



## Claudia Joskowitz

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Feuding with one's neighbor will undoubtedly pressurize the already delicate politics of apartment life. Now imagine the amplified tensions that would arise if that neighbor were former Nazi Klaus Barbie, the so-called Butcher of Lyon, who is estimated to have been directly responsible for the deaths of approximately 4,000 people during the German occupation of France.

Claudia Joskowitz's eight-minute two-channel video *Sympathy for the Devil*, 2011, re-creates just such a scenario, revealing something of the nature of the ideological jumble that resulted from South America's post-World War II asylum-granting policies. Based on an anecdote from the 1970s told to Joskowitz by a relative, as well as on her own memories from childhood, the video stages an encounter in a Bolivian high-rise apartment building between two neighbors: a Polish-Jewish refugee and Barbie, then residing in La Paz under the assumed name Klaus Altmann (spelled Altmann in the work). The video begins with a run-in between the two men at the doors to an elevator. Joskowitz deploys her signature slow tracking shots and pans to create a claustrophobic intensity; though the figures are still, as though freeze-framed, the face-off becomes an epic standoff between strangers who nonetheless know each other to be enemies. Accompanying the elderly Pole is a third man, his son, who introduces the sounds from which her video takes its name: the famous Rolling Stones song from 1968. After the charged but silent encounter in the vestibule, Joskowitz cuts to a shot of the young man in the apartment with the old Jewish émigré seated on a chair. The young man drops the needle on a record, the strains of "Sympathy for the Devil" fill the air, and the camera begins a slow pull-out shot revealing the apartment's stunning view of the La Paz skyline and the distant Andes. As the camera backs out of the room into the hallway, the viewer notices the roughly three-inch-long rectangle of a Jewish mezuzah on the doorframe of the apartment.

The camera on the second channel then enters an identical apartment with Altmann's name engraved on the door, and finds the old Nazi reclining in a chair positioned in the same location in his apartment as his neighbor's, seated before the same picture view of the city. The



Claudia Joskowitz,  
*Sympathy for the Devil*,  
2011, two-channel HD  
video projection, color,  
sound, 8 minutes.

coincidence of the close cohabitation of the two men in a fairly upscale building, combined with the slow moves of the camera and the men's dignified postures and unhurried movements, conveys that they are not going to just duke it out. Yet the jittery intensity of the Stones tune fuels the invisible yet palpable tension of their antagonism. The song, which Mick Jagger sings from the perspective of gleeful and unrepentant Lucifer recounting his terrible deeds, is particularly fitting for Barbie, who, having escaped from Germany to South America with the help of a "ratline" sponsored by United States intelligence services, led a relatively comfortable post-Nazi life as a paid anti-Communist agent for several international government organizations before being extradited to France in 1983. Joskowitz's long-take tracking shots pulling away from windows recall the enigmatic final scene of Michelangelo Antonioni's 1975 film, *The Passenger*, in which a zoom is combined with the movement of a camera as it slowly travels through a window and then returns, an effect that in Joskowitz's piece creates a vertiginous pulse charging the room with both physical instability and psychological strain.

In previous works, Joskowitz tackled the coincidence of Bolivia's having been the site of the last stands of not only Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid but also Che Guevara. It has been argued by some that in his peregrinations throughout Latin America, Barbie was involved in hunting down Guevara—adding another level of complexity to Joskowitz's study of Bolivia's checkered history as a haven for outlaws. As this recent project underscores, chance encounters and historical parallels have unpredictable aftereffects, of which her video is a beautiful example—a surprising event, transmitted via an anecdote to a child, can result in later ruminations on the nature of justice and retribution.

—Eva Díaz