Chapter 12

Romy Schneider, *La passante du Sans-Souci*

Discourses of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, Feminism, and Myth

Nina Zimnik

. . . puisque le mythe est une parole, tout peut être mythe, qui est justifiable d'un discours.

Roland Barthes, "Le Mythe, aujourd'hui."

Myths, Roland Barthes, wrote in the decidedly secular world of the late 1950s, are ways people make sense of reality. Austrians, Germans, and French have recently been invited to explore a new one, "the Romy Schneider myth." On September 23, 1998, the actress would have turned sixty, and the public took note. Many art houses in Germany (*Kommunale Kinos*) screened retrospectives of her work, TV stations aired her famous films, and, in early 2000, the readers of the French newspaper *Le Parisien* together with TV channel *La Cinquième* elected her actress of the century—before Marilyn Monroe, Catherine Deneuve, and Brigitte Bardot. Lesbian feminist icon Alice Schwarzer published a Schneider biography subtitled *Mythos und Leben* (*Myth and Life*),[1] the usual coffee table and "remembering Romy" books came out, and even an exhibition, echoing the expectations of the curators who called it a "traveling exhibition," started touring in Vienna in 1998.

As any star, Romy Schneider answers to a multitude of dreams and desires—identification figure for the women's movement in the 1970s, draw for francophile art house clientele in Germany, gay men's icon, to name only a few. Yet, her last film could be seen as paradigmatic for the contemporary discursive positionings of the star in Germany, *La passante du Sans-Souci* directed by Jacques Rouffio (1982). Playing both in the Berlin of the 1930s and the Paris of the 1980s, the film condenses some

of the topoi with which either Schneider herself or her biographers portray the vagaries and vicissitudes of her life and displaces them onto the heroine: emigration from Germany to France, premature tragic death, abusive relationships and unhappy love, financial problems, alcohol and substance abuse etc., intertwining individual decisions and fate with the greater political picture, that is, with National Socialism and its legacy. This article investigates representations of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming-to-terms-with-the-past, notably with National Socialism) set forth by the film and of feminism in popular discourses on Schneider.

When Schneider died of cardiac arrest at age forty-two in her Paris apartment, she had appeared in sixty films and worked with such acclaimed directors as Claude Chabrol, Luchino Visconti, and Orson Welles. But most often, Schneider is remembered for her cinematic *pas de deux* with Claude Sautet. Her work generally divides into two periods: critics like to contrast the three *Sissi* films and the few films surrounding them with her later work in France, work that is considered "serious"; and in this valuation of the French tradition, her stay in Hollywood comes off as an uneventful escapade, a misfit. To be precise: The early work in Germany is often considered reactionary. In the remake of *Mädchen in Uniform* (1958), for instance, Schneider as the lesbian student, takes the hand of the headmistress, a gesture that signifies an acceptance on the part of the younger generation of the Fascist powers represented by the headmistress—a sequence that ideologically resituates the anti-Fascist original significantly. Playing empress Sissi, Schneider ascended to early stardom as a teenager. The *Sissi* series is notorious because it offered the German public of the 1950s a stockhouse of redemptive fantasies: Sissi consolidates the Austrian-Hungarian empire—albeit to the German national anthem. For the German fans of the 1950s then, her move to Paris to live with her "gaulle cock" boyfriend, Alain Delon, presented a veritable scandal, "treason." Since Schneider developed a political consciousness in the wake of the 1960s and denounced German fascism, she became the star of a younger generation, of the children of the NS perpetrators, who didn't feel like extending their hands to criminals. The press followed her private life closely, and especially women were impressed with her: just as in the movies where Schneider played strong, emotional characters who fought for their personal fulfillment, Schneider led an often unconventional

(love) life. Moreover, Schneider inserted herself into the German women's movement at a crucial point. In 1971, she supported the prochoice activities launched by *Stern* magazine, where women confessed publicly to having had an abortion (*Ich habe abgetrieben* [*Stern*, June 6, 1971]). Thus, from a German vantage point, the Schneider revival tends to imply a reconsideration of the sociohistorical coordinates of Schneider's life as a woman as well as a German, to be more precise as a German woman who "emigrated" to France to come into her own—and who failed miserably.

In *La passante du Sans-Souci*, Schneider plays Elsa Wiener, a gentile Berlin woman married to Michel, a gentile German publisher, during the Third Reich. The story starts when they take in Max Baumstein, a Jewish boy who, after a group of Nazis killed his father and beat him up, suffers from a stiff leg. Eventually, Elsa flees with Max from Berlin to Paris where she works as a cabaret entertainer at *Le Rajah*. On the way to Paris, her husband is caught by the Gestapo and gets five years in a concentration camp. In order to free him, Elsa spends the night with a prominent regular of *Le Rajah*, a local Parisian Gestapo officer called Ruppert von Legaart (played by Mathieu Carrière as a melancholic Nazi dandy). Legaart promises her Michel's freedom in return for her favors but has them both killed on the spot as it were, namely, in front of the café Sans-Souci, when Michel finally arrives in Paris. This diegesis is framed by a contemporary, that is, early 1980s setting: Max (Michel Piccoli) is now a man in his fifties and loves his wife Lina, a woman who looks like Elsa (Schneider plays a double role). "*Inhaber einer der bedeutensten Schweizer Versicherungen*" (owner of one of the most important Swiss insurance agencies), Max is also president of "Solidarité Internationale," a leftist organization that he founded. Through his work on behalf of a Paraguayan prisoner and victim of torture, he inadvertently runs into Ruppert von Legaart again who now calls himself Federico Lego and is Paraguay's ambassador to France. Max kills him and has to stand trial, the perspective from which most of the film's flashbacks start. He gets five years probation. Shortly before the end of the film, during a sequence when Max and Lina take a break at the Sans-Souci after his release from prison, a text on a horizontal band runs through the middle of the screen, telling the viewer that Max and Lina were killed six months after this meeting:

> *Sechs Monate später wurden Max und Lina Baumstein im Erdgeschoss ihres Hauses erschlagen. . . . Zu dem Attentat hat sich nie jemand bekannt. . . . Die Attentäter wurden niemals identifiziert. . . . Sechs Monate später wurden Max und Lina Baumstein im Erdgeschoss ihres Hauses erschlagen.* [Six months later, Max and Lina Baumstein were beaten to death on the first floor of their house . . . the assassins were never identified . . . Six months later, Max and Lina Baumstein were beaten to death on the first floor of their house . . .] The end

As the credits state, the film is based on the 1936 novel *La Passante du Sans-Souci* by Joseph Kessel, *Académie Française*, an author who also wrote the book that Buñuel turned into his famous *Belle de Jour* (the title role went to Catherine Deneuve after Schneider had turned it down). Joseph Kessel's text is a typical encountering the whore story in the tradition of the nineteenth-century French novel. While getting drunk at one of the places he frequents, the café Sans-Souci, the narrator, a writer, develops an obsession with *la passante*, an enigmatic woman whom he first spots through the foggy window panes of the Sans-Souci. He ends up meeting *la passante*, that is, Elsa Wiener, a number of times. Like later in the film, Elsa had to flee Germany because of Michel's work, takes Max with her to Paris, and tries to free her husband from the camp etc. The novel chronicles her decline into prostitution and drugs, tying, as the opening paragraphs already indicate in their poignant use of "*la vitre embuée*" (foggy window pane) onto which "*une très vague cendre crépusculaire*" (a very vague crepuscular ash), [11] falls when she walks by, the (already Baudelairian) themes of subjectivity and reflection as well as distance and proximity to decay.

In general, Kessel paints Elsa's life in much darker colors than Rouffio did. Rouffio also added the frame that extends Kessel's story into the Paris of the 1980s and clearly focuses the diegesis onto the characters' encounter with fascism. To that end, Kessel's story itself was changed. In 1936, Elsa and Michel Wiener are not assassinated by her Nazi lover. Michel continues his successful career in publishing, and Elsa dies a suicidal death because her husband ceases to love her, that is, at the moment when he sees that her beauty had faded during the relentless fight for his life. Further, the Legaart character is more pronounced. While Kessel describes Ruppert von Legaart as "*maniaque,*" "*sadique*" (202), and "[*c*]*ocaïnomane par accès*" (207)—characteristics

that might also sketch Rouffio's Legaart — , Kessel's Legaart is physically repulsive. In the novel, Legaart is entirely devoid of the master ingredient of that "fascinating fascism" whose "seduction is beauty" (Sontag 1981, 105), an air that Mathieu Carrière sets forth skillfully. And although Rouffio refrains from details of their fatal night, his Legaart imparts an act on Elsa that, as Susan Sontag would put it, is being "situated on the furthest reach of the sexual experience: when sex becomes most purely sexual, that is, severed from personhood, from relationships, from love" (105), that is, tied in with the psychology of sadomasochism.—For the literary French consciousness of the mid-1930s, it was obviously still possible to entertain certain fancies about life in a concentration camp. In the novel, the camp actually has a ward where patients enjoy some form of medical care; the camp doctor lets Michel go because he is sick. And the camp has a functioning, honest banking system where Elsa can send money to support her ailing husband—the reason why Elsa prostitutes herself shamelessly which in turn, makes her loose her beauty and fall prey to alcohol and drugs.[2]

Such stories were hardly plausible forty-six years later. Whereas Kessel's narrative unfolds around the relations the "I" entertains with "*la passante du Sans-Souci*", namely, Elsa, the film drops this perspective entirely. The Sans-Souci is now merely an accidental place where the Wieners get assassinated, and, most important, the film an account of Max's first-person flashbacks and his life in the 1980s. Key is that Rouffio adds a character to the script, namely, Elsa's friend, Charlotte, a woman who is first her colleague at *Le Rajah*, and, as the viewer learns during the court hearings a good fifty years later, ends up working for forty years as a *Schlepper* (prostitute) at Place Pigalle. It was Charlotte who, in 1945, after she herself had been liberated from a camp, attached a commemorative table to the outside wall of the Sans-Souci. Shown briefly during the last sequence—except for the names and the word *allemands*, one cannot read it though—the table replaces the tomb stone that, as a hoary Charlotte recounts on the witness stand during Max's trial, French Nazi collaborators didn't grant the victims.

Charlotte's archival prosthesis for memory, defended by Max's act of murder and endangered by hate crime half a century later, presents the backdrop for Rouffio's last sequence, a monologue where Max passionately affirms his love for Lina. In this sequence, Delerue's film music underlines that indifference was killed at the Sans-Souci (*on a tué*

l'indifférence . . . , are the lyrics that lead into the credits). The last words of the film thus celebrate the resistance of Charlotte who doesn't just have a heart of gold but also a good deal of *chutzpah.* First a victim of the Nazis, then, as a prostitute, disenfranchised by patriarchal structures of desire, Charlotte does, however, live to see some form of justice: Legaart's death, and the respect of Frau Präsidentin, the female prosecutor of the case, and the bravos in the courtroom applauding both her final statement and Max's deed "*Meist ist es so, daß diese Schweine wohlbehütet im Bett sterben. Diesmal hat's einen erwischt. Einen Scheißkerl weniger—das erlebt man besonders gern!*" [Usually, pigs like him [Legaart, N.Z.] die in the comfort of their bed. This time, someone got caught. One asshole less—one likes to see that!]. Extending the theme of mourning and remembering to real life, Schneider dedicated *La Passante* to "David and his father" in the credits, that is, to her son who had a fatal accident in 1981 and to her first husband, the German Jewish stage actor and director Harry Meyen, a camp survivor who committed suicide in 1979.

The point of the film is, of course, political and pedagogical: the deaths of Lina and Max show that Fascist powers continue to threaten humanity. Physically represented in the character of Legaart, the enemy remains the same; and vice versa, there is a continuity between old and new "anti-Fascist" causes. Even if the old Nazis aren't personally responsible for all the injustice and political brutality in this world, they are in spirit. At the end of the film, a respectable looking young man spits in Elsa's face and explains: " *Das war für deinen Juden, du Schlampe*" [That's for the Jew, you slut]. Thus, when *Solidarité Internationale* fights "*contre la repression and pour la défense des libertés*" [against repression and for the defense of liberties], Max's anti-Fascist struggle is linked to the gamut of leftist causes popular in France when Rouffio shot his film; support for victims of torture in Latin America "especially in Chile, Bolivia and Paraguay"; imprisoned workers "in Persia, Turkey and other countries"; and IRA prisoners who should be granted the status of "political prisoners."

However, precisely this last sequence where Max and Lina meet at the Sans-Souci was significantly altered when the film was shown on German TV, *Bayrischer Rundfunk*, on December 15, 1999. Cut out from the shot were the frames with the text band that informed the viewer about Max and Lina's imminent deaths. The programmers also omitted

the frames of the bartender of the Sans-Souci who asks to shake Max' hand to congratulate him on his courageous deed, thus diminishing the anti-Fascist community and also reducing the potential approval of the masses of murder. *Bayrischer Rundfunk* went to even greater pedagogical length when it edited out the murder of Max and Lina. The result is a happy ending, affirming the resurrection of Elsa as Lina and uniting the old fighters with the next generation, that is, in the moving court scenes when Max, Charlotte, and Maurice meet again after fifty years (Maurice was Elsa's admirer who had taken in Max after her death).[3]

In short, the recent TV version is a classical redemption fantasy. Or, as Walter Benjamin explains in his "Theses on History":

> The kind of happiness that could arouse envy in us exist only in the air we have breathed, among people we could have talked to, women who could have given themselves to us. In other words, our image of the past is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption. The same applies to our view of the past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a [secret, not "temporal," NZ] index by which it is referred to redemption . . . ("Aren't we touched by a whiff of air that has surrounded our ancestors, too? Isn't there an echo of muted voices in the ones to whom we lend an ear? Don't the women we woo have sisters whom they didn't know?") There is a secret agreement between past generations and our present one. Our coming was expected on earth.[4]

Within the logic of the film, Lina is the miraculously actualized past conditional of Elsa, Max' dream come true, the woman who "could have given herself" to him, the "sister" whom Elsa didn't know. Typical for a *nouvelle vague* male desire, little Max loved Elsa with all his Oedipal longing—staged by Rouffio with the obligatory Freudian prop, the soft brown fur coat, and from the traditional voyeuristic perspective (Max watches Elsa undress when she comes home from the club).

Casting Schneider in a double role allows Rouffio to "present" history, thus wresting its victims out of the hands of the enemy although this enemy has not stopped winning, as Benjamin put it in Thesis VI. Lina, a virtual Elsa, guarantees that the past coexists with the present it once was. Through the continuity of the double role, Schneider reconciles memory, the picture of Elsa, with perception, Lina in the now, promising a repeatable integration of the past and, therefore, happiness

ever after—as long as she "lives"—which is the philosophical reason why the German programmers of *Bayrischer Rundfunk* had to elide her death. As long as Lina stays alive in film, lives ever after in the logic of the diegesis, the horror of the Holocaust is tamed, the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* successful.

Schneider was, of course, perfect for this double role. She herself was dogged by a split identity of which the art house public of the early-1980s was well aware. The clean German Sissi had metamorphosed into a sensuous French "*actrice*" and lived out her own dream of "*vivre libre à Paris*" (lyrics of Rouffio's *passante*), away from her oppressive family and, in retroactive assessment, mining the epitomic space of heterosexual love for the political and aesthetic freedom it harbored. Just as the viewer follows Elsa who, in Delerue's film music, "*s'enfuiait devant sa vie à Berlin . . .pour vivre libre à Paris*" [fled from her life in Berlin . . . in order to live freely in Paris], the media has offered ample material to follow Schneider's own, albeit significantly different, "*triste voyage*" (sad voyage) to France. On the cinematic level, Rouffio sustains the *Doppelgänger* motif through his constant use of mirrors and reflection devices, suggesting that both Elsa and Lina are not truly "one," neither two self-identical characters, nor simply one character that extends through time in two different emanations, but refer to each other through time and space. Both as Elsa and as Lina, Schneider is, for instance, regularly shot before a visually split background, for example, when Lina combs her hair in her hotel room at the beginning of the film, the vertical line of the bed in the background runs right through her torso, or after the fated night with Legaart, Elsa sits down in her hotel room, turning her back to a mirror that reflects her image twice.

Similarly, one should note the repeated use of open doors in the background of the frames, see for example, Legaart at Le Rajah or the shot after Elsa had saved Max's life: first Elsa hovers over Max drawing him off the street; after the cut, we see Lina in a medium shot in front of an open door as if in a Deleuzian movement-image, Elsa had just entered from an adjacent space. This contiguous unfolding of space suggests that time is "in joint," and sustains a logic and an ethics where the present has a door to the past, the future emerges out the past and can be forged in a linear manner, thus articulating a political hope that the film sets forth.

In addition, most of the doors in the film are glass doors. Already the establishing shot shows Schneider first behind a car window, second behind a glass door, the Paris airport entrance, then shows her opening it and rushing on to pick up Max. An interior decorating staple of 1970s architecture, glass is a medium that conveys both distance and proximity and while it is transparent, can also become a mirror and offer multidimensional perspectives. In the second shot (medium to medium close-up), one sees Max walking by a glass partition that reflects surrounding activities onto his face, turning Max into a carrier of time. Announced by his limp, events both inscribe themselves onto his body and, as if his body were the taint of the mirror that defies historical sublimation, it enters into new historical contexts, fraught, however, with the horrors of the past that clamored, loudly and belatedly, for attention in 1982 France. Immediately after shooting Lego, Max opens a glass door that had reflected the environment onto his face, making his way, as it were, through the images that kept inscribing themselves onto him. Elsa, in contrast, is barely visible after she slept with Legaart. When Legaart drops her off in front of her hotel, the viewer can hardly make her out in his car.

Perhaps Schneider's reemergence in the late 1990s also has traumatic functions, this time broadening the discussions of fascism by feminist perspectives and reinvigorating well-known feminist tenets, serving, not unlike Max's and Elsa's in Rouffio's film, as a Lacanian petit a that precipitates a wealth of symbolic activity. Whereas Schneider's Elsa escapes some of the sexist brunt of Kessel's novel, in real life, Schneider was—the well-known ingredient of the Schneider myth—not all that adept in that aspect. Alice Schwarzer starts her 1998 biography of Romy Schneider with a description of a talk show that took place in the fall of 1974 on German TV, in a chapter entitled "*Die Schöne und das Biest*" [Beauty and the Beast]. "Beauty" Schneider, actually meets two "beasts," that is, first Bubi Scholz, the boxing champion, who in 1984 killed his wife but was able, despite feminist protest, to leave prison after two years. The third talk show guest was Burkhard Driest. Driest, enfant terrible of the 1970s, was a law school drop-out who became famous after robbing a bank and writing a book about his prison experience (*Die Verrohung des Franz Blum*). Infatuated with his macho habitus, directors offered him theater and film roles, the first being that

of Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the Tennessee Williams character who rapes his aging, depressed sister-in-law. In 1979, Schwarzer relates, Driest was found guilty of violently raping the actress Monika Lundi. Now, despite the fact that Driest ignores her completely, Schneider tells him during the show: "*Sie gefallen mir. Sie gefallen mir sehr*" [I like you. I like you very much] tugging—the height of humiliation according to Schwarzer—at his elbow to obtain his attention (Schwarzer 1998, 16).[5] The point of Schwarzer's opening scenario seems to be that Schneider had a tendency to hook up with abusive macho men whom she tried to seduce, all the while locating herself or being located in a fantasy structure where when beauty only kissed the beast, love would be the answer. Thus, Schwarzer's description of the actress is reminiscent of certain feminist rhetorics that marked the beginning of the second women's movement, for example, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969; 1971 in German translation *Sexus und Herrschaft*). Versed in both Freud and Marx and weaned on a Frankfurt School criticism that short circuits psychoanalytic and Marxist discourses, texts like that present a woman who desires an abusive man as a masochist.

To comment further on the memorable encounter of 1974, Schwarzer takes recourse to an article that appeared in the *ZEIT*, Germany's leading intellectual weekly:

> *Sie [ZEIT, NZ] befand, daß in dieser Phase der ausklingenden, "Politisierung" und der beginnenden, "Innerlichkeit" hier, "das vom Leben geschlagene feinsinnige Bewußtsein laut mit dem grobschlächtigen, kriminellen Unterbewußtsein in uns allen" gesprochen und geradeheraus gesagt habe: "Sie gefallen mir sehr."* [The ZEIT noted that in the phase of the decline in "politicization" and the rise of "interiority," the "consciousness beaten up by life had talked with the brutish, criminal subconsciousness that is inside all of us," and this consciousness had said: "I like you very much."] (17).

According to the *ZEIT*, in the wake of the 1960s and their "politicization," Schneider and Driest define the thesis and antithesis of a dialectically dehiscing German interiority, notably a female consciousness "beaten up by life" that, as if none of its painful experiences and refined thought processes had left a trace of reason, attempts to flirt with the destructive drives of masculinity. In 1974, "consciousness beaten up by life," is, however, on TV to promote her latest film *Le train* (Granier-

Deferre 1973). Here, Schneider plays Anna Kupfer, a Jew who flees the Nazis, and is brutally murdered. In an interview with the *Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt*, Schneider declares:

> *Diese Rolle ist eine Rolle, der ich in all meine letzten Filmen am meisten zustimme. Das Mädchen handelt, denkt und liebt so, wie ich es auch tun würde. . . . Um ein Signal gegen die Nazi-Typen zu setzen, die in Deutschland noch immer etwas zu sagen haben, habe ich mitgemacht. . . . Ich identifiziere mich mit der Rolle.* [Out of all my latest films, this is the role I agree with the most. The girl acts, thinks and loves the way I do. . . . I accepted the role in order to set a sign against the Nazi guys who still have a say in Germany. . . . I identify with this role.] (Seydel 212, cites from the paper Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt, December 15, 1974.)

Le train marks a certain break in Schneider's career since it was the first of a series of films in which Schneider plays a Nazi victim. Eight years later, *La passante* was the last one, and since it is also the last film Schneider made before her death on May 29, 1982, and rife with personal innuendos, the fan literature often portrays it as her legacy. Partially echoing Schneider's own declaration a propos *Le train*, Schwarzer writes:

> *Romys Identifikation mit den Opfern der Elterngeneration hatte unstreitig politische Motive—aber nicht nur. Vermutlich spielte auch ein ganz persönliches Motiv eine Rolle: Nämlich die Abrechnung einer Frau mit einer Männergeneration, für die in Romys Fall in erster Linie ihr späterer Stiefvater, "Daddy" Blatzheim stand. Und das war wohl nicht nur bei Romy so. Wie oft eigentlich haben auch die "Terroristinnen" der 70er und 80er Jahre nicht nur die fremden alten Nazi-Bonzen, sondern auch den vertrauten Vater oder Onkel gemeint? Wie oft war es nicht nur der allgemeine politische Haß, sondern auch der ganz persönliche auf den Mann, der sie mißbraucht hatte?* [No doubt, Romy's identification with the victims of the parents' generation was motivated by politics but not solely. Probably, a personal motif played a role as well: Namely, a woman's revenge on the generation of men who was first and foremost represented by "Daddy" Blatzheim. And Romy was not the only one who felt that way. Just how often did the "terrorists" of the seventies and eighties mean not only the unknown old Nazi functionaries, but also the familiar fathers and uncles? How often was it not simply general political hatred but also the strictly personal hatred for the man who had abused them?] (37/38)

While the *ZEIT* offers a glimpse at an ethics and aesthetics of male-female relations that marked the prevailing ideology in the 1970s, Schwarzer's and also Schneider's comments situate them further. The *ZEIT* article picks up on an intersubjective matrix of violence where the refined woman desires a brutish, criminal man. Just as Schwarzer describes Schneider sitting next to Bubi Scholz, the context of the remarks that she cites from the *ZEIT*, that is, the opening of *Le train*, relates this particular form of heterosexual desire to German fascism, indicating that such desire is often played out explicitly before this specific historical background. In Schwarzer's opening scene, a submissive Schneider begs for the attention of a rapist-to-be, facing in fact as the singular in the title indicates, only one male "beast," split into the old Scholz and the young, leftist macho Driest. This assumption of an intricate relationship between patriarchy and fascism seems to be the underlying premise of Schwarzer's argument. A good twenty pages after the representation of the 1974 talk show, Schwarzer jumps from "a woman's revenge" on the (NS) generation of her father, pars pro toto to Schneider's stepfather, and to the most notorious women of the 1970s, the "terrorists," uniting Schneider and, presumably, RAF women like Ulrike Meinhof and Gudrun Ensslin in their interests.

Thus, according to Schwarzer, Schneider's work as an actress ties the personal to the political in very specific ways. Through certain semantic elisions, patriarchal abuse of the daughters merges with Nazi crimes, the Holocaust, and as an aside, leads directly into terrorist activity. Let us look at the structure of the second sentence of the above quote: "No doubt, Romy's identification with the victims of the parents' generation was motivated by politics but not solely" Schwarzer writes and continues: "Probably, a personal motive played a role as well: Namely, a woman taking revenge on the generation of men who was first and foremost represented by "Daddy" Blatzheim." How can "a woman's revenge" be a "personal" motive of Schneider? that is, a cause for Schneider's "identification with the victims of her parents' generation?" Is "a woman's revenge" really her own "motive," that "something within a person (as need, idea, organic state, or emotion) that incites him [*sic*] to action" as Webster's dictionary puts it? If we assume that the use of the personal pronoun and the stress on a "personal motive" runs counter to the impersonal generalization expressed in "a woman's revenge," the question imposes itself just whose "personal" motives Schwarzer "probably" "means" and what they are. Be it as it may, the "victims of the parents' generation" have been clearly defined. And, by her own account, Schneider "identified" with the Jews. To Schwarzer then, daughters who retaliate, who punish their "fathers and uncles," or "the man" for "abusing" them, daughters who hate from a "strictly personal" vantage point, actually become the executives of a restitutive world politics given that at least their "fathers and uncles" are likely to have many skeletons in the closet. In short, "daughter" and "victim" and "father" and "perpetrator" are but two foils who often intersect in one and the same intersubjective constellation.[6] But whereas the victims of the Holocaust were just that, a generation later German gentile daughters are in a position to fight back.

However problematic the gesture of paralleling women and Jews, and thus of genocide and incest for instance, is, it does characterize some of the intellectual activities of the 1970s where German fascism provided the soundboard for analyses of sexual identities and relations. Indicated by Schwarzer's account of the 1970s talk show, these relations, insofar as they involved abuse, were often metaphorized as sadomasochistic.[7] What is behind such confluences? Romy Schneider is the daughter of Magda Schneider and Wolf Albach-Retty, both acclaimed Nazi actors who entertained close relations with high politicians and the *Führer* himself. According to an interview that Schneider granted Schwarzer on December 12, 1976 (21), Schneider believed her mother even had an affair with Hitler (36). And "Daddy Blatzheim," Magda Schneider's second husband, seemed to have "black boots" on as Schwarzer's ambiguous remark about his relation to his stepdaughter whose career as Sissi he had managed, indicates: "[*M*]*ißbraucht?*" (abused?)—but exactly what kind of abuse did Schneider suffer? The question is confusing when we look further down in Schwarzer's text. Supposedly, Schneider confessed to Schwarzer during the interview, that when she was a young girl presumably, Blatzheim had wanted to sleep with her ["*Il a essayé de coucher avec moi. . . . Et pas seulement une fois*" (80)]. Even if Blatzheim didn't entertain exactly what legal terminology would call incestuous relations with his stepdaughter—a point only recent biographies bring up—the biographers agree on the "fact" that Blatzheim violated her in another respect: he embezzled Schneider's money or at least made serious mistakes investing it, notably the rather large fees she received for her Sissi films.

When tracing the discursive figurations surrounding this actress, one often has the feeling as if they provide a forum where Sylvia Plath's poetic imagination coalesces with Klaus Theweleit's cultural studies. It was Theweleit who in his famous 1977–78 study *Male Fantasies* looked at the writings (autobiographies, letters, postcards etc.) of German Freicorps men, "the" paradigmatic proto-Fascist and Fascist subjects, and subjected them to psychoanalytical readings. He concluded that these men had to "*entlebendigen*," to kill off "woman"—what she stands for metaphorically, for example, fluidity — in order to sustain their own subjectivity. In a second move, Theweleit interpreted anti-semitism as a collateral defense mechanism for the male German subject, thus formulating the influential theses that Fascist men seemed to feel the need for a mortification of the feminine and, since what is fascist about masculinity is its need to suppress femininity and the ensuing displacement of hatred onto third parties, this type of subjectivization was by no means limited to the specific historical time in question. In short, gender and fascism merge conceptually.[8]

This gesture does not only mark Schwarzer's text on Schneider. Margit Steenfatt, for instance, another one of Schneider's biographers, concludes à propos *La passante* in 1986:

> *Romy kommt mit dem Film ihrer Vergangenheit zwar näher, aber nicht aus ihrer Rolle heraus. Die Erkenntnis, dass Männer Gewalttäter und Frauen Opfer sind, kann keine Lösung sein und wird dem Faschismus in der Welt kein Ende bereiten. Romy hätte bei der Bearbeitung des Romans für den ersten und letzten Teil des Films andere Schlussfolgerungen ziehen können. Der Anteil der Frauen erschöpft sich heute ja nicht mehr darin, daß sie "Männer lieben" und "Verfolgte retten."* [Romy gets closer to her past with this film but doesn't leave her gender role. The insight that men are perpetrators of violence and women victims cannot be a solution and will not end fascism in this world. When Romy worked on the film script, she could have drawn other conclusions, especially for the first and the last part of the film. Today, the part of women is no longer limited to "loving men" and "saving refugees."] (119)

In short, the representations of Schneider are symptomatic of a plethora of feminist issues. Indicative of the prepoststructuralist (popular) discourses around 1986, Steenfatt would have liked to see a more

activist approach on part of the actress and bemoaned her lack of role-modeling. Women and their specific problems are "made,"—one is not born a woman but becomes one in the force field of society as Steenfatt's title "*Eine gemachte Frau*" in the adjective's double entendre on "successful" and "fabricated" suggests in a good Beauvoirian manner. Further, while "*Innerlichkeit*" and "*Politisierung*" form the two poles between which Schneider has been located over and over, in their application to Schneider, these categories themselves are seldom subject to sustained critique, even when they are cited with an attempt at irony, as in Schwarzer's opening scene. Coming from the eighteenth-century German tradition, "*Innerlichkeit*" characterized much of the artistic and intellectual endeavors of the German 1970s. As a discourse that foregrounded the search for "authenticity" during the 1970s, it was related to the topics of the women's movement, which, in turn, were the concerns of many of Schneider's films. Stereotypically, however, in those films, woman's desire is reduced to leaving her men and finding true love or fighting for the one and only true love, as in *La passante*, gestures that, at least, already irritated Steenfatt.[9]

The feminist take on Schneider has, of course, been furthered. The flyer to the travelling exhibition in Speyer (December 5, 1999 through March 26, 2000) reads:

> *Vergebens versucht Romy Schneider zeitlebens die Sehnsucht nach einem geordneten Familienleben, und ihr Streben nach Selbstverwirklichung in ihrer Arbeit als Schauspielerin zu verbinden. Sie scheitert an einem zentralen Konflikt der berufstätigen und erfolgreichen Frau im 20. Jahrhundert.* [All her life, Romy Schneider tried to combine her desire for an orderly family life and her strife for self-realization in her work as an actress. She failed because of the central conflict of the successful working woman in the twentieth century.] (Mythos Romy)

Rather, say, than casting Schneider in psychologizing scenarios of addiction and possibly analyzing her "failure" as a function of alcoholism and substance abuse—her intoxicated fits and self-destructive amorous relations were not only a cinematic fantasy—but also the contemporary marketing strategy of the actress is based on the universalization of problems that West German bourgeois women have been articulating since the beginning of the second women's movement: Women—another 1970s

expression that reverberates contemporaneous Marxist-feminist traditions—can't "realize" themselves in their work. Thanks to the general oppression by German patriarchy, one must assume, because Schneider was neither a victim of the decrepit state of government-funded child care, nor of the tamed German capitalism that, given its salary standards and intolerance of black labor, puts private child care out of reach for most bourgeois women relegates them to live in mommy tracks and traditional private structures. Yet, despite its particularity, the "central conflict" must have an appeal for the masses of German museum goers, decrying, qua Schneider as the identificatory nexus, the inadequate realization of women's rights in Germany. If myths, speaking with Roland Barthes, are ways to order reality semiologically and thus to make sense, the mythmaking and its uncritical reception indicate that people still identify with the representations of the sociohistorical coordinates of Schneider's life and the "central conflict."

In short, the plethora of texts on Schneider often raise the question whether her mystification isn't marked by feminist positions that have been differentiated. While pointing to deficiencies in the implementation of equal rights, as above, the authors tend to work on the assumption of a universal lot of women. Furthermore, some texts on Schneider abound with a retrograde or even hostile assessment of feminism. Let us hear Schneider's key biographer Michael Jürgs on the topic of the women's movement and feminism:

> *Was heute in den neunziger Jahren als Trend in der Frauenbewegung beschrieben wird,—daß die Frau selbst begehrt, auf die Männer zugeht und nicht mehr wartet, bis sie begeht wird—, hat Romy Schneider immer schon gelebt.* [The trend that is described by today's women's movement in the nineties—a woman desires, approaches men and doesn't wait anymore for them to desire her—was always already lived by Romy Schneider.] (1991, 199) *Sie war als Frau eigentlich viel moderner—nur eben zur falschen Zeit—und der herrschenden Moral weit voraus, vor allem der in Deutschland, als die meisten Theoretikerinnen des Feminismus, deren Bücher zwar erfolgreich sind, aber mit dem wahren Leben nichts zu tun haben.* [As a woman she was very modern—only at the wrong time—and was ahead of dominant morality, especially of the German morality of most feminist theoreticians whose books might be successful but bear no relation to real life.] (200)

Skipping the problematic implications of Schneider's libidinal strives that female authors have raised over and over, Jürgs uses Schneider for a quick sideswipe at "most feminist theoreticians," denigrating a putatively homogenous group, at once both mocking their "success" and, yet another atavism from the times of "authenticity," critiquing their supposed distance to "real life." Jürg's hostility toward feminist intellectual analysis is, however, characteristic for the literature on Schneider. This literature generally portrays her as intuitive but uneducated and graced with rather limited intellectual capacity, thus valuing her for something that the generic biographical attitude of superiority has to undermine at the same time that it, by being largely nonanalytical, restages the conflict it displaces onto its heroine.[10] Subsequently, the clichéd assessments of the actress raise the question whether part of her appeal consists in a melodramatic splitting of her persona into a somewhat dumb, yet sensitive and driven artist, in casting her as the artistic version of the woman-next-door who feels strongly but cannot articulate her problems or effect change efficiently.

While feminism certainly catalyzes the discourses about Schneider, they are also informed by other liberal and leftist positions. Mentioning the murder of Max and Lina, the director's cut doesn't limit itself to perspectives on history but offers a critique of both German and French attitudes in the early 1980s. Max's death obviously means fascism hasn't ceased plaguing France, a country that had hitherto cultivated the glory of its *résistance*. The film also rejects the francophile gaze of German leftists who—not unlike Schneider herself who had left the thicket of postwar Germany and gained entrance into Parisian high art circles—managed to ignore the details of French collaboration for a long time, buying instead into the presentation of France as an anti-Fascist refuge from German atrocities.[11]

To sum up, despite the fact that the ongoing making of the Schneider myth toys with her supposed lack of political insight, it is grounded in an assessment of the political importance of the actress' films and her life. Aside from the arguable figurations of "feminism" on part of people who seem hostile to it, the mythmaking process also suffers from incongruencies within feminist theory. Schneider has not only served as a feminine role model, but also as an icon for a "certain coming-to-terms-with-the-past" of her (German) generation, notably for women. It is a

discourse where the will to face National Socialism merges into a hatred of patriarchy, positioning women as victims of men who, insofar as they act as oppressors, are always already Fascist.

The latest representation, a TV screening of *La passante du Sans-Souci*, adds to the retrograde touch of the Schneider revival. Schneider's last film is often hailed as her legacy, because it condenses and displaces the paradigms that serve to articulate both the artist's life and the concerns that thread through her films. The TV screening of *La passante du Sans-Souci* in December 1999 revitalized the romantic francophile gaze of Germans who might have wanted to escape the problems of postwar Germany, dreaming instead perhaps, as Schneider and the passerby she plays, of "*vivre libre à Paris.*"

Notes

1. According to the weekly *Der Spiegel*, Alice Schwarzer's book was number thirteen in the category nonfiction of the German bestsellers January 11, 1999. http://ibiservice.com:80/best/shtml.

2. The narrator summarizes a letter from Michel to Elsa:

> *Il était malade. Surmenage. Cœur affaibli. . . . On l'avait expédié à l'infirmerie du camp. Mais la nourriture y était à peine meilleure que l'innommable bouillie que l' on servait aux internés. Le médecin lui avait accordé seulement deux semaines de repos—l'infirmerie était surpeuplée,—et conseillait la suralimentation. En même temps, il l'avait autorisé à recevoir, de l'extérieur, des colis ou une centaine de marks afin d'améliorer son ordinaire. C'était le secours que Michel . . . venait demander à Elsa.* [He was sick. Overworked. A weak heart. . . . He was sent off to the ward of the camp. But the food there was hardly better than the unbearable soup that they served to the interned. The doctor had granted him only two weeks of rest—the ward was overcrowded—and recommended extra food. At the same time, he had also allowed Michel to receive parcels from the outside or about hundred marks to improve his rations.] (113/114)

3. Holier than thou, the Bavarian version also attempted to make the film more leftist and did away with Rouffio's tenuous attempts at rendering Max more ambiguous. The cutters threw out the scene where a radical journalist uses Max's impressive capitalist achievements in order to question his true dedication to the leftist revolutionary causes he supports.

4. The translation of Benjamin's text "Über den Begriff der Geschichte" is problematic in places. Since a few words are missing from the English translation of Thesis II, I added them to the English text. Here's the German original:

> *Glück . . . gibt es nur in der Luft, die wir geatmet haben, mit Menschen, zu denen wir hätten reden, mit Frauen, die sich uns hätten geben können. Es schwingt, mit anderen Worten, in der Vorstellung des Glücks unveräußerlich die der Erlösung mit. Mit der Vorstellung von der Vergangenheit, welche die Geschichte zu ihrer Sache macht, verhält es sich ebenso. Die Vergangenheit führt einen heimlichen Index mit, durch den sie auf Erlösung verwiesen wird. Streift denn nicht uns selber ein Hauch der Luft, die um die Früheren gewesen ist? ist nicht in den Stimmen, denen wir unser Ohr schenken, ein Echo von nun verstummten? haben die Frauen, die wir umwerben, nicht Schwestern, die sie nicht mehr gekannt haben? Ist dem so, dann besteht eine geheime Verabredung zwischen den gewesenen Geschlechtern und unserem. Dann sind wir auf der Erde erwartet worden.* (693/4)

5. Dietmar Schönherr, the talk show host, recently published his own interpretation of Schneider's much maligned remarks: according to Schönherr, Schneider was first and foremost impressed by Driest's frank leftist statements and not by his virility (Steinbauer 1999, 145).

6. Schwarzer's text joins misogyny, fascism, and leftist struggles in a few places. In Germany, the second women's movement developed out of the anti-Fascist struggles of the 1960s when women noticed that even in these supposedly free and democratic fights, their position was still one of inferiority. Schwarzer also mentions that the terrorist Andreas Bader had earned a living as a pimp before founding the RAF (1998, 15).

7. . . . and also alarmed the public when they played themselves out in subcultural practices. "Today," Susan Sontag wrote in 1974, "it may be the Nazi past that people invoke, in the theatricalization of sexuality, because it is those images (rather than memories) from which they hope a reserve of sexual energy can be tapped" (1981, 104). Since it is no accident that the film ends with Max showering Lina with love in front of the commerative table at the Sans-Souci, we may well ask if politics don't serve to heat up romance for Rouffio.

8. In its modifications, differentiations, and displacements, Theweleit's argument has been floating through feminist theory for many years. Contemporary discussions of fascism and gender tend to be more differentiated, see, for instance, Sander Gilman's impressive study *Freud, Race, Gender*, (Princeton,

NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), where Gilman has demonstrated the identification of the Jew as effeminate.

9. Bereft of any poststructuralist sense of irony, the patterns of passion that Schneider's films set forth tend to smack of a certain melodramatic co-option that is, however dated its aestheticization might feel to contemporary feminist sensibilities, alive in some German contexts. When, for example, the well-known literary critic Ulrich Greiner wrote the ZEIT comment on the Lewinsky affair, he called his article "Der Präsident und das Mädchen," echoing one of Schneider's greatest cinematic successes, namely, *Der Kommissar und das Mädchen* (*Max et les ferrailleurs*, Claude Sautet, 1970). *Der Kommissar und das Mädchen* is a film where Michel Piccoli plays a lonely, maladapted police officer who foolishly throws away the happiness he found with "the girl," that is, Schneider as the hapless whore Lili, when he delivers her and her petty thief friends to the authorities.

10. The press material of the exhibition "Mythos Romy" puts it this way: "*Sie leidet unter der Vorstellung, nicht ausreichend Bildung zu besitzen, um mitreden zu können*" [She suffers from the idea that she isn't educated enough to enter discussions].

11. Robert Paxton's influential study *Vichy France: The Old Guard and the New Order* (New York: Knopf) came out in 1972. One of the important deconstructions of France's self-stylization as anti-Fascist was Marcel Ophul's film *Le chagrin et la pitié*, a film commissioned for French TV but not actually shown until 1981.

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Flyer of the exhibition *Mythos Romy. Verwandlungen, Filme und Leben der Romy Schneider*. Speyer Historisches Museum der Dompfalz (December 5, 1999 through March 26, 2000).