

MASQUERADES OF SELF-ERASURE:
PORNOGRAPHY AND CORPOREAL MEMORY IN LILIANA CAVANI'S
THE NIGHT PORTER

by

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I am utilizing Liliana Cavani's controversial 1974 film The Night Porter to acknowledge the significance of pornography in historical representation and memory work as related to the Holocaust. I will discuss the importance of representations rooted in the corporeal and relegated to the obscene and argue that the term pornography is used in academic, political and popular circumstances to attack texts that disrupt or threaten a dominant, pre-existing understanding of the world. Having been largely misunderstood for the last three decades (and criticized by major scholars, including Michel Foucault, Susan Sontag and Primo Levi), The Night Porter uses the languages of pornography and masochism to initiate a forceful historical dialogue that calls for a re-evaluation of the criteria used to gage and evaluate the past.

The Night Porter argues that culture consoles itself in simplistic, "moral" readings of history. It subsequently attacks the concept of post-Holocaust redemption and issues related to the reassurances of redemptive logic with which culture has long kept itself warm. I propose pornography to be disruptive when placed alongside historical representation because it gestures to historical dialogues that dominant discourses are fearful of having. The film is complicated further by the fact that it was marketed, not as contemplative art cinema, but as kinky pornography by its American distributor.

The Night Porter however, comes with even more problematic implications, including a cycle of low-rent sexploitation films that depict sensationalized and inept representations of concentration camps. The most notorious examples are Gestapo's Last Orgy and SS Experiment Love Camp – ripoffs of The Night Porter that, until recently, have been banned or otherwise unavailable. My discussion of pornography and the obscene is complicated by Nazi sexploitation insofar that they follow the same narrative trajectory as The Night Porter, but carry with them very different ontological implications. I will conclude my thesis with an examination of these films in an effort to acknowledge the pornographic as a cultural necessity with regard to engaging in dialogue with, and reconciling, history.

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DEDICATION

For Shoe.

Introduction

Those who dance are considered insane by those who can't hear the music.

—Anonymous (2001, as cited by George Carlin xi)

Liliana Cavani's Il Portiere di Notte (The Night Porter, 1974) runs counter to dominant representational frameworks by initiating a cultural dialogue rooted in the corporeal.¹ The transgressive behaviors and trajectories of memory exhibited by the protagonists resist redemptive modes of thought and appropriations of history that culture has come to rely upon. As part of the film's counter-position, the protagonists reject language and communicate with their bodies via a corporeal trajectory rooted in masochism. This inclination toward the corporeal has resulted in the film being discussed as pornography. I argue that the term pornography is thrown at resistant narratives by those defending dominant structures, so as to denote them as dirty or obscene. Because the representation of body is vital in different ways to each character, the concept of a corporeal cinema has led to accusations that distract from the dialogue initiated by the film. The Night Porter concerns the post-war reunion between Max (Dirk Bogarde) a former Nazi official and Lucia (Charlotte Rampling), the daughter of a socialist, with whom he shared a masochistic sexual relationship when she was imprisoned in a concentration camp. When Max and Lucia reunite, they renegotiate the terms of their masochistic contract, not with ink and paper, but with their bodies. Consequently, they throw the concept of memory, as it is commonly understood, into crisis. As stated by Theodor Reik,

The unprejudiced observer's first general impression of masochistic phenomena is paradoxical ... contradictory, incredible, running counter to general opinion. Applied to phenomena, it can only mean: something that rationally could not exist and yet is there. It is a strange phenomenon that a river should disappear and reappear on the surface of the earth many miles away. But such examples are known and are explainable. It would produce a paradoxical impression, however, if a river suddenly changed its direction and began running backwards towards its source. Inconsistency, of course, is not to be confused with absurdity. The element of antagonism, of apparently intentional contradiction, proves rather that there is a meaning in this inconsistency. The inconsistency is not nonsensical; it is merely contradictory. It does not stand outside of general belief. It takes a stand against it. (39-40)

¹ Referred to hereafter by its English title.

Reik's reference to a river flowing in reverse is central to the narrative and ideological objectives of The Night Porter. However, as I expand my reading to a controversial cycle of sexploitation remakes / ripoffs of the film, my discussion of corporeal / pornographic historical representation will consider the implications of absurdity and obscenity. I must emphasize that it is not my objective to simply defend the film; rather, I seek to place emphasis on the cultural discussion (however uncomfortable) that the film necessitates on what memory is and the problematic circumstances under which it has come to operate.

In Chapter One, I will root The Night Porter in its context and discuss a salient public debate between Cavani and Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi. Much has been written on the inherent unrepresentability of the Holocaust, and some films have touched on that very fact – most notably the documentaries Night and Fog (Alain Resnais, 1955) and Shoah (Claude Lanzmann, 1985).² Such themes are beyond my objectives here, but it warrants mention that The Night Porter also concerns memory, but in such a way that literal representation is negated in favor of an approach that uses human bodies as stand-ins for other concepts. The Night Porter initiates a forceful dialogue that calls into question the tools that culture has long used to reconstruct and reconcile history. Finally, I will briefly discuss other contexts within which The Night Porter has been situated and the problematic nature of redemptive themes in relation to the Holocaust.

In Chapter Two, I will examine the term pornography as it has been used in relation to The Night Porter. The term functions in a variety of contexts in both Film Studies and Holocaust Studies, in dual reference to graphic sexual content and an absence of empathy with regard to historical events. Scholarly writing has largely condemned The Night Porter – in some cases, going so far as to base assertions on scenes that have been fabricated completely. I will discuss the different ways that the film has been argued as pornographic or obscene, and will conclude with a discussion of how Cavani has been accused of anti-Semitism, and the controversy surrounding the film's release in Israel. In this chapter, I am primarily interested in how accusations of pornography have been wielded in accusatory tones so as to distract from what the film is inherently about.

² See Barry Langford's "'You cannot look at this': Thresholds of Unrepresentability in Holocaust Film."

I argue that the natural (both academic and popular) inclination when dealing with a difficult text is to push it into associations with other films to stabilize or pin it down so that it may be contained and dissected. With this in mind, I have been cautious with the other texts I incorporate. In Chapter Three, I incorporate Gilles Deleuze's discussion of sadomasochism – relevant because, like pornography, sadism and masochism are terms that function at social margins. Max and Lucia have been repeatedly referred to as sadistic (or paranoid / mentally ill) which, I argue, misses the point. I am particularly interested in how masochism and sadism are represented by onscreen bodies. I have illustrated my argument with comparative readings of Agustí Villaronga's In a Glass Cage (1987) and Rainer Werner Fassbinder's The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant (1972).

In Chapter Four, I will examine three scenes from The Night Porter and discuss them in terms of corporeal representation. In The Night Porter, physical gestures are more telling than dialogue. As such, the film's meanings are made manifest through its dialogues of body, where the physical compatibilities of the characters determine how they communicate. I begin with a discussion of an asynchronous corporeal dialogue between Lucia and her husband, Atherton shortly after they arrive at the hotel. Atherton's refusal to listen to Lucia and his inability to recognize the signals of her body are precisely what result in her leaving him for Max. The second scene is the reunion between Max and Lucia where they mutually renegotiate space and reject language in favor of a purely physical dialogue born of common understanding. In the third scene, Lucia performs burlesque for a group of stylized, carnivalesque Nazi soldiers. As a representation that, on the surface, appears disruptive and violent, Cavani uses violence as the language with which Max and Lucia cloak the respect inherent in their masochistic dialogue.

Chapter Five concerns Cavani's representation of supporting characters in The Night Porter whose physicalities are representative of the fascist aesthetic. Cavani binds history to the corporeal by associating confined bodies in a process of stagnation with a political ideology that has fallen out of context. A second representation of fascist bodies, however, is one that functions at the helm of our social institutions and have, since the Holocaust, contributed to how memory is (or is not) assembled and worked through. The Night Porter argues that memory must be encapsulated in the body because language has been perverted by institutions that have, in advance, laid claim to history. Such bureaucratic structures (as represented by Max's Nazi comrades) are exclusively concerned with their own protection and maintenance. Lucia is

consequently seen as mentally ill by Max's comrades (and her relationship with Max, pornographic) because she refuses to allow her memories to be regulated by redemptive logic and phony structures of language. The films' central visual conflict occurs between the physicalities of Max and Lucia (predicated on body and gesture at the expense of language) and that of Max's comrades (as stilted and delusional bureaucrats, clinging to a moral high ground of their own fabrication).

Chapter Six is a reception study of The Night Porter, salient because distributor Joseph Levine purchased the film when it was initially stranded without a distributor, and subsequently marketed it as kinky pornography. The moral authority of the American popular criticism in particular is worthy of close examination, although the film was controversial internationally. Here, I will examine the logic behind hostile responses from three of the most prolific popular critics of the time (Vincent Canby, Pauline Kael and Roger Ebert) and discuss how the marketing strategies were, on one level, key to its success, and, on another, central to how it has been misunderstood ever since. The popular criticism frequently attributes trivial representation to the film and utilizes a particularly venomous language. Because pornography has been attributed to The Night Porter in so many contexts (as justification to examine, condemn, and even as a method to advertise), the term operates as a linguistic sponge, simply absorbing whatever meaning is attributed to it in any given context. In discussing the American reception of the film, I will examine the accusatory tone with which Canby condemned the film as pornographic, and subsequently, how Canby's quote was used by Levine in the film's American ad campaign, spinning the term pornography by making it the reason to recommend the film rather than reject it.

The most problematic of the films associated with The Night Porter is a brief cycle of low-rent sexploitation films made immediately subsequent to its box-office success – all of which are driven by narratives regarding a consensual sexual relationship between a Nazi guard and an inmate in a concentration camp. While The Night Porter certainly did not initiate the Nazi sexploitation cycle as such, it *did* directly inspire the two most notorious films of its kind – L'Ultima orgia del III Reich (Gestapo's Last Orgy) (Cesare Canevari, 1977) and Lager SSadis Kastrat Kommandantur (SS Experiment Love Camp) (Sergio Garrone, 1976).³ Inept and excessive, the films indulge in scenarios of humiliation and degradation with a total lack of any

³ Referred to hereafter by their English titles.

social or historical conscience. I argue that films are vital in a discussion of The Night Porter in relation to pornography, cultural hierarchies, and historical representation.

In Chapter Seven, I will discuss the ontological implications of Nazi sexploitation and propose a methodology to closely examine them, separate from that used with The Night Porter. I argue that Nazi sexploitation is, in fact, enormously important to historical representation as that with which culture has been unable to come to terms. Reik's assertion in my opening paragraph that inconsistency and absurdity not be confused is vital to any argument that discusses The Night Porter alongside Gestapo's Last Orgy and SS Experiment Love Camp. Despite the evident and unavoidable similarities between the films, they cannot be directly compared because the sexploitation films simply cannot withstand a rigorous academic interrogation in relation to Cavani's nuanced and layered film. While I argue The Night Porter to be a complex and psychological film, Nazi sexploitation is equivalent to a destructive, sociopathic criminal with the comprehensive capabilities of a child. Subsequently, one cannot subject the films to an academic interrogation as one can The Night Porter. In this chapter, I propose an alternate route with which to approach this uniquely deviant cinema.

With Chapter Eight, I will end on a discussion of how the previously unavailable Nazi sexploitation films have recently been released as retro-collectibles for a new generation of cult film aficionados. I have selected the sexploitation films to conclude this thesis because they complicate my discussion of pornography as it relates to historical representation and memory work. I argue Nazi sexploitation to be the single most caustic and problematic form of cinema. As such, its re-release (after having been banned or otherwise unavailable for decades) carries with it enormously problematic historical implications. I will incorporate the theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Paul Sartre in an examination of how this tasteless cinema is being newly-celebrated, albeit, for problematic reasons. Due to the incompetence of their representations, Nazi sexploitation films *look* absurd – and it is this precise unintended (or perhaps, indifferent) absurdity that has made them marketable in a contemporary context as deviant retro-products. With The Night Porter having been locked into a position of high art via the Criterion label and the sexploitation films freshly available via their new DVD release, I will examine what, ontologically, is at stake with respect to these films being situated where they are.

Chapter One:

Context / Sontag / Body / Levi:

Public Debates and Contentious Scholarship

This chapter provides preliminary information before I proceed with my thesis. I begin with a short plot summary of the film for the sake of completion, and progress to several films that emerged from Europe at roughly the same time as The Night Porter which also explore the decadent aesthetics of fascism. I will then account for the overall absence of Susan Sontag's well-known essay "Fascinating Fascism" from my research. I move on to briefly acknowledge the origins of the term Holocaust with an explanation as to why its meaning is central to my argument. The final section chronicles a contentious public debate between Cavani and Holocaust survivor Primo Levi as to the merits of the film.

The Night Porter: Summary

Set in Vienna in 1957, The Night Porter concerns Max, a soft-spoken hotel porter who, years prior, was a Nazi official in an Austrian concentration camp. When an American conductor (Marino Masé) and his wife Lucia, arrive at the hotel as he finishes a European tour of Mozart's The Magic Flute, Max and Lucia share a moment of recognition. A series of flashbacks reveal their having previously encountered each other in a camp in Austria (where she was imprisoned as the daughter of a socialist), and that they were involved in a masochistic relationship. The Hotel zur Oper where Max works is a haven and meeting place for those who continue to harbor Nazi sympathies. These individuals are either frantically attempting to survive in the modern day (such as Max's Nazi comrades), or slowly dying, incapable of functioning in a post-War context (Erika [Isa Miranda], a ghostly ode to the burlesque aesthetic and Bert [Amedeo Amodio], a gay Nazi ballet dancer). Max's comrades gather at the hotel for the purpose of conducting pseudo group therapy sessions, where they alleviate themselves and each other for their war crimes, while simultaneously destroying hard evidence that could be used against them in court.

In her hotel room, Lucia, in a state of shock, decides to initiate a reunion with Max. She arranges for her husband to continue his tour without her and resumes her relationship with Max, based on a masochistic economy. Mario (Ugo Cardea), a former prisoner who is utilized by

Max's comrades for their therapy sessions, recognizes Lucia from the camps. Paranoid that Mario may identify Lucia to his comrades, Max kills him. Shortly thereafter, Max's comrades learn of Max's transgressive sexual relationship and, fearful that Lucia may report them to the authorities, demand that Max surrender her. Max retreats with Lucia to his apartment, where they are surrounded by his comrades, who wait for them to emerge. The two continue their relationship, but are gradually starved out of the apartment. When they finally leave together, they emerge in costume – he in his Nazi uniform and she in her baby doll dress, signaling her role as his little girl. They drive away from the apartment with Max's comrades in pursuit. In the film's final shot, having abandoned their vehicle, they are crossing a bridge at dawn when they are gunned down.

Pornographic Frameworks: Transgressive Bodies in Cavani's German Trilogy

The Night Porter was the first (and most well-known) film of Cavani's German Trilogy, followed by Al di là del bene e del male (Beyond Good and Evil, 1977) and Interno berlinese (The Berlin Affair, 1985). As stated by Gaetana Marrone, "Cavani is primarily concerned with the thematization of desire and pleasure in a repetition compulsion that exceeds the logic of history: play, spectacle, violent sexual and political power call into question their ideological origins as well as their stylistic bases" (83). Although the extent of Cavani's oeuvre is beyond my objectives here, I will briefly summarize the other two films and discuss how they function together with regard to pornography and the transgressive body.¹

Beyond Good and Evil follows the brief period of Friedrich Nietzsche's (Erland Josephson) life where he was closely associated with fellow philosophers Lou Salomé (Dominique Sanda) and Paul Rée (Robert Powell). The bold and sexually-assertive Salomé is ultimately, in the wake of Rée's death and Nietzsche's physical and psychological deterioration, the sole survivor. The climax of Beyond Good and Evil depicts Nietzsche hallucinating Good (Robert José Pomper) and Evil (Amedeo Amodio), physically manifested as muscular nearly-nude dancers who perform ballet – the body of each dually resisting and enveloping the other. Evil is clearly the dominant force, in both an implicitly sexual capacity, and insofar that he ultimately strangles / defeats Good. Central to the trilogy is Cavani's representation of the body

¹ For an extensive reading of Cavani's films, see Marrone's The Gaze and the Labyrinth: The Cinema of Liliana Cavani.

in some state of physical or psychic transgression. Cavani's bodies are in an endless state of flux, in one sense tangible and graspable, comprised of flesh and bone – yet fluid and vaporous, operating in abstraction. Nietzsche's sister Elizabeth (Virna Lisi) is central to how the film addresses issues of obscenity, having famously distorted her brother's writings to appeal to Nazi sympathies (through the publication of The Will to Power) after his death. Depicted as a sexually-repressed and self-destructive neurotic, the conservative Elizabeth is the film's moral centre – a recurring concept in Cavani's films being that self-proclaimed morality is merely an underhanded cover for totalitarian structures. Beyond Good and Evil subtly touches on the violation of historical truth by those with special interests – a theme central to The Night Porter.²

Set in the Weimar Era, The Berlin Affair concerns Louise (Gudrun Landgrebe), the wife of Heinz (Kevin McNally), a Nazi official. When Louise enters into an affair with Mitsuko (Mio Takaki), the daughter of a Japanese ambassador, the situation quickly spirals out of control. Heinz also becomes involved in the relationship and, at Mitsuko's request, the three engage in rituals where they consume sleeping powder in excess, effectively transcending their own bodies in a corporeally-based process in which Louise and Heinz struggle for Mitsuko's affections. Ultimately, Mitsuko kills herself and Heinz, leaving Louise to contemplate whether she was rejected or spared by Mitsuko. As such,

[a]n obsessive ambiguity characterizes Cavani's labyrinthine psychological structures: lucidity and madness, dreams and nightmares, real and surreal, delirious forms of absolute beauty and the hegemonic image of death, the privileged ritual is at the heart of her artistic world. (Marrone 10)

The narrative is related by Louise through flashbacks to a professor, Schopenhauer (in reference to German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, himself an influence of Nietzsche) on the verge of being arrested by the German police for writing literature deemed pornographic under the Nazis. Because the relationship between Louise, Heinz, and Mitsuko is deemed obscene, its framing is appropriate insofar that this "pornographic" narrative could only be related to someone who is, himself, implicated in pornography. When, at the end, Schopenhauer gives Louise his last remaining manuscript to smuggle out before he is arrested, the gesture is reminiscent of how

² In terms of the pornographic content of the film itself, Marrone acknowledges the ballet scene as having been "omitted from the American prints" (230). Consider a 1986 Canadian retrospective of Cavani's work in which, as stated in The Globe and Mail: "The board made five cuts to Beyond Good and Evil: 'Eliminate full-length views of man-on-woman in motion and woman astride man and man astride woman in motion; eliminate close-up view of man... all full-length views of couple copulating; eliminate view of erect penis; eliminate view of man on woman in motion; eliminate buggery scene'" (Schwartzberg D5).

Salomé's survival establishes her as the female agency that ultimately emerges from the ashes of the narrative, intact. The films acknowledge a process by which intellectuals are targeted (in this case, accused of pornographic / obscene behaviors) by totalitarian structures. Cavani's films argue representations of transgressive bodies and female sexual agency to be disruptive concepts that lead easily to accusations of pornography.

"Fascist-chic": 1970's Art Cinema

The Night Porter is one of several Italian art films concerning the decadent aesthetics of fascism including, La Caduta degli dei (The Damned, Luchino Visconti, 1969), Saló o le 120 giornate di Sodoma (Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom, Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1975), Pasqualino Settebellezze (Seven Beauties, Lina Wertmüller, 1975), and (straddling the line between art cinema and exploitation) Salon Kitty (Tinto Brass, 1976). Each of the aforementioned films explores the aesthetics of fascism as lush, ornate and baroque – thus, at least superficially exhibiting characteristics comparable to The Night Porter. The Damned chronicles the downfall of a powerful German industrial family during World War II.³ Saló (the one film unrelated to the Holocaust) depicts the final days of Mussolini's reign as channeled through the writings of the Marquis de Sade. Seven Beauties concerns a concentration camp inmate who charms and eventually has sex with an obese female guard in order to save his own life. Cavani is frequently associated with Wertmüller, if only because they were the only two major female Italian filmmakers of the time, although stylistically and ideologically, the two could not be more different. Finally, based on Peter Norden's pulp novel, Salon Kitty concerns the workings of a brothel that doubles as a Nazi surveillance station. Further examples beyond Italy include the earlier Polish drama Pasazerka (The Passenger – Andrzej Munk, 1963) and the French Lacombe Lucien (Louis Malle, 1974). I cite these examples to illustrate how The Night Porter rose out of a unique historical context, but I assert that this particular film, though less graphic than many of its counterparts, proposes a particularly forceful and disruptive cultural dialogue.

³ Bogarde and Rampling initially met on the set of The Damned, and Bogarde made his acceptance of the role of Max contingent on Rampling being cast (as stated by Bogarde in Orderly, 147-8 and Rampling in her interview with David Gregory on the Anchor Baby DVD extras to The Night Porter).

Susan Sontag: The Absent Scholar

Susan Sontag's article "Fascinating Fascism" examines the aesthetic relationship between contemporary culture and fetishistic Nazi-related iconography: "The SS was designed as an elite community that would be not only supremely violent but also supremely beautiful" (99). She concludes with an acknowledgment of a modern aesthetic prototype: "Now there is a master scenario available to everyone. The color is black, the material is leather, the seduction is beauty, the justification is honesty, the aim is ecstasy, the fantasy is death" (105). I must clarify that the absence of Sontag in this thesis was not my decision – rather, it was made for me; Sontag briefly acknowledges The Night Porter (alongside The Damned) and simply rejects it as an uninteresting example, indicating it to be salient enough to warrant mention, but not enough to explain why (100-1). Sontag represents an interesting frustration to my scholarship because her article has been influential and is relevant to my research, yet I cannot apply The Night Porter to the theory of a scholar who has *already* (though simplistically) addressed and discarded the film.

"Holocaust" and the Redemptive Smokescreen

As explained by Holocaust scholar Berel Lang, the linguistic root of the term Holocaust carries its own problematic implications:

the earliest published references in the United States date from the late 1960's ... The main connotations of the term derive from the use in the Septuagint of *holokaustoma* ('totally consumed by fire') – the Greek translation of the Hebrew *olah*, which designates the type of ritual sacrifice that was to be completely burned ... The English usage of 'holocaust' in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries elaborated this sense of a religious burned offering; secondarily, the term began to appear as a metaphor for sacrifice more generally. (xxvii)

Lang goes on to designate more appropriate terms:

Both the Hebrew designation *shoah* ('wasteland' or 'destruction' as in Isaiah 10:3 and Proverbs 3:25) and the Yiddish variation of the Hebrew *churban* ('destruction') ... are more adequately descriptive than 'Holocaust,' because they imply a breach or turning point in history (*and* because they reject connotations of 'sacrifice.') (xxvii)

The fact that Holocaust is the term designated to the Nazi genocide is important because it gestures to a redemptive or harrowing appropriation of history. As articulated by Tim Cole:

From a position of relative ignorance about the Holocaust on the part of non-survivors and relative silence about the Holocaust on the part of survivors, the

Holocaust has emerged – in the Western World – as probably the most talked about and oft-represented event of the twentieth century. (3)

This thesis is based on my assertion that American culture has firmly rooted itself in a value structure that views history through a problematic smokescreen of hope and redemption (an example being the celebrated Hollywood melodrama Schindler's List [Steven Spielberg 1993]).

Prior to The Night Porter, Cavani filmed Storia Del III Reich (1962), a four-hour documentary concerning Nazism made for Italian television, and La Donna Della Resistenza, (1963), concerning female members of the Italian resistance, who fought first against the Italian fascists and then the German in the wake of Mussolini's deposition.⁴ When discussing the inspiration for The Night Porter, Cavani begins by quoting testimony from women who survived the camps:

'I will never forgive the Germans for forcing me to see a side of myself I didn't know existed.' [Cavani, herself then continues...] So, by having survived by having ... more guts than other women there – maybe by stealing a mess-tin, a pan to hide food in, so that she could survive – by evidently only thinking of herself, and without thinking of the others – without any solidarity with them, the teacher from Cuneo told me that she had learned a lesson about solidarity. It's that solidarity is a fundamental value – it's instinct not to give into selfishness, and not to just save yourself. She told me she had learned that from a group of French women who tried to help each other. There's a dilemma as to what to do when confronted with this survival instinct. One never knows how one will behave in such situations.⁵

Jewish-Italian Holocaust survivor Levi related the year he spent in Auschwitz in his seminal text Se questo é un uomo (published in English as Survival in Auschwitz). Even Levi himself has been subject to redemptive logic in that the title of his book translates literally to the more introspective If This Is a Man. As observed by Tony Judt:

Survival in Auschwitz (which captures the subject but misses the point), did not begin to sell well until the success of The Periodic Table twenty years later. La tregua was published here under the misleadingly optimistic title The Reawakening, whereas the original Italian suggests 'truce' or 'respite.' (46)

Levi's texts (staples in the canon of Holocaust literature) have been superficially sanitized as redemptive and uplifting for American consumption. In attacking The Night Porter, Rebecca Scherr argues that "our discomfort stems from the absence of any acts of redemption and resistance by the victim, Lucia, or even a redeeming characterization in her personality ... [and

⁴ Cavani's early documentaries are scarcely available, and only in Italian. See Films Cited for the weblink to La Donna Della Resistenza.

⁵ Cavani's interview with David Gregory, Anchor Bay DVD extras to The Night Porter.

that] [w]e want to see a narrative of redemption through Lucia's resistance to Max's destructive power" (283-4). Here, Scherr feels entitled to a redemptive narrative and argues its absence to be a deficiency, emblematic of an overarching conception that all survivors *should* exhibit moral / redemptive behaviors and further considering an absence of redemption in historical representation to be unacceptable, or in poor taste. In this capacity, the specific social performance demanded by collective frameworks of victims is indicative of a very different kind of violence for which contemporary culture is responsible. With The Night Porter, Cavani feverishly attacks the reductive simplicity of redemptive historical representation, consequently doing violence to the worldviews of a number of critics and scholars.

The Primo Levi / Liliana Cavani Debate

Holocaust survivors themselves have been the most oft-cited sources of criticism on The Night Porter. Elie Wiesel, best known for his memoir, La Nuit (Night), has claimed "whoever has not lived through the event can never know it. And whoever has lived through the event can never fully reveal it".⁶ Wiesel references The Night Porter in stating that:

[audiences] get a little history, a heavy dose of sentimentality and suspense, a little eroticism, a few daring sex scenes, a dash of theological rumination about the silence of God, and there it is: let kitsch rule in the land of kitsch, where, at the expense of truth, what counts is the ratings. (167)⁷

The most influential public debate occurred between Cavani and Levi. In The Drowned and the Saved, Levi refers to The Night Porter as "a beautiful and false film" (48). He quotes Cavani as having said:

'We are all victims or murderers, and we accept these roles voluntarily... [and] that in every environment, in every relationship, there is a victim executioner dynamism more or less clearly expressed and generally lived out on an unconscious level.' [In response, Levi states:] I do not know, and it does not much interest me to know, whether in my depths there lurks a murderer, but I do know that I was a guiltless victim and I was not a murderer. I know that the murderers existed, not only in Germany, and still exist, retired or on active duty, and that to confuse them with their victims is a moral disease or an aesthetic affectation or a sinister sign of complicity: above all, it is precious service rendered (intentionally or not) to the negators of truth. (Levi 48-9)

Further, Levi directly cited Cavani's source material:

⁶ As cited in Wiesel's A Jew Today (197-8).

⁷ As cited in Wiesel's From the Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences

Cavani knows a friend of mine who was in the camps and who goes back every year to visit. She returns because she is a teacher. She takes her pupils with her to show the factory of death; but Cavani thinks my friend does it for a kind of nostalgia, of the victim/accomplice. This is not honest. Her film is based on the wrong idea, more precisely on the idea Cavani has of sex. This has nothing to do with the camps. (Levi in Marrone, 94)⁸

Levi rails against the morally ambiguous territory explored by Cavani, claiming that such an interpretation perpetuates ignorance of the past. Cavani recounts having spoken with Levi:

He remembered and remembered, even though he knew I had read his books, and that he could write many more books. I had the impression that Levi could speak for, or, better, succeeded in speaking, only of that period in his life, as if he had never left. I also wondered if the criminals were as traumatized as their victims. It does not seem so, at least not from their testimony at their trials. To admit remorse is to admit a sense of guilt, but their entire defense is based on an absence of guilt. (Cavani, as quoted in Marrone 92, 94)⁹

Operating under the belief of Levi being the last word on all things Holocaust-related, some have reconciled The Night Porter by simply arguing Levi's condemnation to warrant the end of all necessary discussion – fabricating the impression of having dealt with the film.¹⁰ This method of silencing the film by deeming it unnecessary is, for example, utilized by Nicola King, who explains that The Night Porter contributed “to a long-standing conviction that ‘art’ or entertainment should not be made out of this sort of suffering, and that everyone should be obliged to watch the Belsen documentary (footage of the liberation of Bergen Belsen) and read Primo Levi, and leave it at that” (49). Here King, who both misidentifies Lucia as Jewish, and misspells the name of the filmmaker – “Lilian Caviani” – proposes that students of the Holocaust are, in fact, obligated to limit themselves to two canonical texts (both of which, incidentally, are contingent upon literal, absolute representation). In contrast, Marrone suggests that “Levi's criticism relies on the discomfort caused by Cavani's sexual portrayal, an approach that distracts him from understanding the film” (94). To contribute to the discussion, I draw attention to the social filter that exists between Cavani's initial interview with the survivor and Levi's retort;

⁸ As originally published in an interview with Levi by Pasquale De Filippo in the Italian newspaper La Gazzetta del mezzogiorno, 10 December, 1977. The friend of Levi's and alleged inspiration for Cavani was Lidia Rolfi, a former prisoner of Ravensbruck, as cited in Primo Levi: Tragedy of an Optimist (Myriam Anissimov 426).

⁹ As originally published in the forward to the screenplay, Il portiere di notte.

¹⁰ Holocaust survivor Bruno Bettelheim similarly spoke out against Seven Beauties in “Surviving,” originally published in The New Yorker (Aug. 2, 1976). It is here that the fundamental difference between Seven Beauties and The Night Porter becomes clear. As stated by Bettelheim: “The completely misleading distortion in Seven Beauties ... is the pretense that what the survivors *did* made their survival possible” (288). Lucia, on the other hand, exhibits no behavior to suggest that she behaved out of necessity.

there would be enormous social consequences for any Holocaust survivor to admit, first to being the inspiration for The Night Porter, and further, to express identification with the film. The debate between Levi and Cavani operates at the edge of that which is socially permissible. Levi has countered:

What Cavani chose to emphasize was precisely this reduction to a bestial state of which accepting certain lewd acts was just a minimal part, although she concentrates so much on it that she offends. Several women tell of indiscreet questions thrown at them on their return, or worse still, assumptions – there are cases when they were brutally confronted with the accusation: you’ve come back so you must have ... In any case, it may well be that this made it harder for the women.¹¹

Cavani however, simply refuses to cease questioning the survivors and bases her outlook on the complexities and ambiguities that she sees as inherent in human nature.

To think ‘I won’t ever kill anyone, won’t ever do anything wrong’ and to be scandalized by others’ behavior, it’s better to first have been in the same situation before saying how one should behave. This woman from Milan made a strong impression on me, because the obvious core issue, which she didn’t want to deal with was the fact that she had, in fact, survived by not being polite or generous towards others... What I’m saying is that the victims’ stories can sometimes be controversial. They can be dark. It is because human nature is complex, sometimes far more complex than one would ever imagine. We are convinced that we know ourselves so well. We say we would behave different in this or that situation. Before coming to such a conclusion, one would put themselves in the actual situation. It’s too easy to think that you wouldn’t do the same.¹²

It is this exchange that reveals the most about Levi and Cavani, respectively. Levi seeks to protect the survivors and requests respectful silence, whereas Cavani initiates a dialogue and demands active discussion. The Night Porter draws attention to our own cultural and linguistic shortcomings and outright refuses the respectful silence that Levi proposes.

¹¹ Levi, in The Voice of Memory: Interviews 1961-87 (241).

¹² Cavani’s interview with David Gregory, Anchor Day DVD extras to The Night Porter.

Chapter Two:

Reconsidering the Dominant Narrative:

The Relegation of The Night Porter to Pornography

the ideal order of society is guarded by dangers which threaten transgressors. These danger-beliefs are as much threats which one man can use to coerce another as dangers which he himself fears to incur by his own lapses from righteousness. They are a strong language of mutual exhortation. At this level the laws of nature are dragged in to sanction the moral code: this kind of disease is caused by adultery, that by incest; this meteorological disaster is the effect of political disloyalty, that the effect of impiety. The whole universe is harnessed to men's attempts to force one another into good citizenship. Thus we find that certain moral values are upheld and certain social rules defined by beliefs in dangerous cognation, as when the glance or touch of an adulterer is held to being illness to his neighbors or his children.

—Mary Douglas (1966: 3)

I know it when I see it.

—Justice Potter Stewart (2006: 70)¹

Pornography is a loaded and complex term that has been attributed to The Night Porter in many contexts. In this chapter, I will explore the meanings connoted by the word and the circumstances under which it operates in relation to the film. Pornography originates from the Greek words *porne* (prostitute) and *graphos* (writing), translating to “writing with regard to prostitutes.” When I consider this definition alongside how the term has been appropriated by North American culture, I think of the social taboos associated with prostitution. Not unlike a prostitute, pornography operates under problematic predetermined social assumptions where it is seen as available to whomever chooses to mould, appropriate, and even abuse it. Less a term that stands for itself than one that absorbs meanings attributed to it, I argue that the pornographic is often deemed as such because it initiates dialogues that culture, for whatever reason, is fearful or embarrassed about having. As articulated by Laura Kipnis: “Pornography should interest us, because it’s intensely and relentlessly *about us*” (161). In this chapter, I will address some of the pre-existing scholarship written on The Night Porter – particularly with regard to all-out errors in fact. My acknowledgment of this scholarship is not to debunk the

¹ Regarding a case in 1965 when asked to provide the definition of pornography, upon which he was basing his decision. See *Jacobellis vs. Ohio, 1964: Law 101: Everything You Need to Know About the American Legal System* (Jay M. Feinman).

work of academics, but to illustrate how the film has largely been attacked without having been closely examined.

Pornography and Dominant Ideology

I began this chapter with the infamous quote from Justice Stewart to indicate how there is no broad-scale social or legal consensus on what pornography actually means, the original Greek definition notwithstanding. Consequently, it functions as a linguistic dumping ground into which relationships and meanings unaccounted for by dominant frameworks are discarded. As stated by Terry Eagleton: “Any word which covers everything loses its cutting edge and dwindles to an empty sound” (7). In order for pornography to connote that which conservative discourses resist, it however, *cannot* have a clear definition, but rather *require* pornography to be vague so that it may simply be applied in any circumstance that is convenient. In stating that he knows it when he sees it, Stewart effectively sentenced pornography to a realm of arbitrary meaning, where it will apply to whatever *he* chooses to attribute it in any given situation. As articulated by John Ellis, “Pornography is difficult to discuss because there is no discourse that is analytic yet nevertheless engages the subjectivity of the individual uttering that discourse” (25-6). Pornography has been appropriated by conservative ideology as a point of reference via which pre-existing systems of belief are reaffirmed with regard to that which is socially acceptable. When discussing the law in relation to Emmanuel Kant’s The Critique of Practical Reason, Gilles Deleuze proposes that, when removed from a vague consensus of what constitutes good behavior, it operates exclusively for its own purposes:

Clearly THE LAW, as defined by its pure form, is such that no one knows or can know what it is. It operates without making itself known. It defines a realm of transgression where one is already guilty, and where one oversteps the bounds without knowing what they are ... Even guilt and punishment do not tell us what the law is, but leave it in a state of indeterminacy equaled only by the extreme specificity of the punishment. (73)

Deleuze’s observation points to the tone of Stewart’s claim – a refusal to define the parameters of the unacceptable and a determination to cloak one’s reasoning in the shadows of the bureaucratic structure itself. It is by this logic that the legal system need never account for itself when it deems something pornographic or obscene. If the law is simply taken, on its own merits, to be that which is “right” – as necessary for the maintenance of good behavior and social

stability – then, by such logic, the pornographic *must* be “wrong.” Subsequently, when something is banned or when someone is punished, it is not because it / he *has* wronged, but because a discourse that does not account for itself has determined it to be so, having not measured itself on the basis of anything greater than its own merits.

Empathy and the Pornographic

Scholars of the Holocaust have appropriated pornography in such a way that is not necessarily related to sexually explicit subject matter. Carolyn J. Dean explains how:

a wide variety of critics frequently use the term ‘pornography’ to describe the ‘marketing’ of the Holocaust, presumably to describe the reduction of human beings to commodities and the exposure of vulnerable people at the moment of their most profound suffering, hence re-victimizing the victims. As we shall see, critics are now pervasively using ‘pornography’ to figure an American collective relationship to the Holocaust; in particular, pornography is invoked to describe a deficit of proper empathy. (16)

Dean explores a range of contexts and circumstances within which pornography is used with regard to the Holocaust – particularly as a site for mass-consumption, citing Holocaust museums and concentration camps as contemporary tourist destinations. Though Dean’s argument is beyond the scope of this thesis, her exploration of pornography as relegated to that which is historically irresponsible or obscene is important to the accusations of historical dishonesty leveled against The Night Porter. For example, when Rebecca Scherr argues that: “[b]y relying on the use of the erotic female body as the central trope for the film, The Night Porter borders on soft-porn in its play on voyeurism” (285), she says the film *borders on* the pornographic, without elaborating further. Stewart and Scherr both use pornography as a term of convenience, both implicitly claiming to know what it means, even as neither offer any indication of that may be.

Mary Douglas: Porn, Dirt, and Ordering the World

Sociologist Mary Douglas has made important claims concerning how cleanliness (or a lack thereof) is related to how individuals order and perceive their surroundings. When Douglas states that “the laws of nature are dragged in to sanction the moral code” (3), she argues that dominant discourses fabricate the impression that their systems of value are innately true – intrinsic to human nature, and therefore, unquestionable. For the purposes of maintaining these

beliefs within the collective consciousness, structures of power identify and attack narratives that depict them as problematic. As a defense mechanism, such discourses throw accusatory terms at resistant narratives in an effort to expel them, or at the very least, distract from them – the most prevalent being pornography. To associate a text with the pornographic is to denote it to filth – something applicable only to the lowest and most base faculties of culture. When our historical narratives are designed to comply with dominant ideological discourses, they perpetuate false impressions because the narrative is drawn, not from history itself, but from our own pre-existing beliefs. As articulated by Picart and Frank:

Representation has political consequences. Representation – how we imagine – determines beforehand the world to be imagined. That is, what we see and what we do not see, what we read and how we read, are determined to a great extent by the forms, modes, genres, techniques, and grammars that govern the epistemological enterprise. (135)

Films that counter to dominant frameworks, I submit, are deemed failures because they do not reassure culture of its own pre-existing idea of itself. Max and Lucia represent an active threat – a forceful resistance to popular and conventional readings of history. The Night Porter runs counter to popular memory and questions the social institutions from which one may derive comfort and a sense of belonging. I submit that social structures rely on the impression of an overall sense of order, and it is in relation to this illusion that people often stabilize themselves and determine their footing when navigating the world. Consequently, that which is dirty dually threatens and reaffirms order. With regard to the pornographic:

If we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place. This is a very suggestive approach. It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention to that order. Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systemic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. (Douglas 35)

Douglas refers to the necessity of relegating particular aspects of culture to filth for the purpose of constructing an overall sense of established order. As a result, the perception is created that the world can be understood in rational ways, as long as everything remains agreeably in its proper and socially-ordained place. Douglas continues:

We can recognize in our own notions of dirt that we are using a kind of omnibus compendium which includes all the rejected elements of ordered systems. It is a relative idea. Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining-table ... similarly, bathroom equipment in the drawing room; clothing

lying on chairs; out-door things in-doors; upstairs things downstairs; under-clothing appearing where over-clothing should be and so on. In short, our pollution behavior is the reaction which condemns any subject or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications. (35-6)

I argue that what makes Lucia and Max's relationship dirty or pornographic is the fact that it all-out rejects those precise classifications.² Built into Max and Lucia's relationship is a nostalgia for a historical period that the rest of the world is either repressing or denying.

Over the course of the eleven years between the first and third film of Cavani's German trilogy (from The Night Porter in 1974, to The Berlin Affair in 1985), The New York Times has repeatedly reflected the anxieties as discussed by Douglas. The reviews for each of the three films use the fact that characters conduct sexual acts on the floor as a justification for judging them. In condemning The Night Porter, Vincent Canby stated, "Among the film's various definitions of decadence is a strong preference to do on a floor what most other people would do on a chair, table or bed" (D19). Janet Maslin observes, in her review of Beyond Good and Evil: "Fritz dares Lou to take a vase off the piano and use it as a chamber pot; Lou, the oft-proclaimed free spirit of the three, calmly obliges. Then Lou and Paul couple on the floor" (C14). Finally, Caryn James said of The Berlin Affair: "they sigh, they grapple, they tumble on the floor" (C12). Each review points to the representation of sex on the floor as something that makes the films themselves dirty – as though Canby, Maslin and James each have their own firm ideas of where respectable and sanitary people behave. The critics' moral elevations of themselves over Cavani's characters translate to claims that designate the characters to the low or dirty.

"It hurts": Lucia and Desensitization

Max and Lucia's relationship *is*, in a sense, pornographic, in that it negates proper social decorum. That being said, such a claim is complicated by the fact that the film makes no effort to inspire sexual arousal within the spectator.³ Dean has stated that pornography, in part:

² Michel Foucault makes a claim regarding Nazism that gives Douglas' assertion a salient historical dimension in "Sade: Sargeant of Sex": "The Nazis were chairwomen in the bad sense of the term. They worked with brooms and dusters, wanting to purge society of everything they considered unsanitary, dusty, filthy: syphilitics, homosexuals, Jews, those of impure blood, Blacks, the insane. It's the foul petit bourgeois dream of racial hygiene that underlies the Nazi dream" (188).

³ The Night Porter is not a sexually graphic film, featuring only two brief scenes of intercourse (a momentary glimpse of two male prisoners having sex in the barracks [28:30], and intercourse between Max and Lucia near the end of the film [1:41:25], neither of which feature explicit nudity).

stands in for relationships that are otherwise not accounted for, and that it from whence it arguably derives its rhetorical power, manifest at the very least in the vast and varied references to the term. In sum, pornography continues to suggest a relationship between sexual, moral, and political perversion that it establishes now by reference to 'desensitizing' trends. (24)

The concept of desensitization is vital because Lucia (who frequently does not emote) has been read as a character who has been violated to the point that she ceases to feel pain – a convenient argument for those who seek to read her as a victim of trauma.⁴ At one point, Lucia wants Max to remove a chain feebly clasped around her wrist (1:29:00) as part of their masochistic game. She extends her wrist with expectation and states, "It hurts." In response, Max lowers his eyes, at once relinquishing his dominant role and giving her the key. This exchange addresses how the relationship is, in every way, consensual. Despite the roles of power running fluidly between them, Lucia is able to put the entire game on hold by stating that she is uncomfortable. Max and Lucia share a mutual and straightforward understanding, without safe words or linguistic detours; when Lucia is uncomfortable, she simply says so. Her request – and Max's immediate surrender – of the key illustrates how their masochistic contract is not one to which she is bound.

Because Lucia does not externalize, she has been interpreted as a blank slate upon whom scholars may ascribe a psychology that is not supported by the film itself. In some ways, Lucia *is* a blank slate in that she derives pleasure from acts related to her own negation. Scholars have often looked away from the disruptive fact that Lucia is represented in the film as a willing participant. Forcing motivations onto Lucia creates the impression that she is not only graspable and explainable, but that her psychology can be broken down, deduced, and contained. Douglas has pointed to how one's predetermined worldview may influence how one interprets a text:

As time goes on and experiences pile up, we make a greater and greater investment in our system of labels. So a conservative bias is built in. It gives us confidence. At any time we are ready to modify our structure of assumptions to accommodate new experience, but the more consistent experience is with the past, the more confidence we can have in our assumptions. Uncomfortable facts which refuse to be fitted in, we find ourselves ignoring or distorting so that they do not disturb these established assumptions. (46)

It is the distortion to which Douglas refers that most interests me because events in the film have frequently been misread (or fabricated altogether) in scholarship. When Max and Lucia are trapped in the apartment near the end of the film, Lucia smashes glass across the bathroom floor.

⁴ See, for example, "Staging Trauma in French and Italian Holocaust Film" (Dana Renga) and "Sexuality Power and Love in Cavani's *The Night Porter*: Psychological Trauma and Beyond" (Victor L. Schermer).

When Max realizes he has stepped on it, Lucia slides her hand beneath Max's foot and he crunches his foot down firmly on to the shards, trapping her fingers. The scene is emblematic of a corporeal contract where Max and Lucia cut away at the divisive boundaries of their own flesh. Ralph Berets has stated that: "Max puts glass in Lucia's vagina, and ... Lucia has her revenge by breaking glass on the floor for Max to walk on" (75). The sexual torture Berets describes never actually occurs; in the process of reconciling his own evident frustrations, Berets actually imagines (not misinterprets, but imagines *from scratch*) representations of overt brutality that are not in the film.⁵ It is ironic that The Night Porter – a film about constructed memories and the maintenance of social institutions – has been written on in such a way that content has been imagined by scholars. If one cannot reconcile the ambiguity of the characters' motivations, it makes sense to imagine Max sexually torturing Lucia, thereby reducing their motivations to simplistic moral issues of right and wrong. Similarly, when Richard Schickel describes Lucia as a "weak" character, "requiring assistance when she goes to the toilet" (9), his statement is absurd insofar that nothing of the sort occurs in the film, but argues Lucia to be disgusting by fabricating an association of her with fecal matter.⁶ As stated by Douglas,

...all margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that the shape of fundamental experience is altered. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins. We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its specially vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body. So also have bodily pairings, skin, nail, hair clippings and sweat. The mistake is to treat bodily margins in isolation from all other margins. There is no reason to assume any primacy for the individual's attitude to his own bodily and emotional experience, any more than his cultural and social experience. This is the clue which explains the unevenness with which different aspects of the body are treated in the rituals of the world. (121)

Because Lucia functions at the margins of historical representation, she threatens our own established institutions. Resistant scholarship has reconciled The Night Porter in ways that seek to demean it by ascribing to it meanings that do not exist.⁷

⁵ Berets may be confusing The Night Porter with the depiction of sexual self-mutilation in the unrelated Cries and Whispers (Ingmar Bergman, 1973) – a scene that, incidentally, is not sadistic either. Similarly, in his review for Newsweek, Paul D. Zimmerman imagines a scenario where Bogarde "jam(s) broken glass into Rampling's mouth" (95).

⁶ Also see Kael's reference to Cavani's choice of color as "latrine green" (342).

⁷ Some scholars have not even taken the care to spell Cavani's name correctly: Richard Kearney twice: "Caviani" in Questioning Ethics (28) and "Caviant" in On Stories (51), Nicola King – "Lilian Caviani" (49), Millicent Marcus – "Cavini" (52), Miller – "Liliani" (33).

Max and Lucia as Paranoid / Distrustful / Mentally-ill / Naïve

Individuals functioning within a pornographic relationship are often not seen as capable of co-existing in a trustful or honest way. Gaylyn Studlar, for example, argues that “[c]haracters in the masochistic narrative cannot be trusted to display a true, indexical sign of their feelings. To do so would end suspense, hasten gratification, and break the contracted alliance of suffering” (158). Though Studlar acknowledges the maintenance of suspense and honoring of a contract to be central to masochism, built into her language is an allusion to the masochist as untrustworthy – or engaging in underhanded or dishonest behavior. Similarly, Schermer attributes to Max “a fear that [Lucia] may betray and expose him” (932), interpreting their relationship to be built on paranoia. Teresa de Lauretis first defends the film as one “that deals with female experience from within, that investigates the deeper strata ... that seeks answers, causes, and the dialectic nature of that experience rather than presenting only a surface, whether polished or scarred” (35). She states that Max and Lucia “live out a fantasy which is the only relationship they know, the only one their brutal world ever made possible for them to know” (37), thereby arguing Max and Lucia to be behaving out of naïveté or ignorance. Lauretis’ own moral position is never disrupted by the film because she assumes that Max and Lucia’s behavior is derived merely from them not having known better. I select these statements to address the stigmas associated with masochism, as built into academic writing.

When Max and Lucia are confined to his apartment near the end of the film, Lucia asks how long the ordeal will last, to which Max replies: “Well, it can end for you at once if you go to the police.” The game played by Max and Lucia with the former Nazis is one that Lucia may end at any time; it only has as much power as *she* allots it. The issue of captivity is not supported by the film. I disagree with Kriss Ravetto’s claim that “it is not clear whether Lucia conspires in Max’s demise, whether he has drawn her down with him, or whether it is accidental” (170). Had Lucia’s objective been to enact revenge on Max, she could have done so at any time. Further, by clarifying her option to go to the police, Max informs her that he *knows* his fate to be in her hands. These examples illustrate how language used to describe individuals who operate outside the mainstream is often steeped in suspicion and condescension. It is easier to silence or demean those who question the institutions from which we derive comfort than to address the implications of the questions themselves. Consequently, the subjects of resistant

texts must contend, not only with the culture that they are questioning, but with derision from those upholding or defending the dominant position.

Feminist Discourse and Queer Theory: Cavani as “Radical Lesbian”

Though beyond the scope of this thesis, it warrants mention that the most celebrated texts related to the Holocaust (as attributed to the likes of Levi, Wiesel, Spielberg, and even Leni Riefenstahl [Triumph of the Will, 1935]) are contingent on a masculine subjectivity. As articulated by Esther Fuchs: “Feminist scholarship on the Holocaust is profoundly ethical in its attempt to give voice to the silenced, and to enable the oppressed to regain a sense of self and dignity” (x). Lucia’s empowerment, however, is often contingent upon the *relinquishment* of the voice that Fuchs seeks to acknowledge and restore. Because pornography often involves hostility directed toward the female body, the fact that Lucia frequently does not speak has been read, not as active relinquishment, but as the consequence of her voice having been taken from her – thereby justifying a reading of her as a victim of rape. As argued by Scherr,

[Lucia] rarely utters a word throughout the entire film. The victim here does not make meaning; the woman’s body stands for the atrocity and memory of Cavani’s fictional Holocaust but remains prisoner to it, contained within the boundaries of Max’s perverse, erotic rhetoric. (285)

This preoccupation with Lucia’s victimization negates how power and control runs fluidly between the two. On the other hand, feminist scholars who support the film often give Lucia *too much* agency – much more than any submissive character would ever want – arguing her behavior to be transcendent of patriarchal structure. By elevating Lucia to an ideal feminist model, not only are Lucia’s submissive tendencies forgotten, but so is the vital fact that she is, in fact, a prisoner in a concentration camp.⁸

Both defenses of and hostilities toward The Night Porter have also resulted from extra-diegetic issues related to Cavani’s own gender and sexuality:

[a] furious debate rages over whether The Night Porter is a film shot from a ‘woman’s point of view,’ because the director ... is a woman (and therefore represents deeper and unsettling existential truths concerning the human

⁸ In terms of Holocaust literature that assumes the female subjective position, consider Sursis pour l’orchestre (The Musicians of Auschwitz [aka: Playing for Time]) by Fania Goldstein, under the pseudonym Fania Fénelon. Controversial in its own right, it was also adapted into a stageplay by Arthur Miller (Playing for Time, 1980) and a CBS television film with Vanessa Redgrave (Playing for Time [Daniel Mann, 1980]).

condition) or whether the film is still about Max's fantasy-nightmare with which Lucia is problematically constructed to be complicit. (Picart and Frank 137-8)

Picart and Frank point to Cavani's gender as being of interest for scholars, and ask whether it is indicative of greater ontological questions, or simply that, as stated by Kael, "The Night Porter was directed by a woman ... which proves no more than that women can make junk just like men" (342). This approach reflects a common reading of The Night Porter that sees Cavani's gender and sexuality as its own argument against accusations of misogyny. Chantal Nadeau has argued Cavani's sexuality to be relevant: "Cavani's reputation as a radical lesbian also contributes to the ambivalent reception of her films" (213). Bogarde and Rampling have also had their personal lives examined in relation to the film; Bogarde's homosexuality had long been common knowledge in the British film industry and Rampling was, at the time, living with two men.⁹ Picart and Frank, Kael, and Nadeau all have a preoccupation with extra-diegetic information – as though the film would be unable to adequately speak for itself as a self-enclosed or 'authorless' text. Sue Stewart addresses Cavani's problematic relationship with feminist theory, stating how "it seems that a conventional feminist critique using criteria of social protection, reverse sexism, and condemnation of negative behaviour simply will not work, because Cavani's films confound that perspective" (37). Stewart acknowledges that Cavani's cinema is not disruptive on its own merits – it only appears so because it resists and problematizes the theoretical frameworks that have been laid out for it.

In the film's first feminist reading, Beverle Houston and Marsha Kinder refer to it as "pornography on the level of waking fantasy" (366) and express disquiet with regard to the representation of Lucia, arguing that: "to keep presenting such [masochistic] women in art reinforces the role and makes it more difficult for [women] ever to break out, especially when the subject is treated so romantically, and with such emotional power" (363). Located within this statement is a belief that masochistic behavior is demeaning. Further, Houston and Kinder argue that: "[u]nder the pressure of Bogarde's imposed sexuality, the child / woman / victim uses her imagination to create the role of fawnlike seductress" (367), thereby arguing that Lucia could never be anything more than a rape victim in the process of performing her consent. As far as

⁹ Bogarde starred in the ground-breaking gay-themed British drama Victim (Basil Dearden, 1961) and explored queer-oriented subject matter in The Servant (Joseph Losey, 1963) and Death in Venice (Luchino Visconti, 1971). Rampling candidly discussed living with both her husband, Randall Laurence and close friend Brian Southcombe in an October 1975 interview with Lynn Barber in Penthouse U.K. magazine (20-6).

Houston and Kinder are concerned, there is no way out for Lucia; regardless of whether or not she elicits pleasure, she is, in the eyes of this reading, invariably trapped in the role of helpless victim. Marguerite Waller articulates the tension between the expectations of the spectator and the representation itself: "Especially if her enigmatic passivity is read as acceptance or even pleasure, the viewers may find themselves wishing they were not watching, wishing the filmmaker were not showing us this, wishing Lucia would let us off the hook by appearing to suffer more" (264). The violence of the film is thus, not that which is done to Lucia, but rather, to the spectator insofar that Cavani refuses to indulge preconceptions about what constitutes victimization.

In an effort to validate Cavani's films from a feminist perspective, Kaja Silverman acknowledges that they "have proved singularly intractable to other kinds of feminist analysis" (188). Silverman inventively seeks to find a loophole within feminist theory that would invite Cavani's films into the academic club, arguing Cavani's male characters to be divested of the phallus:

Cavani's cinema would consequently seem to be fueled by the dream of androgyny. I believe that this is indeed ultimately the case, but as in 'Death of the Author,' there is another more immediately pressing goal. Significantly, what we see enacted over and over again in that cinema is a narrative event nearly identical to that through which Barthes dramatizes the demise of the traditional (male) author, and the production of a feminine singing voice. Here, too, male castration becomes the agency not merely whereby the masculine subject is forced to confront his own lack, and is remade in the image of a woman, but whereby the female author constructs herself as a speaking subject, and emerges as a figure 'inside' the text. (225)

Although Silverman's reading is the most thoughtful piece of feminist criticism on the film, her argument relies on Max being read as a castrated male through whom Cavani herself becomes manifest. Essentially, Silverman sees the bond between Max and Lucia to only be possible as one between two women – Lucia and Cavani (emerging within the text, overshadowing Max). By sliding / displacing Cavani into the character of Max, she points to the relationship as an intersection of diegetic and extra-diegetic elements. Silverman states that the film works "to erase the boundaries separating male from female subjectivity, positing highly transversal and unstable heterosexual relationships" (224). While this perspective may sound appealing in the abstract, it cheapens the relationship between Max and Lucia insofar as the "unstable heterosexual relationships" to which Silverman earlier referred are *only* unstable because,

innately, they are not heterosexual at all. Silverman refers to this exchange of power as “the desire for a kind of zero-degree subjectivity, a subjectivity which escapes full symbolic structuration, and which in doing so slips through the defiles of gender” (224). By this logic, feminist theory has its cake and eats it too; if the film were interested foremost in Lucia’s subjectivity, Cavani would be easily welcomed into feminist circles – however, by arguing Max (and his interchangeable relinquishment and reclamation of subjectivity) to be a stand-in for Cavani, masculinity as such is conveniently diluted from the text altogether.

Feminist scholars have approached pornography in many ways beyond my objectives here, but have had a particularly turbulent relationship with The Night Porter. Lauretis claims:

[w]hat makes The Night Porter anything but a pornographic film is that pornography reduces all human experience to genital sexuality devoid of any creative, autonomous, and interpersonal implications, whereas art opens up its content to many possibilities of meaning. (36).

Art and pornography are in polar opposition for Lauretis, illustrated further by her defense of The Night Porter as “a woman’s film” being contingent on a comparison to Last Tango in Paris, as “a man’s film” (38). Lauretis operates in binary categories as she makes effort to claim the film as a feminist text – but in that very process, deems it necessary to distance it from the pornographic. Christine Delphy however, claims that “The Night Porter explains concentration camps by the ‘masochism’ of the Jews, and the oppression of women by the ‘sadism’ of men” (188), thereby justifying an anti-Semitic reading by attributing masochism to Lucia and sadism to Max. Clarifying sadism and masochism to be predicated on entirely different relational economies, Gilles Deleuze states that “a genuine sadist could never tolerate a masochistic victim... [and] [n]either would the masochist tolerate a truly sadistic torturer” (36). Eugenie Brinkema states that: “Lucia’s quality of compelling the male gaze is associated with being the object that inspires shattering and the dissolution of the masterful ego of the man who looks upon her” (434). Brinkema does not acknowledge the characters’ co-dependence, instead arguing the relationship to be a competition in which Lucia is the victor. Because Lucia does not look at Max during intercourse, Brinkema argues “her pleasure in performing, then ... [to be] addressed not to Max but to the Other, to the universe at large, and simultaneously privately to herself” (431). Brinkema must necessarily imagine a divide between the characters because she cannot conceive of a self-enclosed realm in which the two operate on equal terms. Consequently, Max and Lucia’s act of intercourse has been seized by feminist scholarship and politicized as

something that distances rather than unites them, thereby attributing ugliness and distaste to the relationship. Regarding the film's confiscation by Italian censors, Cavani explains: "The director of the Board told me, 'Well, we won't allow it to be shown because the woman is making love while on top of the guy.' That, I have to say, almost made me faint. I was totally taken aback. I told him, 'Sir, this type of thing actually does happen, you know.'"¹⁰ I cite Cavani to illustrate the absurdity of political relevance attributed (by both feminist scholars and the patriarchal structure of the Italian Board of Censors) to something as simple and instinctive as mutual sexual pleasure.¹¹



Lucia (Rampling) "inappropriately" on top of Max (Bogarde) in the past (fig. 2.1) and in the present (fig. 2.2).

Lucia as Jewish: Accusations of Anti-Semitism

Perhaps the most severe attack waged on The Night Porter has been that of anti-Semitism, which is based on Lucia repeatedly being mistaken as Jewish. She is, rather, the daughter of a Socialist, as stated by Mario at 25:48 in the film. There is already intellectual

¹⁰ Cavani, interviewed by David Gregory – Anchor Bay DVD extras to The Night Porter.

¹¹ Emmanuel Reynaud cited Le Nouvel Observateur (8 April 1974) when evaluating why The Night Porter was initially banned in Italy: "Obscenity, scenes of excessive vulgarity showing sexual intercourse, depravity. The film, doubly pernicious as it was directed by a woman, shows a disgraceful scene in which the woman takes the initiative in a sexual relationship" (56). As stated by Bogarde in An Orderly Man: "The Germans banned it. The Italians said it was disgusting, it was obscene, and Charlotte and I were on a summons for indecency if we ever set foot in Italy again. And it got really very, very, very hairy and gruesome but at one point I made a plea with Liliana, who knew 'somebody' in authority, that 'somebody' would see it. 'Somebody', in inverted commas, in Italy, in Rome, and 'somebody' did see it and said, 'No, it's a masterpiece. It must be seen.' It wasn't considered pornographic, so it was put on in Italy. It caused a huge sensation and there were nights and nights and nights of fighting queues and people... Jews marched, saying it was against the Jews and the pro-Nazis marched and said it was against the Nazis, and there were battles all over the place. The Arabs got into the act too and said it was against the Palestinians. I don't know, everything went wrong, but the film got shown" (153, 5).

weakness in defaulting to anti-Semitism when discussing a masochistic character who is Jewish; however, because Lucia is *not* Jewish, it is out of context to associate her with anti-Semitism at all.¹² When Holocaust scholar Omer Bartov mistakes Lucia as Max's "past Jewish sexual slave" (69), he points to what he views as the film's anti-Semitic underpinnings, stating that, in relation to The Night Porter: "the tradition of anti-Semitism, which has so often portrayed Jewish women as both sexually irresistible and destructive, fits perfectly into a universe where, after all, Jews were the main targets of extermination" (227).¹³ Similarly, Yehuda Bauer cites The Night Porter as a film of which culture must be weary in that its purpose is "in effect to make the Holocaust altogether trivial, and thus deny its function as a warning to a humanity which still suffers from chronic diseases such as Jew-hatred" (384).¹⁴

Cavani has explained that Lucia *was*, in fact, inspired by Jewish women she interviewed while filming her earlier television documentaries.¹⁵ In An Orderly Man, Bogarde explains how Lucia had been Jewish in the original screenplay, but that he dissuaded Cavani from making her so in the film: "I was convinced that if we made the girl a Jewess, it would cause the bitterest offense in Jewish circles even to suggest that such a thing could possibly have happened" (141). Cavani, herself, has expressed frustration with the situation:

Almost no foreign newspaper understood that she was not Jewish ... I wanted to bring in the issue of victim/assassin in order to include all human beings, and not only to address the Jewish question ... I was concerned by this misunderstanding about my film. At times, critics pay little attention to cultural discourses and deform the reading of a film. (Cavani, as cited in Marrone 95,97)¹⁶

¹² With regard to masochism in Jewish culture, consider the argument proposed by Jean-Paul Sartre in his argument against anti-Semitism, Anti-Semite and Jew, in which he discusses how an "inauthentic Jew" may default to masochistic behavior in order to reconcile a dominant atmosphere of anti-Semitism: "He [the inauthentic Jew] makes himself an anti-Semite in order to break all his ties with the Jewish community; yet he finds that community again in the depths of his heart, for he experiences in his very flesh the humiliations that the anti-Semites impose upon other Jews" (106-7).

¹³ Other scholars to have mistaken Lucia as Jewish include Christine Delphy (188), Katrien Jacobs (111), Richard Kearney (On Stories, 51), Ilany Kogan (140), Barbara Koenig Quart (31), Ruth McCormick (34), Raylene L. Ramsay (232), and Sue Stewart (37).

¹⁴ Lucy S. Dawidowicz criticizes The Night Porter in her chapter titled "Smut and Anti-Semitism" and claims that: "Pornography and Nazism have mutually reinforced each other over the decades. The antihumanists and sadists were those who helped to create and develop Fascism and Nazism. Those movements, in turn, bred new generations of antihumanists and sadists, providing ever-increasing audiences for the consumption of pornography, plain and political" (224).

¹⁵ Cavani's interview with David Gregory, Anchor Bay DVD extras to The Night Porter.

¹⁶ Cavani's statement, from an interview with R. M. Friedman (May 12, 1990, as cited in Marrone) is further clarified by Marrone: "Cavani is not anti-Semitic. A member of Amnesty International, she has viewed the film's themes as broadly inclusive from the very beginning. For the role of Lucia, she initially

Just as there is no Jewish iconography associated with Lucia, there is nothing in the film so as to explicitly link her with socialism. In this capacity, Lucia is ambiguous (and even frustrating) insofar that the reasoning for her being in the camp has been shifted from religious to political, and then made incidental. Friedman states that he is aware both of Lucia being the daughter of a socialist and of Cavani's own public clarification. He states, however, that "the fact that nearly all the critics made the mistake of identifying Lucia as a Jewess, together with the form of the director's refutation, only underline the vitality of the stereotypes and, even in Cavani's case, of anti-Semitic prejudices" (518). Here, Friedman justifies his association of Lucia and Judaism with the fact that others made the same mistake. He further uses the same logic (that he has acknowledged to be rooted in error) as a means to buttress an accusation of Cavani as an anti-Semite.

Accusations of Obscenity in Israel

The Night Porter was screened extensively throughout the world, but of particular interest with regard to anti-Semitism is a controversy that emerged in Israel upon its release in the form of a lawsuit brought by the film's domestic distributor, Noah Films, against the National Censor. Daniel More cites the Cinematograph Films Ordinance, Sec. 6 (1), stating that all potential film distributors must supply extensive documentation (advertisements, stills of every scene) to the Board and arrange a private screening if necessary (231). Noah Films went through the necessary process and proceeded with exhibition, until the permit was suddenly revoked. As explained by More:

Immediately before the first exhibition of the film, after the petitioner spent a considerable sum of money, the Chairman of the Board informed him that as a result of a member's objection, the Board wished to see the film again and reconsider its previous decision. The film was accordingly screened before another sub-committee which recommended a review of the decision by the Board in plenum. In the meantime, three public organizations (the Students' Union, the Ex-Nazi Prisoners Association and the Religious Teachers' Association) protested authorization of the film. By a vote of 12 to 1, with 5 abstentions, the Board decided to withhold the license originally granted. (232-3)

The Israeli Board of Censors justifies the bannings of films and plays for the following reasons:

wanted Mia Farrow" (222). Also consider how the Russian-Jewish origins of Lou Salomé could not (as she was an actual historical figure) be so conveniently erased from Beyond Good and Evil.

(a) pornography (b) violence (c) anti-Israeli propaganda (especially in Arab-nationalistic films) (d) pro-Nazism or participation or involvement of former Nazis or former collaborators with the Nazis (e) possibility of jeopardizing Israel foreign affairs (f) poor taste (g) anti-religion. (More 235)

Based on these criteria, coupled with the film having already been accused of bearing nearly every one of these characteristics in its American run (as discussed in Chapter Six), it is a wonder as to how The Night Porter was ever approved to begin with. The lawsuit found in favor of Noah Films on the basis of the distributor having gone through the initial formal process. More explains that: “had the proceedings not been defective and had the measures taken before authorizing films for exhibition been as stringent as those taken before banning films, such cases could have been avoided” (233). In other words, had the license been denied to begin with, the film would simply have never have been screened in Israel; the legal victory of The Night Porter in Israel against accusations of obscenity was based on the formality undertaken by Noah Films without addressing the question of whether or not it was actually obscene.¹⁷

Conclusion

It has been my objective in this chapter to examine the most well-known of pre-existing interdisciplinary scholarship on The Night Porter to illustrate how the film has been a source of frustration and disruption. I have further discussed how the term pornography, frequently attributed to the film, operates on a number of layered and problematic levels. The pre-existing scholarship is worthy of note because it is part of a barricade built by dominant frameworks, as a means of protection against a text which calls their validity into question. In this thesis, I never take the term pornography for granted. Instead, I seek to examine how it is attributed to The Night Porter and the subsequent sexploitation films, so as to discard them at the cultural periphery, where they will cease to be a problem.

¹⁷ With regard to further screenings in the Middle East, The Night Porter ran in competition at the Third Tehran International Film Festival in 1974 (Lightman 210).

Chapter Three:

Static Gazes and Plastic Bodies:

Deconstructing Sadomasochism in The Night Porter With In a Glass

Cage and The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant

Masoch has been treated unjustly, not because his name was unfairly given to the perversion of masochism, quite the reverse, but because his work fell into neglect whereas his name passed into current usage.

—Gilles Deleuze (1971: 12)

The Night Porter has been discussed in terms of both power relations in sexuality and the aesthetics of fascism. Michel Foucault, whose History of Sexuality and Discipline and Punish have been enormously influential in discussions of structures of power and sexual institutions, has spoken out against The Night Porter in two separate interviews.¹ Foucault has argued the film to be sadistic (alongside Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom), and as such, “a complete historical error” (“Sade,” 188). Kriss Ravetto also sees Lucia as the helpless victim of Max’s sadistic impulses.² These arguments are significant because the control exchanged between Max and Lucia is the foundation of the cultural dialogue the film initiates. In Masochism, Gilles Deleuze differentiates sadism from masochism because “[i]t has been stated so often that sadism and masochism are found in the same person that we have come to believe it” (13). Lucia and Max disrupt the power structures around them by proposing dominant beliefs to not be innate or natural phenomena, but rather, constructed *by* those in power.

In this chapter, I will incorporate Venus in Furs by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (from whom the term masochism was derived) with Deleuze’s writings for the purpose of exploring how Max and Lucia’s relationship is predicated on an economy of masochistic (not sadistic) exchange. As such, it operates under a unique set of codes that contribute to how the film represents the body in relation to history. In discussing masochism in relation to sadism, Deleuze states that:

[w]e are no longer in the presence of a torturer seizing upon a victim and enjoying her all the more because she is uncontesting and unpersuaded. We are dealing instead with a victim in search of a torturer and who needs to educate, persuade

¹ First in “Anti-Retro” and later, in “Sade: Sargeant of Sex.”

² “Lucia lacks a sense of agency; she does not choose ... but instead is Max’s chosen ‘little girl’” (Ravetto 51).

and collude an alliance with the torturer in order to realize the strangest of schemes. This is why advertisements are part of the language of masochism while they have no place in true sadism, and why the masochist draws up contracts while the sadist abominates and destroys them. (19-20)

Education, mutual consent, and the honoring of contracts are all key to the aesthetics of masochism. Self-conscious performance is a natural bi-product of these elements insofar that the enactment of the submissive role is as central to the overall scenario as that of the dominant.

Deleuze explains the inherent problems with the term sadomasochism by differentiating between the writings of Sacher-Masoch and The Marquis de Sade, and examining how the two concepts are predicated on entirely different economies.³ Deleuze states that “[t]he fundamental distinction between sadism and masochism can be summarized *in the contrasting processes of the negative and negation on the one hand, and of disavowal and suspense on the other*” (32). Safety and comfort may be easily derived from arguing Max and Lucia’s relationship as sadistic, or simply reading Lucia as a willing victim.⁴ Because sadism is contingent on an outright negation of the victim’s subjectivity and psychology, an argument of The Night Porter as a sadistic text must look away from many of the film’s formal elements in order to justify itself.

Based on Deleuze’s model, I will examine the masochistic economy of The Night Porter in relation to two other films: the Spanish Tras el cristal (In a Glass Cage – Agustí Villaronga, 1987) and the German Die Bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant (The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant – Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1972), respectively.⁵ I will first briefly explain why I consider Ravetto’s selection of Death and the Maiden (Roman Polanski, 1994) to be a problematic text to compare with The Night Porter. I propose In a Glass Cage as one that explores similar historical and psychological territory, albeit, in the context of sadism. Because, however, I am arguing Max and Lucia’s relationship to be masochistic, I will then discuss the representation of masochism in The Night Porter alongside that depicted in Bitter Tears. I have selected Bitter Tears because Fassbinder and Cavani both uniquely explore issues of masochism with regard to corporeality and the self-consciously performative body.⁶

³ “Sado-masochism is one of those misbegotten names, a semiological howler. We found in every case that what appeared to be a common ‘sign’ linking the two perversions together turned out on investigation to be in the nature of a mere syndrome which could be further broken down into irreducibly specific of the one or the other perversion” (Deleuze 115).

⁴ Fabio Vighi, for example, refers to Lucia’s “scandalous ‘desire to be raped’” (152).

⁵ Referred to hereafter by their English titles, and, in the case of the Fassbinder film, simply Bitter Tears.

⁶ There are few serious, successful Hollywood films to broach the subject of masochism, a rare exception being 9 ½ Weeks (Adrian Lyne, 1986); efforts have generally defaulted to unsuccessful comedies, such as

Ravetto's Comparison of The Night Porter with Death and the Maiden

Based on her reading of Max as a sadist, Ravetto aligns Lucia with Paulina Escobar (Sigourney Weaver), the traumatized former political prisoner in Death and the Maiden (Roman Polanski, 1994) (168-70). Ravetto states that Lucia and Paulina “both psychically avenge their victimizers by forcing them to identify with the position of the victim (the object, the woman, the violated, or the impure)” (169). I argue that there are problems with discussing the physical and sexual torture of Paulina by an anonymous figure to the active exchanges of subjectivity between Lucia and Max. I think this is an important point to stress because, in order to contemplate what The Night Porter is saying to us, we must look closely to what the characters are saying to each other.

For the sake of clarity, I will summarize Ravetto's choice of comparison. Death and the Maiden, based on Ariel Dorfman's stageplay, is set in an isolated beach house in an unnamed South American country after the fall of the Dictatorship. When a Human Rights Commissions Chief (Stuart Wilson) casually invites a stranger (Ben Kingsley) to his home late one night after a traffic mishap, his wife, Paulina claims to recognize the stranger's voice as that of a doctor / warden who brutally raped and tortured her years before, when she was an imprisoned student activist. Paulina subsequently takes the stranger hostage and demands he confess to and account for his alleged crimes. Her frantic pursuit of justice is complicated by the fact that she has been left psychologically crippled in the wake of the trauma, and as such, cannot be entirely certain that she has accused the right man. The film concerns, first, the reconciliation of memory and trauma, and second, how justice itself becomes more unattainable amid one's own need for retribution. Central to Death and the Maiden is the impossibility of Paulina ever absolutely knowing whether or not the stranger is really the man she believes (or perhaps, *needs*) him to be. While The Night Porter does consider the problematic nature of memory, the two films have little else in common.

Any alignment between Lucia and Paulina is vulnerable first, because there is no ambiguity with regard to the identities of Max and Lucia – when they initially encounter each

(Exit to Eden (Gary Marshall, 1994). I argue that the masochistic aesthetic relies on performance drawing attention to itself and is thus incompatible with how mainstream films work to conceal their own mechanics. For this reason, among others, I find alternative European cinema to be more appropriate for my research.

other in the present day, the recognition is mutual and certain. Second, Max and Lucia's relationship is depicted as consensual, one within which they take evident pleasure. At the conclusion of Death and the Maiden, justice is as elusive as ever, but in The Night Porter, it was never of consequence to begin with. Ravetto's claim that "both characters [Lucia and Paulina] take back their subjectivity, their autonomy, and power" (170) is doubly problematic because the agency to which Ravetto refers is, first, never taken from Lucia, and second, never recovered by Paulina. I am not seeking to divorce Cavani from sadism per se; on the contrary, the writings of Sade have been enormously influential to her work.⁷

Sadism and the Restricted Body of In a Glass Cage

In a Glass Cage is, in many ways, similar to The Night Porter; both concern the post-war reunion between a Nazi and an individual who was, in some capacity, subordinate. Though I have not encountered mention of In a Glass Cage as being inspired by The Night Porter, there are clear parallels in both its narrative trajectory and formal elements.⁸ In a Glass Cage concerns Klaus (Günter Meisner), a former Nazi doctor who performed perverse sexual experiments on children during the War. A failed suicide attempt has resulted in him being confined to an iron lung. Living reclusively in an isolated mansion with his family, Klaus spends his days helplessly enclosed within the enormous respiratory device. When a youth, Angelo (David Sust) arrives mysteriously, he is hired by Klaus as a caretaker. Angelo privately reveals that he is aware of Klaus' war crimes (having discovered his wartime journals), and proceeds, first to physically and psychologically torment Klaus, and second, to reenact the brutal murders of children in the present day. Angelo murders Klaus' wife (Marisa Paredes), but develops a dually nurturing and threatening affinity for his daughter Rena (Giséle Echevarría). When Angelo ultimately liberates Klaus from the iron lung (suffocating him in the process), he reveals himself to be a survivor

⁷ Cavani has stated: "I feel the need to analyze the limits of human nature at the limit of credibility, to lead things into the extreme. This is what I show in Il portiere di notte; it is only the beginning of reality. In the world, it is not virtue that prevails, but crime. That is why Sade is fundamental for me and should be studied in school" (Marrone 82, as attributed to "Liliana Cavani: Le Mythe, le sexe et la revolte" (42). Further, in her forward to the screenplay (Il portiere di notte): "We are all victims of assassins, and accept those roles voluntarily. Only Sade and Dostoyevsky truly comprehended this" (ix). Here, I see the repeated misunderstandings of Sade as attributable to Camille Paglia's claim of him as "the most unread major writer in western literature" (Sexual Personae, 2).

⁸ Villaronga explains on the DVD extras that an embargo was placed on In a Glass Cage when it was to be screened at the 1986 Berlin Film Festival. It was banned outright in Australia in 1994 (Street 176).

whom Klaus molested during the War. I see the references to Sade in In a Glass Cage to be a better point of comparison to that of masochism in The Night Porter. The two films (unlike Death and the Maiden), concern neither the enactment of revenge nor the pursuit of justice – but instead, a fatalistic return to the past, where memories become tangible, entering literally through the front door (of Max’s hotel and Klaus’ home, respectively).

With regard to the representation of space, consider the perpetual darkness and expansive openness of the mansion of In a Glass Cage in relation to the winding corridors and tight enclosures of the hotel (and later, Max’s apartment) in The Night Porter. As stated by Deleuze:

The settings in Sade, the castles inhabited by his heroes are subject to the brutal laws of darkness and light that accelerate the gestures of their cruel opponents. The settings in Masoch, with their heavy tapestries, their cluttered intimacy, their boudoirs and closets, create a chiaroscuro where the only things that emerge are suspended gestures and suspended suffering. (31)

Filmed in luminous shadows and shades of dark blue, In a Glass Cage contrasts with the smoky browns and grays of The Night Porter.⁹ Shapes, colors and objects operate in tangible, absolute terms in In a Glass Cage; vivid colors are utilized and the abstract, stylized representations of The Night Porter are replaced with the concrete and literal. The most delicate objects in In a Glass Cage (the glass casing of the iron lung and mirrors placed over Klaus’ own face to guide / control his gaze) always remains intact, even amid the most extreme psychological violence. In the third act of The Night Porter, Max steps on shards of glass that Lucia has smashed on to the bathroom floor. When Lucia places her hand beneath Max’s bleeding foot and he presses it into the shards, they participate in a renegotiation of the tangibility and composition, first of the material world, and second, of their respective bodies. The breaking of glass is used in the ritual of their transgression and is part of their language of exchange, emblematic of how “[t]he masochist waits for pleasure as something that is bound to be late, and expects pain as the condition that will finally ensure ... the advent of pleasure” (Deleuze 63). Even the most delicate objects of In a Glass Cage (the glass casing of the iron lung and mirrors placed over Klaus’ own face to guide / control his gaze) always remains intact, even amid the most extreme psychological violence. Max and Lucia however, are forever in the process of a corporeal exchange and renegotiation, all within the realm of their masochistic contract. In the case of

⁹ The atmosphere of the present day in The Night Porter is best articulated by Marrone: “Vienna is the city haunted by Kafka, Freud, and the drawings of Egon Schiele. It is a city illuminated by cold, aqueous, humoral light (increasing haze and grayness); a tonality that signals psychic disintegration” (89).

Klaus and Angelo however, neither relationships nor material objects are subject to negotiation because, in the context of sadism, there *is* no compromise.

The opening shots of In a Glass Cage are extreme close-ups – the first of a blinking eye and the second of a camera lens, the shutter similarly “blinking” as a photograph is taken. The mise en scene subsequently reveals the subject of the camera – a barely-conscious nude child suspended by his bound wrists from the ceiling of a dungeon. Immediately, Villaronga depicts a one-sided appropriation of the gaze, the victim being without subjectivity. Unlike Villaronga, Cavani positions Max and Lucia as dual bearers of the subjective gaze. Cavani uses the camera to mediate the relationship by depicting the bond between Max and Lucia as fundamentally self-enclosed; it is within this state that Max and Lucia coexist and distance themselves from the historical circumstances that brought them together to begin with. Much has been written about how the agency of a character is often reflected in whether his / her ability (or lack thereof) to return the subjective gaze.¹⁰ Paulina, for example, was blindfolded when she was tortured, hence her memory being strictly auditory. Lucia is never exclusively the subject of the gaze, but actively looks back at both Max and the world at large, repeatedly represented via both objective and point-of-view shots. In In a Glass Cage, Angelo, after having murdered Klaus’ wife, places her corpse face-down over the iron lung, such that her face is pressed against the glass, directly over Klaus’ own. He subsequently positions a lamp so as to illuminate the face of the corpse, forcing Klaus to look directly at her. With regard to sadism, Deleuze has stated that “the reasoning does not have to be shared by the person to whom it is addressed any more than pleasure is meant to be shared by the object from which it is derived” (18). Klaus’ subjectivity and knowledge are incidental to the film; he does not learn until the end that Angelo was among his own victims and, by that point, it has long ceased to matter.

The ability, or lack thereof, of the victim / subordinate character to navigate space of her / his own free will is central with regard to whether a film is to be read as masochistic or sadistic. Lucia maneuvers territory predetermined by Max, but in a transcendental way (which, I must stress, is both acknowledged and approved *by* him). The process of navigating interior space, both tangible (the labyrinthine corridors of the hotel) and abstract (memory and the subconscious) is central to The Night Porter. Lucia’s agency is evident, for example, in how she

¹⁰ These concepts were originally introduced in Laura Mulvey’s seminal essay “Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema.”

ascertains information in the hotel; when, as she explores, she overhears a meeting between Max and his comrades, it is *they* who are the subject of *her* voyeuristic gaze. Klaus, on the other hand, is physically bound to a machine, and as such, reliant on his own encapsulation and stasis for survival. Angelo's power over Klaus is contingent on Klaus' helplessness being equal to that of Klaus' innocent subjects during the War. Not only can Klaus not move freely as Lucia does, but Angelo forces him into the past, whereas Max and Lucia venture consensually together.

In terms of the crimes of the former Nazis themselves, it is important to differentiate between the children killed by Klaus and the wartime murders ordered by Max. Because Klaus' crimes are motivated solely by his own deviant pleasure (although the political climate of Nazi Germany may have enabled him to carry them out), they cannot be said to have been politically motivated. The relationship between Angelo and Klaus is, however, additionally complex; though Deleuze states that "the sadistic 'instructor' stands in contrast to the masochistic 'educator'" (18), Angelo was (albeit, indirectly) instructed by Klaus, in that he found (and was influenced by) Klaus' journals. In this capacity, while *In a Glass Cage* *does* depict a sadistic relationship, it is, in effect, one in which sadism has turned over on to itself – where the instructor is ultimately the victim. Deleuze articulates how:

[i]n Sade we discover a surprising affinity with Spinoza – a naturalistic and mechanistic approach imbued with the mathematical spirit. This accounts for the endless repetitions, the reiterated quantitative process of multiplying illustrations and adding victim upon victim, again and again retracing the thousand circles of an irreducibly solitary argument. (19)

Here, the instructed has power over the instructor. Klaus' journals are a narrative stand-in for Sade's own texts, including *Philosophy of the Bedroom* and *The 120 Days of Sodom*, and are frequently read aloud in voiceover, first by Klaus (presumably in the past), and subsequently by Angelo (in the present), like a shared stream of consciousness. In voiceover, the past merges with present and victim with victimizer, layered moreover with the lull of children's choral music and the sound of Klaus' breathing within the iron lung:

We constantly heard a choir rehearse in a nearby barrack. Then I often isolated myself with a child. At times, I could hear the soloist's voice while watching a boy agonize. There was a passage that I liked most of all. Unwillingly, I started to associate it with the pleasure death gave me. I discovered that hearing it excited me tremendously. At times, the panting of the boys before dying – seemed to be part of the song. (*In a Glass Cage*, 1:18:34)

The quantitative and repetitive characteristics of Sade are made further evident by the sheer length of the volumes, particularly in relation to the density of Masoch's Venus in Furs.

In the film's provocative finale, in the wake of Klaus' death, Rena approaches the iron lung, which now contains Angelo. Kissing him gently on the forehead, Rena thanks him quietly and climbs atop the device. The final shot freezes as she lifts her blouse over her head, relinquishing her own body to the nihilism initiated by Klaus and Angelo. As the camera zooms out, the shot depicts Rena and Angelo encapsulated in a superimposed glass globe, representing first the self-containment of their relationship and second, of even the most delicate elements of the material world remaining intact as the characters complete their surrender to the void. Rena's willful bodily relinquishment illustrates how "[d]estruction is merely the reverse of creation and change, disorder is another form of order, and the decomposition of death is equally the composition of life" (Deleuze 24). In a Glass Cage concludes on an ideologically disturbing note, even as it alludes to solace and the continuity of a lineage. It has been my objective in the first half of this chapter to clarify how discourses of sadism do not relate to The Night Porter, but are present in similar narratives. Just as the term pornography is frequently thrown at representations without real consideration, sadism has been subject to the same careless usage.

The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant: Plastic Bodies and Masochistic Masquerade

I selected In a Glass Cage to discuss The Night Porter in relation to sadism because the narratives themselves are so similar. Deleuze has stated that "[Masoch] has suffered not only from unjust neglect but also from an unfair assumption of complementarity and dialectical unity with Sade" (12). With regard to Bitter Tears, I will discuss how the human form in relation to the plastic arts is represented within a masochistic context.¹¹ Just as gesture is central to The Night Porter, equally salient is its absence, as represented through static or artificial bodies. Bodies that are conspicuously stiff or non-emotive are integral to Cavani's representations. I ask the reader to return briefly to the statement by Theodor Reik at the beginning of my Introduction. Many have argued the performances in The Night Porter to be incompetent because they are rigid or unconvincing. Such accusations are predicated on an assumption of how a performer *should* act, and a subsequent condemnation of that which does not adhere. Here, I will discuss

¹¹ Fassbinder's Lili Marleen (1981) would also be an appropriate point of comparison.

how The Night Porter, through its representations of the static body, has been misread as an incompetent text, when it is, in fact, a resistant one. In response to Ravetto's alignment of Lucia with Paulina, I propose a more productive comparison to be that of Lucia with Marlene (Irm Hermann), the mute, masochistic assistant in Fassbinder's film.

I will restrict my summary of Bitter Tears to the relationship between Petra and Marlene. Marlene is the mute assistant to Petra (Margit Carstensen), a vain and domineering fashion designer. Endlessly mistreated and demeaned, Marlene obediently serves, catering to Petra's whims while fulfilling administrative responsibilities. Frequently represented in the background or out of focus, Marlene remains faithful even as Petra becomes infatuated with a young up-and-coming model, Karin (Hanna Schygulla). Petra collapses emotionally when later rejected by Karin, and hysterically renounces her family and friends. At the film's conclusion, the defeated Petra tells Marlene that she has had a change of heart, and that she will begin to treat her with kindness and respect – at which point, Marlene promptly packs her bags and leaves. It becomes clear that Marlene's own gratification in the relationship was *contingent* on her continued mistreatment. Marlene, like Lucia, is most content on terms bound to an erasure of herself. The natural by-product of both Lucia and Marlene's gestures toward self-negation is that of performative minimalism. Because they are both so internalized, Lucia and Marlene are difficult to assess in any performative capacity, resulting in statements arguing Lucia to be “a one-dimensional character ... [who] shows little emotion, moral sense, or life experience” (Schermer 933).

My position is based on the importance of clearly differentiating bad acting from a *lack* of acting; I pose the question of whether a conspicuously stiff body poses in such a way because it does not know how to emote, or because it deliberately *chooses* not to. The static bodies in The Night Porter resist realist representation, pushing counter to the expectations of the spectator. I argue that by *not* moving – or by doing so in a way that is rigid and stilted (or otherwise stylized) – the body does, in fact, speak, albeit in a language of gesture and resistance. A rigid body could be superficially read as having nothing to say, simply because it does not move. This type of reading is indicative of a widespread and problematic assumption that

competence and absolute representation must go hand-in-hand, particularly in films about history.¹²

In her damning popular review, Pauline Kael states that the Nazis, during Lucia's burlesque performance "sit around like department-store mannequins" (344-5).¹³ Kael's observation is phrased as though the representation were a formal flaw or error rather than a deliberate choice on the part of Cavani (or, in other words, as if the carnivalesque iconography were there by accident). I assert that The Night Porter is not a superficial film but, rather, a film *about* superficiality. As such, it is contingent on externalities and the presence of individuals performing for each other. Both Bitter Tears and The Night Porter address performance conceptually by juxtaposing expressive, sensual gestures with representations of stiff, artificial bodies. The plastic mannequins of Bitter Tears and the rigid bodies of The Night Porter are arranged within the *mise en scène* like those in a fashion spread so as to draw attention to their decorative or ornate qualities.¹⁴ They also self-consciously point to larger implications of spectatorship – and, in turn, gesture indirectly to the spectator her / himself.

Lucia's fellow prisoners in the flashbacks of the concentration camps are also represented as static bodies, including a scene where a Nazi guard has anal sex with a male prisoner in the barracks while prisoners in the camp, gathered in a corner, look on. The bodies of the prisoners are stiff and emotionless, just as how "the scenes in Masoch have of necessity a frozen quality, like statues or portraits; they are replicas of works of art" (Deleuze 61). The corporeality of the male bodies having sex is juxtaposed with the rigidity of the prisoners. Cavani emphasizes resistant performance by filming bodies standing conspicuously still, conscious and breathing, rather than in freeze frame.¹⁵ The self-conscious rigidity of the prisoners is emblematic of memory and body being simultaneously suspended, but has been read as complicity or

¹² Houston and Kinder criticize the film for the lack of "realism" (366) with which history is represented. In doing so, they negate stylization and argue anything short of literal, unambiguous representation and clear cause-and-effect narrative progression to be a shortcoming.

¹³ I elaborate further on Kael's review in Chapter Six.

¹⁴ Lucia's fetishistic uniform has also been referenced many times in the fashion industry, including the Christian Dior Autumn/Winter 2000-1 collection (as featured in Caroline Evans' Fashion at the Edge [53-4]) and fashion spreads, including those shot by Roberto Aguilar Wig #4, and Alex Lubomirski in German Vogue (Aug. 2008), directly referencing the film.

¹⁵ As stated by Cavani, in relation to Visconti's The Damned: "In the end, my characters are dramatic mannequins like [Visconti's]; but in my film their objective was quite the opposite: in La caduta, they were punished mannequins, defeated and guilty; in Portiere, they are two demons, the symbol of a two-faced reality; thus they are exorcised but not defeated" (Cavani, as interviewed by Tiso [9] – Marrone, 107).

indifference.¹⁶ The mise en scene of Bitter Tears is similarly populated with static bodies – however, the mannequins that populate Petra’s fashion studio represent artificiality by their very nature. In arranging plastic bodies within the mise-en-scene, Fassbinder constructs an artificial audience for the expressive antics of Petra, just as Lucia performs burlesque for a group of Nazis who seem artificially frozen in time. Through their respective representations of the static body, Cavani and Fassbinder each self-consciously address how spectatorship and artifice are dually significant in the role undertaken by the masochist.

In both The Night Porter and Bitter Tears, characters pose and self-consciously perform their assigned roles with gesture and costume. Marlene’s silence, rigidity, and absence of emotion are all characteristic of a lack that she uses actively to merge her physicality into that of the mannequins. She is often relegated to the background as static window dressing, out of focus, but always present, or even positioned in the mise en scene in such a way that she and the mannequins cannot be immediately differentiated between. Marlene’s agency is predicated on her being a mannequin – an obedient servant whose very physicality is an extension of the objects in Petra’s studio. Just as the mannequins are blank slates ascribed with meaning via designer clothing, Marlene is a mannequin whose meaning is ascribed to her by Petra. The mannequins of Bitter Tears are plastic bodies locked into poses – a self-consciously hollow and phony audience to the events of Petra’s life.¹⁷

Costume is also central to Lucia’s performance – as soon as she is alone at the hotel, she purchases a pink baby doll dress similar to that which Max fitted her in the camps.¹⁸ Even Max and Petra, as the “masters” in the respective films (although, as discussed later, Max also assumes the submissive role), are represented as extensions of the plastic arts. When Lucia performs burlesque for the static crowd of carnivalesque Nazis, Max merges himself into the

¹⁶ Joy Gould Boyum claims that, “the concentration camp inmates [are] equally as enthralled by perverse performances as their guards” (20), Kael refers to them as “mute participants in assorted sexual high jinks” (342), and Scherr has argued that “Cavani deliberately juxtaposes the watchful prisoners’ faces with Max’s and Lucia’s erotic entanglements, transforming the prisoners into an anonymous group of voyeurs” (289). Readings of rape have been argued by Waller (268), Scherr (279), and Renga (477). Although the representation is somewhat ambiguous, none of the scholars have taken into account the fact that the recipient of the anal sex is masturbating as he is penetrated and that there is no evidence within the film itself to suggest force.

¹⁷ I am reminded of the burlesque scene as performed by Ingrid Thulin in Salon Kitty (35:42), where she performs on a mattress with four life-size statues painted white at each corner functioning as makeshift bedposts. At the conclusion of her act, the bodies expressively move in toward her, revealing themselves not to be statues, but actors assuming a frozen stance.

¹⁸ Reik attests that: “A return to childhood phantasies is not to be doubted in some of the features, but this is not the cause of masochism, but its consequence” (151-2).

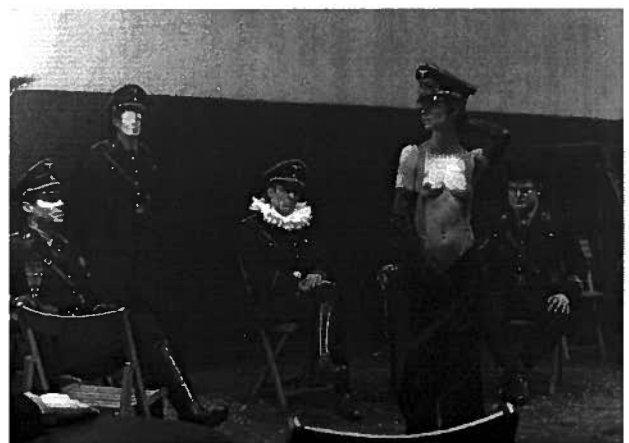
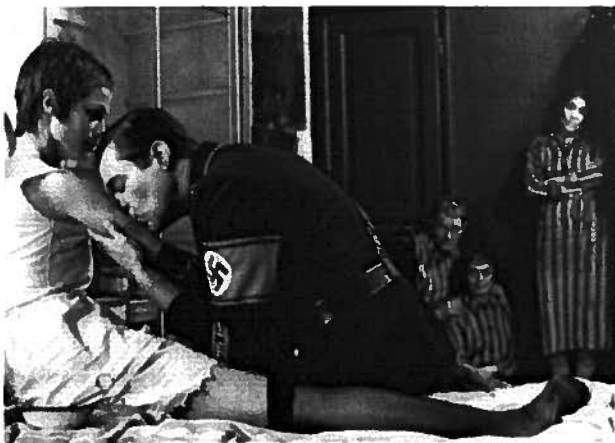
scenery, his own face layered with white powder make-up. In Bitter Tears, Petra is forever conscious of her appearance, wearing elaborate costumes and wigs, and evaluating her own reflection, emblematic of how “[m]asks and costumes are the masochistic props par excellence. Masquerade reveals the characters’ intent or emotional status while temporarily (and thinly) concealing the overdetermination of desire and the ambivalent status of the persona” (Gaylyn Studlar 167). As part of the masochistic aesthetic, “women become exciting when they are indistinguishable from cold statues in the moonlight or paintings in darkened rooms” (Deleuze 61). A reproduction of a fresco (Midas and Bacchus) by Nicolas Poussin covers a wall in Petra’s home, and comprises much of the background of the mise en scene in the film’s second half.¹⁹ The plastic arts are also present with regard to how Petra is positioned in relation to the images of reclining bodies in the fresco; as she lounges, her body is to scale with those in the print and is positioned so as to appear as an extension of their own limbs, visually merging her body with the plastic arts. Elena del Río has explained how “[i]n Petra von Kant, the linguistic and representational frames that, under the classical regime of cinema, contain and organize the body are instead, absorbed or redirected by the body’s own powers of affection” (91). The physicalities of both Max / Lucia and Petra / Marlene merge with the plastic arts, where replication is as important to Lucia’s appropriation of Dietrich as it is to Marlene’s of the mannequins.

Because the philosophy of Masoch “has every reason to rely on art and the immobile and reflective qualities of culture [insofar that] the plastic arts confer an eternal character on their subject because they suspend gestures and attitudes” (Deleuze 62), Lucia’s channeling of the Dietrich persona is ideally emblematic of the masochistic aesthetic. Lucia’s burlesque performance hovers in liminal space – between carnival and artifice, memory and history. Marlene absorbs and channels the mannequins whereas Lucia absorbs and channels the Nazis. When Lucia dances for the Nazis, she utilizes the plastic arts through the burlesque personas of Dietrich and Miranda, indicative of how masochistic appropriation “consists in neutralizing the real and containing the ideal within the phantasy” (Deleuze 64). By vanishing into the Dietrich / Miranda persona, Lucia’s performance is pure artifice, and, as such, she, herself, remains submerged. As stated by del Río with regard to Bitter Tears:

¹⁹ The replica / imitation is key to the masochistic aesthetic. In Venus in Furs, when describing the ideal woman, Masoch refers to a meadow: “In its centre stands a statue of Venus, the original of which I believe is in Florence. This Venus is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen” (127).

extreme spatial restrictions result in unlimited powers of affection. Faced with limited possibilities of action, the performer's body grows in the direction of affective intensity. As the extensive function of space ceases to matter, editing and camerawork enter the virtual zone of time – the opening of the image to a sense of unlimited duration [and further, how] [t]he actor's face, or any other visible part of her body, becomes a surface of affective inscription, a literal unveiling of the 'hidden face' of theatre... (90)

Lucia's performance is not encapsulated in a clear historical or temporal framework, but in a channeled series of photographs suspended in flesh and blood, as represented through theatrical, self-conscious performance.



Static spectators amid expressive corporeality: fig. 3.1: static prisoners (Rampling, Bogarde, extras), fig 3.2: static Nazis (Bogarde, left, Rampling performing, extras).

Burlesque and Typewriters: The Voice in Disguise

The representation of the plastic arts in The Night Porter and Bitter Tears is as significant in an audible capacity as a visual one. When discussing linguistics in relation to collective memory, Maurice Halbwachs states that “[p]eople living in society use words that they find intelligible... [and that] this is the precondition for collective thought ... It is language, and the whole system of social conventions attached to it, that allows us at every moment to reconstruct our past” (173). What sets Lucia and Marlene apart from the rest of the world is their willful relinquishment of their own respective voices. Though Lucia is not mute like Marlene, both derive agency from the processes by which they vanish beneath the surfaces (both visually and audibly) of the respective worlds they inhabit. As stated by Gamaliel Bradford, “There is no means by which men so powerfully elude their ignorance, disguise it from themselves and from others as by words” (114). Marlene completely rejects language – and when Lucia *does* use it

(as when she sings the Dietrich number) it is already self-consciously cloaked in performance. For both women, language *is* just another performance, and one with which they choose to disengage.

Even when relegated to the periphery of Bitter Tears, Marlene is audibly present; her typing can frequently be heard offscreen while Petra converses with other characters – however, because the sound is not located within language, others do not engage with it. In this sense, Marlene is speaking in such a way that she knows her voice will be ignored, thereby rendering her even more subservient. Marlene’s typing is its own language cloaked in submissive duty. The dull, mechanized sounds of the typewriter, of course, do not play on intervals, express emotion, or reveal interiority. This is not to say that Marlene does not express herself – she simply does so exclusively in relation to Petra. Marlene’s agency is born of self-negation, and it is by way of that precise disavowal that she derives her own transcendent power. Deleuze has stated: “It is the victim who speaks through the mouth of his torturer, without sparing himself” (21). In other words, the voices of Marlene’s (the typing) and Lucia (singing the lyrics of the Dietrich song) – both operate solely in adherence to their masters. The respective agencies of Lucia and Marlene are born of the processes by which they willfully transform themselves into reflective surfaces that absorb and cast back the world.

At the end of Bitter Tears, when Petra offers Marlene validation and respect, Marlene, in effort to save their relationship, submissively kisses Petra’s hand. When Petra replies, “No, not like that. Tell me about yourself,” she summons Marlene’s voice, and indicates that she can no longer live up to the terms of their masochistic contract as the dominant force. As stated by Deleuze, masochism, “must be regulated by contracts that formalize and verbalize the behaviour of the partners” (17). Because Marlene defines herself on a minus scale, *her* identity is threatened when Petra decides to consider them equal. Having been emotionally crippled by Karin’s rejection, Petra misguidedly assumes that because she, herself, wants validation, so must Marlene. As stated by Victor E. Taylor: “Once the true power relation has been expressed, the arrangement is no longer useful to the masochist. Pleasure comes for the masochist from manipulation and control, not from pain. The masochist must have the power to place the whip in the torturer’s hand” (69). When Petra asks Marlene to speak, she sets down the proverbial whip with which she has been dominating Marlene, and subsequently realizes that, for Marlene, the whip has been the point of the relationship all along.

Masochism, Sadism and the Language of Dance

I conclude this chapter on the movement of body in masochistic and sadistic contexts. Because dance is so significant to the representations body central to this thesis, I will compare two dance sequences – from In a Glass Cage and from Bitter Tears – for the purpose of solidifying the corporeal differences inherent to masochistic and sadistic representation. Early in Bitter Tears (8:50), Petra dons a coat laced with fur and a wig, and has Marlene dance with her to a remake of Jerome Kern’s “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes” by The Platters. This harkens back to the motif in masochism of replication, just as Lucia replicates the Dietrich song in her burlesque performance. As a pseudo-mannequin, Marlene is dually a source of inscription and stability / reliability for Petra. In a static long take, with a mannequin in the background, Marlene dances with Petra obediently and without emotion until Petra curtly dismisses her: “Well – hurry up. That drawing must be finished by noon.” Although it is not explicitly acknowledged as such in the film, the sadistic dance of In a Glass Cage carries with it very different connotations. Here, Angelo enters Klaus’ room late at night and lifts the glass casing of the iron lung, disabling the machine and severing Klaus’ air supply. Angelo climbs atop Klaus, straddling him on the enormous respiratory device and presses his hands into Klaus’ chest, using his own body to perform the function of the lung. These bodies moving in tandem are, I assert, a clear representation of sadistic dance. Briefly ceasing, Angelo breaks down in tears atop Klaus and begins to unbutton Klaus’ nightshirt, kissing Klaus as he weeps. Even at his most desperate and vulnerable, Angelo is the unquestionable centre of power, but regardless of how desperate he is, he assures that Klaus’ position is more so. In opposition to the nostalgic optimism elicited by “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes,” this dance of corporal control utilizes the sounds of Javier Navarrete’s rhythmic, pulsating non-diegetic score and the sounds of Klaus’ desperate gasps. In a sadistic relationship, the subordinate must be choked (or, in the case of In a Glass Cage, his air supply severed). The masochist, on the other hand, willfully holds her / his breath.

In Conclusion

It has been my objective in this chapter to provide examples that acknowledge sadism and masochism as operating via entirely different codes. When Cavani shifts history into the

plastic arts and depicts Nazis as mannequins, she is speaking to a culture that has essentially forgotten its past – one that views Nazism as a singular collective body – an image so hollow and simplistic that it may as well be plastic. Mannequins are unburdened with guilt, responsibility, and psychology, and, like pornography, accept whatever meaning is ascribed to them. I argue that Cavani's representation of the plastic Nazi seeks to shake us awake by pointing to where we exist in relation to our history, and that her representation of the masochistic victim speaks clearly to narratives and testimonials that have been repressed because they resist our pre-existing dominant narratives.

Chapter Four:

Speaking Through the Body:

The Corporeal Language of The Night Porter

Eros is a competitive form of love that spares nothing; it is a fight toward courage, adventure, against everybody ... This type of love is creative. In order to exorcise it, we say that it destroys us. The lovers seem indeed to destroy themselves. In reality, they regenerate themselves constantly, until death, since death is not abstract to them; it is part of their experience.

–Liliana Cavani (as cited in Marrone, 2000: 89)¹

But, you will say, the individual who revolts against the institutions of society is immediately rejected, ostracized, stoned. So be it; I am willing to take the risk.

–Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (1971: 134)

Although The Night Porter is not a sexually graphic film, its emphasis on the corporeal is central to how it has been argued to be a pornographic text. In this chapter, I will discuss three scenes where The Night Porter represents intelligence as manifest through body and gesture. In line with the pornographic, Lucia expresses herself via a corporeal economy – one where her psychology is represented, not in terms of language or dialogue, but through how she uses her physicality to respond to and maneuver the world. In doing so, Lucia points to language as unreliable; a masquerade of misunderstanding and self-delusion. The scenes I have selected illustrate how Lucia uses her body (and in turn, her subservience) to attack binary codes of gender and preexisting structures of power. The first scene is the exchange between Lucia and Atherton shortly after they arrive at the hotel. The second is the initial reunion between Lucia and Max after their extended separation. The third features Lucia dressed in an SS uniform, performing burlesque for a static audience of carnivalesque, stylized Nazis. Although I am focusing on The Night Porter as corporeal cinema, I am not seeking to divide between concepts of mind and body. Rather, in keeping with my examination of pornography, I will discuss how Lucia acknowledges a corporeal language severed from words, where her body speaks – and subsequently how Max's is the only body capable of replying.

¹ As quoted in “Abelardo e Eloisa una storia d’amore e di anarchia” in Tuttolibri, the weekly supplement to the Italian newspaper La Stampa (8 December 1979, 20).

Lucia and Atherton: Striking False Notes

There is a vital and nuanced moment of miscommunication between Lucia and her husband (simply referred to by his last name, Atherton) before she abandons her marriage to resume her relationship with Max. After having initially encountered Max in the hotel lobby, Lucia, in a state of shock, pleads with Atherton to leave with her immediately. Unaware of what just transpired, Atherton does not notice Lucia's shaken state, nor does he take the urgency and alarm in her tone seriously. Instead, he attributes her pleas to moody, dramatic or "typically feminine" behavior. Similarly, when Lucia later encourages Atherton to go without her to Frankfurt, she says she wants to do some shopping – defaulting to clichés of women as consumptive and simple-minded. It seems that Lucia has, since the War, found a dominant companion in Atherton – the problem being, however, that his dominance is rooted in the patriarchal structure, and, as such, has no real understanding or interest in her psychology or desires. Upon a knock at the door, when Lucia pleads with Atherton not to open it, he ignores her request completely. Consoling her in a tone akin to addressing a child, he states: "I understand what you feel ... It's a question of a few days more. Tomorrow we go to Frankfurt, in three days, Berlin, Hamburg, and that's it." Lucia knows, however, that Atherton has absolutely *no* understanding whatsoever of the situation. The mere concept of future – even of the next few days – in the wake of Lucia's reencounter with Max, is so absurd that she breaks into laughter that immediately sounds stilted and out of place. The naïveté of Atherton's rational consolation and the knowledge behind Lucia's laughter represents them splitting away from each other. Such irrationality is articulated by Sacher-Masoch: "We are driven by a gentle and mysterious power that deprives us of all will and reason, and we are swept along with no thought for the morrow" (166). When Atherton embraces Lucia, he still sees a future for them together whereas a part of Lucia has already surrendered to Max; the contradiction of Lucia and Atherton's exchange is that their bodies coming together actually signifies them splitting apart, with him progressing obliviously into the future as she relinquishes herself to the past.

Martin Esslin has stated that: "'Absurd' originally means 'out of harmony' in a musical context" (16), appropriate when Atherton, as a conductor preoccupied with his own reviews, casually complains about an incompetent violinist. The misunderstanding between Lucia and Atherton aligns with Esslin's definition insofar that Atherton senses incongruity within his orchestra, but is oblivious to the false note struck in his marriage. Atherton misinterprets Lucia

as her laughing at *herself* – as though she simply realized that she had been behaving irrationally. It is clear, however, that her laughter is aimed directly at his own inability to comprehend the larger implications of the situation. Atherton clearly sees himself as the mature, pragmatic adult in the marriage, and does not give Lucia credit for her intelligence – evidently because he cannot recognize it. The absurdity Lucia sees is articulated in Albert Camus' explanation of the absurd:

A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity. (13)

Atherton's senseless explanation for Lucia's behavior is emblematic of the bad reasons to which Camus refers. Lucia's reunion with Max has made her an exile, severing her from the stability of her upper-class, post-war life.

As Lucia considers how close she is once again to Max, she is standing on the edge of an abyss, dwarfed by its scope and initially fearful of stepping into it – her experience doubled over by her own self-knowledge that, if left with Max, she will invariably pick up where she left off over a decade before. Atherton thus functions more as a plot device than a complex individual, perhaps emblematic of America itself as foolish, or incapable of understanding the greater historical picture. Atherton's oblivious self-involvement results in his not noticing Lucia slip through his fingers. Before Atherton leaves for Frankfurt, he asks Lucia one last time if she would prefer to join him, at which point she makes up her mind completely: "I'm so silly – come on, you'll miss your plane." As manifested and expressed through her body, Lucia harbors an awareness and understanding of a situation that Atherton cannot begin to comprehend.

Max and Lucia Reunite: Redrawing the Contract of Body

As stated by Deleuze, masochism, "must be regulated by contracts that formalize and verbalize the behaviour of the partners" (17). After Atherton leaves the hotel, Lucia does go shopping, though with different objectives than Atherton would ever have imagined. In preparation to resume her role, she finds a pink dress in an antique shop, similar to one in which Max dressed her in the camp. That evening, to instigate the reunion, Lucia places a telephone request through Max (with regard to his role as a night porter rather than her master) to contact Atherton in Frankfurt. It warrants mention that it is *she* who formally acts as the catalyst to their

reunion, first by remaining behind, and second, by initiating a dialogue. Had Lucia genuinely wanted to contact Atherton, she, of course, would not have placed the call through Max at the front desk. By doing so, Lucia is essentially *asking* Max if she may speak to Atherton – consciously prompting him to resume his control over her – indicating that she needs to be put in her place. Seeking to be disciplined or corrected with the cadence of a mischievous child, Lucia is extending her reach to something she knows that Max would not want her to touch, with the active anticipation of him proverbially slapping her hand away.² In the process, she is also communicating to Max that he has a decision to make, and that her husband is expecting her.

It warrants mention that Max initially does put Lucia's phone call through – but then cancels the request with the operator. This gesture is equivalent to Lucia (after having initially encountered Max) telling Atherton that she wanted to leave after having first arrived, before subsequently giving up on her efforts (canceling *her* request) when not taken seriously. Both Max and Lucia individually demonstrate an initial hesitancy to reunite, as though an internal voice akin to survival instinct were holding each back. The subversive position from which they are about to regress into the past is equivalent to them standing together at the edge of a black hole. I propose that the hesitation each initially experiences stems from their knowledge that, once each steps into it, neither will ever reemerge. Anxiously awaiting a response to her call (from Max, that is), Lucia contacts the front desk again to inquire on the status of her call to Atherton. She walks over to the closet, takes out her suitcase and begins to pack, as though with the intent of leaving if Max does not promptly resume his role.³ She then stops and wraps her arms around herself in anxiety and indecision, waiting for Max to respond to her initiation, and momentarily, it seems, fearful that he may not. At this point for Lucia, time has stopped and her body is adrift, its trajectory contingent on whether or not Max comes to reclaim her.

Reassuming his role, Max walks up and lets himself into Lucia's suite where he demands to know why she came. It is here, at the halfway point of the film, where Max and Lucia are

² Consider Petra and Marlene's relationship in Bitter Tears; Marlene and Petra share an understanding with regard to the expectation of Marlene's silence. When the telephone rings and Marlene picks it up, Petra immediately snatches the receiver – effectively slapping Marlene's hand away. This gesture is central to the relationship because if Petra were to simply *allow* Marlene to answer the phone, Marlene would, of course, be expected to speak, thus throwing the entire power dynamic out of order. Every time Petra takes the receiver away from Marlene (denying Marlene her own voice), Marlene's submissiveness and Petra's dominance are reassured.

³ Consider the last scene in Bitter Tears, which features Marlene packing her bags and leaving Petra when Petra proves incapable of fulfilling her role in the masochistic contract.

alone for the first time since the War, that Cavani depicts their reunion in a long take (totaling 3:42) – a shot around which the entirety of the film spirals. If one were to consider Max and Lucia as a force of energy akin to a tornado, this shot would be the eye of the storm. In terms of the cinematic apparatus, the shot is calm (with minimal camera movement), yet the force with which the characters' bodies collide – and the processes through which they seize and relinquish power – depicts them in a state of simultaneous reclamation and disavowal that spirals forcefully, creating the life force upon which they thrive. This shot is the most evident example of the tension between the film's minimalist formal elements and its underlying psychological violence. As articulated by Marrone: "When Max and Lucia look at themselves in the mirror, each sees the reflection of his or her own life in the plane of consciousness of the other [...] They are not the chained prisoners in Plato's cave: they light the fire that casts their own shadows" (105). As individuals who think independently of the institutions around them, Max and Lucia see the world, not through a smokescreen of propriety, but through each other – and for themselves.

The long take begins as Max seizes Lucia and fiercely slaps her. He then throws her to the floor and collapses with her, shaking her as he shouts: "Why did you come? *Why? Why? Why?*" Max lowers his head to rest on her crumpled body and gently caresses her. He then stands and begins to pour himself a drink, momentarily "distracted," at which point Lucia "seizes" an opportunity by scrambling towards the door. I put Max's "distraction" and Lucia's "attempt" to escape in quotation marks because, of course, both are feigned and self-consciously performative – part of a process by which each encourages the other to assume her / his respective role.

According to Deleuze (and evidenced by the character of Wanda in Venus in Furs), in a masochistic heterosexual relationship, it is the woman who is ascribed the dominant role:

In the [standard] contractual relation, the woman typically figures as an object in the patriarchal system. The contract in masochism reverses this state of affairs by making the woman into the party with whom the contract is entered into. Its paradoxical intention extends even further in that it involves a master-slave relationship, and one furthermore in which the woman is the master and torturer. The contractual basis is thereby implicitly challenged, by excess of zeal, a humorous acceleration of the clauses and a complete reversal of the respective contractual status of man and woman. (80)

Cavani complicates the laws of masochism in that, even as binaries of gender structure the world around them, gender is incidental to Max and Lucia's mutual understanding. This self-enclosure

is not indicative of entrapment, but rather a corporeal renegotiation of the space each requires to perform his / her role.⁴ Max chases Lucia and seizes her body as she reaches the door, thrusting her to the ground. Lucia then rises to her feet, crying aloud, throwing her body into his. As they struggle, he makes an effort to restrain her (knowing she wants to be restrained), and she shouts for him to release her. It is no wonder feminist theorists have taken issue with the representation of Lucia. In her relationship with Max, she is a woman who *says* no but *means* yes.⁵ What that same criticism ignores however, is that it is within only *this* relationship, one of absolute mutual understanding, that Lucia exhibits such impulses – and further, that Max relinquishes as much control as he claims. As stated by Victor E. Taylor:

The relationship between the dominant and submissive is not static: each participant plays an active and changing role in shaping the meaning of the S&M language scene ... In these various S&M language scenes, power is not stable, nor is it exclusively in the hands of the dominant. This reversibility of the power relationship contradicts the general understanding of the S&M dynamic, in which the masochist is viewed as being at the mercy of his or her master. (54)

In comparison to Lucia's relationship to Atherton, consider this statement by Severin, the subordinate character in Venus in Furs: "Marriage can only be founded on equality and mutual understanding, but great passions are born from the meeting of opposites. It is because we are opposites – indeed almost enemies – that my love for you is part hatred, part fear" (Sacher-Masoch 143). Breathing heavily and clutching Max, Lucia begins to slink from his arms to the floor, pulling him down with her, rasping, "Come with me, come with me," as though inviting him to take the next steps with her into the black hole of history and memory in the process of reestablishing a corporeal synchronicity. They both begin to laugh, but unlike the disingenuous laughter directed toward Atherton in the aforementioned scene, *this* represents a common understanding and a near-disbelief in the coincidence that has reunited them.

Max and Lucia express themselves through guttural sounds and fragmented words, abandoning the coherence and linearity of language itself. Their bodies are in a state of purgation as they celebrate their reunion; each is consumed by the other, as though in some effort

⁴ When the masochistic contract is redrawn in Venus in Furs, the masochist Severin likens it to a "suicide," after which he is reborn with a new name (184-5). Similarly, the reunion of Max and Lucia represents a mutual rejection of the world and a subsequent trajectory that only they, together, understand.

⁵ This approach to corporeal exchange is applicable to Camille Paglia's response to the phrase "no means no": "Will we ever graduate from the Girl Scouts? 'No' has always been and always will be part of the dangerous, alluring courtship ritual of sex and seduction, observable even in the animal kingdom" (Sex, Art, 5).

to make up for lost time. Clutching each other, their language is a succession of moans and cries, less concerned with the annunciation of phrases than with the attribution of sounds to the impulses of their bodies. Gradually, Max's noises begin to take shape, as he pleads: "Tell me, tell me, tell me—" with an excitement that does not know how to contain itself. Lucia screams: "I want you!" – a pronouncement so shrill it is barely coherent. Suddenly eager to take cue from Lucia, Max begins to repeat: "Tell me what to do, tell me what to do" – to which she screams, joyously, "No!" – delaying his pleasure, and forcibly seizing the power. Deleuze explains that "[t]he masochistic contract implies not only the necessity of the victim's consent, but his ability to persuade, and his pedagogical and judicial efforts to train his torturer" (66). Exhausted, they begin gradually to calm down, clutching each other as they recover from the initial impact of their reunion, their bodies renewing themselves in celebration of the fact that the twelve years they have spent apart has not changed anything.

As stated by Sacher-Masoch: "[Wanda] has drawn up a contract by which I am to commit myself on my honour to be her slave for as long as she wishes. Her arm around my neck, she reads me this incredible document, punctuating each sentence with a kiss" (164). A vital differentiating factor between these two relationships is, first, that Max and Lucia actively exchange positions of power (unlike Wanda and Severin, who are locked, respectively, in their dominant / submissive roles), and second, that they have no use for tangible documents; instead, they draw up their contract and establish its parameters with their bodies.

The long take of Max and Lucia is also a long shot with their entire bodies in view for the full duration. Cavani does not use the cinematic apparatus to interfere with the union.⁶ In this shot, Max and Lucia seize and relinquish control over each other forcibly and interchangeably, thriving on a fluid life force as though even their respective bloodstreams and circulatory systems were operating in tandem. As stated by Marrone, "Lucia looks within herself through Max's eyes; and he needs her gaze to reconstitute his own self-identity" (105). Because Max and Lucia's relationship is almost exclusively enacted within the private space, it is odd to encounter claims such as those made by Andrea Slane: "the most important logic in the film is

⁶ Marrone argues Cavani's use of the long take is intended to distance *The Night Porter* from the pornographic: "Porn is passive and its goal is deflecting gratification, an on-screen theatrics of debauchery (mostly in close-ups), where the body performs ritualized exertions ... [and further] "[t]o describe the actions of these characters as pornography is to disclaim an important contextual meaning, which is crystallized by the stylization of the actors' performance and the long takes" (103-5).

that external disapproval structures the couple's sexual excitement" (160). To see Max and Lucia as motivated by those sickened by their behavior ignores the fact that they carry out their rituals almost exclusively in private. With a desperate animal force, the two bodies *appear* to resist one another – yet they are, in fact, moving together in the same direction. Compare this to Lucia's exchange with Atherton when he embraces her – drawing her body *to* him – in the process of a misunderstanding that severs them. This relationship is based on a common understanding where language itself, as predicated on the laws of bureaucratic structure and dominant ideology, is an afterthought. As a result, the aggression with which their bodies reunite is not a representation of violence, but rather, an active exchange – a dance of relinquishment and reclamation where each takes her / his turn leading.



fig 4.1: Renegotiating space: Max (Bogarde) and Lucia (Rampling) reunite.

Lucia's Burlesque Performance

The most famous scene in The Night Porter is a surreal, carnivalesque flashback where Lucia performs burlesque for a group of Nazi soldiers, overseen by Max – emblematic of how “the horrifying world of Nazism becomes abstract, a figural exploration of forms” (Marrone 105). Wearing a Nazi cap with a blue carnival eye mask placed overtop, a pair of trousers with suspenders (her breasts exposed), and black elbow-length gloves, Lucia is clearly paying homage to the stylized sexual ambiguity of Marlene Dietrich – even singing the Dietrich standard “Wenn

ich mir was wünschen dürfte” (“When I Wish for Something”). The Nazi soldiers watch, stoic and emotionless, wearing masks, powder-makeup, lipstick, and props derived from Elizabethan garb as she dances teasingly around them like a nightclub performer. This stylized, ornate spectacle is an example of “one distinguishing feature that appears to be common in all instances of S&M: ‘the scene’ ... [defined as] the presentation of power and desire in which the relationship between domination and submission is enacted” (Taylor 54). At the end of Lucia’s performance, a soldier emerges from behind the scenes and presents her with a gift from Max – a box containing the head of a prisoner who had previously mistreated her. Amused, Max clarifies that the gift of the head was inspired by a Biblical story (evidently in reference to the head of John the Baptist as presented to Salome in Mark 6:21-9).⁷ The carnivalesque aesthetics of the scene have been best described by Slane: “Cavani’s concentration camp scenes do not pretend to be historical recreations, but rather are more like stylized photoplays, or silent opera” (160). As the most contentious and debated in the film, I have selected this scene for the purpose of exploring a unique and private corporeal dialogue between Max and Lucia – one that *appears* to be driven by violence, but is actually grounded in absolute respect and mutual understanding.

The abstract representation of the camp as a carnivalesque playground for Max’s “little girl” is articulated by Laura Frost: “When Cavani puts history in quotation marks, she signals her interest in how fascism has become part of the cultural imaginary in ways that contradict history as we understand it” (157). Rebecca Sherr, on the other hand, resents the ambiguity: “It is as though the Holocaust is secondary and dispensable, merely a stage set for the author’s mediation on ‘the ambiguity of human nature’ through the presentation of perverse and sensationalist eroticism” (284). Ravetto states that: “The blue-and-grey hue of Max’s and Lucia’s memory establishes a mood, a nostalgic, faded image ... [which] suggests a sense of personal memory rather than a public, popular, or historical documentation of Nazism, fascism, and the ‘Final Solution’” (155). Ravetto’s observation is salient insofar as this representation is rooted in individualized memory, actively resisting all collective claims and appropriations.

The visceral force of the cabaret scene is self-explanatory; on a purely aesthetic level, the imagery is arresting and provocative. Inviting readings that reconsider the representation of history and the renegotiation of traditional gender roles, its surrealism has also invited a range of

⁷ See the New Testament; here, I cite The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha (Ed. Herbert G May, Bruce M Metzger, 1221).

scholarly interpretations. As the most abstract scene in the film, virtually every piece of academic writing on The Night Porter touches on Lucia's burlesque dance in some way. The transgression as related to the performance has been the subject of a number of extreme interpretations that have seen Lucia as either excessively demeaned or uniquely empowered. Ralph Berets has argued that:

[Lucia] is rewarded by being allowed to survive, but her moral character is seriously maligned... [and that] Lucia's performance during the dance suggests desperation and defeat rather than indulgence and triumph ... [insofar that] [s]he has allowed herself to succumb to Nazi values. (77-8)

When Lucia appropriates Nazi-related clothing, Berets sees Lucia's own values reflecting those of the Nazis. Kriss Ravetto, on the other hand, attributes shape-shifting / chameleon-like qualities to the performance: "Lucia changes from 'Max's little girl' to Salome, to a transvestite, performing bare-chested in long black leather gloves and an SS uniform in a smoky room full of SS officers, resembling a little boy, a femme fatale, or a dragged-out interpretation of cabaret more than a little girl" (171). Victor L. Schermer views Lucia as being in a position of absolute victimization, stating that, in the process of his sadistic domination over her, "he displays his success to his colleagues by arranging for Lucia to sing a cabaret song, her breasts exposed, wearing a militaristic hat, pants, and gloves, for the pleasure of his fellow officers" (932). Schermer sees Lucia as forced into a patriarchal exchange where "Max and Lucia 'lose their minds' just as John the Baptist lost his head" (931). On the opposite end of the spectrum, Eugenie Brinkema argues Lucia to be driven by a self-enclosed agency that excludes and transcends the patriarchy surrounding her: "Lucia's half-smile and seductive self-touches indicate a private female desire to which the male spectators are not given access" (428). Brinkema further claims that "Lucia touches nothing but her body, and the gesture towards masturbatory pleasure thrills with its total exclusion of the other... [given that Lucia] is not exposed, but rather exposes herself" (429). Brinkema's claim surrenders the entire scene to its aesthetic elements, and, in the process, forgets that Lucia is in a concentration camp and is, as such, devoid of agency. However, even if a transcendental agency *were* available to Lucia, to assume that she would *want* it would be to forget her masochistic bond with Max and subsequently, to miss the entire point of the film. Amid this range of interpretations which read Lucia as, respectively, amoral, ungraspable, degraded and empowered, I will conclude this chapter by offering a reading which I argue to be best supported by the film.



fig. 4.2: Masochistic dialogues: Lucia (right) performs for Max (left).

Appropriation is central to Lucia's performance in that there is nothing of Lucia herself in her cabaret act – her channeling of Dietrich submerges her beneath the surface of the scenario. The Dietrich persona simultaneously frees her (enabling her to return the gaze of her captors) and engulfs her within its iconographic costume and language. As articulated by Brinkema: “The mask on Lucia's hat functions against this exposed body: its lifeless face frustrates our desire to fully see behind the spectacle. The mask hides something and makes Lucia's performance impenetrable” (428). Ultimately however, I argue that the pleasure Lucia experiences as she runs her hands across her body is not *for* her. Reik has stated that “[t]he masochist is comparable to a person who ‘intentionally’ goes astray in order to reach his secret aim by a detour” (40). Because Lucia is channeling someone else, even as she runs her hands over her own body the pleasure is directed, not toward her, but rather, the once-removed persona; in turn, it is not Lucia who is returning the gaze, but rather, the icon of the burlesque queen frequently attributed to Dietrich.

As she dominates the carnivalesque Nazis around her, Lucia is, however, submissive to Max in the camps; even as her performance gestures to a transgressive bodily state, the space she maneuvers is, nonetheless, *still* that which is allotted her by Max. The dominance she exercises over the soldiers is not a position she acquires, but which she has *only* due to Max's influence.

As a result, Max's gift to Lucia is not merely the head of the prisoner, but also the space within which she may assume and exercise power over her political and historical circumstances. To describe this scene as one where Lucia achieves a transcendent agency is to focus exclusively on her performance and forget that Max is still the centre of control. Lucia is, in effect, a marionette doll permitted by her master to dance of her own accord, though he nonetheless exercises an overarching governance of the strings. When Max ultimately has the prisoner's head presented to Lucia, he has control of the scenario in that his will is being carried out behind the scenes. It is Max's high-ranking military position (as someone who orders executions) that gives Lucia immunity in the camp. When Max gives Lucia the box containing the head of the prisoner who bothered her, he communicates in such a way that language is incidental. Bondanella states that Max's gift of the head inspires a feeling of responsibility within Lucia from which she never recovers, and, as a result, "[r]ightly or wrongly, from that moment on she views herself as guilty of murder and no different from the SS troops Max led" (351). This assertion is problematic simply because there is nothing textual to support it, although it does, conveniently attribute a moral centre to Lucia, making her behavior graspable and sensible. When it is argued that Max ultimately frees Lucia "from her past, and in a certain sense, his is an act of selfless love" (Bondanella 351) or that "Lucia instructs Max in a masochism that is shown to redeem him" (Siegel 82), Max is elevated to the status of a martyr. To consider the relationship to be motivated by guilt and obligation safely avoids the more complex and problematic notion that the primary motivation for both Max and Lucia was purely and exclusively their own pleasure.⁸ Johan's head is Max's way of communicating that he will use his own high-ranking military status to ensure that Lucia is safe within the camps – thereby laying out the parameters of their initial masochistic contract. In keeping with the aesthetics of masochism, Max's gesture is one of fondness and reassurance *parading* as violence.

In Conclusion

Lucia is an individual who gages her relationships and circumstances on the impulses of her body; it is thus, easy to argue The Night Porter as pornography given that it is first, disruptive, and second, grounded in the corporeal. A language of gesture operates at the centre

⁸ It does warrant mention however, that Max *is* plagued by guilt – though unrelated to Lucia. He admits to being a night porter because he "feels a sense of shame in the light" with regard to his own war crimes.

of the film and it is one with which, I argue, characters such as Atherton as well as certain scholars, do not know how to engage. In closely considering a cinema of body, dialogue is made subservient to gesture – indicative of how corporeal language is capable of probing concepts in a way that vocal expression cannot. At its most basic, The Night Porter is about two individuals engaging in a dialogue of body that attacks our institutions and proposes a reconsideration of how history is reconciled and understood.

Chapter Five:

The Things We Tell Ourselves:

Memory-as-Performance and Redemptive Delusion in The Night

Porter

...when instead of letting the past recur, we reconstruct it through an effort of reasoning, what happens is that we distort that past, because we wish to introduce greater coherence. It is then reason or intelligence that chooses among the store of recollections, eliminates some of them, and arranges the others according to an order conforming with our ideas of the moment.

–Maurice Halbwachs (1992: 183)

What differentiates (individual and collective) memory is that while the emanation of individual memory is primarily subject to the laws of the unconscious, public memory – whatever its unconscious vicissitudes – testifies to a will or desire on the part of some social group or disposition of power to select and organize representations of the past so that these will be embraced by individuals as their own.

–Nancy Wood (1999: 2)

In this chapter, I will explore how the controversy surrounding The Night Porter stems, in part, from its claim that evidence and historical details were manipulated and distorted by special interest groups in the wake of the Holocaust. As such, our own memories, as based on the information we have accepted in the process of forming them, are called into question. Maurice Halbwachs, who coined the term collective memory, has stated that “[c]ollective frameworks are ... precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society” (40). Halbwachs argues that dominant ideological frameworks largely dictate how memories are constructed within a social setting. Subsequently, for the purpose of protecting themselves, those who maintain the status quo rail against anyone who seeks to question them. I submit that because pornography is attributed to relationships and experiences that exist outside of dominant frameworks, collective structures associate the term pornography with counter-memories as though it were a virus, so as to prevent people from going near them for fear of association or infection. The Night Porter argues our current understanding of history to be based on information that has, long in advance, been tainted by those in positions of power. I will begin this chapter by discussing the characters of Erika (Isa Miranda) and Bert (Amedeo Amodio) as

corporeal representations of fascism having fallen out of context. Mario (Ugo Cardea), the former camp prisoner who initially recognizes Lucia, is further emblematic of how the circumstances of the film do not even spare innocent bystanders. I will then move on to a discussion of Max's comrades – a group of former Nazis who frequent the hotel to conduct group therapy sessions where they absolve themselves and each other of guilt for their war crimes, while simultaneously destroying hard physical evidence against them (which includes killing witnesses from the past). Nancy Wood has expanded on Halbwachs' theory "by considering 'collective' memory – or 'national' or 'public' memory – as essentially *performative* – i.e. as only coming into existence at a given time and place through specific kinds of memorial activity (such as commemorations, historical narratives, etc)" (2). According to Wood, collectives form their kinships by agreeing on the nature of their memories, and subsequently performing similar recollections so as to construct a sense of belonging. I will finally discuss a particular scene from The Night Porter where Klaus, one of Max's Nazi comrades, speaks alone with Lucia and seeks to evaluate her behavior and motivations.¹ This scene represents tension between an individual's memory (rooted in body) pushing resisting the phony and delusional nature of bourgeois morality.

Erika: Isa Miranda and the Fascist Star Persona

Bert and Erika are figures from Max's past who populate the hotel and whose physicalities are bound to a decaying fascist aesthetic. With fascism having fallen out of context, they have retreated to the dark, reclusive safety of the hotel, where they cling to the past. In the present day, the bodies of both Bert and Erika are in crisis; they, like fascist ideology itself, are slowly dying.²

Stephen Gundle has examined the uniqueness of Miranda's career as the only film star of Italy's fascist period who made films throughout the world (including Germany, Austria, France and The United States). Most relevant to my argument are the repeated comparisons of Miranda to Marlene Dietrich – Gundle states that, when under contract with Paramount, Miranda was

¹ Klaus in The Night Porter is not to be confused with Klaus, the former camp doctor in In a Glass Cage, as discussed in Chapter Three.

² Bert has been compared to a vampire by Waller (266). Similarly, Erika, whose persona is decomposing, could be discussed as a sort of zombie. The hotel functions for them as a proverbial coffin, sheltering them from the daylight of the modern world.

commonly “reduced in Hollywood to merely being a Marlene Dietrich look-alike or stand-in” (325).³ Because Lucia’s burlesque scene refers to the aesthetics of the Dietrich / Miranda persona, the iconography of burlesque itself operates on multiple planes.

The fact that Miranda can represent both fascist and antifascist ideals, morals, and aesthetics blurs the distinctions between fact and fiction by treating her relationship to history and historical events as a product of both fact (her own personal memory of fascism and her involvement in fascist aesthetic politics) and fiction (what she represents in fascist and postfascist culture). (Ravetto 156)

Lucia’s burlesque performance is represented in a flashback as related by Max to Erika. Erika (bed-ridden in the present) and Lucia (performing in the past) are dually emblematic of the decadent, sensual Dietrich persona; as stated by Ravetto: “The image of Erika harks back to a decadent image of the femme fatale, an image of reclining (seductive) sickness” (155). The concept of the grotesque fascist body alongside Erika’s reclusive state in the hotel further recalls how Dietrich continued to perform her burlesque show into her mid-80’s – until she was considered an absurd, grotesque parody of herself, and ultimately spent the last decade of her life bedridden, refusing to be photographed.⁴

Bert: The Tragic Fascist Butterfly

Among Max’s Nazi comrades, Bert stands out as a uniquely transgressive figure, lending a valuable corporeal dimension to the representation of Nazism.⁵ As part of Max’s hotel duties, he caters to Bert privately and indulges in a ritual where Bert performs ballet in his small, dark hotel room while Max holds up a spotlight for the performance. Bert’s enclosed present-day dance frames an obtuse, surreal flashback, featuring him almost nude, in an expressive extended

³ Gundle cites an article by William Boehnel in the New York World Telegram (from 4 April 1940), describing Miranda as the “blonde Venus from Mussolini-land” (325) in clear reference to the Dietrich vehicle Blonde Venus (Josef von Sternberg, 1932).

⁴ See Studlar’s article on Dietrich in The Oxford History of World Cinema (241). Though beyond my objectives here, it warrants mention that the iconography associated with Dietrich and Miranda has been further appropriated by several other Italian representations of fascism. In The Damned, Helmut Berger performs before his family in drag in a burlesque number that hovers between the decadent and the grotesque. In Seven Beauties, Concettina (Elena Fiore), the overweight sister of the protagonist, performs burlesque in a brothel while the patrons laugh and jeer. Salon Kitty also features Ingrid Thulin performing gender-bending burlesque. As stated by Marrone, “The Dietrichesque dancer (a recurrent topos in postwar cinematic representations of Fascism) is a culturally identifiable fetish, which embodies the legacy of the Third Reich” (111). Dietrich’s reclusion is further illustrated in Maximilian Schell’s documentary Marlene (1986), which features Dietrich only in voiceover, as she was unwilling to be filmed.

⁵ Bert has been misread as a prisoner in the camps rather than a Nazi soldier by Houston and Kinder (369) and Schermer (933). More crudely, McCormick referred to him as “a ‘decadent’ ballet freak” (33).

ballet performance, dancing for a group of Nazis in an enormous, brightly-lit hall to Strauss' Der Rosenkavalier. The space in which Bert performs is expansive, and his movements take advantage of his open surroundings, expressively maneuvering his stage, as though celebrating the limitless possibilities of the fascist context alongside that of his own body. There is a further contrast between the musculature of his body and his sensual, feminized gestures. Just as in Lucia's burlesque performance, the audience of Nazis is relegated to stiff, "cardboard" representations, used as stand-in spectators, peppered around Bert's enormous stage. The space (as allotted by the fascist context) for Bert's performance in the past simply does not translate to the modern-day dance that frames it; there is an evident freedom to Bert's performance in the flashback, whereas, in the present, Max is the entirety of his audience (and, of course, present only out of duty). As Bert dances in the confines of his hotel suite, he resembles a caged butterfly – at one point free to fly and explore his natural habitat, but now forcibly contained and beginning to die. Bert's contemporary entrapment is further represented by the restrictive buttoned shirt and tie in which he dances in the present day, as opposed to the freedom represented by his nudity in the past. Running counter to how fascism is commonly understood, it is in the modern context that Bert is restricted, and in the fascist one that he was free.

Bert's fantasy of clinging to the fascist past is further represented by his expressed desire for a sexual relationship with Max.⁶ While Max is indeed a soft-spoken individual (and played by the openly-gay Bogarde) there is no reference in the film to his character being bisexual. It is important to note, however, that when Max and Lucia finally leave his apartment at the end of the film, it is Bert who shoots them. Insofar that Bert is infatuated with Max, some have argued jealousy to have motivated the killings; this however, is not supported by the film.⁷ The fact that Max and Lucia happened to emerge on Bert's shift is depicted as coincidental; Max's comrades were taking turns on shifts as they waited for Max and Lucia to emerge. When Bert kills Max and Lucia, it is not in response to his rejection, but because he is following orders.

In the present day, Erika and Bert share a mutual need for penetration – for an injection of something that keeps them going, and which they mutually rely upon Max to arrange. Erika's

⁶ Bert's sexuality is also known and accepted among his comrades; Waller, however, disregards this when she refers to Bert as "the gay Nazi, who is trapped in the closet, as well as in the past, by his own fascist homophobia" (266).

⁷ Àine O'Healy states that Bert ultimately kills Max and Lucia as an act of jealousy and vengeance (137), thereby forcing a queer reading on to the film. Only if Bert had deliberately manipulated the situation (ie – entered the apartment and killed Max and Lucia) would O'Healy's reading be possible.

comes in the form of liaisons between herself and another hotel employee. Bert's is a hypodermic needle (containing an undisclosed substance) that he requires Max to inject into his buttocks. The tending to and nursing of the decay of fascism are included in Max's hotel duties. The respective vices of Bert and Erika (Bert dancing in his room, Erika being attended to sexually) have been deemed institutionally acceptable by Max's comrades because they are enacted privately and do not pose external threat. In comparison, however, Max's relationship with Lucia is considered shocking and disgusting by Max's comrades; not only is the relationship a betrayal on the part of Max because she could report them to the authorities, but Max's behaviors (unlike those of Erika and Bert) are not confined to the hotel. In relation to the civilized and formal behaviors of Max's other comrades, Bert and Erika represent the baroque and ornate aesthetics of fascism requiring life support to slow their inevitable deterioration.

Mario and Greta: Collateral Damage

Though he only has a supporting role, the character of Mario, in many ways, serves as the film's narrative backbone. Mario is an Italian-Jewish restaurant owner who survived the camps, spared because of his cooking skills, and periodically called upon by Max's comrades to participate in their therapy sessions. With Mario, Cavani creates a scenario where a former camp inmate is utilized by Nazis in the present day as part of their effort to cleanse their consciences. Mario complies because, as he indicates to Max, he only wants a quiet and peaceful life for himself and his wife, Greta (Hilda Gunther). Here, Cavani argues that the conclusion of the War may have ended the immediate starvation and dehumanization of the camp inmates, but that those with influence during the War, in many ways, retained it thereafter.

In Cahiers du Cinéma, Serge Daney argued The Night Porter to be a manipulative film, forcing spectator-identification away from Max's comrades, favoring Max and Lucia:

We will be (whether consciously or not doesn't really matter) in favor of the one who 'assumes' his Nazi identity and gets back in touch with his humanity (Max), and against the one who represses himself as a Nazi and so continues to seem completely inhuman (Hans [and the other comrades]). (63)

Mario is central to how spectator-identification relates to Max and Lucia because it is he who initially recognizes Lucia when she arrives in Vienna in the present day. Mario reassures Max that he will not disclose Lucia's identity to the Nazis because he has left the past behind and wants to simply live peacefully with Greta. Mario's knowledge (despite his pledge to be quiet)

regarding Lucia's identity is nonetheless threatening to Max, and thus, Max invites Mario on a fishing trip where he drowns him. This event is pivotal; Greta is also aware of Lucia's presence, and she indicates to Max's comrades that Mario's death was not an accident. When Max's comrades suddenly ascertain knowledge of Lucia, it only makes sense that Greta, in retaliation for Mario, told them – and that Max killing Mario had a ricochet-effect that sealed his and Lucia's fate.

Max's paranoia resulted in him killing Mario. In this sense, the film does not side with Max and Lucia's relationship – at the end, when Max and Lucia are gunned down on the bridge, they are killed for the same reason Max killed Mario. When Max and Lucia lie dead on the bridge in the final shot, no affective response is elicited from the spectator – the musical score is unemotive simply because, at the film's core, simplistic concepts of right and wrong have long become incidental. Max's murder of Mario in pseudo self-defense is an act that sets into motion a succession of events that ultimately results in him and Lucia being killed. The final shot of Greta is a close-up as Hans explains to Klaus that “she is getting along just fine” in the wake of Mario's death. The image however, contradicts Hans' claim; seated on a porch, Greta stares ahead, emotionless and pale – appearing corpse-like (1:37:05). Having sealed the fate of Max and Lucia in retaliation for Mario's murder, Greta has been absorbed into the redemptive delusion of Max's comrades. That which persists is a surreal nightmare of historical paranoia where people hysterically cancel each other out in a grand machine of action and consequence. Contrary to Daney, I argue that Max and Lucia are only protagonists in that they have the most screen time, designed neither to be likeable, nor to elicit spectator identification.

Representation and the Collective Obligation

In relation to how Cavani questions the legitimacy of collective memory, a source of controversy, (not only for The Night Porter, but Italian Holocaust representation as a whole), is an emphasis on individual experience. Giacomo Lichtner disapproves of individualistic representation because “approaching the Holocaust from an individual perspective carries the danger of considering the Holocaust an experience that ends with the conclusion of the story of the character(s) involved” (238). For Lichtner, there is a moral obligation to represent the Holocaust exclusively in collective terms, and he thus sees narratives focusing on individual experience as trivial. The Night Porter is at odds with Lichtner's reading, arguing concepts

related to *collectivity* to be the most historically vague and problematic. In her interview with David Gregory, Cavani further refers to the enormous social pressures described by the women she interviewed for her previous documentaries with regard to forgetting / repressing their individual recollections of the camps. Halbwachs has stated: “the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society” (51), therefore, if one is to belong to a collective, his / her understanding of the world must adhere to that of his / her social group. Feelings of belonging are thus, not inherent, but rather, constructed through rituals of performance within a community. Wood states that memory:

situates representations of the past within recognizable temporal and spatial structures and sensibilities. Individuals may thus be bound to a collectivity by virtue of their endorsement of these representations, regardless of whether or not they have shared the experiences upon which they are based. (3)

Even as individual experiences differ, it is frequently necessary to perform a degree of commonality in order to merge into the collective. Lichtner is invested in collective representation to the point where he does not acknowledge the roles of social pressures in the construction of collective memory. It is not enough to say that Max and Lucia do not subscribe to collective memory; instead, the notion of collectivity *as such*, never so much as *occurs* to them. They are obsessively encapsulated within themselves and each other to the point that they cease to even notice the world closing in around them.

Max's Comrades and the Redemptive Delusion

Max's Nazi comrades are four genteel professionals who regularly gather at the hotel, where they engage in ritualistic pseudo group therapy sessions. There, they alleviate themselves and each other of responsibility for their war crimes. Max's comrades are attempting to regulate memory with two core objectives: first, on a grand scale, to destroy all proof / documentation linking them to their crimes, and second, on a personal level, to individually cleanse themselves of their own guilt and sense of responsibility. Since the Holocaust, Max's comrades have established themselves as successful and functional professionals; Klaus is a lawyer, Kurt, a businessman, Hans, a professor and psychotherapist, and Bert (an exception, in that he does not publicly perform) a dancer. The respective professions of the Nazis are salient in that they span the major disciplines (law, business, education, the sciences, and the humanities, respectively), thus proposing that those at the helms of our social institutions have a personal investment in the

regulation of our collective memory. As the Holocaust fades further into history, the concept of memory has, of course, become increasingly problematic.⁸ Through her representations of Max's comrades, Cavani makes an extreme and disruptive statement with regard to the investment (in both collective and personal capacities) in the control and regulation of memory. The fraternal bond and systems of value shared by the former Nazis is one that has seeped into the fundamentals of the major disciplines, and has subsequently been absorbed into much larger bureaucratic structures. These structures, in the process of protecting themselves, use the power allocated by their positions to sever association with their crimes. This bureaucracy has further steeped itself in a phony, hyper-civilized language where words are severed from their meanings so that not even language can be used as a reliable means by which to remember.⁹ In The Night Porter, Lucia and Max use gesture to communicate, in part because language itself has been irreparably violated.

Through an absurd, self-affirming process of displacement, Max's comrades have externalized their guilt, referring to it as a disease of which they may be cured. John Carroll defines guilt, in part, as:

the anxiety stimulated by an enraged conscience, following an action. This anxiety is the psychological result of the individual turning his own aggression back against himself. It is conscience that usually impedes aggression ... An individual who feels no inhibition in acting out all his aggressive feelings would feel no guilt. But he would not be human. (9)

Max's comrades are physically represented as rigid, stilted, and non-expressive – steeped so heavily in bureaucratic formality that they eerily resemble the static, carnivalesque “Nazi-mannequins” from Lucia's burlesque scene. It is important to acknowledge how stylized performance may occasionally be mistaken for poor acting.¹⁰ Max's comrades are, of course, *designed* to be stiff and non-expressive – as the performative equivalent of cardboard, they are

⁸ The central concern addressed by Night and Fog, for example, involved the consequences of the Holocaust being forgotten by subsequent generations as represented by extensive tracking shots of overgrown, forgotten concentration camps in the present day.

⁹ Just as the term The Final Solution (Die Endlösung) was used in reference to the obliteration of the European Jewry, Max's comrades refer to the process of killing witnesses as “filing them away.”

¹⁰ Houston and Kinder see The Night Porter as “an odd phenomenon: a film whose basic situation – a romantic sado/masochistic union – is extremely powerful and well-developed, whereas its realistic plot – chance meetings and conspiracies – is so unsuccessful as to be almost ludicrous” (369). Here, an absence of realism is read as a formal flaw.

stand-ins – representations of larger social structures.¹¹ Minish referred to the dialogue of Max’s comrades as “Berlitz English that comes through as pure Harold Pinter” (39), but, as was the case with Kael and the Nazi-mannequins, he sees it characteristic of a flaw rather than a choice on the part of Cavani. The performances of the Nazis are cold and stilted, particularly in relation to the sensual and expressive corporal gestures of Lucia and Max. It is presumably Max’s own reluctance with the role of “civility” that has prevented him from joining the professional ranks of his peers.



fig. 5.1: Max and his comrades: Bodies rigidly performing civility. From left: Kurt (Geoffrey Copleston), Bert (Amedeo Amodio), Hans (Gabriele Ferzetti), Stumm (Giuseppe Addobbati), Klaus (Philippe Leroy), and Max (Bogarde).

Despite her representation of Max’s comrades as stand-ins, Cavani is not content to simply represent them as subhuman; the fact that they *do* experience guilt, and must plunge into delusional self-reaffirmations to avoid being consumed by it, serves as a reminder that the Holocaust was not committed by some otherworldly force of evil, but rather, ordinary soldiers. The delusion of Max’s comrades stems from the logic they invoke in the process of alleviating

¹¹ It may be this rigidity that has led some critics (Pauline Kael [343] and Geoffrey Minish [39]) to mistakenly state that the film’s dialogue was dubbed. In an interview with Peter Cowie, Rampling stated: “In Italy at the time they dubbed all films, even the Italians were dubbed, no one actually used their own voices... The Night Porter was different. Dirk Bogarde insisted that we have an original version, a direct sound film, which was very difficult because the Italians didn’t know how to do it... I think this was one of the first films made with direct sound in Italy” (see Works Cited for weblink).

themselves (and each other) of personal responsibility.¹² As stated by Ravetto: “Because [a] therapeutic process is performed by former Nazis who wish to liberate themselves from the trauma of the past, Cavani undermines the social function of ‘working through’ trauma itself” (166). When the Nazis refer to their guilt as a disease of which they may be cured, they appropriate their guilt as a bodily affliction. By using psychoanalysis to equate their guilt with a virus, they see it as an external threat that afflicts them from the outside world and must be defended against. When Hans states “we’re all clean – all evidence has vanished,” he sees their crimes to only exist insofar as they can be proven in court. At one point, Bert explains to Max the relief he felt as a result of his own therapy, to which Kurt replies: “Perhaps also because Klaus burned some thirty documents concerning you.” In retort, Bert states matter-of-factly, “Just as he burned yours.” Max’s comrades see their guilt not in themselves, but in the documents that associate them with wrongdoing – a process that enables them to construct and maintain a vision of the world in which it is *they* who are the victims. Lucia’s appearance is therefore a threat because her presence – her *body* – indirectly attacks their own phony self-assurances. It also stands as her option to identify them to the authorities as war criminals. The reconciliation of guilt is central to the issues explored by Cavani; as stated by Theodor Adorno:

Guilt reproduces itself in each of us – and what I am saying is addressed to us as subjects – since we cannot remain fully conscious of this connection at every moment of our waking lives. If we... knew at every moment what has happened and to what concatenations we owe our own existence, and how our existence is interwoven with calamity, even if we have done nothing wrong, simply by having neglected, through fear, to help other people at a crucial moment, for example – a situation very familiar to me from the time of the Third Reich – if one were fully aware of all these things at every moment, one would really be unable to live. One is pushed, as it were, into forgetfulness, which is already a form of guilt. By failing to be aware every moment of what threatens and what has happened, one also contributes to it; one resists it too little; and it can be repeated and reinstated at any moment. (113)

Adorno discusses the inability of any individual to truly comprehend the circumstances of his / her own existence. As such, Adorno presents the possibility that it is within our best interests of survival to forget – the conundrum being that that forgetfulness is precisely what leads to history

¹² With regard to the evasion of responsibility, I am reminded of the sequence in Night and Fog, where former Nazis, on trial for war crimes, stated simply that they were “just following orders.” The post-war trial of Nazi official Adolf Eichmann, who oversaw the deportation of Jews, initially to the ghettos, and ultimately to the extermination camps, raises similar questions, albeit beyond my objectives here. Please see Hannah Arendt’s Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil.

being neglected and carelessly repeated. Cavani has stated: “What interested me was to explore this cellar of the present, to inquire into the human subconscious; it was to offer up that which troubles me in order to trouble others so that all of us can live wakefully.”¹³ Cavani draws attention to concepts that Adorno does not see the masses as capable of comprehending. Just as Lucia reminds Klaus of that which he has worked to repress, Cavani disrupts social structures by initiating a cultural dialogue so fundamentally disruptive that it was bound to be read as pornographic. When Max’s comrades gather with him on the hotel rooftop, they make effort to convince him to turn Lucia over to them. When Max refers to their mock trials as “games for freaks,” Klaus retorts: “The freaks are you and your whore,” indicative of how Max’s comrades consider the relationship to be pornographic / obscene.¹⁴

Klaus and Lucia: Civil and Savage Masquerades

The film’s argument regarding the pollution of collective memory is most evident when Lucia engages in a dialogue with Klaus, one of Max’s Nazi comrades. Near the end of the film, knowing his comrades are in pursuit of Lucia, Max hides her in his apartment. When he leaves for work, he clasps a chain around her wrist and binds it to an exposed pipe, explaining to Lucia that it is to prevent his comrades from taking her. Lucia laughs at Max’s effort, amused by his continuation of the masquerade. In response, Max snaps at her to be quiet, his behavior indicative of how “[t]he masochist needs to believe that he is dreaming even when he is not” (Deleuze 64). When Lucia laughs, attention is momentarily drawn to the absurdity of Max’s effort. While Max is at work, Klaus breaks into the apartment (as expected) to speak alone with the “captive” Lucia. The dialogue in this scene is less representative of a discussion between two individuals than two concepts – one where a force seeking to regulate memory (Klaus) encounters a physical manifestation of resistant counter-memory (Lucia). The two forms operate in clear opposition – one via a delusion of the mind, and the other through gestures of the body.

The scene begins with a close-up of Lucia holding Max’s cat, as Klaus proclaims offscreen: “We’ve all had our trials. Now we are cured and live in peace with ourselves.” Here, Lucia assumes a feline-like physicality, as though absorbing the physical traits of the cat. When

¹³ As cited in Friedländer (129), originally from a letter to the French newspaper *Le Monde*, 25 April, 1974.

¹⁴ The association of Lucia with prostitution has been further discussed by Lichtner (238). When Frost states that Max “pull[s] Lucia out of the camp and do(es) her favors, expecting sex in return” (156), she associates the relationship with trade and obligation.

Klaus approaches her, she moves cautiously away on all fours, and “hides” underneath a table (knowing, of course, that he sees her), emblematic of how, “[w]ithin the masochistic construct, masquerade frequently takes the form of animal disguises which evoke the metaphoric animality and self-abasement of masochistic desire” (Studlar 167).¹⁵ Lucia’s absorption of feline traits enables her to use the chain which “restrains” her like a leash. By utilizing the chain as a prop, Lucia transcends both her circumstances and her body. As stated by Deleuze, “[t]he masochist appears to be held by real chains, but in fact he is bound by his word alone” (66). Just as Lucia could only maneuver space allotted to her by Max in her burlesque performance, because she is chained, she may only move as far as Max has pre-decided. It is important to emphasize that, her chain notwithstanding, Lucia is in no way forcibly confined. There is no evidence to suggest that Lucia derives pleasure from the idea of being restrained *per se* – rather, it is only her restraint specifically by *Max* (as the only one who fundamentally understands her and the nature of her behavior) that she willingly accepts. She is fully aware that the chain merely a prop of the masquerade, and that she would be more than capable of “escaping” if she were so inclined.

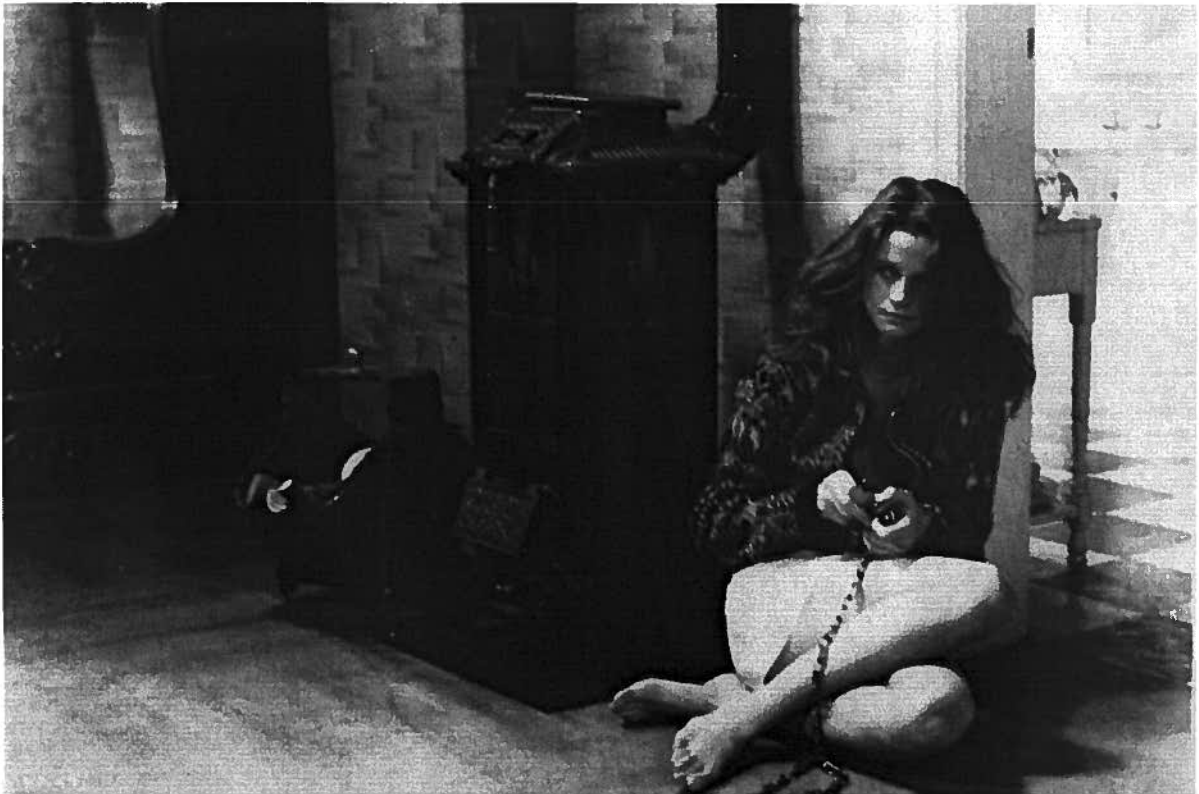


fig. 5.2: Pseudo-captivity: Lucia (Rampling) “chained.”

¹⁵ Sacher-Masoch aligns the masochistic impulse with a feline-like physicality when he explains that Wanda “wrapped her marble body in a great fur beneath which she was huddled like a shivering cat” (119).

Lucia's self-conscious performance assists in her own self-erasure, enabling her to become part of Max's apartment, as though part of the décor.¹⁶ Just as she channeled the burlesque aesthetic *a la* Dietrich in her cabaret performance, Lucia "masks" herself with the guise of Max's cat. Relegated to offscreen space, Klaus speaks in a rational tone, having firmly positioned himself as a source of reason, and speaking as though he were diagnosing her. The rigidity of Klaus and the sensual gestures of Lucia indicate how, as stated by Ravetto, "[b]y juxtaposing these cardboard Nazis ... who are indifferent to any form of human suffering – with Max and Lucia, Cavani implodes such one-dimensional symbols of evil, demonstrating how fascist moral constructions dovetail with bourgeois morality" (150). The phony image that Cavani invites the spectator to ponder is that of a logical / civilized medical professional attempting to speak rationally with a savage / mentally-ill subject who, chained to a pipe, slinks across the floor like an animal. Reik has stated:

There is a principle never to admit defeat. The masochist follows the opposite rule. He always admits defeat, but in reality he is undefeatable. His complete surrender has more power than wild rebellion. Because he does not resist he can endure a lot. His obedience kills the commands of his aggressors. His shameful and ridiculous acceptance of the authorities make them impotent and his uncompromising acknowledgment of their power prepares for their overthrow. (164)

Given the feeble nature of the chain that she claims binds her, by so faithfully adhering to an *alternate* set of laws, Lucia uses the consensual restriction of her own body to call attention to the concepts of adherence and obedience, as represented by Klaus. Lucia's behavior is, thus, emblematic of how "[t]he function of the masochistic contract is to invest the mother-image with the symbolic power of the law" (67).¹⁷ With regard to mock-restriction in *Venus in Furs*, Sacher-Masoch has written: "The comic side of my situation is that I can escape but do not want to; I am ready to endure anything as soon as [my master] threatens to set me free" (169). In line with Deleuze's explanation of the masochist, Lucia "is insolent in [her] obsequiousness, rebellious in [her] submission; in short [she] is a humorist" (78). I have further encountered scholars who attribute mental illness to Lucia's behavior – and some have further taken it upon

¹⁶ Again, consider Marlene ornately posing as a mannequin in *Bitter Tears*.

¹⁷ When Max concludes his meeting with his comrades by abruptly shouting "Sieg Heil," his comrades follow suit in zealous synchronicity. When Max smirks and leaves, he draws attention to their blind adherence.

themselves to diagnose her with a clinical disorder.¹⁸ These types of readings are particularly ironic in that the film already addresses the notion of Lucia being mentally-ill when she is questioned by Klaus. These scholars do not acknowledge therapy to be an intrinsic part of what the film is about, and further forget that the film itself makes a mockery of these types of evaluative strategies.

As a lawyer, Klaus aligns with Deleuze's discussion of masochism in relation to the law. Deleuze invokes Immanuel Kant's The Critique of Practical Reason:

...in which the law is no longer regarded as dependent on the Good, but on the contrary, the Good itself is made to depend on the law. This means that the law no longer has its foundation in some higher principle from which it would derive its authority, but that it is self-grounded and valid solely by virtue of its own form. For the first time, we can now speak of THE LAW, regarded as an absolute, without further specification or reference to an object. (72)

By this reading, the sense of righteousness to which Klaus and his peers cling is severed from the notion of "an absolute good" and called upon to defend itself on its own merits. In other words, without the phoniness of legal and moral institutions, Max's comrades would have nothing with which to shelter themselves. I return to my claim that The Night Porter is not a superficial film, but rather, a film *about* superficiality; on the surface, Klaus appears to be civil and rational, but it is Lucia who sees the situation for what it is. When Klaus pronounces the mock trials conducted by himself and his comrades to have cured them, Lucia retorts with a phrase that embodies the danger she poses: "There is no cure." That simple statement crystallizes how Lucia reminds Max's comrades of the superficial nature of their own self-assurances – that their therapy is a form of self-delusion – a process by which they tell themselves and each other what they need to hear, so as to fabricate a mindset with which they can live with themselves.

Max's comrades take their civilized self-image very seriously because it is integral to the process by which they have alleviated themselves of wrongdoing. Cavani argues that those who

¹⁸ Michael Fleming and Roger Manvell relate what they believe to be Lucia's trauma alongside Open Season (Peter Collinson, 1974) and The Deer Hunter (Michael Cimino, 1978), regarding the representation of trauma among Vietnam veterans, and further discuss her as having receded into a repressive state of numbness and denial (126). Lawrence Baron cites Lucia as an example of a survivor represented as a "neurotic or psychotic stereotype" (216). Ilany Kogan describes a patient, the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, who had an anonymous sexual experience with an Arab in a hotel after having seen The Night Porter years earlier; Kogan's description of the plot (where "[t]he man sexually abused the woman, and then, no longer able to return to reality, killed her" [140]) is incorrect to the point of fabrication. Finally, Birgit Wolz diagnoses characters in a number of films, and slots Lucia alongside the neurosis of Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini) in Blue Velvet (Lynch, 1986), as being indicative of "Dependent Traits/Dependent Personality Disorder" (207).

seek to regulate and control how people think use discourses cloaked in language that claims to be civil and moral.¹⁹ At the core of Klaus' delusion is the moral position into which he places and stabilizes himself with the aid of his peers. When Klaus pronounces to Lucia: "It is you who are ill ... your mind is disturbed – that's why you're here, fishing up the past," his tone and phrasing is indicative of bourgeois morality responding to (what he sees as) the carnal and degraded position of Lucia. Lucia's savagery and Klaus' civility are both masquerades in their own right – the vital difference being that Lucia's is self-conscious, whereas Klaus' is contingent on a lie of which he has convinced himself. Klaus argues that anyone who would actively *choose* to remember *must* be mentally ill. Cavani has, herself, stated that The Night Porter was inspired by her own interviews with survivors of concentration camps who, in the wake of the War, were actively encouraged to forget their ordeal – to "bury the hatchet and move on."²⁰

Adorno has pointed to the necessary negation of a rational logic:

I believe that an attempt to state as a general law why Auschwitz or the atom bomb or all those things which belong together here should not be repeated would have something utterly feeble about it because it would transfer into the sphere of rationality, which is ultimately the secondary sphere of the mind, the right to a jurisdiction which it can only usurp. (116)

In keeping with Adorno's claim, one cannot use rational language or logic to describe historical circumstances which, by their very definition, were inherently *irrational* and *illogical*. In this sense, the apparent irrationality of Lucia's gestures and behaviors points to the concept of rationality *as such*, in the wake of the camps, to be the *real* farce. Cavani represents civilized language as a misguided tool when considering the past insofar that the camps effectively destroyed any rationality or stability that language could ever propose.

The mind / body conflict in The Night Porter is also part of a larger dialogue concerning the discomfort of bourgeois morality with female sexual agency. When referring to mythological appropriations of sexuality, Linda Williams has stated:

To the Greeks, sexual pleasure was constructed in opposition to the ideal of self-mastery and control; so when Hera is portrayed as having the whole pleasure of sex, the apparent moral is that she is an out-of-control female. In contrast, Zeus' mere one-tenth of pleasure demonstrates the moderation and self-mastery that earn him the right of patriarchal authority over others, including his wife. (153)

¹⁹ Silverman notes that, in the film, "language is virtually synonymous with dominant culture [and further] functions as a fascist tool, a mechanism for 'binding' guilty and unpleasurable memories" (223).

²⁰ Cavani, interviewed by David Gregory, The Night Porter Anchor Bay DVD extras.

Lucia embodies the out-of-control female in several ways – not only does she derive pleasure unapologetically, but the logistics operating behind the *source* of her pleasure fly in the face of the precise historical circumstances central to Klaus’ guilt. The mere existence of Lucia reminds Klaus of the farcical nature his own morally-authoritative self-image – she represents the blood on his hands he has long told himself has been washed away. Klaus has alleviated his own guilt by regarding it akin to a disease – therefore, because Lucia represents a recollection of his crimes (and thus, a return of the “virus”), killing her would, once again, obliterate that guilt. Klaus, however, *cannot* harm Lucia precisely *because* of the morally authoritative position he claims to assume. Klaus’ idea of himself is one of the self-mastery and control to which Williams refers.

The Night Porter argues that our collective memory of the Holocaust has, long before it reached us, been perverted and manipulated by special interest groups for their own protection. As proposed by the film, immediately following the War, bureaucratic structures stepped in to cover their tracks – and vital information (with which we have since formed our collective narratives) was distorted or manipulated. This concept is unsettling because it brings to light the fact that history does not exist unto itself, but rather, has been constructed for us by those in power. Cavani asks that we reconsider how we remember because her interviews with camp survivors have dictated memory *itself* to have been under attack in post-War Europe – first, by an ideological structure in denial – and second, by perpetrators determined to cover their tracks. The film further argues that individuals who claim to remember history in a way that runs counter to how they “should” are subsequently attacked or seen as delusional, and relegated to the pornographic for fear of the disruption that they may cause. Relationships that exist on the pornographic periphery of culture – akin to that of Max and Lucia – are threatening because they draw attention to the fact that our historical recollections do not belong to us, but, rather, are dictated via dominant ideological discourses.

In Conclusion

The Night Porter depicts two distinct representations of fascism – the first (Erika and Bert) in a process of decomposition, and the second (Max’s comrades) determined to persevere at any cost. Max’s comrades represent the regulation and control of history by dominant structures of power. Just as Wood explored collective memory as something innately performative, Max’s comrades have constructed their own version of history, and perform their

phony narratives for themselves and each other. His comrades, however, are threatened by Max and Lucia's relationship because it calls into question the version of history they have constructed and narrativized for themselves. Cavani points to behaviors rooted in linguistic and legal discourses as those that, first, construct our memories for us, and second, dictate where we situate ourselves within larger historical frameworks. Lucia rails against collective rationale, denouncing it as farcical. Halbwachs argues that history is constructed within the collective consciousness, and made tangible (and, presumably more authentic) through the contrived assemblage of historical documents constructed within the parameters of our own pre-existing ideological frameworks. The Night Porter complicates Halbwachs' theories further by arguing that the information we began with has *already* been polluted. The Night Porter is ultimately about obscenity, though not one located within Max and Lucia; the *real* obscenity is the disservice done when people simplify their world by telling themselves that which they want to hear.

Chapter Six:

“Romantic Pornography” and Moral Authority:

The American Reception of The Night Porter

The crazy thing was that when I went to the premiere in New York, I stayed at the Waldorf Astoria. The New York Times had a front page and two inner pages filled with articles against the movie. They were all asking, ‘What is this thing? This movie is immoral!’ In fact, back then, the movie, in spite of being rated X, made over fifteen million dollars. Because their culture had no words that could appropriately describe the film ... there are only appropriate adjectives which sound degrading when used for criticizing this movie ... obviously, they had a problem with it. That is, they were average people who tend to be sub-educated when it comes to their way of understanding the messages or morals the movie is trying to convey. The Night Porter’s European audience was on a higher level – they were more prepared and educated than the audiences in the States ... the whole thing turned out to be... a pretty weird experience for me.

–Cavani, interviewed by David Gregory, describing her experience of traveling to New York to publicize The Night Porter in “Liliana Cavani on ‘The Night Porter’”

When The Night Porter was released in North America in October of 1974, it was met with an enormous critical hostility and immediately condemned as pornography. In this chapter, I will draw from publicity materials, interviews, autobiographical writing, popular reviews, and documentary footage for the purposes of examining the circumstances that led to the North American release, the conditions under which it was marketed, and the common logic operating beneath the severity with which it was almost-universally lambasted by the American popular press. Because The Night Porter is so muted, it is significant to investigate the methods and reasoning behind American distributor Joseph Levine’s marketing strategies, which, evocative of Tom Gunning’s theory of the cinema of attractions, sold it as a kinky soft-core sex film. Prior to its American release, Bogarde had already been quoted as expressing uncertainty with regard to the film’s distribution: “I’m just terrified it will get into the wrong hands and be released as a ‘sexploitation move’ which it totally isn’t” (Coldstream 195). I return to Carolyn J. Dean’s assertion that pornography “stands in for relationships that are not otherwise unaccounted for” (24). I assert that, when the American press wields terms such as junk, trash and pornography to describe the representation of relationships that do not operate within dominant ideological frameworks, they are seeking to expel them from culture for the purpose of protecting their own pre-existing and inarguable understanding of the world.

As stated by Janet Staiger, “Although questions about the industrial and social institutions of cinema and about cinematic form and style retain their interest, scholars recognize that questions of reception are equally significant for sociological, cultural, and aesthetic theory” (11). The reception of The Night Porter is unique because its marketing strategies presented objectives divorced completely from those of its filmmaker. Levine’s marketing campaign dissuades from a serious reading, resulting in a difficulty encountered by the critical establishment in differentiating between the film’s marketing campaign and the film itself. For example, when Jim Harper refers to The Night Porter as “dubious ... sleazy, pretentious and sensationalist” (21), he supports his argument with a reproduction of the film’s poster, thus, not differentiating between Cavani’s objectives in making the film and Levine’s in selling it. It is from this perspective that I consider The Night Porter a film trapped; it seems as though its sale to Levine for distribution in America was some sort of Faustian bargain where its wide accessibility and box office success came at the price of it being forever misunderstood.

Levine’s Cinema of Attractions

The Night Porter was filmed in English and utilized British lead actors because of a predominant belief that it would find its most lucrative in America and the United Kingdom.¹ The finished film was, however, initially unable to secure an American distributor. Bogarde has discussed the film’s rejection by the major studios:

The reaction from the major company executives was one of stunned incomprehension; followed by charges of ‘offensiveness,’ an ‘insult to the Jewish faith’ (although there was absolutely no Jewish connection anywhere in the context of the film), and ‘obscenity.’ Warner Bros. refreshingly found it ‘dull and uninteresting.’ (Bogarde, Orderly, 182)

Peter Lev attributes commercial strains with regard to the French New Wave and new Italian cinema in explaining why American companies began to increase their investments in English-language European art films: “The first American producer to make this switch was probably Joe Levine, an opportunistic producer-distributor who had built his Embassy Films into a large company primarily through investments in European films” (46). I will briefly emphasize

¹ James Hay cites The Night Porter as an example of how the national perception of Italian cinema was complicated by the industry’s reliance on the international market. Consequently, “more and more films took on foreign stars to boost their appeal and more and more directors were tempted into international co-productions” (The Companion to Italian Cinema, [Nowell-Smith, Hay, Volpi, eds.], 6).

Levine's approach to the industry as one with financial profit as its sole motivation. Though Levine was not involved in filming The Night Porter, (having purchased it in Italy when it was stranded without an international distributor) he served as co-producer on Le Mépris (Contempt, Jean-Luc Godard, 1963). Robert Stam has discussed the tensions between Godard's artistic and Levine's commercial interests in the filming of Contempt in that "Levine is reported to have demanded the nude shots of Bridget Bardot, and Godard eventually gave in to the pressure, but in ways ... that undercut the producer's intentions" (99). Godard himself states that Contempt "was very badly produced by Levine because [Levine] had no idea what sort of product he was turning out" (209). Bogarde remarked that Levine seemed the ideal distributor for The Night Porter since he was known for "difficult subjects ... lavish publicity campaigns and could have sold sand to a Bedouin" (191-2). By pushing his projects into the media spotlight, Levine drew attention to foreign films that would likely not have been seen otherwise. For example, the force of his campaign for La Ciociara (Two Women, Vittorio de Sica, 1960) is said to have been responsible for the exposure that led to Sophia Loren's Academy Award for Best Actress – the first ever for a performance in a foreign-language film. In 1967, Levine established Embassy Pictures as a theatrical distributor through which he released several major Hollywood productions, including The Graduate (Mike Nichols, 1967) and The Producers (Mel Brooks, 1968).² The Night Porter, as stated in the American pressbook, was Levine's first release for his new company, Joseph E. Levine Presents Inc., after having sold Embassy Pictures to Avco Industries in 1974.³ The film was eventually released by Levine's new enterprise through the newly conglomerated Avco Embassy Pictures. Teresa de Lauretis states:

In the US, The Night Porter was brutally murdered by pandering advertising and inept critiques ... Billed as a sadomasochistic thriller, romantic pornography, hypnotically repellent – something somewhere in between Deep Throat and The Exorcist (it ran 24 hours a day in New York, surpassing even Last Tango in Paris) – The Night Porter was purposely avoided by many people, including many women who were unwilling to put up with what they believed to be yet another slick item of female sexploitation. (35)⁴

I see Levine as having been misguidedly criticized by scholars who have taken issue with his trivial marketing of the film. While the film's ad campaign is referred to as pandering, desperate

² In terms trivializing the Holocaust, consider the infamous, self-consciously misguided show tune "Springtime for Hitler" in the The Producers.

³ As cited in Wasser (108).

⁴ Also, consider the release of other sexually graphic or otherwise controversial European imports at the time, such as The Devils (Ken Russell, 1971) and Emmanuelle (Just Jaeckin, 1974).

– or Levine himself as “incompetent” (Lauretis 35), scholars claim that a more refined or artful publicity campaign would have been more appropriate. The marketing of the film carries an air of indifference – concerned less with psychological detail than with pandering to the curious. Certainly, marketing the film as, say, an existential chamber drama depicting destructive sexual tendencies of masochistic lovers reunited after the Holocaust may be somewhat closer to what The Night Porter *is* – but it would have been, of course, a poor investment. By packaging the film as a sexploitation curiosity, Levine made an otherwise inaccessible European art film a popular success.

Strike Me: The American Premiere

The Night Porter premiered at the Baronet Theatre in New York City on October 1, 1974. The initial thrust of Levine’s elaborate marketing campaign was an exclusive, star-studded after-party at the Four Seasons Hotel, focused on themes of masochism and sexual bondage. Video artist Anton Perich attended Levine’s American premiere with National Star society/gossip columnist R. Couri Hay, and featured extensive footage on an episode of his television program, Anton Perich Presents.⁵ The event was populated with major Hollywood celebrities, including Andy Warhol, Dustin Hoffman, Lynn Redgrave, Taylor Mead and Mick and Bianca Jagger. At the party, between interviews with Rampling (with questions regarding her diet, make-up, and status as a sex symbol), Hay refers to her, not unlike an adult-film actress, as “the greatest sex star in the world ... sexy, sheik, perverse” (6:08). Hay further discusses the promotional party favors, including a matchbook with a key attached, labeled with the phrase “Strike Me,” explaining: “on the table, we had the gloves, we had the bell, we had red carnations for the blood, we had the chain, we had the lock and the key – all symbols of things that happened in the movie The Night Porter” (15:10).⁶ The party favors were associated with kink, devoid of any interest in the film’s psychological layers. In the process of gluing the film’s nuances to more tangible and easily recognizable iconography, Levine made the film widely accessible – parading it dually as a kinky sideshow curiosity *and* a representation of an edgy *avant-garde* sensibility. As stated by Levine himself: “You can only do so much with advertising. After a while, they

⁵ See Films Cited for weblink.

⁶ Morley describes how, “[f]or the press show critics were seated in black leather chairs with chains across them” (155).

[the public] don't believe all the lies you tell them. You have to have a film to back it up" (Filmmakers on Filmmaking, 33). According to Bogarde, despite its box-office success, the severe response from the critical media resulted in Cavani not being in demand for interviews, whereas "the press receptions to which [Rampling] was invited were jammed with *Girlie* magazines and coaxing photographers" (Orderly, 192). While Cavani was unknown in America at the time, Rampling had previously appeared in some minor film roles and the March 1974 issue of Playboy.⁷ The tone of Levine's campaign enhanced her public image as a sex kitten, and encouraged audiences to view the film as something designed to titillate.⁸ The dual indifference and hostility of the American press resulted in Cavani and Rampling leaving the country without notice after its premiere.⁹ Bogarde explains that Levine contacted him to promote the film in America only after Cavani and Rampling had fled unexpectedly (192-3).

Levine marketed The Night Porter with a philosophy similar to that of Gunning's cinema of attractions. Gunning initially coined the term in relation to silent cinema, stating: "By its reference to the curiosity-arousing devices of the fairground, the term denoted early cinema's fascination with novelty and its foregrounding of the act of display," using vaudeville performance as an example (42). In this circumstance, however, the cinema of attractions is evoked, not only via the curiosity cultivated by Levine through his promotional strategies, but also the nature of the iconography he incorporated; the image of Lucia's fetishized body performing burlesque in an SS uniform is emblematic of the seamy ranks of vaudeville / burlesque. Gunning lists significant characteristics of the cinema of attractions upon which Levine's efforts were founded:

...an interest in novelty (ranging from actual current events to physical freaks and oddities), an often sexualized fascination with socially taboo subject matter dealing with the body (female nudity or revealing clothing, decay, and death), a peculiarly modern obsession with violent and aggressive sensations (such as speed or the threat of injury). (44)

⁷ In a pictorial tied to the publicity of her previous film, Zardoz (John Boorman, 1974). Rampling's newfound reputation was not easily shaken; see Playboy's "Zardoz – Pictorial" in Works Cited. Playboy made mention of her work in The Night Porter for the next three consecutive years in their "Sex Stars" issues, each December.

⁸ Take, for example, the song "Charlotte Rampling" by the English rock-punk group Kinky Machine: "You'll always be so much more / than just a late night star on Channel 4 / ...In my dreams / I always wanted to be your trampoline / Charlotte Rampling / Charlotte Rampling."

⁹ As cited in Coldstream: "Levine took the film for distribution in the United States and launched it with a party in New York that makes Charlotte Rampling shudder to this day: 'It was the kinkiest thing you've ever seen, and I caught the first plane home'" (380).

James Combs situates Levine “in the lineage of circus barkers who convinced people walking down the midway that they were about to see sights and wonders they must not miss” (113). Indeed, the claim most famously attributed to Levine is: “You can fool all the people all the time if the advertising is right and the budget is big enough” (Andrews 41).

In Cahiers du cinéma, French critic / scholar Serge Daney acknowledges the significance of social class in marketing, but is critical of the demographic for The Night Porter as determined through Levine’s strategies:

In the domain of the cinema, the assimilation of the dominant ideology by a popular audience means that the *auteur* film (thought, reflection, experimentation, a signature) can combine with the pornographic-film-set-in-a-concentration-camp, a ‘popular’ genre of which there are many examples. (66)

In differentiating between what he sees as the film’s two demographics (the popular and the petite bourgeoisie), Daney argues The Night Porter to straddle the aesthetics of popular and art cinema. He sees the contradiction in the coarseness of Levine’s marketing strategies and the introspection of the film itself, but argues the film (not Levine) to be taking advantage of the popular sensibility (65-6). Further, when he argues the film to be “bourgeois propaganda” and Cavani to be enforcing a lesson of stupidity, he sees the film as veiled in popular conventions as it reinforces elitist / fascist strategies.

Filmmakers on Filmmaking features an April 1979 interview with Levine, where he spoke at a seminar with the Fellows of the Center for Advanced Film Studies. There, he recalled The Night Porter as a profitable investment and discussed his sale of the “home box” (pay-TV) rights for \$50,000 (38). The rights were, thus, suddenly up for grabs when Home Video evolved, resulting in numerous video labels manufacturing their own Home Video incarnations of the film – always, of course, selecting a still from Lucia’s burlesque performance for its box art.

Porno-Profundity and Popular Criticism

As stated by Laura Kipnis, “pornography has a talent for making its particular fantasies look like dangerous and socially destabilizing incendiary devices” (163). The most influential popular critics in North America, one after the other, regarded The Night Porter, not with mere distaste, but with all-out hostility, wielding the term pornography like a weapon. I see these reactions as indicative of the film committing an active violence to the dominant ideological frameworks upon which the critics’ worldviews are predicated. Reactions of anxious laughter

and frivolous insults are less indicative of the text itself than the processes by which individuals safeguard their own pre-existing systems of belief. The most influential and widely-read popular critics in America – Vincent Canby (The New York Times), Roger Ebert (The Chicago Sun Times) and Pauline Kael (The New Yorker) – each wrote scathing reviews which I will briefly examine more closely. While it is not my objective to criticize their collective distaste, what makes a closer reading of the reviews relevant is the absence of objective logic and rational argument. These critics were reduced to reactionary and morally authoritative mudslinging, demonstrating no interest in analysis or subtext, as though the film’s mere *existence* were a direct and personal insult. Canby’s review begins with the statement, “Let us now consider a piece of trash” (D1). Similarly, Ebert’s opens with, “The Night Porter is as nasty as it is lubricious” (256), and Kael proclaimed that, “The picture says that human sexuality is loathsome and that every once in a while the beast makes itself heard” (345). In each example, the film is not being reviewed, but rather *reacted* to – there is no possibility of an active or productive assertion when reactionary terms like junk, nasty, and trash are thrown.

Ebert states that, “For a long time, [he has] defended the belief that what we see in the movies doesn’t direct our behaviour, if we’re more or less normal” (256). The Night Porter is immediately a problematic text when considered from a perspective of a critic who already has a pre-existing (and idealized) personal definition of normal. Ebert goes on to express overarching concerns about cinematic violence and its impact on larger cultural behaviors, stating that “[i]t’s been years since movie violence was motivated, explained or even taken seriously by the characters themselves” (256). Ebert’s assertions curiously neglect the fact that The Night Porter is *not* a violent film *per se*, particularly in relation to Hollywood fare of the era, such as The Wild Bunch (Sam Peckinpah), The Exorcist (William Friedkin, 1973) or Mean Streets (Martin Scorsese, 1974), all of which he praised.¹⁰ Thus, amid Ebert’s own self-congratulatory defense of film violence, he uses The Night Porter as a platform from which to defend social values. Ebert’s reaction causes him to attribute brutality to the film that does not actually exist, and his decision to use it as the catalyst for a moral rant about separate social issues avoids discussion of the film itself. In my research, it is these same so-called “moral standards” to which critics and academics alike consistently hold The Night Porter, as though condemning it were less a process of film criticism than social responsibility.

¹⁰ See “Appendix: Ten Best Lists, 1967-2005” in Awake in the Dark: The Best of Roger Ebert (441,2,3).

The most severe criticism is that of Kael, who attacks the film in every thematic and formal capacity, accusing it of offensiveness and incompetence. When Kael states that “[t]he film’s porno-profundity is humanly and aesthetically offensive” (342), she substitutes the term porno for phony or insincere (mondo, if you will), and further refers to it as a “porno-gothic” (342) and that “the goofy political plot is ... merely a device to set the porno plot in motion” (343). When Kael cannot articulate her discomfort, she interjects porn with the expectation that the word can simply be used as a stand-in for all that she, herself, does not explain.

Of all the critical reaction, however, the most significant is that of Canby, whose review was the catalyst for a media controversy. Canby, like Ebert and Kael, demonstrates evident discomfort with the subject matter, loading his writing with casual and trivial language. The simple fact that The New York Times – arguably the most prolific and respected daily newspaper in America – would publish such a defensive review is indicative, I argue, of dominant ideology anxiously and defensively protecting itself. Canby, like his professional counterparts, hurls blind insults, even taking a cheap shot at co-star Isa Miranda’s weight (“whose balloon-like shape suggests she ... likes to sniff helium” [D1]) – an accusation that fails to even differentiate between the character and actress.

The aforementioned critical writing is ripe with defense mechanisms, including an overarching tone of nervous laughter. With regard to the film’s audience, Canby states: “Although they want to be shocked, they more often wind up in advanced stages of giggles. There’s no other way to react sanely to a movie that recalls the concentration camp as *Our Blue Heaven*” (D1). Similarly, Ebert states, “It’s such a superficial soap opera, we’d laugh at it if it weren’t so disquieting” (256). Finally, Kael asserts that “these fanatic Nazis might just as well be businessmen who have lost their Dairy Queen franchise” (343). This defensive laughter is indicative of Ebert, Kael, and Canby preserving their own beliefs by treating something that disturbs them as though it is not worthy of serious consideration to begin with.¹¹

Levine chose to actively incorporate the damning criticism into his ad campaign, with emphasis on Canby’s review. The widely circulated trade ad for The Night Porter quoted Canby’s condemnation: “The Night Porter is romantic pornography... a hectic love affair.

¹¹ The Night Porter has also been met with extreme reactions by other public figures including John Fowles, who referred to it as “[a] very sick film... [and further stated that he took] a sort of natural interest in it, since so many wrong values were brought out” (196). On the other hand, novelist Anne Rice selected her pen name, Anne Rampling, based on Rampling’s performance in the film (Ramsland 225).

Among the film's various definitions of decadence is a strong preference to do on a floor what most other people would do on a chair, table or bed... what a kinky turn-on!" (D19)¹² Levine's strategy was more subtle than merely lifting Canby out of context. Instead, it took advantage of how the arbitrary nature of pornography was the hinge on which the meaning of Canby's statement rotated. When Canby accuses the film of being pornographic, he is speaking from a morally authoritative position where the word pornography *itself* is accusatory. Levine's appropriation of Canby's statement drains the moral authority of Canby's position, thereby proclaiming the film's pornographic elements to be the precise reason *to* see it. The success of Levine's decision to publicly market the film as pornography is perhaps best articulated by Kipnis, who states that pornography "speaks to its audience because it's thoroughly astute about who we are underneath the social veneer, astute about the costs of cultural conformity and the discontent at the core of ... normative sexuality" (xii).

Canby himself published a response to Levine's use of his quote, titled "The Art of Turning Bad Reviews into Good Quotes." In this puzzling article, Canby interchangeably shifts in tone from outrage, to acceptance, to good humor, initially accusing Levine of having possibly overstepped a law (*which* law, he fails to mention), stating that:

[w]hat Levine is doing – apparently with some success – is selling the film on the strength of its bad reviews ... [and further] What Levine knew – and the critics did not – was that The Night Porter was the kind of silly movie that could excite the public's imagination by being accurately described ... the quote carried to sense of what I had thought to be irony when I wrote the piece, but again that was my fault. Irony is fragile. It may even be effete. No law has ever been written that could effectively protect its use in the knockdown-dragout world of movie advertising. (D17)

Canby misuses the term irony (here, he refers to sarcasm) and argues that his comments were used out of context, when in fact, it was his own facetious tone being thrown back at him. Canby does not acknowledge that Levine's appropriation of his review was only possible because of the sarcasm in his tone and the vagueness of his own language.¹³

¹² Canby's use of the term pornography is less an adjective to be contemplated, and more, a *reason* to justify an all-out rejection of the film – a synonym for tasteless, unacceptable or disgusting.

¹³ Perhaps of no surprise, Cavani's subsequent films have not fared much better in The New York Times – Beyond Good and Evil was referred to as "bordering on the absurd" (Maslin C14) and The Berlin Affair, as "careless" and "exploitative" (James C12).

“Differing” Perspectives

In her 1975 review for Jewish Currents magazine, Sandy Miller states that, “[w]hen Joseph E. Levine and Avco Embassy get together for the purpose of packaging ‘socially relevant’ pornography, the result is a mockery of issues and events that no one dare exploit – for any purpose, least of all pornographic (34).” She asserts that those who admire the film based on its formal strategies “give attention to a work which should be disregarded outright” (34). For Miller, the film simply warrants no discussion, and she concludes with a plea to avoid it. With regard to the film’s exhibition, Miller states: “There is no doubt as to what is the intent of the producers of The Night Porter. This reviewer saw it at a Times Square moviehouse where crowds were enticed in by a trailer of the spiciest scenes on a television-like screen in front of the theater” (34). Like the cinema of attractions, this method of enticing the public is equivalent to the promoter of a carnival announcing the range of sideshow attractions to the crowd outside the gates. Miller however, views the intent of the film as transparent only insofar as she does not differentiate between the marketing strategies and the film itself (Cavani is mentioned only once, and even then, misspelled “Liliani” [33]). In other words, because Levine attached his name to the film in a more visible sense than even Cavani’s, it was *Levine* to whom authorship was essentially ascribed, which made the film even easier to hate. In Take One, Geoffrey Minish initially states: “As for the film itself, I’m baffled” (39) before discussing possible interpretations. However, when he later claims that “a film as confused as The Night Porter just has to be a work of instinct” (40), the bafflement that, moments before, was *his*, has shifted to a confusion that is suddenly attributed to the film. Moving from confusion to rage, Leslie Halliwell (in The New Yorker) referred to it as: “A downright deplorable film, with no cinematic skill or grace to excuse it; the visuals are as loathsome as the sound is indecipherable, and the sheer pointlessness of it is insulting” (730).

In a more academic context, Cineaste partook in the cultural dialogue, and the December 1974 issue published reviews by Henry Giroux and Ruth McCormick, side by side titled “Two Views on The Night Porter.” The two articles are, however, not particularly different. Giroux accuses the film of harboring fascist sympathies, while McCormick argues the opposite, but both rail against the film for different reasons. In what may be the most extreme accusation of all, Giroux refers to The Night Porter as “a thinly-disguised fascist propaganda film ... [and that] [i]ts barbarism rests not only in its audacity to extol fascist principles, but also in its attempt to

legitimize the deaths of millions of innocent people at the hands of the Nazi machine” (31). McCormick, on the other hand, mistakenly refers to Lucia as Jewish and concludes her analysis by referring to it as a “turgid, confusing and ugly film” (34). It is curious that Cineaste titled the combined piece as “Two Views on The Night Porter,” as though Giroux and McCormick were in some disagreement. This is indicative of there being no real option to support the film. As far as North American critics were concerned, an adequate dialogue constituted a disagreement on *why* they thought it was deplorable – or, in other words, on *why* they felt essentially the same way.¹⁴

Ramplng on Display: The American Press Book

The Avco Embassy Exhibitors’ Showmanship Manual for The Night Porter was a pressbook initially sent to theatres, containing Mat options of the poster for newspaper ads, source information for trailers, as well as television / radio spots, and articles for newspaper-publication detailing the process of making the film. The press articles announce The Night Porter to be Levine’s first film for his new-formed company, Joseph E. Levine Presents. It publicizes Levine as much as the film itself, trumpeting him as “having pioneered the distribution in New England of such Italian masterpieces as Paisan, Open City, and The Bicycle Thief, at a time when the market for foreign films was as yet limited,” further praising him as a visionary and “[e]ver the pioneer and innovator” (11). The articles are additionally exploitive, the headline of one proclaiming: “Fascinating ‘The Night Porter’ Depicts Weird Relationship!” (11). Furthering its emphasis of the film as trash, the pressbook states that television and radio spots could be ordered through the Exploitation Department of Avco Embassy Pictures.

Generally, the variations of the newspaper ads are similar, with the exception of the occasional computer-generated addition of a black lace bra superimposed on to the image of Ramplng – likely for more conservative publications. What makes the poster and trade ads interesting for my purposes is how they are visually assembled, and what this says about the relationship between the film’s marketing campaign and the issue of subjectivity. The poster features a cut-out photograph of Bogarde’s head in the upper corner, facing Ramplng. The subjectivity proposed by the poster is significant; Ramplng is empowered in that she is returning

¹⁴ Similarly, Gary Arnold of the Washington Post stated that “Cavani, unhappily, has complete confidence in her bad taste [insofar that] [s]he insists upon finding romantic sustenance in a romantic relationship that looks fundamentally sickening” (C5).

the gaze of the spectator, yet, the entire purpose of the ad relies on the display of her body. Max's discriminating gaze from the upper corner of the ad (as opposed to Lucia, almost nude from the waist, up) further situates him in a role of dominant authority. It is important to acknowledge the imagery that marketed The Night Porter to the masses because, on the poster, the relationship between Max and Lucia is clearly depicted as one where Max's control is evident through his discriminating gaze and appropriation of Lucia's body. Although earlier in this thesis, I have argued such appropriations regarding Max and Lucia to be inaccurate, the poster is difficult to fault in that it proved so effective as a marketing strategy.¹⁵



fig. 6.1: Lucia's body as the object of Max's gaze on the American poster, as opposed to shared subjectivity in its Italian promotion, distributed by Ital-Noleggio Cinematografico (fig. 6.2). fig. 6.3: The use of Canby's quote on the American pressbook.

The image of Lucia performing in her SS gear is, by far, the most well-known of the film.¹⁶ Lucia's dance aligns with how, as stated by Gunning, "The act of display on which the cinema of attractions is founded presents itself as a temporal interruption rather than a temporal

¹⁵ It is relevant to note that the film's Italian poster (as distributed by Ital Noleggio Cinematografico) features Max and Lucia each in a half of a yin-yang symbol. Though Lucia is in her SS uniform, the iconography does not fetishize her. The image is, of course, out of context in that the film has nothing to do with Chinese philosophy, but it is nonetheless emblematic of Max and Lucia co-existing equally – as opposed to the vastly different planes on which they are featured on Levine's poster.

¹⁶ At the time of the film's release, People magazine described the ad as "the most provocative movie poster since the 1950s, when Brigitte Bardot turned bottoms up for And God Created Woman" (Kevin Dowling, see Works Cited for weblink).

development” (46). By this, I mean that this representation operates in a realm independent of linear and literal understandings of history. The image that Levine used to sell The Night Porter was one that was lifted out of a purely abstract temporal space. While Lucia’s burlesque performance is a pivotal scene, it comprises only four minutes of the film’s 116-minute running time. The scene not only provided the iconography for Levine’s ad campaign, but has since become an easy reference point for academics, who have even appropriated it for their own purposes.¹⁷

Last Tango in Auschwitz: The Night Porter and Bertolucci

The Night Porter was released shortly after the storm of controversy surrounding Ultima tango a Parigi (Last Tango in Paris – Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972). Although there are some similarities (American/European co-productions by Italian filmmakers, sexually-subversive subject matter), The Night Porter was immediately acknowledged by the popular media as capitalizing on the success of Bertolucci’s film.¹⁸ Although Last Tango in Paris was controversial due to explicit subject matter, there is no active debate – nor was there ever, really – with regard to its artistic merits. Instead, a broad critical consensus hailed Last Tango in Paris as a masterpiece; it was praised by the Academy and Brando’s performance has since been celebrated as perhaps the definitive example of method acting.

Kael’s condemnation of The Night Porter makes its association with Last Tango in Paris particularly salient. Her exorbitant praise of Last Tango in Paris pronounced that it “must be the most powerfully erotic movie ever made, and [that] it may turn out to be the most liberating movie ever made” (28). Her remarks with regard to The Night Porter, however, could not have been in greater opposition. Like the other American critics, Kael accused Cavani of neglecting a moral obligation to collective memory. She further attributed the lack of emotion in Rampling’s performance *not* to Lucia’s self-erasure, but to poor acting, stating that, “absolutely nothing

¹⁷ Ravetto’s The Unmaking of Fascist Aesthetics, Frost’s Sex Drives: Fantasies of Fascism in Literary Modernism, and Marcus Stiglegger’s German text Sadiconazista: Faschismus und Sexualität im Film each utilize the image of Lucia performing in her SS uniform for their cover pages. Here, the fetishized body of Lucia / Rampling is appropriated even by academics in a way similar to how Levine marketed it to the base impulses of the American public three decades prior.

¹⁸ Nora Sayre further accuses The Night Porter of riding on the reputation of Belle de jour (Louis Buñuel, 1967) and Il Conformista (The Conformist, [Bertolucci, 1970]). More severely, a statement attributed to Peter Hall argues the film to be “bumming a free ride on the gas chambers” (155).

emerges – as an actress, she has no hidden resources” (344). Kael’s subsequent comparison of Rampling to “better” actresses such as Greta Garbo and Lauren Bacall reiterates how the critical frustration emerged from the refusal on the part of The Night Porter to adhere to modes of performance and value structures in line with classical Hollywood. Similarly, Canby referred to Last Tango in Paris as “beautiful, courageous, foolish, romantic and reckless” (471) (although Canby *was* mildly critical of Tango), and Ebert pronounced it to be “one of the great emotional experiences of our time” (240). In her interview with Gregory, Cavani jokingly mimics the precise simplistic logic and outrage behind the American reception when she states, “For God’s sake – it’s about him being an evil Nazi and her being a victim! What are they *doing*? Oh my God!”¹⁹ It bears relevance to reiterate that I am not seeking to criticize the American press with regard to their communal arguments. Instead, it is my objective to examine the intellectual weakness in the communal logic – problematic because the critics judged the film in a way that indicates a lack of interest in understanding it to begin with.

The associations drawn between The Night Porter and Last Tango in Paris served as a convenient marketing platform and point of reference for Levine. Levine clipped his ad campaign to the coattails of Bertolucci’s film, creating the impression that it was made exclusively to ride on the success of the former, resulting in reviews that referred to the film as “Last Tango in Auschwitz” and “the latest Tango at the turnstiles”.²⁰ Further, in the BFI companion to Last Tango in Paris, David Thompson refers to The Night Porter as “[t]he most obvious ‘son’” of the film (89).²¹ An additional consequence of the marketing strategies that linked it to Bertolucci’s film, has perpetuated misconceptions among academics as well as popular critics. The cover of the February 1975 issue of the celebrity tabloid Modern Screen proclaimed: “Scenes from ‘Night Porter’ hotter than ‘Last Tango’!” In line with this statement, as cited in Grace Lichtenstein’s article in The New York Times: “As for the ‘Tango’ connection, [Cavani] simply dismisses it as ‘the search of magazines for headlines’” (D19). A scene in the third act of The Night Porter features a starving Lucia reaching into a jar of jam with her hands and licking it from her fingers – and continuing to do so even after Max has broken the glass. When Lichtenstein states: “‘Porter’ does for strawberry jam what Tango did for butter” (D19),

¹⁹ Gregory’s interview with Cavani, The Night Porter Anchor Bay DVD extras.

²⁰ Minish (40) and Dowling in People (weblink in Bibliography) respectively.

²¹ Coldstream cites an interview with Bogarde (by Dilys Powell), in which Bogarde, responding to the comparisons drawn between the two films, states that he, Rampling, and Cavani had, in fact, not seen Last Tango in Paris before they filmed The Night Porter (380).

she is referring, of course, to the scene in Last Tango in Paris where butter is used as a sexual lubricant. Levine had no interest in preserving the integrity of the film, but instead, chose to market it so as to appeal to the most base instincts of the masses, and clipped it to something with which they were already, at least somewhat, familiar. Simply put, self-evident in Levine's marketing philosophy was an understanding that the cultural capital of his audience had no correlation with how much they paid for a ticket. For Levine's purposes to market the film as a respectable piece of high art would only limit its profit potential.

Rambling Re-appropriated

The iconography of Lucia's burlesque performance has been referenced in contemporary contexts by pop icons, including Madonna and Marilyn Manson. In 1990, Madonna's controversial music video for her single "Justify My Love" featured the representations of unorthodox and anonymous sexual encounters in a hotel.²² Among these figures was a shot of a woman in an SS uniform, replete with leather suspenders, gloves and cap (3:03). Camille Paglia acknowledges the reference to The Night Porter, and her description of the video is one that could be very easily attributed to the scene of Lucia's burlesque performance: "an eerie, sultry tableau of jaded, androgynous creatures trapped in a decadent sexual underground" (5). Paglia further cites the influence of photographer Helmut Newton, whose first nudes were of Rambling.²³ Similarly, Marilyn Manson donned an SS cap, suspenders and elbow-length leather gloves in his music video for "The Fight Song" – clearly using his own androgynous star persona in homage to Rambling.²⁴ Madonna and Manson both appropriate Lucia's burlesque performance – with Manson, inviting the Nazi-burlesque iconography to his own physicality.²⁵ Additionally, on the CD cover for their album Private/Public, the rock group Flux Information Science features a clear reference to the burlesque sequence. However, while the Nazi

²² The video was famously banned from MTV (Goodwin 39). In For the Time Being, a collection of Bogarde's journal entries, he states that he received a letter, "[p]urporting to come from Madonna and her photographer, Steven Meisel, who wanted (him) to cooperate with them on a forthcoming book called simply Sex" (273). Bogarde goes on to say, "I can't think how Madonna got the idea... maybe she'd seen a rerun of The Night Porter?" (Time Being, 274)

²³ See Camera Portraits: Photographs From The National Portrait Gallery (Ed. Malcolm Rogers) (288-9).

²⁴ From Manson's album Holy Wood (In the Shadow of the Valley of Death) (Interscope Records, 2000)

²⁵ The impact of Italian female filmmakers is clear in Madonna's work, and perhaps most evident in her starring role in the remake of Lena Wertmüller's Travolti da un insolito destino nell'azzurro mare d'agosto (1974), Swept Away (Guy Ritchie, 2002).

iconography is appropriated, it remains pure artifice – in other words, while such forceful imagery will no doubt be absorbed by the mainstream, there is nothing contingent on any of these representations – they are used purely as novel appropriation, and not even the apocalyptic imagery associated with Manson gestures to the self-erasure central to Lucia. Sacher-Masoch has explained that “Venus must hide herself in a vast fur lest she catch cold in our abstract northern climate, in the icy realm of Christianity” (124). In keeping with the aesthetics of masochism, religious iconography is additionally salient to each performer. Consider the appropriation of the story of Salome in The Night Porter, alongside, for example, the titles of Madonna’s and Manson’s albums (The Immaculate Collection [Sire, 1990] and Antichrist Superstar [Interscope, 1996], respectively). The androgyny as performed by Madonna in The Night Porter and Manson in their larger respective bodies of work is worth noting in that they uniquely appropriate iconography and invite it upon their own bodies in contexts that threaten established discourses. As stated by Paglia: “‘Feminism says ‘no more masks.’ Madonna says we are nothing but masks” (5). In this sense, Madonna and Manson do embody the concept of artifice, serving as deviant reflections of the anxieties and repressions of American culture.

In Conclusion

The Night Porter is significant with regard to Gunning because attractions, as he emphasizes, do not adhere to a succession of events that form the trajectories of a narrative. Gunning states that: “attractions have one basic temporality, that of the alteration of presence/absence that is embodied in the act of display. In this intense form of present tense, the attraction is displayed with the immediacy of a ‘Here it is! Look at it’ (44). My objective here has been to explore how Gunning’s cinema of attractions bridges the gap between the film Cavani made and the one Levine sold. Ultimately, the marketing strategies used by Levine actively *encouraged* the sensational, simplistic accusations leveled against the film, setting it up as one that strived to be precisely what so many people hated it for.

Chapter Seven:

Trivial Agony in Nazi Sexploitation:

Trauma and Absurdism in Gestapo's Last Orgy and SS Experiment

Love Camp

Do we really have to see the whole lot of them before we take a stand? By which I mean all the films whose posters show a naked woman against the background of a swastika? ... Its itinerary follows a classic path, beginning with a skilful cultural forgery, a work of reasonable level such as Liliana Cavani's The Night Porter; slipping down a few rungs we reach the more dubious craft of Salon Kitty, and then the doors are flung open to the cheapest brands, the plethora of Nazi-porn films.

—Primo Levi (2005: 37)¹

What rough beast, its hour come at last, slouched towards Sodom to be born? Nazi exploitation did. And it was a bloody, multiple birth.

—Simon Whitechapel (2003: 74)

In the wake of the international success of The Night Porter, a cycle of low-budget exploitation films emerged from Italy, the likes of which no one could possibly have foreseen.² In this chapter, I will begin to explore Nazi exploitation cinema and propose a more productive means by which to consider it. The Night Porter may be read from several perspectives; as the first film in Cavani's German Trilogy, it may be explored via themes of female agency and corporeal transgression. Alongside the work of other Italian auteurs (Visconti, Pasolini and Wertmüller, among others), it reads as a political text, commenting on the aesthetics of fascism. These readings lend respectability to The Night Porter, considering it in relation to other modes of art cinema. When stripped down to its basic plot, The Night Porter concerns a consensual sexual relationship, both during and after the Holocaust, between a prisoner in a concentration camp and a Nazi commandant. While The Night Porter certainly cannot be held responsible for Nazi exploitation as such, it is the catalyst of the two most severe and notorious films of the cycle: Lager SSadis Kastrat Kommandantur (SS Experiment Love Camp – Sergio Garrone, 1976) and L' Ultima orgia del III Reich (Gestapo's Last Orgy – Cesare Canevari, 1977).³

¹ In The Black Hole of Auschwitz, originally published as an editorial in the Italian newspaper La Stampa (February 12, 1977).

² Referred to by Laurence Baron as “pornocaust” films (50).

³ Gestapo's Last Orgy is singled out as the most severe example of Nazi exploitation by Jim Harper (22) and Jay Slater (64). For a list of the films' alternate titles, please see the Filmography.

Pornography of the most simplistic and unambiguous kind, the films' historical representations are so outlandish and divorced from logic that they defy comprehension, operating at the forefront of "a genre of movies about Nazis who use concentration and death camps as brothels and laboratories for sexual experiments and torture" (Baron 50). In these alarming and trivial representations, buxom young women consistently depicted in various states of undress portray prisoners in concentration camps with stunning ineptitude, as though they were on the site of a photo spread, performing forced labor with the same casual reluctance one might with remedial chores.⁴ The women engage in degrading sexual acts with Nazi guards, and further, are tortured and subjected to ludicrously depicted medical experiments. In a letter to the Italian newspaper La Stampa in 1977, Primo Levi directly addressed the Nazi sexploitation cycle with a logic that is more relevant today than ever, and I will be engaging with his claims in these final chapters. It is necessary to discuss these films because they complicate my reading of The Night Porter and contribute to my discussion of pornography and corporeal cinema.

French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre has discussed the concept of the viscous or slimy (from the French *visqueux*, which translator Hazel E. Barnes further associates with the 'sticky'). This physical state – committing to neither solid nor liquid – is commonly associated with indifference and disgust. As he remarks:

Immediately the slimy reveals itself as essentially ambiguous because its fluidity exists in slow motion; there is a sticky thickness in its liquidity; it represents in itself a dawning triumph of the solid over the liquid – that is, a tendency of the indifferent in-itself, which is represented by the pure solid, to fix the liquidity, to absorb the for-itself which ought to dissolve it.
(774)

I will be returning periodically to Sartre's claim because it applies to Nazi sexploitation, not only in terms of the films themselves, but to how they have (like slime) "oozed" through the cracks of culture in the process of having been subjected to government suppression, unavailability and censorship. Similar to my argument regarding pornography, the term slimy accounts for whatever meaning is attributed to it – only, in this case, meanings do not have to be forced – rather, the slimy willfully sticks to anything with which it is associated. Insofar as the slimy commits to no fixed state, it willfully assumes whatever meaning / state / form is attributed to it; in other words, we do not have the power to appropriate the slimy because the nature of its

⁴ With regard to the cheap sets, the DVD commentary of the American-made Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS discusses how the concentration camp was recreated on the abandoned lot of the television series Hogan's Heroes (Stratton 159).

physical state already indicates its own willingness *to be* appropriated. I propose Nazi sexploitation to be relevant to Sartre's discussion insofar that, just as slime commits to neither solid nor liquid states, part of what makes this cinema disgusting is the fact that it is too inept to be taken seriously, yet too caustic and destructive to laugh at.

Nazi Sexploitation: A Brief History

Because the Italian variations are the most notorious of the cycle, Nazi sexploitation has been understood as exclusive to Italian culture. It existed however, long before The Night Porter, the first film of its kind being the American Love Camp 7 (Lee Frost, 1969), which "appeared several years before the brief flourishing of the genre in the midde to late 1970s and is often explained as one man's labor of love, appearing out of nowhere and bequeathing nothing to posterity" (Whitechapel 46).⁵ Of further interest are the Ilsa films, a series of low-rent American / Canadian co-productions featuring Playboy Playmate Dyanne Thorne as a monstrous, sex-crazed concentration camp warden based on notorious concentration camp warden Ilse Koch.⁶ It warrants mention that the origins of these films date back to a literary aesthetic that is beyond my objectives here.⁷ More so than even slasher films or hardcore pornography, Nazi sexploitation has existed only on the outermost peripheries of culture. The films do not merely repulse, but incorporate inane representations of sex and gore to invoke an eroticized and masturbatory reaction while using concentration camps as backdrops. Designed to dually invoke arousal and self-disgust, the films are excessively explicit, yet phony and unconvincing, loaded with enormously problematic historical implications that they, themselves, demonstrate no interest (or competence) in addressing.

As a Film student, I see a necessity in the close examination of Nazi sexploitation, and at the same time, am dwarfed by what I seek to undertake. The sloppy production values and

⁵ Whitechapel's unpublished Kamp Sex is the most extensive work yet written exclusively on the topic.

⁶ The notorious Ilsa films include, but are not limited to Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS (Don Edmunds, 1975), Ilsa, Harem Keeper of the Oil Sheiks (Edmonds, 1976), and Ilsa, the Tigress of Siberia (Jean LaFleur, 1977). Also see Rikke Schubart's "A Pure Dominatrix: Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS" and Lynn Rapaport's "Holocaust Pornography: Profaning the Sacred in Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS."

⁷ Examples include the Holocaust memoir House of Dolls by Yehiel De-Nur (under the pseudonym of his prisoner name/number Ka-tzetnik 135633), originally written in Hebrew, and Stalags – a tradition of Israeli pulp literature. Feminist anti-pornography crusader Andrea Dworkin's article "Israel: Whose Country is it Anyway" was the text that first brought the origins of the Stalags into the American consciousness (originally published in Ms. Magazine [Sept./Oct. 1990]).

trivial, simplistic historical representations demand a thoughtful and non-judgmental reading. Jay Slater (who himself, sees The Night Porter as “simultaneously compelling drama and utter sleaze”), states: “Once the Italian exploitation producers at Cinecittà observed that easy money could be made by concentrating on horror and sickening depravity, social conscience was of less concern than lire” (64). This absence of social conscience is, for example, represented in a grotesque banquet scene in Gestapo’s Last Orgy featuring a group of lust-crazed Nazis who, while devouring the remains of an aborted fetus, discuss a large-scale plan to eliminate the Jewish population in the camps by eating them. They subsequently strip a prostitute who has fainted from shock and proceed to lustfully smother her in cognac and flambé her. In SS Experiment Love Camp, when a German soldier realizes that he has been surgically castrated, he shouts to his superior (the recipient of the transplant), “What have you done with my balls?” These films are fundamentally indifferent, first, to the historical context that they claim to represent, and second, to any cultural damage they may do in the process. The representations are so humorless, incompetent and extreme that the entire filmic medium seems to collapse into a state of simultaneous nausea and delirium.

In directly comparing The Night Porter with Gestapo’s Last Orgy, I immediately encounter a key problem. Despite the evident and unavoidable similarities between the films, they simply cannot *be* compared outright. In a rare scholarly discussion of the two films, Mikel J. Koven states that “Cavani is able to present flashbacks featuring rape, bondage and medical and sexual experimentation without appearing as exploitative as Canevari does in L’Ultima Orgia” (23). In directly aligning The Night Porter with Gestapo’s Last Orgy, Koven forgets that there *were* no scenes of rape or medical / sexual experimentation in The Night Porter. Again (as discussed in Chapter 2), The Night Porter has had scenes fabricated and forced upon it by a scholar who has simply weighed it against its low-rent counterpart. Both The Night Porter and Gestapo’s Last Orgy concern the female survivor of a concentration camp whose sexual relationship with a high-ranking Nazi official is rekindled when they encounter each other years after the Holocaust. The differences between the films, however, are much more complex than that of art and exploitation cinema.

Nazi sexploitation requires a unique methodological approach simply because it is not *designed* to withstand a rigorous academic interrogation. Instead, it was made to be chewed up and spit out by popular culture as the cinematic equivalent of chewing tobacco. As stated by

Pam Cook, “exploitation films offer schematic, minimal narratives, comic-book stereotypes, ‘bad’ acting, and brief film cycles that disappear as soon as their audience appeal is exhausted” (57). Anyone may easily accuse Gestapo’s Last Orgy of chauvinism or historical inaccuracy, give numerous examples, and simply close the book on it. It may sound strange to propose that we treat Nazi sexploitation gently – but that is precisely what I am saying. To accuse Nazi sexploitation of being insipid or vulgar is to fall into the precise trap with which the films were rigged to begin with. To deal productively with these films is to read them against their grain and *not* treat them with the hostility that they so actively invite. It is necessary to read these films with an awareness that they are too naïve and one-dimensional to understand what they are doing. The combination of our own sense-of morality with historical hindsight is our blind spot in studying these films, disabling our objectivity. Despite the representations being shameless and caustic, it is not possible to engage with them productively unless moral authority is left behind, thus, to study Nazi sexploitation, one must suspend an inherent part of oneself.

In this thesis, I have referred to the necessary negation of moral judgment in academic work. As extreme and trivial representations of insurmountable human suffering, these films defy all description. Terms like ignorant or disgusting default to the moral authority I seek to avoid, and accusations of inaccuracy or historical irresponsibility allude to there being an accurate or responsible way to represent the camps. Even referring to the films’ ideological trajectory as rancid suggests that that they were, at one point, fresh. Just as these films represent slime slipping through the cracks of culture, they largely defy description altogether – or, simply put, must be seen to be believed.

The Significance of Titles: The Night Porter and Gestapo’s Last Orgy

The Night Porter refers to singularity and solitude, consistent with the film’s themes of intimate and individualized memory. Cavani sees night as “a metaphor for the subconscious... [where Max] is literally the porter – or gatekeeper – of the night” (Lichtenstein 11). It further emphasizes the subservient profession assumed by Max, in relation to the dominant role that he performed in the camp. A night porter is a role of quietude and subservience where one’s name is unimportant; the title is simple and even banal – as though *designed* to disappear among others around it, just as Max preferred to live his life after the War in relative anonymity (in his words, “like a churchmouse”). Gestapo’s Last Orgy, is, of course, designed to elicit immediate reaction

– associating the atrocity of the Holocaust with excessive or gluttonous sexual indulgence. As a title that knows no limits in drawing attention to itself as something vulgar and filthy, there is no pretence or remote suggestion of any nuance, subtlety, or respectable ulterior reading.

Regardless of whether it has been seen (or even *heard of*) Gestapo's Last Orgy inspires reactions if it is so much as mentioned, and in this sense, is caustic in a way unlike any other film. The title is so deliberately repellent that something akin to a linguistic transgression occurs if one is to even publicly utter the succession of words. To its credit however, the title does describe the film accurately; Gestapo's Last Orgy is, for all intents and purposes, a straightforward film, never pertaining to be anything that it is not. As stated by Sartre:

From the first appearance of the slimy, this sliminess is already a response to a demand, already a *bestowal of self*; the slimy appears as already the outline of a fusion of the world with myself. What it teaches me about the world, that it is like a leech sucking me, is already a reply to a concrete question; it responds with its very being, with its mode of being, with all its matter. (773)

In keeping with Sartre's claim, Gestapo's Last Orgy, by nature of its very title, comes with its own proverbial warning label. Because the film so clearly communicates its objectives (or lack thereof, perhaps) from the very beginning, at the very least, culture cannot claim that it was not adequately warned when it attempts to wash its hands after touching Nazi sexploitation, only to realize that they do not come clean.

There is nothing that could possibly be done to a film titled Gestapo's Last Orgy that could raise it from the cultural gutters. This cinema is so deviant that, not only can it not be elevated, but, as the ultimate cultural deadweight, it actually obliterates the credibility of anything with which it is associated. The title, however, also serves as a protective shield for the film itself insofar that few (academics or otherwise) would want their names associated with it.

As stated by Sartre:

To touch the slimy is to risk being dissolved in sliminess. Now this dissolution by itself is frightening enough, because it is the absorption of the For-itself by the In-itself as ink is absorbed by a blotter. But it is still more frightening in that the metamorphosis is not just into a thing (bad as that would be) but into slime. (777)

In other words, to associate oneself with Gestapo's Last Orgy is to relinquish one's own credibility and be irreversibly subsumed (or infected) by the film's own historical carelessness, sexual gluttony and overall ineptitude.



Violated bodies and inane representations: promotional material for *Gestapo's Last Orgy* from Belgium (fig. 7.1), Spain (fig. 7.2), and Japan (fig. 7.3).

Historical Indifference and the Exploitation Aesthetic: Empowering No One

With regard to other forms of exploitation cinema, I must clarify that Nazi sexploitation specifically interests me, and that exploitation cinema *as such* does not apply to my position. Paul Watson, discussing the central paradox of exploitation cinema, states: “it is precisely its ability to resist and escape established networks of theoretical and historical discourse that makes it of fundamental interest and importance to those discourses, even as that same elusive quality condemns it to remain in the province of cinephilia” (66-7).⁸ There are ways in which exploitation cinema has been read as empowering for marginal groups. Blaxploitation cinema, for example, has been acknowledged as important to the empowerment of Black communities, just as more conventional sexploitation films have been discussed within feminist scholarship as indicative of female sexual agency – although such assertions are admittedly problematic in their own right.⁹ Nazi sexploitation cinema quite simply empowers no one – there is no minority for

⁸ There has been minimal scholarly work on the films, with the exception of more offbeat, informal publications; in *Eaten Alive: Italian Cannibal and Zombie Movies*, Jay Slater casually discusses *Gestapo's Last Orgy* alongside a parade of other severe and excessive exploitation films, but nonetheless points to U.K. censorship of the film as being “wise” (66), and ultimately states that: “Part of me wanted to embrace this film, but ultimately rejected it as Canevari crossed the thin line between an exploitation movie and sickening exploitation of real suffering” (67).

⁹ See Isaac Julien's *Badasssss Cinema* (2002) and Kristen Hatch's “The Sweeter the Kitten, The Sharper the Claws: Russ Meyer's Bad Girls” (145), respectively. There are, however, references to Nazism elsewhere in exploitation film, such as the Black grassroots militia in *Black Gestapo* (Lee Frost, 1975). Russ Meyer's

whom it speaks and no discourse that would benefit from association.¹⁰ Cook states: “The fact that they were often low-budget remakes of more up-market productions has led many critics to measure them against those productions, and to find them lacking in comparison” (56).¹¹ As a cultural deadweight, however, Nazi sexploitation has had precisely the opposite effect on The Night Porter. Because the inferiority of Nazi sexploitation so clearly goes without saying, The Night Porter has been held culturally responsible for the sexploitation films. Gestapo’s Last Orgy and SS Experiment Love Camp are essentially malignant growths that have emerged from the success of The Night Porter. In many ways, the Nazi sexploitation films are unambiguously guilty of almost everything that The Night Porter has been problematically accused.

I must clarify and emphasize, however, that, like The Night Porter, these films harbor absolutely no anti-Semitic or fascist sentiments. These representations are so damaging to the credibility of anything with which they are associated, that not even those who willfully perpetuate hate or the negation of historical fact (anti-Semites or Holocaust deniers, for example) would further their cause from aligning themselves with these films. Nazi sexploitation is so single-minded in its pursuit of financial profit that to deem it insidious or accuse it of harboring an agenda of any kind is to ascribe to it an intelligence and ideological trajectory that it simply does not have. I view Nazi sexploitation films as equivalent to an ideological hit-and-run – entirely self-interested and indifferent to any historical or cultural damage that they may do.

Nazi Sexploitation and the Naïve Sensibility

To place the weight of moral judgment on to these flimsy, one-dimensional films merely results in them folding in on themselves. There is nothing productive about accusing them of carelessness, misogyny or historical inaccuracy – such statements go without saying, and to consider them with the hostility that they actively invite is counter-productive. As stated by Mary Douglas, “There are several ways of treating anomalies. Negatively, we can ignore, just

Up! (1976) features, among other things, an absurdist caricature of Hitler receiving anal sex in a dungeon. Other exploitation films that refer by title to the Holocaust, including Jungle Holocaust (Ruggero Deodato, 1977), Cannibal Holocaust (Deodato, 1980), Zombie Holocaust (Marino Girolami, 1980), and Porno Holocaust (Joe D’Amato, 1981), have nothing whatsoever to do with the historical context.

¹⁰ Other types of exploitation cinema (such as youthsploitation or nunsploration) do not aspire to the extremity or severity of the Nazi sexploitation cycle.

¹¹ Consider, for example, Beyond the Valley of the Dolls (Russ Meyer, 1970) and Black Godfather (John Evans, 1974), unofficial remakes / follow-ups to The Valley of the Dolls (Mark Robson, 1967), and The Godfather (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972), respectively.

not perceive them, or perceiving we can condemn. Positively we can deliberately confront the anomaly and try to create a new pattern of reality in which it has a place” (38). As the “deviant criminals” of the medium, I align them with a naïve sensibility insofar that they are too elementary to comprehend the social and cultural damage that they do; it is as though this proverbial criminal was revealed to only house the intelligence of a child, and would not, as such, be fit to stand trial. By this, I mean that because the films’ representations are so inept and simplistic, they simply cannot withstand a serious academic interrogation, just as a criminal without the intellectual capacity to comprehend his crimes must be evaluated under different criteria. To the producers of the Nazi sexploitation films, Levi has written: “No, the women’s concentration camps are not indispensable to you: you can leave them alone, and not be any the worse off for it” (38), the use of the camps as a backdrop do not even contribute to the box-office of the films (insofar that the demographic would be indifferent to any historical context). In this sense, the films actively seek to be as hideous and reprehensible as they are for no clear practical reason. Without any motive for their violating and ideologically destructive trajectory, the criminality of Nazi sexploitation is not only naïve, but nihilistic.

Gestapo’s Last Orgy and the Desecration of Trauma

In Gestapo’s Last Orgy, a former Nazi official Conrad von Starker (Adriano Micantoni) reunites with a former Jewish prisoner Lise (Daniela Poggi) at the site of what remains of the concentration camp where they met several years prior. It is revealed (in voiceover) that Lise testified before a war crimes tribunal in defense of Starker. The subsequent flashbacks depict Lise’s ambivalence to Starker’s demeaning, sadistic treatment of her in the camp. At the film’s conclusion, distraught at him having taken away her newborn child, Lise kills Starker in revenge.

A revealing moment in Gestapo’s Last Orgy features a drunken Starker summoning Lise to his quarters and demanding that she strip naked. Subsequently, Starker aims his pistol between her legs and pulls the trigger. When the pistol merely clicks, unloaded, he is impressed and aroused by her lack of response. Deciding that her death is of no value to him until she can exhibit suffering, Starker states, “What fun would it be to kill you when you have no desire? But I’m going to get that desire back in you... I’m going to humiliate you. I’m going to destroy your body.” The film centers largely on Starker’s efforts to restore humanity to Lise by violating her in every imaginable way, presumably to shock her out of her numb psychological state before

killing her. Additional scenarios feature Starker whipping Lise and threatening to lower her restrained body into a pit of rats. With regard to performative minimalism, Lise's incompetent representation of numbness simply cannot be read on par with the willful self-erasure of Lucia in The Night Porter, a clear example of the difference between bad and stylized acting. Deliriously grotesque and implausible, such prolonged spectacles, of course, miss the entire point of the Nazi machine, designed above all else, for the purposes of efficiency.

Central to the audacity of Nazi sexploitation is how feverishly it profanes the concept of trauma. At one point in Gestapo's Last Orgy, Lise confides the reasons for her indifference to life to the camp doctor (Fulvio Ricciardi), explaining her guilt to have resulted from having revealed the whereabouts of her family to Nazi officials. This guilt has made her essentially dead inside and thus, a curiosity to Starker. Within moments, the doctor makes a phone call and immediately confirms the death of Lise's family to *not* have been her fault, suddenly alleviating Lise of all responsibility. To further illustrate the unique criteria necessary in examining this film (as opposed to The Night Porter) one may question the impossible speed (literally, a few seconds) with which the doctor made his call and accessed records on Lise. One could say that the doctor *never made* the phone call – but, instead, *told* Lise that he made the call simply to ease her conscience. This reading, however, ascribes to the characters motivations and psychological complexities that the film simply cannot support. Here, the spectator must simply accept that the doctor *did* make the phone call and further, believe what he tells Lise. In relation to the multidimensional labyrinth of The Night Porter, there is no interiority *to* maneuver or explore in Nazi sexploitation, thus making the films more difficult to grasp in an analytic sense. Of interest to me in exploring The Night Porter were its multi-dimensional elements; the film is, on one level, about exteriors – superficial self-assurances, self-conscious performance and masquerade. It houses an interiority, visually represented via the catacombs of the hotel – but also figuratively, with regard to the characters' ambiguous motivations and unspoken self-enclosed understanding. If there is a single self-evident formal difference between The Night Porter and Gestapo's Last Orgy, it is that the latter is entirely one-dimensional. From the cheap props to the awkward performances, everything in the mise-en-scène of Nazi sexploitation looks completely flat. The stiff, stoic dialogue of Max's comrades, as I have explained, was indicative of their position as stand-ins for other concepts. The dialogue in Nazi sexploitation is also stilted – but is dubbed into American accents and sounds as though, behind the scenes, it was being read for the

first time. When the doctor reveals the truth to Lise, trauma is further appropriated as an excuse to shift the film into an extended soft core sex scene. As Lise and the doctor make love, in moral and physical ecstasy, he laments that: “No one is truly evil – people become evil through circumstances ... but maybe one day, peace will be built on the ruins of the cruelty of Nazi Germany.” Lise’s traumatized state is used as a narrative convenience which, first, enables her to absorb the violence inflicted upon her by Starker, but later, when alleviated, inspires her to boldly pronounce: “Life! Now I want life! Life!” As stated earlier, the absence of any moral grounding was central to critical attacks on The Night Porter. Unlike Cavani’s film, Gestapo’s Last Orgy *does*, in effect, have a self-satisfied, life-affirming centre. Morality however, is as incidental and frivolously represented as history. For example, at one point in SS Experiment Love Camp, in response to the suffering around her, camp prisoner Mirelle (Paola Corazzi) exclaims how, in terms of “all these people being sacrificed... [that the Nazi authorities] seem so – seem so *inhuman!*” The bewildered, delusional tone of Mirelle’s words, as though the mere *concept* of mistreatment in a concentration camp was something entirely new to her, *does* gesture to moral issues, but in a way that is flimsy and incompetent. Despite the films’ representations of survival and morality, they are also too thoughtless and deviant to be read in line with the redemptive logic as discussed in Chapter Five.

If Nazi sexploitation were divorced entirely from historical fact, it would be more easily reconciled and dismissed. These films, however, concern actual historical atrocities, of which there are virtually no other cinematic representations – such as the medical experiments as depicted in SS Experiment Love Camp. It is no surprise that cinema has never broached the subject in any serious way; the unquantifiable violence inflicted upon the prisoners included (but certainly was not limited to) mass sterilizations, the severing of limbs, exposure to radiation, and the deliberate injection of diseases such as typhus, tuberculosis and syphilis.¹² Garrone has attempted to legitimize the film within a historical framework, claiming to have researched authentic historical documents. However, with regard to the depictions of torture and medical procedures, he states, just moments later: “If you don’t have ideas, you just throw in tomato sauce... or scraps from the butcher. You take pork rind ... put it in a close-up, cut it open with a

¹² When Medicine Went Mad: Bioethics and the Holocaust (Ed. Arthur L. Caplan) is a collection of essays examining the continued ethical issues faced by medical professionals with regard to experiments conducted in the camps, and The Holocaust: Selected Documents in Eighteen Volumes – Vol. 9: Medical Experiments on Jewish Inmates in Concentration Camps (Mendelsohn) features extensive reproductions of original medical documents.

scalpel, and it looks like human skin.”¹³ Garrone points to the film as an authentic historical recreation, only to interchangeably and indifferently describe techniques used to achieve a purely sensational effect. Historical atrocities have been extensively documented where, for example, mass groups of prisoners were packed into freight cars where the floors were lined with quicklime.¹⁴ In Gestapo’s Last Orgy however, nude female prisoners are playfully pushed down a makeshift water slide into a pool of phony quicklime, which merely resembles a powdered-water solution. The incompetence of the representations almost begs to be laughed at, yet for anyone aware of the larger context, there is no human reaction more unimaginable.

Gestapo’s Last Orgy and SS Experiment Love Camp are not simply delinquent offspring of The Night Porter. Made with artistic indifference and a total disregard for that which they claim to represent, there is no sign *anywhere* of the representations holding themselves accountable and no indication that anyone involved ever assumed that they should. With regard to the “snare of the slimy,” Sartre has stated: “it is a fluidity which holds me and which compromises me; I can not *slide* on this slime, all its suction cups hold me back; it can not slide over me, it clings to me like a leech. The sliding however is not simply denied as in the case of the solid; it is *degraded*” (776-7). In other words, on one level, Nazi sexploitation can be manipulated and engaged with – the cost being that anyone who tries will be invariably subsumed by it.

Amid the theorists and representations to which I refer, the most central and repressed voices remain unaccounted for: the real-life victims themselves. Criminal Experiments on Human Beings in Auschwitz and War Research Laboratories: Twenty Women Prisoners’ Accounts features first-hand testimonials of female survivors of Auschwitz or Rajsko who first, had the enormous luck of surviving, and second, would describe their torture and humiliation in the public sphere. The most extensive account is that of Renée Duering, who details her experience of being subject to experiments that involved, alongside the starvation and dehumanization of life in the camps, the removal of an ovary, the exposure of her genitals to radiation, and injections of unknown substances (89). This, of course, says nothing of the innumerable victims who did not survive – my point is that their suffering and deaths exists now in the public consciousness in the forms of amateur actresses lounging recreationally around

¹³ Interview with Garrone on SS Experiment Love Camp Exploitation Digital DVD extras.

¹⁴ See, for example, Robert M. Spector’s World Without Civilization: Mass Murder and the Holocaust, History and Analysis: Vol.I (435).

makeshift concentration camps, casually wearing the Star of David like a fashion accessory.

Carolyn J. Dean states that:

pornography continues to suggest a relationship between sexual, moral, and political perversion that it establishes now by reference to ‘desensitizing’ trends, the mass media’s assault on historical memory, and its transforming Jewish victims of Nazism into consumable things, all of which undermine healthy empathic identification. (24)

Nazi sexploitation represents an active threat to everything we collectively rely upon to stabilize ourselves in the world. It makes a mockery of history of incomprehensible suffering, proverbially *spitting* in the face of a historical period that culture has never been able to reconcile.

In Theodor Reik’s statement with which I opened this thesis, he differentiates between that which pushes counter and that which is absurd. In Chapter Three, I discussed how the plastic body is emblematic of the masochistic aesthetic in terms of counter-representation. Here, the differentiation between counter-performance and absurd performance comes full-circle in that the rigidity of the performances in the sexploitation films has nothing to do with stylization, but is instead, simply incompetent.¹⁵

In Conclusion

Nazi sexploitation demands a serious academic interrogation that considers them without judgment, and acknowledges them, not as trash, but as historical documents. I see these films as (inadvertently) initiating a dialogue that culture simply does not know how to have. The actual medical experiments conducted on camp inmates during the Holocaust represents suffering so unspeakable that it is impossible for culture to address head-on and still be left intact. In this sense, these representations belong exactly where they are – their formal incompetence is necessary, as it is only within the context of nauseated mockery that we can even begin to scratch the surface of what these experiments entailed. Not only do we *need* these representations, we also need them to be as phony and frivolous as they are – forever on the periphery of cinema, but never completely gone. Gestapo’s Last Orgy and SS Experiment Love Camp may initially appear unworthy of close analysis. It is, however, the influence of our own cultural hierarchies

¹⁵ The principal actors of Gestapo’s Last Orgy assumed pseudonyms for their roles (Adriano Micantoni is credited as Marc Loud and Daniela Poggi, as Daniela Levy). Further, Bruno Mattei directed SS Girls under the name Jordan B. Matthews.

that has caused them to fly for so long under the academic radar. Any representation designed to elicit such base loathing or appears to otherwise not be deserving of close consideration, is that which must most urgently be examined. I propose that we examine these films as we would mentally disabled violent criminals who harbor a childlike understanding of the world. Nazi sexploitation films have demonstrated resilience through past decades, and their repackaging has put culture and academics in such a position that it is impossible to continue looking away.

Chapter Eight:

Desecration Repackaged:

The Negation of Taste and the Indifferent Auteur in Nazi

Sexploitation

“To the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools or periods, corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. This predisposes tastes to function as markers of ‘class.’”

–Pierre Bourdieu (1984: 1-2)

“All that garbage we see – reality TV – Yeah, who are they kidding? That’s the height of awfulness right there – I don’t let that show into my living room! It’s true, I made some semi-porno Nazi films, but I’d never make disgusting crap like that.”

–Sergio Garrone (2005: SS Camp Women’s Hell DVD interview)

In this chapter, I will examine how Nazi sexploitation cinema has undergone a revival in recent years, entering the cultural mainstream via digital media. Enormously controversial when initially released, the films were marketed extensively throughout the world and were among those banned in Britain under the infamous Video Recordings Act of 1984. As of recently, the bans have been lifted and Nazi sexploitation has undergone resurgence, released for (or unleashed *upon*, if you will) a new generation on the Exploitation Digital DVD label as absurdist retro products. Despite the controversy of The Night Porter, it has since been elevated to the status of high art via its DVD release on the Criterion label. I will discuss brief excerpts from Pierre Bourdieu’s Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste alongside concepts related to auteur theory to examine the re-entrance of this notorious cycle of films into popular culture.¹ Bourdieu’s discussion of the correlation between personal tastes and social class is challenged when considered alongside these films because here, the very concept of taste is made incidental. Central to my argument is that this tasteless cinema attacks the social and cultural hierarchies with which we collectively stabilize ourselves. Even as Bourdieu’s assertions question and deconstruct such hierarchies, he is nonetheless, an academic institution in his own right, and one to whom much scholarly work has been attributed. It is, of course, not my objective to question the importance of pre-existing scholarship, but rather, to explore how this

¹ Auteur theory originates with Andrew Sarris’ “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962.”

uniquely marginal cinema not only resists established discourses in a way unlike any other, but also destabilizes theoretical frameworks frequently taken for granted in academic circles.

Nazi sexploitation exists only on the outermost peripheries of culture – a consequence of the fact that it does not merely seek to repulse, but actively incorporates repellent and absurdist sexual imagery to invoke an erotic, masturbatory reaction to the historical memory of the Holocaust. In 2005, the Exploitation Digital label released the previously unavailable Nazi sexploitation films on glossy digital DVD transfers. I base my position on what I see as a consensus of the artistic legitimacy (or cultural capital) of Nazi sexploitation as being non-existent. Via its new digital transfer, however, Nazi sexploitation has undergone a process where its packaging has endowed it with a cultural legitimacy, albeit only in the most superficial sense. Exploitation Digital is using attractive packaging to draw attention to (and, of course, profit from) the darkest corners of the medium, celebrating Gestapo's Last Orgy precisely *because* it is devoid of cultural capital.

It is vital to consider the larger implications with regard to the fresh accessibility of these films, and here I return to Primo Levi's 1977 letter to La Stampa. The films' new availability may create the *impression* of cultural progression – however, this re-entrance is more problematic than it may initially appear. In keeping with Sartre's discussion of the slimy, I think of the films as characteristic of that viscosity – capable of indifferently gluing themselves to other forms of culture, and reattaching back to themselves, long after they have been cut apart. Even with the films having been “dismembered” (via censorship and title changes), they do not suffer artistically when they are edited (even excessively) because artistry was never of consequence to begin with. With the availability of Nazi sexploitation for a new era, we must consider larger questions related to mass consumption and memory work, and acknowledge that the easy accessibility of such films requires us to be responsible for and accountable to our own history in a way that we have never before been.

The Night Porter on the Criterion label

As I have discussed, The Night Porter was critically attacked at the time of its American release, and was controversial for a variety of reasons as it was marketed throughout the world. Aaron Barlow discusses the 1984 establishment of the Criterion Collection by The Voyager Company (initially utilizing laserdisc technology) as that which “became the model for the

packaging of the DVD when it came on the market more than a decade later ... [and that] produces the most careful versions of movies on DVD that can be found anywhere, with the broadest, most eclectic catalogue of any DVD packager” (74). The release of The Night Porter on the Criterion label is a broad-scale acknowledgment of its value and subsequent acceptance into the canon, its bureaucratically ordained status (as Criterion DVD #59) comfortably positioned between Peeping Tom (Michael Powell, 1960) and Autumn Sonata (Ingmar Bergman, 1978), Criterion DVD numbers 58 and 60, respectively. Even as contentious scholarship on The Night Porter continues to be written, its release on the Criterion label purports to secure its place in a high-ranking artistic position. While such positions are, of course, arbitrary, the tangibility of the DVD creates a powerful (albeit superficial) impression of being the last word in the cultural debate. Not even a condemnation by the likes of Primo Levi carries with it the same tangible certainty. Sartre has stated:

immediately the slimy reveals itself as essentially ambiguous because its fluidity exists in slow motion; there is a sticky thickness in its liquidity; it represents in itself a dawning triumph of the solid over the liquid – that is, a tendency of the indifferent in-itself, which is represented by the pure solid, to fix the liquidity, to absorb the for-itself which ought to dissolve it. (774)

Nazi sexploitation is, in a sense, slime marketed under the guise of something solid. As stated by Bourdieu, “nothing more rigorously distinguishes the different classes than the disposition objectively demanded by the legitimate consumption of legitimate works” (40). The Night Porter now sits in a unique position insofar that it is an art film originally rejected by the purveyors of high art.²

Nazi Sexploitation: Unearthing and Reassembling “The Video Nasties”

Scholarly acknowledgment of Nazi sexploitation has been largely limited to the context of the British Board of Film Classification (the BBFC), which introduced the Video Recordings

² The Night Porter is by far the most accessible of the films in Cavani’s German Trilogy. After its initial theatrical run, Beyond Good and Evil was released only on VHS in Australia (under the title Seeds of Evil) and Italy; bootleg copies can be found online. The Berlin Affair was released on VHS, and later, on the Amazon.com Exclusive VHS label – one designed to make more readily available films that will, in all likelihood, not have a DVD release. It is, however, available as a Region 2 DVD in Europe. While a re-release on VHS may contribute to a few private collections, it will not shift the film into any noticeable cultural dialogue. Because the availability of a film is key to its perception in public discourse, it is no surprise that The Night Porter is more commonly associated with the sexploitation aesthetic than with Cavani’s larger body of work.

Act in the U.K. in 1984. The conservative media fuelled a large-scale banning of low-budget horror and exploitation films dubbed “video nasties” by the popular press. The initial banning of the films was based on arguments of there being no possible legitimate reason to enjoy them, and that the nature of their subject matter may have damaging effects on the minds and moral codes of children.³ As discussed in the previous chapter, the most notorious of the “nasties” were SS Experiment Love Camp and Gestapo’s Last Orgy.⁴ For the next two decades, heavily-censored and poorly-dubbed VHS cuts of the films circulated among underground enthusiasts and collectors throughout the world. Amid controversy, the titles have recently been released in the U.K. As reported by Lionel Shriver in the British newspaper The Guardian:

The BBFC has been gradually letting out of the doghouse dozens of violent ‘video nasties’ that were considered too ghastly for the delicate sensibilities of the public decades ago, and now seem acceptable ... [Shriver then quotes Sue Clark of the BBFC]: ‘Times shift, attitudes change, and what was then problematic is not problematic now. In today’s current climate, we do not consider these films to be a concern.’ [Shriver then continues] In the wake of Holocaust memorial day, the newly declassified film that has raised the most hackles is the 1970’s SS Experiment Love Camp ... Backed by Keith Vaz, head of the Commons home affairs committee, and with cross-party support from other MPs, the Conservative MP for Canturbury, Julian Brazier is introducing a private member’s bill to make it easier to challenge the BBFC’s permissiveness, and get icky films re-banned. (Comments and Features: 4)

In keeping with Conservative efforts to maintain the banned status of the films, Gestapo’s Last Orgy was *not* on the initial list of “video nasties” to be re-released. As of December 2008, however, a Region 2 DVD of the film (on the Danish label Another World Entertainment) was released in Europe, featuring subtitles in Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, and Finnish, thereby making it accessible to an even more expansive international audience. Despite Levi’s own disgust, even he retained the objectivity to acknowledge that simply banning them would be to miss the point:

Invoking censorship would mean putting ourselves in the hands of inept and corrupt judges, breathing new life into a dangerous mechanism. We already have censorship, but it confiscates only films that are intelligent, if at times questionable. Obscene films, as long as they are idiotic, present no problem. (38)

³ The Video Nasties: Freedom and Censorship in the Media (Ed. Martin Barker), features a series of essays on the moral panic – particularly timely insofar that it was published during the banning itself. Further, although her text does not touch on Nazi sexexploitation, Kate Egan’s Trash or Treasure: Censorship and the changing meanings of the video nasties extensively examines the implications of the films as novelty objects.

⁴ Other examples include SS Camp Women’s Hell (Garrone, 1977) and SS Girls (Bruno Mattei, 1977).

Levi's statement is as salient now as ever, given that the incompetence of the films creates the illusion that they are somehow less problematic. As stated by Laura Kipnis, "Why it exists, what it has to say, and who pornography thinks it's talking to, are more interesting questions than all these doomed, dreary attempts to debate it, regulate it, or protest it" (x-xi). While however, the demographic for Nazi sexploitation has changed, their destructive ideological trajectories have not.

The assemblage of this new DVD situates each film as its own art object insofar that its digital transfer has produced the sharpest possible print – and features extras, including theatrical trailers and interviews with the directors. In response to restrictions previously forced upon Nazi sexploitation by the MPAA (X-ratings, of course), Exploitation Digital sidestepped the process altogether, releasing the restored versions unrated. In this capacity, not only have the films ultimately gotten away with their cultural crime, but their transference to a fresh (and, of course, easily accessible) DVD make their cultural capital initially difficult, on the surface, to differentiate from films released on the Criterion label.⁵ In his research on the remediation of Italian horror films into contemporary American culture, Raiford Guins has stated:

'Extras,' digital transfers, widescreen/letterbox, subtitles, original soundtracks, and attractive packaging easily close the gap between the highbrow cinema attributed to Criterion's restoration process and the low-brow aesthetics once associated with tattered videocassette covers, dark prints, poor dubbing, and cut-up releases. (28)

Just as Nazi sexploitation cannot be interchangeably discussed with sexploitation or blaxploitation films, it cannot be viewed in relation to other Italian gore films from the 1970's, such as the horror films of Dario Argento and Mario Bava. As stated by Guins:

Permanently locked in as an 'authored original,' the Italian horror film on DVD ceases to be a gore-object: an object known by its incompleteness, a 'disposable' object (in that dubbing connotes a marked mass product), an object rented and watched from bootlegged copies in search of a complete print. (27)

Guins' assertion of Italian horror being in search of a complete print does not apply to Nazi sexploitation because the films operate under the single-minded pursuit of financial gain without any aspirations to high art. There are, of course, relevant aesthetic similarities between Italian horror and Nazi-sexploitation – particularly a baroque excess that takes precedence over realism. Both also faced complications in distribution and exhibition (Bava's Bloodbath [1971] and

⁵ As of this publication, these films are available on Amazon.com.

Argento's Inferno [1980] and Tenebre [1982] were among the "nasties"). Argento's films however, for example, depict a lush, romantic atmosphere; red paint / blood splashes across his mise-en-scene in stylized excess and his skilful incorporation of disorienting, ambiguous point-of-view shots and references to classical Hollywood align him with the standard of an auteur.⁶ Despite some aesthetic similarities with other modes, Nazi sexploitation is alone – rejected on a cultural scale more emphatically than any other cinema.

Guins uses both Gestapo's Last Orgy and SS Experiment Love Camp as examples of how: "On account of limited funds for marketing, the videocassette box cover had to communicate in a blatant (and sometimes vicious) manner... [and further discusses how the videocassettes] often shared space with porn in the forbidden 'separate room'" (18). Although the sex in the films is simulated, full nudity (usually female) is on parade at every opportunity. In opposition to the dominatrix gear worn by Lucia in the ads for The Night Porter, the sexploitation films transcend the boundaries of any ambiguous reading to an all-out hostility directed toward the female body. Among the most severe of these images is that of Lise about to lustfully perform fellatio on the barrel of a Nazi pistol (an image that re-appears on the back of the Exploitation Digital DVD box).

Pam Cook has stated that: "in order to attract/exploit their target audiences, exploitation films contain a high degree of sensationalized sex and/or violence, apparently playing on the more retrograde, sadistic/voyeuristic fantasies of young male viewers" (57). In a tone of pity, Levi has asserted the demographic for Nazi sexploitation to be "young and old men who are timid, inhibited and frustrated ... [who] want the image of an object-woman because they can't have her in flesh and blood" (38). While the original audience for Nazi sexploitation was clearly heterosexual men, its repackaging has opened the floodgates to a more expansive popular audience whose interest stems from curiosity of that which was formerly unavailable. The

⁶ From a perspective of mainstream popular culture, consider the reference to Argento in the popular American comedy, Juno (Jason Reitman, 2008). The reference occurs when Juno (Ellen Page) expresses an affinity for Argento when engaging in a conversation about films. Juno's selection of Argento establishes her, in the mind of the film, as edgy, cool, and cultured – a lover of the unconventional. By associating Juno's personal tastes with films such as Profondo Rosso (aka: Deep Red [1975]) and Suspiria (1977), screenwriter Diablo Cody develops an affinity between Juno and select spectators aware of Argento's work. The in-joke would carry very different connotations if Juno were to have associated herself with Gestapo's Last Orgy instead. I use this example to emphasize that, despite some aesthetic similarities with other films, Nazi sexploitation cannot be compared outright to anything.

question remains, however, as to what someone's consumption of Nazi sexploitation fundamentally says about him / her. As stated by Sartre:

If the slimy is indeed the symbol of a being in which the for-itself is swallowed up by the in-itself, what kind of a person am I if in encountering others, I love the slimy? To what fundamental project of myself am I referred if I want to explain this love of an ambiguous, sucking in-itself? In this way *tastes* do not remain irreducible givens; if one knows how to question them, they reveal to us the fundamental projects of the person. (783)

With regard to the blurring of high and low art, the Exploitation Digital label has elevated Nazi sexploitation to such heights that they, at least via their elaborate packaging, appear to hold the same cultural stock as Triumph of the Will or Night and Fog. As vehicles manufactured exclusively for the purposes of economic gain, Nazi sexploitation films were, first, built for speed rather than distance, and second, made to retain indifference toward anything they ran over (history, memory, suffering). Exploitation Digital has, however, reassembled these films (via a complete cut, in the case of Gestapo's Last Orgy), thereby placing a new rebuilt engine into their bodies (via their digital transfer) that enables them to run or operate in contemporary culture as novelty objects.

This new packaging, however, comes with ontological implications that other such appropriations do not. As stated by Sartre:

I open my hands, I want to let go of the slimy and it sticks to me, it draws me... it lives obscurely under my fingers, and I sense it like a dizziness; it draws me to it as the bottom of a precipice might draw me ... In one sense, it is like the supreme docility of the possessed, the fidelity of a dog who gives *himself* even when one does not want him any longer, and in another sense there is underneath this docility a surreptitious appropriation of the possessor by the possessed. (776)

It is misguided, I propose, to assume that it is possible to *possess* Nazi sexploitation, despite the tangibility of the new DVDs. Although the impression of ownership is created in the purchase of the film, as articulated by Sartre, their sliminess results, not in us possessing them, but in *them* possessing *us*. Here, the slimy perpetuates "the image of destructive creation. The slimy is *docile*. Only at the very moment when I believe I possess it, behold by a curious reversal, *it* possesses me" (Sartre 776). As commodities designed to make money any way they can, Nazi sexploitation gives itself to a culture that does not want it. Further, "[the] fixed instability in the slimy discourages possession... The slimy flees with a heavy flight which has the same relation to water as the unwieldy earthbound flight of the chicken has to that of the hawk. Even this flight can not be possessed because it denies itself as flight" (Sartre 774). Anything that attempts

to contain these films must contend with the fact that the films' own indifference makes them inherently uncontainable.



The Exploitation Digital DVD boxes for SS Camp Women's Hell (fig. 8.1), Gestapo's Last Orgy (fig. 8.2), and SS Experiment Love Camp (fig. 8.3).

Bourdieu and Caligula: Nazi Sexploitation as “Cultural Leech”

Bourdieu has asserted individual taste to be predicated on cultural capital as related to education and social class. On this basis, he considers two relative certainties:

on one hand, the very close relationship linking cultural practices (or the corresponding opinions) to educational capital (measured by qualifications), and, secondarily, to social origin (measured by father's occupation); and, on the other hand, the fact that equivalent levels of educational capital, the weight of social origin in the practice-and preference-explaining system increases as one moves away from the most legitimate areas of culture. (13)

By nature of its very title, Gestapo's Last Orgy was produced and marketed without any consideration whatsoever of taste – on the contrary, its all-out *negation* of taste is the fuel upon which it operates. Consequently, to apply Bourdieu's assertion to those who consume this cinema would relegate their cultural capital to an impossible minus-scale:

[t]he denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile – in a word, natural – enjoyment, which constitutes the sacred space of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasures forever closed to the profane. (7)

Bourdieu states that high culture rejects base, indulgent representations because they do violence to the civilized context within which high culture prefers to think of itself as existing. While Bourdieu's first five aforementioned adjectives certainly do describe the Nazi sexploitation cycle, when he condenses them to the elements of natural enjoyment, Nazi sexploitation becomes even more problematic. To attribute natural enjoyment to these films would be to entertain the possibility that perhaps our own bourgeois sensibilities are all that prevent us from taking pleasure in them.

A salient point from which to compare The Night Porter with Gestapo's Last Orgy is that of their respective marketing strategies. As I discussed in Chapter 6, both reviews and scholarly writing has problematically situated The Night Porter in the high art company of Last Tango in Paris. Just as Gestapo's Last Orgy is a trivial rip-off of The Night Porter, it was additionally latched on to its own film albeit, in a more crude and simplistic way – to, of course, a more crude and simplistic film. In 1979, the release of Caligula (Tinto Brass, Bob Guiccone, Giancarlo Lui) inspired controversy due to its enormous budget, major stars, and graphic sexual content.⁷ In the wake of its release (which further entailed terrible reviews and poor box-office), Gestapo's Last Orgy was promptly latched on to the commotion and retitled Caligula Reincarnated as Hitler in its VHS (and later, initial DVD) release on the Magnum label.⁸ As stated by Cook,

One of the reasons that exploitation films are deemed unworthy of serious critical attention is their blatant commercialism... they seem to revel in their own trashiness and aura of disposability. In exploiting, or capitalising on the success of more up-market, mainstream productions, they parody rather than emulate them. (56)

Just as the film demonstrates indifference to its representation of the Holocaust, even elements that house it (such as its title and box-art) are always negotiable. Because Nazi sexploitation exists *so low* on the hierarchies of cultural capital, it must compromise fidelity to its own structural elements (via title changes, alternate cuts) in order to navigate its way through culture. Because it has already indicated an indifference to the history that it claims to represent,

⁷ Caligula was initially seized at customs as obscene at the Kennedy Airport in New York; theater managers were threatened with arrest if they screened the film, and it was further met with resistance from the Conservative group Morality in the Media, and finally, a class-action lawsuit (Grazia, Newman 148-151).

⁸ Alongside the re-titling Gestapo's Last Orgy, Magnum re-released Bruno Mattei's exploitation film Nerone e Poppea (1982) under the title Caligula Reincarnated as Nero. Additionally, the comparison is even further out of context insofar that Caligula was not even released theatrically until two years *after* Gestapo's Last Orgy.

the fact that it has no association with Ancient Rome (as depicted, albeit superficially, in Caligula) is of no consequence. Caligula itself, plays like a sexually-loaded, low-rent hybrid of the surreal and ornate Rome as envisioned by Federico Fellini in Satyricon (1969) and the “ultraviolence” (replete with the stardom of Malcolm McDowell) of A Clockwork Orange (Stanley Kubrick, 1971). Gestapo’s Last Orgy has the unique ability to latch itself to any potentially lucrative context, simply because, in the total absence of its own cultural capital, it has nothing to lose.⁹ Sartre has stated, in reference to the slimy, that “there is a sly solidarity and complicity of all its leech-like parts, a vague, soft effort made by each to individualize itself, followed by a falling back and flattening out that is emptied of the individual, sucked in on all sides by the substance” (778). Gestapo’s Last Orgy is essentially a cultural leech, latching on to whatever it can and unquenchably draining the blood / currency for as long as possible.

With regard to pornography, the concept of an authored original is as incidental to Caligula as it is to Gestapo’s Last Orgy.¹⁰ Guiccone hired director Tinto Brass for the project (on the basis of his work on Salon Kitty), but later fired him due to artistic differences.¹¹ Guiccone then added extensive hardcore and softcore footage to the film with Giancarlo Lui.¹² The film was, however, censored extensively for its theatrical release and has since been available in several different cuts. The authored original operates under the assumption of it being the most faithful or legitimate. In the case of Caligula, however, the most complete version is that which was taken away from its original auteur and finished by someone else. Insofar that Gestapo’s Last Orgy is indifferent to artistry, the mere existence of a reassembled cut seems to mock the very concept of an authored original. Similarly, associations of Caligula with low art and pornography have not hindered its receiving a similar DVD repackaging as a high art object.¹³ Caligula is an ideal film for Gestapo’s Last Orgy to latch on to; like Caligula,

⁹ Gestapo’s Last Orgy opens with a quote from Nietzsche, referring to his Übermensch (Overman / Superman) that is not only out of context, but also misspells his name (without the “t”). Caligula opens with, of all things, a Biblical citation: “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36) – indicating the setting of Ancient Rome to be entirely incidental. Similarly, Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS begins with a quote from Thomas Jefferson.

¹⁰ Guiccone, the founder of Penthouse magazine, produced Caligula with a large budget and high profile stars, including Malcolm McDowell, Helen Mirren and Peter O’Toole.

¹¹ As explained (albeit, one-sidedly) by Guiccone in his May 1980 interview with Penthouse (116).

¹² In this sense, the footage added by Guiccone is easy to identify.

¹³ Still a celebration of excess, the three-disc “Imperial Edition” DVD of Caligula is loaded with extras. Brass’ Salon Kitty has received similar treatment – a two-disc DVD on the Blue Underground label.

Gestapo's Last Orgy uses a phony historical backdrop as the context – and both actively trumpet associations with pornography.¹⁴

In considering The Night Porter alongside Last Tango in Paris and subsequently, Gestapo's Last Orgy with Caligula, there is an implicit acknowledgment of the divide between high and low art. Although the similarities between each pair of films are simplistic and superficial, there are evident similarities between the respective pairs, whereas it would make no more sense to compare The Night Porter to Caligula than it would Gestapo's Last Orgy to Last Tango in Paris. In this capacity, the films themselves know their own boundaries. However, despite the controversy with which Caligula was received, it does not carry any real historical weight on its shoulders. The implications of Gestapo's Last Orgy are more severe insofar that it represents genocide for the sole objective of profit. Because Caligula is no longer a lucrative point of comparison, just as a leech sucks for only as long as there is blood to be drained, Gestapo's Last Orgy has reverted to its original title for its recent release.

Nazi Sexploitation: Re-gluing Limbs and Oozing Through Culture

The restored cut situates Gestapo's Last Orgy as equivalent to a criminal body whose limbs have, in the wake of having been severed, been glued back in order to restore its status as a retro object. Guins has asserted that:

It is fair to wager that most Italian horror films to reach American shores as videocassettes were cut to satisfy MPAA censorial policies. This is perhaps the most marked example of Italian horror being positioned as an object of low

¹⁴ The notion of Nazi sexploitation and Caligula existing on the peripheries of cinema is additionally interesting when one considers how they are being remade today – in the form of trailers for films that do not exist. In 2005, A Trailer for Remake of Gore Vidal's Caligula (Francesco Vezzoli, 2005) ran at the Venice Biennale with a well-known Hollywood cast (including Milla Jovovich, Benicio del Toro, Gerard Butler, Courtney Love – and, returning from the original, Mirren). Similarly, for Grindhouse (Robert Rodriguez, Eli Roth, Quentin Tarantino, Edgar Wright. Rob Zombie, 2007), Zombie directed a trailer titled Werewolf Women of the SS (clearly an ode to the Ilsa films). The concept of a trailer for a film that does not exist is indicative of a process where a film receives tribute, but is too far on the peripheries of cinema to actually be made. In keeping with Zombie, consider the remix of his song “Superbeast” on his album American Music to Strip By, subtitled “Porno Holocaust Mix.” While this appropriation of history may appear to be contingent on shock value (particularly given that the track itself has nothing to do with either pornography or the Holocaust), clearly noticeable in Zombie's work is an affinity for popular culture of the 1970's. His films House of 1000 Corpses (2003) and The Devil's Rejects (2005) (and also his 2008 remake of Halloween [John Carpenter, 1978]) are loaded with self-conscious references to The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Tobe Hooper, 1974), among other films. Zombie's reference to Nazi sexploitation is linked to subversive novelty and nostalgia. Finally, however, Blitzkrieg: Escape from Stalag 69 (Keith J. Crocker, 2008) is an example of a contemporary Nazi sexploitation film.

quality, low value, and further removed from any claim of authorial intentions. In addition to retitling, poor dubbing, and non-‘original’ cover art, it should be stressed that any judgment as to the quality of a particular film was a judgment passed on an incomplete and severely cut print. (21)

Guins’ work is salient in that the Nazi sexploitation films *were* excessively cut and subject to retitling and poor dubbing. What differentiates the Nazi sexploitation cycle from the other titles to which Guins refers is the simply that, because quality as such was of no consequence to the films, there was no artistic legitimacy to jeopardize when they were censored. When films such as these are heavily cut, it is easier to protest via a political argument (with regard to freedom of speech) than one defending their artistry. The remastered DVD opens with the disclaimer: “The following presentation of GESTAPO’S LAST ORGY was completed using multiple sources. We hope the differences in quality do not detract from your enjoyment of this nasty little picture.” Part of viewing this film requires an acknowledgment that it cannot possibly have been reassembled perfectly (insofar that some of the restored footage comes from deteriorated videotapes with inferior picture quality); after having stagnated in the cultural sewers for decades, the film naturally has some irreparable damage. As stated by Slater, “The French version (Da Derniere Orgie du III Reich) is three minutes, 24 seconds longer than the next most complete print (although it lacks the ejaculation scene found in the Portuguese video)” (237). In the American transfers, the film ends with Lise firing three gunshots and dying with Starker in the abandoned concentration camp. The French version, however, extends the narrative, showing Lise rising from beneath Starker’s corpse and discarding it in the basement. An elderly man subsequently appears from out of nowhere (with no explanation) and sets fire to the body. The film’s final shot features Lise walking away from the camp as smoke from Starker’s burning corpse rises from an overhead chimney.

Garrone and the Collapse of the Auteur

The process of ascribing authorship to a film contextualizes, legitimizes, and elevates films from academic (and sometimes popular) perspectives. The new digital transfers of SS Experiment Love Camp and SS Camp Women’s Hell both boast “A Sergio Garrone Film” on their covers, and on the boxes of each of the aforementioned films, the director’s name is similarly situated before the title in a proclamation of authorship. The simple words “A Sergio Garrone Film” are relevant because, by flattering the director of a Nazi sexploitation film with

the status of auteur, the term itself subsequently loses its power. In terms of basic utterance, “A Sergio Garrone Film” is as easily enunciated as pronouncements of “An Ingmar Bergman Film” or “A Martin Scorsese Film” – yet, due to Garrone’s own lack of cultural capital, it is somehow more difficult to *say*. Stylistically, none of the Nazi sexploitation filmmakers demonstrate unique formal strategies or aesthetic objectives – the films were made via an economic assembly-line process, with no interest in artistry or unique filmmaking strategies.¹⁵ The mere succession of words “A Sergio Garrone Film” drains the power of the discourses that elevate the auteur, drawing attention to the fact that they only exist insofar as they are constructed and only have as much power as they are permitted, whether that be within the public space or academia.

When asked about his representations of concentration camps as sites of erotic spectacle, Garrone has answered: “If there are pieces in the film that are excessively erotic, they’re not mine. They’ve probably been added by someone else. I can’t defend them since they’re not mine.”¹⁶ Here, Garrone never *specifies* the scenes to which he is referring, or clarifies whether they, in fact, exist at all. Instead, he merely states that, *if* any degree of erotic interpretation were to be derived by the spectator from the film, he is simply not accountable. The highbrow concept of the auteur is dealt a severe blow insofar that *this* auteur acknowledges having made the film, but accepts no responsibility for its impact or even for the authorship of any given scene. The central reason for a director to be featured on DVD extras is, of course, to serve as an authority on the film – yet Garrone does not profess to even having seen his own work: “Between screenwriting, editing, shooting and so on, and the fact that as soon as I finished a movie, I started another one, I had practically no time to see them.”¹⁷ In short, Garrone discusses his commitment to the film, but *then*, does not commit to it.¹⁸ By elevating a filmmaker to the status of auteur, and then featuring him speak with indifference about his own work, Exploitation Digital initiates a dialogue that proposes the role of the auteur to be merely an extra-diegetic performance – a title which, though frequently revealed in, can be just as easily shrugged off.

¹⁵ Garrone explains in an interview on the SS Camp Women’s Hell DVD that it was filmed immediately after SS Experiment Love Camp on the same set, in a single seven-week shoot.

¹⁶ Interview with Garrone, SS Experiment Love Camp Exploitation Digital DVD extras. There is no record of anyone else shooting footage for this film.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Garrone does, however, profess to having been influenced by The Night Porter, Salò, and Salon Kitty.

Cultural Capital and the Naïve Sensibility

Despite the new elevations of Nazi sexploitation, there are, nonetheless, socially-ordained codes to which even the subversive discourses of Exploitation Digital must adhere. Central to the deviant nature of Nazi sexploitation is its total absence of humor, yet the informal plot details on the back of the DVD for SS Experiment Love Camp clearly indicates the tongue-in-cheek conditions under which Exploitation Digital has released it. The text reads: “Seems the white race just isn’t superior enough for those nasty Nazis” – indicating that, the elaborate packaging notwithstanding, the film can only really even be discussed using joking, informal language. Similarly, the DVD for SS Camp Women’s Hell states: “this harrowing and tasteless follow-up makes its first (and likely last!) appearance on American DVD,” as though those behind the product were expressing a genuine surprise in its being permitted to exist in the mainstream. Exploitation Digital protects its own reputation by phrasing the plot-details on the back of the DVD as it does. The marketing of the films must necessarily indicate clearly that they are not to be taken seriously if they are to be permitted to exist actively in culture at all.

The new Exploitation Digital transfer exposes the fundamentally constructed processes by which high art is represented, celebrated and understood. If a film deemed tasteless – lacking any cultural capital – may be honored with an elaborate digital transfer, then it stands to reason that absolutely *any* film could. Though I admire the elaborate digital transfers made available on the Criterion label, when a similar-looking DVD of Gestapo’s Last Orgy is released, a curtain of sorts is pulled on the Criterion label (and everything else that purports to represent high art), exposing a select few whose position it is to pick and choose that which is “worthy.” I am reminded of the curtain being pulled on the booming voice in The Wizard of Oz (Victor Fleming, 1939), only to reveal an ordinary man at the helm of the machinery, influencing innumerable people via illusion. Nazi sexploitation, in a way unlike any other cinema, pulls the curtain on the inherently constructed and artificial nature of our own hierarchies.

Primo Levi and Nazi Sexploitation: Burning Through the Plastic

As I have stated, the films have necessarily been repackaged in such a way that it is made clear to the consumer that the distributor does not take them seriously. The vital problem is that they are being marketed as absurdist products to a demographic of cult film aficionados so

caught up in novelty that they do not consider the larger implications of that which they are laughing at. As stated by Aaron Barlow, “the DVD has thrown us unprepared into a whole new cinematic possibility where, among other things, the integrity of the film is of higher importance than ever before and its life is immeasurable” (xi). While Barlow’s statement may sound obvious, his use of the term unprepared is salient because, when one views this film on the basis of novelty, historical context becomes an afterthought. While the repackaging of these films is certainly done with a tongue-in-cheek approach, it is not enough to allow the cultural dialogue to conclude on their appropriation as novelty objects. There is much at stake with regard to enjoying these films, even if the spectator’s laughter is inspired by the evident budgetary limitations or the ineptitude of the dialogue. What he or she *is* laughing at (or perhaps, even being aroused by), is the representation, however flimsy, of unquantifiable suffering.

I am reminded of the anxiety of history being forgotten, as expressed in voiceover by Michel Bouquet in Night and Fog – particularly in that film’s final, incomplete phrase: “those of us who see the monster as being buried under these ruins, finding hope in finally being rid of this totalitarian disease, pretending to believe it happened but once, in one country, not seeing what goes on around us, not heeding the unending cry–” Bouquet’s statement is salient insofar that it is simply not acceptable for the discussion of Nazi sexploitation films to end with their being subsumed in a postmodern context as deviant novelty objects. This new packaging alludes to them as somehow contained, tamed or reconciled by culture. I have discussed how the re-releases necessitate that the films be packaged in such a way that they can be laughed at – yet I wonder how this laughter could be anything beyond a defense mechanism. I propose that there remains an enormous gap between the formal simplicity of the films and the complexity of the cultural discussion that their existence necessitates. I propose that Nazi sexploitation takes Sartre’s assertions a step further; these films are not only slimy, but corrosive – burning, without conscience, through anything that would make effort to contain them. As such, not only are these films ungraspable – they are the ideological equivalent of a toxic substance – ontologically burning through the plastic DVD cases made to contain them.

In Conclusion

Through its ludicrous representations, Nazi sexploitation tells the spectator that it is not about anything. If the spectator accepts this assertion, he / she is thinking precisely as the film

wants him /her to, at the very moment, ironically, that he / she is so certain to have outsmarted it. The films, however, are so caustic and vulgar that, to invest value in the concepts that they inadvertently propose is to be subsumed by the abhorrence of the films themselves. We must look at these films dead-on with seriousness and – even as every formal element would seem to resist it – respect. Nazi sexploitation operates in its own vacuum – a slime too outrageous to be taken seriously and too vulgar to mock. Consequently, it may be tempting to either ignore it outright or even strike back with an academic interrogation that the film would not be able to withstand. Simply put, the fragile structure of Gestapo's Last Orgy, when combined with the extremity of its subject matter, amounts to a film that ideologically spits blood in our faces. It is up to us to retain the objectivity to read these films against their grain and, in the process, to not spit that blood back.

Conclusion

My objective in examining The Night Porter and the sexploitation films has been to propose that the texts we most emphatically reject are precisely the ones that say the most about us. As stated by George Lipsitz: “Cultural forms create conditions of possibility, they expand the present by informing it with memories of the past and hopes for the future... (but are also responsible for) internalizing the dominant culture’s norms and values as necessary and inevitable” (16). The Night Porter demands a re-evaluation of how history has been dictated by dominant structures. In doing so, one must first look directly toward the inherently constructed nature of one’s own moral universe. When Gavriel D. Rosenfeld states that The Night Porter contributed to “a growing tendency to forget precisely those aspects of the past that most needed to be remembered in order to prevent their recurrence” (19), I argue that he does not realize that The Night Porter contributes to memory work, demanding that we think independently and consider the possibility that the tools we have so far been using to explain history to be more a product of our own pre-existing social norms than of history itself.

In keeping with the aesthetics of masochism, the film itself argues Max to have initially selected Lucia due to his own recognition of *himself* within *her*. Within their self-enclosed world that each is defined by his / her inherent compulsion of each to dominate and submit exclusively in relation to the other. In this capacity, despite the evident human suffering in the camps *outside* of their relationship, he is every bit as vulnerable as she. It is on this basis that the film has been argued as obscene – the belief that, amid the millions killed in the camps, the representation of a psychologized (and even vulnerable) Nazi simply has *no right* to exist. The fact that Max is inherently fragile does violence to the black-and-white dichotomies of victim-victimizer that imbue our collective rationale of the Holocaust. However, the humanization of Max does something even more disruptive: it reminds modern spectators that the ideology of the Third Reich was *not* a mythic sweep of evil – but rather, something executed by ordinary human beings. The concept of a vulnerable or multidimensional Nazi attributes human characteristics to individuals who, undoubtedly, *were* human, but whom contemporary North American culture does not like to think of as such. If a Nazi is represented as a three-dimensional, psychologized individual, the Holocaust no longer fits into classical narrative modes that divide clearly and unambiguously between good and evil.

The Night Porter calls attention to the performative nature of collective / social memory and argues that contemporary culture is functioning under a delusion where redemptive appropriations of history have been hammered fervently into the collective consciousness to the point that other possibilities are simply not viable. The self-conscious roles assumed by Max and Lucia draw attention to our own social performances and the redemptive logic that we assume (Schindler's List) to reassure ourselves *of* ourselves. I argue that we divide between high / tasteful and low / tasteless for the purpose of stabilizing ourselves in the world in the same way that we separate legitimate from illegitimate memory. Similarly, just as memory is spoken with what the *mind thinks*, pornography is performed via what the *body does*.

I argue Max and Lucia to be equivalent to an ideological tornado; Max (the subdued, grounded night porter) being the proverbial ground and Lucia (traveling with her husband), as the wandering funnel cloud. In their separate lives, both live quietly, in relative anonymity. Like the funnel cloud and the earth, neither pose any real threat on an individual basis. However, together, they comprise a tornado, a relationship contingent on energy forcibly swirling into itself, draining history and memory in the process. Max and Lucia (like a tornado) are considered destructive because they pose an immediate threat to our homes / institutions, and threaten the naïve concepts from which we have, for so long, derived comfort. Because Max and Lucia threaten that which we use to stabilize ourselves in the world, they are ascribed terms rooted in language that defaults to the obscene (pornography) or the simplistic (good / evil, right / wrong) so that they may easily be exorcised from culture.

Collective rationale serves as an ideological mortar that holds social our institutions in place. I propose that the venomous insults hurled at The Night Porter by scholars and popular critics alike are thrown from precisely the institutions that The Night Porter attacks with a logic that favors emotional reaction over pragmatic response. When a text threatens the way one thinks, it is only disruptive insofar that it proposes a counter-argument. One fears the tornado because the destruction it may potentially do reveals that the moral laws that govern our institutions are not innate, but rather, social constructs; in turn the tornado presents the frightening possibility that perhaps, those institutions are not built out of the indestructible materials that, I propose, the collective consciousness has always assumed they were.

Consider finally, those institutions as enormous skyscrapers, with low art designated to the lower floors, and vice-versa. I propose Nazi sexploitation to be equivalent to termites,

having been unleashed (via digital media) within the institutions' lowest cellars of cultural capital / the proverbial skyscraper. Not only has Exploitation Digital freed these destructive termites to attack established discourses and memory work – it has also enabled the termites to step into the proverbial elevators of these institutions, elevating them via high art packaging. Having been packaged as high art, films such as Gestapo's Last Orgy and SS Experiment Love Camp are now ascending the floors of cultural capital, and attacking the integrity of the structure as a whole. It seems here that censors have made efforts to persuade themselves of their own civility by banning the films, as though banishing them to the absolute furthest outskirts of culture would perhaps alleviate a larger social guilt. With the resurgence of these films into the mainstream – as deviant novelty objects, the repressed has returned more forcefully and tangibly than ever. My objective in this thesis has been to draw parallels between texts denoted to the pornographic and those which, in some capacity, attack how the value structures that we have, for so long, used to maneuver our history. However, when we discourse upon history rather than look at it head-on, one only deludes oneself. In this respect, The Night Porter and (albeit in a very different way) the sexploitation films are only pornographic insofar as they shake the spectator awake.

It is easy to simply relegate a disruptive text (such as The Night Porter) to the realm of pornography or obscenity, and even easier to accuse a text of being pornographic when (like Gestapo's Last Orgy) it already announces itself *as such*. The Night Porter argues that that which is most problematic and threatening about historical representation has nothing to do with pornography in any traditional sense of the word. Instead, the true historical obscenity is that which disguises history as redemptive and reassuring. *This* type of pornography is not as self-explanatory as sexually-graphic material but is significantly more insidious insofar that it perpetuates an artificial sense of comfort that discourses *upon* history rather than making effort to learn from it. As stated by Terry Eagleton: "The most efficient oppressor is the one who persuades his underlings to love, desire and identify with his power; and any practice of political emancipation thus involves that most difficult of all forms of liberation, freeing ourselves from ourselves" (xiii-xiv). The real danger, as proposed by The Night Porter and the Nazi sexploitation cycle, is not in the "dirty" pornography that culture pushes away, but in the reassuring and "beautiful" narratives that culture admires and celebrates. As such, Cavani forcibly resists that which is pleasant when it comes at the cost of that which is true.

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