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My Love to Be Defused: Beginnings of an Ethics of Belonging through Negotiations of a National Socialist Image in Daily Life, from Infancy to Adulthood (Excerpts from Diaries Now Titled, *The Responsibility of Being That Sort of Baby*, March 24–July 25, 2020)

Ellen Takata

Preface: Ethics of Belonging, "Defusing" and The Responsibility of Being That Sort of Baby

This little piece—consisting of minimally tweaked diary entries and a preface that is "finished" only as an ethical articulation of its historical moment—originally claimed to imitate cinema: by leaving you to your own anticipation of effects and application of references. It also was meant to elicit your tactile and temporal responses as a booklet on paper, for which you would control the pace of realizing its associations with your present surroundings, memories, and received knowledge (surely you have the time!). The format seems less important now, however, for those aspects of experiencing media are as important as always, so I remind you just in case.

Such an approach to media also is central to the ethical practice that I explore across my work, whether personal or professional. I mention this admittedly artificial distinction because it captures my journey of self-judgment in preparing this piece. Briefly, I moved from considering my diaries a personal secret to realizing that they fuel my scholarship and should be shared more transparently. For many years, in fact, I have wished that whatever I do might be considered an attempt to meld daily life with an ethics of responsibility and compassion toward the

past and other people—to engage a range of forms of redress for historical harm (generally: whatever others require of me) as well as affection for aspects of individuals across historical circumstances (whatever I imagine of others). I shall elaborate these ethics before explaining the origin of my diaries, which I have come to call *The Responsibility of Being That Sort of Baby*.

Specifically, I have conceptualized my personal habits into what I call an "ethics of belonging." I define this approach roughly as seeking implications of harm in elements that furnish feelings of safety and comfort that may underlie a sense of belonging in a place or a group of people, in order to "defuse" such feelings. In fact, however, "defuse" is only an approximation of the impossible task that I mean. I indulge in the term partly out of love for wordplay, because it sounds like "diffuse." It encodes the innocent wish behind what you may find my guilt-laden work: my wish that I simply could spread my love. The conundrum is that my love itself is not simple, and I also would not presume such simplicity in anyone else, though I may speak only for myself. I therefore must re-explore, re-explain and update the compassion and justice that my love attempts every day—it always is "to be defused" through new attention to the emotions and statements of both those who receive harm and who cause it. My diaries are the main place where my subconscious gives me such impressions and voices, and I respond to them in order to work on myself as well as find new areas of "outside" research.

Before going into detail about my diaries, therefore, I would like to be a bit clearer on my ethics in my particular contexts. My general goal across all my work is to build awareness of past and potential dangers that have arisen (or might arise) when emotions map onto signs and messages in daily life. More specifically, I have been focusing on religions and nationalisms through both my graduate studies and my responsibility for my ancestry, which spans various branches of Christianity as well as German and Japanese identities. In barest terms, my notion of an "ethics of belonging" is just the implementation of a simple principle from my childhood: that love's capacity for self-interest corresponds to its potential to harm others, and that one must guard against *disguising* self-interest *as* love for others.

I call the site of this potential self-deception a "space of belonging." It is a space of emotional safety and comfort that consists of signs and sensations from one's life mapped onto an idea of togetherness. In ideal terms, a space of belonging would originate through growing up in a culture with the capacity to imagine, investigate, and love everyone who ever existed, exists, and might exist in the future. I take a realist approach to my own space of belonging, however, by looking for the deceptions that interrupt that perfection. I may not enjoy feelings of togetherness, comfort, or safety unless I persist in updating attempts to raise my awareness of their own harm (and potential harm). I may critique harmful elements among

my emotional attachments but not deny their hold. Instead, I must move forward with my attachments to specific signs and sensations by taking responsibility for finding, hearing, and caring for people harmed by the meanings attached to those elements.

Since the original draft of this piece, for example, I have followed the emotional hold on me exercised by a figure of National Socialism—whom I shall discuss in relation to the origin of my diaries—to increasing affection for an actor who was forced to flee that regime.¹ At the same time, it was not the historical opposition of these two that brought about this development; rather, it was my investigation of the theatrical world that they once occupied *together*. This case may capture best the balancing act of my work: my heart always leans toward people in all their emotions and contexts, so my mind must meet the challenge of "defusing" my heart's openness.

It is for this reason that my heart and mind have agreed on the umbrella term *legacies of harm* to designate that for which I take ongoing responsibility. The term allows me to anticipate my life as a growing range of ways to redress harm and expand affection in response to both history and individuals within it (or in its wake). My redress is for those in legacies of receiving harm, and I look to their words and other expressions to find the modes of redress that they want from me. Conversely, my affection spreads across those in legacies of both receiving and causing harm, and I attempt to control this phenomenon through the ethics of belonging that I have described. In general, the legacies of harm that I currently engage are the same across both my diaries and research: those of World War II and (to a lesser extent) the Asia-Pacific War. I now comment more specifically on how responsibility for the former brought about my diaries.

Although my written diaries are little, commercially available journals and not often illustrated, they are visual—more properly, they are sensory. They create what becomes an intimately symbolic space (a space of belonging) by attaching (and reattaching) ideas to the emotions that arise from what I have seen during the day in relation to memories and history. In this sense, the role of the "illustrations" to this piece (Figs. 1–2) is primarily to "show" the inability to illustrate, the impossibility of clarifying a space of belonging visually at one point in time. They only touch on memories, moods, histories, and (changing) relations to the persistence of these modes. They are all I can show to evoke the space of belonging in which I try to take responsibility for others in relation to what I find to be my past.

When I "watch" my favorite films, for example, I mainly *listen* to them—at least, unless it is possible to see them in theaters, when I would not waste that experience. At present, however, I take only a peek or two in order to compare the little screen to what one conventionally calls "the images in my head" but that

I prefer to call "the spaces where my head puts me." I inhabit these films. They create a comforting sensation that I "belong" in them and am "safe," yet I know that this sensation threatens to separate me from others: by mapping onto an idea of safety as "being myself" or with others "like me." In fact, I might call my own ethics of belonging an ongoing rethinking and refeeling of "safety" as a mode of keeping others safe from me.

In this way, the need for discovery—and ongoing defusing—of my own earliest space of belonging seems to have "caused" my diaries in 2018. I would not say that I "chose" them. Amid growing anxieties about a worldwide rise in farright rhetoric and activity, I had had the additional shock of confirming that I shall have an increasingly noticeable limp and accompanying medical problems from something stupid that I could have avoided. I am sorry for the arrogance of that last sentence, which equates the rise on the far-right to "something stupid that I could have avoided"—specifically, my newly diagnosed "flat feet" that, in my past life of athletic self-confidence, I subjected to too much running. Perhaps similarly, my past scholarly life also ran away from the responsibility that I choose now. What happened next thus may seem appropriate: I began to address casual remarks to a suddenly familiar image of National Socialist Propaganda Minister Dr. Paul Joseph Goebbels, who limped on the same side as I do.

I first found myself "talking" to Goebbels as I walked through artificially maintained woodland and tried to dodge the paths of stags without falling down a crevasse. At first, I thought that it was a German Romantic effect of the landscape. In fact, I had read Goebbels's novel about a year before and forgotten.² I had thought to seek his novel at all (through only a hunch that it existed) in an ethical crisis as a visual historian—or so I had thought. I had told myself that I had to assess my own ability to avoid harming others by comparing myself with Goebbels: as a fellow person in my fundamental line of work—assessing the emotional effects of images, words, and other sensory and symbolic markers.

My past intellectual framing of my choice to read Goebbels was not a lie. Now, however, I would add that I also was turning to Goebbels to "check" how he had handled our common German Catholic past. I increasingly discover German Catholic vestiges in my own approach to life, and I wanted to investigate *in detail* how I could do the *opposite* of what Goebbels did, despite what I feared might be major similarities in our emotional and practical lifestyles. The more I find of him, in fact, the more I feel that our attention to the effects of communication is exegetical in the more selfishly Christian sense: that we secretly still wish that a divine voice sends signs in order to show that it hears us.

Conversely, my dad—a Japanese Okinawan American Lutheran (lapsed)—early critiqued that selfish aspect of Christianity to me, or so I see it now. I remember

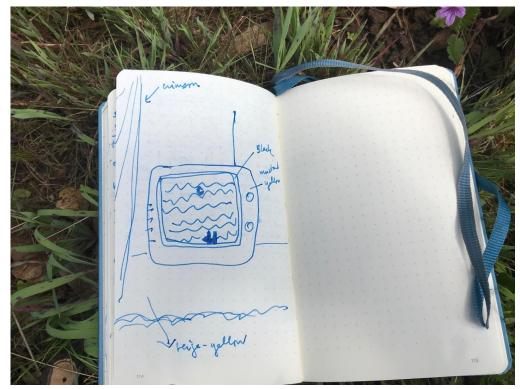


Figure 1 Author's photograph of her drawing from memory of historical footage of Goebbels on television, Cambridge, MA, ca. 1978. Image courtesy of Ellen Takata, March 27, 2020.

his story of deciding not to be a Lutheran minister, which he told me when I was five, teaching me that to be concerned with an omnipotent voice—no matter whose voice it is supposed to be—is to live in the blindness of wanting to be heard instead of wanting to listen. I was not supposed to approach listening greedily as a confirmation that my own prayers had been heard.

This is why I effectively listen to myself in my diaries through different "voices" in order to seek intimate ways to listen to those living with my legacies of harm. Conversely, I grew up in the less intimate terms of "simple" historical accountability, for example, reading Holocaust literature as a teenager and hearing my maternal grandfather's rhetoric from the civil rights movement and other progressive activisms in his longish life. Even at the time, I had had pricks of conscience that my attempt to "take responsibility" in these ways was too shallow. Among other things, I knew that Grandpa himself had had family on both sides of the Civil War and spent World War II in prison as an antiwar protester. When I was little, he was my main model of ethical complications in idealism.

It therefore is to honor the humanitarianism of Grandpa's rhetoric that I also look beyond rhetoric. I follow pricks of conscience toward individual creations by recipients of harm, which allows me to keep a strictly humanitarian ethics

while not so strictly defining individuals within it.⁴ At the same time, I hesitate to name those recipients of harm whom I am pricked to find, because I do not want to put them "on the spot" with me.

It is bad enough that they were on that spot without me—some before I was born. The irreverence and didacticism that I allow my diaristic voice (with my fellow perpetrator-types) also is not appropriate for others, and I often wonder if I shall be able to write myself into a better voice. I cannot say now if I can.⁵

Instead, I simply live with the responsibility inherited through an early and vivid space of belonging, which it now behooves me to describe. There is not much to it. Goebbels wears an oil-cloth jacket cut like many that I have owned over the years, starting with my mom's mother's ski jacket. He attempts to hide his limp by acting as though he is trying to shift his posture from relaxing to standing at attention. We and the air around us quiver uniformly within a sort of mustard-yellow halo.

In retrospect, that halo is likely the mustard-yellow body of the TV set that my parents owned from before my birth until I was about two. I imagine now that I saw Goebbels on it as I was learning to walk. Perhaps I sympathized with his unsteadiness through my own. The flickering of the analogue TV may have helped. His image might have been part of a history book advertisement or stock footage in a British comedy. It strikes me now as Allied footage, for would Goebbels have circulated himself as so frail a persona? No—that's what I would do! Remember that so that I cannot fool you.

Not fooling you is perhaps half of my responsibility insofar as I resemble Goebbels while trying not to do what he did. This is half the meaning of my diaries' title, *The Responsibility of Being That Sort of Baby*. The other half is not to fool *myself*—both about who I am and who I could be, because the first does not predict the second as rigidly as Goebbels let himself believe.

This is why, I repeat, I do my best to find the voices that have been erased by our fooling people (and ourselves). I also am sorry that this effort is not very evident in the diary entries that follow. Beyond these—as indicated by the recent case that I mentioned—I have been tracing actors from my favorite films to various distances from Goebbels, from him as their prospective "boss." Their experiences range from collaboration in Germany to escape to Hollywood.

Should you choose to read on, you will meet the earliest such actor: Rudolf Schündler, who arose for reasons that my diaries make apparent. I must share one detail left out, however—a "scholarly" discovery that I made as a fan. In 1946, under Allied Occupation in Germany, Schündler jotted down an approach to cabaret that strikes me as akin to an ethics of belonging. He called it "a nice responsibility for future cabarets."

March 24, 2020: Waking Up

Rudolf, wake up! Don't look at me like that—I'm not Goebbels (Goebbels, can you believe he can't tell us apart?).

No, it's not Goebbels this time, I promise. I'm American. Yes, I'm an American who has a long history with Goebbels and knows what he's like, because she happens to resemble him in ways that she constantly tries not to allow in evil directions.

Ah, see, now you get it—thank you for not being confused. You wouldn't believe how many Americans don't get that—that a person trying not to be evil could share so many traits with an evil one.

The younger Americans, especially, don't get it (I mean the ones my parents' age and younger). *Your* generation always understands, which is maddening, because so many of you don't let that understanding change you (in fact, Rudolf, I wonder if you yourself already were sort of a nice person and therefore didn't have the type of transformative denazification that would have been impressive in someone not as nice).

And the other thing, of course, is that the younger generations rarely get it—get that someone trying not to be evil could share traits with an evil person—because they HAVE changed, or, at least, forgotten.

But Rudolf, what else can I say to you, because that was everything! (True, Goebbels, two days ago I told you that everything was the question of how to reconcile love and hate—it is the same thing. I don't have to say it as directly to Rudolf because he already knows.)

Well, I'll think of something. You see my tone already is less annoying because you are here. But no, it's not like Goebbels is gone—he's here too. He always is. Is that what it's like when you've worked under the guy for real? (I don't mean directly, I mean stayed and acted in Germany when he was in charge of acting.) But then again, when you really do know a person when he's alive, perhaps it's easier to reject him in death, because you feel as though you knew him enough.

Yes, Goebbels, that's why I can't reject you—that, and my longstanding ideal of not hating anyone (though, true, rejection is not necessarily hate—*now* you make these distinctions!).

After the Passing of the Morning

Pouring rain, boys, and I missed the police by going out early in the drizzle, still saw people to avoid, got covered in the sharp seeds of burrs like when I was a kid playing on the banks of the Charles in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

You know, Goebbels, I always think that I am not writing this for us—that I wish the living would read it (Rudolf, you are the closest to that, as another person whom I don't consider so much like myself, though, yes, you are dead).

But then I never show them (except those few I've mentioned before, and I'm not sure always that I should have) because I think that I have figured out various things for myself that they might have helped me figure (or might *not* have, more likely, which would be disappointing).

March 25, 2020: Kale Edible Melted (Forgiveness as Consciousness-Raising as Critique)

Rudolf, a friend was kind enough to bring me two bunches of Lacinato kale (not the curly kale we know) from the market—crowded even at 6 a.m.! They were in a bag outside the door when I awoke around eleven, Goebbels, having fallen asleep watching Rosen blühen auf dem Heidegrab for the third or fourth time last night, because its message is that one must undergo a curse in order to overcome it, rather than try to avoid it completely (aptly forgiving for the postwar defeated, you've got to admit—these days, we critique that this self-forgiveness might extend to include you, or your work's effects on people—well, so what if it does: that *is* one way of establishing that we don't agree with you all the same).⁷

Forgiveness, Goebbels, can be as consciousness-raising as critique, because it is inherently critical—it acknowledges and understands a crime.

But yes, Rudolf, before watching that postwar film, I also watched Goebbels's horror-comedy (no, not his regime, which, as you know, isn't funny: a film that he allowed to be made under it, called *Freitag der 13*—in 1944, do you remember?). Yes, long before the American *Friday the 13th* which also is not funny, but *Freitag der 13* is a *bit* funny, despite all—especially the butler, perhaps a timeless character (or one who always finds a place with me, anyway—for what is timeless?). 9

But Rudolf, I must remember that I am trying to freeze one of the bunches of kale so that it will last longer. There was just space for it amid all my roommates' things in the freezer. I never use the freezer, in case the power goes out and everything melts (as tends to happen here when it rains), but kale still is edible when

melted.

After the Passing of the Day

A bright afternoon, boys, no police and no sails on the ocean, though I imagined that I saw breaks in the waves, maybe whales or dolphins—maybe emerging into the absence of people like the deer, turkeys, gray foxes, and coyotes that already were ubiquitous but now even more so. Trying to avoid some elderly on the path, Goebbels, I discovered that my foot is a bit stronger than I thought, bracing it against the earth again as I climbed up by grabbing tree stumps and stones, to the barbed wire by the road, where what appeared to be poison oak caught so strongly on my trousers that it unrolled the bottoms.

March 26, 2020: The Media (My Concern Should Be Other People)

Din of a construction crew outside, Goebbels, I am afraid of the media invading my life further than it already does—no, that's not true. I'm not afraid, I'm annoyed—sorry it's come to that, the reaction to bombardments that replace one's own concerns with those of other people, and yet, as I used to say to Jesus (yes, I know he's here, I just can't presume to talk to him as you do, or anyway, not now)—shouldn't my concern *be* other people?

Ah Rudolf, yes, the annoyance is that the media itself has a personality that pretends to be everyone. It is a very friendly personality these days, Goebbels, friendly to all its audiences (I shouldn't say "it," for there are many, yet all slip into their own spots, imagining themselves somehow apart from the others—and *that* is the annoyance, though it can be pleasant, I guess, when one is in despair. But yes, *that* would be the reason to be afraid! No, not of the media—don't give yourself so much credit—but of how one sees it).

But yes, I myself am slipping into a sort of spot—reduced to material needs as a sort of weird comfort in deprivation that I still might expect to be remedied, as when my electric towel rack will arrive this weekend, so that I can make things less cold and damp, and when my laundry detergent arrives in two months (well, I exaggerate—a bit over a month) but of course, Goebbels, I have laundry soap now, just hope it is enough.



Figure 2 Re-creation of author's re-encounter of "phantoms" in Fritz Lang's Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse (Nero-Film AG, 1933), accessed via YouTube.com, channel "gustavo anibal sicardi," on March 26, 2020. Image courtesy of Ellen Takata, March 27, 2020.

After the Passing of the Day

Downpour as soon as I got inside—no sails on the sea (though perhaps a ship), no police. Lovely scent of vanilla and dry sawdust as I crossed the street, and of flame this morning—wonder if these are elements of my perfume that emerge, as desired, to surprise and warm me, as though from somewhere else, but actually from me.

Don't, Goebbels, say that this is what you have been doing—I mean, along with Jesus and Rudolf, of course. I know that you are right, that the three of you have begun to emerge from me to help me, so that I can be responsible in real life. Why, because I "am responsible" even when we play pretend (I hope!).

Going to do the laundry now, the sun shining again through the rain.

Toward Evening

Laundry nearly done. I made goulash except with oatmeal—yes, I should call it *something like* goulash, except with oatmeal. No need to record the recipe here; it is one of those things that will happen again when it must.

March 27, 2020: The Occasion

Boys, I'd never call myself "speechless" (how could I, Goebbels, being so much like you) yet the occasion that you made for me so long ago ought to leave me speechless—yes, in *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse.*¹⁰ I guess Fritz Lang made the occasion. Really it is all of us who are making the occasion—you don't know the occasion?

Why, Goebbels, it was when you banned that film—critics say because Dr. Mabuse was like Hitler, but that is not my impression.¹¹ The big, dumb guy in Mabuse's *gang* is like Hitler, and the overwrought, little smart guy in his gang is like you. I took a picture!

Whether or not Lang meant it, he showed what looks today like the two of you as phantoms, appearing to the character of Hofmeister: the tall one mustachioed in jodhpurs, the small one dressed like James Cagney but with our own, characteristic circles under the eyes.

But *the occasion*, Rudolf, is that the small one was played by you! So: I *didn't* discover you for the first time when you played Robert's father in *Im Lauf der Zeit*, or even faintly in *Suspiria*—I've known you since I saw *Dr. Mabuse* in high school, maybe even sixth grade!¹² Must I now see that, I suppose, there is no escape from myself, because, I guess, I don't want to escape?

I do find it satisfying, Rudolf, that Lang should have mapped you and Goebbels onto each other, even by accident, so that you both are mapped onto me.

Also, Goebbels, I'd say it was nice of Fritz (or nice of his subconscious) to blame a magical force of evil for controlling you, rather than suggesting that you controlled the evil. I figure it always goes both ways.

Yes, though I'm not sure if I should, I cannot seem to help but see hate as only one facet of people who hate. It makes it easier to love you without agreeing to most of what you want—then, when (sometimes) you do want things that don't hurt people, I imagine that I could change the rest. But yes, this is in my imagination.

March 28, 2020: A Sail on the Ocean

Boys, yet again I have given away the punch line in my title—not that you don't always already know it, because you are myself. But you *know* that.

Rudolf, I have been considering really sharing this thing—us (me)—with other people, living people, and I have been fretting all day.

Goebbels, *everything* is a potential problem, and there are *no solutions!* How many times have I told you?

But mainly, boys, I think that I was too hard on my fellow Americans—the ones under a century old—for forgetting you, for not getting as close to you as I have. They are to be congratulated for focusing on their own pursuits despite the massive distraction that you provide for people like me, and I do not want them to think that I want to distract them. I suppose I want to let them know that someone is looking after you so that they can do something else.

And yes, I did see it—a sail on the ocean today, though in the rain.

* * *

Ellen Takata researches forms of postwar responsibility for media, memory, and emotion in the German- and Japanese-speaking worlds, largely through what she terms an "ethics of belonging": reading interconnected implications of harm and comfort through histories, literatures, and imageries from (and of) various cultures in legacies of causing and receiving harm. She is currently a PhD candidate at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Notes

The author would like to express her deepest thanks to the Refract team, whose efficient gentleness toward this piece prompted such clarity and honesty as it has, and spurs her toward more.

¹ These developments are beyond the scope of the present piece. Briefly, this actor is among my main "personal" interests at the moment. He is Wolfgang Zilzer (a.k.a. "Paul Andor" in Hollywood), whom I also turned out to "know" from visual spaces in my past. Readers might know him from *Casablanca* as the man whose

identity papers have expired, an uncredited role now listed under *Casablanca* on IMDB.com, accessed July 22, 2020.

- ² [Paul] Joseph Goebbels, Michael: Ein deutsches Schicksal in Tagebuchblättern (Michael: A German Destiny in Diary Pages) (Munich: Franz Eber, 1938).
- ³ Among Holocaust-related works that I read in my youth, perhaps the standard for my generation was still Elie Wiesel, *Night*, translated by Stella Rodway, with a foreword by Francois Mauriac (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960); see also *La nuit* (Paris: Éditions de la minuit, ca. 2007). As to my grandfather's remarks—some might be approximated in his postwar papers in the library at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. They may be accessed there under his name, William Karr Hefner.
- ⁴ For example, I have been moved by the variety of individual perspectives emerging from legacies of resistance in the following: *Ganja & Hess* (dir. Bill Gunn; Kelly-Jordan Enterprises, 1973), accessed via KinoNow.com (Kino Lorber), June 22, 2020; *Because I Was a Painter: Secretly Crafted Artworks from Concentration Camps* (dir. Christophe Cognet; Cinema Guild, 2015), accessed via Kanopy.com, November 26, 2019.
- ⁵ As of this writing (July 24, 2020), I indeed have started "talking" to Wolfgang Zilzer in my diaries (see n. 2). I am not sure if he gives me a "better voice," but I am in a more hopeful frame of mind toward my work as a whole. In personal terms, it seems vital that he turned out to be another figure who had lived in my subconscious (from movies in my youth) and "returned" in terms of history. Although I should not need such an affirmation, I'll take it.
- ⁶ In Schundler's original German, the phrase is eine schöne Aufgabe künftigen Kabaretts. See Rudolf Schundler, "Während der Zigarettenpause: Gedanken eines Kabarett-Regisseurs" ("During the Cigarette Break: Thoughts from a Cabaret Director"), in Das literarische Kabarett (The Literary Cabaret) (Munich: Drei-fichten Verlag, 1946), 44.
- ⁷ Rosen blühen auf dem Heidegrab (Roses Bloom on the Moorland Grave; English title: Rape on the Moor) (dir. Hans H. König; König Film, 1952), accessed via YouTube.com, channel "matz kap," March 24, 2020.
- ⁸ Freitag der 13 (Friday the 13th) (dir. Erich Engels; Viktoria Film Verleih, 1944), accessed via YouTube.com, channel "matz kap," March 24, 2020.
- ⁹ Friday the 13th (dir. Sean S. Cunningham; Paramount Pictures, 1980).
- ¹⁰ Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse (English title: The Testament of Dr. Mabuse) (dir. Fritz Lang; Nero-Film AG, 1933), accessed via YouTube.com, channel "gustavo anibal sicardi," March 27, 2020.

¹¹ See, e.g., Siegfried Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 84.

¹² Im Lauf der Zeit (In the Course of Time; English title: Kings of the Road) (dir. Wim Wenders; Wim Wenders Stiftung, 1976); Suspiria (dir. Dario Argento; Seda Spettacoli, 1977)—in both cases, my memories refer to seeing these films in theaters multiple times and on dates that I have forgotten.