic cliché Landa invokes — a clear reference to the swarms of rats in Fritz Hippler's propaganda film *Der ewige Jude* (1940) — points back at his very own malicious invasion of LaPadite's home.³² With that prejudice, which is inversed into an apt self-description of Landa, the scene introduces an important and recurrent motif in the film: the clandestine intrusion that brings harm to the people inside — first the cottage, then the tavern and finally the movie theater. Landa's speech features several techniques of persuasion that are effective both on a rhetorical level as well as in their meticulous execution. As his 'scariest weapon', Landa's linguistic dexterity allows him to adapt his words in accordance with his scheme.³³ What the refugees are supposed to understand, he says in French, everything else, he says in English, while his slight Austrian-German accent does not so much disturb his eloquence as underline the sharpness of his thespian abilities. At the same time, Landa's facial expressions are disarmingly charming. His smile is so natural and trustworthy that his claim to be carrying out a mere formality appears quite convincing. Compared to Landa, LaPadite's attempts to enhance his own disguise, e.g. when he had spattered himself with water before the interrogation to conceal his cold sweat, are painfully amateurish. Part of the game is that Landa's deception creates scenes of sheer suspense, since his reputation as the 'Jew hunter' and the messenger of evil is well known to all his interlocutors. After LaPadite finally reveals the hideout of the Jewish family under his floorboards, their oldest daughter, Shosanna, escapes miraculously. Whether Landa lets her go because she is out of firing range or because he views her escape as part of his gruesome game remains ambiguous.

This first role-play scene therefore sets up a framework for the movie based on the strategic employment of deception. It continually invites the spectator to study the execution of LaPadite's and Landa's acts of disguise. Notably, the scene is not only dominated by the actors' 'marvel [...] of tightly coordinated performances', but also the characters' role-play strategies.³⁴ The tone, however, remains

unsettling, due to the juxtaposition of Landa's exaggerated style, including his inappropriately oversized Sherlock-Holmes-style pipe, and the gripping tragedy of the dairy farmer as well as Shosanna's family. Landa's lambent 'performance of his duty', as he puts it, is set against the fearful expression in the faces of Shosanna's family members. Here a stark contrast between the exploitative display of Nazism and the drama of the victims is introduced. This generic split has raised unease among film critics who have suggested that *Inglourious Basterds* might be 'disconnected from feeling' and that 'Jews are irrelevant' to the film and just a mere pretense for the exploit of spectacles.³⁵ However, it can be argued that the disturbing generic inconsistency at this point singles out 'Shosanna'. It distinguishes her mode of representation as a victim, which later in the film will unfold into a powerful alternative.

The second chapter presents Landa's direct opponent, Lt Aldo Raine. Of Native American descent, Raine was assigned to put together an American-Jewish military unit to infiltrate German territory and kill as many Nazis as possible. He and his comrades are emissaries from dirty war movies, whose qualities they combine with features from Western and gangster movies. As Tarantino himself points out, the alignment of war movie and Western is supposed to link up the heroic image of the US fighting against the European genocide of the Jews with the cultural history of North America founded upon the repressed genocide of Native Americans.³⁶ While the Basterds' style in that film-trailer fashioned introduction resembles a Native American ambush in a Western, the plot clearly refers to war films of the 1970s like *The Dirty Dozen*, many of which are about a group of American outlaws attempting to conquer a German stronghold.³⁷ As David Denby puts it, the Basterds 'are themselves right out of the movies.'³⁸ The second major role-play scene features the ruthless methods of the Basterds to spread the threat of their existence, and thus undermines the power of Nazism as established in the first scene. By scalping the dead and marking the survivors with a swastika, the Basterds leave their dirty fingerprints, and thereby contaminate and defetishize the tidy Nazi chic. As a mark of shame, the giant rough scar clearly undermines any aesthetic appeal of Nazism. The Basterds are at the same time scaring and scarring Nazis. As long as their mission remains as basic and random as this, their guerilla tactics are fully effective.

For the moment, I will leave out Shosanna/Mimieux's introduction of chapter three and antedate the role-play scene of chapter four, when the Basterds are joined by a representative of yet another war movie genre: the espionage film. The generic demands of the latter suddenly imbue the guerilla mission with a plot, and thus severely challenge the Basterds' straightforward methods. Moreover, they also initiate the real comedy. Suddenly the Basterds must improvise much more refined performance techniques. Sent by the British Secret Intelligence Service, Lt Archie Hicox (Michael Fassbender) is supposed to collaborate with the Basterds to execute an undercover invasion called 'Operation Kino'. The plan is to have Hicox, an expert in German film and a fluent speaker of the language, as well as two of the German-speaking Basterds, sneak into the premiere of the Nazi film *Nation's Pride*, which key figures of the Third Reich will attend. After infiltrating the building, they hope to blow up the movie theater and kill everyone inside. Just like Lt John Curtis (George Peppard) in *Operation Crossbow* (1965),³⁹ Hicox appears in James Bond fashion, with a slick haircut, perfectly fitting suit, and surprising linguistic proficiency. The alignment of this elegant spy with the Basterds' savage, brute style seems ill fated from the start. Thus it is not surprising that their secret plot is doomed to fail.

In the major role-play scene of chapter four, Hicox, Stieglitz and the Austrian Jew Cpl Wilhelm Wicki (Gedeon Burkhard) meet with Brigit von Hammersmark (Diane Kruger), a glamorous German film star and spy for the British, who is supposed to help them gain access to the premiere. The meeting takes place in a basement tavern, where they are caught off guard by SS Major Hellstrom (August Diehl), a less sophisticated version of Landa. The scene is dominated by the German parlor game 'Identity', which emphasizes a certain fetish for interrogation — an interrogation ironically turned on the interrogator himself. Major Hellstrom proves to be an excellent player in both the game and in unmasking his co-players' non-German identities. Given the constant emphasis on eloquence, it is obvious that the discovery is connected to accents and paralingual codes. The Mexican standoff at the end of the scene, when the opponents level their guns at each other's laps, can therefore also be read as a generic deadlock that finally ends both the scene and their ambitious plot.

Just like in the parlor game, the generic rules of World War II espionage movies demand the competition of disguise, on the one

hand, and the uncovering of adversaries on the other. In *Inglourious Basterds*, these rules do not work out for any of the parties involved. The failure of the original plan necessitates subsequent improvisation for the Basterds. Whereas the confrontation in the tavern is finally fought out in military fashion, the face-off between Landa and Raine at the movie premiere remains entirely within the scope of a role-play competition. Not as well trained as SS lieutenant Landa or Secret Service Agent Hicox, the Basterds must play it on the fly to make it into the cinema. While Utivich is supposed to play their chauffeur without being able to drive, the other remaining Basterds (Raine, Donowitz and Ulmer) present themselves as an Italian film crew, although they speak close to no Italian. Indeed, their linguistic incompetence leads to several moments of slapstick comedy, as their off-the-cuff abilities are hardly adequate to the demands of the situation.

In the fifth major role-play scene, Raine and his fellow Basterds are introduced to Landa, who immediately displays an impressive command of Italian. Although he knows of their disguise even before talking to them, he nevertheless tests them with great pleasure and plays the game out to the end. It becomes clear that this marks the end of the Basterds' plans and makes it very likely that they are soon to be killed. The comedic effect that this scene evokes develops out of the imbalance of the two role-play styles, with Landa clearly having the advantage over the Basterds. He is acting out his 'honey pot', as von Hammersmark aptly labels it — a gender-reversed reference to strategies of seductive deception known from espionage films.⁴⁰ She thus unmasks his 'oppressive polite[ness]'.⁴¹ The situation's incongruity and suspense again play out on the level of linguistic dexterity. The Basterds' failure to speak Italian tips over into a linguistic slapstick, and Aldo Raine's Southern American pronunciation of 'Arrividerci' is among the most hilarious scenes of the movie, weirdly conjoining an increase in both tension and comic relief.⁴²

Female Roles: Takers and Resisters

As described above, over the course of the story, the male confrontation is unexpectedly traversed by Shosanna/Mimieux's secret rape-revenge scheme, which manifests itself formally in the order of the chapters: Shosanna/Mimieux appears in chapter three, between the Basterds and Hicox. She undergoes a significant transformation from the

potential victim who flees Landa's ruthless assassination of her family into the avenging femme fatale who emerges as Landa's most threatening antagonist. After her unlikely escape, she lives in Paris as Emmanuelle Mimieux, a name that refers both to the soft-porn film franchise *Emmanuelle* (1974), and the obscure 1960s actress Yvette Mimieux.⁴³ The name also alludes to her new life as a *mime*, a new identity she takes on as a means to survive. Acting out that new part as convincingly as possible is a matter of life and death for Shosanna. The fact that she earns her living by running a small movie theater underscores the importance of role-play skills. Her strategy thus requires her to constantly maintain her disguise, to *impersonate*, as it were, her new identity. However, even as Mimieux, she remains critically aware of her situation and shows signs of resistance against the Germans, already anticipating her sudden role switch.

When, at the end of the first chapter, Landa shouts after her: 'Au revoir, Shosanna!' his smile suggests that he could develop an abasing sexual relationship with Shosanna. Landa's promise of a reunion opens up the possibility that the movie might develop according to the generic pattern of a *sadiconazista* movie.⁴⁴ That generic trend is taken up in various ways, without ever really developing. All of the film's female characters face humiliating situations that nevertheless do not unfold into a self-sustaining *sadiconazista* plot. They rather function as generic allusions that disclose various highly stylized constellations of power and subjugation between uniformed men and beautiful women. All these constellations are directly contingent on the women's ability to participate in the Nazi game. Again, linguistic eloquence is presented as a decisive aspect of these power relations.

French women, whom the German oppressors treat like possessions, are presented as victims. First of all, Landa flirts with LaPadite's daughters and uses them to break their father's will. Landa alludes to a potential future humiliation when he promises the reward that 'your family will cease to be harassed in any way by the German military during the rest of our occupation of your country.' It is suggested that LaPadite betrays Shosanna's family to protect his own daughters. Another example is the French waitress at the tavern who is forced to participate in the parlor game against her will. She clearly lacks the proper language skills to play with the German soldiers on an equal level. Goebbels' French translator and possible mistress Francesca Mondino (Julia Dreyfus), whose name alludes to an Italian origin,

stands for full participation in the Nazi game — an involvement that is, yet again, signified by her language abilities. The German actress von Hammersmark, by contrast, represents the attempt to cheat in the Nazi game. Fluent in English, she can switch from the German side to the British side of the conspiracy plot, which means that she is still trying to play along. In her final scene she is confronted and eventually brutally murdered by Landa, who has discovered her treason. This scene, when Landa asks her to place her foot on his leg, comes closest to *sadiconazista*. But his humiliation remains yet again only suggested, as he seems not to have any sexual motivation at all but is driven by bestial rage.⁴⁵

Shosanna represents the possibility of an efficient resistance to the game. Although she passes through different constellations of potential humiliations, she manages to change tactics in the end. She faces several moments of potential victimhood, for example when Major Hellstrom (August Diehl) forces her into his car. This scene is all linguistic superiority. He talks to her in German, a language she most likely does not understand. The sexist contempt of his words is thus merely reflected in his degrading tone.⁴⁶ Her encounter with Frederick Zoller, a young German sniper who plays himself in a propaganda film about a victorious military action, *Nation's Pride*,⁴⁷ demands that Shosanna become his mistress. Partly afraid of appearing suspicious, and partly stunned by the absurd naiveté and the risible pomposity with which Zoller tries to win her over, she does not run away this time. Her five-second vision of Goebbels and his translator Mondino copulating — the movie's only explicit sex scene — displays their relationship as a *variété*-like grotesque and reveals Shosanna's profound disgust. The take suggests that she considers participation in the Nazi game a non-option. Yet it remains clear that she does not have much room to maneuver. Shosanna has no other choice but to accept Zoller's proposal to host the premiere of *Nation's Pride* at her movie theater.

It is in the third of the six role-play scenes in *Inglourious Basterds* that Shosanna experiences the hardest test of her disguise. As promised, Landa finally meets Shosanna again, when he is put in charge of ensuring security at the premiere. Throughout the scene, it remains unclear whether Landa recognizes her or not.⁴⁸ After this scene, which leaves it open as to whether or not her disguise was successful, Shosanna's tension gives way to tears when Landa leaves the room.

This is Shosanna's last appearance as a victim. The order to hold the premiere of Zoller's movie at her cinema all of a sudden provides her with the opportunity to take on her new role as femme fatale in a revenge plot.⁴⁹ Together with her boyfriend Marcel (Jacky Ido), she creates a veritable inferno. They hatch a plot to lock up all the theater's exits during the screening of *Nation's Pride*, into which they have inserted a self-made short film stating a condemning message, and to burn down the house including the entire Third Reich command. The male World War II hero's failed plan is thus devolved upon the female survivor who will succeed in its execution.

From Victim to Avenger

The fifth chapter of *Inglourious Basterds*, 'The Revenge of the Giant Face', displays the peak of the generic combat in a final and decisive confrontation, which is conflated with a spectacular showdown of visual attractions. The sequence is cut so rapidly that the different individual takes blend into each other. Although Aldo Raine's and Shosanna/Mimieux's plans for the assault developed independently, they powerfully complement each other. While Raine and his Basterds fail in their performance upon entering the cinema undetected, with their enormous shootout scene within the cinema — a condensation of gangster and war movie spectacles — they provide a spectacular accompaniment for Shosanna's inferno.⁵⁰

The weird effect of Shosanna's twofold role-play resonates in the trap that the cinema eventually presents for the Nazis.⁵¹ With her role-transformation, 'our young French Jewish heroine', as Tarantino calls Shosanna in his script, inverts the expected development of a character through narration.⁵² As the only figure whose traumatic past and emotions are shown, her portrayal evokes empathy that contrasts with the other more stereotypical roles. However, by transforming her into a ruthless avenger whose brutality eventually comes closest to that of her antagonists, Tarantino complicates our ability to identify with her.⁵³ Her transformation from victim into femme fatale discloses that victimhood and its melodramatic mode of representation is an arbitrary role that can be switched just like any other.

Moreover, together with Zoller, Shosanna is one of two figures who actually makes it on to the screen of the film within the film, which she extends — and thus occupies — with her own footage. Zoller's

performance in *Nation's Pride*, however, cannot be called a spectacle in itself. His 'heroic exploits' consist merely of instigating shootouts and thus recall the etymological proximity between deed and exploitation in the original German. (Zoller: 'my exploits consisted of me killing many men'.) Shosanna, by contrast, displays her voice and face, which become spectacle and message at the same time. The fact that she is already dead when she appears on screen accentuates this point. She sacrifices herself, leaves her body, as it were, and becomes disembodied visual material. However, the spectacle is literally inscribed with her message 'for Germany:' 'You are all going to die!' And during that verdict, when Shosanna's projected face is suddenly shown in a close-up and thus directed towards the spectators of *Inglourious Basterds*, they suddenly find themselves addressed as well.⁵⁴ Moreover, Shosanna's film is set against Hitler's (Martin Wuttke's) excessive laughter at the cheap war movie spectacles of *Nation's Pride*, which seems to reflect upon an anticipated audience celebrating *Inglourious Basterds* as 'Jolly. Redundant. Excessive. Unworried',⁵⁵ and makes the delight in the exploits and the comic relief taste bitter. It reminds us yet again that enjoying a war movie is a highly ambivalent endeavor.

The Stigma of World War II

Yet the film does not end with the burning movie theater. The film ends with a sixth role-play scene that, although technically still part of the fifth chapter, actually feels more like an epilogue. This last scene truly thwarts Landa's plans. After he turns out to have the upper hand even in the final execution of 'Operation Kino', he makes the mistake of feeling safe and miscalculates the Basterds' trustworthiness. Of course, they will implement their usual procedure on him. Landa's eventual stigmatization as a Nazi, now carved deep and bloodily into his face, will prevent him from ever taking off his 'handsome looking SS uniform' (Raine), from ever being able to discard his Nazi role. The film's bloodiest spectacle consists of a close-up of the blade carving a swastika into Landa's forehead. In addition to scarring Landa, this take also de-fetishizes the neat, symmetrical design of the symbol.

The last take, however, is shot from Landa's perspective, which means that Raine and Utivich stare directly into the camera. Thus, the viewer is allied with Landa's gaze in a way similar to that in which Shosanna's message in her interpolated film extends to the actual

spectators of *Inglourious Basterds*. Raine's last words, 'I think this just might be my masterpiece', are thus addressed to Landa as well as to the audience, rendering Tarantino's movie as reminder of what is at stake in a World War II movie. *Inglourious Basterds* therefore turns out to be not so much a film about World War II, but rather a World War II 'movie movie', a film about the exploitation of war and fascism as cinematic spectacles as well as a film about genre conventions that determine the audience's, that is our, expectations. By employing such a diverse assembly of roles and having them act their way through generic competitions, *Inglourious Basterds* questions our mode of enjoying and being moved by films on the Third Reich and their respective spectacles. Yet Tarantino does not condemn. He reveals what cinema in its kernel always already is: an exploitation of narratives in order to produce pleasure (and box-office success) as a visual attraction. *Inglourious Basterds* is no exception.

Notes

- 1 See James Beardinelli, review of *Inglourious Basterds*, *reelviews.net*, August 8, 2009, accessed July 1, 2010, www.reelviews.net/php_review_template.php?identifier=1774, and Roger Ebert, review of *Inglourious Basterds*, *Chicago Sun-Times Online*, August 19, 2009, accessed July 1, 2010, rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090819/REVIEWS/908199995.
- 2 See Jens Jessen, 'Skalpiert die Deutschen', *Zeit-Online*, August 20, 2009, accessed July 1, 2010, www.zeit.de/2009/35/Kino-Inglourious-Basterds.
- 3 See Manohla Dargis, 'Tarantino Avengers in Nazi Movie Land', *The New York Times*, August 21, 2009, accessed July 1, 2010, movies.nytimes.com/2009/08/21/movies/21inglourious.html.
- 4 Schaefer is well aware of the terminological ambivalence of 'spectacle', but nevertheless defines it to make it applicable for his analysis. Whenever I use the term, I refer to his account: 'In employing the term [spectacle] here, I refer to something that is presented to fascinate the eye of the spectator. Spectacle can be beautiful or hideous, the familiar presented in a unique way or the uncommon. Spectacle invariably exerts an immediate, affective response in the spectator: loathing or lust, anxiety or amazement.' Eric Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True! A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 76. According to Schaefer, 'exploitation' derives from low-budget film productions in the first half of the twentieth century that tried to reach its audience by promising 'areas of forbidden spectacle' (*ibid.*), by which he refers to scenes that break with taboos of explicit violence and sexuality. Unlike mainstream narrative movies, in which spectacles might contribute to underlining certain aspects of the narrative (e.g. pathos-loaded music scores, or, depending on genre expectations, also violence and sexuality), Schaefer argues that exploitation movies *require* spectacles to a degree that prohibited them to be substituted by 'less-spectacular ways without damaging the narrative coherence of the film.' (*ibid.*, 77).

- 5 Georg Seeßlen, *Quentin Tarantino gegen die Nazis: Alles über Inglourious Basterds* (Berlin: Bertz und Fischer, 2009).
- 6 See Seeßlen as well as a great number of Internet forums: 'Before They Were Basterds', *Scarecrow Video*, accessed May 15, 2011 www.scarecrow.com/2009/09/25/before-they-were-basterds/; 'Inglorious Basterds: List of Film References', *Filmspotting Forum*, accessed May 15, 2011, www.filmspotting.net/forum/index.php?topic=6410.0; 'Inglorious Basterds Movie References Guide', *The Quentin Tarantino Archives*, accessed May 15, 2011, www.tarantino.info/wiki/index.php/Inglourious_Basterds_movie_references_guide; and 'Quentin Tarantino: The *Inglorious Basterds* Interview', *The Village Voice Online*, accessed May 15, 2011, www.villagevoice.com/2009-08-18/news/quentin-tarantino-the-inglourious-basterds-interview/1.
- 7 See Seeßlen, 99.
- 8 Seeßlen gives a valuable summary of the critical account of these films in his chapter on 'dirty war movies'. According to him, films like *The Dirty Dozen* contaminate the image of the clean and heroic war of US American World War II films. (ibid.)
- 9 Susan Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism,' in *Under the Sign of Saturn*, 73–105 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), 99.
- 10 'The pornographers Robert Lee Frost and Don Edmonds brought the so called *sadiconazista* films to the cinema with the Canadian productions *Love Camp 7* (1968) and *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (1974). These films, following a trivial structure, take a voyeuristic look into the concentration camp brothel and a pseudomedical experimentation centre. Although this exploitative use of holocaust motifs caused a huge scandal, these films are still extremely successful in the form of home media.' Marcus Stiglegger, 'Beyond Good and Evil? Sodomasochism and Politics in the Cinema of the 1970s', Translated by Kathrin Zeitz. *Ikonen: Magazin für Kunst, Kultur, und Lebensart*. February 9, 2007. Accessed January 10, 2011. www.ikonenmagazin.de/artikel/Nightporter.htm.
- 11 In an Interview with Michel Ciment and Hubert Niogret, Tarantino says, 'When I started to develop, for lack of a better word, my 'aesthetic', I loved exploitation movies.' Michel Ciment und Hubert Niogret, 'Interview with Quentin Tarantino (1992)', in *Quentin Tarantino Interviews*, ed. Gerald Peary, 9–26 (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 12. Manohla Dargis quotes Tarantino in an article on *Pulp Fiction*: 'Pulp sneaked in through the cracks, it was made for a certain brand of reader. The pulps weren't put under any kind of critical light except in retrospect. What's cool about that is that's how I felt about exploitation movies in the '70s. I was going to see all these movies, and they weren't put under any critical light, so you made your own discoveries, you found the diamonds in the dustbin.' Manohla Dargis, 'Quentin Tarantino on Pulp Fiction (1994)', in *Quentin Tarantino Interviews*, ed. Gerald Peary, 66–9 (Oxford: University Press Mississippi, 1998), 67. Don Gibalevich quotes Tarantino: 'There still was a quality of anything can happen, in some of the '70s movies, which is kinda gone now, almost completely. Just the fact that they were actually going out to play in theaters gave them more of an urgency than they have just throwing them in a video store. The same happened to exploitation films. I love exploitation films, and I would go see exploitation films all the time.' Don Gibalevich, 'Out of the Past: Quentin Tarantino. On Ambition,

- Exploitation and Playing Psycho', in *Quentin Tarantino Interviews*, ed. Gerald Peary, 176–82 (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 178. See also Joshua Mooney, 'Interview with Quentin Tarantino', ed. Gerald Peary, 70–9 (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 72, 74, 77.
- 12 See Tarantino in an interview with David Wild: 'Part of the fun of making movies is that you're on ground that's been covered before (...) and you can use (...) that as a jumping-off point for all the weird places you want to go. I'm trying to make a combination of a movie movie and a real movie. I want to make movie movies with real consequences.' David Wild, 'Quentin Tarantino, Violence and Twisted Wit (1998)', in *Quentin Tarantino Interviews*, ed. Gerald Peary, 124–35 (Oxford, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 132.
 - 13 See Blen calls *Inglourious Basterds* a 'Tour de force of genres' and a 'genre bastard'. See See Blen, 95, 98.
 - 14 See Paul McDonald, 'Why Study Film Acting?', ed. Cynthia Baron, Diane Carson and Tomasulo P. Frank, 23–41 (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 32.
 - 15 See See Blen, 34.
 - 16 See Blen emphasizes the isolation of roles instead of development of characters. Ibid, 166.
 - 17 I take the phrase 'figures created by roles' as opposed to an authentic representation of a character from Robert T. Self, 'Resisting Reality Acting by Design in Robert Altman's *Nashville*', in *More Than a Method*, eds, Cynthia Baron, Diane Carson und Frank P. Tomasulo, 126–50 (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 141.
 - 18 As See Blen puts it: '*Inglourious Basterds* is no heroic journey nor an education novel. Despite its epic length it basically provides nothing else than five scenes (...). These scenes are so 'attuned' that the authority of the linear narration is suspended.' (See Blen, 140, my translation).
 - 19 Examples for his genre performances would be the *Ocean's* sequels (2001, 2004, 2007) or *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2008); for his talent as a comedian: *True Romance* (1993) and *Burn after Reading* (2008).
 - 20 *Cabin Fever* (2003) and Roth's subsequent film *Hostel* (2005, 2007) are the most prominent examples.
 - 21 See See Blen, 69.
 - 22 *Die fetten Jahre sind vorbei* (*The Edukators*, 2004); *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003).
 - 23 *Der Bewegte Mann* (*Maybe... Maybe Not*, 1994), *Männerpension* (*Jailbirds*, 1996), *Keinohrhasen*, (*Rabbit Without Ears*, 2007).
 - 24 *Body Armour* (dir. Gerry Lively 2007); *Already Dead* (dir. Joe Otting 2008).
 - 25 See See Blen, 39.
 - 26 For instance, he has gone on to play the alternately charming and abusive circus ringmaster August in *Water for Elephants* (2011) and the villainous Russian crime boss Benjamin Chudnofsky (a.k.a. 'Bloodnofsky') in *The Green Hornet* (2011).
 - 27 Laurent's biographical background as the granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor in Southern France adds a significance to the choice of casting her for the role of Shosanna that would be worth discussing. However, that detail opens up a set of questions with regard to acting and performance on screen as a potentially realistic account that would go far beyond the

context of my argument here.

- 28 See J. Hobermann, 'Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* Makes Holocaust Revisionism Fun', *The Village Voice Online*, August 18, 2009, accessed July 1, 2010, www.villagevoice.com/2009-08-18/film/quentin-tarantino-s-inglourious-basterds-makes-holocaust-revisionism-fun/.
- 29 On the term rape-revenge-plot see Jacina Read, *The New Avenger: Feminism, Fertility and the Rape-Revenge-Cycle* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000). The revenge plot had already been a central motif for Tarantino in *Kill Bill* (2003/2004) and in *Death Proof* (2007), and can in itself be seen as taking a critical stance with regard to exploitation.
- 30 His performance of the ruthless string player resembles the unscrupulous intriguer SS-officer Aschenbach (Helmut Griem) in Visconti's *La Caduta Degli Dei* (1969).
- 31 See Hobermann.
- 32 In Hippler's NSDAP propaganda movie, the migration of Eastern European Jews is compared to the global distribution of rats.
- 33 See Dennis Lim, 'Inglourious' Actor Tastes the Glory', *The New York Times Online*, August 16, 2009, accessed July 1, 2010, www.nytimes.com/2009/08/16/movies/16lim.html.
- 34 See Dargis.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 See Tarantino in an interview with Terri Gross on NPR's *Fresh Air*: 'The other thing is even the Jews in the course [sic] — even though metaphorically aligning themselves with Indians, and you know, you have genocide aligning itself with another genocide.' Terry Gross, 'Pulp And Circumstance: Tarantino Rewrites History', *NPR online*, August 27, 2009, accessed July 1, 2010, www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=112286584.
- 37 '[...] I actually thought that the idea of doing a World War II movie in the guise of a spaghetti Western would just be an interesting way to tackle it. [...] It hit me that an Apache resistance would be wonderful, you know, it would be a wonderful metaphor for Jewish-American soldiers to be used behind enemy lines against the Nazis because the Apache Indians were able, from different points of time [...] to fight off for decades [...] because they were great guerilla fighters.' (ibid).
- 38 'The Americans are themselves right out of the movies.' 'The Inglourious Basterds, as they are known, are a kind of Jewish Dirty Dozen' David Denby, review of *Inglourious Basterds*, *The New Yorker*, August 31, 2009, accessed July 1, 2010, www.newyorker.com/arts/reviews/film/inglourious_basterds_tarantino.
- 39 The title of chapter four, 'Operation Kino', suggests Anderson's World War II conspiracy movie, which is made overly explicit by the analogous plotlines. While in *Operation Crossbow*, British physics experts with excellent foreign language skills are sent into German territory in order to destroy a secret rocket factory, in *Inglourious Basterds*, Tarantino replaces the military location with a cinema.
- 40 Most recently in *Munich* (2005).
- 41 See Lim.
- 42 See Tarantino on the importance of linguistic skills in an interview with Verena Lueken: 'Language is central for the build-up of suspense. World War II was the last time that white men of different linguistic background

- fought against each other. Older films completely ignored that fact. It was possible to undermine one's opponent, if one was in control of the latter's language. Or it was possible to be detected, if not.' (my translation). Verena Lueken, interview with Quentin Tarantino, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Online*, August 20, 2009, accessed July 1, 2010, www.faz.net/s/Rub8A25A66CA9514B9892E0074EDE4E5AFA/Doc~E4F3FF466D3C44C0EBABF2DC0BD68708F~ATpl~Ecommon~Scontent.html.
- 43 See Seeßlen. These references attribute pornographic undertones to her role.
- 44 An allusion to *Au Revoir Les Enfants* (1987).
- 45 In his interview with Gross, Tarantino claims that choking someone to death is the most brutal but also singularly human way to murder. The scene can thus be seen as fully and physically realizing an act of subjugation that tries to evade the rules of power: 'Strangling the very life out of somebody with your bare hands is the most violent act a human being can commit.' See Gross.
- 46 Hellstrom says to Shosanna in German: 'Beweg deinen Arsch ins Auto.' ('Move your ass into the car.') (my translation).
- 47 The shootout at a small French village invokes the final scene in Spike Lee's *Miracle of St. Anna* (2008).
- 48 For instance, the way he doffs his friendly mask when he says, 'I did have something else I wanted to ask you, but right now, for the life of me, I can't remember what it is' suggests that he does in fact recognize her.
- 49 Carol J. Clover discusses female retribution in rape-revenge films, and also makes the connection to the socio-political realm, when she claims that horror movies also work on the axis of city-country. Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 115. In Tarantino, however, *rape* is substituted by incredibly brutal violence, and revenge is never just personal. In this regard his approach comes closer to Jacina Read, who defines *rape-revenge* as a narrative structure rather than a genre. According to Read, the basic structure is the opportunity of revenge for any kind of violence, which might appear in different generic contexts. See Read, 25.
- 50 As much as the destruction of leading Nazi commanders evokes the burning fortress in *The Dirty Dozen*, the burning cinema certainly also alludes to *Cinema Paradiso* (1988).
- 51 See Seeßlen, 155.
- 52 See Quentin Tarantino, 'Inglourious Basterds', script, *The Internet Movie Script Database (IMSDb)*, July 2008, accessed December 14, 2010, www.imsdb.com/scripts/Inglourious-Basterds.html.
- 53 'The good guys, who don't want to be victims any longer, can no longer be entirely good either.' (Seeßlen, 145, my translation).
- 54 Shosanna's 'giant face' on the burning screen, which eventually evaporates, with her images ghostly projected on the remaining smoke, certainly invokes two of the most memorable 'faces' in cinema, first of all Brigitte Helm as the robotic 'False Maria' at the moment she is finally engulfed by flames in *Metropolis* (1926), and then Frank Morgan as 'The Great and Powerful Oz' in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), his giant face also being a projected image — a creation of smoke and mirrors.
- 55 See Tobias Kniebe, 'Die guten, brutalen Jungs', *Süddeutsche Zeitung Online*,

August 19, 2009, accessed July 1, 2010, www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/kino-inglourious-basterds-die-guten-brutalen-jungs-1.173385.

Of Blitzkriege and Hardcore BDSM:¹ Revisiting Nazi Sexploitation Camps

MICHAEL FUCHS

AS OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS TO this volume demonstrate, Nazisploitation imagery is nearly omnipresent in today's mediascape. Contemporary Nazi representations range from reincarnations of the mad scientist Nazi, as in the 2009 action-adventure video game *The Saboteur*, to undead Nazis in films like *Outpost* (2008), *Død snø* (*Dead Snow*, 2009), and Rob Zombie's animated meta-exploitation *The Haunted World of El Superbeasto* (2009), in which the leather outfit of the character Suzi-X is only one of numerous references to Nazisploitation's iconic Ilsa.² Similar to *El Superbeasto*, Adolf Hitler's living head also appears in an episode of Fox Television's *Futurama*. In the gaming world, the unlockable 'Nazi Zombies' leisure game mode in the first-person shooter game *Call of Duty: World at War* (2008) presents players with the goal of killing as many Nazi (and Japanese) zombies as possible. Of course this scenario may remind readers of the godfather of Nazi zombie games, *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992), which has recently seen a remake entitled *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* (2001) as well as a sequel to that remake, *Wolfenstein* (2009).

Amidst this omnipresence of Nazisploitation imagery, a certain form of Nazi representation from the 1970s has seen a revival in some contemporary films.³ This genre, which I will refer to as 'Nazi sexploitation', in order to differentiate between the larger cultural

phenomenon of the (ab)use of Nazi imagery that is Nazisploitation and this specific genre, has been termed ‘the most despised product of Euro-exploitation.’⁴ More specifically, this essay focuses on the ‘sex camp’ thread of Nazi sexploitation, which, since *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (1974) ‘introduced an explicit Sadean aesthetic of sexual torture’ into the genre, has often featured medical experimentation on the prisoners.⁵ By investigating four relatively recent sexploitation films set in Nazi prison camps — first, a series of Nazi-themed hardcore BDSM features, directed by ‘Pedro’ and produced and distributed by the Hungarian company Mood Pictures, entitled *Dr. Mengele* (2005), *Gestapo* (2006) and *Gestapo 2* (2006); and second, the ultra-low-budget American exploitation film *Blitzkrieg* (Keith J. Crocker, 2008) — this contribution examines representations of Nazi Germany, the appeal of Nazis, and the role of Nazis in the popular culture of the twenty-first century. Indeed, as I will argue in the following, in our (post-)postmodern age, the myth of Nazi Germany has become so ubiquitous that it has replaced historical knowledge about the Third Reich as the most prevalent source of information about that era.

BDSM Hardcore Made in Hungary: Subordinating to Nazi Power?

In *Sadiconazista*, his seminal monograph on the interrelation between fascism and sexuality in film, Marcus Stiglegger states that employing *sadiconazista* elements in hardcore pornography only serves ‘picturesque and exotic’ functions and that these elements generally hold little meaning with regard to the (minimal) plot.⁶ While there is no doubt that *Gestapo* features only a minimal plot and reduces the atrocities of the National Socialists ‘to [their] most base elements’,⁷ the film is not that easily pigeonholed. To outline to what degree *Gestapo* breaks from the conventionalized exploitation myth of Nazi Germany, a relatively detailed outline of the opening sequence of the film is necessary. *Gestapo*’s opening resembles earlier (softcore) Nazi sexploitation films by using a title card as an authentication device; however, at the same time, it already questions ‘the representation of history that [...] exploitation films [usually] utilize’⁸ by emphasizing that ‘[t]he following film is based partly on historical facts and is partly fictitious.’⁹ The subsequent title card provides the narrative frame for the events depicted in the film: ‘Right after the attempted assassination of Hitler, Himmler set up the ‘Special Committee of

July 20', whose responsibility was to investigate all the circumstances of the putsch.¹⁰ It was the biggest police squad in number ever set up in connection with one case. They tortured the suspects and brought them before the court. Court President Freisler sentenced more and more people to death.¹¹ Next, a female SS officer walks up and down in front of a cell holding five female prisoners before proceeding to torture one of the inmates for a few moments. Then the screen fades to black and the opening credits roll, accompanied by Hitler's first speech as Reichskanzler on the *Tag der nationalen Erhebung* (roughly, the 'day of national revival', January 30, 1933, the day Hitler came to power). The concluding phrases of the speech, which is presented in German without subtitles, read like a typical BDSM scenario in which the submissive wants to follow the orders of the dominant partner: 'A great time has now dawned. Germany has awakened. We have won power in Germany; now, it's imperative to win the German people. My comrades, I know it has probably been rather hard on you, desiring change and yet it didn't come, and you have to be called on time and again: the fight has to continue; unquestionably, you are not to act, you are to obey and to conform; you have to submit to the primordial need to obey.'¹²

The remaining 45 minutes of the film are devoted to various forms of torture — clitoral electrocution, caning and (most often) whipping — of the five aforementioned prisoners to make them testify that they and their respective husbands have been involved in the July 20 plot. Of course, the opening disclaimer stressing that the depicted events are partly fictional can be regarded as self-defence against overly critical voices condemning the film for its historical inaccuracies. However, with the target audience and primary function of BDSM pictures in mind, such condemnation is unlikely. Still, the speech by Adolf Hitler may be found in a history textbook, as may the name of Dr Roland Freisler, President of the *Volksgerechtshof* from 1942 until his death, as well as the facts surrounding the *Sonderkommission 20. Juli 1944*.

While the tension between 'reality' and fiction will reverberate throughout this essay, it bears mentioning here that some historical 'facts' have been altered in this opening sequence. One of these facts is that no women were allowed to become members, let alone officers, of the strictly patriarchal SS.¹³ While this depiction of female SS officers may be due to the film-makers not 'doing their

homework', it is especially noteworthy for the fact that there is not a single male SS member depicted in *Gestapo*. *Gestapo 2* lacks the relatively complex opening frame (complex, that is, for a BDSM hardcore feature) of *Gestapo* and focuses on the 'interrogation' of potential communist conspirators, topped off by a medical experiment subplot. In *Gestapo 2*, there is just one male character. Even though the character represents patriarchal power in his role as a guard, his potential power is largely negated by both the story and the discourse: he has very limited screen time, he is always situated on the outer edges of the frame and, most importantly, is not present in the torture scenes. *Dr. Mengele*, meanwhile, features the titular character at the helm of the camp hierarchy as the only male character. Unlike the male guard in *Gestapo 2*, Dr Mengele actively participates in torture, whipping two female prisoners in one scene. Thus, in two of the three films, women are complicit in the enforcement of the dominating and patriarchally structured Nazi power.



Figure 14.1 A typical whipping scene from Mood Pictures's *Dr. Mengele* (2005).

If one disregards the abovementioned tensions between historical 'facts' and fiction, which are, nevertheless, relatively clearly evoked, one could at first agree with Stiglegger's claim that the Nazi context creates no additional meaning in these films. Arguably, like any other hardcore BDSM film, these movies are amalgamations of 'prolonged scene[s] of 'bondage and discipline' showing the binding and torture of the victim by either dominator or dominatrix', in which 'the highly ritualized forms of violence and domination enacted on the body of the woman' take center stage.¹⁴ In the torture scenes, only minimal editing — mainly cuts between the faces of the victims and the inflicted wounds — is employed. According to film scholar Linda Williams, 'The emphasis throughout is on the suffering and emotion of the victims. [...] There is no visible climax, in either the dramatic or the sexual sense of the word, only a suspenseful spectacle of prolonged suffering.'¹⁵ Some of the torture scenes simply end with a fade to black. However, some of the scenes end with inmates being sent to 'the showers', while others end with prisoners being sent to one of the doctors for medical testing. All of the endings of the torture scenes are far from the (actual, as opposed to sexual) 'happy endings' that traditionally conclude BDSM pornography,¹⁶ not only giving the films a more sinister feel than a 'standard' example from the genre, but also (albeit in simplified ways) connecting them to the specific historical context of the Third Reich.

One of the central questions Williams poses in relation to sadomasochistic pornography is: 'Is the sexual violence a fictional depiction, or is it an enacted reality?'¹⁷ Williams points out that BDSM porn 'attempt[s] to create in the mind of the viewer an impression of reality.'¹⁸ However, one has to bear in mind that the violence depicted in BDSM porn is very different from violence in other cinematic genres (unless one believes in the existence of snuff). While usually the spectator knows that the violence is fictional, in the case of BDSM, the audience cannot be sure. Even if the visual indications point towards real violence, as is the case with the films discussed here, the question that the spectators again cannot answer with absolute certainty is whether the person on whom violence is inflicted is just a practicing submissive, and thus participating in a game of power from which s/he derives pleasure, or whipped, caned, etc. against her will.

This struggle for power on the extra-compositional level also finds a double in the diegesis, which Williams sketches as follows: '[I]n

sadomasochistic cinema the woman engages in a more self-conscious strategy of role-playing. [...] She gets pleasure, but she must pay obeisance to a value system that condemns her for her pleasure; the rules of the game are not her own.¹⁹ While this description may be appropriate for a number of BDSM films featuring a female submissive,²⁰ in the respective story worlds depicted in the three films under discussion, the victims seem to derive no pleasure from being dominated. Furthermore, in all three films, punishment by the (mostly female) dominant for not obeying rules or orders is the exception. In *Gestapo*, all the torture is based on the potential involvement in the July 20 plot. In *Gestapo 2*, very similarly, potential involvement in a red conspiracy with the aim of overthrowing the *Führer* provides the motivation for torturing the prisoners. In these two films, there is not much of a game of power. It is clear that patriarchal power is the dominating force, even if this patriarchal power is enacted through female SS officers who impose their will on the victims for the pleasure of sadistic domination.²¹ However, it is noteworthy that the female SS officers occupy a rather queer space in these films, as they gain pleasure from being dominated by male Nazi power but also from inflicting violence on the inmates, thus being dominant and submissive at the same time.²²

Dr. Mengele is different, primarily because it is the only one of the three films featuring a man at the top of the pecking order. But it also toys with power relations more explicitly than the two *Gestapo* films. In the first torture scene in *Dr. Mengele*, the title character selects a female capo for one of the barracks, starts whipping one of the other female prisoners, and then orders the newly selected capo to continue the punishment. When she disobeys, she is also whipped. Dr Mengele then finds a new capo, and the second capo follows Mengele's orders, seemingly whipping the first capo.²³ While, diegetically speaking, the first capo does not whip the other inmate because of a seemingly sudden spate of compassion that has the potential to subvert Nazi power, in sadomasochistic terms, the first capo is a submissive, who cannot gain pleasure from occupying the dominant role. Like the majority of BDSM practitioners, she cannot simply swap roles.

At first, it seems blatantly obvious that *Dr. Mengele* represents the violence inherent in patriarchal Nazi power. However, one should not forget that this is one of just two scenes in all three films that feature a male dominator. Thus viewing Mengele as the violent and

dominant stand-in for patriarchy would ignore the power relations at play throughout the films. Additionally, one should keep in mind that 'somasochistic sexuality is more theatrical than any other.'²⁴ BDSM is a paradoxical game of power, borrowing, as Anne McClintock observes, 'its décor, props and costumery (bonds, chains, ropes, blindfolds) and its scenes (bedrooms, kitchens, dungeons, convents, prisons, empire) from the everyday cultures of power.'²⁵ As a result, 'S/M seems a servant to orthodox power.'²⁶ However, 'with its exaggerated emphasis on costume and scene S/M performs social power as *scripted*.'²⁷ By emphasizing that social power is scripted, BDSM draws awareness to the momentary and socially constructed nature of power. In other words, if social power is not real power, but rather merely scripted and performed power, it is constructed, a fiction, and thus not fixed, but rather subject to change. In this context, Robin Bauer has recently suggested that in BDSM, reality and fiction are not so much opposites as they are terms that complement and intersect each other. One of the central ideas of BDSM is to embody sexual fantasies playfully, i.e. to transform fantasies into reality.²⁸ In BDSM, 'natural' power structures are momentarily suspended for the duration of a play of enacted dominance and submission, and the power structures valid for the duration of that game are mutually agreed upon by the participants. Though this game may also take place on the extra-textual level of the films in question, in the diegetic worlds, there is no doubt that the Nazis are in control: they are the ones in power, and the slightest indication of rebellion against their rules is severely punished. Indeed, as the second torture scene in *Dr. Mengele* shows, sometimes members of oppressed groups, that is, the prisoners, are even punished for violations on the part of the Nazis.

This second punishment scene has already been set up earlier: female SS officer Irma Grese, a historical person who worked in the concentration camps Ravensbrück, Auschwitz-Birkenau and Bergen-Belsen and was turned into an icon of Nazi barbarism shortly after the war, has chosen a new maid and given her some bread for her work. Later, Irma and Mengele are in his office, and the other central female SS officer, Margot Elisabeth Drechsler, leads two prisoners into the room. Drechsler tells Dr Mengele that the inmates have some bread they shouldn't have, and that one of them has claimed that she got it from Irma. Irma protests: 'You know that I wouldn't give them a crumb. If she's saying that I gave it to her, she's obviously lying. They're

like that. Let's whip them.'²⁹ In the following scene, the two prisoners are thus punished for Irma's disobedience against patriarchal (i.e. Nazi) rules. Indeed, by having Irma witness the punishment (carried out by Dr Mengele), she — who in this film has been constructed as a sadist — is even rewarded for her disobedience, since she is allowed to gain pleasure from the punishment of the inmates.³⁰ The construction of Irma as the sadistic centerpiece of the camp is continued when she, obviously in love with or at least sexually attracted to Dr Mengele, punishes one of the prisoners after Mengele has chosen the respective inmate to become his 'maid'. On the symbolic level, the maid not only threatens Irma's dominating role, but also impairs the power of Nazi Germany.

The power symbolized by the Nazis is of central importance in these BDSM movies. While military uniforms per se 'signify hierarchy (some command, others obey), as well as membership in what was traditionally an all-male group whose function involves the legitimate use of physical violence', and therefore are among the most prototypical BDSM costumes, the specificity of Nazi uniforms needs some further thought.³¹ Susan Sontag introduces some conclusive points that may help to answer the question why Nazi imagery is employed to represent dominants. When Sontag ponders the reasons for the existence of Nazi chic, she suggests that on a personal level, playing the submissive in a game of BDSM may unleash reserves of sexual energy from the past. Meanwhile, the Nazi past serves as this reservoir of sexual energy on a communal level, a kind of communal 'return of the repressed', to use the Freudian dictum.³² Marcus Stiglegger adds some observations by stating that especially black SS uniforms, which are oddly absent from the three Mood Pictures productions (SS members are dressed in greenish uniforms), with their erotically connoted color as well as their eccentric chic and elitist elegance, are almost magically appealing.³³ Sontag even states that Nazi uniforms are sexy and concludes that BDSM 'has always been an experience in which sex becomes [...] severed from personhood.'³⁴ Similarly, the domination (and annihilation) of inferior 'races' and those rebelling against the system was depersonalized in the Third Reich. In this context, *Blitzkrieg* provides a very telling scene: Facing the tortured women who now want to take revenge, Wolfgang, one of the central Nazi characters, poignantly says: 'It was nothing personal.'³⁵

Indeed, in recent Western history, as Sontag notes, 'the relation

of masters and slaves [has never been] so consciously aestheticized³⁶ as in the Third Reich. Thus it is not very surprising that the BDSM community and BDSM filmmakers have repeatedly turned to Nazi imagery. Sontag concludes that while ‘Sade had to make up his theater of punishment and delight from scratch, improvising the decor and costumes and blasphemous rites’, Nazi Germany provides a — if not *the* — master scenario for playing dominants and submissives.³⁷

Blitzkrieg: Intertextuality, Exploitation, History, Memory and Reality

Blitzkrieg: Return to Stalag 69 was released in 2008. Produced on a budget of only \$10,000, the film itself is a torture to sit through; paradoxically, not so much because of the exploitative use of Sadean aesthetics, but rather because of tedious dialogues, inferior editing, bad acting and a narrative structure that suffers from the film-makers’ lack of craft. However, the people involved in the film’s production seem to be content with the final outcome, suggesting that through employing certain narrative elements, such as lengthy dialogues, *Blitzkrieg* is not your typical exploitation film, but should rather be mentioned alongside films such as Billy Wilder’s *Stalag 17* (1953). Trash (or ‘cult’?) director Uwe Boll adds his voice to those praising the film, suggesting that *Blitzkrieg* ‘should be screened in German schools to show German kids what the Nazis really did.’³⁸

The minimal plot of *Blitzkrieg* is artificially stretched over more than 130 minutes: *Blitzkrieg* focuses on Helmut³⁹ Schultz, Kommandant of the German POW camp Stalag 69, who narrates the majority of the events depicted in the film. Helmut is obsessed with the idea of improving upon the supposedly perfect German soldier by creating an ape/man-hybrid that would tear apart Allied soldiers in man-to-man combat, then rape and kill all the enemy’s women. A couple of days before the expected arrival of the Allied forces, a group of surviving Allied POWs and some USO girls overtake the camp, killing everyone in the camp apart from Helmut Schultz, who escapes to Argentina. After they arrive at the camp, Russian Allied forces decide that ‘[t]his camp shouldn’t be closed. We might need it to interrogate Neo-Nazis or other anarchists.’⁴⁰ Ten years later, some kind of task force breaks into Helmut Schultz’s house wishing to arrest him because of ‘crimes perpetuated against the Jewish people of Eastern Europe during World War II.’⁴¹ Helmut emphasizes that he has ‘never touched a

single Jew',⁴² but that his brother Heinrich, who 'currently works with the United States Government [...] did interrogations at Auschwitz.'⁴³ Helmut kills the two agents and a couple of other people on his escape route and hopes to find shelter in a church, but he is not aware that prior to turning to religion, the priest had been one of the first prisoners in Stalag 69 and lost his sexual potency due to Helmut's experiments. The priest kills Helmut in the middle of the church.

As an example of contemporary media production, it is not incredibly surprising that *Blitzkrieg* is filled with references to other media texts. For example, the film's subtitle alludes to the 1982 hardcore porn film *Stalag 69*, in which three Allied agents land in a Nazi camp and are taken prisoner. The ape-man comes right out of *La bestia in calore* (*The Beast in Heat*, a.k.a. *SS Hell Camp*, 1977). Candice's dance performance, which actress Tammy Dalton likens to Judy Garland in an interview, eerily resembles Lucia's Marlene-Dietrich-like bar-room song in *L'ultima orgia del III Reich* (*The Gestapo's Last Orgy*, 1977). Finally, at a point in the movie right after three prisoners have been shot at point-blank range for no obvious reason, Helmut says, in an allusion to *Apocalypse Now* (1979): 'Wolfgang, I truly love the sound of gunfire in the morning. It is the sound of victory.'⁴⁴ The plethora of intertextual references may seem paradoxical considering the otherwise simplistic nature of the film, but there is, indeed, some greater significance attached to these intertextual games. The film can be regarded as an investigation of naturalized assumptions concerning reality, and thus, implicitly, history and how (not) to represent the 'reality of history'. In fact, while this interpretation seems highly questionable at first, both the film's narrative structure and especially its ending provide evidence that supports this reading.

Like a number of Nazi sexploitation films of the past, the narrative of *Blitzkrieg* is situated on a number of spatio-temporal levels: the framing narrative takes place in Argentina in 1955. On this narrative level Helmut, the intradiegetic narrator, mainly tells the priest about his last few days in Stalag 69, seemingly seeking absolution, even though he believes that what he has done in the past was with the best of intentions, namely to advance the human race. I say 'mainly' because the extended flashback depicting the last few days of Stalag 69 in 1945 is repeatedly interrupted by other flashbacks to even earlier points in the past. For example, the narrative once moves back to the Röhm-Putsch in 1934, a flashback in which the homosexual

predisposition of Helmut and Wolfgang is uncovered. In another case, the audience is shown that Natasha, one of the female prisoners of Stalag 69, has been captured after castrating a Nazi soldier post coitum⁴⁵ and disposing of several others with a machine gun. On the other hand, the frame narrative includes events that Helmut could not know about. In part, one can argue that by narrating, Helmut willingly reconstructs the events, filling in the gaps with his speculations. However, in some cases, this argument does not work at all, e.g. when a dream of one of the American POWs appears in Helmut's narration.

As indicated above, the events that take place before Stalag 69 is liberated by Allied soldiers are entirely represented through the subjective voice of Helmut, the victimizer, who tells his story about experimenting on and tormenting his prisoners without emotion. This lack of emotion is emphasized by cinematic means as well. The medical experiments and tortures are usually visualized via Steadicam shots and long takes, implying a relatively objective point of view. The liberation of Stalag 69 is noteworthy in this context: after the camp has been liberated from the Germans, the arrival of the American soldiers is recorded with a handheld camera in black and white, giving an authentic 'newsreel feel' to this moment. Even though the earlier pseudo-objective pictures have already been undermined by the obvious unreliability of Helmut's narration, these documentary-like images depicting the arrival of the Americans finally undermine the 'reality' status of the earlier pictures. In combination with the fragmentation of narrative chronology, that is, the constant jumping back and forth between 1945 and 1955 — with some further jumps to 1934 and 1943 — this authentication device raises questions about historical validity. In contrast to earlier Nazi sexploitation movies, in which 'nonlinearity is about the construction of a historical simulacrum, which through the parallel existence of various eras should be endowed with a whiff of historical authenticity',⁴⁶ *Blitzkrieg* thus transforms 'history' and 'past' into diffuse concepts, creating a 'historical simulacrum' that is actually beyond the question of whether or not the depiction is, after all, 'true', canceling out the question of historical authenticity altogether.

The Third Reich and the Holocaust: Master-Narratives for the Twenty-first Century?

In a well-known phrase from *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-François Lyotard characterizes postmodernity by its ‘incredulity towards meta-narratives’.⁴⁷ Two years before Lyotard defined the postmodern condition in these words, Jean Baudrillard had already discussed the cinematic treatment of history. Starting from his central argument that, ‘[h]istory is our lost referential, that is to say our myth’,⁴⁸ Baudrillard writes: ‘Myth, chased from the real by the violence of history, finds refuge in cinema. Today, it is history itself that invades the cinema according to the same scenario — the historical stake chased from our lives by this sort of immense neutralization, which is dubbed peaceful coexistence on a global level, and pacified monotony on the quotidian level — this history exorcised by a slowly or brutally congealing society celebrates its resurrection in force on the screen, according to the same process that used to make lost myths live again.’⁴⁹ As we know from Roland Barthes, a function of myth is to ‘empty reality’,⁵⁰ a notion that resembles Baudrillard’s ‘neutralization’ quoted above. In short: myths are depoliticized speech, not so much in the sense that myths do not carry ideological meanings, but rather that these meanings are completely naturalized and thus pretend to be non-political. Today, these myths are both constructed and distributed through the mass media, neatly packaged for mass-market appeal. Nazi Germany is a welcome carrier of mythic messages, because its meaning seems so fixed: Nazis are evil. Furthermore, as Andreas Huyssen puts it, Nazi Germany is also representative of ‘Western civilization’s [...] constitutive inability to live in peace with difference and otherness, and to draw the consequences from the insidious relationship between enlightened modernity, racial oppression and organized violence.’⁵¹ Due to their seeming simplicity and their compatibility with old, established schemes of good vs. evil, Nazi Germany and the Holocaust have turned into myths, universal tropes, master-narratives, (negative) fantasies that are by now part of the collective consciousness of Western civilization.

In different ways, both the three Mood Pictures productions and *Blitzkrieg* emphasize the constructedness of this Nazi myth. The role-playing at work in BDSM, in which the submissive is actually the one in power, would in the most radical interpretation lead to a conclusion

that may cause a similar outcry as the one following Jean Baudrillard's claim that everybody had desired the 9/11 attacks.⁵² This most radical interpretation would be that all the peoples and groups oppressed and exterminated by the Nazis fantasized about and desired this treatment. Of course, I am not at all suggesting that this was the case. At the very least, however, the Nazi-themed BDSM films express the idea that the Nazis would not have been so powerful if the masses just did not play along in such an unresisting way. Furthermore, both *Gestapo* and especially *Blitzkrieg* highlight the idea that representations of historical events are exactly that: representations, reconstructions, signs that may point to a distant referent in the past, a referent that need not even evoke the Real that took place under the Nazi reign, but may rather allude to other representations of those events. Indeed, in our day and age, the myth of Nazi Germany that is perpetuated by the mass media has usurped the actual events that occurred more than half a century ago in such a way that the historical referent has been lost, not 'even though' but 'precisely because' it is repeatedly resurrected in popular culture. These fictional reincarnations do not even attempt to provide any 'real' connections to the past, but are rather exclusively driven by concerns of the solipsistic present. In our self-absorbed present, as implausible as it may seem, *Blitzkrieg* or any other representation of Nazi Germany discussed in this volume could very well serve to show the public 'what the Nazis really did'. Indeed, the question is not so much 'what is' but rather 'is there' actually a difference between restaging the atrocities of the Third Reich by presenting documentary footage and using an entirely fictional frame, since, at the end of the day, 'history is only accessible to us in narrative form.'⁵³

Notes

- 1 Here and in the following, 'hardcore BDSM' connotes graphically explicit BDSM (a compound acronym derived from the terms bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sadism and masochism) pornography. In contrast to 'standard' hardcore pornography, hardcore BDSM does not depict penetration, but rather focuses on the infliction of bodily pain. Arguably, the 'money shot' in hardcore BDSM is a close up of a person in pain or an actual wound on his or her body rather than the male orgasm known from 'standard' hardcore pornography. The genre is very much about power games and fantasies rather than actual power. The films discussed in the following center on questions of dominance and submission and sadism and masochism. A detailed discussion of these concepts is well beyond the scope of this contribution, but for a short introduction to hardcore BDSM, see chapter 7 of Linda Williams' *Hard Core*:

- Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'* Expanded Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). One thing that should be emphasized is the power that submissives have, because it is the submissive that can always stop the role-play if it goes too far.
- 2 In the signifying chain, the visual construction of Ilsa refers to yet other signifiers, namely representations of female Nazis in comics in the 1950s and the pulp novels known as Stalags that emerged in Israel at the time of the Eichmann Trial. For further details on Stalags, see Ari Libsker's 2007 documentary *Stalagim (Stalags: Holocaust and Pornography in Israel)*.
 - 3 See the contributions by Daniel H. Magilow, Marcus Stiglegger, Benedikt Eppenberger, James Ward, Robert von Dassanowsky, Michael D. Richardson and Elissa Mailänder in this volume.
 - 4 Omayra Cruz, 'Tits, Ass, and Swastikas: Three Steps Toward A Fatal Film Theory', in *Necronomicon Book Two: The Journal of Horror and Erotic Cinema*, ed. Andy Black, 89–98 (London: Creation, 1998), 95.
 - 5 Mikel J. Koven, "'The Film You Are About to See Is Based on Documented Fact': Italian Nazi Sexploitation Cinema", in *Alternative Europe: Eurotrash and Exploitation Cinema since 1945*, eds. Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik, 19–31 (London: Wallflower, 2004), 24.
 - 6 Marcus Stiglegger, *Sadiconazista: Faschismus und Sexualität im Film* (St. Augustin: Gardez!, 1999), 46. All translations mine.
 - 7 Koven, 24.
 - 8 Koven, 25.
 - 9 'Title Sequence', *Gestapo*, VOD, directed by 'Pedro' (Szolnok, Hungary: Mood Pictures, 2006).
 - 10 The 20 July Plot revolves around Claus von Stauffenberg's failed assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler on July 20, 1944. A bomb detonated in the *Wolfsschanze* during a military conference, but Hitler was hardly injured. Hitler was, however, infuriated by the plot. Gestapo investigations triggered by the 20 July Plot were carried out until after Hitler's death, and the Nazis used the occasion to arrest and kill many people suspected of oppositional sympathies. Some conspirators were given perfunctory trials before the *Volksgerichtshof*, which always decided in favor of the prosecution.
 - 11 'Title Sequence', *Gestapo*.
 - 12 Ibid.
 - 13 For details on the role of women in the SS, see e.g. Claudia Taake, *Angeklagt: SS-Frauen vor Gericht* (Oldenburg: BIS, 1998), 29–36.
 - 14 Williams, *Hard Core*, 197.
 - 15 Ibid.
 - 16 While in the last few years hardcore BDSM has become increasingly violent, and the number of films lacking happy endings after torturing scenes has increased at a similar pace, traditionally, at least, hardcore BDSM features scene closings in which all partners involved in the role play of torture drop character, embrace one another, and are happily together when the picture fades to black.
 - 17 Williams, *Hard Core*, 201–2.
 - 18 Williams, 201.
 - 19 Williams, 209.
 - 20 Williams mentions that in BDSM practice, men are more likely to be submissive. However, writing *Hard Core* as a sex-positive feminist academic

- during what is known as the Feminist Sex Wars or the Porn Wars, Linda Williams focuses on the liberating powers of female submission.
- 21 Though usual, if not a generic convention in BDSM movies, it may be mentioned that the dominants are always dressed while the submissives are topless, bottomless or totally nude, adding another level of domination.
 - 22 Granted, any act of BDSM is 'queer' in the sense of deviating from heteronormative sexuality, but the difference with these SS officers is that they occupy a space that in the BDSM community is referred to as 'switch', a practitioner that can take both the dominant and the submissive role and derive pleasure from it. In essence, a switch thus transgresses the binary opposition of 'dominant' versus 'submissive.' Thus a switch is at odds with normal BDSM practice, which is, in a very specific way, an example of queer if following the definition put forward by a number of proponents of queer theory, such as David Halperin, who in his *Saint Foucault* defines queer as follows: 'Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.' (61). In other words, a switch actually occupies a 'queerer' space than a dominant or submissive.
 - 23 It may be added that the second capo's whipping of the first capo takes place off-screen and is thus only heard, so it is not absolutely certain who is whipping whom. Furthermore, I cannot go into detail here, but it is noteworthy that in *Dr. Mengele*, hierarchization among the inmates becomes an issue as some of them turn into dominants (and thus occupy a similarly queer space between dominant and submissive as the female SS officers), whereas others are submissive throughout.
 - 24 Susan Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism', In *Under the Sign of Saturn*, 73–105 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), 103.
 - 25 Anne McClintock, 'Maid to Order: Commercial S/M and Gender Power', in *More Dirty Looks: Gender, Pornography and Power*, ed. Pamela C. Gibson, 237–53 (London: BFI, 2004), 237.
 - 26 McClintock, 237.
 - 27 McClintock, 237, emphasis in original.
 - 28 Robin Bauer, 'Zwischen Phantasie und Realität: Die Debatte um BDSM in queeren Räumen', in *QuerVerbindungen: Interdisziplinäre Annäherungen an Geschlecht, Sexualität, Ethnizität*, ed. Elisabeth Tuijder, 69–88 (Münster: LIT, 2008), 80.
 - 29 'Plot Scene 4', *Dr. Mengele*, VOD, directed by 'Pedro' (Szolnok, Hungary: Mood Pictures, 2005).
 - 30 Interestingly, Jessica Lee, who plays Irma in *Dr. Mengele*, is one of the prisoners punished in *Gestapo*.
 - 31 Valerie Steele, *Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 180.
 - 32 Sontag, 105.
 - 33 Stiglegger, 21.
 - 34 Sontag, 105.
 - 35 'Chapter 23', *Blitzkrieg: Escape from Stalag 69*, DVD, directed by Keith J. Crocker (Wild Eye Releasing, 2008).
 - 36 Sontag, 105.
 - 37 Ibid.
 - 38 DVD Cover, *Blitzkrieg: Escape from Stalag 69*.

- 39 The end credits actually read 'Helmet Schultz,' but I suppose it should be 'Helmut.' The various pronunciations of the name in the movie do not conclusively point in either direction.
- 40 'Chapter 26', *Blitzkrieg: Escape from Stalag 69*.
- 41 'Chapter 21', *Blitzkrieg: Escape from Stalag 69*.
- 42 As Mikel J. Koven states: 'Jews are conspicuously absent from these Nazi sexploitation films as signifiers[.] [...] [T]hese filmmakers seem shy about the ethnic/racial specificity of the Nazi programmes of genocide.' (28) In the three Mood Pictures productions, Jews are also absent; in *Blitzkrieg*, however, there is a Jew (tellingly only referred to as 'Jude'), who seems to be Helmut's stooge and benefits from the atrocities of war, as one brief scene indicates, in which the Jew is weighing his jewelry (which can be read as a meta-textual comment about stereotyping of Jews). After Stalag 69 has been liberated, Helmut's Russian camp spy attacks and kills the Jew in front of the Allied soldiers, who do not intervene at all, but rather prefer just to talk about possible interventions.
- 43 'Chapter 2', *Blitzkrieg: Escape from Stalag 69*.
- 44 'Chapter 8', *Blitzkrieg: Escape from Stalag 69*.
- 45 There is yet another castration scene in the film, namely when Dr Zuber (a woman) castrates a Russian POW, saying that 'inferior races' are easier to control if their animalistic desires are eliminated. Both may be a homage to the title character's nasty post-coital castration habit in *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (1974).
- 46 Stiglegger, 189.
- 47 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.
- 48 Jean Baudrillard, 'History: A Retro Scenario', in *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser, 43–48 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 43.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Roland Barthes, 'Myth Today', in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers, 109-159 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 143.
- 51 Andreas Huyssen, 'Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia', *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000): 24.
- 52 Jean Baudrillard, 'The Spirit of Terrorism', in *The Spirit of Terrorism*, trans. Chris Turner, 1–34 (New York: Verso, 2002), 5.
- 53 Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), 20.

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Selected Filmography

This filmography lists titles included in the preceding chapters as well as films that, broadly construed, are useful for understanding Nazisploitation. As such, it includes not only the most obvious and well-known examples of Nazisploitation cinema, but also many films that influenced the genre, were influenced by it, or that evince its themes, tropes and narrative conceits in significant ways. Moreover, this filmography includes representative (but not comprehensive) examples of pornographic and fetish-themed Nazisploitation films.

In that many of these films were released under multiple titles in different markets, this filmography provides both the original titles and, when available, the best-known English-language titles (in parentheses), in addition to lead production company or companies, year of release and director. For films that had no official English-language release, a translation of the title is provided in quotation marks.

- 5 per l'inferno (Five for Hell)*. Filmstar and Società Ambrosiana Cinematografica (SAC), 1969. Director: Gianfranco Parolini.
- 100 Jahre Adolf Hitler: Die letzte Stunde im Führerbunker (100 Years of Adolph Hitler)*. DEM Film, 1989. Director: Christoph Schlingensiefel.
- L'âbime des morts vivants (Oasis of the Zombies)*. Eurociné, 1981. Director: Jesus Franco.
- After Mein Kampf? The Story of Adolph Hitler*. Association British Picture Corporation and Welwyn Studios, 1940. Director: Norman Lee.
- Al di là del bene e del male (Beyond Good and Evil)*. Clesi Cinematografica, Lotar Film, Les Productions Artistes Associés, and Artemis, 1977. Director: Liliana Cavani.
- The American Nightmare*. Minerva Pictures, 2000. Director: Adam Simon.
- Eine Armee Gretchen ('An Army of Gretchens')*. (*Fräuleins in Uniforms*, a.k.a. *Fräulein Without a Uniform*, a.k.a. *She-Devils of the SS*). Elite Film, 1973. Director: Erwin C. Dietrich.
- Auschwitz*. Boll Kino, 2010. Director: Uwe Boll.
- Le bambole del führer ('The Führer's Dolls')*. Capital Film, 1995. Director: Joe D'Amato.
- The Berlin Affair*. Cannon Italia and Kinofilm, 1985. Director: Liliana Cavani.
- La bestia in calore (SS Hell Camp a.k.a. The Beast in Heat)*. Eterna Films and Sonora Films, 1977. Director: Luigi Batzella.
- The Big Red One*. Lorimar Productions, 1980. Director: Samuel Fuller.
- The Black Gestapo*. Bryanston, 1975. Director: Lee Frost.
- Blitzkrieg: Escape from Stalag 69*. Cinefear, 2008. Director: Keith Crocker.

- Blood Creek*. Gold Circle Films, 2009. Director: Joel Schumacher.
- Blue Ice*. Caballero Control Corporation Home Video and Gilt Edge Pictures, 1989. Director: Phillip Marshak.
- The Boys from Brazil*. Incorporated Television Company, Lew Grade, and Producers Circle, 1978. Director: Franklin J. Schaffner.
- Bordel SS (SS Bordello)*. Thanatos, 1978. Director: José Bénazéraf.
- The Bunker*. Millenium Pictures, 2001. Director: Rob Green.
- Cabaret*. Allied Artists Pictures and ABC Pictures, 1972. Director: Bob Fosse.
- La caduta degli dei (The Damned)*. Ital-Noleggio Cinematografico, Praesidens, Pegaso and Eichberg Film, 1969. Director: Luchino Visconti.
- Captain America: The First Avenger*. Marvel Enterprises, 2011. Director: Joe Johnston.
- Casa privata per le SS (SS Girls)*. Distribuzione Associate Regionali, 1977. Director: Bruno Mattei.
- El clon de Hitler (Hitler's Clone)*. La Raza Mex Producciones, 2003. Director: Christian González.
- Il conformista (The Conformist)*. Mars Film Produzione, Roma and Marianne Productions, 1970. Director: Bernardo Bertolucci.
- Convoi de filles (East of Berlin)*. Eurociné, 1978. Director: Pierre Chevalier.
- Cross of Iron*. EMI Films, Incorporated Television Company, Radiant Film, Rapid Film, and Terra-Filmkunst, 1977. Director: Sam Peckinpah.
- The Cut-Throats*. 1969. Director: John Hayes.
- Dabide no hoshi (Star of David: Hunting for Beautiful Girls)*. Nikkatsu, 1979. Director: Norifumi Suzuki.
- Dead at the Box Office*. Throbbing Temple Productions, 2006. Director: Shawn Stutler.
- Dead Knight*. Cine Excel Entertainment, 2006. Directors: Mark Polonia, John Polonia, and Jon McBride.
- The Death King (Der Todesking)*. Manfred O. Jelinski, 1990. Director: Jörg Buttgerit.
- Le deportate della sezione special SS (Deported Women of the SS Special Section)*. Nucleo Internazionale Produzioni Cinematografiche, 1976. Director: Rino Di Silvestro.
- The Dirty Dozen*. MKH, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and Seven Arts Productions, 1967. Director: Robert Aldrich.
- The Dirty Dozen: The Deadly Mission*. Jadran Film and MGM/UA Television, 1987. Director: Lee H. Katzin.
- The Dirty Dozen: The Fatal Mission*. Jadran Film, MGM Television, and Radiotelevisione Italiana, 1988. Director: Lee H. Katzin.
- The Dirty Dozen: Next Mission*. MGM/UA Television, 1985. Director: Lee H. Katzin.
- Død snø (Dead Snow)*. Euforia Film, Barentsfilmm AS, Miho Film, and Yellow Bastard Productions, 2009. Director: Tommy Wirkola.
- Dr. Mengele*. Mood Pictures, 2005. Director: 'Pedro.'
- Elsa Fräulein SS a.k.a. Fräulein Kitty (Captive Women 4)*. Eurociné, 1977. Director: Patrice Rhomm.
- Il était une fois le diable (Devil Story)*. Condor Films Productions, 1985. Director: Bernard Launois.
- Der ewige Jude ('The Eternal Jew')*. Deutsche Filmgesellschaft, 1940. Director: Fritz Hippler.

- Experiment 17*. Crawling Chaos Pictures, 2005. Director: Christian Matzke.
- Experiment 18: Das Hexenhammer-Projekt* ('Experiment 18: Project Witch's Hammer'). Crawling Chaos Pictures, 2007. Director: Christian Matzke.
- Der Fan (Trance)*. Barbara Moore Workshop, 1982. Director: Eckhart Schmidt.
- Force Ten from Navarone*. Columbia Pictures, Navarone Productions, American International Pictures, Mondo Film 78, Open Road, and TBC, 1978. Director: Guy Hamilton.
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Notes on Contributors

Elizabeth Bridges is Assistant Professor of German at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee. Her research focuses on popular, literary and visual representations of science and technology in German culture. She has published on topics such as the intersection of gender and technology in Berlin's 'Love Parade', neuroscientific aspects of Kleist's 'Marionettentheater', and the folkloric Uncanny in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. She is currently at work on a monograph called *Die Mensch-Maschine: Technologies of Replication and Reproduction in the German Imagination*.

David Church is a PhD candidate in Communication and Culture at Indiana University, where he studies fan cultures, exploitation cinema, and cultural memory. He has edited *Playing with Memories: Essays on Guy Maddin* (Michigan State University Press, 2009), and contributed essays to *Cinema Journal*, *Journal of Film and Video*, *Disability Studies Quarterly*, *Participations*, *Offscreen*, *Senses of Cinema*, and several edited collections on cinema culture.

Benedikt Eppenberger graduated with an MA in History and German Literature from the University of Bern. He currently works as an editor for Swiss Television (SF) and as an author and freelance film critic with a special interest in European trash cinema. He is co-author of *Mädchen, Machos und Moneten — die unglaubliche Geschichte des Schweizer Filmunternehmers Erwin C. Dietrich* (Verlag Scharfe Stiefel, 2006). He lives and works in Zürich, Switzerland.

Michael Fuchs is a research and teaching associate in the Department of American Studies, University of Graz (Austria). He is the co-editor of *Landscapes of Postmodernity: Concepts and Paradigms of Critical Theory* (LIT Publishers, 2010). Currently, he is co-editing two books, *ConFiguring*

America: Iconic Figures, Visuality, and the American Identity (forthcoming from Intellect Books) and *Time, Space, and Place: Constructing American Identities*, and finishing his PhD thesis on self-reference in horror movies.

Jeff Hayton is a graduate student in the History Department at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is completing his comparative dissertation on the punk subculture in divided Germany entitled '*Culture from the Margins: Punk Rock, Authenticity, and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany*'. His next project will further explore the imbrication of Nazism and popular culture, and is tentatively titled *Digital Nazis: Video Games and the Visual Representation of National Socialism*.

Sven Jüngerkes finished his PhD thesis titled *Deutsche Besatzungsverwaltung in Lettland 1941–1945. Eine Kommunikations- und Kulturgeschichte nationalsozialistischer Organisationen* in 2009 at the University of Konstanz (Germany). He currently conducts research for the Berlin-based Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations about West German strategic trade policies towards the Comecon and China during the 20th century. His fields of study include the history of National Socialism, bureaucracies, and organizational theory.

Alicia Kozma is Adjunct Lecturer in the Department of Film and Media Studies at Hunter College in New York City, where she works within the areas of cult television, audience and fan communities, and film genre studies. Her teaching and research encompass exploitation film and its various subgenres, female fan communities, cult studies, and the role of American normative values in the construction of cinematic identities.

Daniel H. Magilow is Assistant Professor of German at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. His teaching and research focus on German visual culture in the twentieth century. Aside from several articles about film, photography, Nazi Germany, and the Holocaust, he is also the author of the forthcoming *The Photography of Crisis: The Photo Essays of Weimar Germany* (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012) and the translator and editor of *In Her Father's Eyes: A Childhood Extinguished by the Holocaust* (Rutgers University Press, 2008).

Elissa Mailänder is a lecturer of German Studies at the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* (EHESS) and the coordinator of the PhD program at the *Centre interdisciplinaire d'études et de recherches sur l'Allemagne* (CIERA) in Paris. Her teaching and research focus on the history of Nazism, violence and sexuality. Aside from her recently published PhD research project *Workaday Violence: Female Guards at Lublin-Majdanek (1942–1944)* (Hamburger Edition, 2009), she has published several articles on perpetrator history and the structures, mechanisms and dynamics of violence in Nazi concentration and extermination camps.

Michael D. Richardson is Associate Professor of German and Chair of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Ithaca College. His research focuses on German literature and film, as well as the representation of Hitler in popular culture. He has written and presented on German film, from Weimar to the present. He is co-editor of *Visualizing the Holocaust: Documents, Aesthetics, Memory* (Camden House, 2008) and co-editor of the forthcoming *New History of German Cinema* (Camden House, 2012).

Marcus Stiglegger teaches film studies at the University of Siegen, Germany. His writings include books and articles on film aesthetics, history and theory. His dissertation *Sadiconazista. Faschismus und Sexualität im Film* (Gardez! Verlag, 1999) will be published in English in Spring 2012 as *'Nazi Camp': Fascist Aesthetics in Cinema & Popular Culture*. He has also authored *Ritual & Verführung. Schaulust, Spektakel & Sinnlichkeit im Film* (Bertz + Fischer, 2006) on the seduction theory of film, and is the editor of the cultural magazine *:Ikonen:* (www.ikonemagazin.de).

Craig This is a lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Geography, and Social Work at Sinclair Community College (Dayton, Ohio). He previously published 'Observing Culture' in the edited volume *Sociology Through Active Learning: Student Exercises* (Pine Forge Press, 2008). He recently launched the Project Read Comic Book Literacy Project in conjunction with his 'Comic Books and American Culture' courses to promote literacy using comic books.

Kristin T. Vander Lugt's research focuses on the legacy of German fascism in postwar memorial culture, in particular with respect to

depictions of the dead and undead body. She has written on the plastinated bodies of Gunther von Hagens, the schlock horror of Jörg Buttgerreit, Christoph Schlingensief's cultural politics of gore, and Elfriede Jelinek's theater of death. She is currently completing a monograph on German horror with the working title *Horrific Germany: Haunted Screens from Lotte Eisner to the Hitler Channel*.

Robert von Dassanowsky is Professor of German and Film and director of the Film Studies Program at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. He is cofounder of the International Alexander Lernet-Holenia Society and editor of *The Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*, 2nd ed. (Gale, 1999). His most recent books are *Austrian Cinema: A History, New Austrian Film* (co-editor with Oliver C. Speck, McFarland Press, 2007), and *Hugo von Hofmannsthal's Der Schwierige Revisited* (co-editor, Iudicium, 2011). He is currently at work on a collection examining Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (Continuum, 2012) and is active as an independent film producer.

James J. Ward is Professor of History and Co-Director of the Honors Program at Cedar Crest College, Allentown, PA. His teaching and research areas are modern European history, German history, urban history, and film and history. For the last two years he has taught an Honors course on 'Zombies — From the Living Dead to the Posthuman,' in which *Shock Waves* is one of the films students watch.

Christiane Wienand is a Research Fellow in the Department of German at University College London (UK). In her post-doctoral project she is researching transnational reconciliation activities and activists in Europe and Israel since 1945. Her work focuses on the history of memory in Germany and Europe after World War II. She is currently preparing for publication her PhD thesis, *Performing Memory: Returned German Prisoners of War in Divided and Reunited Germany*.

Mimmi Woisnitza is a doctoral candidate in Germanic Studies at the University of Chicago. She is currently preparing a dissertation on Theater and Imagination in Lessing, Schiller and Kleist, which explores the general interest in the *mise-en-scène* of genre conventions in the performing arts. More recently she extended her research into the history of Hollywood comedies.

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