

Sexual Desire and Social Transformation in *Aimée & Jaguar*

In 1994, the Austrian-Jewish feminist Erica Fischer published the biography *Aimée & Jaguar*, which tells the story of the passionate love affair between Lilly “Aimée” Wust, wife of a Nazi sympathizer and mother of four boys, and the Jewish *submarine* Felice “Jaguar” Schragenheim in wartime Berlin.¹ The book reconstructs the life of Schragenheim until her arrest, deportation, and death in 1945 and narrates Wust’s long search for her lover, her grieving, and her struggle to raise her children as a single parent after the war. It scrutinizes Wust’s role as protector of four persecuted Jews (she sheltered three more Jewish *submarines* after her lover’s arrest) and documents her courage as well as her errors of judgment at the time. It also, importantly, questions whether Wust’s experiences under the Third Reich had made a difference in her life in the Federal Republic of Germany: How did Wust remember Schragenheim? How did she relate to surviving Jews, specifically to the Jewish community in Berlin? What conclusions did she draw from her experiences, and what

I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Institute for Collaborative Research and Public Humanities in Columbus, Ohio, which funded a one-quarter resident fellowship during which I researched and wrote the first draft of this article. I especially thank Esther Beth Sullivan for her hospitality and generosity, as well as for her careful reading and probing comments. Warm thanks also to Jennifer Terry for her questions and suggestions. A summer faculty fellowship from Indiana University allowed me to revise the manuscript, and a research fellowship from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation allowed me to complete it.

¹ *Submarine* is the term used colloquially and by historians to describe those Jews who went into hiding after the “Final Solution” was implemented in January 1942, which resulted in mass deportations to the death camps in eastern Europe. Several autobiographies describe life “underground”: among them is Anne Frank’s famous *Diary of a Young Girl* (1996), set in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam. Both Inge Deutschkron’s *Outcast: A Jewish Girl in Wartime Berlin* (1989) and Gad Beck’s *An Underground Life* (1999) chronicle the protagonists’ survival as illegals in Berlin. Peter Schneider (2000) notes estimates by historians that between 2,500 and 5,000 Jews in Berlin went underground before and during the war, of whom about 2,000 survived. Claudia Schoppmann mentions only 1,200 illegal survivors (1996, 84). That means that the *submarines’* survival chances were much higher than those of Jews who were deported to the concentration camps.

[*Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 2002, vol. 28, no. 1]

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did she teach her children about persecution, justice, compassion, and accountability? What kind of antifascists did she and her sons become?

The story of Aimée and Jaguar has captured readers and spectators' imagination not just in Germany: the best-seller has been translated into thirteen languages. The English translation won the Lambda Literary Award in 1998. An acclaimed feature film, based on the book and directed by Max Färberböck, was released at the 1999 Berlin Film Festival and shown in the United States in 2000.² Färberböck's *Aimée and Jaguar: A Love Greater than Death* (referenced here as *Love/Death*) garnered overwhelmingly positive critical recognition, and the two actresses in the title roles, Maria Schrader (Jaguar) and Juliane Köhler (Aimée), subsequently received awards for their performances. Among the reasons for the film's popularity may be its focus on the everyday dimension of the Holocaust, the titillation promised by a lesbian romance, and its appeal as a tragic love story. Yet "love," as I hope to show, is also a problem that the book and the film grapple with in different ways. Researched and written in the early 1990s, when anti-Semitism and racist violence resurged after German reunification, when the war in Bosnia horrified the public with news of "ethnic cleansing," and when politicians countered Western Europeans' fears of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers with visions of a "Fortress Europe," *Aimée & Jaguar* invokes the Holocaust to intervene in the closing of minds and borders. Fischer's historical reconstruction of what, according to Nazi terminology, would have been an *interracial* affair celebrates a passionate bond stretching across the deep gulf of respectability and race.³ At the same time, her book is marked by deep ambivalence about Wust's behavior. On one level, the love between Wust and Schragenheim provides a trope for antifascist commitment and resistance that is familiar from many gay Holocaust narratives in which fascism provides the obstacle to be overcome by the lovers, in the process uniting those the Nazis would segregate and stratify in an antifascist alliance (Sherman 1979; Heger 1980; Beck 1999). On another, the text is careful to emphasize precisely the *different* social valences of sexual and racial identities

² In addition, British director Catrine Clay turned the story into the documentary *Love Story* (1997), with Erica Fischer serving as consultant.

³ The Nuremberg race laws (1935) were antimiscegenation laws that criminalized sexual relations between "Aryan" Germans and non-Aryans, proscribed marriage between them, and annulled marriage engagements. Existing marriages between Aryans and non-Aryans were not annulled, but officials encouraged divorce. I must note, however, that sexual relations between women, whether interracial or not, were not criminalized under the Third Reich, except in Austria (see Schoppmann 1999); homosexuality was a punishable offense only between men.

in the Nazi state. As the central relationship is threaded through a feminist critique of love as an ideology mystifying objectification, dependence, and exploitation, the interracial affair serves as a paradigmatic case of postwar Germans' philo-Semitic relationship to Jews. It registers the author's profound suspicion of the motives and behavior of Wust and, more generally, all those whose "love" for the victims of oppression leads them to identify with them. That dynamic characterizes many Germans' fantasies about and relations with specific ethnic groups, including Jews, which I have discussed at length elsewhere (Sieg 2002). Färberböck's film expands on that ambivalence but also closes down the ethical quandaries opened up by Fischer. It dramatizes a romance in which lesbian desire is flatly at odds with Jewish survival and reserves heroism only for the woman who renounces that desire. In short, the book and the movie provide different answers to the question whether "love" offers a remedy against xenophobic violence, or whether it is indeed part and parcel of it.

Racism, with its ontological underpinning and violent effects, and philo-Semitism's gesture of identification and appropriation are the twin problems the biographer negotiates. She constructs the by-now staid binary terms of *essentialism* versus *performativity*, in which feminist theory positions the latter as antidote to the former, as equally troubling historiographical problems. Fischer's effort to secure Jewish identity against German appropriations leads her to conscript lesbian sexuality into an ethnic logic of identity by organizing both around collective loyalty. As a result, however, both sexuality and ethnicity attain a degree of impermeability that mitigates against the conceptualization of change or the articulation of antifascist alliances across communities. When change becomes associated with injustice and appropriation, social transformation becomes increasingly difficult to conceptualize outside of a logic of betrayal. My aim in this article is to delineate an antifascist politics that would allow for a collective and shared custodianship of memories of the Holocaust without either postulating a false equivalence of racial and sexual persecution or constructing lesbians and Jews as antagonists.

The discussion proceeds as follows: in the first section I compare the two textual solutions to the problem of "love." In order to assess how the different media authorize or discredit memory, I examine the ways in which they grapple with the problem of ensuring the integrity of a marginalized voice. I consider the role of genre to explain how the book and the film construct Jewish and lesbian identity as both analogous and antagonistic. In the second section I historicize that antagonism in the context of cold war constructions of gender and sexuality. While Holocaust discourse has been an important site for feminist and gay interventions

in sexism and homophobia, lesbians have been less able to ground a politically progressive agenda in narratives of fascist oppression. By identifying how specific problems in lesbian historiography shape Fischer's telling of the story, I open up the possibility of an alternative reading of Wust and Schragenheim's relationship that stresses the potential of transformation over the preoccupation with preserving or betraying integrity. The third section discusses this conflict of values in terms of a feminist antifascist politics, that is, a politics that is articulated through historical memory work and addressed to the exigencies of the present. To develop an antiracist politics it is necessary to go beyond the notion of performative subversion as remedy to the trap of racial essentialism. The elision of lesbian social history in *Aimée & Jaguar* points to certain blind spots in feminist notions of agency and resistance. I argue that by restoring the sexual dimension of the story as socially and politically meaningful, the book allows us to address pressing problems in feminism, including the question of how to imagine ethical action in the face of absent or co-opted oppositional ideologies and institutions. The suspect identity politics of the film adaptation *Love/Death* underscores the urgency of such a critical enterprise.

I. Performative parallels: The philo-Semitic impostor and the lesbian usurper

Fischer's portrait of a German-Jewish romance is deeply troubled by her perception of Lilly Wust as a philo-Semitic impostor and unfaithful lesbian. The author's difficulty in establishing the woman's "true" identity (Nazi or antifascist? lesbian or heterosexual?) turns ethnic and sexual performativity into a narrative quandary of equal political weight to the biological essentialism that constitutes the story's historical frame. In addition, my reading of Färberböck's *Love/Death* underscores the dangers of postulating *performativity* as opposite and remedy to *essentialism*, thereby highlighting Fischer's achievement in recasting these terms. I am less interested here in explaining the differences between these two texts through authorial intent, but I do find them instructive in regard to generic possibilities and limitations. The Holocaust scholar James E. Young wrote, "The truths of the Holocaust—both the factual and the interpretive—can no longer be said to lie beyond our understanding, but must now be seen to inhere in the ways we understand, interpret, and write its history" (1988, 1). How then do the generic conventions of biography, on the one hand, and of the Hollywood-style romance, on the other, structure our understanding of the "truth" and the lesson of Wust

and Schragenheim's relationship? How does the book tackle the challenge that Wust's sexual history poses to the narratological framework of the coming-out story, and how does the movie grapple with the insertion of lesbian protagonists into a mainstream romance?

Erica Fischer frankly records her apprehensions about Wust's philo-Semitic zeal, exemplified by her joining the Jewish community in West Berlin, her thwarted attempt to convert, her registering of her children as Jews at school, and her decree that her mementoes of Schragenheim should be "sent to Israel upon her death, away from a Germany she despised for what it had done," as a *Newsweek* article reported (Nagorski 1999, 40). Fischer balked at Wust's "imposition" on Jews, her "assumption of a closeness" with them, and her arrogation of a "collective we" of victims (1995, 271), which created serious tension between the biographer (and teller of a Jewish story) and her subject, a German who, Fischer suggests, avoids facing her own responsibility by taking up a haughty, delusional, and undeserved distance to that identity: "I do not grant her the status of a victim," Fischer writes in the epilogue. "I guard the line that separates her from Felice, my Jewish mother, and myself obdurately, protective of my small piece of identity. She [Lilly] tried again and again to cross that line, sending greetings to my mother, using Jewish expressions, glorifying Israel and such, as if she had nothing to do with her own land of Germany" (1995, 271). Fischer's attempt to "guard the line" between Wust on the one side and Schragenheim and herself on the other begs the question, however, whether such insistence on the boundary between them invokes the very regime of race her book indicts. From the biographer's perspective, a performative notion of Jewishness, exemplified by Wust's "impositions," is indeed the problem, rather than offering a solution to the question of responsibility. At the same time, Fischer refuses to invoke racial terminology in order to block what she perceives as a usurping gesture. Instead, she reconceives identity in terms of collective commitment and doubles this logic across "race" and sexuality. In both the book and the film, coming-out, masquerade, and passing serve as key tropes of subject constitution shared by Jews and lesbians, emphasizing a common ethics of communal loyalty.

The presumptive equation of whiteness with Aryanness made it possible for some Jews to remove the yellow badge and move through public space as Germans, just as the presumption of heterosexuality allowed many gay men and most lesbians to escape persecution and incarceration by the Nazi state. It also required them to come out, or be outed, in order to become visible in public discourse. Yet a comparison of Schragenheim's coming-out to her lover as a Jew and Wust's coming-out to her husband

as a lesbian underscore the different, even antagonistic social consequences these performative acts are shown to have for Jews and lesbians. While the book and the film show the declaration of Jewish and lesbian identity to be structurally equivalent performative acts, they also suggest that the lesbian coming-out endangers and even betrays the trust and responsibility bestowed by the Jewish coming-out. Even as they emphasize the riskiness of Schragenheim's announcement, "Lilly, I'm a Jew," they depict it as a brave, community-creating act that issued a challenge to which Wust rose with fervor and endurance. Fischer writes, "Lilly stared at her for a moment in astonishment. Suddenly she understood all the inconsistencies she had never asked about. Coming out of her stupor, she pulled Felice to her and held her tight. 'And now more than ever,' she whispered" (Fischer 1995, 40). By contrast, Wust's lesbian coming-out is shown to jeopardize the very person, or persons, whom she had vowed to protect. Färberböck's film pointedly dramatizes the two coming-outs as incommensurable. Lilly's impulsive request for a divorce from her Nazi husband, who is infuriated at having just found his flat in postorgy disarray and his wife, her lover, and their friends in postcoital slumber, is shown to endanger an entire community of underground Jews. Wust's "gay pride" is clearly condemned as inconsiderate and destructive in this dramatization.⁴ While *Love/Death* is more tendentious in its predication of Jewish survival on the closeting of lesbian desire, Fischer's *Aimee & Jaguar* is therefore no less suspicious about Wust's trustworthiness.

The writer's doubts about Wust's moral integrity are implicitly challenged by repeated comparisons with her look-alike, the notorious Jewish informer Stella Kübler-Isaaksohn (née Goldschlag) whose collaboration with the Gestapo resulted in the arrests of hundreds of Jews. The informer, who, along with her husband, zealously hunted down Jewish *submarines* and delivered them to the Gestapo, was known for her reddish-blond hair, blue eyes, and encyclopedic memory and was much feared among *sub-*

⁴ The situation that Fischer (1995) documents—even though she, too, questions Wust's rationale for the divorce—is more complicated. Günther Wust never found out about his wife's sexual choice; moreover, he remained on friendly terms with the couple after the divorce and accepted Schragenheim's role in his ex-wife's life. Even though he tried to convince Wust to marry him again for the sake of the children, he negotiated for a sort of extended family including himself, the four sons, Schragenheim, and a close friend of theirs, an unwed mother and her child: "It would be best for us to look for a seven-room apartment. Not such a bad idea at all," he wrote to Schragenheim (Fischer 1995, 164). The movie's representation of Wust's coming-out made for high drama, yet its tendentious portrayal downplayed her ability to judge its consequences and elided its positive, community-creating effects.

marines. The pretty, red-headed Wust's resemblance to that dreaded figure leads the three Jewish lesbians, whom Wust later picks up in a café, to mistake her for the spy. Kübler-Isaaksohn's very narrow loyalty to her immediate family is starkly contrasted with her betrayal of German Jewry at large. This treacherous figure, who abused her insider's knowledge to protect only her loved ones, underscores that loving one Jew does not necessarily equate with collective loyalty or political resistance.⁵

Fischer also criticizes Wust explicitly for withdrawing from lesbian life after the war and casts that withdrawal in terms of betrayed loyalty. In 1950, Wust was briefly married to a man; she rejected the advances of a female lover and chose instead a particularly miserable patriarchal arrangement in the hope of gaining support in raising her four young sons. Her desertion of the lesbian life infuriated the heterosexual biographer, who rails, "Why did she have to reject Helene and marry the horrible Willi Beimling? Why didn't she dare to step back into life in the seventies, when the lesbian scene in Berlin was in full swing?" (1995, 270). Reader expectations as shaped by coming-out biographies, which celebrate the revelation of a hidden, "true" identity and bemoan the social obstacles that prevent that revelation, contribute to the discrediting of a biographical subject who apparently reneges on her achievement out of her own moral weakness. Coming at the end of a narrative that takes such pains to construct identity in terms of collective loyalty, Wust's return to heterosexuality suggests that love did not truly change her. By analogy, her anti-Semitism did not reconstruct her racial positioning but merely inverted into philo-Semitism.

Through its casting of the role of the aged Wust, Färberböck's *Love/Death* likewise raises doubts regarding the woman's transformation. The director chose Inge Keller for this role, the grande dame of the Deutsches Theater in Berlin, where she specializes in playing imposing old ladies in classical dramas. Her elegant bearing starkly contrasts with the photographs of Lilly Wust that are reproduced in *Aimée & Jaguar*. These photos clearly show how Wust's downward class mobility and social isolation, precipitated by her experiences, were etched into her physical appearance and posture. One shows her staring wild-eyed into the camera, with fly-

⁵ In addition, Fischer casts aspersions on Wust's motives as a rescuer by comparing her with greedy so-called custodial Aryans who took advantage of the increasing restrictions on things Jews were allowed to own or take with them when emigrating from Germany; many offers of "storing" their friends' and neighbors' property turned into claims of ownership. Fischer traces the dispute between Wust and some of her lover's friends and relatives about the fur coat Schragenheim had inherited from her grandmother.

away white hair, wearing the kind of cheap glasses state health insurance dispenses freely, her hands curled into fists and drawn up close to her thin, caved-in face. It is the pose of a cornered animal, combining fear and despair with aggression. The social and physical effects of the disjuncture in Wust's life are altogether elided in Färberböck's film, which portrays her as an impeccably dressed old lady on her way to a luxurious old age home, a far cry from Wust's cramped one-room apartment in a working-class neighborhood. By depicting her as an affluent, imperious widow, the film represses the real woman's poverty and alienation as if nothing had ever turned her life inside out. Ostensibly, her coming-out made no difference—either to Schragenheim, to other women like Schragenheim, or to herself.

Färberböck's *Love/Death* rehearses the very binary of essentialism versus performativity that Fischer's *Aimée & Jaguar* seeks to revise. Its recipe of subverting fascist ontologies of race and sex through racial and gendered masquerade is riddled with ambiguities that undermine its ostensibly progressive message. In one scene, for instance, Schragenheim and three girlfriends (two of them also Jewish *submarines*) pose for pinup pictures marketed to soldiers in exchange for much-needed illegal passport photos. Dressed as Dutch maidens with demurely folded hands and wearing little more than white headdresses, the four nudes' naughty impersonations turn the wet dreams of the German army into racial crimes. Scenes like this, which bare the Jewish body in order to negate anatomical difference, have become a staple of post-Holocaust visual culture. They function as a rote antiracist gesture that says "See? Racial difference is nothing but a Nazi myth!" Yet the way *Aimée* and *Jaguar* are lit in a nude scene peculiarly underscores the stark, visual contrast between the former's pale skin and fair hair and her Jewish lover's swarthy complexion and dark, cascading curls. On the level of casting, the stereotypical portrayal of Jewishness by Maria Schrader, who is known not to be Jewish, simultaneously denies and asserts ethnic difference. Critics' praise for Schrader's mimetic artistry implies that ethnicity can and should be detached from particular bodies, yet her depiction confirms a visual iconography of race that belies that implication. *Love/Death* vacillates between denying the validity of "race" and representing the difference Jewishness made to its protagonists' lives and ends up reinstalling ethnic difference in troublingly biologicistic terms.

The film's deployment of gendered drag similarly appears to call on a progressive tradition of troping homosexual identity in mainstream cinema, but the insertion of lesbian protagonists into a tragic romance plot denies the very desire that drives the romance. Gendered cross-dressing has long been a shortcut for connoting (often celebrating) homosexuality



Figure 1 Maria Schrader (Felice Schragenheim/Jaguar) and Juliane Köhler (Lilly Wust/Aimée) in *Aimée and Jaguar: A Love Greater than Death*, directed by Max Färberböck (1999).

in German as well as American films, from the classic *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931) to the Oscar-winning blockbuster *Philadelphia* (1993). *Aimée and Jaguar*, too, includes the obligatory drag ball scenes that announce homosexuality to the viewer. Moreover, Wust and Schragenheim are shown to be clotheshorses who delight in dressing up. Yet the film portrays cross-dressing as glamorous, decadent, and somehow sexy but devoid of internally consistent social or sexual meaning. It takes viewers through a lot of clothes-swapping and presents Schragenheim by turns in a Chinese dress, a man's suit, a dirndl, a Dutch milkmaid's outfit, and a *Great-Gatsby*-type gay man's getup without indicating the relationship of costume to ethnic, class, or gendered/sexual role. Although one scene, which shows the couple dancing, with Schragenheim attired in tails and top hat and Wust in a lacy gown, echoes their real-life division of gendered roles, another reverses these roles, with Schragenheim sporting Wust's dirndl and Wust a suit, a cigarette dangling from her lips (see fig. 1). It is this second image that now graces the film poster, the video cover, and the cover of the new book edition. The seemingly random exchange of clothes between the two ignores and falsifies the internal stability and social meaning of lesbian codes that were central to Wust and Schragenheim's efforts

to defy, resist, and survive the Nazi regime, as I argue below. Worse, the history of troping desire between women in mainstream cinema suggests that lesbian attraction tends to slip into identification and impersonation. As Teresa de Lauretis has demonstrated in some detail in *The Practice of Love* (1994), women's putative inability to tell the difference between wanting another woman and wanting to be her indicates a failure on the part of Hollywood cinema (but also some feminist theory) to imagine and represent lesbian desire *as sexual*; at best, mainstream movies dramatize "intrafeminine fascinations" (1994, 116). This slippage has also produced a pathological variant of representing female relationships through the figure of the sinister female copycat. These films (such as the 1950 classic *All about Eve*, starring Bette Davis) dramatize the potentially lethal outcome of initially innocuous masquerades; the copycat's crush, revealed as a longing to become the other, leads her to take her love object's place by sometimes violent means. Wust's admiration for the urbane and sophisticated Schragenheim supports this homophobic representation of lesbianism. Wust's adoption of Schragenheim's smoking habit becomes a visual cipher for the former's incorporation of her lover. While her smoking at first seems to naively ape the woman she adores, it later attains an eerie quality of displacing her. When Wust tells her friend Ilse that she went to the Theresienstadt concentration camp to see Schragenheim, Ilse shrinks back in horror, realizing that such a visit must have endangered the Jewish woman. Her reproach that Wust jeopardized her lover's life is visually underlined by Wust lighting a cigarette, looking pleased with herself: the verbal accusation of recklessness is visually confirmed as Wust's displacement of Schragenheim. The film thus condemns Wust in much stronger terms than the book does.

In sum, *Love/Death* ultimately fails to unsettle either biologicistic notions of race or homophobic notions of desire between women. Its failure throws into relief Fischer's achievement of constructing communal loyalty as an alternative to the conceptual binary of essentialism and performativity. Yet the teleological structure of the coming-out biography, with its rigid notion of identitarian truth, can conceive of the mutability and social contingency of Wust's sexual practice only as failure and betrayal, limiting Fischer's ability to imagine subjective transformation mobilized by desire. Her perception of Wust's claim to Schragenheim's memory as illegitimate, moreover, secures her own authority over that memory at the cost of grasping the extent to which desire mobilized and reworked the antagonisms, hierarchies, and boundaries she upholds. By rewriting Wust's scrapbook of the romance (she named it her "book of tears"), which one might well interpret as emblematic of Germans' narrative mastery over

the Holocaust, their fetishization of the Jew, and the inscription of the Jew as dead in the contemporary German imagination, Fischer restores the gaps in Wust's story that are not accidental and idiosyncratic but result from the systematic blindness created by anti-Semitism. But this restoration is incomplete because of Fischer's systematic blindness to the sexual dimension of the story as socially meaningful.

II. Nazi woman/German femme: Problems in lesbian historiography

Fischer paints the couple's courtship, sexual practice, and daily life in a fair amount of detail, but she confines lesbianism to the private sphere, more specifically, to the bedroom.⁶ On the one hand, this accurately reflects the eradication of homosexuality from public life, but, on the other, it fails to account for the ways in which lesbianism furnished a set of symbolic and social practices that allowed Schragenheim to craft a sense of self-worth gleaned from lesbian books, art, and fashions of the 1920s and that were also important to her survival efforts as an illegal in Nazi Berlin. At the very time the teenage Felice became aware of her desire for other women, the collective, political nature of the once-vivacious, open, and diverse lesbian community and its social network in Berlin was being destroyed. The raiding and closing of lesbian bars, social clubs, and political organizations, the censoring of lesbian publications, and the burning of "obscene" books would have cut off an important lifeline for a young woman for whom a support network was all the more essential in the absence of a family to sustain her after her parents died, her grandmother was deported, and her older sister and her stepmother emigrated to England and Palestine, respectively. Yet the expression of desire and commitment continued under deep cover, as Claudia Schoppmann's collection of biographical portraits in *Days of Masquerade* (1996) demonstrates. Wust's memories of their relationship and the documents illustrating Schragenheim's role in it are vivid, explicit, and nuanced, which makes this biography absolutely unique in the context of Holocaust history as it intersects with lesbian history. In the following discussion, I venture to cull from Fischer's account a sense of how Schragenheim and Wust's role-based relationship operated as a symbolic register of gendered, class, and racial power differentials, as an economy of conversion, and as a node of social and subjective transformation. I argue that Schragenheim's butch role was relevant to her survival efforts and that Wust's disidentification,

⁶ This contrasts starkly with Fischer's biographical technique of embedding Schragenheim's identity as a Jew in the larger canvas of Jewish life in Nazi Germany.

as a lesbian femme, with Nazi femininity prompted her to reconfigure permanently her political, religious, and racial allegiances.

The omission of lesbian social history in Fischer's biography requires teachers and readers to restore this dimension on their own initiative, but that history is incomparably difficult to research due to a scarcity of sources, critical paradigms, and published scholarship, especially in English. The groundbreaking anthology *When Biology Became Destiny* by Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossman, and Marion Kaplan (1984), which theorized the Nazi state as an extreme form of a male-supremacist, essentialist system bent on controlling women's bodies and sexuality, ignores lesbians, arguably because of the book's focus on reproductive ideologies and policies. The same goes for Atina Grossman's erudite study *Reforming Sex* (1995). Claudia Koonz's seminal history of women in the Third Reich, *Mothers in the Fatherland* (1987), describes the factors that predisposed women to complicity and resistance in Nazi Germany, yet it does not specifically address the situation of lesbians, perhaps because sexual orientation did not steer lesbians as a group toward one or the other—unlike women's ethnicity, political conviction, generational experience, feminist affiliation, or religious doctrine. Most histories of gays in the Third Reich (except Grau's) exclude lesbians because they were not criminalized. The only scholarly study of lesbians in Nazi Germany so far is Claudia Schoppmann's *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und Weibliche Homosexualität* (1991), which has not been translated into English. While Schoppmann confirms that lesbians were not systematically or consistently persecuted in Nazi Germany (except Austria), she demonstrates that they were prone to a variety of other diagnoses and punitive measures, including being categorized and incarcerated as asocials.⁷ Lesbianism has not been historicized in relation to fascism's policing of female sexuality, nor has it been conceptualized as a site of antifascist commitment or resistance. My reading of *Aimée & Jaguar* and *Love/Death* traces the ways in which both insinuate an antagonism between lesbian sexuality and Jewish survival. This antagonism, I maintain, results only in part from certain ambivalences in Fischer's text or from Färberböck's recourse to homophobic tropes. It is consistent with larger ideological figurations of gender and sexuality in the cold war.

⁷ Excerpts from Schoppmann's (1995) findings are included in Grau (1995), and she also condensed her thesis in the introduction to *Days of Masquerade: Lesbians in the Third Reich* (Schoppmann 1996). See also Stuart Marshall's documentary *Desire* (1992) for a discussion of lesbians' persecution, underground activity, and resistance, as well as Schoppmann 1999 about lesbian persecution in Austria.

Both feminist and gay historiography in the West have constructed Nazism as the nadir of sexist and homophobic oppression against which gender equality, reproductive rights, and sexual diversity can be demanded, measured, and celebrated. Feminist histories of the Third Reich, along with memoirs and survivors' testimonies, intervened in cold war narratives and iconography that associated totalitarianism with both the eradication of gender differences and women's arrogation of (masculine) power.⁸ Similarly, gay historians, artists, and critics contested abiding preconceptions about Nazi society itself as homosexual and perverse, which served to legitimate homophobia in the West (Hewitt 1996). The uncertain status of lesbians as ostracized but not criminalized, however, has made it difficult to predicate a rhetoric of rights on Nazi oppression.⁹ While individual communist and Jewish lesbians have spoken about survival and resistance, sexuality has not been thematized or considered significant in their efforts (in marked contrast to the gay memoirs by Gad Beck [1999] and Heinz Heger [1980]).¹⁰ To the contrary, several survivor memoirs about concentration camps tend to portray lesbian sexuality as exploitative, violent, and monstrous.¹¹ Written from a heterosexual perspective, the perception of sexually predatory fellow prisoners and wardens, perhaps understandably, exacerbated feelings of violation and victimization, but they effectively associated lesbianism with fascist aggression.¹² Ilse Kokula (1994) balanced such accounts by including lesbian-generated testimony that stressed their victimization and sexual violation in at least one camp,

⁸ Lina Wertmüller's despicable film *Seven Beauties* (1976) epitomizes such thinking and shows how it serves to bolster conservative ideologies of women as mothers or whores.

⁹ Lesbians' exemption from legalized homophobia did not hold true in Austria, where even after the country's annexation by Nazi Germany, both female and male homosexuals could be punished with up to five years in prison (Schoppmann 1999, 10).

¹⁰ Such generalizations are highly problematic because of the scarcity of sources, but compare, for instance, the portraits of Annette Eick and Gertrude Sandmann (both Jewish) in Schoppmann 1996 and the interview with communist Hilde Radusch in Marshall's 1992 film *Desire*. Radusch is also portrayed in Schoppmann 1996.

¹¹ Kokula 1994 refers to the memoirs of concentration camp survivors Fania Fénelon, Krystyna Zywulska (1951), Isa Vermehren (1946), and Margarete Buber-Neumann (1966). Hedda Zinner's play *Ravensbrücker Ballade* (The ballad of Ravensbrück) (1961) duplicates such representations in a socialist context and associates lesbian sexuality with Nazi domination. See Sieg 1995 for a discussion of this play.

¹² By contrast, Heger 1980, Deutschkron 1996, Fogelmann 1998, Beck 1999, and Stoltzfus 2001 acknowledge sexual desire and relations as positive components or consequences of rescue, resistance, and survival (inside and outside the concentration camps), albeit in reference to heterosexual or gay male relationships.

whereas Schoppmann or her interlocutors excised sexuality altogether from the life stories of lesbians (1996).¹³

The corrections undertaken by feminist and gay artists, writers, and critics illuminate the enormous political stakes of configuring gender and sexuality through the lens of Nazism and the Holocaust. By locating feminism and gay rights within the Western democratic project, they created a progressive consensus against Nazi gender inequality and homophobia.¹⁴ Lesbian culture cannot easily be subsumed under these agendas, because—unlike male homosexuality—it was not criminalized, but also because it did not fit the feminist discourse about equality between women. The names that the lovers found for each other, and which give Fischer's biography its title, hint at the division of roles between sexually aggressive Jaguar and her "prey" Aimée. Such role divisions were integral to some lesbian subcultures and relationships at the time. As Schragenheim's letters, poetry, and photographs indicate, she developed a style of sexual expression that we would now call "(soft) butch." In the language of her day, she most likely would have identified as an elegant *garçonne*, rather than as *Bubi* (lad) or *Kesser Vater* (literally, naughty daddy), which were associated with rougher, more working-class codes of appearance

¹³ Kokula (1994) published a letter by the lesbian partner of a survivor, who reveals that lesbians were housed in a segregated block (this was also the case in Auschwitz-Birkenau) and were systematically raped in the KZ Bützow. Yet Kokula's titling of this letter "Dokument über ein Lesben-KZ" (Document about a lesbian concentration camp) suggests that lesbians were incarcerated for their sexual orientation, a claim that cannot be substantiated, according to Schoppmann 1991. Kokula's inclusion of this letter in the first anthology documenting the German lesbian movement, which she edited under the pseudonym Ina Kuckuc, titled *Der Kampf gegen Unterdrückung* (The fight against oppression) (1975) indicates the political importance of constructing lesbians as oppressed by the Nazis.

¹⁴ Gay men in the United States have integrated historical knowledge of Nazi homophobia into a liberationist agenda, as evidenced by the adoption of the pink triangle by gay men and AIDS activists. See Marshall 1991 and Clum 2000 for critical accounts of gay Holocaust discourse. Gay survivors' testimony, such as Heger 1980, appeared at the beginning of the gay liberation movement in the 1970s and fueled consciousness of historical oppression. Several texts not only contrast the commitment to homosexual love with fascist sexual repression but also strengthen their message by having protagonists enter interracial relationships with Jews (see Sherman 1979) or Gypsies (see Heger 1980). By contrast, lesbian historians and writers locate the nadir of lesbian oppression predominantly in the McCarthy era with the House Un-American Activities Committee's (HUAC) harassment and persecution of artists, homosexuals, and communists. See Nestle 1987; Faderman 1991; and Schulman 1998. I am aware of only one work of American lesbian fiction that explicitly links lesbian and Jewish liberation, Valerie Taylor's pulp romance *Journey to Fulfillment* (1982), which tells the story of young Erika Frohmann, a Jewish survivor of a Nazi concentration camp, who emigrates to America and comes out as a lesbian.

and behavior, although neither Fischer nor Wust names her specific position on the spectrum of “virile” lesbians.¹⁵ She is described as a flirt, handsome, self-confident, and gallant in her pursuit of feminine women (called *Damen* [ladies] or *Muttis* [moms]), whom she would woo with love letters, sweets, and flowers. Put in the context of other *submarine* memoirs, Schragenheim’s butch ability to approach, seduce, and charm women was a valuable asset; illegals were generally dependent on extended networks of friends, acquaintances, and sympathetic strangers.¹⁶ Gad Beck’s memoir *An Underground Life* (1999) particularly emphasizes the importance of the individual *submarine*’s social and erotic skills, on which her or his ability to secure support rested.

I suggest that the young butch was able to integrate and transform her experience of material dependency and racial vulnerability through her sexual role as suitor and protector of femme women. Wust sheltered and fed her, but she also demanded Schragenheim’s guidance and support: “You know that you’ve brought my world crashing down around me (nor, God knows, am I sorry)—my whole world,” she wrote to her lover. “And now you must protect me. Will you be able to do that? . . . Your love alone will help me through. It’s a great responsibility!” (Fischer 1995, 109). Schragenheim called herself Wust’s “Rosenkavalier,” referencing the famous Strauss operetta in which the role of the young, ardent suitor of an older, aristocratic woman is customarily played by an actress. She presented Wust with dresses that emphasized her femininity and her delicate

¹⁵ Schlierkamp 1984, Vogel 1992, and Plötz 1997 reconstruct various class-specific lesbian identities and gendered styles from the magazines that catered to lesbian readers in the 1920s and early 1930s, *Die Freundin* (Girlfriend) (1924–33) and *Garçonne* (the French word for “boy” with a feminine ending). All three devote some space to the debates about masculine/feminine roles in lesbian relationships. I chose not to call Schragenheim a *garçonne* in this article, not only because some writers associate the *garçonne* with androgyny but also and especially because I see its feminine counterpart, the *Dame* (lady), as a problematic term. See the discussion in the text below.

¹⁶ The story of the Jewish lesbian Gertrude Sandmann, a student of Käthe Kollwitz, who survived the war by relying primarily on her lover, Hedwig “Johnny” Kowalski, for shelter and food, seems to be the exception to this rule (see Schmidt 1992 and Schoppmann 1996 for biographical information). Of the ten lesbian portraits in Schoppmann 1996, three tell the stories of Jewish survivors, and Sandmann is the only one who stayed in Germany as an illegal. The other two emigrated in time. Peter Schneider, in his *New York Times Magazine* (2000) essay “Saving Konrad Latte,” demonstrates that some illegals were aided by as many as fifty helpers. Schneider questions as too conservative historian Wolfgang Benz’s supposition that for each of the approximately 2,000 Jews who survived the Third Reich as *submarines* at least seven people must have intervened. He points to the experiences of Deutschkron who, along with her mother, changed hiding places twenty-two times and notes that conductor Konrad Latte names fifty helpers (52).

features, while she herself wore pants, shirts, and ties. Both lovers responded with desire to sartorial display of their butch-femme roles, signifying differences of age and social station between them within an erotic, gendered framework. Arguably, these roles served as an important symbolic conversion mechanism for the grave power imbalance between them, by allowing Schragenheim to assume responsibility, control, and authority over someone on whom she was also dependent. The social conflict they inhabited together was the stuff from which they forged their erotic practice.

Significantly, sexuality did not operate as a discourse set apart or in opposition to other arenas of social interaction, neither for Schragenheim nor for Wust. Schragenheim's butchness, her defiant refusal to be victimized by a violent eugenic state, corresponds with her other endeavors. She took an active part in her Jewish group's efforts to survive under false names, organize escapes, obtain information about Allied advances through her position as a stenotypist at a Nazi newspaper, and disseminate it in the underground as well as smuggling it abroad. One member of Schragenheim's group wrote about their preparations for illegality: "We were no longer passive victims, we even had weapons and were organizing our own defense. Though our means were more than limited, our solidarity gave us strong moral support" (Fischer 1995, 101). Jaguar's sexual practice resonated with social and political action rather than compensating for it.¹⁷

Although representations of lesbians in the Weimar Republic, such as the drawings by Jeanne Mammen (1991), depict the masculine lesbian in the context of butch-femme couples and subcultures, the femme did not share in the butch's privileged status as the preeminent sign of feminist gender resistance (Martin 1996). Because of the sexological notion of gender inversion, only the "mannish" lesbian (and her male counterpart, the effeminate man) was regarded as a genuine homosexual, whereas femmes' homosexuality was seen as acquired and reversible. The very term *Dame* (lady) elides the difference between feminine gender identity and a sexual style that defied many of the attributes of femininity in its dom-

¹⁷ By contrast, Anne McClintock's (1995) analysis of the sadomasochistic rituals practiced by the working-class drudge Hannah Cullwick and her middle-class husband in Victorian London imbues sexuality with social meaning and power, but she also notes that Cullwick's sexual role-playing converted erotic agency into social authority, whereas her husband's ritual abdication of control did not result in a reconstruction of his class and gendered position.

inant formation.¹⁸ That elision presumes a continuity of femininity and femmeness that is belied by femmes' sexual practice and social role in lesbian and feminist communities in general and by Lilly Wust's story in particular.¹⁹ Fischer's interpretation of the relationship and her conclusions about Wust's role then and later are shaped by her misreading of femme identity.²⁰ Taking that into account, I propose to read Wust's coming-out as a femme as a *chosen and enduring* reconstruction of her identity as a Nazi woman, a reconstruction that was initially compelled by, but sustained independently of, her sexual practice.

Wust's description of her "wedding night" and of the weeks of sexual exploration following it throws into sharp relief the lesbian reconstruction of femininity, heterosexually acquired and defined, into femmeness. She quickly realized the erotic opportunities created by being the focus and agent of sexual pleasure rather than the receptacle of someone else's. "With men I was always the inferior one. The men did it *to me*. *A woman always has to wait*, that's how I was raised. With Felice, I myself could be the one who loved," Wust remembers (Fischer 1995, 34). Wust's perception

¹⁸ A series of articles and letters about the respective capacity of *Bubis* and *Damen* for fidelity that appeared in the lesbian magazine *Garçonne* in 1931 underscores a widespread perception of femmes as fickle as well as unambitious and less intelligent (see Schlierkamp 1984; Plötz 1997). Such characterizations underscore that femmes were seen not so much as lesbians but as women. Significantly, *Aimée & Jaguar* eschews the above schema. Schragenheim named her lover "Aimée" ("Beloved") after a character in a play popular at the time whom the character list described as "a young woman whose irrationality hides a good deal of intelligence" (quoted in Fischer 1995, 122). The description evokes delight in the flaunting of femininity as masquerade and recognizes Aimée's underlying trustworthiness.

¹⁹ The work of historian Ilse Kokula about German lesbians from the turn of the twentieth century to the lesbian liberation movement ([Kukuc 1975], 1983, 1994) and of Claudia Schoppmann, who has focused on German and Austrian lesbians during the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich (1991, 1996, 1999), largely omits the sexual vernaculars that the organizations, groups, and individuals they describe are likely to have developed, perhaps because the context of the Autonomous Women's Movement that made their research possible and provided its readership so strongly disfavored gendered styles. The lesbian feminist literature produced in the context of the women's movement championed androgynous, nongendered styles. Verena Stefan's groundbreaking novel *Shedding* (1978) altogether elided existing butch-femme communities and relationships, and Margot Schroeder's *Ich stehe meine Frau* (1975), one of the canonical lesbian feminist coming-out narratives, depicted them pejoratively. The terms *butch* and *femme*, which have gained currency among younger German lesbians in the 1990s, were imported along with "queer" styles and writings from Britain and the United States in that decade. See, e.g., Stephanie Kuhnen's anthology *Butch Femme: Eine erotische Kultur* (1997).

²⁰ Laura Harris and Liz Crocker (1997) criticize feminists' equation of femme gender with patriarchal femininity, which denies "femme its radical and critical nature" (3). See also historian Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy (1997) on problems in lesbian historiography.

of Schragenheim as being in control, and Schragenheim's wearing of the clothes that signal such control, did not lock her into a position of feminine helplessness or passivity. Her remarks emphasize consent and pleasure as the parameters for the enactment of difference.

Wust's discovery of sexual pleasure and agency precipitated her reconstruction of her social role as well and illustrates that her lesbianism significantly shaped her life beyond the bedroom. She initiated divorce proceedings and prepared to take on a new role as family breadwinner by enrolling in a language school and learning to write shorthand and to type. Wust's preparations for economic independence did not stave off her experience of abject poverty during the 1950s and 1960s as the economic consequence of her departure from Nazi femininity, but her exit from the patriarchal institution that had supported and rewarded her, and her entrance into professional training, are ideologically significant.²¹

Wust's willful disidentification with the Nazi patriarchy had far-reaching consequences not only in terms of her gender identity and downward class mobility, but it also powerfully and lastingly reconfigured her political, national, and racial allegiances. Realizing that the woman she loved was Jewish prompted her to research and revise her own family history to include her mother's Jewish lover, a Berlin rabbi, who had fathered her half-brother. Her sudden, acute sense of the injustice of anti-Semitism awakened her to other oppressive aspects of the Nazi state as well as to an awareness of antifascist causes and forces, including her brother's fighting in the Spanish Civil War and her father's erstwhile Communist Party membership. Along with Schragenheim, she listened to Allied broadcasts on the radio and marked the progress of Allied armies on a map in their living room. After Schragenheim's arrest, she sent her letters and packages with food and clothing, tracked her whereabouts, and apprised friends and family members of her condition. Later, she sheltered and fed three more Jewish lesbian *submarines* during the chaotic final months of the war. After the war, she joined the Jewish community in Berlin. Although she did not convert, she went to synagogue, lived kosher, observed the Sabbath, and celebrated the Jewish high holidays. Her youngest son studied Hebrew, built his own connections to the Jewish community, and later

²¹ Koonz demonstrates that many Nazi women refused to rejoin the workforce when the state began to recruit women into the war effort in January 1944, not out of pacifist or antifascist convictions but because they tended to subscribe to fascist femininity as revolving around *Kinder* and *Küche* ("children" and "kitchen") (1987, 396–97). Conversely, Kokula argues that those lesbians who embraced the economic and social opportunities offered by the war cannot thereby be assumed to have been Nazi sympathizers (1994, 119–20).

emigrated to Israel. Wust's profound disaffection with West German society and politics and her distance from her neighbors were driven by her perception of deep-seated continuities in racial attitudes. Whereas West German culture at large addressed Jews exclusively as victims and survivors of the Holocaust rather than as living, creative, changing participants in German culture and society, Wust endeavored for the rest of her life to understand and appreciate Schragenheim's Jewishness not just as a category of oppression but as a lived religious and social practice.

Fischer regards Wust's marriage and her distance from the lesbian community as evidence that her coming-out precipitated neither a deliberately resistant nor sustained feminist disidentification with Nazi femininity and that indeed she betrayed such a political commitment (see Fischer 1995, 8). Yet the lesbian feminist counterculture that emerged in Berlin in the 1970s condemned butch-femme roles as Wust and Schragenheim had practiced them; it would not have been an inviting social arena for Wust as a sexual agent. Moreover, lesbian feminists privileged gender at the expense of race in their critique of the patriarchal West German state, which would have held little appeal for a woman whose sexual identity was deeply enmeshed in her antiracist convictions and religious practice.

Fischer's project of "guarding the line" between Wust and Schragenheim reveals a failure to imagine either alliances across social boundaries or subjective and collective transformation. This is a grave problem for a contemporary antifascist politics that, by narrating the Holocaust, must not only articulate the specificity of homophobic and anti-Semitic persecution but construct coalitions on the basis of common interest, a shared critique, and a vision of the changes produced through that collaboration.

III. Feminism, Nazism, and the Holocaust

Aimée & Jaguar closes on a personal note, revealing that while Fischer was writing the book, her non-Jewish husband Martin involved himself in rescuing Muslim refugees from the cruel ethnic cleansing campaigns in Bosnia. His commitment to this cause prompted him to leave his wife and work full-time in Croatia. Her admiration at his successful rescue efforts is mingled with mourning over his absence, and her pride in the biography is offset with misgivings about her feminist decision not to prioritize his work over hers. The oppositions set up in these final paragraphs impose powerful tropes of suffering, sacrifice, and defeat on a story that, I believe, would support a different set of conclusions. Whereas Fischer values "life" (1995, 273) over the demands of the dead and the past, her very framing of the biography in the contemporary resurgence

of fascist ideologies, parties, and practices, which has become more disturbing in the course of the 1990s, eschews any simple dichotomy between these terms. Nor am I persuaded by her implication that private comforts and erotic desire are less important than, and must be sacrificed to, political resistance. That opposition of desire and resistance troublesomely assumes that desire always already interpellates the subject into dominant—in this case fascist—discourses and that in order to resist those discourses, one must resist, or forgo, the pull of desire. Yet Wust's desire and the political reconfiguration of her identity and the allegiances that it compelled eschew this pattern. Fischer's reconstruction forces me to face, therefore, what Vivian Patraha calls "a sorrow in time and a locale for misrecognition" (1999, 5), which she identifies as the risk and the threat that attend all reiterations of the Holocaust. By examining the tropes through which Fischer connects past and present, the personal and the political in her epilogue, I wish to call into question more generally how Western feminists have constructed notions of power, resistance, and agency through the lens of Nazism and the Holocaust.

Fischer's epilogue contrasts her husband's spontaneous and risky resistance to injustice with her own dogmatic clinging to feminist principles.²² Her suspicion of actions perceived to be driven by ideology (defined as *empty orthodoxy*), as opposed to those arising from what Fischer names *morality*, imposes a distinction and a hierarchy that one might challenge by pointing to the story, noting the convergence of a feminist practice (Wust's femme disidentification with Nazi femininity) with spontaneous action. After all, Wust's "now more than ever!" in response to Schragenheim's coming-out as a Jew indicates her *impulsive and sustained* commitment first to Schragenheim, later to other Jews in Schragenheim's position, and then to the Jewish community in Berlin and elsewhere. This distinction, which Fischer's book shares with other Western feminist scholarship on fascism, is better explained, I suggest, as a response to the historical failure of bourgeois feminist organizations during the Third Reich.

Although a feminist critique of fascism was available early on, bourgeois German feminists did not use their institutional clout and international connections to oppose the Nazi patriarchy.²³ Likewise, the Communist

²² "Should I have stopped writing and supported his [Martin's] work instead?" Fischer muses. "My women friends convinced me to take my own work seriously. This encouragement was good for me, and yet I know they weren't right" (1995, 273).

²³ The work of Virginia Woolf (1938) and Katherine Burdekin (1985) illustrates such a critique from a bourgeois feminist perspective; socialist feminists had recognized the danger of fascism much earlier.

Party and the Catholic Church, transnational and centralized institutions, failed to oppose Nazism and organize resistance movements.²⁴ In early May of 1933, the Nazis presented the country's 230 women's organizations with the choice of either disbanding or assimilating into the Nazi corporate structure, which meant expelling their Jewish members, pledging loyalty to Nazi doctrine, and electing Nazi functionaries to office (Koonz 1987, 143). The swiftness with which so many associations accepted Nazification surprised even the party leadership. The Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine (BDF), the national federation of German women's associations with more than sixty affiliates and half a million members, was the institutional home of the bourgeois feminist movement. Even though it decided to dissolve itself, Richard Evans notes that the decision did not reflect "ideological defiance" (1976, 257).²⁵ Many of the federation's affiliates, such as the powerful Women Teachers' Association, had already dissolved themselves and recommended to their members to join Nazi organizations and accept their conditions. In her seminal book *Mothers in the Fatherland* (1987), Claudia Koonz responds to the historic failure of bourgeois feminism with an abiding suspicion of ideologies of gender difference and of feminist bureaucracies. Koonz demonstrates how the Nazis' promise of a female *Lebensraum*, or "separate sphere," invoking (albeit ultimately undermining) bourgeois feminists' dream of female autonomy, functioned to orchestrate women's mass consent to fascist rule.²⁶ Moreover, she argues that the bourgeois sexual division of labor, which many feminists championed in principle even if they sought to expand women's sphere of influence beyond the home, was the structure that psychologically enabled German men to execute atrocities, thereby im-

²⁴ Communist lesbians were forsaken when German communists adopted Soviet homophobic policy. See Schoppmann 1996. Klaus Mann's essay "Homosexualität und Fascismus" (1934) poignantly describes the predicament homosexual leftists and antifascists found themselves in because of this situation: persecuted by the Nazis and ostracized by leftist antifascists, they were rendered politically homeless. See Sieg 1995.

²⁵ Rather, it resulted from a clause in its statute that forbade joining another association. According to Richard Evans, the BDF leader, Agnes von Zahn-Harnack, "stressed as far as possible its affinities with and its approval of National Socialism" (1976, 257). Evans names the federation's championing of gender difference and separation, aggressive nationalism, racism and eugenics, and opposition to parliamentarism among these affinities and concludes that "the women's movement could do nothing but extend a warm welcome to Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich" (259).

²⁶ Koonz's (1987) concept of a female *Lebensraum*, or "separate sphere," a term usually reserved to describe the Nazis' aggressive expansionism in order to claim eastern European "living room" for Germans, stresses women's implication in the Nazi state's imperialist, racist, eugenic discourses.

plicating “innocent” women in a system geared to mass murder. Yet neither the refashioning of masculinity and femininity in *Bubi-Dame* couples and communities nor the politics of gender equality pursued in the name of the third sex appear as sustained resistance to Nazi patriarchy (which advocated segregation and difference) in feminist scholarship. Theorizing maintenance and survival strategies, Sybil Milton stressed the importance of building alternative kinship systems in single-gendered environments (1984, 307), and Koonz has underscored the significance of unlearning and reassembling traditional gender roles and behaviors (1987, 408). Yet lesbian butch-femme practice, which embodied these values, is omitted from their accounts. In a Foucauldian move, Koonz champions instead local, momentary subversions of power. Her privileging of resistant acts of masquerade and deception arising from spontaneous “morality” and “common decency” over organized opposition foreshadows the ascendancy of drag and performativity in feminist theories of subversion during the 1990s.²⁷

Lilly Wust’s spontaneous and sustained resistance, while not guided by a feminist or lesbian leadership, grew from the experience of an outlawed desire, the rules and rituals of an underground community, and the pleasures and dangers of material independence; this feminist practice also led her to locate herself in proximity to communists and Jews, as her revised family genealogy illustrates. Similarly, one might point out (as Deutsch-

²⁷ Peter Schneider (2000, 2001) makes the same point in his biography of Konrad Latte, who survived the Holocaust in hiding. By contrast, Eva Fogelmann’s psychological study of numerous rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust links the capacity for spontaneous, risky action to a range of motivations and predispositions. One-third of rescuers were “morally motivated.” Among those, the largest portion was compelled by political beliefs, the smallest by emotional compassion and empathy (1998, 177). She labels the second largest group of rescuers (approximately 22 percent) *Judeophiles* (rather than using the pejorative term *philosemites*), who are driven by strong positive feelings for individual Jews or Jews in general. The third largest group is that of rescuers in networks, who were the most socially homogeneous, often coming from middle-class, educated backgrounds and beginning their resistance activities as students. Although they constitute the third largest group, their activities were the most effective and successful: over 90 percent of rescuers in this category were involved in more than five actions that saved more than fifteen people; 41 percent saved 100–2,500 people; and 23 percent rescued 15–50 people. More than ninety were involved full time in their activities as “professional” rescuers (1998, 211). Even as Fogelmann acknowledges the failure of institutions such as the churches or political parties to adhere resistance, she recognizes the force of beliefs, attitudes, and habits formed among adherents of particular ideologies. Similarly, Deutschkron correlates rescuers’ willingness to demonstrate solidarity at great personal risk with “a strong faith, a political orientation—loosely defined—or the personal experience of suffering” (1996, 159).

kron [1989] and Fogelmann [1998] have done) that individuals who resisted, even though they were not directed by a feminist, Communist, or Catholic leadership, were nevertheless impelled by the “moral” principles they had acquired through their socialization in these political and religious contexts. Although Koonz’s critique is clearly driven by a feminist impulse, the salvaging of nothing more than “common decency” from the wreckage of feminist bureaucrats’ failure, along with the abstraction of resistance from women’s bodies through the concept of a “female style of resistance” (which reinscribes, even as it revalues, traditional notions of femininity as deceptive and duplicitous), extends an abstract notion of subversive gender acts to antibourgeois men and women while expunging a lesbian referent from the scene. What is elided along with that referent is a notion of long-term, organized efforts in which a political vision of acknowledged difference (from binary gender arrangements and hierarchy) is wedded to a lifelong investment in social transformation (of a homophobic, patriarchal system).

The story of Schragenheim, Wust, and the three women Wust saved figures a notion of resistance that is subversive and sustained, openly defiant and deliberately deceptive, and shaped by abiding loyalties as well as spontaneous sympathies. It calls into question feminists’ Foucauldian conclusion about the failure of oppositional institutions and utopian ideologies. Schragenheim’s butch defiance and Wust’s desire for it were shaped by a rich and complex social world whose central institutions were eliminated. Even as many of the individuals participating in it survived, lesbian culture was extinguished as a place where, as in Schragenheim’s circle, German Jews commingled with “Aryans,” men with women, and lesbians with heterosexuals.²⁸ Schragenheim’s death and Wust’s isolation

²⁸ Although the milieu portrayed in *Aimée & Jaguar* is thoroughly bourgeois, its composition reflects political alliances across racial, gender, and sexual lines in a lower-class context that is the subject of several recent queer novels and memoirs. In the local history evoked in the autobiography *I Am My Own Woman* (1995) by Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, a gay transvestite and sexual pioneer, as well as in the fiction of sex work activist Pieke Biermann (1993), collaboration across social lines was forged in the crucible of the Scheunenviertel, Berlin’s old center, where poor Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe shared space with prostitutes, perverts, gamblers, and thrill seekers. Mahlsdorf and Biermann portray this world in order to intervene in the surge of xenophobic violence following German reunification, but their vision of courage and loyalty among sexual and racial minorities is also nostalgically tinged. In both authors’ work, lesbians tend to get lumped in with either sex workers, feminists, or homosexuals in the interest of political alliance. While I sympathize with their agenda, their evocations of solidarity among sexual and racial minorities tend to obscure the specificity of lesbian social history and lesbian strategies for survival, accommodation, and

together mark the destruction of a social formation that could not be resumed after the Nazi regime was defeated and the bars reopened. Due to the limitations of feminist and gay historiography, the scope and consequences of this destruction could not be fathomed. Nor can this loss be redressed through a familial model of transmitting and guarding memory, as the difficult interactions of Fischer and Wust demonstrate. While I do not want to claim that all butch-femme or lesbian practice is always antipatriarchal or antifascist, this couple's story challenges the supposition that all we are left with in this postideological, postcommunist, postfeminist moment is an ethical imperative as murky and individualist as "common decency" as the only alternative to calcified and corrupt political machines.

Färberböck's solution to the problem of Wust's perceived transgression suggests a change in antifascist discourse by the end of the decade. By way of conclusion, let me briefly sketch the direction and implication of this change. The plot of the film adaptation conforms to the well-worn melodrama of the "exceptional German" who, despite her best efforts, cannot save the persecuted friend she loves. This exceptional German is personified not by Lilly Wust, however, but by the fictional character Ilse. That character is similar to but not identical with Schragenheim's friend Inge (a pseudonym), who metamorphoses from the subordinate role of witness (in the book and the documentary) to that of the narrator of the film. Her voice observes, interprets, passes judgment, and grants absolution. Ilse, who is Schragenheim's ex-lover and Wust's employee, is able to judge both of them fairly and definitively. Objectivity is her special accomplishment and results not from dispassionate distance or indifference but from a deep passion ennobled and transcended by renunciation. "You are a very special person," Schragenheim tells Ilse in a tear-drenched voice before going on to indict her own ordinary, selfish, and ungrateful action of dumping her for Lilly. Ilse's demeanor throughout the film is one of righteous indignation and noble suffering. She is the mythical exceptional German that Ruth Klüger (1994) describes, who defies the Nazi state out of the goodness of her heart. By inviting spectatorial identification with such a figure and its inscription both of goodness and passivity, the film relieves audiences both of the pragmatic consequences of Fischer's call to activist interference in racial injustices and of facing the morally difficult question of usurpation. When the aged Wust asks, coyly, "Was it all my fault, Ilse?" Ilse responds soothingly, "I used to be so sure, Lilly, but now

resistance that, I believe, need first to be elaborated before commonalities with other persecuted subjects of Nazi rule can be articulated.

I no longer know. Felice stayed with you because she loved you, and you visited her [in Theresienstadt] because you loved her." Whatever. Erecting a moral center obviates the need for the film's spectators to grapple with the thorny issue of Wust's "crossing the line"; it preempts the wrenching work of remembering through a facile fantasy of absolution and through an assertion of unbreachable boundaries whose crossing can only be represented as pathological. The erasing of a sinister, cross-identificatory desire from the formula of antifascist resistance and solidarity produces a "cleaned up" German heroine who is a lesbian, but a nonpracticing one. Compassionate and situated at a safe distance from her Jewish friends, she is endowed with the moral authority to speak memory and judgment. Despite its omissions, despite its tendency to construct hierarchies of victimhood, Fischer's critical rewriting of Wust's "Book of Tears," achieved through interrogation, research, self-reflection, and an avowedly contentious collaboration, offers a more promising model of remembering the past and imagining the future; it risks and accomplishes much.

For feminists, the impasse between essentialist formulations of identity and their opposite and remedy, which has evolved from poststructuralism to performativity and citationality, is more than a decade old. Taken as interpretive frames for the pressing political problems of the 1990s, they bring into focus the dangers both of building communities through an appeal to difference and of enacting "resistance" through performative subversion. The rise of religious fundamentalism, ethnic nationalism, and genocide in postcommunist Europe illustrates the continued virulence of essentialist assertions that the liberal response of a multicultural market, fueled by the sampling of diverse minoritarian styles, has not been able to challenge effectively. The centrality of performative reiteration to the theorization of subject-effects, as feminists in the Marxist tradition have pointed out, has all but voided notions of agency and social transformation. The projects of coalition building between groups vested with different access to power and resources and of imagining social change (rather than the momentary subversion of hegemonic sign systems) are stalled by the increasing difficulty of constructing agency and transformation without resorting to essentialist formulations of the subject and by the tendency of performative strategies to emphasize and multiply differences and subsume them under a logic of capitalist appropriation. I agree with Nancy Fraser's assertion that the uncoupling of a politics of differences from a politics of transformation constitutes one of the greatest problems of the past postcommunist decade (Fraser 1999, 12). One of the greatest challenges for cultural critics today lies in theorizing the connection between them.

The set of texts I examine here lends itself to this purpose. The biography *Aimée & Jaguar* underscores both anti-Semitic essentialism and the performative usurpations that mark contemporary philo-Semitism as historiographical problems; my reading of the book and one of its two film adaptations seeks to articulate a model of cross-racial collaboration impelled by an ethic of loyalty along with a notion of transformation impelled by desire. The enactment of that desire through the conventions of butch-femme relations allowed both subjects of the biography to negotiate, rather than repress, the power differences between them and the social conflicts structuring the culture at large. Fischer's revision of identity as neither essential (and racist) nor performative (and open to philo-Semitic impositions) but, rather, a call to collective commitment falls short in its inability to imagine cross-ethnic alliances and allow for subjective or social change. Germans' performances of "elective affinities" in post-Holocaust culture court the danger of usurpation. The story of Felice Schragenheim and Lilly Wust allows us to historicize lesbian desire and retrieve through it a notion of embodied, sustained, collective agency, antiracist alliance, and antifascist transformation that feminists might well consider in grappling with historic and current predicaments.

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