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The Perplexing, Hypersexualized Nazi
by Ben Mercer

Janet Lungstrum, in her essay Foreskin fetishism: Jewish male difference in *Europa, Europa* labels Agnieszka Holland's autobiographical depiction of Salomon Perel "an uncomfortable film" because of its "sexual hilarity" and goes on to suggest that "the film promotes a type of fetishism normally unbefitting to the Holocaust genre: a fetishism that eroticizes the heroic male lead's Jewish body and focuses on his circumcised penis" (Lungstrum 53). The film's themes of sexuality, i.e. "teenage sexual awakening and exploration" prompted an uproar from German critics who slammed it as politically incorrect, offensive and "guilty of… crimes of Holocaust (mis)representation" (Lungstrum 54). But what exactly does this mean? Does there exist a set of criteria for proper cinematic representation of the Holocaust? Naturally, one tends to think of sex in terms of pleasure and unity which contrasts starkly with the torture, hatred, and we typically associate with the Shoah. But this line of thinking ignores a persistent trend in mainstream post-Holocaust cinema, both foreign and domestic: a curious fascination these films have with the sexuality of their fictitious National Socialist characters. These Nazis are imbued with a sexuality that is explored and in many cases used to further their characterization. *Europa Europa* uses sex to spotlight the absurdities of Nazi ideology. And *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) invites us into the private, sexual spheres its two main characters – Oskar Schindler and Amon Goeth – in a bid to further an understanding of who they are both as men and as Nazis. A great deal of research and study has gone into conceptualizing the relationship between sex and the Third Reich (a definitive understanding of this dynamic is well beyond the scope of this paper), but I wish to at least exemplify the seemingly unnecessary prevalence it enjoys within the cinema today, and its usefulness in eliciting both irony and a deeper sense of characterization.

Europa Europa functions primarily "to demonstrate and ridicule Nazi racist anxiety over the racial or sexual 'castration' of the Aryan in face of Jewish difference", but also in the face of sexual difference too (Lungstrum 54). After being conscripted into the Wehrmacht as an interpreter, Solly befriends a German soldier named Robert, a closet homosexual fearfully secretive of his identity. Thus, Robert exists in the film through the lens of his sexuality, and it is through this that we read Holland's critique of Nazi Germany's policy regarding homosexuals – who were deemed undesirable along with Jews, Poles, etc. Chiefly, Robert represents the absurdity of a government policy that casts aside a chunk of the population for hollow, superficial reasons when it could instead use said population to further its militaristic ambitions. For he is as effective a soldier as any other, yet in the eyes of the country he fights for, he is considered sub-human. We find a similar example in the a homely female German official tasked with escorting Solly en route to an elite Hitler Youth school, introduced as a sultry temptress who becomes intensely aroused not only by Solly's boyish good looks, but also by the characteristics he shares with Adolf Hitler, namely his birthday and dark hair. During the scene on the train her dialogue and mannerisms ooze sexuality, right up to the moment where she seduces Solly and initiates him into manhood. Holland uses sexuality in this scene to cast a light on another inherently absurd part of Nazi ideology: the overarching fact that despite all the prejudice and the propaganda and the fear, a Jew is not biologically different from any other man. She reaches climax almost instantly, screaming "Mein Fuhrer!" at the top of her lungs, blissfully unaware that the penis inside of her is a Jewish one. The irony here is obvious, as a

female Party official engaging in illicit intercourse with a Jew is in direct violation of the 1935 Nuremburg Laws which "prohibited both marriage and extramarital relations between Jews and 'Aryans'" (Stibbe 67). But perhaps the most important Nazi figure in the film is Leni, a young Hitler Youth whom Solly meets at school. As with most of the film's Nazis, she is presented from the start in a noticeably sexual way. We first see her serving Solly's table, where she angrily brushes aside a physical advance from a friend who informs Solly that "she's the best one here, but she's unapproachable" (Holland). Sexuality will be used as a means of both elaborating her character *and* undercutting her ideology. We understand her as both physically desirable *and* sexually aware, yet hopelessly unattainable for poor Solly, as his need to hide his circumcised penis prevents him from ever becoming intimate with her. Her scenes serve to elicit from the audience a persistent sense of '*will they or won't they*', but in the end, it is precisely through Leni's heightened sexual awareness that we come to understand who she is as a person. After Solly's unfavourable reaction to one of her anti-Semitic remarks, she calls him a "limp-dick" and storms off. We find out later that she has become pregnant with Solly's friend so that she may bear a child of higher racial purity for the Fuhrer. Thus Leni is a compelling character because of her sexuality, but must also be dismissed as a villain because of it.

Janet Lungstrum mentions that "the same German film establishment" that ridiculed and chastised *Europa Europa* "…proceeded to welcome the far more straightforward *Schindler's List* as 'the work of mourning' that they were unable – or unwilling – to produce themselves" (Lungstrum 54). This is curious, because like Holland's film, Spielberg's use of Nazi sex proves useful in commenting on the hypocrisy of National Socialist thought. Oskar Schindler is an interesting man of often contradictory values. We come to know him as many things – failed businessman, war profiteer, gentleman, Nazi, etc., but Spielberg also privileges us a glimpse into his sexuality. For he is a ladies' man – handsome, charming, and promiscuous, but also capable of love and fidelity. For example, when his mistress Klonowska answers his front door to find his wife standing there, Oskar gently jests at their embarrassment. His wife maintains that she loves him, however, and says that she will stay if he agrees to remain monogamous, which he does not. Yet by the close of the film they are reunited, closer than ever. Schindler's sexuality provides us an understanding of his contradictory nature in the same way as his war profiteering in that he is comfortable behaving amorally to further his own ends. His alter-ego, the maniacally sadistic Amon Goeth, also has an active sex life. In one of the most memorable scenes, Amon stands on his balcony overlooking the Płaszów concentration camp, sniping (almost at random) the Jewish workers below. Spielberg adds a sexual element to this scene in showing one of his mistresses, lying nude in his bed just behind him. This adds a new layer to Amon's sadism, as he does not appear the least bit ashamed or concerned in exposing his lover to such violent and ruthless behavior. Like Schindler, Goeth is perfectly comfortable not only with his own immorality, but also in making those close to him aware of it. The sexual dimension added to these two characters is what brings this similarity to the fore. But it is their sexual dispositions toward Jews that best illustrate the flaws in their character while simultaneously acknowledging the imperfections in Nazi prejudice. At his birthday party, Schindler receives passionate kisses from virtually all of the females in attendance. When presented with a cake from one of the Jewish girls from the camp, he does not hesitate to extend to her this same expression of passion, much to the horror of everyone in attendance, especially Goeth. Yet Goeth will go on to make sexual advances toward his Jewish housekeeper, nearly to the point of rape. These two sexually charged scenes illustrate not only the falsification of the 'otherness' of

Jews (Schindler does not become sick or crippled for having kissed one, as Nazi propaganda led one to believe), but also the hypocrisy of a Nazi desiring a Jewess.

These films are only two examples, and do not include the entre genre of "Nazi exploitation" films but it is clear that the cinematic link between Nazism and sex has endured in a significant way since World War II and the end of the Holocaust. The hypersexualization of the Nazi, while providing a greater layer of character depth and fertile ground for ideological critique, perhaps also serves to blunt the horror and pain that irrevocably comes in any effort to represent the Shoah.

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