

**Why are films about Nazi Germany popular?**

L. M. Stallbaumer, PhD  
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### Axel Bangert's Interpretation

- Audiences are seduced and repelled by Nazism and Nazis
- Story lines and visual design fulfill those expectations
- Undermine individual agency of the Nazi by making them appear seduced by Hitler

*The Nazi Past in Contemporary German Film (2014), 17, 55*

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### Sabine Hake's Interpretation

**Fascist imaginary** – “fantasies about fascists (i.e. Nazis) by nonfascists – from the perspective of post-fascism”

We become spectators “to make sense of, and take pleasure in, a particular film.”

Fascism and Nazism are the opposite of democracy. Allows clear delineation between friend and enemy, good and evil, beautiful and ugly. While democracy is messy, it's better than the terror of Nazism.

*Screen Nazis: Cinema, History, and Democracy (2012), 11, 20-21, 23.*

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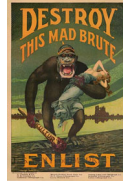
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## Stereotypical Nazis

- “villains, clichéd madmen and voiceless, faceless extras.”
- Portrayed with too much or too little masculinity, deviant sexuality, or dysfunctional personalities



WWI Poster



Sabine Hake, *Screen Nazis: Cinema, History, and Democracy* (2012), 21-23.

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## Stereotypical Nazis in Film

- Exhibited in gestures, movements, and facial expressions
- Who do they engage with? What does banter suggest?
- Party member – “short, pudgy, balding”; humiliates and mistreats others
- Nazi officer – “tall, lean, elegant, and sexually alluring”; honor bound, hides emotions behind social propriety
- Sympathizer – attracted to Nazism out of “alienation, isolation, and disempowerment”; evidence of being socially marginalized
- Collaborator – ethnic and/or sexual ambiguity; loner, yet knows everyone, vulnerable

Sabine Hake, *Screen Nazis: Cinema, History, and Democracy* (2012), 40-42.

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## Normalization?

- Germany learned from its past
- Liberal, democratic values
- Unselfconscious about Nazi past
- Nazi era was just a low period in the context of centuries
- Blurring victim categories

Axel Bangert, *The Nazi Past in Contemporary German Film* (2014), 136-137; Jeffrey Olick, “What does it mean to normalize the Past?” *Social Science History*, 22, no 4 (Winter 1998): 553, 565

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### Professor Ernst-Günter Schenck

Member of the Waffen-SS who earned an Iron Cross while serving on the Eastern Front.  
Lost his medical license after the war when he was "implicated in the conduct of 'frivolous' medical experiments on inmates in Mauthausen concentration camp."  
David Cesarani, "The Massaging of History," *The Guardian*, 7 April 2005



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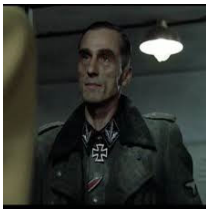
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### Waffen-SS General Wilhelm Mohnke

His unit massacred 80 British soldiers captured at Dunkirk and 60 Canadian troops who had surrendered at Normandy.  
David Cesarani, "The Massaging of History," *The Guardian*, 7 April 2005



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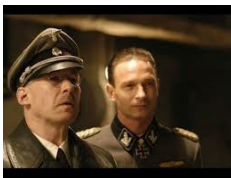
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### Waffen SS Hermann Fegelein

Under his command on the Eastern Front in 1941 responsible for the deaths of 17,000 civilians, largely drowning in the Pripet Marshes.  
Adjutant to Himmler, 1943-1945.



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## SS Reichsarzt Ernst-Robert Grawitz

- One of the doctors responsible for “euthanasia”
- Gave approval to researchers who wanted to use inmates of SS camps for experiments



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## Becoming a Nazi - Fictional Exploration

*The Captain (Der Hauptmann)* (2017; 2018 US Release)

“The Captain follows Willi Herold (Max Hubacher), a German army deserter who stumbles across an abandoned Nazi captain's uniform during the last, desperate weeks of the Third Reich. Newly emboldened by the allure of a suit that he stole only to stay warm, Willi discovers that many Germans will follow the leader, whosoever that happens to be. A parade of fresh atrocities follow in the self-declared captain's wake, and serve as a profound reminder of the consequences of social conformity and untrammelled political power. Simultaneously a historical docudrama, a tar-black comedy, and a sociological treatise, *The Captain* presents fascism as a pathetic pyramid scheme, a system to be gamed by the most unscrupulous and hollow-souled.”  
IMDB

Director and Writer: Robert Schwentke



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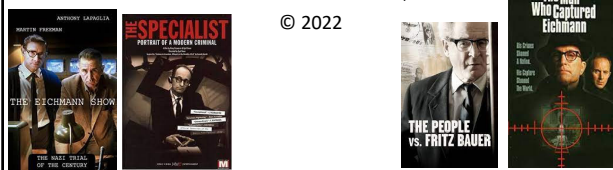
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## “Desk Murderers” Working Towards the Führer: Why so many movies about Eichmann?

L. M. Stallbaumer-Beishline, PhD

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- Head of the Jewish Affairs section of the RSHA
- Essential at the Wannsee Conference (January 1942)
- Coordinated deportations of Jews from all parts of Europe
- Determined how property of deported Jews would be seized and distributed
- Actively involved in the deportation of Hungarian Jews, 1944
- “only following orders”; “a little cog” in the machine
- Escaped to Argentina after the war
- Captured by Israeli Mossad agents in Argentina, May 1960
- Put on trial and executed by hanging in Jerusalem



**Adolf Eichmann**

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### Eichmann on Screen

- *Operation Finale* (2018)
- *Die Akte General* (2016) arrest
- *Eichmann Show* (2015) decision to film Eichmann Trial
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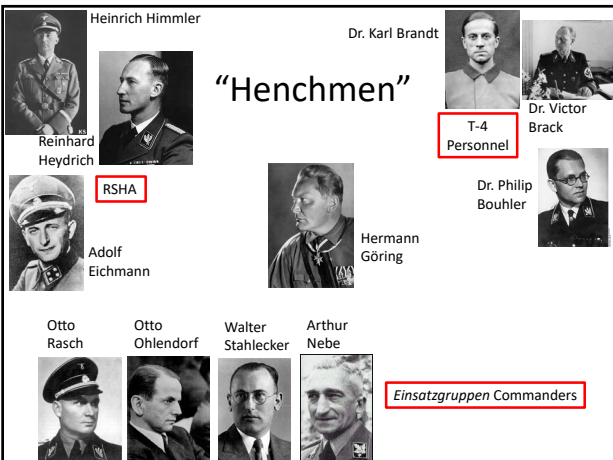
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### “Henchmen”



Heinrich Himmler

Dr. Karl Brandt

Reinhard Heydrich

Adolf Eichmann

Hermann Göring

Dr. Philip Buhler

Dr. Victor Brack

T-4 Personnel

RSHA

Otto Rasch

Otto Ohlendorf

Walter Stahlecker

Arthur Nebe

Einsatzgruppen Commanders

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### Perpetrators

- “Holocaust by bullets”
- Operating killing centers
- “desk murderers”

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### Perpetrators?

- “Holocaust by bullets”
- Operating killing centers
- “desk murderers”

**Are all perpetrators Nazis? Are all Germans Nazis? Or all perpetrators “good” Germans?**

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### Social Science Research

- Dispositional Factors – Flaws in the Individual
- Evil people do evil
- Anti-Social Behavior
- Racism, anti-Semitism
- Fanaticism
- Sadism
- Authoritarian personality

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### Fanaticism

- Uncritical zeal, obsessed, abnormal
- “A fanatic is one who can't change his mind and won't change the subject”.
- “the key to all fanatical beliefs is that they are self-confirming....(some beliefs are) fanatical not because they are 'false', but because they are expressed in such a way that they can never be shown to be false.” (Neil Postman)

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### Antisocial Personality Disorder

- A.k.a. “Sociopath” or “Psychopath”
- Inability to form human attachment
- Abnormal lack of empathy
- Do not feel guilt or shame

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Sabine Hake, *Screen Nazis: Cinema, History, and Democracy* (2012), 21-23.

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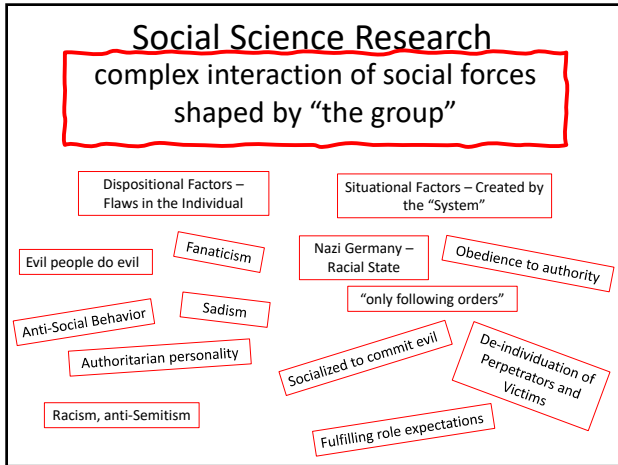
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"make someone adopt radically different  
beliefs by using systematic and often forcible  
pressure"



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brainwashing

What risks do we take if we try to explain  
motivations this way?

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### Can Hollywood portray the complexity of being German in Third Reich? Of being a Nazi in the Third Reich?



Community:  
"Schickelgraben" or "inner circle"

- **Rudolf Hess:** "spoke of 'the power of personality' radiating 'something that puts those around him under its spell and spreads in ever-widening circles'"
- **Hans Frank** upon witnessing a Hitler speech: "positively spellbound"
- **Josef Goebbels** having read *Mein Kampf*: "'Who is this man? Half plebeian, half god! Truly Christ, or only S. John?'"
- **Hermann Göring:** "he saw in him 'the rare union between the most acute logical thinker and truly profound philosopher and the iron man of action'" (Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: Profiles in Power*, 1991, 93-94)

**Hollywood's Challenges**

- Avoid caricature
- Overstate monstrosity
- Overstate anti-Semitism
- Humanization: normalizing or developing admiration
- Demonstrate the complexity of historical events, Hitler's character, multiple German perspectives
- Individual characters must represent thousands/millions

Why would the Germans follow?

Ambivalence

Ambiguity

Symbolism

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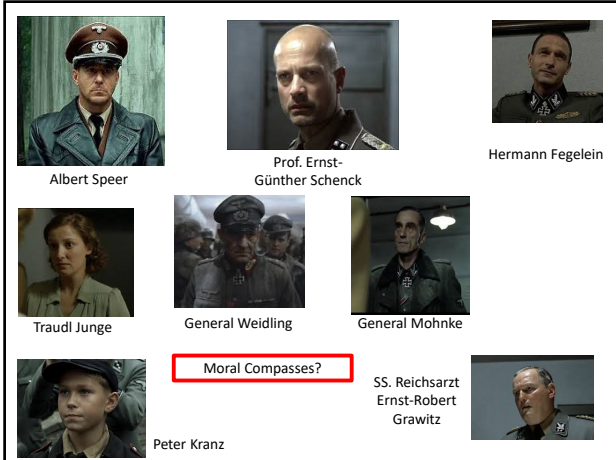
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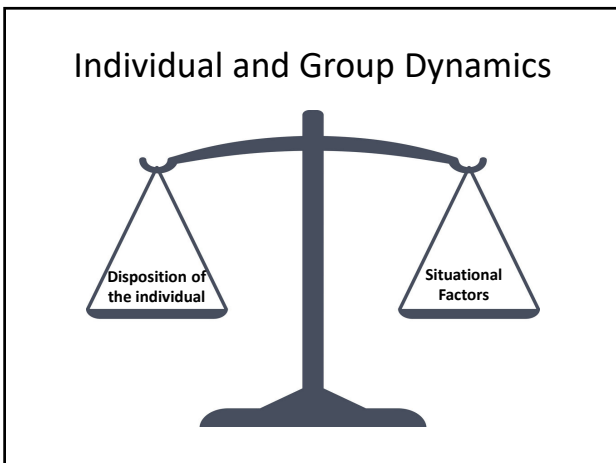
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### Race State



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- Jews
- Disabled
- Roma, Sinti (a.k.a. "gypsies")
- Eastern Europeans



**Racism Creates an anti-type for group identity**

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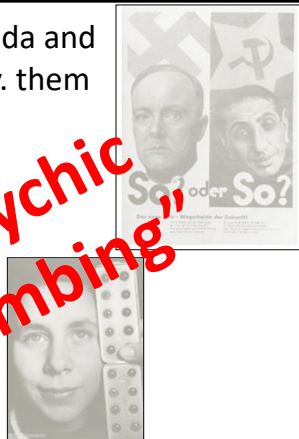
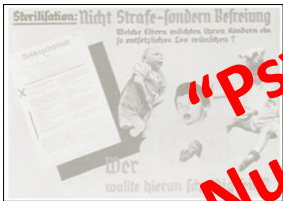


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### Impact of Propaganda and Discrimination: us v. them



**"psychic numbing"**

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## Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience*

- Conscience: “an inner voice that admonishes ‘Thou shalt’ and ‘Thou Shalt not’” (p. 1)
- “ethnic Germans were exhorted to expunge citizens deemed alien and to ally themselves only with people sanctioned as racially valuable. The road to Auschwitz was paved with righteousness.” (p. 3)



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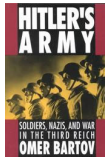
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## Ideological Soldiers on the Eastern Front

- Drawn together by comradeship either fighting for Nazism or nationalism (Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, p. 34)
- Egon Freitag, “We were never mercenaries, but – to use the hackneyed phrase – defenders of the Fatherland. There are certainly among our ranks those who fight for the idea of National Socialism, and others who fight for the Fatherland, that spot on the map for which risking one’s life remains self-evident. We lie together in the tent.” (28 August 1941, p. 34)



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## Ideological Soldiers on the Eastern Front

- Ordinary soldiers had “adopted a racialized point of view” as evident their language found in letters and efforts to document their contributions to the war (Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, p. 148)



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Fred Katz

*Ordinary People, Extraordinary Evil*

- Immediate context → shut “out the outside world’s values, leaving one vulnerable to new ‘values.’” (p.6)



Adolf Eichmann



Rudolf Höss



Dr. Johann Paul Kremer  
(postwar photo)

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Fred Katz

*Ordinary People, Extraordinary Evil*

- Evil “packaged” as an acceptable commodity (p.6)



Adolf Eichmann



Rudolf Höss



Dr. Johann Paul Kremer  
(postwar photo)

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Fred Katz

*Ordinary People, Extraordinary Evil*

- Careerism can lead individuals “through small, incremental, and innocent decisions” (p.6)



Adolf Eichmann



Rudolf Höss



Dr. Johann Paul Kremer  
(postwar photo)

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**Filmmakers**







*Operation Finale* (2018)



**Case Studies of Larger Populations**

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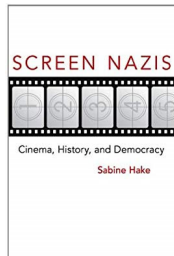
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