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# A Nazi Amusement Park: Flakturm Tower IV and the Rise of Alt-Right Fetishism in Vacation Venues

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## **Abstract**

This paper contends that the NH Hotel Group’s decision to convert Flakturm Tower IV, a former Nazi military installation in Hamburg, Germany, into a luxury hotel performatively establishes an Alt-Right fetishism. Though NH Hotel Group plans to include a rooftop garden to serve as a “memorial center for victims of the Nazi regime,” this paper argues that even this gesture magnifies the terror. Drawing primarily from Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection, Dick Hebdige’s theory of style, the project’s surface discourse proclaiming the benefits of restoration and repurposing, is really a gesture of repossession. This repossession emerges as residual cultural modes of Nazi strategies of excess and exclusion become performatively ingrained in the architecture of the building. Rather than having abjection the Nazi regime’s terror, Flak Tower IV restyles it, offering a popular and consumable form of oppression, an Alt-Right entertainment. By doing so, the NH Hotel Group further perpetuates the commodification of Nazism and profiting off such atrocities, not just on the scale of hotel ventures.

*Keywords:* Reappropriation, Fascism, Authoritarian Fetishism, Commodification, Nazi Fetishism

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An Auschwitz themed Christmas ornament and other merchandise were pulled by Amazon after online outrage this holiday season, due to the products. The Auschwitz-Birkenau state museum called out Amazon for selling the products and called for them to remove them due to their inappropriate nature, although there are still pieces of holocaust merchandise purchasable on the website (Hassan). Another instance of this blatant cannibalism of the suffering of those in WWII by the means of the Nazis is the renovation of Flakturm Tower IV which fetishizes and commodifies alt-right horrors. The reappropriation of Flakturm Tower IV shows an ever-growing culture which idolizes the actions of those which could fall under the umbrella of being Alt-Right, this has resulted in the commodification and fetishization of Nazi artifacts and ideology.

Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: an Essay of Abjection*, discusses abjection in the context within its relationship to an object and as something that is not quite an object. She specifically states that:

When I am beset by abjection, the twisted braid of affects and thoughts I call by such a name does not have, properly speaking, a definable object. The abject is not an object facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an object, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire. What is abject is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous. The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses.(Kristeva 1-2).

As well as giving the illustration that abjection is “To each ego its object, to each superego its abject,” (Kristeva 2). “For abjection, when all is said and done, is the other facet of religious, moral, and ideological codes on which rest the sleep of individuals and the breathing spells of societies. Such codes are abjection's purification and repression. But the return of their repressed make up our ‘apocalypse,’ and that is why we cannot escape the dramatic convulsions

of religious crises,” (Kristeva 209). The abject relates to the tower as something within the tower, a looming presence, it is both the tower and not. The abject is not the physical tower, but what it represents and that which follows it. With the superego being the abject, it would be reasonable for the character of the building and the character of those who seemingly worship Nazi ideology to align with the abject Kristeva writes about. The dark presence of artifacts or ideology which most attribute to it being involved with fascism is correct on a surface level. But to further explore the unnamable quality they possess, Kristeva’s abject allows for that further exploration, to identify the unsettling presence the aforementioned things possess. That, it alone is not the object that is solely unsettling, but the quality of being opposed to I, the Abject (Kristeva 1-2).

In his writings, Hebdige discusses hegemony in a section of his book *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*, the passage starts with Hegemony being called a “moving equilibrium” (Hebdige 15). Hebdige further examines hegemony and states it as being “a situation in which a provisional alliance of a certain social group can exert ‘total social authority’ over other subordinate groups (Hebdige 15-16). Hegemony is an exertion of power over someone else generally by means, which are either moral, spiritual, or political, although more than one of those means can be employed.

In Hook’s *Language and the Flesh: Psychoanalysis and the Limits of Discourse*, he observes how social or discursive meaning can variously be understood as the effects of the uncanny (in Freud), of the abject (in Kristeva), or the Real (in Lacan). The theories to be used from Hook’s work will be Freud and Kristeva, more specifically, how psychoanalysis interacts with abjection from Hook’s point of view. As well as how it relates to the theories from Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror: an Essay of Abjection*. The uncanny is hence that class of the frightening in which something repressed makes its return.

Regarding the uncanny Hook writes “Herbst (1999) is hence right to speak of the uncanny as an ‘emotional adjunct to the emergence into consciousness of repressed unconscious material’” (p. 105). Moreover, the uncanny is not a category of repressed material but “an unsettling sense of familiarity that appears when repressed material manages to slip into consciousness”(Herbst, 1999, p. 105),” as well as his interpretation of Freud “The paradox that Freud poses at the beginning of his 1919 paper is hence retrieved: the uncanny is thus both that which is at some level familiar and unfamiliar, that which had been known, secreted away, and then returned – the old-established ‘thing’ which became alienated to the mind precisely through repression. In figurative terms, one is reminded, as Freud points out, of the return of the dead, the previously familiar, now forgotten persona who returns to stake a claim on the living,” (Hook 5). The uncanny relates to Flakturm Tower IV in a brilliant way, the Nazi Party in its original form is exactly that, it is known by majority though very few if any remain that deeply knew the group on a personal level. People are taught in school about the Nazis, but the way that people about it is a removed form, in essence, both familiar and unfamiliar.

Throughout *Marxism and Literature*, Williams writes a critique and argument surrounding culture through a Marxist and non-Marxist lens. A theory to be applied to the artifact is that of *Dominant, Residual, and Emergent* (Williams 121-27). The cultural theory Williams provides in his book affords the opportunity to observe an artifact and the cultures surrounding it. The dominant culture is at its basis the system of association that is most observable in the culture, the commonly held behaviors and patterns of the masses. The residual culture is not something perfectly taken from the past and enacted modernly; it is from the past but still active in the cultural process; it is something of the past and the present. The emergent culture is the system of association that challenge the majority, a culture born out of opposition

to the one that is most observable. However, Williams makes no case for a reemergent culture, a culture that was residual in a way but came back as an emergent culture. In relation to the subject matter at hand, a reemergent culture would be the one which is most applicable. Due to Williams not having made a case for this culture, a hybrid of residual and emergent cultures is applicable.

*Kevin Lynch's What Time Is This Place?* Discusses the architecture and style of a specific building and how it relates to the current time period, such as restoration, preservation, environmental impacts, and costs. (Lynch 29-35). Another passage from *What Time Is This Place?* States that “fragments of an obsolete physical environment are lovingly preserved, or restored so that they may be preserved, as relics of a time gone by” (Lynch 29). The latter passage is somewhat small, but with the application of the view to a particular structure an underlying theme can be found, one that brings into question the motive of those which try to preserve those things. This analysis of architecture and preservation does allow for a thorough observation of Flakturm Tower IV, as well as asking why someone would restore such a place, let alone lovingly preserve a Nazi structure.

To get a firm grasp of what Nazism is, there needs to be a definitional analysis as well as some historical context presented. To begin with, Nazism is the totalitarian movement led by Adolf Hitler as head of the Nazi Party in Germany. While sharing many qualities with Italian fascism, Nazism possesses intense mass appeal, dictatorial rule, and nationalism. Though, Nazism is significantly more extreme together with its concepts and in the application. In virtually every single respect it was an anti-intellectual and atheoretical movement, emphasizing the will of the captivating dictator as the sole source of inspiration of a people and a nation, as well as a vision of annihilation of all enemies of the Aryan Volk as the only goal and policy of the Nazi Policy. The intellectual viewpoint Hitler possessed was influenced during his formative

years not just by the currents in the German tradition but also by explicit Austrian movements that declared multiple political sentiments, particularly those of Pan-Germanic expansionism and anti-Semitism. Hitler further added to the Pan-Germanic aspirations that were already in existence, which caused it to have almost mystical fanaticism of faith in the mission of the German race and the fervor of a revolutionary social gospel. This gospel was most fully expressed in Hitler's personal testament *Mein Kampf* (1925-27; "My Struggle"), in which he outlined both his real-world objectives and his philosophies concerning race and propaganda (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019).

The most significant individual contribution to the theory and practice of Nazism Hitler provided was his profound understanding of mass psychology and mass propaganda. Hitler stressed the detail that all propaganda has an obligation to hold its intellectual level at the capacity of the least intellectual of those at whom it is directed and that its truthfulness is nowhere near as important as the success of the propaganda. Nazism attempted to merge conservative, nationalist ideology with a socially radical doctrine. In so doing, it became a profoundly revolutionary movement--albeit a mostly negative one. Rejecting nationalism, liberalism, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and all movements of international collaboration and peace, it stressed instinct, the subordination of the individual to the state, and the necessity of blind and unswerving obedience to leaders appointed from above. It also emphasized the inequality of men and races and the right of the strong to rule the weak; sought to purge or suppress competing political, religious, and social institutions; advanced an ethic of hardness and ferocity; and partly destroyed class distinctions by drawing into the movement misfits and failures from all social classes (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019).

Flak Tower IV, which is currently under renovation as a luxury hotel, presents an unprecedented crisis for history and memory in Germany. Critically, Flak Tower IV, an offensive rather than a defensive bunker, represented the power of Nazi oppression and, significantly, resistance to forces of liberation. The tower is both physically and symbolically an architectural ode to the “embodiment of Hitler’s master military” (Hosie). This architectural symbol stands in Hamburg, Germany, as an omnipresent reminder of the history of Nazism, yet these changes will erase that past, by commercializing that which was decidedly not available for consumption.

The aforementioned bunker, Flak Tower IV, was a structure designed for anti-aircraft purposes and built by forced labor, the reason for not being a typical bunker is due to the far-right nationalists who were known as Nazis. They alone are the reason for the existence of the building. Though people who agree or identify with the Nazi Party still exist, just not at the caliber they did during the Third Reich. Since the Nazi Party is not a new formation nor their ideology, it would be appropriate to refer to it as a residual culture, due to the culture never dying out. Though it has reemerged but, in the reemergence, it was found that those who agreed with the ideology never went anywhere, just stayed hidden in the shadows while trying to further the ideology of the Nazi Party. The artists who used the space of the bunker were not using it to glorify the people who had it built, but rather a form of shock value, or even to degrade the beliefs of the Nazis.

The bunker was built by forced labor and was explicitly an anti-aircraft bunker, so those who were forced into building the tower also had to shoot at British planes (Hosie). Nevertheless, the hotel company stated they were going to expand it and add a five-story rooftop garden with a memorial, the hotel group said they “wanted to inject life into the building,” but



the company also stated that it would reflect “eye-catching designs” and become a “fashionable destination.” Though there has been some opposition from the locals, an architect from Hamburg noted that the building “should represent the strength and brutality of National Socialism,” and should not be made “cuddly and green,” (Hosie). To overwrite the history of the building is an erasure of the atrocities, when Hosie wrote of “cuddly and green,” the inherent problem to doing so as alluded to, is making a Nazi bunker a trendy destination. By attempting to make the tower “cuddly and green,” the tower no longer appears to be what it is, a Nazi bunker, something which should not be commodified to be trendy or even more horrifying, cute. The hotel company had stated that the bunker had been home to live music venues, nightclubs, a music store, and a workplace for media and artists, which the developers say will remain on the lower floors below the hotel (Hosie). But while it has served as a home to those things, it always maintained being a Nazi bunker, never trying to hide or play down what it was. While the appropriateness of those uses could be debated, those using the structure acknowledged the building for what it was, never hiding its dark history.

In *Marxism and Literature*, a notable theory discussed is the *Dominant, Residual, and Emergent* (Williams 121-27). Williams gives a theory in which to observe culture; the dominant culture is at its basis the system of association that is most observable in the culture, the commonly held behaviors and patterns of the masses. The residual culture is not something perfectly taken from the past and enacted modernly; it is from the past but still active in the cultural process; it is something of the past and the present. The emergent culture is the system of association that challenge the majority, a culture born out of opposition to the one that is most observable. Though since Williams makes no case for the reemergent culture, as previously mentioned, there is limitations to apply a theory which does not fully exist. However, with the

analysis of the residual and emergent cultural systems, the observable phenomenon of the fetishization of the Nazi bunker shows a reemergent culture. Since this sub-culture of fanaticism is not an emergent culture, there have been those which fetishized Nazi actions from the start, nor is it fully a residual culture. This culture which seems to worship actions of the Nazi Party cannot be a residual culture due to their idolization of the period as well as their attempts at preservation. Their actions would mirror that of a reemergent culture, with the preservation of the artifacts and ideals, as well as using this to challenge modern society. The barbaric and horrific actions of the Nazi Party have been heavily condemned, to worship such things shows an anti-societal view.

Though in consideration of what the bunker is and what the hotel represents the culture surrounding the artifact, in observation, it can be noted that there is a dominant form of culture which exists, one of cold hard capitalism. Notably due to the disregard for the atrocities committed and the flagrant reappropriation of the structure for a luxury hotel. The dominant form of culture, capitalism, can also be observed in the Auschwitz themed merchandise Amazon was selling--and still is (Hassan 2019). A case could be made that Nazism is a residual culture, that it slowly has stayed festering in the underbelly of the world but that would be incorrect, nor is it an emergent culture. With the surge in alt-right and Nazi fetishism, the culture it belongs to would be re-emergence, something Williams makes no case for in *Marxism and Literature*. A re-emergent culture would have elements of the residual, with respect to having been from the past but strangely has evolved and no longer is the residual culture nor an emergent culture due to the dominant culture being most observably one of capitalism, pure profit. The re-emergent culture has elements of Nazism but has become a hybrid of ever-evolving Alt-right views and the actions and ideals of the Nazis.

In *Powers of Horror: an Essay of Abjection*, the writer notably articulates that “For abjection, when all is said and done, is the other facet of religious, moral, and ideological codes on which rest the sleep of individuals and the breathing spells of societies. Such codes are abjection's purification and repression. But the return of their repressed make up our ‘apocalypse,’ and that is why we cannot escape the dramatic convulsions of religious crises” (Kristeva 209). In observing Nazism and the Alt-right with respect to the aforementioned passage, the reemergent culture is one of the repressed. Nazism was the darkness in which the individuals that identified and supported the movement viewed themselves as the repressed, this is the very same mentality that dominates the current Alt-right movement. The current religious, moral, and ideological codes are in opposition of what the alt-right and Nazism promotes; however, through abjection to those standards the Alt-right and Nazi views were able to multiply.

As the architect that was interviewed for the article noted earlier that the bunker “should represent the strength and brutality of National Socialism” (Hosie), keeping the bunker in its current state for business ventures would be a point of controversy but completely remodeling the bunker for a luxury hotel is blatant reappropriation and erasure of what happened there and the actions of the Nazis concerning the bunker.

In *What Time Is This Place?* architecture is discussed and how it relates to the time period from which it came and how it exists during modern times (Lynch 29-35). A passage from *What Time Is This Place?* states that “fragments of an obsolete physical environment are lovingly preserved, or restored so that they may be preserved, as relics of a time gone by,” (Lynch 29). By viewing the bunker which is soon to be a hotel through Lynch’s lens the undertone of the hotel renovation brings into question why a Nazi bunker would be “lovingly

preserved,” what purpose is there to preserve the Nazi qualities of a structure that is being turned into a hotel, the answer to that is fetishization and commodification. The fetishization and commodification of such a structure shows a problematic and rather concerning sub-culture that is obsessed with things pertaining to the Nazi Party.

In *Language and the Flesh: Psychoanalysis and the Limits of Discourse*, Hook discusses the uncanny by the view of Freud “The paradox that Freud poses at the beginning of his 1919 paper is hence retrieved: the uncanny is thus both that which is at some level familiar and unfamiliar, that which had been known, secreted away, and then returned – the old-established ‘thing’ which became alienated to the mind precisely through repression. In figurative terms, one is reminded, as Freud points out, of the return of the dead, the previously familiar, now forgotten persona who returns to stake a claim on the living,” (Hook 5). The bunker is a prime example of this, something which has some familiarity and unfamiliarity at the same time, a relic of the past which has been brought to the current time. Most people who were involved in WWII have passed away, the first-hand experience of these atrocities dwindles by the day but to some extent the average person has some familiarity with the concept of Nazis, though most are typically unfamiliar with the ideology of Nazism.

While the reappropriation of the bunker destroys the history of the building, it becomes something else. It no longer is a bunker used for other purposes but a building that, at some point, was a bunker. The bunker becomes an outlier in its history, something that exists but not quite in the narrative of the hotel anymore. Something that was but no longer is, a husk from a past which is being erased in the narrative it exists in. By turning the bunker into a hotel, the atrocities committed by the Nazi Party are then silenced. With the hotel not being in anyway a memorial for those lost, the existence of the hotel sidesteps everything that happened due to the

bunker existing. A prime example of erasure and reappropriation of a structure for profit; the erasure destroys any meaning or history connected to the object, and the reappropriation takes the husk of the object and any residual culture that survived and turned it into whatever the appropriator wants. The appropriation of the structure for a luxury hotel is blatant in its disregard for the horrors committed and those who suffered by the hands of the Nazis. To remove the context or historical value wherein an object resides removes the meaning and value of the respective object.

Moving to analyze the artifact through hegemony from *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* (Hebdige 15). With the bunker construction being owed to forced labor, an example of Nazi hegemony during the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The bunker was a representation of the dark time from which it came; it no longer serves the purpose of shooting down aircraft but is still viewed as a WWII installation. With the aforementioned comment from the architect from Hamburg, the architect never attacked the use of the bunker for commercial ventures; the architect did, however, attack it for reappropriation. The problem with the bunker is not the commercial use but the glorification of the bunker with the remodeling of it and the capitalization from it due to the actions of the Nazis. The building would not exist if it were not for the Nazi Party existing and then the forced labor imposed upon the people of Hamburg by the Nazis and their hegemonic power.

The current path for the bunker is one of flagrant capitalism showing the current hegemonic state of corporate power over the individual. For a company to exert such power, to be able to openly capitalize on the transgressions of an alt-right party shows the hegemonic state corporations operate out of in the modern age. To announce that a company will reappropriate a Nazi bunker into a luxury hotel is an affront to those essentially subjugated by the company due

to financial status. The hotel company stated they would put a little memorial in the five-story garden, yet the company is going to erase all the history associated with the bunker by reappropriating it. At that point, the memorial is only a venture to appease those in the face of being accused of profiting from the actions by the Nazis. The people of Hamburg were once subjugated by the Nazi party to build and operate an anti-aircraft bunker; but now they have to see the very monument of Nazi control that they overcame become a luxury resort for those that idolize the actions of their former oppressor.

The selling point of the hotel over other luxury hotels in Hamburg would be that the structure was a Nazi bunker. The most plausible reasoning behind using a Nazi bunker as the structure for a luxury hotel would be that it was a Nazi bunker. The argument of the hotel being in a historical site or having unique architecture relates to the reason the structure possesses those qualities; again, it was a Nazi bunker. However, if the bunker were not a bunker, just a concrete building with no notable features, it would have no value architecturally nor as a destination spot. The success of the hotel venture is grounded in the infamous nature of the building, why it was created, who commissioned it, and how it was used. The hotel venture would probably have a lower success rate if it was an old office building or schoolhouse.

The renovation of the bunker to make it “eye-catching,” a “fashionable destination,” and “wanting to inject life into the building,” is a marketing ploy, the hotel wanted to add a five-story rooftop garden as well (Hosie 2019). Renovating the structure to be the aforementioned luxury destination is blatant reappropriation, keeping the original structure but adding features, so the hotel will be luxurious is just picking aspects of the building and the corresponding history and choosing to keep the specific aspects on the basis of whether or not a notable profit can be made.

The hotel cooperation in charge of the venture is selling Nazism in a physical form by using the bunker as a structure for the hotel over building a new luxury hotel that has no connection to Nazi or Alt-right practices. The only reason to use the bunker as a hotel would be for what it once was, a Nazi bunker, not a revitalization. Would it even be possible to revitalize a building in which atrocities were committed in and tailor the experience towards those with the funds to accommodate a luxury experience? From the article regarding the bunker renovation, the hotel company stated that the bunker would be a “fashionable destination” (Hosie 2019). The only way for a building that represents the rise and fall of the Third Reich to be a fashionable destination would be to commodify the horrors which made the structure infamous and sell to those who are either too ignorant of history to know the significance of the structure and the time or sell to those who know exactly what it means, and on a deeper level fetishize the crimes committed for some perverse reason.

Another problem with the hotel venture to be considered is the ramifications of the actions from making a Nazi bunker a luxury hotel. How far is too far to be considered unacceptable in the eyes of the consumer and the boards that approve these actions? After the hotel has been finished will another company possibly decide to build a chain of hotels in various villages across Rwanda where there was the highest number of killings or is that too recent genocide for the glutenous consumer (Beauchamp 2014)? Would a business venture to build a resort around one of the numerous killing fields in Cambodia be approved since the area no longer serves the purpose of a genocidal regime; maybe another cooperation sees an opportunity to revitalize that area as well and profit off the notoriety of the millions murdered (Taylor 2019).

However, the intrinsic fault of the hotel venture is that it solely relies upon the infamy of the Nazi Party to make any profit due to the clientele that they have cornered the company into

providing accommodations. The hotel venture will only be successful if those that fetishize Nazism and other Alt-right horrors support the venture by staying at the hotel. Due to the origin of the bunker, those who suffered at the hands of the Nazis or related to those who did probably will not stay at the bunker. By making the bunker a luxury destination, if that is even possible, the clientele which it would attract would be those fascinated with Nazism and the modern Alt-right, more precisely wealthy clientele. To take a step back and observe the situation objectively, the observable pieces are a Nazi bunker, the reappropriation of a structure, renovation for a luxury hotel, and a hopeful hotel venture.

In a final observation of the situation, is it appropriate for a business to reappropriate a structure and base their profits from clientele who hold the same beliefs as those who originally constructed the structure? Has the clientele that inadvertently or blatantly support Alt-right atrocities intentionally chosen an area which suffered at the hands of the Nazi Party? To make the residents of that area work for the hotel company be in a position of servitude to the clientele that fetishizes the Nazi Party, which bears a similarity to how those who lived in the area years ago were forced to work for the Nazi Party.



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