A Not So Foreign Affair

Fascism, Sexuality, and the Cultural Rhetoric of American Democracy

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She was the most dreaded Nazi of them all. With her ‘Black Widows’ she committed crimes so terrible—even the SS feared her. Until an American POW uses his sexual prowess to combat her insatiable appetite and bring her to her knees.—Jacket cover for *Ilse, She Wolf of the SS* (1974)

Historian Claudia Koonz notes that despite the massive amount of scholarly attention paid to Nazi Germany, women supporters of the regime are rarely the object of study. She writes, “Women do not appear as historical actors. If we think of women at all, we imagine masses of plain Eva Braun with a Leni Riefenstahl here and there, or perhaps an Irma Grese (the infamous ‘bitch of Auschwitz’) in riding boots and SS uniform.” These three images of “Nazi women” each serve a function in anti-Nazi rhetoric, often resulting in an understanding of women’s political subjectivity that codes women’s political power exclusively through sexuality.

The soft porn exploitation film *Ilse, She Wolf of the SS*, for instance, draws from the last image that Koonz names. Pulling through the thinnest of historical threads, the film turns the horror of Grese into an occasion for a story of American sexual conquest of this “most dreaded Nazi,” crafting an absurdly antifeminist tale. The cover art on the video jacket of the film features Ilse in an iconic Lola Lola pose: feet planted firmly apart and arms akimbo (figs. 15 and 17). In subsequent films in
the series, Ilse (always played by Dyanne Thorne) follows up her concentration camp doctor role with a series of other authoritarian figures: Ilse, Harem Keeper of the Oil Sheiks (Don Edmunds, 1976), Ilse, the Wicked Warden (Jess Franco, 1978), and Ilse, Tigress of Siberia (Jean LaFleur, 1979). Each time Ilse is imaged in the same iconic pose—only her costume and accessories have changed.

While surely the plot is not the “point” of such productions, the rhetorical function of the sexy authoritarian woman still illuminates the broader cultural role such figures can play. Each of these roles is part of an erotic vocabulary that posits women’s sexual authority in place of political authority, illustrating in exaggerated form the interchangeableness of each setting. That the series begins with Ilse as a Nazi speaks to the ways in which the Nazi scenario serves as the prototype for the
subsequent variations. The Ilsa series in this way reflects a postmodern textual practice that disregards contextual specificity and drains signifiers of content; but the Ilsa series also marks a new moment in the ongoing history of rhetorical practices that have linked sexuality and politics in the wake of World War II.

As an extreme representation of what a Nazi woman is and what her image means, Ilsa serves as an excessive version of the sexy Nazi icon embodied in Marlene Dietrich. Indeed, Ilsa’s image makes overt the more embedded associations that produced the icon of Lola Lola as she became emblematic of the psychosexual dynamics of fascism. Unlike the Dietrich image, however, Ilsa does not embody the doubleness (as fascist and as champion of democracy) that troubles the direct links she forges between politics and sexuality. Instead, the film itself manoeuvres a different doubleness through the exploitation genre. Ilsa takes the one side of Lola Lola’s iconic qualities (the woman as fascist) to such an extreme that her excessiveness as sexual/political evil is instanciated as camp. The socially conservative content of her image is not thereby dispelled; rather, it is recontextualized as an icon available for (albeit tasteless) textual play. Ilsa, _She Wolf of the SS_ is thus a film that reveals two levels of post-1960s uses of sexualized Nazism: (1) as a conservative rhetoric that continues to demonize all but highly traditional sexual relations and (2) as a marker of the freedoms of expression upon which such pornographic texts rely.

First, let us address the content. The plot of _Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS_ turns in two directions: The first involves the German-American prisoner of war (whose name is Wolf) mentioned on the jacket of the video, who escapes Ilsa’s usual practice of castrating the male inmates she sleeps with due to his remarkable staying power. The rather obvious equation of her sexual insatiability with fascist power lust and imperialism is countermanded by Wolf’s sexual prowess as a parallel to American national invincibility. The film expresses this plainly in the use of audio, ostensibly coming from a nearby radio, announcing that “enemy aircraft” (the Allied forces) are approaching, just as Wolf promises to satisfy Ilsa, saying, “you’ll beg me to stop.” The second plotline parallels the first, as Ilsa subjects a particularly willful female inmate to a series of sexual tortures in the service of her “feminist” experiments. Through these experiments, Ilsa hopes to prove that women have a higher pain threshold and should be granted more power in the Nazi hierarchy. Here it is the inmate, Anna, who refuses to beg Ilsa to stop—ironically thereby serving Ilsa’s aims.

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The film's antifeminism is thus also twofold: Ilza (the "she wolf") must be made into a sexual submissive to Wolf in order to be vanquished, and her sadistic cruelty is linked to her intertwined fascist-feminist project. In this sense, it is feminism that must be vanquished in order to ensure democracy, making Ilza a prescient prototype for the feminazi of the contemporary American right-wing imagination. As in contemporary uses of the feminazi, antigay rhetoric is also deployed in the service of the film's political battle, as Ilza's "experiments" are coded as lesbian sex wherein Ilza roughly inserts objects into Anna's (off-screen) vagina while leering into her eyes. The parallel plot structure is decidedly sexist, too, as the male protagonist is active and the female passive: Wolf neutralizes Ilza through sexual dominance, while Anna can only resist Ilza's sexual sadism and finally dies before exacting revenge.

Now, to the form. Clearly Ilza, She Wolf of the SS is part of the ground-swell of pornographic depictions of Nazism that were all the rage in the early 1970s, and so the rather campy extremes depicted in this film need to be taken into account even as they reflect a broad range of conservative political discourses that, in their less exploitation-oriented forms, have served central rhetorical functions in defining political issues in the last three decades. Because of the obvious lasciviousness of the genre and its spirit of sexual libertarianism, perhaps this rhetoric is ultimately undermined. It is thus not the vaguely Lola Lola–like figure embodied in Ilza who expresses doubleness here; instead, it is the entire practice of sexualizing the Nazi scenario.

Many cultural theorists who have examined the resurgence of images of Nazism in the 1970s assert that fascism thematizes a burgeoning postmodern sensibility, foregrounding spectacle over substance and circulating signs without the burden of history. This use of Nazism has not, as these critics would agree, entirely drained the phenomenon of political content. Whether as acts of "political bad faith," or reflecting a "simultaneous desire for absolute submission and total freedom," critics have most often looked, however, at the overall appeal of images of fascism rather than at the specific ways in which they might be deployed for a political rhetoric about sexuality. I argue that both general and specific analyses are necessary.

Susan Sontag links the sexualization of Nazism with spectacle, claiming that "between sadomasochism and fascism there is a natural link. 'Fascism is theater,' as Genet said, as is sadomasochistic sexuality: to be involved in sadomasochism is to take part in a sexual theater, a staging of
sexuality. The psychosexual theories of fascism that linked it to sadomasochism in the course of the 1930s and 1940s are here deployed as evidence of a theatricality that resonates with the postmodern present. When Sontag asks, "Why has Nazi Germany, which was a sexually repressive society, become erotic?" it is a question that rightly identifies a renewed and highly sexual interest in the phenomenon. But it is also a question that neglects the longer rhetorical history behind it. Sontag writes, "If the message of fascism has been neutralized by an aesthetic view of life, its trappings have been sexualized," wherein she assumes that the sexualization of Nazism follows a process by which the political specificity of its politics is drained. While on some level this assessment holds true as the uses of Nazism as a rhetorical rather than strictly historical phenomenon proliferate, this profligacy also speaks to the ways in which Nazi—and anti-Nazi—politics have sexualized politics all along. The dramatic increase in the invocation of Nazism as a sexual scenario is connected not only with sexual libertarianism, "an oppressive freedom of choice in sex," as Sontag puts it, but also with the complex ways these scenarios connect with feminism and antifeminism and gay rights and the persecution of homosexuals, in short, with the history of sexual politics and the sexual rendering of politics, which do indeed retain a prurient and exploitable interest in detailing sexual/political offenses but also continue to serve a central function in American political culture.

A completely different example of the use of World War II as a scenario for sexual politics, for instance, is The Desert Peach, a comic book series by Donna Barr. The series revolves around an imagined pacifist gay brother of German General Erwin Rommel, the Desert Fox. Pfirsch (peach) is a kind, gentle, and effeminate man who comes out while serving as an officer in Africa. According to Barr, Comics Journal gave the series a positive review in 1991, hailing "the Peach [as] 'a truly wonderful gay role model,' [sic] and the book itself as a work of 'confident, audacious, and utterly singular humanity.' " Fans of the comic have sent in drawings featuring Pfirsch as a member of a gay nuclear family (fig. 18) or as a catalyst in antiwar activism (fig. 19). Coming much later in the legacy of post-1960s uses of Nazism in sexual politics, this comic presents an opposite pole of rhetorical uses of the common association of Nazism with homosexuality—where the gay German officer is not a Nazi at all (building on the historical distinction between the army and the ss) and is indeed the hero of the comic's largely pacifist message.

Clearly, between Ilisa and Pfirsch a great range of political rhetorics can
be invoked through even campy images of sexualized Nazis: from the dominant depictions that ally Nazism with sexual deviance to those that invert even this. None of these texts endorses fascism; all of them, however, use sexuality to different political ends.

As in 1948, when Billy Wilder’s film *A Foreign Affair* and Siegfried Kracauer’s book *From Caligari to Hitler* presented very different visions of the political function of the Lola Lola icon, so the various texts that deploy this icon (or Nazism more broadly) in the new proliferation of “sexy Nazi” images of the 1970s also put her to a variety of rhetorical uses. Indeed, the two films that Sontag mentions as enacting a “solemn eroticizing of fascism,” Luchino Visconti’s *The Damned* (1969) and Liliiana Cavani’s *The Night Porter* (1974), invoke the Dietrich/Lola Lola icon to different ends. In *The Damned*, she appears as part of a drag performance by the film’s central character, reflecting both his decadence (transgressing the boundaries of gender) and his Oedipal irresolution (signaling perversion), which serve as part of the film’s explanation for his becoming a fascist. In *The Night Porter*, she appears as a cabaret
performer in a concentration camp, muddying the boundaries between victims and perpetrators of Nazi political crimes. Critics have either panned or praised these films, depending on what sort of political project they imagine them to be staging.

Boundary blurring is often the characteristic of the Dietrich/Lola Lola icon that marks her as politically troubling. But, depending on the aims of the text in which she appears (or the aims of the critic interpreting the text), this blurring may or may not be seen as liberating in the postmodern sense. There are two major trajectories that the icon (and hence this chapter) follows, which characterize political sexuality in the postmodern moment. One focuses on the Oedipal underpinnings of the figure, and the other focuses on boundary transgression, especially with respect to gender. In the former, there are multiple narratives spun out of either psychical or actual acts of incest, which reflect larger cultural negotiations about the status of the “democratic” family. In the latter, there are multiple narratives spun out of either liberatory rhet-

Fig. 19. The Desert Peach as a poster boy for pacifism. Drawing by Pia Guerra, characters by Donna Barr. (Copyright Pia Guerra, TM Donna Barr.)
orics of transgression as a positive act or conservative rhetorics insisting on boundary fortification.

While perhaps neutralizing Nazism’s specific politics, these films (including even *Lola*) narrate and visualize larger trends in the rhetorical function of political sexuality in Western democratic culture. The postmodern sensibility of these representations does not drain politics; rather, it gives it form. This chapter aims to catalog the broad strains in these myriad uses and so point to the ways in which, as the centrality of sexuality to political rhetoric has become more overt, fascism has continued to be rhetorically central to the ongoing process of defining democracy over the last thirty years.

**The Proliferation of Sexualized Nazis: Lola Lola after the 1960s**

The political uses of the Lola Lola icon since the late 1960s bring together several threads of argument examined in the course of this book. Following on the logic of nationalist melodrama, the icon has sometimes served as an emblem of that which threatens the family or, following the logic of national psychobiography, she has served as a marker of Oedipal trouble, gender ambiguity, and the assorted perversions that stand against “healthy” democratic political subjectivity. In her more recent incarnations, she has also come to embody renewed negotiations of both of these trajectories over a postmodern terrain that often valorizes these previously demonized transgressions. Postmodernism, with its celebration of the ineffectivity of boundaries and binaries and its purported de-Oedipalization of families, may have provided the conditions for the icon’s resurgence. As a political icon, then, she can be deployed either in the service of this celebration or as a cause for heightened anxieties and hence the fortification of boundaries, binaries, and the Oedipal family. The films that deploy the Dietrich/Lola Lola icon are often caught between celebration and anxiety, mapping the terrain of political sexuality that she inhabits.

From the conservative side, concerns about the erosion of boundaries derive from the history of national discourse, which stakes much national imagery on a logic of difference and exclusion: “Othering” in Homi Bhabha’s formulation. By preserving these boundaries, the nation is then understood to be well ordered (an association of national order with strict gender dimorphism and the regulation of sexual contact, for instance). Hence, in building the binary of fascism/democracy,
wartime and immediate postwar anti-Nazi films often characterized Nazism as having violated gender boundaries, despite the fact that Nazism extolled gender difference to an extreme. That Lola Lola’s first screen reappearance without Dietrich should be a drag performance speaks to this legacy of associating fascism with gender inversion and homosexuality as well as to the history of Lola Lola specifically.

Following the logic of abjection as defined by psychoanalytic theorist Julia Kristeva, violence and sex both share symbolic power due to their dissolution of boundaries between bodies and between control and the loss thereof. Abjection is the visceral rejection of those traces of this dissolution, either in the form of bodily fluids or with respect to the social body and hence the rejection of women, cross-dressing, homosexuality, and miscegenation. Kristeva argues that eroticism stands at the opposite pole from abjection and is hence closely tied thereto. The dual nature of images of sexualized Nazis, as erotic or as abject, is thus linked to the anti-Nazi displacement or merger of Nazism’s violence with sex.

Klaus Theweleit has suggested that fascism itself functions by way of abjection, as he reads a rejection of sex and an embrace of purity and death in the writings of proto-Nazi Freikorps members. The Damned stages its fascist character Martin’s development into a full-blown Nazi by way of Theweleit’s portrait. While the Lola Lola performance introduces the audience to Martin, this scene also serves as a bookend with the last shots of the film, wherein Martin, after having consummated his always too close relationship with his seductive mother and given her no choice but to commit suicide, is finally pictured in uniform giving a Nazi salute. In Theweleit’s theory, sex would not be the operative desire here but rather Martin’s desire to eradicate that which causes him anxiety: violence rather than sex. In Visconti’s film, the drag performance sets the stage for Martin’s transformation and indicates his immaturity and perversion, but he is not fully converted to Nazism until he has completed this substitution.

Film historian Annette Insdorf writes that “Despite The Damned’s numerous scenes of murder and sexual perversion (rape, incest, pedophilia, transvestism), it constitutes a historically faithful tapestry of the rise of Nazism.” It is, however, the inclusion of the former that marks this film’s engagement with psychosexual theories of Nazism, toward which, as Insdorf also notes, filmmaker Visconti feels some ambivalence. The scene in which Martin “cavorts in Dietrich drag while singing one of her numbers from The Blue Angel” marks a reinforcement of the connection of decadence and fascism, but it also presents the specta-
cle of the drag performance not merely for abjection but also for fasci-
cination.\textsuperscript{17} Lola Lola thus inhabits a region between desire and abjection in this anti-Nazi film, establishing the general problematic of the 1970s cycle of Lola Lola incarnations.

*The Damned*’s location of Lola Lola/Martin as ensconced in a family dynamic is also a new placement for the icon. In Dietrich’s embodiment, Lola Lola mostly functions as a consolidation of fascism’s seductive-
ness. In Martin, she appears as a symptom of Oedipal fallout. The Italian cycle of films, including *The Night Porter* and Bernardo Bertolucci’s *The Conformist* (1971), all claim to address present-day fears of a rightist resurgence but do so through highly sexualized scenarios.\textsuperscript{18} In this choice, all appear to be influenced by leftist theories of fascism, which see it as a “postpatriarchal” movement in which the state has replaced the father’s traditional role, preventing the formation of an ego-fortified subjectivity from which political critique can arise. This fascist subject is coded as either latent or overtly homosexual or grasping to stage an Oedipal drama that did not adequately transpire within the family itself.

In the U.S., films using Nazism as a sexual scenario often engaged variants of these ideas as well, although here they were generally not addressed to fears of a rightist resurgence per se. Instead, American films thematized contemporary political crises as reflected in a culture of self-involvement, lack of political commitment, and sexual upheaval (including anxieties about a rising divorce rate, feminism, gay liberation, and sexual experimentation). Films like *The Formula* (John Avildsen, 1980) explicitly narrate a link between the 1970s and Nazi Germany, while films like *Just a Gigolo* (David Hemmings, 1979) present these links in terms of the era’s parallel components: political turmoil, sexual decadence, and a lack of direction for men returning from war. Both films feature references to the Weimar cabaret as a site of political contention. In *The Formula*, images of Nazi atrocities are projected on the wall behind slinky dancers in a 1970s Berlin bar, while in *Just a Gigolo* Dietrich herself makes a cameo appearance as the madam for whom the protagonist (David Bowie) peddles his sexual wares.\textsuperscript{19}

In the latter film, the protagonist is not a Nazi or proto-Nazi, as in the Italian films, but is apolitical. He returns from World War I only to find that his family home has become a brothel. As his father is suffering from hysterical paralysis contracted when he heard of Germany’s defeat, his only option for making money is prostituting himself to either wealthy middle-aged divorcees or homosexual Nazis. The family has thus been corrupted by decadence, the father rendered impotent by
defeat, and the war veteran reduced to prostitution; economic and political crises are primarily coded in sexual terms. Bowie’s character shows no sign of interest in either Nazi ideology or its communist alternative, as these two factions engage in peripheral street fighting, yet he is nonetheless claimed as a martyr by the Nazis after his entirely accidental death. It is an ending through which the film seems to suggest that the hapless participants in this sexual/political madness are connected to the rise of fascism as much as those who have political opinions.

This type of character at the center of a story about Weimar sexual decadence is the culmination of a series of characters who are all, in one fashion or another, derivative of Christopher Isherwood’s Sally Bowles, who represents the problem of political naïveté. The primary Sally Bowles character of the 1970s is of course her most direct rendering in Bob Fosse’s film version of Cabaret (1972), but she is also to be found in more coded form in The Serpent’s Egg (Ingmar Bergman, 1978) and Lili Marleen (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1981). Indeed, the lead character in Lili Marleen is a hybrid of the Lola Lola and Sally icons, as she becomes a celebrity among Nazis but claims “I’m only singing a song.” She does not see a contradiction between her desire to help her Jewish boyfriend and his resistance organization and her status as an icon for the Nazis.

Willie, the Lola Lola/Sally character in Lili Marleen (Hanna Schygulla), takes the doublessness that Dietrich’s real anti-Nazism lent to the Lola Lola icon to a more direct level: Dietrich, after all, never worked for the Nazis and only played a Nazi icon in Hollywood. Although both the fictional Willie and the real Dietrich sing “Lili Marleen,” they do so from opposite sides of the conflict. This move drew fire from some critics, who consequently saw Fassbinder’s film as making excuses for non-Nazi Germans who collaborated with the Nazis. It is the inverse of the criticism leveled at The Night Porter, where once again the cabaret singer appears but this time singing a song for her captors. Her song, “Wenn ich mir was Wünschen Dürfte” (If I Could Wish for Something), is again a song that Dietrich recorded—in 1930, before the Nazis came to power—as written by Friedrich Holländer, composer for The Blue Angel. The Night Porter invokes the Dietrich icon to characterize moral ambiguity, a common practice, but as the reference seems to implicate a victim of the Nazis, the invocation parallels the equally unconscionable gesture of exonerating a Nazi collaborator in Lili Marleen.

Indeed, The Night Porter drew harsh criticism for crossing an already tenuous line in the use of Nazism as a sexual scenario, a line from which
the other films had, at least on this count, steered clear. While many of these films share an ongoing engagement with the psychosexual reading of fascism that grew out of wartime political psychology, criticism was most harsh when films shifted too far from smearing the Nazis. This line drawing can be seen in a comparison of the critical reception of Cabaret and The Night Porter.

Most reviews of Cabaret praised the film’s political project, if not everything about the production, with many commenting on the possible political warning the film issued in its forging of parallels between contemporary U.S. culture and the Germany of the early 1930s. A review that appeared in Variety, for instance, saw the film as “depicting disillusion and despair, a retreat from reality, a political unawareness and naivete, and all the other manifestations of a population ripe for radicalization from either pole,” while Judith Crist of New York magazine described it as “a compassionate story of people trapped by their own indifference and slowly contaminated by their lack of involvement.” The Night Porter, on the other hand, was not initially thought by American reviewers to reflect any such contemporary criticism, despite Cavani’s track record as a leftist documentarian. Instead, critics called the film a “piece of junk” (Vincent Canby), complained that its “porno-profundity is humanly and aesthetically offensive” (Pauline Kael), and described it as “eerily frivolous” (Geoffrey Minniss). Film scholar Henry Giroux dismissed it as “a thinly-disguised fascist propaganda film that glorifies sadism, brutality and exaggerated machismo.” Most reviews were more dismissive than alarmist, as evidenced in Stanley Kauffmann’s comment that Cavani is “apparently humorless and, in a basic sense, stupid. Only a humorless person could so often cross over into the ridiculous; only a stupid one could believe that all this sexual-homicidal blantancy was symbolically illuminating.” Charles Champlin, writing for the Los Angeles Times, compared The Night Porter with Cabaret as follows: “Cabaret dealt with a decadent and poisonous time and place, but it kept its own perspective and became a strong, implicit comment on its own material. The Night Porter, which in a sense updates the same strain of decadence, is by contrast a sweaty, kinky undertaking which merely exploits its subject matter and defies belief right from the beginning.”

Minority opinions on the relative merits of these two films, however, immediately began to invert their political value, signaling thereby the development of a new, perhaps postmodern, sensibility about sexual imagery and images of Nazism. Stephen Farber, writing for the New York Times, writes that audiences watching Cabaret are “probably quite
willing to accept the neat, unexamined parallels between sexual dissipation and Nazi brutality, parallels that seem equally dubious in *The Damned.* Farber sees *Cabaret*’s efforts to be read as “a cautionary tale for today, a warning that contemporary America, because of its new sexual freedom, is a sick society, comparable to Weimar Germany” as an ideology born of the minds of moralist hypocrites. Farber’s review was exceptional in its criticism of *Cabaret*’s sexual politics at the time the film was released, but he was joined two years later by Andrew Sarris, who voiced an inverse comparison similar to Champlin’s when he wrote that “*The Damned* and *Cabaret* demonstrated to the film industry how audiences could be made to wallow in decadence in the name of social consciousness.” Sarris goes on to offer a tempered but positive review of *The Night Porter* as a film that does not attempt realism since both of the lead actors (Charlotte Rampling and Dirk Bogarde) “have consolidated their iconographical identities within the past decade” and hence tend to evoke “the absurdist disorder of the 6os and 70s rather than the existential disorder of the 40s and 50s.” As minority opinions in the critical landscape, the views of Farber and Sarris helped define a new approach to the politics of this burgeoning genre of sexualized Nazis. They drew attention to the persistence of the use of sexual decadence as a means of building an opposition between fascism and democracy and also pointed to a different sensibility that a film like *The Night Porter* might express: as a film that bears a closer relation to the more recent history of rhetorical practices than to the historical phenomenon of Nazism.

Another line of debate surrounding these films has been the place of family dramas in sexualized political scenarios. It is a line of debate that continues to see family as central to democracy in various ways. In contrast to its central feature of spectacular and performative marginal sexualities, *Cabaret* posits a psychosexual diagnosis of Sally (Liza Minnelli) as driven by unresolved Oedipal attachments and presents these aspects entirely unspectacularly and reflexively. Sally’s fixation on her negligent father is offered as an explanation for her promiscuity and her eternal search for a rich man who will support her. Her Oedipal immaturity is indirectly connected to her lack of political awareness, but it is not, as in the case of films that revolve around Nazi characters, ultimately a reason to condemn her. Instead, her immaturity is also reflected in Natalia (Marisa Berenson), the film’s Jewish supporting character, who likewise needs the approval of her parents for everything she does. Even though the film presents its cabaret scenes as sexual commentaries on political events, it offers no performative criticism of
women's troubled relationships with paternal authority. It instead reinforces the alliance of female immaturity with the political norm.

Contrary to commentary on the role of sexual decadence in the film, many critics did see Fosse's addition of an Oedipal motivation for Sally's behavior as a flaw. Kauffmann, for instance, writes condescendingly that "she sleeps around like mad because she's in love with her diplomat father who rejects her. When she became American, she had to be 'explained,' and the explanation had to be Freudian." Farber, the progressive iconoclast, takes this criticism further, complaining that the film "'explains' Sally with that all-purpose character—an unloving father—and turns Isherwood's tribute to a resilient, amoral girl into a routine love story with a moralistic conclusion." Farber's feminist criticism, which perhaps ignores the upbeat nature of the film's title song, contrasts strongly with nonfeminist critics like Roger Greenspun, who aside from praising Minnelli's body notes that "Brian's bisexuality now has as much as Sally's accidental pregnancy to do with moving the plot, and it connects as well with a general theme of sick sexual ambiguity that runs through the film as a kind of working motif." Greenspun represents the conservative voice wherein women's sexual and political subjectivity is less relevant than her legs while willfully ejecting sexual alternatives from the realm of acceptable behaviors. Indeed, Greenspun ignores the film's more socially progressive elements on this count; for instance, that Brian's newly overt bisexuality (his character is asexual in the story) is sympathetically handled.

Indeed, in the film's most dramatic departure from its usual cabaret format for musical numbers, the Chris character, Brian (Michael York), and Max (Helmut Griem), the pinnacle of a ménage à trois with Sally, are seated in a beer garden discussing politics. Brian voices concern that moderate Germans like Max will not be able to control the Nazis much longer. An androgynous young boy stands and begins singing what turns out to be a Nazi anthem, "Tomorrow Belongs to Me." He is joined by one after another traditionally dressed German extras. At the end of this scene, Brian asks, "Do you still think you'll be able to control them?" This afternoon turns out to be a prelude to Brian and Max having sex, as he later tells Sally, but his sexuality is linked not with fascism but (if anything) with antifascism. Brian becomes increasingly outspoken in his anti-Nazism as the film progresses. The garishly clad transvestites of the cabaret may also potentially offer criticism of the political events occurring outside the club, but the film is not entirely clear about this since Nazis are regularly seen among the members of the
audience. It has thus been possible for critics and scholars to interpret
the film in a variety of ways: as socially conservative (aligning fascism
with decadence) or socially progressive (aligning sexual freedom with
anti-Nazism).

The Night Porter goes further in its refusal to preserve the traditional
conservative political relationship between family and sexuality. The
film acknowledges a relationship between patriarchal female sexual sub-
jectivity and authoritarianism (denied in Cabaret) by way of the sexual
psychology of victims. Cavani’s central female character, Lucia (Char-
lotte Rampling), clearly suffers from an unresolved Oedipus complex,
but as she is a prisoner and not a Nazi the link between family dramas
and politics troubled critics. Cavani evades the question of Lucia’s
ethnicity/religion—explaining her presence in the camp through her
being the daughter of a socialist—a move that many critics who were
deply offended by the film overlooked, almost invariably assuming that
she is Jewish. The purpose of this move, however, is to shift the terrain
entirely over to issues of gender and so to mobilize popularly held
beliefs in the fundamental masochism of the female sexual psyche,
brought out in overt and performative form. Unlike Cabaret, which
reserves the authority-dependence of its female characters for un-
criticized moments of truth, The Night Porter eliminates any point of
origin, making both the “original” interactions in the flashback con-
centration camp and the “re-created” sexual scenarios in the present
equally theatrical.32

It is this shift that feminist film theorist Teresa de Lauretis cham-
pioned in her praise of The Night Porter in Film Quarterly in 1976. De
Lauretis sees Cavani as having invoked Nazism as a metaphor for pa-
triarchy and the warping of female subjectivity that can occur under so
oppressive a sexual system. In this sense, she extends the already promi-
nent feminist rhetorical practice of invoking Nazism as a parallel to
then-contemporary sexism, seeing the generalizability of the Nazi ideal
of “Kinder, Küche, Kirche” (children, kitchen, church) in patriarchal
cultures as the only realms legitimately open to women.33 De Lauretis
argues that “it is not Lucia’s experience (her victimization, initiation,
and subsequent unbreakable bondage to her oppressor-Father-lover)
that serves as a metaphor for the infamy perpetrated by the Nazis on
humanity, but Nazism and the atrocities committed in the camps that
are the allegorical framework chosen by Cavani to investigate the dialec-
tics of the male-female relationship in our contemporary, post-Nazi,
society.”34 In this way, de Lauretis is able to suggest that the film’s pairing

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of Max (Dirk Bogarde) as the Nazi/father and Lucia as the inmate/daughter indeed privileges the second term. She writes, "The way in which Lucia is victimized, the truth she discovers in herself and lives out, the imagery of her bondage to the Father . . . are a true metaphor, however magnified, of the female condition. That the same ambivalence exists in the Father, who is nonetheless, objectively, the oppressor, only makes the metaphor complete." In other words, de Lauretis argues that the film has not drained the politics out of Nazism but is about a different type of politics, feminist politics, where it is precisely sexuality ("the personal") that is political.

A second strain of film criticism, which also tried to retrieve the film from its detractors, pursued the erotic potency of the film (which de Lauretis’s reading largely denies). Beverle Houston and Marsha Kinder for instance, writing in 1973, based their reclamation strategy on an insistence that the film is primarily about sex and secondarily about Nazis: "It’s as if Cavani begins with the desire to create a powerful sado/masochistic story and then draws from the past the most extreme setting possible—the Nazi concentration camp—in order to enhance its imaginative power. This is quite different from setting out to make a film about the historical reality of Nazi brutality and then reducing it to a romantic love story, which would be grotesquely immoral and obscene." Houston and Kinder generalize the appeal of Lucia’s regression to Max’s "little girl," asking, "Who among the audience has not wanted to ease back into utter dependence, to be totally cared for by another? Thus, as Lucia stands quietly, arms upraised, waiting for Max to slip on her Sunday dress, she evokes identification even among those who must reject other aspects of the sado/masochism." Between de Lauretis’s and Houston and Kinder’s readings lies a central debate of cultural feminism, the practitioners of which have variously insisted on sexuality as a political terrain.

Michel Foucault was among those who categorically criticized The Night Porter, but his comments on the larger phenomenon of sexualized Nazis help to situate the debates more generally. He wrote that "Nobody loves power anymore," at least in the form of fetishizing leaders, and so the Nazi fad in the 1970s was a symptom of "the beginnings of a re-eroticization of power, taken to a pathetic, ridiculous extreme." This “re-eroticization of power” appears in a variety of both long-standing and contemporary forms in The Night Porter’s final sequence, wherein Max dresses in his well-preserved SS uniform and Lucia wears not her cabaret outfit nor an inmate’s garb but the little girl’s dress,
which has appeared recursively throughout. As they finally leave the apartment and invite their execution, Lucia/Dietrich’s cabaret song is reprised on the soundtrack. The mixing of two versions of role inequity underscores the plurality of systems of power on which the film’s erotics work, while the cabaret once again stands for the ambiguity on which these erotics rely. *The Night Porter*, indeed, specifically eroticizes public scrutiny of private relationships, drawing on the Lola Lola trope as a marker of public/private boundary violations. Two trajectories leading out of the debates about *The Night Porter* follow from the dense re-eroticization of power performed in this final sequence: Nazism as a continued parallel, in various forms, to family dynamics; and Nazism as part of a theatrical sensibility that challenges the dominant system of surveillance, which hopes to limit the range of sexual expression in a democratic society.

In the rest of this chapter, I will pursue three ongoing strains of the uses of Nazism that give form to these trajectories: (1) as central to discussions of child abuse and the political symbology of family; (2) as central to assertions of sexual/political freedom; and (3) as central to an antifeminist, antiquesque counter-rhetoric arguing for the fundamental political need for difference between the sexes and the banishment of “perversions.”

**Child Abuse and the Nazi Scenario**

> Every woman adores a Fascist,  
> The boot in the face, the brute  
> Brute heart of a brute like you.

> You stand at the blackboard, daddy,  
> In the picture I have of you,  
> A cleft in your chin instead of your foot  
> But no less a devil for that, no not  
> Any less the black man who

> Bit my pretty red heart in two.  
> —Sylvia Plath, “Daddy” (1962)

Sylvia Plath’s poem reflects the most straightforward feminist use of Nazism as political rhetoric, wherein, as in de Lauretis’s reading of *The Night Porter*, Nazism serves as a metaphor for patriarchy. This image of the father as Nazi extends to narratives not only of familial sexism but
of child abuse, wherein intrafamilial abuse—especially incest—is frequently spoken of as a “private holocaust.”

The feminist approach to incest and family violence counters the dominant discourse, which sees it as an aberration, instead asserting that violence is endemic to the social order and signals a struggle to maintain it.41 This is in itself a political stance, of course, deriving from the central feminist tenet that “the personal is political.” But the extension of the rhetorical use of Nazism to discussions of child abuse and incest more generally also highlights the centrality of narratives of dysfunctional families to contemporary political debate, often without an accompanying critique of patriarchy. In these latter narratives, children populate the national imaginary and perform a central role in narrating the nation and, indeed, democracy. Contemporary rhetorical uses of Nazism to characterize the dysfunctional family, in both feminist and patriarchy-supporting forms, continue some of the themes of nationalist melodrama transferred to the domestic scene. But these uses of Nazism also reflect a national subjectivity that is (1) highly privatized and (2) scripted through political/sexual trauma.

Psychologist Janice Haaken notes that “Increasingly, trauma stories have taken on a mythic tone in casting the survivor in dramatic combat with an archetypal personification of evil.”42 The stark oppositions of good and evil in these narratives easily lend themselves to Nazi metaphors, a phenomenon that Haaken critiques by warning that “While the Holocaust is often invoked to dramatize the private, unacknowledged pain of survivors, it also trivializes the vast distinctions in the magnitude and nature of trauma suffered by various oppressed groups.”43 Haaken sees the collapse of different experiences under the metaphor of Nazism as a corollary to the “adult child” movement, which sees the American middle-class family as deeply dysfunctional. As she notes, the public interest in missing and abused children and the adult child movement, though perhaps growing out of the feminist movement’s influences, more commonly maintain an idealized notion of family life. They make the family both the seat of all sorts of larger social and personal problems and the cure. By scripting child abuse as a national crisis, these narratives are political in another sense; for they hope to recenter a normative notion of family life through a rhetorically politicized foregrounding of sexuality.44

The emergence of the adult child movement and “child within” therapies has coincided with the growth of both medical and public interest in child abuse. This interest, however, took a decided shift to-
ward sexual rather than physical abuse in the course of the 1970s. Histori- 
arian Ian Hacking notes that child abuse and incest were not commonly 
connected until 1975, after which time abuse by strangers steadily de- 
clined as a central interest of the child abuse movement. The contem- 
poraneous upsurge of images of sexualized Nazis is clearly connected to 
their use in this likewise now sexualized context. This is not to say that 
incest has not always been a dark component of some family’s lives, but 
rather that a nearly exclusive focus on sexual abuse signals another side 
of the increasing centrality of sexuality to political rhetoric in the later 
twentieth century, with fascism once again serving as a conduit for the 
increase.

Feminist scholar Elizabeth Wilson warns that the heightened focus 
on incest narratives might reflect a bias whereby “the middle class has 
historically exhibited a lack of concern for the possible ill-effects of 
physical or psychological abuse as compared with sexual abuse,” a bias 
that can be linked to the equation of the liberal-democratic nation with 
“respectability” and sexual propriety historically associated with the 
middle class. Hacking, too, notes that the rise of the child abuse move- 
ment in the course of the 1980s concealed the material decline in social 
support of especially poor children during the Reagan and Bush presi- 
dencies. Anthropologist Marilyn Ivy suggests that in this era the abused 
child came “to bear a symbolic burden dependent on the fluidities of 
advanced capitalist social formations and identities,” wherein the child 
is the ideal national subject because he or she is not seen as a political 
being, and so “privatization, familialization, and infantilization of these 
therapies have accorded well with the dominant American political cli- 
mate, where the private sector, the individual, and the family are sup- 
posed to assume the burdens of the social.” Holocaust metaphors 
used in child abuse narratives assist not only in dramatizing the horror 
they describe but in replacing large-scale public forms of understanding 
political activity with small-scale, formerly “private,” and certainly per-
sonal ones. Unlike the feminist project, which seeks to politicize our 
understanding of the personal, these narratives hope to personalize the 
political, thereby limiting the public sphere further by substituting non-
political actors (children) for the political agency of adults or else asserting a conservative notion of parental authority over a nation of children 
in the guise of “family values.”

I will analyze two very different media texts in order to illustrate the 
range of issues involved in the process of personalizing the political: 
underground filmmaker Beth B and painter Ida Applebroog’s experi-
mental video *Belladonna* (1989) and Steven Spielberg's blockbuster film *Schindler's List* (1993). Each of these texts deals with a parallel between Nazism and family dynamics, in a blend of victims and perpetrators in the former and in the substitution of the "good Nazi/father" for the bad in the latter. *Belladonna* very compellingly illustrates the manner in which different sorts of experiences become rhetorically fused under a banner of sexual/political victimization, while *Schindler's List* illustrates the ways in which paternal authority and social normativity continue to characterize the Hollywood hero as a corollary to antifascist political intervention.

*Belladonna* cuts together three versions of sexuality and violence that produce an unsettling mixture of psychosexual confession, Nazi brutality, and modern-day child abuse. The tape consists of a series of people repeatedly speaking fragments of the following texts: Freud's 1919 case history "A Child Is Being Beaten" (Freud's treatise on masochism), testimony from the posthumous trial of Nazi doctor Josef Mengele (1985), and testimony from the trial of Joel Steinberg for the abuse and murder of his young daughter (1988). Like *The Night Porter*, *Belladonna* levels private and public tribunals, as court and couch are made equivalent. As the catalog for a retrospective exhibition notes, Beth B's work displays "an attentiveness and a unique sensitivity to social and psychic history as recalled by participants/witnesses. In this respect, Beth B's ongoing artistic project is to investigate and reclaim the site where lyricism meets anguish, recollection exposes trauma and the act of speaking is valued as a therapeutic triumph."

Most of B's installation and video work features the "talking heads" form of address, in which characters speak deeply traumatic or confessional monologues directly into the camera, the sources of which are often not revealed or not revealed until the end. Two of B's tapes, *Belladonna* and *Amnesia*, draw parallels between contemporary personal dramas and Nazism. B's use of talking heads reflects television's organizing paradox, conveying intimacy through the public mediation of broadcast technology. Nazism, then, serves for B as the rhetorical link between the private and public arenas that the medium itself blurs. Art critic Joseph Di Mattia likens *Belladonna* to "a segment from 'Nightline' from an alternative universe where the guests can only speak the subtext of their most intimate thoughts," a subtext made primary, in which "childhood fears, sexual guilt and anxiety about physical punishment" are consequently no longer subtextual. This seems a fitting strategy, perhaps *not* because it runs counter to current trends but rather because

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it duplicates and complicates them. Belladonna problematically enacts a merger between opposing tendencies: childhood-perverse sexuality (the male “child” who wants to be beaten as punishment for Oedipal desires in Freud’s case history) and the physical abuse and consequent murder of a young girl.\textsuperscript{52} The crimes of Mengele, reported with the same intimacy and emphasis on voyeuristic witnessing, also drift toward private, personal, and intimate realms that consequently replace, at least in form, more traditionally public tribunals and arenas for political debate.

Belladonna in this sense is a tape that uncomfortably oscillates between the two functions to which the Nazi trope is commonly put: as ultimate horror and erotic scenario. The two stories of childhood beatings, one wished for, the other not, are hard to distinguish from one another in the fragmented utterances of the tape’s players. Freud’s male patient, the only actual child who appears in the tape, says repeatedly, “I’m not a bad person,” while his adult self details the contours of his guilty sexual fantasy. The defendant in the murder trial, the young girl’s father, similarly claims his innocence and love for the girl he killed. The various accounts of Mengele’s entirely disingenuous reassurances, also often told from a child’s perspective, echo the murderous father Steinberg, but also the disavowals of the fantasizing adult child.

Of her choice not to reveal the sources of her testimonies until the end, B has said, “Maybe by not knowing who is speaking or where the source material comes from, the viewer can hear and understand what’s being said more than they would if the identity of the speakers was known.”\textsuperscript{53} But the generalizable meaning of both the Freudian and, indeed, Nazi texts ensures that the information is always already filtered, already conflated. In this sense, the Steinberg story gets lost under Freud’s recantation long ago, which erased the reality of child abuse and replaced it with a fantasy, while Nazi violence, stylized and theatrical, cannot escape the recognizability of Nazi eroticism/horror.\textsuperscript{54} The cumulative effect of the Freudian and Nazi narratives is to obscure the victims (those killed by the Nazis and the daughter of the Steinberg couple) with the general diagnosis of a male sexual subject with a guilty conscience.\textsuperscript{55}

The Nazi trope thus functions as an obscuring device because it is a readily available metaphor for both family violence and family erotics. However the fact that Belladonna does not document corporal punishment as an act, but rather documents testimony around it, speaks to the ways in which the tape is more about how these arenas discursively intertwine. As such, the tape portrays a deep cultural ambivalence about
childhood sexuality, family violence, and a pervasive tendency to take a personal, therapeutic approach to political events, the consequence of which is the loss of distinction between rhetorically similar but materially very different historical experiences.

Given the dual rhetorical tendency by means of which Nazism (and especially the Holocaust) serves as a medium for transposing public, historical tragedies into intimate, familial realms, a companion rhetoric to the universal, dysfunctional family (and the subject it produces—the universal victim) tries to reverse the rhetorical flow, mending the family through the positing of a good father and mending the nation through the reinstatement of a benign patriarch. Rhetorics of the good father tend not to deny the status of the bad father as a villain; instead, the bad father is, in the dominant rhetoric, precisely the reason why the good father is needed. While Nazism does not figure as centrally as a rhetorical mediator in this process as it does in the creation of the father/villain, it does, as in *Belladonna*, function in his absolution (the repetition of “I’m not a bad person”). The rhetoric denies the feminist analysis, which would see paternalism as part of the problem, instead reinstating a buffed-up version of the tarnished father ideal.

The Promise Keepers movement is an example of this sort of rhetorical move, wherein men who have been less than ideal husbands and fathers join together in male-only, Christian, stadium events in order to procure the spiritual strength to go back to their families and resume their headship. Promise Keepers rhetoric claims that this is not a political but rather a “moral and spiritual” solution to what ails the nation, focusing on issues like unwed teenage motherhood, AIDS, and young male criminal behavior to which the movement sees itself as an answer, with antifeminism and homophobia corollary requirements. This is a strong example of Berlant’s “nonpolitical political,” wherein religious and other sentimental responses claim not to engage in the tainted political arena but actually do, of course, by redefining “what ails the nation” even as they claim to be doing so in nonpolitical terms.

Indeed, as the speaker who begins video artist Niklas Sven Vollmer’s tape *Daddy Said So!* (1996), which is about a Promise Keepers event, recounts, the “ messed up man” leads to not only a “ messed up family” but a “ messed up community,” a “ messed up country,” and finally a “ messed up world.” Men, as fathers and husbands, are thus quite literally at the center of the Promise Keepers universe. Undergirding this endeavor is, as cultural critic Linda Kintz writes of Promise Keepers rhetorician Stu Weber, the strategic reconstruction of “the feminist critique
of men’s abdication of their responsibilities, even as he duplicitously begins to define feminism as a desire for male headship. . . . In setting out these absolute gender differences, he must criticize the tyrant in order to reestablish the legitimate male head.\textsuperscript{56} It is this sort of logic, I would argue, that governs the story line of Schindler’s List, wherein Schindler’s heroic goodness is juxtaposed with the concentration camp director’s badness and his redemption from indifferent Nazi to hero is in part achieved by way of shifting Schindler (Liam Neeson) from his indulgence in hedonistic pleasure to a sense of idealized paternal responsibility. This is, then, a second way in which Nazism has proven useful to contemporary social politics, providing a setting for the redemption of the wayward man.

To Spielberg’s credit, the Schindler character is far more complex than most of his heroes, precisely because he isn’t one at the start of the film. Schindler begins as a boozing, womanizing opportunist who appears not to have great moral trouble doing business with the Nazis (being a party member himself) and profiting from the war and the exploitation of Jewish labor. The fact that Oscar Schindler (the book and film are based on a true story) really did have a moral reckoning and came to protect the Jews in his employ is without question a positive change. But Thomas Keneally’s book is far more complex in its portrait of this man and so maintains the enigma of Schindler throughout. Indeed, in the book the man’s womanizing and appreciation for nice things is not diminished by his growing, passionate advocacy for the Jews in his employ.\textsuperscript{57} Spielberg, by contrast, makes Schindler’s change include a willingness to forsake material goods and a reawakened sexual propriety (he promises his wife fidelity) as a corollary to his admirable paternalism.

Early in the film, Schindler wins his first round of Nazi friends by throwing a raucous, drunken party with loose women and dancing girls in bowling derbies, tuxedo jackets, and hot pants, a Cabaret-like scene that is crosscut with images of countless Jews being herded and harassed. The crosscutting establishes the typical connection between Nazi decadence and brutality, self-indulgence and a lack of concern for the plight of others. Indeed, unlike Cabaret, Spielberg’s images of decadence do not comment critically on the Nazi brutality with which they are juxtaposed; instead, a more direct connection is implied. This practice establishes Schindler at this point in the film as an unlikely savior to the Jewish victims of the men he wines and dines. A second crosscut sequence focuses on the plight of one particular Jewish woman, Helen Hirsch, Nazi labor camp commander Amon Goeth’s hapless maid.
Spielberg’s camera stays tight on Goeth’s hands as he nearly caresses then strikes her, cutting to match the movement as an opulently clad nightclub singer seductively advances on Schindler. Again, Schindler’s decadence marks his still too casual concern for the plight of Helen and by extension all Jews. Schindler’s sexual escapades indeed express Goeth’s repressed desires, as he substitutes violence for his sexual desire for the Jewish woman.

Yet this scene begins to mark Schindler’s distinction from Goeth (Ralph Fiennes), in that the staging of the commander’s advance on Helen parallels an earlier scene in the same basement, with the same lighting, wherein Schindler “reassures” her. Schindler clearly also instills sexual fear in the quivering young woman, but in what is supposed to be read as a gesture of magnanimity he instead offers her chocolate and kisses her on the forehead over her fearful protests, saying, “It’s not that kind of kiss.” With the megalomaniacal statement “I am Schindler,” Spielberg’s character is awash in a sea of sexual ambiguity; his creepy paternalism, however, is deployed as a sign of his later heroism. While Goeth substitutes violence for sex with Helen, Schindler substitutes fatherly affection, a gesture that will be inflated to a grand scale by the end of the film, as he ascends to the role of paternal savior to his hundreds of Jewish employees.58

The book opens with this scene, using it to initiate the story of Schindler’s characterological enigma, the seeming aporia of why a Nazi guest of a brutal camp commander would go to the trouble of bringing chocolate to the mistreated Jewish maid.59 Spielberg, however, by re-positioning the scene and contrasting it directly to Goeth, instead uses it to valorize the paternity Schindler so dramatically asserts. Indeed, the centrality of paternalism to the film’s logic is emblematized in the poster used to publicize the film, which features an extreme close-up of an adult male hand clasping the hand of a child. By adding Schindler’s entirely fabricated promise of fidelity to his wife, Spielberg greatly limits the complexity of the historical character Schindler was.

The compelling denseness of Keneally’s Schindler perhaps signals that the paternal figure is being asked to serve an inordinate number of rhetorical functions in a cultural climate that both extols family values and focuses on the faults of men. Thus, Schindler’s reaction to Helen, a young woman, is to turn her into a child rather than a fellow adult. But by aligning paternalism with sexual fidelity Spielberg makes Schindler’s transformation akin to the Promise Keepers’ project for the reclamation of wayward men. Spielberg’s film thus makes overt the fact that such

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reclamation is a political activity, indeed, an anti-Nazi act. The Promise Keepers, meanwhile, mask the political nature of their project. What the Nazi setting does here is allow the direct expression of the political project that paternal reclamation represents. Whether as metaphor for family dysfunction, mediator between public and private traumas, or staging ground for political paternalism, the Nazi trope helps deliver the traditional family to a position of centrality in contemporary democratic political culture.

Sexual Libertarianism, Feminism, and the Nazi Trope

The second major trajectory that branches off from the debates over *The Night Porter* and the sexual use of Nazism moves in an opposite rhetorical direction, turning the conservative association of Nazism with perverse sexuality into an appropriable fantasy. Certain strains of feminist and queer discourse celebrate either the freedom to express an active and varied female sexuality or to valorize queer sexual practices as representationally sophisticated. These approaches turn the common association of Nazism with homosexuality and perversion back on itself. In so doing, they celebrate the textual freedoms brought by a postmodern sensibility and see sexual and representational freedom as fundamentally political freedoms.

In the course of the 1970s, feminists voiced diverging views of the place of pornography and sadomasochism in a feminist worldview, with some speaking out against both sexual practices and others insisting that sexual freedom is an important element of women’s self-realization. The debate about feminist sadomasochism prominently invoked Nazi fetish play as a limiting case, with the anti-s/m side claiming that sexual play with Nazi items and scenarios reflects a duplication of the mind-set of historical Nazis and the pro-s/m side claiming that such play has little or nothing to do with historical Nazis. As with criticism of the films that invoked Nazism as a sexual scenario, the political grounds for either argument relied on their different understanding of what was at stake, with both sides seeing themselves as furthering and protecting democracy. The argument sometimes centered on the classic nationalist associations of decadence with fascism and sexual propriety with democracy or on whether fantasy and material conditions could be separated.

Advocates of sexual freedom often countered conservative versions of the argument through recourse to an alternative strain of antifascist criticism different from that which ruled Cold War political psychol-
ogy—one growing instead out of the work of Wilhelm Reich, for instance. Reich associated fascism with the repression of “natural sexuality” in his 1933 study The Mass Psychology of Fascism and saw the road to political utopia and peaceful living as a reconnection of the civilized self with the natural core. The German title of the book includes the subtitle “zur Sexualökonomie der politischen Reaktion und zur proletarischen Sexualpolitik” (Toward a Sexual Economy of Reactionary Politics and toward a Proletarian Sexual Politics), a title that includes both the terms of his analysis and his revolutionary plan for the future. In Reich’s view, sexual suppression is deployed in the service of reactionary politics in that, unlike the suppression of material needs, which would lead eventually to revolution, the suppression of sexual needs “anchors itself as a moral defense,” which then “prevents rebellion against both forms of suppression.”

Reich also thought that the Oedipus complex, from whence such sublimations issued, was not the cause of sexual restrictions but the result of them. The repression of other sexual outlets causes a fixation on the mother, which, due to an explicit taboo, leads to a displacement onto nationalism. Reich’s theory is that the veneration of the mother in Oedipally fixated societies is a patriarchal denigration of matriarchy, a social system that would be more in tune with the natural sexual core. Reich thus advocated a more open sexual relationship to the world as an antidote to both Oedipus and nationalism, which he saw as mutually constitutive.

While he was not very influential at the time he was writing, Reich did ultimately influence the work of Frankfurt School political theorist Herbert Marcuse, who greatly influenced the student movements of the 1960s. Marcuse’s Eros and Civilization (1955) asserted that aggression could be overcome through the nonrepressive re-eroticization of people’s relations with each other and nature. This would require departure from an exclusive sexual focus on the genitals and a return to the “polymorphous perversity” of childhood sexuality—a re-eroticization of the entire body. In this way, according to Marcuse, alienated labor and the reification of the nongenital areas of the body that it relied on would be overcome, leading to a political utopia. These ideas influenced the sexual liberation movements of the 1960s counterculture, which saw true political freedom to be attainable in part through bodily freedom. Avant-garde art practices of the 1960s also reflected this emphasis on breaking taboos, to the point where, as media theorist Patricia Mellen-camp writes, “Because daily life and the sexual were founding terms,
everyone could take action and be involved; the local and the global were elided; the personal was political.63

On the one hand, these ideas became more mainstream in the 1970s, becoming depoliticized and consumerist in nature as the form, but not the political spirit, of sexual liberty spread to the wider culture. On the other hand, feminism and the gay and lesbian rights movement continued to advocate sexuality as a politicized terrain. The conservative backlash against these new sexual/political values often collapsed these different approaches to sexual liberty, finally creating a flashpoint of political debate around the public funding of “obscene” art—often by feminist, gay, or lesbian artists—after Ronald Reagan became president in 1980.64 As this timing ultimately coincided with the growing AIDS crisis, the gay community also became more thoroughly politicized, linking sexual puritanism with homophobia, public indifference to AIDS victims, and an unwillingness to provide sex education to help prevent the spread of the disease. By the late 1980s, sexual expression had once again become an issue of central political concern.

While images of Nazism no longer functioned as centrally as they did in the 1970s, one key player in the popular variation on this political debate did invoke these images: pop singer Madonna. Her 1990 music video for the song “Justify My Love,” for instance, bills itself as an anticensorship statement, concluding with the line “poor is the man whose pleasures depend on the permission of others.” The controversy around the video Justify My Love centered on whether MTV, the music video cable network, would broadcast it. The tape features a catalog of sexual alternatives, including threesomes, voyeurism, a much discussed lesbian kiss, and some glimpses of bondage and domination. Among these is an image lifted directly from The Night Porter of a bare-chested Charlotte Rampling look-alike in suspenders and something like an SS officer’s cap, a third-generation Lola Lola icon. The textual invocation of The Night Porter recalls the controversy that that film originally inspired, which already centered on whether the erotic use of the Holocaust could be extricated from Nazi atrocities. Indeed, Madonna’s use of this image is so decontextualized from the narrative of the original film that, in postmodern style, it becomes a tribute to the freedom of images more generally, not a statement intending to make any reference to Nazi history at all.

The rather short-lived flurry of “Madonna criticism,” a blend of cultural studies and feminist studies, illuminates the ways in which this new
variant of “Nazi” imagery was politically inscribed. These critics, too, claimed that Madonna’s oblique references to Nazism were entirely severed from a historical reference to German fascism. Unlike the advocates for The Night Porter fifteen years earlier, the argument now was not that the Lola Lola image staged an equivalence between patriarchy and fascism or spoke to a universal urge to regress, but rather Madonna’s advocates saw her as rewriting the terms of women’s self-representation and championing the freedom to invoke whatever erotic scenario she liked. Feminist film scholar E. Ann Kaplan, for instance, claims that while Madonna’s videos and performances, such as Open Your Heart (1986), Express Yourself (1989), and Justify My Love, drew on “the decadent Germany of the 1920s immediately preceding the Nazi era,” the videos “rewrite such patriarchal narratives completely.” Professional iconoclast Camille Paglia likewise praises Madonna’s performance in Open Your Heart, writing that she “plays Marlene Dietrich straddling a chair. Her eyes are cold, distant, all-seeing . . . Playing with the outlaw personae of prostitute and dominatrix, Madonna has made a major contribution to the history of women.” Feminist scholar Cathy Schwichtenberg also writes in politically grand terms: “Justify My Love . . . opens up a Pandora’s box of sexual prohibitions, which are judged as such through the maintenance of a single sexual standard. The kind of sexual morality, whether religious, political, or psychological, that legislates such a standard has, as [feminist theorist Gayle] Rubin notes, ‘more in common with ideologies of racism than with true ethics.’”

Madonna’s history of playing with sexual images of women, from Marilyn Monroe to the Virgin Mary, surely helped insure that her invocation of Weimar and Nazi Germany would be read as an emblem of democratic sexual and representational freedom. Indeed, shortly after the release of Justify My Love, Madonna did a photo spread for Rolling Stone wherein she appears as a Jewess, a lesbian, a cross-dresser, a contortionist, and a patriot (all in 1930s-style sepia tones). The spread is emblematic of her refiguration of the functions these images have had in the history of eroticized Nazis, as she instead makes them markers of the new queer sexual politics of the early 1990s, which worked through a language of democracy. Thus, the images of Madonna kissing and lying about with women, standing in a suit among men in garter belts, and looking sultrily into the camera through a Star of David are culminated in the final photo of the spread, where she salutes the heavens as she lies half naked on a piano—wrapped in an American flag.
Gender Dimorphism, Conservative Rhetoric, and the Feminazi

Queer political rhetoric valorizes both gender and sexual fluidity as freedom as well as seeing marginality (whether fluid or not) as a strong point of democratic pluralism. Since images of fascism have been so central to the recent American history of sexual politics, these images form part of the textual play chest of postmodern queer strategies. The Christian Right's backlash against queer and feminist politics, then, willfully literalizes the use of Nazi images and indeed deploys rhetorical images of Nazism to opposite political ends.

Postmodernism figures negatively and prominently in the foundationalist visions of the various factions of the Christian Right. In often rather simplistic arguments that illustrate less than thorough readings of the available materials on postmodern theory, evangelists blame postmodernism for what they see as moral decay. Televangelist Pat Robertson, for instance, warns of "a virtual America—a poor imitation of a country—one obsessed with escaping into a false reality," which will replace the world of moral absolutes and foundational master narratives that he seeks to resuscitate. "Gender feminism" (which includes queer theory) is named by Christian conservatives as one of the foremost culprits of postmodernism, sending the country down a path toward ultimate chaos and destruction.

Gene Veith, the Christian conservative author of Postmodern Times, appeared on Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network program Newswatch Today and is quoted on the corresponding "fact sheet" put out by Robertson's 700 Club as saying, "postmodernism is dangerously similar to Hitler's Nazism and fascism." Veith bases his parallel on fascism's purported "irrationalism," which he extrapolates, warning that "examples of irrational postmodern influences can be found everywhere—in art, architecture, radical environmentalism, feminism, political correctness and science—they are most prevalent in television and movies." Since feminism and environmentalism question the traditional master narratives of patriarchy and androcentrism, and hence deny the transcendent (and thus "rational") truths on which conservative Christians insist, they are "irrational" and, like the Nazis, bent on the destruction of the Christian definition of the nation and democracy.

The logic behind this parallel with Nazism pervades conservative Christian diatribes against gender feminism, which also includes gay rights activism. These diatribes alternately fixate on images of gender inversion (women who act like men and men who act like women) and
on the eradication of gender difference (the elimination of the categories male and female). In order not to appear to be against women’s rights, some rhetoricians of the Christian Right narrowly define true feminism (meaning pay equity, opposition to domestic violence, support for maternity leave), which they claim to support, while labeling as neofeminist any agenda that extends beyond these limited bounds. The conservative Pro-Life Activist’s Encyclopedia describes the neofeminist as follows: “Anyone who personally knows a neofeminist realizes why she is so desperately unhappy and bitter. She is struggling pointlessly to become the very person she loathes so passionately: A man.”72 Having established gender inversion as a strategy for discrediting feminists (i.e., they are not “real” women), the second tactic is deployed to discredit feminist claims to equity: “Neofeminists are trying to eliminate all distinctions between the genders. They are not seeking equality; they are striving for identi-
cality.” Gender inversion and the eradication of gender differences both defy the strict division between men and women that undergirds the conservative Christian cosmology in which this rhetoric operates. Feminism and gay and lesbian rights threaten the Christian Right’s vision of a gender-differentiated nation: hence, they can be seen as rhetorically “Nazi,” and indeed the publication is full of references to parallels be-
tween feminism and Nazism.73

The dire images that a world without strict gender difference conjures for Christian conservatives can be found in a letter from evangelist James Dobson to his followers, wherein he describes the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women. Dobson explicitly links gender feminism and proponents of “homosexual and lesbian rights,” claiming that they are hatching a conspiracy whereby “There will be absolutely no differences tolerated between the sexes. In short, the distinction between masculinity and femininity will utterly disappear from the culture of the world.” Recalling the tactics used to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s and early 1980s, the outcome of the elimination of gender will be that “All household responsibilities will be divided 50/50 by governmental decree. Every business will be governed by strict 50/50 quotas. The military will also be apportioned equally between men and women, including ground combat assignments and any future selection of draftees.” Images of government-enforced gender equity conjure the image of feminists as authoritarians, forcing their will upon the nation with the help of a liberal government. The pervasive associ-
atation of Nazism with gender inversion helps to secure this image whereby gay men (whether in hypermasculine garb or in drag) and
feminist women (often coded as lesbians and hence gender inverters as well) are the ringleaders of a modern day Nazism.74

A similar strategy is invoked in other conservative diatribes, which focus on first lady Hillary Clinton, often by picturing the president and his wife as gender inverters or as “Billary Clinton,” an androgynous blend (figs. 20 and 21). The first Clinton administration was particularly beset by this sort of rhetoric from its arch-conservative opponents in ways that targeted many of Clinton’s female appointees as well (the nickname of “Butch” Reno for Attorney General Janet Reno being the most obvious).75 The neologism “feminazi” became a common conservative epithet used to address either feminist political agendas generally (especially abortion rights or dubious “political correctness,” as discussed in chapter 3) or Hillary Clinton and Clinton appointees specifically. An extreme example of this sort of rhetoric can be found in Far Right extremist Texe Marrs’s book Big Sister Is Watching You!, whose cover features an image of Hillary Clinton that is later compared to an image of Hitler in a similar pose.76 The book goes on to attack the women in
Clinton's first administration, giving most of them male nicknames and implying that many are lesbians.  

While clearly this is an extreme example, the logic of these associations does echo widespread conservative antifeminist and antigay rhetoric, sounding what Kintz calls "structures of resonance" with more mainstream conservatism. Indeed, even an ostensibly nonpolitical text like the 1990 made for TV movie Hitler's Daughter resonates with this logic. The plot of this film revolves around the need to locate the woman of the title who, due to her genetic heritage, is destined to want to replicate her father's regime. The investigators have identified three women who could potentially stand in positions of enough influence over American government to effect such a takeover: a newscaster who is having an affair with the vice president of the United States (who is running for president), the vice president's wife, and the other vice presidential candidate. As they are women, their access to the presidency is indirect, so they need to manipulate the weak men with whom they are either sexually or professionally associated. Because of the genetic premise of the plot, the actions of all three women are suspected to be motivated by a devious desire to rule. The fact that logically two of
these women are not Hitler’s daughter but just ordinary career women means that viewers are encouraged to think that all ambitious women should be suspected of secretly being feminazis. While this is a truly frivolous film, the resonance with conservative antifeminism indicates that it presents a readily available cultural narrative.

By casting feminism as uniform rather than multifaceted and internally contentious, as it is, different sorts of anti-Nazi rhetoric can be compiled by antifeminists, which on the one hand associate feminism with institutional power (i.e., the tyranny of “political correctness”) and at the same time associate it with moral degeneracy (i.e., support of abortion rights, gay and lesbian rights, and freedom of sexual expression). The image of Nazi decadence thus serves this double purpose of conservative rhetoric whereby family values are posited as the antifascist, democratic alternative.

**Conclusion: New Political Directions for Images of Nazi Sexuality**

Over the course of the last thirty years, the Nazi trope has been put to a wide array of uses in the rhetorical negotiation of the relative weight of public and private political concerns, in which sexuality plays a major role. “Nazi” sexuality has been championed as an arena of free sexual expression, held up as a dark mirror to patriarchy, and read as a sign of the moral bankruptcy of progressive politics. At the center of many of these rhetorical uses of Nazism stands the Dietrich/Lola Lola icon. Always complex and multiply understood even as she was being consolidated in the 1940s, the figure continues to serve as a sign of both fascism and deeper democracy. The vast majority of the current uses of sexualized Nazis reference the rhetorical history of this prominent mode of political representation in the United States and Europe rather than the material history of the Nazis’ actual beliefs and deeds.

What often gets lost in these invocations of Nazism in contemporary political discourse is Nazi racism, which is typically displaced onto the history of ways in which the phenomenon has been used to address issues of gender and sexuality. There are, of course, other political arenas where Nazi racism continues to be central, but it is rare that issues of racism, sexuality, and gender are discussed together in the rhetorical examples described above. By way of a conclusion, then, I will analyze work by media artists Ellen Flanders (of Canada) and Rachel Schreiber (of the United States), each of whom have brought these three dis-
courses together in order to point out new directions toward which the rhetorical uses of Nazism might be headed. Both of these artists complexly negotiate Jewishness, the postmemory of the Holocaust, sexuality, and gender in ways that build on the panoply of rhetorical uses to which the sexual imagery of Nazism has been put—including, once again, the Lola Lola icon.

Flanders’s 1996 short film essay *Surviving Memory* takes as its central project the negotiation of queer and Jewish identity and political activism. It features a series of encounters between Flanders (who is the speaking subject of the film) and various Jewish women, one of whom inhabits Israel as an allegorical figure of ethnicity and historical memory. The voice-over in the opening shot, which features Flanders and another woman kissing in a parking lot, says, “she complained that I only speak of my past lovers—I explained that without her I have no memory of anyone.” The next shots serve to interpret this statement as melding lesbian desire with historical memory and ethnic identity: blue-toned images of sex (perhaps alluding to the blue-toned memory scenes in *The Night Porter*) are cut together with images from an unidentified contemporary political demonstration and an image of a tattooed arm reading “Yahweh” in Hebrew. The last of these images is particularly compelling in that it signals specifically Jewish transgressions and interpretive tensions. First, the tattoo oscillates between the edict against speaking or writing the name of God and recent reinterpretations thereof by cabalists, who have instead come to see the written word *Yahweh* as a sign of protection. Second, the tattoo invokes the Jewish prohibition against marking the body, making it both an invocation of Nazi tattooing practices in concentration camps (involuntary) and an invocation of the contemporary urban cultural trend in which (voluntary) tattooing is aligned with urban sexuality.

As a Jewish lesbian who will shortly be revealed to participate in the sexual play of urban s/m subculture, Flanders shifts the ground from a primary focus on sexual transgression, which characterizes the beginning of the tape, to one in which sexuality, religion, and ethnicity are entirely intertwined. Still photographs of concentration camp victims, Nazi banners, and a mug shot of a lesbian concentration camp inmate accompany the next voice-over progression: “At age six, I knew the Holocaust and died twice; at age 12, I tried Eichmann; and at age 19 I wore a pink triangle.” The visual progression culminates in posters of neo-Nazi David Irving, which are plastered on the construction fences surrounding the rebuilding of fellow neo-Nazi Ernst Zundel’s house in
Toronto after it was bombed by antiracist activists. As Flanders’s personal chronology culminates in her coming out, signified by the wearing of the pink triangle, the film insists on maintaining the historical link between racism and homophobia that that symbol entails. The images of past and present Nazis here function to consolidate the political alliance of antiracist and antihomophobic agendas and between historical and contemporary political moments.

There are, however, two moments of ambivalence in the film that complicate these otherwise straightforward uses of Nazism and its symbols. The first one, occurring shortly after the above, features footage of a demonstration by the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and a voice-over lamenting, “For years I mourned my father’s untimely death, but there was no commemoration ceremony. His cancer was not kaposi sarcoma. His death had no meaning, I thought, as I traced my body in chalk on the street, climbed out of the mass grave, and put my friend James to rest.” The “Silence = Death” slogan that characterizes the credo of AIDS activism visually coincides with the end of this monologue and signals a personal struggle with the practices of memorializing wherein her father’s death, unconnected to prejudice, is difficult to script into a meaningful political narrative—either in terms of ethnicity/religion (of the Holocaust) or sexuality (the AIDS epidemic, which derives many of its symbols from drawing a parallel to the Holocaust).

The second moment of ambivalence occurs in the context of the next major segment of the film, wherein a series of negotiations illustrate the constructedness of gender as specifically related to Jewishness. Images of Flanders dressed in butch leather and a woman in a dress kissing at a bar are intercut with clips from the last Yiddish film made in Poland, Yidl Mitn Fiddle (1936), featuring a woman musician dressed as a man. The voice-over recounts, “She had a fetish for Jewish girls. I always hated that,” she confided in me. Dressed in leather, we went out that night—two Jewish girls: one boy, one woman.” After another series of connections between past and present political action (featuring images of Jewish resistance fighters in World War II and ACT UP demonstrations), the scene is revisited, with Flanders this time accompanied by a man in a dress. Another clip from the Yiddish film shows the magical transformation of the woman into a wearer of men’s clothing—a change her male lover rejects. The now modified voice-over explains, “He had a fetish for Jewish girls. We dressed in leather, and went out that night—two Jewish girls: one boy, one woman.” Flanders continues to narrate their sexual encounter, during which the cross-dressed “woman” takes
Flanders’s strapped on dildo into his mouth, exclaiming “I’m a little feygeleh” (the Yiddish word for “faggot”). Flanders then confesses, “I felt uneasy, my contradictions laid bare,” as the Yiddish film shows the woman dressed as a boy being transformed again into a dress wearer.

This complex sequence again very specifically interconnects contemporary queer play involving gender and sexual categories and historical enactments of related gender dramas within Jewish culture. Instead of the more pervasive cultural association of gender transgression and boundary blurring with Nazism, Flanders connects them with Jewish negotiations of gender identity in the face of Nazi persecution. She describes her interest in Yiddish filmmaking in the 1930s as in part due to its dealing with how Jewish understandings of gender roles were different than those of the gentile world, and how in this historical moment Jewish film was trying to counter the anti-Semitic casting of Jewish men as effeminate by positing a difference between “old world” Jewish practices such as studying the Torah and new ones such as assimilation, reflecting more of the dominant notions of “manly” behavior. Ultimately, Flanders valorizes gender transitivity, as both a Jew with a consciousness of history and a contemporary queer. Her ambivalence comes from the ways in which neither assimilation to norms nor resistance to them can guarantee political freedom. Flanders thus endorses, on the one hand, the postmodern political strategy of challenging essentialized, embodied identities but insists, on the other, on the historical constitution of specific gendered, sexual, and ethnic meanings. She proposes unqualified opposition to the politics of Nazism and other forms of racism and homophobia but also refuses the sort of rhetoric that would ally sexual “decadence” and gender inversion therewith.

Rachel Schreiber’s 1996 video, Please Kill Me; I’m a Faggot Nigger Jew, approaches some of the same issues, taking as its overt subject the ways in which Nazism, and especially the Holocaust, have found their way into contemporary sexual practices. The tape begins with the typed solicitation that Schreiber (using the name Justine) has posted on an Internet listserv dedicated to S/M topics, saying that she wants to interview people who practice Nazi fetish S/M. This source being established, the rest of the tape consists of an alternation between three elements: (1) voice-over readings of some of the replies she received to her online questionnaire, (2) typed text describing her childhood experiences with images of the Holocaust and her grandfather’s photo album, and (3) the act of writing “Jude” (Jew) in Germanic script on her trimmed and shaved upper pubic region. All images are digitally medi-
ated and appear as computer images. Schreiber thus interrogates the fantasy practices of her respondents by juxtaposing them with her own inescapable sense of history, in terms of both her childhood experiences and the way she experiences her body as Jewish.

The Internet responses range across a broad spectrum of sexual orientations and attitudes toward Nazi fetish s/m, beginning with the statement that also serves as the title of the piece, “Please kill me; I’m a faggot nigger Jew.” This respondent is a submissive male, looking for “Aryan” women to dominate him as he plays a composite of the degraded categories he names. The next response is from a pair of women claiming to be Aryan lesbians, who see the accouterments of Nazi uniforms as sexy. Then there is a Jewish gay man who likes to use Nazi scenes to get him in the mood to submit to his dominator but doesn’t see Nazis as sexy in themselves. There is a heterosexual woman who plays at scenes between ss and sa members or between Nazis and partisans but never Jews, and finally an Aryan male who defines himself as “homomasculine” and voices sadistic desires.83

This range of possible uses of Nazi fetishism raises issues about Internet personas as parallel to (or part of) the sort of sexual role-playing that is typical of s/m practice. Indeed, none of these identities is verifiable in the Internet environment. While Schreiber grants these written responses embodiment by recording them as voices (and thus provisionally anchoring at least the gender identity claimed in the response), she mostly chooses texts that either discuss posturing overtly or voice a self-conscious disassociation between the politics of the Nazis and the use of their political aura in sexual play. The paradox of granting embodied voices to the writings references the imagery over which they are read and with which they are intercut, all of which insist on Schreiber’s own contrary movement toward more rather than less connection with the historical legacy of the Holocaust. It is this unresolvable tension that organizes the piece.

Schreiber’s assumption of embodied Jewishness unfolds slowly in the course of the tape, as the activity of trimming pubic hair, shaving, and then inking the word Jude extends across its entire span. The typed text that narrates a series of coming of age experiences complicates the voice-over accounts from the respondents and lends intrigue to the obtuse activity of the naked lower torso. The first typed story describes how when she was a child watching a movie at synagogue the projector was turned off in the middle and the children told to leave the room. This practice is later revealed to have been an effort to shield them from
the most gruesome images of the Holocaust—images also contained in a forbidden book at home, which Schreiber had already seen, unknown to her parents. Images from the grandfather’s photo album are not immediately contextualized but culminate in a typed account of finding the album when she was a young adult. She describes being especially struck by a photo of her grandfather on vacation at the World Exposition in Paris in 1937, standing in front of the Nazi pavilion, a swastika flag waving in the background. The type reads, “I was shocked when I realized that, while there was never a time in my life when I didn’t know what that symbol meant, for him there had been a time when it meant nothing.” These stories thus inscribe Schreiber into the history of the Holocaust, both in terms of her own introduction to the images most strongly associated with Nazism (death camps and swastikas) and her subsequent inability to remember a time when she didn’t know what these images meant.

While the practitioners of Nazi fetish s/m on the soundtrack do not claim that these symbols of Nazism mean nothing—indeed, if they did, there would be no point in playing with them—the tension lies between Schreiber’s deep sense of embodiment as a Jew raised with a strong sense of history and the kind of ungroundedness sexual play seems to enact. Schreiber does not condemn the virtual play she catalogs in the voices of the respondents per se but rather tries to situate herself within this cultural field. Indeed, one of the implications of the act of inking “Jude” on herself is to counter the respondents’ tendency to script the role of the Jew as only that of victim, and not resister, to Nazi brutality. She thus inscribes her own body into history but also reclaims the act of marking a body’s Jewishness for herself in a gesture that is in itself erotic.

The last segment of the tape, in which the washing and shaving are revealed as preparations for writing on her body, is accompanied, significantly, by a music track of the song “Wenn ich mir was Wünschen Dürfte” (If I could Wish for Something) as recorded by Marlene Dietrich in 1930. The lines of the song in German speak of ambivalence and a recognition that given the choice the singer would wish to be only somewhat happy so as not to lose the ability to feel sadness. Schreiber modifies this message, in the tape’s final image, as the typed words “If I had one wish, I would wish for the sadness of the past” scroll by, followed by the computer command “>>Logoff.” This modified lyric echoes the dominant sentiment of the tape, that the history of the Holocaust should not be lost in the free flow of wish-fulfilling fantasies. The final command further implies that the stories that have been typed
in the course of the tape are in direct response to the statements of the 
online respondents to Schreiber's questionnaire.

The song itself, however, is densely referential not to the Holocaust 
itself but to the history of these sexual/representational practices, for it 
is the same song that Lucia sings in her controversial Lola Lola persona 
in one of the concentration camp flashbacks of The Night Porter. The 
Night Porter, as discussed in the course of this chapter, was a pivotal text 
in moving Nazi iconography away from history and making history into 
an image/toy of sexual rhetoric. This same image is referenced at an-
other remove in Madonna's music video Justify My Love, which no longer 
references the Holocaust at all. Schreiber's tape, on the other hand, 
moves in the opposite direction—toward history rather than away from 
it. This sentiment is revealed in her choice of Dietrich's recording of the 
song instead of Rampling's. Dietrich, a highly complex icon of both 
"Nazi" sexuality and anti-Nazi activism, is the counterpart to Schrei-
ber's critique of fetishized Jewish victims, as Dietrich, too, is at odds 
with the cultural currency of her image. Indeed, in 1930, when she 
recorded this song, the icon was under construction, as she had already 
shot The Blue Angel and given Lola Lola a screen presence that would 
never fade. She is once again accompanied by composer Friedrich Holl-
länder, as in both The Blue Angel and A Foreign Affair, but before any of 
Germany's dark future could be known. In this sense, Schreiber's use of 
Dietrich's version echoes her account of her own shock upon realizing 
that, on looking at her grandfather's vacation photos, there had been a 
time when the swastika didn't mean anything, for neither did Dietrich's 
song. For Schreiber, this is nearly inconceivable, but it resonates with the 
claims of some of the Nazi fetishists who speak in the tape. Schreiber 
does not judge their sexual practices but articulates her own inability not 
to see herself implicated in these never really empty symbols.

In this way, Schreiber's tape and Flanders's film point to a new kind of 
dense ambivalence toward the icons of sexualized Nazis. As a represen-
tative of the complexity of rhetoric surrounding these images, Lola Lola 
can be sexy and she can be politically appropriated but she cannot be 
etirely divorced from both the history of Nazism and the history of the 
rhetorical uses to which they have been put. This is perhaps the new 
doubleness that the always double icon of Lola Lola now embodies.
86 Kenneth C. McLain, “The Untold Story of Marlene Dietrich,” Confidential: Tells the Facts and Names the Names 3.3 (July 1955): 22. While some of these exploits have been confirmed by Riva, this particular article is short on historical accuracy.

87 Ibid., 24.


90 Mayne, 42.

91 Bach, 384.

92 Mayne, 43.

93 Film scholar Annette Insdorf writes of Judgment at Nuremberg that it relies on the casting of recognizable stars, saying that some were used “for their suggestion of integrity,” while others, especially Dietrich, were used to “connote the dubious psychological or moral states of their own film personas: for example, when the song ‘Lili Marleen’ accompanies Haywood’s walk with this German woman, her identity resonates beyond the frame.” (9). Insdorf does not elaborate on this “dubiousness.”

94 Riva, 640. Riva also recounts how Dietrich sang songs to women as a regular part of her show insofar as she refused to change pronouns in love songs.

95 Sian Phillips performed as the Dietrich icon in the musical play Marlene, which was written by Pam Gems and directed by Sean Mathias. The play takes place onstage and backstage at one of Dietrich’s concerts in Paris in 1969. Marlene originated in London and played for only three weeks in New York, from 11 April to 2 May 1999.


8 Sexualized Nazis and Contemporary
Popular Political Culture

1 Claudia Koonz, Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics (New York: St. Martin’s, 1987), 3. Koonz describes the Braun image as “passive-docile,” Riefenstahl as “ambitious, determined, opportunistic,” and Griese as “hearthless, brutish” (12).

2 Koonz notes that the few women who did work as camp matrons or guards are often described by survivors as the “most vicious” of the guards. While not denying their sadism, she cautions that it might be precisely because they are women that they seem exceptional in a context in which the relative comparison of ex-

3 Koonz concludes that under the Nazis “some compliant, ambitious, and non-Jewish women profited from a kind of ‘tokenism,’ while the oppression of most women became more pervasive” (84). The issue of “Nazi feminists”—in other words, women who were not only unopposed to the ideology of fascism but advocated for their more active and broader participation—is also taken up by Lella Rupp in *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939–1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

4 The guards in the film are divided into two groups: the female SS members who accompany Ilso and the beer-guzzling and lascivious male guards who indulge in the gang rape of women prisoners for sport. Among the latter group resides the film’s one definitive lesbian, who apparently sleeps in the men’s barracks and chooses female inmates who have scorned her for the men to rape. The male guards’ violence is thus figured as a relay for perverse lesbian sex.


7 Ibid., 100.

8 Donna Barr, “His Story,” *The Desert Peach*, #18 (Seattle: MU Press, 1992), 13–20. Barr describes the genesis of the character as stemming from a costume party she attended in a faux German Army uniform in 1972 while serving in the U.S. Army. After she performed the character at several science fiction and comics conventions, the first issue of *The Desert Peach* was published in November 1988.

9 Fellow comic book artist Colleen Doran drew the picture of Pfirsch and his main love interest, Rosen, with an infant, and fellow comic book artist Pia Guerra drew the dreamy-looking Pfirsch with the pacifist message (ibid., 22, 24). The latter image is an homage to a Mike Dringenberg pin-up.

10 Donna Barr, e-mail exchange with the author, January 2000. Barr is very intent on the historical accuracy of her story’s context, especially with regard to the German military and its distinction from the Nazi Party and the SS.

11 Sontag, 100.


15 Theweleit writes that incest is not at the core of the fascist psyche in the usual sense but that “They want a contact with the opposite sex—or perhaps simply access to
sexuality itself—which cannot be named, a contact in which they can dissolve themselves while forcibly dissolving the other sex” (ibid., vol. 1, 205).


17 Ibid., 140. Lina Wertmüller’s Seven Beauties (1975) banks more directly on abjection. The reference to Dietrich/Lola Lola occurs in a labor camp, where the commandant, a large, unattractive woman, sits, Dietrich-like, astride a chair with her legs spread, Nazi boots on, and wearing ordinary, lumpy underwear, as the protagonist (an inmate) tries to seduce her.

18 Peter Bondanella argues that the central tension of The Night Porter is between the ideas that nothing changes (history repeats itself) and time heals all wounds (or things change after all). The oscillation between history and memory is meant to reflect on the part fascism might play in the 1970s Italian present (Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present [New York: Ungar, 1983]).

19 This was Dietrich’s final screen appearance, which her daughter claims she accepted for purely financial reasons (Maria Riva, Marlene Dietrich [London: Bloomsbury, 1992], 765). Dietrich refused to appear on camera in Maximilian Schell’s 1984 documentary about the star.


21 In The Serpent’s Egg, cabaret performers fall on both sides of the conflict with Nazism. The Sally character is a Jewish cabaret singer with not a lot of brains but a heart of gold, but when the cabaret is raided by the Nazis (a nod to the fact that they at least billed themselves as anti-decadent) one of the other performers eagerly points to the Jewish proprietor and participates in his condemnation.

22 See, for instance, Insdorf, 126.


30 Farber, 14.


32 If the film is read to suggest that a relationship between Max and Lucia was truly

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possible, then I would have to agree that the film is morally unconscionable. But since Cavani had made several documentaries for Italian television on the subject of survivors I am assuming, along with Teresa de Lauretis, that this film is decidedly unrealistic. Of course, by transferring the insights she garnered from actual survivors into the psychosexual realm, much of the particularity of their experience is lost. For the most part, I am interested in this film as a text that inspired debate rather than coming to a definitive conclusion about its moral choices. See Teresa de Lauretis, “Cavani’s Night Porter: A Woman’s Film?” Film Quarterly 30.2 (1976–77): 35–38.


34 De Lauretis, 35–36.

35 Ibid., 37. The Polish-German film Angry Harvest (Agnieszka Holland, 1985) is a more recent offering that more closely conforms to de Lauretis’s argument than The Night Porter does, as it features a much less eroticly stylized sadomasochistic dynamic between a Jewish woman and a German farmer in which the heterosexual dynamic of protector/protected (a paternal relation) slides into that of captor/captive (a patriarchal relation).


37 Ibid., 369.


43 Ibid., 1079, n. 9.

shoot of psychoanalysis, date back to the publication of Hugh Missildine's *Your Inner Child of the Past* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963).


47 Ivy, 44, 47.


49 *Santa Monica Museum of Art Newsletter*, 5.2 (Spring 1994).

50 *Amnesia* features talking heads of various actors making xenophobic remarks about foreigners, which are later revealed to be derived from sources that range from 1860 to 1992, over images of Nazis marching in the background.


52 In "A Child Is Being Beaten," Freud describes how being beaten by the father substitutes for the castration the male child fears as retaliation for his desire for the mother. This transforms into desire for the father and a projection of the punishing figure onto the mother to disguise the homosexual implications of the fantasy. The patient conveys these various shifts by describing a dream in which "a child is being beaten." The child is revealed to be a youngster the patient doesn't like and finally the patient himself. There are several layers of displacement at work in the case, and hence the various acts of witnessing brutality with which this case is blended in *Belladonna* might begin to sound like a projection as well. This aspect is deeply problematic.

53 Di Mattia, 8–9.

54 The issue of Jewishness is completely submerged and obscured in *Belladonna*, in which, as in *The Night Porter*, the word *Jew* is never uttered. The racial constitution of the concentration camp inmates and the Jewishness of the Steinbergs are not addressed.

55 Ironically, the persistence with which violence against women and children is figured ensures its sexualization precisely because it functions not on its own but in relation to the therapy of the perpetrator. The various ways in which the death of a female inmate is recounted highlights its perversion, in keeping with the theatricality common to the uses of the sexualized Nazi scenario since the 1970s, with a ring of witnesses and a guard who sometimes "whistles an aria from *Madame Butterfly*." Finally, this one repeatedly invoked victim comes to stand in for the Steinberg child, whose death is never explicitly mentioned and who thus remains the true subtext of the tape.


58 Film scholar Miriam Bratu Hansen, in her survey of criticism of the film, also notes
that Spielberg follows a classical narrative form, which hinges on "the restoration of familial forms of subjectivity (Schindler as a super father-figure who has to renounce his promiscuity and return to marriage in order to accomplish his historic mission, the rescue of Jewish families)" ("Schindler's List Is Not Shoah: The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory," Critical Inquiry 22 [1996]: 298). See also Yosefa Loshitzky, ed., Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

Keneally, 27.


Wilhelm Reich, The Mass Psychology of Fascism, trans. Vincent R. Carfagno (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), xi. The quote is from the preface to the third edition, published in 1942. Reich originally belonged to the Communist Party and was a member of psychoanalytic circles, a very unpopular combination with both groups in the 1920s. By the mid-1930s, he had been excluded from both.


For an account of how conservative critics of feminist art misread the way these artists used sexuality in their art, see Christine Tamblyn, "The River of Swill: Feminist Art, Sexual Codes, and Censorship," Afterimage (October 1996): 10–13.


For the various efforts to negotiate identities, both firm and fluid, see Kate Bornstein, Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us (New York: Vintage, 1994); C. Jacob Hale, "Consuming the Living, Dis(re)membering the Dead in the Butch/FTM Borderlands," GLQ 4.2 (1998): 340; Judith Halberstam, "Transgender Butch: Butch/FTM Border Wars and the Masculine Continuum," GLQ 4.2 (1998): 287–310; and Judith Halberstam, "F2M: The Making of Female Mas-


72 Brian Clowes, "Neofeminism: Religion of Despair," in *Pro-Life Activist's Encyclopedia* (Stafford, VA: American Life League, 1993). Available from the World Wide Web: ⟨http://www.all.org/plae/plae.htm⟩. Cited on 12 February 1998. Since repetition is the name of the game in these documents, the inversion claim is repeated to include men a bit farther on: "It seems that much of the pointless and fruitless anger and unrest in this society is caused by women who want to be men (and, to be fair, men who want to be women)."

73 See my discussion of antigay and antiabortion rhetoric in this publication in chapter 3.


75 Performance scholar Diana Taylor notes that during the Malvinas/Falkland Islands conflict in Argentina in 1982, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was often pictured wearing a pirate's patch over one eye, and cartoons featuring her husband as henpecked abounded. The political use of gender inversion to characterize female political figures is thus not at all limited to the U.S. context. See Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 87.


77 Linda Kintz's analysis of this book concurs that the feminazi conspiracy that Marrs posits centrally revolves around a rhetoric of gender inversion. In the course of the book, Marrs is able to equate strong women, Jews, sexual freedom, and multiculturalism with Nazism, while white Christian male proponents of patriarchy represent an imperiled traditional American democracy (ibid., 23, as discussed in Kintz, 261).

78 Kintz, 257.

79 Party affiliation is not revealed, although some reference to the 1984 bid of Geraldine Ferraro as Walter Mondale's historically first female vice-presidential running mate is certain.

80 My interpretations of Flanders's film are informed by interviews I conducted with her by e-mail in the fall of 1998.

81 Again, these are explanations provided by Flanders in e-mail interviews with the author, fall 1998.

82 The listserv Schreiber used was gl-asb.alt.sex.bondage. My interpretation of Schreiber's work has benefited from an extended interview and discussion with her by e-mail in the fall and winter of 1998–1999.

83 Schreiber published a print version of this project wherein she interjects a childhood story in which a friend brings over a doll identical to one she has, one child

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claiming the doll is Christian and the other Jewish, the point being that people who seem to be engaging in the same act may be experiencing it very differently. See Rachel Schreiber, “Please Kill Me; I’m a Faggot Nigger Jew,” *Dawka: Jewish Cultural Revolution* 1.3 (1997): 20–21.

**Epilogue**


6 *Cultural Conservatism: Toward a New Agenda* (Washington, DC: Institute for Cultural Conservatism/Free Congress Research and Education Foundation, 1987), 5, quoted in Messer-Davidow, 53. As Messer-Davidow writes, symptoms of this “drift” are “conspicuous consumption, a ‘me-first’ ethic, demands to eliminate racism and homophobia, scientific proposals to achieve zero-population growth and eliminate male aggression as the source of war, decreased religious and parental influence, deterioration of school education, women’s and critical legal studies, rock videos. Blame goes to 60s cultural radicals and a new cast of 80s characters: yuppies and welfare recipients (both, oddly enough, produced by liberal largesse)” (41).

7 Rachel Schreiber, text from the catalog of the exhibition “Strange Fruits,” Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies, October 1995.

8 In an e-mail exchange I conducted with Schreiber in the fall of 1998, she wrote, “While a lot of work has been done which investigates why our culture is fascinated with fascism, my particular interest is in how Jews continue to be represented as victims, and how this role of Jew as victim has become the object of fetishization.”