



everybody sells diamonds...

der weisse engel!



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## DER WEISSE ENGEL [2011]

It is Lotte Palfi Andor who screams.

The Szell of the Holocaust camps is in New York's Diamond district

Trying to get a fair assessment of a bag of diamonds.

An architect of waiting death stumbles onto a Manhattan teeming with where he may run into a camp survivor of the camps.

Like that other New York, where an insistent Volkswagen reminds us him. This will always be a German car.

The "Volk" of the brand means "people" in German, but it also stretches to *völkisch*, or "ethnic". Founded in 1937 by the German Labour Front, under Hitler.

At least in the 1970s there were survivors. Still alive, still remembering.

It cannot be, but it is. *Der Weisse Engel*.

And Lotte has seen him.



Three decades earlier, Lotte was the character who sold her diamonds to escape the Nazis in *Casablanca*. The word "Moor" comes from the script. It was not yet *verboten* in polite conversation.

In real life, she fled Germany in 1934, ahead of Kristallnacht. In old age, Lotte divorced her husband when he wanted to die in Germany. Better to be alone than to return. She died the same year.

In Michael Chabon's slim book, a parrot recites the numbers of death trains. In William Goldman's novel, a merchant's arm reveals camp numbers.

What was Lotte thinking that morning, while rehearsing her lines? What was Hanif Kureishi doing, when he had Shashi Kapoor meet the Bengali couple? An archetypal Bollywood actor, playing an exiled Pakistani dictator. The survivor and witness, messy in real life, also unresolved in fiction.

In *United Red Army* (dir. Mohaiemen, 2011), the hostage negotiation tapes from JAL 472 on Dhaka airport blanket the seventy minutes of the film. Green / Red are the interplay of negotiator and counterpart. In *Der Weisse Engel*, expanded in a new version for Bucharest, after a few frames of film, there is only Black / White. Schlesinger's film recedes, Michael Small's operatic score continues, and a new script unspools: linking *Casablanca* to *Marathon Man* and *Sammy and Rosie get Laid*, and an idea of delayed justice.

Critic Murtaza Vali wrote in 2011 of "Dustin Hoffman's Babe, a hapless history student studying for a Ph.D., an erstwhile stand-in for Mohaiemen." ("Complicating the History of the Left", *Art Info*, February 20, 2012)

**Woman Selling Her Diamonds:** But can't you make it just a little more . . . ?

**Moor Buying Diamonds:** Sorry, madame, but diamonds are a drag on the market: everyone sells diamonds; there are diamonds everywhere . . . Two thousand four hundred.

**Woman Selling Her Diamonds:** All right . . .