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Militant ethics: Daniel Schmid's film *Adaptation of Fassbinder's Garbage, the City, and Death*

Keywords: Fassbinder, cinematic ethics, politics of representation, Deleuze, Badiou, Rancière.

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Abstract:

The publication of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's play *Der Müll, die Stadt und der Tod* (*The Garbage, the City, and Death*, 1976) constitutes one of the major scandals in German cultural history. The play was accused of being antisemitic, because one of its key characters, a real estate speculator, was merely called the Rich Jew. Furthermore, some (negative) dramatis personae in the play openly express antisemitic views. When asked to respond, Fassbinder retorted that philosemites [in the West Germany of the time] are in fact antisemites, because they refuse to see how the victims of oppression can at times assume the roles and positions assigned to them by pernicious social structures. Fassbinder's vilification on the part of the right-wing press prevented the play's staging; subsequently, in 1984 and 1985-6 two Frankfurt productions were banned due to the reaction on the part of the local Jewish community. A similar controversy sparked off by the film adaptation of the play *Shadow of Angels* by Daniel Schmid. During the film's screening at the Cannes Film Festival the Israeli delegation walked out while there was also rumor of censorship in France. Gilles Deleuze wrote an article for *Le Monde* titled "The Rich Jew" defending the film and the director. Deleuze's article triggered a furious reaction from the *Shoah* (1985) director, Claude Lanzmann, who responded in *Le Monde* and attacked the cultural snobbery and "endemic terrorism" of the left-wing cinéophile community. Lanzmann saw the film as wholly antisemitic and suggested that it identifies the Jew—all Jews—with money. While, I acknowledge the complexity of the subject, I intend to revisit the debate and the film, so as to unpack its ethical/aesthetic intricacy, and propose a pathway that can potentially enable us to think of ways that political incorrectness can function as a means of exposing the persistence of historical and ethical questions that are ostentatiously resolved. I proceed to do this by drawing on Alain Badiou's idea of militant ethics and Jacques Rancière's redefinition of critical art as one that produces dissensus.

Introduction

Thus, the ultimate aim of this essay is to suggest a pathway that can make us think about the possibility of militant cinematic ethics that do not aspire to create a moralist consensus, but

produce conflict and facilitate a better understanding of the interrelationship between ethics and politics. Much of the contemporary discussion on cinematic ethics focuses on involuntary emotional responses and the types of attitudes that spectators are invited to adopt towards fictional characters and narratives (see Jones, Vice 2011; Smith 2011; Carroll 2014). For the most part, these discussions are associated with cognitive film theory, a strand in film scholarship committed to identifying the conscious activities employed by audiences to process a narrative rationally and emotionally. Yet cognitivist ethics dictate the conversation on cinema and ethics in very narrow parameters aiming to produce a sense of apolitical consensus. Some cognitivist scholars go as far as to suggest that characters in films can function as “moral examples” that can inspire audiences to act ethically. In other words, cognitivists tend to explore how films can produce “correct” responses or attitudes on the part of the spectators. This is partly to be blamed on an uncritical acceptance of communal values that cognitivists tend to universalize. However, as Janet Wolff aptly suggests, values and ethics have their roots in communities, but one should not forget that communities are far from being static. They are instead “always in process of formation and dissolution in relation to other communities and to transformations in the economic, social, and discursive structures out of which they are formed and in which they participate” (2008, 23).

Unlike cognitivist scholars, film commentators drawing on continental philosophy understand cinematic ethics not as a process of moral instruction or adoption of a set of absolute/prescriptive ethical principles, but rather as a process of investigation that cannot be simply reduced to an uncritical acceptance of positive representations of groups who have historically been the victims of discrimination (see Downing, Saxton 2009; Lübecker 2015; Del Río 2016). Much of the recent discussion has focused on films that deploy an aesthetics of resistance by producing negative affects and encouraging us to adopt a more critical stance towards systemic structures and the contradictions of the dominant moralist codes. The works

of Nikolaj Lübecker and Elena del R o are key exemplars of this scholarly trend. Other scholars, such as Robert Sinnerbrink, follow a more pluralist approach with the view to identifying the connection between ethics, aesthetics and politics (see Sinnerbrink 2016). My essay intends to join the scholarly conversation initiated by scholars working in the continental tradition by exploring the concept of militant ethics through Schmid's adaptation of *Garbage, the City, and Death*. The term militant ethics is informed by Alain Badiou's critique of ethics. According to Badiou, the ethical turn in aesthetics and politics is problematic because it tends to depoliticize the conversation striving for a consensus that operates as a justification of the current regime of things. For the advocates of ethics seek to find ways to integrate oppositions and conflicts to a predetermined whole, which is uncritically accepted as the universal norm/truth. Militant ethics instead is predicated on the idea that political emancipation is premised upon the production of dissensus; Badiou asserts that the abstract universality promoted by the ethical ideology is prescriptive and aspires to conceal capitalist contradictions and inequalities. The reason for this is that it understands the individual as a victim that needs protection rather than as an active agent, who can work with others to bring about social transformation.

The controversy caused by the play and the film

Before discussing Schmid's adaptation, a series of introductory comments on the controversies raised by the play and the film are in order. According to Fassbinder scholarship, the director wrote the play during an international flight to the USA (see Calandra 1988; Elsaesser 1996; Galt 2011). The play was loosely based on Gerhard Zwerenz's novel *Die Erde ist unbewohnbar wie der Mond* (*The Earth is uninhabitable like the Moon*, 1973). Merging expressionist, morality play, and Brechtian aesthetics, *Garbage the City, and Death* takes as its starting point the gentrification of the *Westend* district in Frankfurt, which was inhabited by numerous working-class people, students, and immigrants. Real estate speculators tried to force the area's

population out of the *Westend*, in order to transform it to a commercial district. Many speculators were of Jewish origin and Fassbinder's play takes this historical case as its point of departure for examining the persistence of repressed conflicts and antagonisms in the post-war West Germany of the time.

Set in the *Westend* of Frankfurt, *Garbage* takes place in spaces associated with the underworld, such as red-light districts, run-down council houses, and nightclubs. The main character is Roma B. a marginalized sex-worker whose labor supports the gambling addictions of her pimp and boyfriend Franz B. Roma B. suddenly gains status and money through her association with a new client, "The Rich Jew." The latter is an unscrupulous real-estate speculator, who falls in love with her and becomes her benefactor. Herr Müller, Roma B's father, is an unrepentant Nazi, who performs as a drag queen in seedy bars, and her mother is a communist in a wheelchair. Thus, Roma's family stands as a reminder of Germany's repressed history. Roma realizes that the Jew is using her to take revenge from her father, whom he suspects to be responsible for his parents' murder in a Nazi concentration camp. Towards the end of the play, Roma feels dejected and begs the Jew to kill her, who agrees to do so "out of love." When the police discover her dead body, one of the Jew's henchmen denounces his boss only to be thrown out of the window by Müller II, a corrupt police commissioner who collaborates with the Rich Jew. The former also manages to frame Franz for Roma's murder.

In a typical Fassbinder fashion, the boundaries between victims and perpetrators are quite blurry; Germany's traumatic past seems to burden its present of the time as evidenced in various stichomythias between Roma B. and her anti-Semite father, where one gets to see the latent antisemitism in post-war West Germany. In one of the most shocking passages, a business rival of the Jew goes on an anti-Semitic tirade:

Hans von Gluck: He's sucking us dry the Jew. Drinking our blood and blaming everything on us because he's Jew and we're guilty.....Just being there he makes us

guilty. If he stayed where he came from or if they gassed him I'd be able to sleep better. They forgot to gas him. This is no joking matter. And I rub my hands together as I imagine him breathing his last in the gas chamber (Fassbinder 1991, 180).

Instead of seeing this character as the textual proxy of the author, as some of the critics of the play do, it would be more productive to place *Garbage* alongside other plays and films by Fassbinder, which focus on questions of everyday fascism (of which more below) and West Germany's inability to come to terms with its past crimes. Fassbinder wanted to express some uncomfortable truths about latent antisemitism, which was well concealed by the status quo to promote a modernized image of Germany as a country that had managed to put its past contradictions aside. In effect, this implied that one was not allowed to point to the embarrassing tenacity of attitudes of bigotry, intolerance and suppressed hatred. David Barnett contends that Fassbinder was forced by the management of the *Theater am Turm* to have Hans wear a Nazi armband while voicing these lines. Fassbinder declined and his rationale was that regular people shared similar sentiments and not just Nazi nostalgics, as the advocates of German normalization suggested. As he explains, this was precisely the problem with Hans as a character, who was not a former Nazi; instead his anti-Semitism is to be understood as "sublimated business envy and unconscious collective guilt felt in the aftermath of Auschwitz" (2005, 234).

Far more complicated in the play is the portrayal of the Rich Jew. He is presented as an unscrupulous businessman, who collaborates with the authorities and the police to carry out the unpopular gentrification plans in the *Westend*. Emblematic in this respect is his monologue in the fourth scene of the play, where he introduces himself and his social position in an à la Brecht monologue:

Rich Jew: "Besides I'm a Jew. The police chief is my friend in the broad sense of a friend; the mayor invites me over. I can count on the city council. No one particularly likes what he condones, but it's not my plan, it was there before I came..... The city needs the unscrupulous businessman who allows it to transform itself. It must protect him thank you very much (Fassbinder 1991, 171).

What is problematized in this monologue and throughout the play is the very idea of social agency. One is invited to consider how the character performs a role that has been imposed on him by problematic social structures. At the same time, the character may well be seen in light of what Enzo Traverso calls the end of Jewish modernity after World War II. The term Jewish modernity refers to the vibrant intellectual culture instigated by people of Jewish origins in continental Europe; this culture was committed to the production of radical thought, literature and art. It embodied a desire for universal emancipation, which was instigated by the Jewish community's social experiences of discrimination, mobility and urbanity. According to Traverso, the post-war European societies managed to integrate the majority of their Jewish citizens into the very structures against which Jewish modernity reacted: "After having been the main focus of critical thought in the Western world – in the era when Europe was its centre – Jews today find themselves, by a kind of paradoxical reversal, at the heart of the mechanisms of domination (2016, 5). In Traverso's view, this integration of the European Jewry to the structures of capitalism, managed to make a significant number of European Jews unthreatening for the capitalist status quo. In many countries, including the USA, Jewish people even managed to reconcile themselves with the political right, which traditionally opposed them.

The play caused controversy partly due to the critics' tendency to quote the antisemitic lines by the characters Herr Müller and Hans von Glück out of context. On the 19th of March 1976, Joachim Fest published an article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* titled "Reicher Jude von Links: Zu Fassbinders Stück „Der Müller, die Stadt und der Tod“ (Rich Jew from the left: on Fassbinder's play *Garbage, the City and Death*). Fest went on to accuse Fassbinder of *Linksfaschismus* (left-wing fascism). He took issue with the fact that the Rich Jew does not have a name and thus the character's role in the play reproduces a series of historical clichés.

Fest suggested that the new antisemitism comes from the left (Fest 1976, 19). His argument equates antisemitism with anti-capitalism and, as critics have noted, this approach betrays a desire to exonerate the right from its historical guilt. This interpretation is strengthened considering that Fest was a Hitler biographer and revisionist historian; as David Barnett explains, Fest wrote a more than one-thousand-pages Hitler biography, in which he devoted only four and a half pages to the plight of the Jews (see Barnett 2005: 236). Other critics have noted that following Fest's article, Fassbinder's critics came mostly from the right, which did not want to rekindle a debate on the country's troublesome past (see Lorenz 2011). Consequently, there were some interesting alliances against Fassbinder, who, as Daniel Schmid points out, was shocked to see "that former Nazis were suddenly and sanctimoniously presenting him as an anti-Semite" (1997, npg). Following this public controversy, the publishing house *Suhrkamp* decided to temporarily withdraw the play from publication.

Attempts to stage the play in 1984 and then in 1985-86 failed to materialize due to the intervention of local politicians and the reaction on the part of the Jewish community. Again, many critics of the play came from the right including Walter Wallmann, the racist mayor of Frankfurt and the newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Wallmann ran a xenophobic racist election campaign in 1980 and forced many Ethiopian and Afghani asylum-seekers out of the state of Hessen. Roger Karapin explains that "the asylum issue again played a role in Wallmann's successful mayoral campaign in 1985" (2002: 205). Furthermore, the *Frankfurter* had previously threatened the Jewish community not to oppose the controversial visit by Helmut Kohl and Ronald Reagan to the Bitburg cemetery, where the two politicians paid their respects to the buried Waffen-SS (see Markovits, Benhabib, Postone 1986, 26).

Evidently, the play confronted a sensitive issue that West Germany had tried to relegate to the past. Then again, the figure of the Rich Jew raises reasonable questions regarding the ethics of representation. Did Fassbinder uncritically blame the evils of capitalism on a

vulnerable minority? The answer lies in considering how the playwright/filmmaker has depicted oppression in other plays/films where vulnerable individuals unwillingly accommodate the image projected on them by society. This is for instance the case in plays and films such as *Katzelmacher* (1969), *Faustrecht der Freiheit* (*Fox and his Friends*, 1975), and *Mutter Küsters' Fahrt zum Himmel* (*Mother Küsters' Trip to Heaven*, 1975). Fassbinder's rationale was that one cannot depict oppression without showing how the oppressed respond to repressive structures in order to survive. This approach subtly undermines liberal ideas of choice, demonstrating how choice can be limited within an unequal social environment. According to Gary Indiana, Fassbinder was usually attacked because of his emphasis on anti-heroes at a historical period that people were badly in need of heroes:

His enemies included both reactionaries and progressive types who couldn't bear looking at their own neuroses. *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven*, 1975, and *The Third Generation* 1979, alienated the whole spectrum of the conventional left, while films like *Katzelmacher*, 1969, and *Veronika Voss*, 1982, exposed the spirit of fascism thriving in postwar Germany. The play *Garbage, the City and Death* (filmed in 1976 by Daniel Schmid as *Schatten der Engel*) brought cries of anti-Semitism from people determined not to understand it. *Fox and His Friends*, 1974, and *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, 1972, outraged gay groups by displaying homosexual relations that were every bit as corrupt as heterosexual ones. (The message: capitalism turns everyone into a whore; anyone who resists this fate comes to a bad end.) But the bigger scandal was Fassbinder's anarchism, his proclaimed self-exemption from any program or belief system. Our beliefs are animated by feelings, and, as he relentlessly showed, our feelings are manufactured for us, not least by the movies (1997, 12).

Responding to the negative critiques of the play, Fassbinder noted that the Rich Jew is merely executing the plans that have been developed by an elite; they use his Jewish identity as a protective shield for the implementation of policies that perpetuated social inequality (see Fassbinder 1992, 119). He also noted that the outcry caused by the play aimed in fact to silence those willing to explore a taboo issue of the West-German society. Philosemites were in fact antisemites who wanted to exonerate themselves of their past guilt and avoid touching uncomfortable questions about the historical continuity of structures that gave rise to fascism:

I mean the way Jews have constantly been treated as a taboo subject in Germany since 1945 can result in hostility towards Jews, particularly among young people, who have not had any direct experience with Jews. When I was a child and I met Jews, people would whisper to me. "That's a Jew, behave yourself, be nice to him." And that continued with variations, until I was twenty-eight and wrote the play. It never seemed to me that that was the right attitude" (1997, 12).

Scholars have agreed that the play was very much ahead of its time in the sense that the country was not ready to come to terms with its historical past and its equally problematic present of the time: one needs only to recall that one year after the first publication of the play the Federal Republic of Germany experienced the famous crisis of the German Autumn. But there is something more intricate in the play that has to do with the author's refusal to reduce fascism to something that belongs to the past as it is the case in many of his films and plays e.g. *Pre-Paradise Sorry Now*, where he muses on questions of everyday fascism. Fascist attitudes for Fassbinder are omnipresent in everyday social relationships between employers and employees, family members, lovers, and even left-wing activist groups; this is also the case in *Garbage, the City, and Death*, where we see the micropolitics of domination amongst people living in the margins of society. Telling in this respect is Roma B's relationship with her clandestinely gay boyfriend and pimp, and with the Rich Jew, who both exploit her for personal gain. As Thomas Elsaesser notes, the blurring of the boundaries between oppressors and oppressed and the depiction of the victims' capacity to act in dehumanizing ways towards other underdogs are recurring themes in Fassbinder's oeuvre: "his homosexuals are not always nice, his Jews can be exploitative, his communists may be careerists" (1996, 31).

Thus, in Fassbinder's universe, the social violence experienced by those at the bottom of the social hierarchy is shown as replicating itself in their own relationships and interactions. Fassbinder's understanding of everyday fascism chimes neatly with Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's view of fascism not just as a historical event of the twentieth century, but as something immanent to the micropolitics of everyday life. Key to their understanding of

fascism is what Michel Foucault mentions in his preface to *Anti-Oedipus*; fascism cannot be reduced to figures such as Hitler and Mussolini, but refers to “the fascism in us all” that makes us desire and perpetuate the very conditions of our repression (1983, xiii). Deleuze and Guattari articulate a similar point and assert that fascism is not necessarily tantamount to a totalitarian state. Fascism is also visible in the “microfascism” of everyday interactions and in the masses’ tendency to reproduce and desire their own oppression (1983, 215). The consequence is that fascism is something not necessarily associated with malicious individuals, but a “disease” that can affect everyone participating in the micropolitics of power in the everyday life. Ian Buchanan usefully suggests that everyday fascism for Deleuze and Guattari stands for the desire for power. People do not just conform to power, “they want what it offers them, even at the price of their subjection” (2017, 108).

No doubt, Deleuze might have recognized similar questions in Schmid’s adaptation of Fassbinder’s play, which was released as *Schatten der Engel* (*Shadow of Angels*, 1976). Fassbinder played Frantz B. (Raoul in the film) Roma B’s pimp (she is called Lily in the film and played by Ingrid Caven). At the film’s premiere in Cannes, the Israeli delegation walked out in protest against Schmid’s adaptation. In 1977, the film was screened in Paris and the French minister of the interior censored it, while cinemas were attacked by protestors with smoke-bombs. Deleuze and other intellectuals signed a petition protesting against censorship.¹ On the 18th of February 1977, Deleuze wrote an article in *Le Monde* titled “Le Juif riche” (“The Rich Jew”) in which he defended Schmid and Fassbinder. His line of argument was that the film spoke about the problematic conditions of post-war Germany. He suggested that the two leading characters, Lily and the Rich Jew, are two individuals who respond and adapt themselves to conditions of fear. The charges of antisemitism were insubstantial since the Rich Jew “owes his wealth to a system which is never presented as Jewish, but as that of the city, the municipality and the police” (1998: 45). Not unlike Fassbinder and Schmid, Deleuze argued

that people who criticized the film were mostly those who wanted to obstruct any public debate on a sensitive issue that has political implications. In a passage that merits to be quoted in full he concluded by saying:

Schmid has declared his political intention, and the film constantly shows it in the simplest and most obvious way. The old fascism, however current and powerful it may be in many countries, is not the new problem now. We are preparing ourselves for other fascisms. A complete neo-fascism is setting up shop, in relation to which the old fascism appears as a figure from folklore (the transvestite singer in the film). Instead of being a politics and economy of war, neo-fascism is a global agreement for security, for the administration of a no less horrible “peace,” with the concerted organization of all the little fears, all the little anxieties that make us into so many micro-fascists, assigned to stifle anything that is even slightly strong, every slightly strong face, every slightly strong word in his street, her neighborhood, his movie theater. “I don’t like the films on the fascism of the Thirties. The new fascism is so much more refined, so much more disguised. Perhaps, as in the film, it’s the motor of a society in which social problems would be settled, but in which the question of anxiety would only be stifled.” [Schmid quoted by Deleuze here]. If Schmid’s film is banned or blocked, it will not be a victory in the struggle against anti-Semitism. But it will be a victory for neofascism, and the first case in which we could say to ourselves: But was this, could this be only a pretext, the shadow of a pretext? Some people will recall the beauty of the film, its political importance, and the way it will have been eliminated (Ibid, 46).

Deleuze’s line of argument prefigures some of the key ideas he articulates with Guattari three years later in *One Thousand Plateaus*, where they elaborate on the connection between fear and fascism as well as on fascism’s capacity to contaminate everyday social relationships, even amongst those who regard themselves as antifascists. The connection between fear and the “new fascism” is paramount, since fear makes individuals adaptable and ready to integrate themselves to oppressive structures offering at the same time a pseudo-sense of choice.² The Rich Jew in Fassbinder’s play is a case in point, and Deleuze and Guattari’s arguments point to the contradictions of liberal societies. Liberal societies proclaim to be against totalitarianism; but there is an inherent totalitarianism in their *modus opeandi* too, since they coerce the population to desire its very conditions of domination by marginalizing those who do not fit in. Choice in liberal societies does not offer individuals the capacity to criticize and change social structures; instead, choice turns into a means of reconfirming the existing order of things by

pronouncing its inalterability. Badiou has also mused on this arguing that the supporters of liberal democracy praise it precisely because they are aware of its inegalitarianism. Liberal democracy conceals or justifies its contradictions by suggesting that it is the only system of government that protects its citizens from the condition of Evil, the past monstrosities of fascism and Stalinism and the structures of underdevelopment in the Third World. Yet, for Badiou, the self-evidence of this deduction is a red herring and aims at camouflaging how systemic conditions of inequality prevent social emancipation by naturalizing a reality structured upon unjust social structures (see Cox, Whallen 2018).

Claude Lanzmann, the renowned director of the film *Shoah* (1985), who was a friend of Deleuze, took exception to the latter's article and accused the French philosopher of being an advocate of an art for art's sake aesthetic. For Lanzmann, the film perpetuated the fascist cinematic aesthetic of Veit Harlan; he was also disturbed by the fact that the Jew in the film was the only character who was nameless:

Among all the characters in the film – whores, idiots, transvestites, each worthy of individuation – why does not he [the Jew] possess either a surname or even a first name? From the beginning to the end of the film he is - Der Jude - (the Jew) or - Der Reiche Jude - (the wealthy Jew) (1977, 23).

Lanzmann pointed to the Israeli delegation's irritation with the film at the Cannes film festival, while he posed the legitimate question whether thirty thousand Jews in West Germany have so much power as to be blamed for the evils of capitalism. While Lanzmann is correct to ask this question, he seems to ignore the tensions in Frankfurt during the 1970s, where many real estate speculators were of Jewish origin. They were employed by the city officials precisely because of the Jewish taboo in the FRG that would immediately render people criticizing their unpopular policies as antisemites. [As Dan Diner suggests, the Jewish community found itself implicated in a market that produced a social conflict for which they were unprepared.](#)³ As far as the character's name is concerned, one needs to note that Fassbinder deploys stereotypes in

his portrayal of other characters too. Both Lily's Nazi father, and the corrupt police officer are called Müller, a typical German name that produces a sense of typicality in both characters instead of individuality. The first one acts as a representative of the old system and the second one of the systemic corruption of the time.

Two observations are paramount. The play instigated reactions in Germany not only from the Jewish community, but as mentioned above from the conservative right, which was historically hostile to the European Jewry. We might want to think of the right's desire to cancel the play's performances as an attempt to publicly exonerate itself from its past guilt and present a revived image of tolerance not just of the Federal Republic of Germany, but of the political right itself. This recalls a famous Jewish joke: "What is a philo-Semite? An anti-Semite who loves Jews" (as cited in Badiou, Hazan 2009: 7). The film, on the contrary, provoked mainly reactions in France where it was screened as part of the Cannes Film Festival. Apart from the Israeli delegation, which found it offensive, it caused friction within the French left. Some of the protesters came from the left and were amongst those attacking cinemas with smoke bombs, whereas other public intellectuals from the left, such as Deleuze, found the reactions problematic, because they thought that the film had been misread. At the same time, the negative reactions on the part of left intellectuals such as Lanzmann can be seen as a response to the fifth Republic's inability to acknowledge France's complicity in the deportation of the French Jews. One needs not to forget that the documentary *Le Chagrin et la Pitié* (*The Sorrow and the Pity*, Ophüls, 1969), which discussed French collaborationism, was banned from the French television until 1981. The responses provoked by the play in Germany reflect the political right's desire to rebrand itself. The film, however, provoked negative reactions in left circles in France on account of the country's historical revisionism that for many years denied its historical responsibility for the Holocaust. One thing is certain: Fassbinder's play and

Schmid's adaptation opened up the possibility of raising uncomfortable issues that made both countries revisit their problematic history.

Rituals of Humiliation

In a way, the play and the film prefigure the contemporary state of things, where the commemoration of the horror of the Shoah is used as a means of building a liberal consensus that does not aim to change the very conditions that led to the emergence of fascism; Cecile Winter has insightfully argued that today in Western democracies the word Jew has turned into “a transcendental signifier” that aims to exonerate the West for its past crimes (2006, 219). Such an approach is not concerned with a productive reexamination of the causes of fascism; it acts as a protective shield for the current economic status quo, rather than a call for collective responsibility, social justice and democratic participation. As Winter explains, liberal democracies hold a “monopoly over the word “Jew”” with the view to suppressing any political movement addressing their inherent conditions of inequality (Ibid, 232). The recent revivification of the extreme right across Europe demonstrates the failure of the belief that commemorating the crimes of fascism without changing the material conditions that produce right-wing extremism can prevent the repetition of sinister historical phenomena. Similarly, Traverso understands contemporary Holocaust memory as a desire to reduce history to a binary of victims and perpetrators. Holocaust memory is conservative, because it assumes that liberal democracy is the only guarantee that similar atrocities will not take place again. Yet Traverso cautions that such an approach simply enables a commemoration of the victims of the past and not a commitment to fighting “the executioners of the present” (2016, 3). For Traverso, Holocaust memory can turn into a smokescreen that prevents us from debating current issues such as Islamophobia, the refugee crisis, and histories of European colonial violence in which the Holocaust needs to be placed too.

Schmid's adaptation stays for the most part faithful to the play and mobilizes an aesthetic treatment of the material that invites the audience to break with the doxa that fascism and the crimes of the past are a historical aberration. In keeping with Fassbinder's cinematic aesthetic, Schmid places a great deal of importance in theatricalized staging and stylized language. The film's expressionistic visual imagery invokes a universe that revives memories from the camps clearly connecting the present of the time with the past. This is a token of the filmmaker's desire to exploit the capitalist contradictions of Frankfurt to make visible the traces of the past in the present, as manifested in practices of dehumanization that allude to the persistence of the logic of the camp.

Let us start by exploring questions of everyday fascism. A remarkable sequence in this respect is shown in the opening of the film when a client approaches Lily and the other sex-workers who gradually encircle him to draw his attention. He for his part gazes at them and enunciates a sexist adaptation of meeny, miny, moe to choose the woman with whom he will spend the night. The women are framed static in the shot occasionally gesturing towards the client, while the restricted dramatic space adds an element of aggression to the characters' movements in space. In the following visual, we can see the signs of fatigue on the women's faces who complain about their working conditions in the cold streets of Frankfurt. The sequence effectively conveys a dark image of the underworld of Frankfurt, where the desire for survival erodes people's capacity for empathy and sociability. The shot points to the normalization of violence and humiliation as survival strategies.

Frankfurt is represented as a city of inequality that reproduces conditions of oppression. Later, Lily having been unable to attract any punters approaches an immigrant street cleaner and tries to solicit him as a client. She interrupts his work in a mannered way by placing her foot on top of his broom and asking him: "Love"? The immigrant snubs her cruelly telling her that much love may cause diseases. Lily then responds with a racist tirade. In a typical

Fassbinder fashion, marginality does not make people immune to bigotry. This lack of solidarity and the capacity for bigotry amongst the underprivileged are indexes of the film's point that fascism is not just a historical phenomenon of the past, but something immanent in everyday relationships structured around the play of domination and submission; pertinent here is the underdogs' capacity and desire to participate in humiliating and sadistic power games that reproduce a social reality of violence. This is in keeping with what Brad Evans and Henry A. Giroux identify as a fundamental aspect of fascist culture and imaginary, that is, the "ritualization of humiliation," which refers to these interactions and practices that dehumanize individuals and standardize their "expendability and disposability" (2015, npg).⁴ Humiliation in the fascist imagery is not just a power game, but a means of normalizing debasing attitudes and oppressive hierarchies.

The film abounds with similar examples that point to the underdogs' tendency to humiliate and degrade each other as well as to their inability to form relations of solidarity. In the sequence that comes immediately after the aforementioned one, Lily's boyfriend and pimp forces her to go back to the streets and solicit more clients. She is then humiliated again, this time by an immigrant *Gastarbeiter*. Schmid's emphasis on similar rituals of humiliation is put forward through a stress on stylized gestures that border between violence and cruelty. The director makes use of static shots and expressionist imagery that highlight these instances of cruelty. Schmid here evokes the typical Fassbinder *mise en scène*, which manipulates theatrical devices and acting styles rooted in experimental performance. Adrian Martin calls this "arch-theatricality" and suggests that this conscious dialogue with the art of theater on the part of filmmakers of the likes of Fassbinder and Rivette led to the re-emergence of long-take cinematography and the "open frame" (2014: 85).

In Fassbinder's cinema – and indeed Schmid follows in the footsteps of Fassbinder's aesthetic in this film – this reanimation of the long-take and the static shot aimed to produce an

attitude of observant curiosity committed to discovering social attitudes in the characters' physical interactions. The combination of long-take cinematography, static shots reminiscent of the early days of the medium, and hyper-theatricalized performance and *mise en scène* invite the audience to consider the persistence of Nazi aesthetic sensibilities in the present. There is indeed something theatrical in the ways the characters carry themselves and deliver their lines as if the filmmaker cautions the audience that post-war politics has not abandoned the kitschy theatricality linked with a Nazi aesthetic sensibility as well as the bigotry that comes with it. Paradigmatic in this respect is a sequence where Lilly encounters her communist wheel-chaired mother and her Nazi father, dressed as woman. Lily's mother asserts in a wooden language: "we will not submit to conditions set by others to make us suffer." What is implied here is that even Marxist opposition has turned into an empty slogan a kind of bad theater; the scene concludes with Herr Müller responding to her by closing the blinds, a gesture that creates a theater curtain effect.

This overstylized *mise en scène* prioritizes mood and style over diegetic motivation and coherence. In foregrounding style and atmosphere, the film gives rise to cinematic excess. This term has been introduced by Kristin Thompson who suggests that cinematic excess refers to all these stylistic elements deployed by filmmakers not with the aim of strengthening a film's narrative unity; cinematic excess, instead, aspires to disorganize narrative consistency and causality. It emphasizes all these stylistic features that cannot be contained within the narrative: "At that point where [diegetic] motivation fails, excess begins" (1977, 58). Excess can be identified in experimental films but also in straightforward narrative ones and it is not fortuitous that Thompson refers to Eisenstein, a filmmaker, who unlike other Soviet directors e.g. Dziga Vertov and Esfir Shub, experimented with film form without doing away with narrative. Cinematic excess can either be deployed for aesthetic reasons, or also as a means of suggestion to appeal to a reality that cannot be contained within a conventional story-telling format.

Consider, for example, a scene towards the end of the film when the other sex workers collectively abuse Lily for having solved her financial worries by becoming the Rich Jew's partner. Within a tracking-shot that lasts roughly two and a half minutes, we get to see Lily slowly walking through a street where her former colleagues congregate; as she walks down the road the camera captures a sex worker questioning Lily's new lifestyle. Lily walks past her only to be humiliated by the rest. There is an element of circularity in the sequence, since as Lily continues her walk the same people re-appear again and again in the center of the frame and repeat their abusive behavior. The viewer has the feeling that the character finds herself returning to her initial point of departure re-encountering again each of her former friends. The stilted dialogue and the highly formalized gestures are not in service of verisimilitude; they rather point to a reality that cannot be expressed by means of dramatic and compositional coherence.

Here Schmid's emphasis on audiovisual excess that prioritizes mood over narrative alludes to the tenacity of the "concentrationary" mind-set in the present, where the desire for individual survival disintegrates people's capacity for sociability. My understanding of the term "concentrationary" is informed by Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman's theorization of a concentrationary cinema. Drawing on the works of David Rousset and Giorgio Agamben amongst others, Pollock and Silverman suggest that the concentrationary mind-set is something that defines modernity and cannot be restricted to what took place between 1933-1945. The key aspects of the concentrationary outlook are the structures that impede humans' capacity for socialization, spontaneity, and empathy; from this perspective, the term concentrationary refers to a system that has its roots in a specific historical period, but whose mechanism extends beyond that moment in history. Pollock and Silverman explain that the concentrationary can be expanded to refer to biopolitical practices of systematic dehumanization and humiliation that are part and parcel of the historical experience of modernity.

Crucial here is their important clarification that within the concentrationary universe the inmates were not necessarily meant to be murdered immediately (the *Konzentrationslager* are to be distinguished from the *Todeslager*). Instead, they were subjected to experimental biopolitical practices dedicated to their gradual and systematic dehumanization:

the concentrationary plague is not simply confined to one place and one time but, now unleashed on the world, is a permanent presence shadowing modern life, and that memory (and art in general) must be invoked to show this permanent presence of the past haunting the present so that we can read its signs and counter its deformation of the human (2015, xv).

This argument can be further clarified when considering some of the films that they place under the rubric of “concentrationary cinema” – a type of cinema that connects the traumatic past with the present to reveal the persistence of the concentrationary mind-set. Apart from Resnais’ *Nuit et Brouillard* (*Night and the Fog*, 1956), which they deem as a paragon of the “genre”, some of their other case studies are Liliana Cavani’s *The Night Porter* (1974) and Michael Haneke’s *Funny Games* (1997). In these films the experience of the camps returns as a haunted imaginary and sadistic violence that permeates spaces that we might not even associate with these gruesome historical experiences. As a result, the aim of concentrationary cinema is to resist the liberal doxa that the mechanisms of dehumanization and humiliation that were utilized in the camps are absent from post-war democracies.⁵

These arguments provide an apposite context for rethinking Fassbinder’s play and its film adaptation. Both the play and the film allude to the persistence of the concentrationary mindset as implied by the strategies of adaptability and survival that people on the margins develop. Survival in a repressive environment implies the compromise of one’s ethical principles; to survive in a concentrationary universe entails a capacity to reproduce the violence one suffers to those who are weaker. One recalls Primo Levi’s experiences from the camps as narrated in *Survival in Auschwitz*, where he explains that the desire for survival diminished the *Häftlinge*’s ability to form relationships of solidarity and mutual respect. The longing for

survival makes the individuals capable of desiring the very things that they should find intolerable; fascist attitudes can, therefore, spread to the victims as well. These points have a direct bearing on my argument that in *Shadow of Angels*, the lack of solidarity on the part of the oppressed is an indicator of the persistence of the concentrationary mindset in the present. It is a defining characteristic of an unequal social environment that forces subjects of oppression to adapt to humiliating structures.

For instance, when the Jew first appears in the diegetic universe and introduces himself to Lily, one of his first lines is: “I am not like the other Jews.” He is accompanied by two thugs the Little Prince (Ulli Lommel) and the Dwarf (Jean-Claude Dreyfuss); in his conversation with Lily the Jew keeps on making humiliating remarks about his thugs and they reciprocate. As the Jew and Lily enter the former’s car, the Dwarf tells her: “he is repulsive girl, but he pays well and his virility is enviable.” The Jew on his part tries to justify his unethical business tactics and exonerate himself of any guilt. Suddenly, an expressionist visual that breaks any sense of diegetic continuity intrudes in the narrative universe. Within a semi-lit room, which recalls a brothel iconography, we see the Dwarf naked placed at the center of the shot, while in the left side of the frame a naked woman sings an aria. This is another key example of cinematic excess concerned with mood/atmosphere rather than diegetic continuity and unity. The scene turns into a semi-independent interlude, which is not subordinated to narrative causality. In his study of cinematic *Stimmung* (mood), Robert Sinnerbrink has aptly explained how mood can either serve a supporting role within the cinematic universe, that is, it can intensify narrative tensions and emotions, or it can instead have a meta-cinematic role that invites the audience to consider questions of aesthetics, ethics, and politics. Quasi-autonomous mood sequences, create uncanny images and sounds “expressive of a multitude of affective and reflective dimensions” (2012, 162).

The abovementioned sequence can be seen in light of Sinnerbrink's comments as a broader meta-cinematic commentary on aesthetics and politics. The mise en scène and the lighting communicate a sense of audiovisual surplus, which recalls fascist theatricality, but also films that manipulated the appeal and sense of fascination generated by fascist aesthetic sensibilities; the tableau here seems to act as an intertextual reference to Luchino Visconti's *The Damned* (1969) and Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter*. The sequence activates an encounter between the present and the traumatic past that haunts it. This is a retroactive visual that disturbs neat chronological categories and points to the persistence of a disquieting experience that cannot be relegated to the past. The scene's lack of narrative function, its staginess, and its indirect reference to the camp universe reinforces the reading that *Shadow* cautions about the continuity of camp structures in the present.⁶

Militant Ethics and Dissensus

The film's subtle references to a diverse group of people who suffered during the fascist years – and some of them kept on facing discrimination in the post-war Germany – e.g. gays, immigrants, and sex-workers provides the historical context that enables us to think of the perpetuation of fascist attitudes in the post-war period. The play and the film engage explicitly with the parallels between fascist exclusionary and binary mechanisms and contemporary practices e.g. gentrification. Additionally, the lack of positive images of the oppressed disrupts conventional accounts of fascism as aberration and demonstrates – as per Deleuze's and Guattari's famous formulation – fascism's capacity to expand like a cancer and poison social relationships. It is also worth rethinking Fassbinder's suggestion that showing positive images of the underdogs is not necessarily a responsible manner of dealing with sensitive issues, since such an approach can make the audience assume that past histories of violence and material structures that produced them have been overcome.⁷

The analytic I am advocating in this article intends to make us think of cinematic ethics in much more complex ways and think of how cinema can point to collective structures of oppression without simply resorting to the binary of ethical/unethical characters. From this perspective, the timeliness, the urgency of re-reading the film and the play lies in urging us to think about ethics and cinema beyond virtue theoretical approaches that simply explore how films can produce moral examples or Levinasian ones that reduce ethics to one's duty to recognize an abstract other. The problem with both approaches is that they assume a somehow universalistic character and personalize conflicts which have a social dimension. Fassbinder's desire to reveal how oppressive structures can "contaminate" even vulnerable groups, which unconsciously accept them in order to survive or even fit in, has been influential on filmmakers such as Ulrich Seidl, Michael Haneke and Lars von Trier.

In Seidl's *Paradies: Liebe* (*Paradise Love*: 2012), we follow the story of a middle-aged overweight Austrian tourist visiting Kenya to meet young locals and have sex with them. The film's complexity lies in the fact that she and her friends on the one hand fetishize local black men, while Kenyan men take advantage of their need for companionship to ask them for money and presents. One is invited to go beyond a simplified understanding of ethics as individual responsibility and consider how social conditions force vulnerable individuals to reproduce abusive behavior or even stereotypes. Consider, for example, how the poor Kenyans in the film participate in perpetuating the stereotype of the virile black male. Similarly, in *Manderlay* (2005) von Trier explores how slaves in the USA could become complicit in their oppression; the aim here is not to criticize individual behavior, but reflect on the horror of slavery as an institution that could make oppressed people perpetuate their disadvantaged position as a means of surviving. All the same, in *Das Weisse Band* (*The White Ribbon*, 2009) Haneke explores questions of everyday abuse in a small village in North Germany on the eve of WWI.

The film brilliantly muses on how the abused – in this film children – can replicate abusive behavior to more vulnerable individuals.

In all these films, the filmmakers try to challenge ethical binaries in order to encourage the audience to think about oppression in dialectical ways. Vulnerable groups can also reproduce structures of oppression, because of their socially disadvantageous position. This is also the case in *Shadows of Angels* and in Fassbinder's original play, because although the anti-Semitic reading can be debunked through analysis, Schmid and Fassbinder play with anti-Semitic stereotypes that appear shocking and provoke the audience. One is not invited to reconfirm them, but to engage with them rather than ignore them and this in itself is a gesture of aesthetic resistance, because it goes beyond liberal aesthetics of positive representation.⁸ This is the reason why I argue that the film's (and obviously the play's) daring confrontation with such a complex subject matter can be best subsumed under the banner of what Badiou calls militant ethics. Badiou takes issue with the contemporary turn to ethics as articulated in theoretical paradigms predominant in the Anglophone University, such as Cultural Studies and studies in postcolonialism. The crux of his argument is that the turn to ethics presupposes that liberal democracy is the only social structure that can prevent the repeatability of past horrors. Ethical ideology is founded on the premise that evil is something definite and pre-existing and it is the ethical duty of liberal thinking to protect those (minorities) who tend to be more susceptible to discrimination and harassment. For Badiou, there is something inherently apolitical behind such an approach; liberal ethics speak from a position of superior power, since the Western democracies are the ones to define the universal ethical consensus. The contradiction that arises is that they are the ones responsible for a political history of violence that produces these divisions, which are rooted in concrete material conditions and not in prejudices as per the liberal rhetoric. This in turn suggests that any forms of "alterity" can be accepted so long as they integrate themselves to the existing order. The "Other" is accepted

provided that he/she becomes indistinguishable from the “universal individual,” namely the Western one. Consider for instance the integration of the Rich Jew in Frankfurt as portrayed in Schmid’s film, which is founded on his capacity to execute the gentrification plans of an economic elite. His “otherness” is rendered innocuous because it simply sustains the dominant economic but also political and ideological order.

Setting as an example the Nazi atrocities and the horror of the Shoah, Badiou postulates that the advocates of ethics understand the Holocaust as the epitome of radical evil. In treating this historical event as a matter of abstract evil, ethical thought strives for a universalized consensus that prohibits any political understanding of the particularities of fascism. This dominant viewpoint prohibits an understanding of fascism as “a political sequence” and as the product of particular material forces and contradictions of Western modernity (2002, 65). In Badiou’s estimation, responding to Nazism through a universalized consensus that reduces it to a form of radical evil prevents us from noting different totalitarian symptoms in the present. His *raison d’être* is that reducing such a loaded political issue to a matter of ethics runs the risk of depoliticizing it and in doing so we are prevented from understanding other political contradictions taking place in the historical present: “by dint of seeing Hitlers everywhere we forget that he is dead, and that what is happening before our eyes is the creation of new singularities of Evil” (2002, 64). The key precept here is that responding ethically to political questions becomes a reductive approach, because past “radical evils” turn into a protective shield for the current state of things; as such, the historical experience of fascism and the horror of the camps are treated as ethical aberrations ignoring their political and historical context.

Therein resides Badiou’s fundamental critique of ethics. Abstract ethical ideology goes hand in hand with a moral reformism that inhibits any radical critique of the present. Badiou sets as an example the dominant human rights rhetoric whose principal standpoint is the refusal to understand humans as members of organizations, who can actively contribute to the

changing of their social circumstances. Instead, human rights legislation aims at stabilizing the status quo by means of minor modifications that can make life more tolerable, without however empowering those whom it purports to protect. As Benjamin Noys states, Badiou suggests that for the partisans of the ethics “the Other must stay as Other to receive our pity” (2003, 125).⁹ As such, ethics sits at the antipodes with theoretical and revolutionary Marxism because it fails to envisage an alternative to the status quo and energize the underprivileged. Consensual ethics, therefore, produces a uniformity of thinking that impedes the rise of new social movements. For this reason, Badiou concludes that the understanding of the Holocaust as the paragon of extreme Evil and the cultivation of a victim ideology aim to silence any critique of the structural flaws of liberal democracy.

My claim, therefore, is that *Shadow of Angels* can be seen under the rubric of what Badiou calls militant ethics whose purchase lies precisely in their capacity to produce conflict rather than harmony: “Contrary to consensual ethics, which tries to avoid divisions, the ethic of truths is always more or less militant, combative” (2002, 75). Schmid’s adaptation of Fassbinder’s play performs the gesture of dissensus, since it aspires to explore how a taboo subject operates as a means of hindering criticism of the insidious social structures of the time. Moreover, the film highlights the material forces that perpetuate the logic of the camps in the present by forcing those who are prone to victimization to adapt to degrading social circumstances. In doing so, Schmid and Fassbinder evade the canonical ethical tendency to create a pseudo-sense of communal coherence. Badiou cautions that the creation of homogeneous and universal ethical values goes hand in hand with the desire to create a unified community, something that is politically dubious, since the manufacturing of homogeneous communities is premised upon mechanisms of exclusion; those who do not fit in are marginalized. One is tempted to imagine here the imminent fate of those underprivileged inhabitants of the *Westend* in Fassbinder’s play, the sex workers, the working-class, the

immigrants, and the gay people, who were to be excluded from their district in the name of economic development, which is purportedly in service of community wellbeing. Communities, however, are far from being fixed and, as Badiou suggests any attempt to name a community and create a consensus tends to conceal the conflicting tendencies within it. As he says, “every emancipatory project” aspires “to put an end to consensus” to reveal suppressed political conflicts (Ibid, 32).

Badiou’s point chimes neatly with Jacques Rancière’s comments on dissensus as a political gesture that intends to reveal the divisions within a community. For Rancière, this is also the task of contemporary critical art that does not predetermine its own effects but produces conflicts and divides the audience. Art breaks with the commonsensical by showing a non-uniform image of the community. Whereas the ethical consensus is grounded in an unambiguous understanding of reality and the production of a collective unitary subject – and here Rancière’s criticism is certainly applicable to cognitivist approaches to ethics and representation – political art fragments reality and refutes consensual hermeneutical harmony. From this perspective, political art is not concerned with communicating a message and offering an unequivocal method of interpreting the world; it aspires to generate debate and produce divisions within the community. It is for this reason that, like Badiou, Rancière is suspicious of artistic treatments of the Shoah and efforts to build a political community by commemorating it. Much of the artistic output and political debates in the post-1989 world have lost their radicalism and to an extent this is to be attributed to the use of the Shoah as a means of building a liberal consensus. As Solange M. Guénoun explains, “for Rancière, as a theoretician of dissensual democracy, the Shoah is, first and foremost, an object of a dominant consensual discourse that blocks the political horizon, a depoliticizing, demobilizing, inhibiting fiction of political inventiveness and an artistic usurper of insurrectional forces” (2009, 184). The key contradiction that arises is that the production of artworks that commemorate the

Shoah – a political subject per se – has not made citizens politically engaged and alert, but has led to the depoliticization of a vast amount of contemporary art and the public sphere.

A key premise of Rancière's argument is that consensus impedes artistic development and political imagination. Both in art and politics dissensus is committed to denaturalizing any pre-existing preconceptions regarding what can be considered as normal by attempting to bring into the field of vision something that has been suppressed. In this context, unlike the historical avant-garde that at times resorted to practices of agitation, contemporary political art does not predict its own effects or guide the audience to a specific hermeneutical response.¹⁰ As he says,

For critical art is not so much a type of art that reveals the forms and contradictions of domination as it is an art that questions its own limits and powers, that refuses to anticipate its own effects. This is why perhaps one of the most interesting contributions to the framing of a new landscape of the sensible has been made by forms of art that accept their insufficiency (2015, 149).¹¹

Rancière's understanding of dissensus and critical art find deep resonances in *Shadow of Angels*. The stereotype of the Rich Jew and the film's implication that the concentrationary mind-set is still persistent refuse to pacify the historical anxieties of the time. Considering *Shadow of Angels* through Rancière's understanding of critical art, it is legitimate to suggest that the film's political impact is the product of its refusal to articulate a clear-cut message that can unify the audience. Conversely, its political incorrectness is not a matter of bigotry, but of a desire to produce disagreement, which is a necessary precondition for any fruitful engagement with politics and aesthetics. Disagreement is the sine qua non of socially engaged art, which is not interested in preaching to the converted, but in creating a space for debate through its formal complexity and interpretative indeterminacy. As James Harvey cogently argues, for the French philosopher, "political art should not explain to its spectator, but, rather, should provide a space of engagement for the spectator to occupy and participate" (2018, 7).

Taking a cue from Rancière, I suggest that the presence of the Jew in the film becomes a different form of sensory disruption, refusing to accommodate a unified image of post-war

Germany. The Jew acts as a retroactive reminder of the country's history of violence, while it simultaneously disrupts its complacency in the light of its post-War economic development. Thomas Elsaesser notes that along with Alexander Kluge's film *Abschied von gestern* (*Yesterday Girl*, 1966), *Shadow of Angels* and later Peter Lilienthal's *David* (1979), were the only post-war films with a Jew as a central character (see Elsaesser 2013,262) ; one can certainly notice here how other films of the time presented a different form of communal pseudo-coherence by refusing to represent what was still a taboo issue. The absence of the figure of the Jew was not only a means of evading guilt, but also of cultivating a new sense of communal homogeneity; this in turn shows the persistence of past attempts to name a community (a national one) through mechanisms of exclusion. But there is also something more provocative in Schmid's film, which is that the reproduction of the stereotype of the Rich Jew invites one to consider how democratic notions of inclusiveness are reliant on different forms of exclusion: those who disrupt the sense of communal homogeneity are expected to adjust themselves to the image projected on them by society. In doing so, they reconfirm their status as "others" and "aliens;" in other words, their inclusion is a novel, subtle form of discrimination. Consequently, strategies of survival and adaptability that were the practice of the concentrationary universe are still relevant and applicable in the present.

In bringing this essay to a close, I would like to point out that both the reception of the play and the film demonstrate that artistic dissensus is a strategy deployed by artworks that refuse to railroad the audience to a uniform response and interpretation; films that perform the gesture of dissensus are grounded in a militant understanding of ethics. They do not aspire to produce harmony based upon allegedly universal values; they generate productive and unresolved tensions that divide a community and force it to engage with histories of violence hurt and persist in the present. Schmid's adaptation of Fassbinder's provocative play is compatible with Badiou's critique of ethics and Rancière's call for a critical art that produces

new “forms of enunciation” (2010, 141).¹² For the film resists the production of a pseudo-communal coherence and rather than celebrate redemption and historical progress points to the continuing threat of totalitarianism which derives from the persistence of the concentrationary mind-set and universe. In refusing a redemptive narrative of therapeutic healing of the past traumas, the play and the film visualize certain problematic structures in the present. The ethical significance of this approach is that it seeks to expand the debate on complex historical legacies and identify the persistence of past histories of violence in the present.

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¹ For more on the historical context see François Dosse's *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 399-400.

² There are certainly theoretical affinities between Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben here. For Agamben famously suggested that the experience of the camps was not an abnormality in modern history; instead liberal democracies rely on biopolitical practices that prevalent in the

camp universe. The implication of Agamben's thesis is that fascism is not an exception – not the fascism of the personality cult and the mass rallies – but the fascism of the biopolitical organisation of social and spatial relationships within the liberal democracy. This creates oppressive structures that produce fear and fear can make individuals acquiesce to repressive conditions. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 181-182.

³ Diner offers a good summary of the historical context. As he says, “Because the Frankfurt area experienced a building boom at this time, and banks were willing to lend under conditions that attracted investors to construction and real estate, distortions were inevitable. This was especially the case when persons of Jewish faith and origin who still valued their provisionality and transience in Germany became active in a sector of the economy that is based on long-term social interaction. Such distortions were the consequence of the lax approval policies required to modernize the city and the almost trivial barriers to bank loans. These factors created unprecedented pressures that heated up the market, pressures to which Jewish developers, who were new to the sector, also succumbed. But they desired neither new visibility nor the social conflict that this situation brought with it, nor were they really prepared to deal with it.” Diner, “Banished: Jews in Germany After the Holocaust”, in *A History of Jews in Germany Since 1945: Politics, Culture, and Society*, edited by Michael Brenner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 44.

⁴ Henry A Giroux, Brad Evans, *Disposable futures: The Seduction of Violence in the Age of Spectacle* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2015), Kindle-book, npg.

⁵ See Pollock's Chapter “Redemption or Transformation: Blasphemy and the Concentrationary Imaginary in Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* (1974)”, in *Concentrationary Imaginaries: Tracing Totalitarian Violence in Popular Culture*, 121-160. See also Silverman's Chapter “Haneke and the Camps” in the same book, 187-200.

⁶ Schmid's staging throughout the film makes use of Fassbinderian cinematic motifs. Fassbinder has commented on the aesthetic appeal of the fascist *mise en scène* which he manipulated in many of his films including *Lili Marleen* (1981) and his comments tally with Susan Sontag's well-known commentary on "fascinating fascism". As Fassbinder says, "I think it's possible to say something about National Socialism, which is specifically German, simply by showing what was appealing about it. The parades had a certain aesthetic of their own that appealed to people. The swastika had a certain appeal....But for me the Third Reich wasn't just an "accident." It was a predictable development in German history. But its "impact" had a great deal to do with the aesthetics of staging." Fassbinder, *The Anarchy of the Imagination: Interviews, Essays, Notes*, edited by Michael Töteberg, Leo A Lensing (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 66.

⁷ Responding to the controversies caused by the play, Heiner Müller suggested that there is a danger when a democracy tries to repress uncomfortable feelings and to treat aspects of its past as taboo. See Denis Calandra, "Politicised theatre: the case of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Garbage, the City and Death*." *Modern Drama* 31, no 3 (1988): 420-428.

Similarly, Fassbinder has explained that treating something as taboo can be a different form of discrimination. As he says, "That's the last taboo in Germany, this business with the Jews. And clinging to this taboo, in my opinion, isn't a way of defending the Jews but a further form of discrimination. It stands to reason that when you create a taboo you get a backlash. If you're not allowed to talk about them, that simply means that someday they'll be the scapegoats again. I can't explain it any other way." Fassbinder, *The Anarchy of the Imagination*, 19.

Thomas Elsaesser captures this brilliantly and as he says, "the good Jew, the positive identification figure in a fiction film easily becomes a screen of projection that compensates either latent aggression or unacknowledged guilt-feelings. It was a trap that Fassbinder consistently wanted to expose in his films (also with respect to other minorities: foreign

workers, homosexuals) and that Henryk M. Broder once satirized in his (imaginary) West German citizen who says: “If I take the trouble to be a philo-Semite, the least I can expect is that the Jews know to behave themselves.” Thomas Elsaesser, *German Cinema: Terror and Trauma: Cultural Memory Since 1945* (London: Routledge, 2014), 99.

⁸ Commenting on Spike Lee’s *Bamboozled* (2002), a film that intentionally plays with the history of racial stereotypes in Hollywood and the television industry, W.J.T Mitchell aptly explains that banning stereotypical images and replacing them with benign ones is not the correct aesthetic/political response, because it aims to neutralize or even ignore the contradictions that led to their genesis. See WJT. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 298.

⁹ Benjamin Noys, “The Provocations of Alain Badiou,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 12, no 1, (2003): 125.

¹⁰ Rancière’s point corresponds with his understanding of a post-Brechtian aesthetic, whose dialectical contradictions produce “unresolved tensions” instead of anticipating the answers to the questions they pose. See Rancière, *The Intervals of Cinema*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 2014), 104. Importantly, Fassbinder has been discussed as a post-Brechtian playwright and director. See Barnett, 174, 251.

Abraham Geil has excellently clarified Rancière’s view that art that produces calculable effects tends to be consensual in the sense that it predetermines a certain response and interpretation. Geil, “The Spectator Without Qualities”. *Rancière and Film*, ed. Paul Bowman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 53-82.

¹¹ Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 149.

¹² Rancière, *Dissensus*, 141.