



JUDGING
“PRIVILEGED” JEWS

*Holocaust Ethics, Representation
and the “Grey Zone”*



ADAM BROWN

JUDGING “PRIVILEGED” JEWS

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Judging “Privileged” Jews: Holocaust Ethics, Representation, and the “Grey Zone”

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*For Phillip Maisel,
Holocaust survivor and dear friend*

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INTRODUCTION

“PRIVILEGED” JEWS, HOLOCAUST REPRESENTATION, AND THE “LIMIT” OF JUDGMENT



On 17 October 1962, the fragmented and partially indecipherable manuscript of Salmen Lewenthal, a Polish Jew, was unearthed at the site where the crematoria of the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp once stood. Although he died before the camp’s liberation, Lewenthal had included in his testimony the following passage:

We were shamed of one another and we dared not look one another in the face ... [...] I admit that I, too, ... [...] it appeared that my actions, too, [...] were [...] ... the truth is that one wants to live at any cost, one wants to live because one lives, because the whole world lives. And all that one wishes, all with what one is, if only slightly, bound [...] is bound with life first of all, without life [...] such is the real truth.¹

Lewenthal had been a member of the *Sonderkommando* (“special squad”) forced to work in Birkenau’s gas chambers and crematoria.² The tasks of these prisoners, the vast majority of them Jews, involved using deception to keep order among those about to be gassed; sorting their confiscated belongings; hosing down the corpses; cutting hair and extracting teeth from the bodies; burning the corpses in the furnaces or on outdoor pyres; crushing the remaining bone fragments; and disposing of the ashes, which were used as fertilizer or insulation, or were scattered on

the Vistula River. Men were chosen for the *Sonderkommandos* upon arrival at the camp or, less commonly, as a form of punishment. In return for their cooperation, members of the *Sonderkommando* had access to clothing, bedding, food, cigarettes, and alcohol, all taken from newly arrived "transports." Lucie Adelsberger, who survived as a prisoner doctor in Auschwitz, writes that the members of the *Sonderkommando* "were well paid for their labours. They were allowed to take whatever they wanted from the booty, including cigarettes and brandy. On the other hand, they had their own death sentence in their pocket."³ There were thirteen successive "special squads" in the Birkenau extermination camp, as each group was routinely executed after approximately four months. Any refusal to cooperate was answered with immediate death. Survival invariably came down to chance.

The members of the *Sonderkommandos* belonged to the important category of so-called "privileged" Jews—the central focus of this book. In addition to referring to crematorium workers such as Lewenthal, the term "privileged" is used here to refer to the camp inmates who held positions as prisoner-functionaries, such as the supervisors of prisoner barracks and *Kapos* ("heads") of labor squads. The term is also understood here to refer to inhabitants of the ghettos who were members of the *Judenräte* ("Jewish councils") and *Ordnungsdienst* ("order service," or Jewish police), who are also viewed as having held "privileged" positions.⁴ The ethical dilemmas encountered by this group of victims have proven very problematic for Holocaust survivors, scholars, writers, and filmmakers alike in their attempts to understand and represent such experiences. Jews suffered unprecedented persecution in the camps and ghettos, places where the normal concepts of "choice" and "responsibility" were radically undermined. When confronted with the traumatic circumstances of "privileged" Jews, the practice of passing judgment over their actions becomes highly contentious. The complexities involved in approaching this issue are revealed most clearly in an essay written by the influential Holocaust survivor Primo Levi entitled "The Grey Zone," the central text from which this study arose.

Levi's paradigmatic concept of the "grey zone" directly addresses the issue of "privileged" Jews and is of particular importance due to its engagement with the problem of how their extreme situations are to be understood. A crucial part of Levi's final book, *The Drowned and the Saved* (first published in 1986), "The Grey Zone" raises fundamental questions regarding the treatment of liminal figures by those who represent the Holocaust.⁵ Subjected to extreme levels of coercion, these "privileged" victims were compelled to act in ways that have been judged as both self-serving and harmful to fellow inmates. Indeed, "privileged"

was a term commonly used by other prisoners to describe these individuals.⁶ A crucial, often overlooked, aspect of the Holocaust, the issue of “privileged” Jews concerns victims who, in order to prolong their lives, were forced to behave in ways that have often been interpreted as contributing in some way to the killing process. As Susan Pentlin argues in her essay “Holocaust Victims of Privilege,” in order to develop a deeper understanding of the Holocaust and its ethical implications, one must listen to the “voices from the grey zone” and explore the often taboo issues of “position and privilege.”⁷ Levi writes similarly that the grey zone of “prisoners who in some measure, perhaps with good intentions, collaborated with the authority, was not negligible, indeed it constituted a phenomenon of fundamental importance.”⁸

Drawing on his experiences in Auschwitz, Levi engages with the problematic of *not* judging “privileged” Jews. In his essay he is chiefly concerned with *Kapos*, members of the Auschwitz *Sonderkommandos*, and the controversial Jewish “elder” Chaim Rumkowski of the Lodz Ghetto. While he unequivocally holds the perpetrators of the Holocaust responsible for their actions, he warns that one should abstain from judging their victims. In the case of the *Sonderkommandos*, Levi declares that “our need and ability to judge falters” and that any moral evaluation of them must be “suspended.”⁹ Likewise, he asserts that the same *impotentia iudicandi* “paralyses” us when considering Rumkowski’s behavior. While we should not condemn Rumkowski, Levi writes, we cannot “absolve him on the moral plane” either.¹⁰ At the same time, Levi argues that praising the morally ambiguous behavior of “privileged” Jews is also inappropriate, as he feels that “not all their acts should be set forth as examples.”¹¹ In short, he contends that “privileged” Jews should not be judged for their actions *in extremis*—that negative and positive moral evaluations of their behavior should be suspended. Levi’s meditation on the grey zone poses a number of questions: If “privileged” Jews are not to be judged for their behavior in situations beyond their control, can judgment be suspended in the representations of their experiences? And while passing judgment on “privileged” Jews may be impossible, is it not also inevitable?

Primarily a work of cultural criticism, this book takes an interdisciplinary approach to examine how moral judgments of “privileged” Jews are conveyed in representations of the Holocaust. In investigating this issue, I adopt what might be called a “metaethical” perspective. John K. Roth defines “metaethics” as a reflection on judgments that have already been made, which “seek[s] to understand more fully *how those judgments work* as well as what limits they face and problems they entail.”¹² The focus of this book is on *how* judgments of “privileged” Jews

are constructed; the separate, but intrinsically related, question of *why* judgments of these liminal figures may be inappropriate is secondary. Nonetheless, this chapter and those that follow will also unavoidably reflect on the latter question, particularly when considering the often controversial ideas that historical and cultural representations of "privileged" Jews communicate to their audiences.

While numerous studies have focused on the contribution of Holocaust representations to collective memory, identity, and knowledge, no studies have concentrated specifically on the representation of "privileged" Jews and how this involves making moral judgments. A consensus has formed among those who have engaged with the events of the Holocaust in one form or another that capturing the "reality" of the tragedy—in writing, film, or any other medium—is impossible. Taking this idea further, many scholars argue that some or all representations trivialize the Holocaust through "simplification." Significantly, Levi's anxiety over this phenomenon was an important driving factor in his exploration of the issue of "privileged" Jews. Not only did he raise the question of whether judgment can be suspended, by pointing to historians and filmmakers as being particularly predisposed to making judgment, but his own representation of "privileged" Jews in "The Grey Zone" can itself be seen to entail certain judgments. Going forward, the proceeding chapters of this book explore the possibilities for portraying "privileged" Jews in different representational modes or genres.

Taking Levi's concept of the grey zone as a point of departure, the chapters that follow provide a close analysis of representations of "privileged" Jews in important examples of Holocaust writing and film. Detailed attention is given to how judgments are revealed in Levi's own writings, the highly influential work of Raul Hilberg, and several documentary and fiction films. Many of the specific representations to be examined have been selected in part because of their prominent status in the field of Holocaust studies. Levi's testimonies, Hilberg's scholarship, and the major films examined, including Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) and Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), are consistently highlighted for their "canonical" influence on Holocaust consciousness.¹³ Tor Ben-Mayor and Dan Setton's less well-known documentary *Kapo* (1999) and Tim Blake Nelson's fiction film *The Grey Zone* (2001) take considerably different approaches to representing the behavior of "privileged" Jews than the approaches taken in the seminal films of Lanzmann and Spielberg. An analysis of these representations exposes different modes of judgment vis-à-vis different modes of representation. First, however, a book that engages with such a deeply sensitive subject as the behavior of "privileged" Jews under Nazi persecution necessi-

tates some observations in relation to its conception, construction, and limitations.

As Geoffrey H. Hartman has remarked, Holocaust studies is a veritable “minefield,” where “even the *words* ... in which we express our thoughts on what happened” are disputable.¹⁴ It will already be clear from the preceding pages that the problematic implications of judging Jewish victims of the Nazis render the term “privilege” a nebulous one. Indeed, the phrase is likely to raise some curiosity, if not a degree of suspicion. While my research into this area saw several shifts in the terminology adopted, I settled on “privileged” due to its common usage both at the time of the Holocaust and in its aftermath. It must be emphasized that no matter what physical or other benefits “privileged” Jews may have gained for their cooperation with their persecutors, they experienced immense suffering and were, along with all other Jewish victims, intended to perish. The use of the term “privileged” therefore needs to be understood in the context of the unprecedented conditions of the Nazi-controlled ghettos and camps; the term’s positive connotations must be qualified. Indeed, the categorization of a group of Holocaust victims as “privileged” may be viewed as oxymoronic and the fraught nature of the term must be constantly kept in mind (hence the pervasive inverted commas).

I argue here that moral judgment is inevitable and, furthermore, that when one is faced with such a catastrophic event as the Holocaust, moral judgment is almost unanimously thought to be essential, if not obligatory. However, as Levi’s essay on the grey zone suggests, when confronted with the extreme circumstances of Jews in so-called “privileged” positions, it may be impossible to pass judgment on them. “Impossibility” here does not imply that one is literally unable to pass judgment—far from it, as the following chapters reveal. Instead, the “impossibility” of judgment refers to the perceived invalidity or *inappropriateness* of any moral evaluation of “privileged” Jews. Yet suspending judgment, even of those forced to confront irresolvable ethical dilemmas, is no easy task. I come to the study of the Holocaust from a non-Jewish and non-German background, although I make no claims to any form of “objectivity.” Throughout the researching and writing of this book, my own judgments have undoubtedly impacted on the final result. The more I engaged with representations of the *Sonderkommandos*, for example, the more I felt I sympathized with them. Other cases perhaps produced the opposite effect. This was unavoidable. Even the selection of images for a book such as this can be read as implying judgment. I have endeavored in my critical analysis to avoid “judging the judges,” so to speak, whenever I disagreed with a judgment made in their representations of

"privileged" Jews; nonetheless, my own limitations and the intrinsically judgmental nature of language itself mean that my own judgments will have impinged on the analysis. The emotionally and morally fraught issue of "privileged" Jews at least necessitates an awareness of this.

In order to map out the terrain to be covered in the subsequent chapters, this chapter includes the following sections, which highlight key concepts and debates that inform the book as a whole. First, a more detailed explanation of the phrase "privileged Jews" is accompanied by a broad account of the experiences of the particular groups of people to be the primary focus of analysis. The discourses and controversies that have formed around the interrelated problems of judgment and representation—problems that remain unresolved in Levi's writings and more widely—are then surveyed, with Lawrence L. Langer's concept of "choiceless choices" providing particularly valuable insights into the ethical dilemmas confronted by Holocaust victims. Finally, I explore the problems faced by those who attempt to represent liminal figures and the Holocaust in general by positioning judgment as a "limit" of representation, thereby charting a path for an investigation of how "privileged" Jews are portrayed in different genres.

A Matter of Life and Death: The Category of "Privileged" Jews

"Privileged" Jews include those in the Nazi-controlled camps and ghettos who held positions that gave them access to material and other benefits beyond those available to other Jews. This study adopts a very specific definition of "privilege" in order to concentrate on the extreme ethical dilemmas that many victims faced, although the term has also been used at times to categorize Jews in Germany whose deportation was postponed due to prior military service, marriage to non-Jews, and so on, or Jews in the ghettos who held a higher socio-economic status than others. Indeed, the use of the term "privileged" in relation to victims in the ghettos and camps has been far from consistent. For example, Marlene Heinemann's analysis of camp inmate relations in Holocaust testimonies is partly divided into reflections on "privileged" and "less privileged" prisoners.¹⁵ Levi himself implies a similar distinction (or "spectrum") when he separates the categories of "privileged" prisoners at issue in this book from both the "unprivileged" prisoners and the "picturesque fauna" of "low-ranking functionaries," who included "sweepers, kettle washers, night-watchmen, bed smoothers ... checkers of lice and scabies, messengers, interpreters [and] assistants' assis-

tants.”¹⁶ Setting the ambiguities of the term aside, it is the victims who held the particularly controversial—and frequently condemned—roles of *Kapos* and crematorium workers in the camps or Jewish leaders and police in the ghettos with whom I am primarily concerned here. In addressing the crucial issue of “privileged” Jews, therefore, it is essential to understand—to what extent possible—the unprecedented situations in which victims became “privileged.”

A common theme running throughout survivor testimony is the extreme dehumanization experienced by Jews in the ghettos and camps and the moral compromises they were forced to make in order to survive (or at least to prolong their lives). Part of the Nazi system of dehumanization involved the creation of a complex network of “privileged” prisoners to be responsible for aspects of the administration of, and discipline within, the numerous camps and ghettos.¹⁷ Conditions in these settings varied markedly, both geographically and temporally, thus it is difficult to generalize.¹⁸ Isaiah Trunk’s detailed study of the *Judenräte* demonstrates that although there were extensive differences between ghettos, in every one a façade of “ghetto autonomy” was used by the Nazis to disguise “the satanic purpose of using the victim himself [*sic*] to assist the hangman in his work.”¹⁹ Exposed to widespread starvation, disease, slave labor, and random executions, tens of thousands of Jews died in the ghettos even before deportations to extermination camps commenced. As one survivor has noted, “You can’t apply any normal criteria to the ghetto. I didn’t wonder about what was moral and what was immoral.”²⁰

The ethical dilemmas that “privileged” Jews confronted in the ghettos are epitomized in the establishment of the Jewish councils and police forces. Being part of these organizations had the potential to prolong one’s life and the lives of one’s family members through the provision of extra food, freedom of movement, exemptions from searches and evictions, and (at least initially) immunity from deportation; however, it is crucial to keep in mind that the establishment of the ghettos was only to be a temporary measure. In the end, most “privileged” Jews did not survive the Holocaust.

The role of the *Judenräte* has been the subject of intense debate, as will be discussed later in the chapter. The councils were comprised of up to twenty-four men, who were directly responsible for carrying out Nazi policies and overseeing the daily operation of the ghettos.²¹ Supervised and often abused (verbally and physically) by the Nazi administration, Jewish leaders were made responsible for registering and housing the ghetto population; distributing life-prolonging work permits; organizing health, education, and sanitation services; rationing the always-

inadequate food supply; and providing law enforcement and the required number of Jews for forced labor. Faced with massive unemployment, overcrowding, hunger, and epidemics, *Judenrat* officials found themselves in an impossible situation. After 1941, some council members were forced to draw up lists of people demanded by the Nazis for deportation to "the East," although due to their captors' efforts at secrecy, it was rarely clear that this meant certain death. Indeed, many *Judenräte* were established before the total physical annihilation of the Jews was decided upon. Furthermore, while a position on a council generally bestowed significant "privileges," the vast majority of Jewish leaders died before the war ended, having been deported to various camps,²² shot by killing squads, or, in some cases, dying by their own hand.²³ While councils were supposed to consist of the prewar Jewish community leaders, the degree of continuity varied, and there were some instances where the SS chose ordinary civilians. In any case, the ethical dilemmas *Judenrat* officials confronted were beyond anything they had encountered previously. The councils were formed and governed, metaphorically speaking (and often literally), at gunpoint. This may be also said of the *Ordnungsdienst* (Jewish police).



Figure 0.1. The senior officer of the Krakow Ghetto police (*Ordnungsdienst*) straightens the cap of one of his men during roll call (#06224). *Courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives*



Figure 0.2. A member of the Jewish police and a German soldier direct pedestrian traffic across the main street dividing the two parts of the Lodz Ghetto. The sign reads: “Jewish residential area, entrance is forbidden” (#37316).
Courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives



Figure 0.3. Leon Rozenblat, the controversial chief of the Lodz Ghetto police (left), and other members of the *Ordnungsdienst* pose with a newlywed couple (#63000). *Courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives.*

Jews became members of the *Ordnungsdienst* by volunteering, having advantageous contacts, or being randomly conscripted by the Nazi authorities. Armed with truncheons and sometimes whips, Jewish police were charged with keeping order in the ghettos; enforcing Nazi regulations; guarding fences and *Judenrat* institutions; collecting property the SS ordered to be confiscated; and, most controversially, escorting fellow Jews to the trains bound for extermination camps, sometimes even through violent means. Jewish police often had to arrest a daily quota of people for deportation, lest they suffer the same fate. While some ghetto police forces were independent of their *Judenrat*, they were often directly supervised by armed Germans or collaborators to ensure that they undertook the tasks expected of them and that they behaved with the required brutality. Significantly, holding these "privileged" positions could also benefit or protect one's family. The testimony of Calel Perechodnik, one of the few firsthand accounts by a member of the Jewish police, recalls his trauma in helping the SS assemble 8,000 Jews for deportation to Treblinka. The Nazis had deceitfully promised exceptions would be made for Perechodnik's wife and daughter, along with the families of other ghetto police, although as soon as the police had



Figure 0.4. Jewish police escort a group of Jews in the Lodz Ghetto who have been rounded up for deportation (#10055). *Courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives*



Figure 0.5. Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto board a train for deportation with the assistance of Jewish police (#37287). *Courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives*

done what was required of them, their families were deported anyway. Dying before the war's end, Perechodnik wrote in the opening lines of his memoir, which is filled with loathing for himself and his fellow "privileged" Jews: "Please consider this my deathbed confession. . . . I don't ask to be absolved."²⁴ While self-reproach is perhaps understandable under the circumstances, it might be argued that such remorse is the result of the coercive actions of the Nazi perpetrators and no cause for moral condemnation on Perechodnik's part.²⁵ Importantly, many Jews in the ghettos (and some Jews who did not experience persecution in this setting) were subsequently incarcerated in the camps, where Nazi-enforced hierarchies also saw a proliferation of "privileged" positions.

Prisoners in the concentration camps were subjected to primitive living conditions, constant fear, rampant disease, long hours of meaningless manual labor, roll calls in extreme weather, limited access to sanitary and medical facilities, and random physical beatings. In the various camps that made up the Auschwitz complex in particular, Jews (along with a number of other groups of prisoners) were exposed to an intentional policy of starvation and continuous "selections" for the gas chambers. Faced with the inverted morality of the *univers concentrationnaire*,²⁶ victims were turned against each other in a literal struggle for survival, leading to a widespread impression among prisoners that life for one meant death for another. Exemplifying this is the German prisoner doctor Ella Lingens-Reiner's reflection on the dilemma she faced in trying

to use her "privileged" position in Auschwitz to help others amidst the Nazis' obsession with numbers: "If I rescued one woman, I pushed another to her doom, another who wanted to live and had an equal right to live. ... Was there any sense in trying to behave decently?"²⁷ Similarly, in discussing the proliferation of coercion, "privilege," and "compromise" in Auschwitz, Levi writes that the Lager was "an excellent 'laboratory,'" and that "the hybrid class of the prisoner-functionary constitutes [the camp's] armature and at the same time its most disquieting feature."²⁸ Notably, most of these "privileged" positions were automatically allocated to *non-Jewish* inmates, particularly criminals and political prisoners, although the number of Jewish prisoner-functionaries increased toward the end of the war due to a shortage of labor. By having access to better shelter, increased rations, and other items for trade, "privileged" inmates were less vulnerable to—though not immune from—camp punishments. For these reasons, Levi writes that "prominents," or camp officials, along with other "privileged" prisoners, including doctors, messengers, musicians, interpreters, kitchen hands, shoemakers, and so on, comprised the majority of survivors.²⁹ In terms of "privileged" prisoners in the camps, this book is primarily concerned with the *Sonderkommandos* (described earlier) and the *Kapos*.

The behavior of *Kapos*, who generally served as supervisors of forced-labor squads, is a particularly controversial topic. *Kapos* are infamous in survivor literature for their brutal treatment of their subordinates, with some even taking part in the decision-making of the "selections" for the gas chambers. Although not all *Kapos* are demonized by survivors, positive portrayals are generally the exception to the rule. The behavior of *Kapos* often included the intimidation or abuse of some of the prisoners "beneath" them, while favoring or even rescuing others. The motivations behind the behavior of Jewish *Kapos* in particular are fiercely contested and inherently difficult to evaluate. Significantly, *Kapos* were subject to punishment by Nazi guards for any problems arising from the prisoners they were responsible for, and Jewish *Kapos* were arguably under more pressure to keep their positions through violence.³⁰ The most crucial distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners, whether "privileged" or not, is that from late 1941 onward the Nazis intended to kill every Jew.³¹ Any reprieve was only temporary.

Importantly, the focus of this book on (some) Jewish experiences in (some of) the ghettos and camps should by no means be viewed as representative of the Holocaust, as Nazi persecution also occurred at mass-shooting sites, in deportation trains, during the death marches toward Germany at the end of the war, and through a variety of other means. Equally, just as the experiences of Jews varied in a number of

settings and over a number of years, the situations, experiences, and behaviors of “privileged” Jews were incredibly diverse, with important differences existing between the groups of prisoners outlined above and within these groups themselves. On the other hand, emphasizing such differences too strongly often means passing clear-cut moral judgments on some victims over others, in effect constructing a “moral spectrum,” the likes of which will be highlighted at different stages in the forthcoming chapters. In any event, the extreme situations of “privileged” Jews during the Holocaust has placed large, if not insurmountable, obstacles in the path of moral judgment, raising the question of whether or not such judgment should be (if at all possible) suspended. By placing “privileged” Jews within what he calls the “grey zone,” this suspension of judgment seems to be what Levi recommends.

Primo Levi’s “Grey Zone” and the Problems of Judgment and Representation

Levi’s influential essay entitled “The Grey Zone” highlights the interrelationship between judgment, representation, and the category of “privileged” Jews. Indeed, Levi’s writings constantly draw attention to the problems faced by those who seek to represent the Holocaust. In his first memoir, *If This Is a Man* (1947), Levi emphasizes the immense physical and moral degradation experienced by Jews in Auschwitz, arguing that “our language lacks words to express this offence, the demolition of a man [*sic*].”³² Subsequently, in his essay on the grey zone, published just one year before his suicide, Levi expands on the obstacles to representation. Here he stresses not only the incomprehensibility of the suffering of the victims, but also the problem of moral judgment. His sober, questioning, and self-reflexive analysis offers some invaluable lessons on how one might perceive and portray the Holocaust.

Levi’s “grey zone” is in the main a metaphor for moral ambiguity, a conceptual realm with “ill-defined outlines which both separate and join the two camps of masters and servants. It possesses an incredibly complicated internal structure, and contains within itself enough to confuse our need to judge.”³³ This in itself highlights the way in which Levi’s concept problematizes judgment, as his characterization of the grey zone could be (and often has been) interpreted to involve a merging, if not a blurring, of the fundamental categories of persecutor and victim. However, Levi stresses elsewhere in his essay, and for good reason, that “to confuse [perpetrators] with their victims is a moral disease or an aesthetic affectation or a sinister sign of complicity; above all,

it is precious service rendered (intentionally or not) to the negators of truth."³⁴ Accepting the inherent difficulties in judging "privileged" prisoners, Dominick LaCapra reiterates that "one may judge quite harshly and with little qualification Nazis who were instrumental in creating the situation that gave rise to the grey zone."³⁵ In short, the distinction between victim and perpetrator must be maintained.³⁶ Here then is the crux: how are distinctions between groups of victims—those with "privileged" positions and those without—to be drawn without undermining the crucial separation of victims from their persecutors?

Levi's effort to impress on his readers the precariousness of addressing such a complex and sensitive issue is of critical importance. Meditating on the unprecedented situations that "privileged" Jews faced works toward exposing the horror and degradation of the Holocaust experience for its victims, helps to avoid falling into stereotypes that simplify or trivialize the event, and arguably leads to a deeper understanding of the Holocaust. Levi's concept of the grey zone is particularly valuable as it destabilizes clear-cut moral distinctions, such as those between "good" and "evil," and warns against hasty judgment—or, in some cases, calls for it to be suspended. For these reasons, an acknowledgment of the grey zone poses significant obstacles to representation, which Levi shows to be strongly related to judgment. Commenting on the human need or desire for "simplification" early in his essay, Levi writes:

[T]he network of human relationships inside the Lagers [camps] was not simple: it could not be reduced to the two blocs of victims and persecutors. In anyone who today reads (or writes) the history of the Lager is evident the tendency, indeed the need, to separate evil from good, to be able to take sides, to repeat Christ's gesture on Judgment Day: here the righteous, over there the reprobates.³⁷

The notion that simplification results from passing moral judgment in and through representation is evident in this passage. Indeed, Levi opens his essay by stressing the prominent, even necessary, place of simplification in human affairs: "What we commonly mean by 'understand' coincides with 'simplify': without profound simplification the world around us would be an infinite, undefined tangle."³⁸ To state the problem Levi evokes briefly: understanding requires representation, which involves making moral judgment and, inevitably, results in simplification.

Significantly, part of the reason Levi felt compelled to reflect on the grey zone was due to his concern about historical and filmic representations that he felt trivialized the complexity of Holocaust experiences. Levi singles out popular histories, the history taught in schools, and films as particularly predisposed to the simplifying trend he identi-

fies—the “Manichean tendency which shuns half-tints and complexities” and resorts to the black-and-white binary opposition(s) of “friend” and “enemy,” “good” and “evil.”³⁹ Levi’s skepticism toward history and film highlights the problems of judgment and representation in relation to “privileged” Jews, and it is partly for this reason that historical and filmic representations of these figures have been chosen for analysis in this book. Indeed, in a highly critical essay on *Schindler’s List*, Bryan Cheyette argues that “the ethical uncertainty at the heart of Levi’s writings is the necessary critical yardstick by which one ought to understand present-day films and novels, many of which glibly assimilate the Holocaust in a breathtakingly untroubled manner.”⁴⁰ Reflecting on his impetus to write about the grey zone, Levi himself proclaims:

From many signs, it would seem the time has come to explore the space which separates ... the victims from their persecutors, and to do so with a lighter hand, and with a less turbid spirit than has been done, for instance, in a number of films.⁴¹

In the more than twenty years that have passed since Levi’s essay was published, hundreds of Holocaust-related films have been made. Nelson’s representation of “privileged” Jews in his film *The Grey Zone*, discussed in chapter 4, engages directly with Levi’s ideas, and therefore I examine the relevance of Levi’s aversion to the medium of film to contemporary Holocaust cinema.

As noted earlier, Levi argues that one should abstain from passing positive and negative judgments when representing “privileged” Jews. One way in which Levi’s concept of the grey zone suggests judgment should be suspended is to dispose of ethical Manicheanisms and “heroic” discourses. The extreme situations of “privileged” Jews reveal traditional notions of heroism to be highly problematic. In his literary analysis of the “anti-heroic” in Levi’s writings, Victor Brombert observes: “Heroic models and heroic expectations are shown to be illusory and misleading. Offended by any rhetoric that might present the victim as hero, Levi is interested rather in what he calls the ‘gray zone’ of moral contamination.”⁴² While the need to avoid demonizing perpetrators is the chief concern of Ronnie Landau’s contention that “one must seek to guard against grotesque oversimplification and debasement of Holocaust terminology and imagery,”⁴³ rejecting stereotypical representations of Jews as passive victims, heroic martyrs, or complicit traitors is arguably just as important. Finding the language to describe the severe ethical dilemmas faced by victims, a task with which survivors themselves invariably struggle, is immensely difficult. While the distinction between perpetrators and victims must be upheld, an abandonment of

a Manichean perspective and any related heroic discourse is essential in order to highlight the complexity of the situations that "privileged" Jews faced. Nonetheless, avoiding black-and-white stereotypes alone does not guarantee that all judgment is suspended when representing the impossible scenarios that confronted these liminal figures.

The ethical dilemmas encountered by "privileged" Jews render issues of agency—and thus accountability—highly problematic, as without choice and subsequent responsibility, the faculty of moral judgment is threatened. While the wider philosophical debate over free will and determinism lies outside the scope of this book, it is clear that evaluating Jewish experiences during the Holocaust relies on the existence of choice.⁴⁴ This problem is exemplified in what the influential Holocaust scholar Lawrence L. Langer terms "choiceless choices," which scholars have frequently connected to Levi's grey zone.⁴⁵ In his study *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit* (1982), Langer characterizes "choiceless choices" as "crucial decisions [that] did not reflect options between life and death, but between one form of abnormal response and another, both imposed by a situation that was in no way of the victim's own choosing."⁴⁶ Heavily influenced by Levi's early writings, Langer states:

Choiceless choices are perversions of power and will; they proclaim the impotence of the victim, who contaminates his [*sic*] future by the very compulsion to survive in which his oppressors seek to drown his moral nature.⁴⁷

Due to their unresolvable quality, Langer argues that choiceless choices do not even involve deciding between a "greater" or "lesser" evil and can thus be seen to have existed in an environment constructed by the perpetrators not of immorality, but of "non-morality," an environment "beyond good and evil."

Persecuted Jews' "decisions"—if they can be called that—were made under extreme duress, and the notions of intent or volition, which are central to most concepts of justice and judgment, are therefore impossible to evaluate. "Privileged" Jews have often been said to have acted at the expense of fellow prisoners in various ways, for various reasons, and under varying levels of coercion. However, at such a distance of time and experience (and arguably even without this distance), it is problematic for anyone to evaluate the consequences, motivations, and personal autonomy that were in play during the events in question. If it is the case that, as Slavoj Žižek briefly puts it, "only a free choice is morally binding,"⁴⁸ then Levi's imperative to suspend judgment of Jews *in extremis* seems to hold some weight. As Levi writes in *If This Is a Man*, "In the Lager there are no criminals nor madmen; no criminals because there is

no moral law to contravene, no madmen because we are wholly devoid of free will, as our every action is, in time and place, the only conceivable one.”⁴⁹ Nonetheless, a reliance on conventional notions of choice and free will has still been influential in many conceptualizations of victim behavior during the Holocaust.

Some scholars optimistically argue that Auschwitz is “capable of showing us essential aspects of the *human spirit*, and hence of bringing our knowledge of *good* and *evil* into sharper focus.”⁵⁰ The link between an affirmation of choice and a moral judgment of the victims of the Nazis is clear in Victor Frankl’s statement that “man” is “ultimately self-determining”:

What he becomes—within the limits of endowment and environment—he has made out of himself. In the concentration camps ... we watched and witnessed some of our comrades behave like swine while others behaved like saints. Man has both potentialities within himself; which one is actualised depends on decisions but not on conditions.⁵¹

Likewise, Bruno Bettelheim condemns what he views as the passive submission of inmates, pondering why millions of prisoners marched “willingly” to the gas chambers rather than rebelling and dying “like men.”⁵² Such views simplify the complex pressures on, and responses of, victims. While Terrence Des Pres devotes much attention to the “excremental assault” on camp prisoners, he maintains that survival depended, above all, “on forms of social bonding and interchange, on collective resistance, on keeping dignity and moral sense active.”⁵³ In the case of “privileged” inmates in particular, this view is problematic. The victims who are the subject of this book did not survive through what might be readily described as “heroic” means—if, indeed, they survived at all.

Langer argues that the ethical dilemmas engineered by the Nazis render preexisting moral systems an “irrelevant luxury” that cannot be used to understand victim behavior.⁵⁴ In his chapter entitled “Auschwitz: The Death of Choice,” he draws heavily on survivor testimony to describe the “optionless anguish of the death camp” and points to its implications for judgment and representation.⁵⁵ Considering choiceless choices to be a defining feature of the Holocaust, Langer stresses the inappropriateness of preexisting categories of morality and representation when attempting to come to terms with the event. He rejects optimistic explanations for survival that draw on conventional notions of dignity, courage, sacrifice, heroism, and freedom, arguing that these concepts, along with “choice,” are part of the long “list of free words that died in Auschwitz, leaving no successors.”⁵⁶ Like Levi’s conceptualization of the grey zone, Langer’s discussion of choiceless choices confirms

the desirability of suspending judgment. Reflecting on the "dismal fate" of the *Sonderkommandos*, forced to perform such ghastly activities before an inevitable death, Langer declares: "We reserve judgment for the authors of that fate, not its victims."⁵⁷ Warning against "formulas and single truths" when contemplating the Holocaust, Langer contends that "those who attempt to generate such truths ... *sacrifice ambiguity* for the sake of coherence, seeking to construct a possible future from the debris of an impossible past."⁵⁸

Levi and Langer focus primarily on Auschwitz, although the associated problems of judgment and representation also apply to the ghettos. Zygmunt Bauman states in his study *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989) that *Judenrat* officials and Jewish police played "a crucial mediating role in the incapacitation of the Jews," although he also emphasizes their lack of "choice."⁵⁹ Reflecting the concepts of the grey zone and choiceless choices, Bauman stresses the high level of coercion and minimal choices created by the Nazi authorities, forcing the *Judenräte* to partake in the "save what you can" game—a game of acting *rationaly* on good intentions that invariably resulted in death for the many and survival (albeit temporarily) for the few.⁶⁰ While Levi writes that all camp inmates were engaged in "a desperate hidden and continuous struggle,"⁶¹ Bauman describes a similar situation existing in the ghettos:

The individualization of survival strategies led to a universal scramble for roles and positions deemed to be favourable or privileged, and to widespread efforts to ingratiate oneself in the eyes of the oppressors—invariably at the other victims' expense.⁶²

Nonetheless, a strong divide has often been constructed between victim behavior in the camps and victim behavior in the ghetto environment, with philosophers, historians, and other scholars judging the behavior of the prewar and wartime Jewish leadership in various European countries according to clear-cut moral standards. Indeed, the various controversies over the behavior of "privileged" Jews reveal a longstanding tradition of passing judgment on them.

In terms of ethical discussions that focus specifically on the behavior of "privileged" Jews, Levi's reflection on the grey zone stands almost alone. The few other exceptions include writings by Massimo Giuliani, Abigail Rosenthal, and Richard Rubenstein.⁶³ Like Levi, Giuliani and Rosenthal conclude that "privileged" Jews should not be judged. On the other hand, Rubenstein's direct response to Levi's attempt to represent Rumkowski as a morally ambiguous figure rejects the survivor's moratorium on judgment and concludes that "in Rumkowski the gray zone had turned black."⁶⁴ Likewise, David Jones argues in his study entitled



Figure 0.6. A group portrait of members of the Warsaw Ghetto Jewish police (#48568). Courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives

Moral Responsibility in the Holocaust (1999) that many Jewish leaders were “blameworthy” for “collaborating” with the Nazis.⁶⁵ Also problematic are Ervin Staub’s brief reflections on the Jewish councils, which attempt to classify the “psychological experience” of Jewish leaders by examining the possible effects of various contextual factors on the likelihood of resistance. Staub concludes that “many Jews must have progressed along a continuum of victimization and *abandoned themselves* to the currents that invariably led to destruction.”⁶⁶ Significantly, Rubenstein, Jones, and Staub draw heavily on Hilberg’s work (the subject of chapter 2), adopting the very negative judgments of Jewish leaders that they seem, at times, to be critiquing. The problem of judgment that Levi highlights is further evident in the furor sparked by Hannah Arendt’s writings on Jewish councils; the controversial treatment of former “privileged” Jews in the years following the Second World War; and the historiographical debate over Jewish responses to Nazi persecution.

In evaluating Jewish behavior, Arendt makes a distinction between what she calls the “limited freedom of decision and of action” in the ghettos and the utter lack of choice in the camps, which she views as having inhibited any possibility of effective resistance.⁶⁷ Her major

study, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), stresses the unparalleled "total domination" of the prisoners in Nazi camps, including the intentional and systematic erasure of Jews' legal status, personal identity, and moral being. At one point, Arendt describes a situation that to some degree reflects Langer's concept of a "choiceless choice":

When a man is faced with the alternative of betraying and thus murdering his friends or of sending his wife and children, for whom he is in every sense responsible, to their death; when even suicide would mean the immediate murder of his own family—how is he to decide? The alternative is no longer between good and evil, but between murder and murder.⁶⁸

Adopting an apparently sympathetic attitude, Arendt suggests that there is "no moral problem" regarding Jewish behavior in the camps because of the extreme situations that confronted the prisoners (although ironically, the dilemma she describes above appears to more closely fit the circumstances of the Jewish police in the ghettos).⁶⁹ On the other hand, after attending the Israeli trial of the perpetrator Adolf Eichmann in 1961, Arendt published *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, in which she aggressively censures the activities of the *Judenräte* and Jewish police. While some argue that Arendt never intended to judge the Jewish leaders,⁷⁰ her language clearly condemns their actions. Arendt draws heavily on Hilberg's work, arguing that without the "collaboration" of Jewish leaders, "the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people."⁷¹ Many critics contest the depth of Arendt's understanding of conditions in the ghettos and her sweeping generalizations regarding the *Judenräte*.⁷²

Criticisms of Jewish behavior began long before the Eichmann trial. Indeed, denunciations of the "inaction" of Jews were made during the war itself by members of the Jewish resistance. Such criticism is exemplified in the partisan leader Abba Kovner's oft-repeated declaration that the Jews of the Vilna Ghetto must not go to their deaths like "sheep to the slaughter."⁷³ There was also considerable conflict between the *Judenräte* and resistance groups in the ghettos, and "privileged" Jews in the camps were vilified both during and after the war.⁷⁴ After the liberation, a number of *Kapos*, including Jewish *Kapos*, were murdered as "collaborators" by survivors or executed en masse by Soviet forces.⁷⁵ The problem of judgment became a divisive issue in Israel when public discoveries and denunciations of former "privileged" Jews led to what came to be known as the "Kapo Trials" (1951–1964).⁷⁶ During the approximately forty trials that took place, several defendants were acquitted; those found guilty were given light sentences; and the one case of a

death penalty was commuted to a ten-year imprisonment.⁷⁷ Idith Zertal suggests that the trials were “purges” motivated by political agendas and aimed at “the lowly and the trivial.”⁷⁸ These problematic trials of Jewish “collaborators” serve as the basis of *Kapo*, one of the documentary films to be analyzed in chapter 3.

A statement in a postwar report by Rudolf Kastner, a former Jewish leader in Hungary and the focus of the most prominent legal case involving a “privileged” Jew, closely reflects Levi’s ideas in its account of the situation *Judenrat* officials faced:

Common sense is almost incapable of drawing the line between self-sacrifice and betrayal. ... To judge the *Judenräte* after the fact, on the basis of testimonies, documents and sources—this is a task that is beyond the capacity of any human tribunal.⁷⁹

Lawrence Douglas writes that the demonization of Kastner, who was accused by the presiding judge of selling his “soul to the devil,” reveals the widespread tendency to examine Jewish behavior in “Manichean terms.”⁸⁰ Later, in the formation of Israel’s national identity, themes of resistance and martyrdom superseded criticisms of survivor behavior. These developments underline the importance of Levi’s warning against ethical Manicheanisms and discourses about “heroism,” which cannot encapsulate the complex ethical dilemmas of “privileged” Jews. The historiographical debate over Jewish behavior during the Holocaust has also pivoted on the binary opposition constructed by the terms “collaboration” and “resistance,” further bearing out the problem of judgment.

The debate over Jewish responses to Nazi persecution often condemns or glorifies Jews who, depending on the judgment, are labeled “collaborators” or “resisters” respectively. This arguably simplifies the complex influences on, and nature of, Jewish behavior and deviates considerably from Levi’s warning against employing ethical Manicheanisms. Discussions of “collaboration” first arose in the context of the Vichy regime’s relationship with the Nazis in France,⁸¹ and the negative connotations of the term render its use in relation to “privileged” Jews dubious at best.⁸² In what might align more closely with Levi’s ideas, Yehuda Bauer’s reflection on “privileged” Jews in *Rethinking the Holocaust* (2001) usefully distinguishes between “cooperation,” which he says signifies “unwillingly yielding to superior force,” and “collaboration,” which he says stands for “collusion based on identical ideological premises or a conviction that the Germans would win the war.”⁸³ Under these definitions, Jews seldom, if ever, collaborated with their Nazi oppressors. On the other hand, the judgment and representation of the controversial

behavior of "privileged" Jews often hinges on the positive appraisal, if not glorification, of Jewish "resistance."

The disagreement between historians regarding what constitutes Jewish resistance during the Holocaust has often involved those who argue that resistance is characterized only by armed action and those who extend the concept to incorporate more passive forms.⁸⁴ Hilberg conceptualizes Jewish resistance as referring exclusively to direct opposition that impeded the perpetrator, and he is very critical of Jewish leaders for not having encouraged this response. Yet there is an extensive literature that disputes claims made by Hilberg in *The Destruction of the European Jews* that resistance was unusual, and which stresses the vast array of obstacles to armed resistance in the camps and ghettos.⁸⁵ Hilberg's definition of resistance is considerably narrower than Bauer's more inclusive definition, which includes any conscious action—individual or collective, armed or unarmed—that was taken "in opposition to known or surmised laws, actions and intentions" directed against Jews by Germans and their collaborators.⁸⁶ Despite disagreements over its definition and scope, "resistance" is generally perceived as involving clear-cut, virtuous acts that can be portrayed in an unambiguous, "heroic" manner. Indeed, Levi's characterization of the inhabitants of the grey zone seems to exclude any individuals involved in active "resistance."

Levi writes of those "privileged" political prisoners who were also "members of secret defense organisations," stating that these functionaries "were not at all, or only apparently, collaborators, but on the contrary were camouflaged opponents."⁸⁷ In this way, he seems to view resistance and the behavior of "privileged" Jews as incompatible, separate phenomena. Likewise, Philip Friedman views anything that constitutes "non-collaboration" as Jewish resistance.⁸⁸ I argue that this issue is far from clear-cut due to the inherently ambiguous nature of some acts of resistance on the part of victims. To be sure, many acts of what may be termed "resistance" by "privileged" Jews might also be seen to involve an element of "moral compromise." For example, Gisella Perl and Miklos Nyiszli, who were both prisoner doctors in Auschwitz-Birkenau, saved fellow prisoners from death while simultaneously aiding Josef Mengele in his medical experiments.⁸⁹ There are also many accounts of members of the Jewish police rescuing individual Jews from deportation while participating in the process of rounding up others.⁹⁰ Such extreme situations not only render judgment problematic, but raise considerable challenges for representation. With these interrelated problems in mind, judgment is conceptualized here as a "limit" of representation.

Approaching Liminal Figures: Judgment as a “Limit” of Representation

Conventional vocabulary limps through a situation that allows no heroic response, no acceptable gesture of protest. . . . This predatory profile of survival, when fear of such death, not affirmation of a basic human dignity, drives men and women to behavior they would not consider under normal circumstances, confirms another moment when reality defeats both a language of judgment and a mode of moral behavior.

—Lawrence L. Langer, “*The Dilemma of Choice in the Deathcamps*”⁹¹

Despite highlighting major obstacles to the representation of the Holocaust, Levi never intimates that it should not be represented. Indeed, in response to Theodor Adorno’s oft-cited proclamation that “after Auschwitz, to write a poem is barbaric,”⁹² Levi ironically commented in an interview that “after Auschwitz it is barbaric to write poetry except about Auschwitz.”⁹³ There is widespread agreement among scholars that the question of *if* the Holocaust should be represented has given way to *how* it should be portrayed.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, the paradoxical notion of “representing the unrepresentable” is a foundational idea underlying the writings of the Holocaust historian Saul Friedländer and many others, with the problematic variously termed “speaking the unspeakable,” “comprehending the incomprehensible,” and so on.⁹⁵ The impossibility yet inevitability of passing judgment on “privileged” Jews (discussed further in chapter 1) may be fitted in here as well.

While a considerable critical literature has been preoccupied with the (un)representability of the Holocaust experience, little explicit attention has been given to the place of moral judgment in representations of Jews, particularly those holding “privileged” positions.⁹⁶ Friedländer points out that the events of the Holocaust are often perceived as “so extreme and so unusual that they are considered events at the limits, posing unique problems of interpretation and representation.”⁹⁷ He addresses the necessity of both maintaining the memory of the past through representation and avoiding its distortion in his introduction to the seminal collection, *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”* (1992). He argues that “there are limits to representation *which should not be but can easily be transgressed*. What the characteristics of such a transgression are, however, is far more intractable than our definitions have so far been able to encompass.”⁹⁸ By highlighting the intersection between Levi’s writing on the grey zone and the notion of “representational limits,” I propose that the ethical dilemmas confronting “privileged” Jews may be seen to give rise to a “limit” of judgment.⁹⁹

The problems or "limits" of representation are crucial, for as Claire Colebrook writes in her general study of ethics and representation, "Representation marks a limit, a point beyond which knowledge cannot go: a recognition of the point of view of knowledge. For knowledge's very possibility lies in perspective, point of view, position and finitude."¹⁰⁰ However, the problems with, rather than possibilities of, Holocaust representations are often the sole focus of scholarly reflection. While the obstacles encountered by writers and filmmakers when representing "privileged" Jews are addressed in this book, the chapters that follow also highlight the *potentialities* for a nuanced representation of these figures. Many commentators contend that conventional techniques, whether literary, historiographical, or artistic, are particularly inadequate for representing such a traumatic and incomprehensible event as the Holocaust. While it appears that the extreme situations confronted by "privileged" Jews should be represented, there are undeniably considerable obstacles to doing so in what might be termed an "authentic" manner.

One problem to be considered is that the vast majority of "privileged" Jews have left no testimony of their own, which raises the question of how others can represent their experiences. For instance, very few *Sonderkommando* members lived out the war, and fewer still have spoken of their experiences or written memoirs.¹⁰¹ Annette Wieviorka suggests that "certain categories of survivors" have tended to abstain from recalling their experiences, highlighting "privileged" Jews as a case in point.¹⁰² Nonetheless, those holding "privileged" positions in the camps and ghettos make frequent appearances in survivor testimonies and other modes of representation.¹⁰³ In the field of life-writing, G. Couser emphasizes the ethical obligations an author has when "representing vulnerable subjects," who "are unable to represent themselves in writing or to offer meaningful consent to their representation by someone else."¹⁰⁴ These problems may be seen to apply more widely to genres other than life-writing and are of particular relevance to the situations of "privileged" Jews—situations that arguably contribute to the "empathetic incomprehensibility" of the Holocaust.¹⁰⁵ As these liminal figures invariably perished along with other victims of the Holocaust, it is important to examine representations of them with a critical eye.

The need to suspend moral judgment of "privileged" Jews, as espoused by Levi, can be connected to the influential anti-redemptory approach taken by some theorists of Holocaust representation. For example, James Young identifies what he terms an "anti-redemptory aesthetic" in Friedländer's writings, which self-consciously exposes "its own limitations, its inability to provide eternal answers and stable meaning,"

while “call[ing] for an aesthetics that devotes itself primarily to the dilemmas of representation, an anti-redemptory history of the Holocaust that resists closure, sustains uncertainty, and allows us to live without full understanding.”¹⁰⁶ Oren Stier likewise stresses the value of a self-conscious approach, arguing that “the ideal form of Holocaust memory bears within it a sense of its own deconstructive potential.”¹⁰⁷ Significantly, in his reflection on the problem of judging “privileged” Jews, LaCapra writes that “something like a middle voice that suspended judgment or approached it only in the most tentative terms might be called for.”¹⁰⁸ Through exploring the use of anti-redemptory and self-reflexive discourses by some writers and filmmakers, I examine the potential for these modes to facilitate a nuanced representation of “privileged” Jews, if not the suspension of judgment.

One of the premises of this book is that language is never neutral or value-free, and I contend that judgment is inherent in all forms of representation. Drawing heavily on the work of the postmodern theorist Hayden White, William Guynn writes that unmediated representation does not exist and that this applies to “all levels and all units of discourse.”¹⁰⁹ He states:

There is nothing within discourse, written or filmic, which bears infallible witness to the “truth” or “falsehood” of a field of reference. We accept “truth” or *judge* it according to signs of truth we find in the text, but these signs can be—and in certain realist texts both fictional and documentary often are—simulated.¹¹⁰

Indeed, if one considers Richard Freadman’s discussion of representation as narration that goes beyond “mere physical ‘facts’” to involve “subjective individual feelings, and interpretations of what various ‘facts’ mean in historical, moral and other terms,”¹¹¹ it is perhaps unsurprising that representations of “privileged” Jews are permeated with moral judgments of their behavior. An investigation of Levi’s own writings provides crucial insights into the simultaneous impossibility and inevitability of judgment. A massive literature has focused on Levi’s life and writings, reinforcing his status as one of the foremost witnesses to the Holocaust.¹¹² However, relatively little attention has been paid to the implications of his essay on the grey zone for the issue of judgment, and there has been no sustained discussion of his own representation of “privileged” Jews.

By invoking the need to suspend judgment, Levi implicitly calls for a nuanced representation of “privileged” Jews. However, while at times he seems confident that judgment of “privileged” Jews can be suspended, at other times his writing suggests that it is unclear whether suspend-

ing judgment of these figures is possible. Early in "The Grey Zone" he writes: "The condition of the offended does not exclude culpability, and this is often objectively serious, but I know of no human tribunal to which one could delegate the judgment."¹¹³ This statement seems to suggest that while "privileged" Jews *are* to be blamed and found morally responsible for their behavior, it *might* be the case that nobody can take such a position. In asserting that "privileged" Jews should not be judged, it is evident that Levi's judgment precedes this. Even in the midst of questioning the possibility of judgment, he appears to make tentative judgments about the behavior of Jews *in extremis*, suggesting some form of compulsion to judge. While Levi is highly regarded for his sophisticated and unemotional prose, his own representation of those he argues should not be judged reveals that he himself struggled to suspend judgment. Chapter 1, "*La 'Zona Grigia': The Paradox of Judgment in Primo Levi's 'Grey Zone,'*" explores the evolution of Levi's concept of the grey zone in order to investigate the origins of his ideas. Levi's grey zone is a multilayered, often contradictory concept, and his own portrayal of "privileged" Jews highlights the limit of judgment in his testimony.

Friedländer stresses that the "limits of representation" apply to all forms of representation but always in different ways.¹¹⁴ Indeed, he fully expects that the obstacles to understanding the Holocaust will remain "even if new forms of historical narrative were to develop, or new modes of representation, and even if literature and art were to probe the past from unexpected vantage points."¹¹⁵ With the "limit" of judgment in mind, this book turns to the ways in which judgment is passed in the work of Raul Hilberg, documentaries, and fiction films. It must be stressed here that it is not my intention to formulate value judgments regarding which genre best represents "privileged" Jews, but to reveal the problems and possibilities of representing their experiences and behavior in different modes.

In alignment with Arendt's argument regarding *Judenrat* complicity, Bettelheim writes: "In retrospect, it is quite clear that only utter non-cooperation on the part of the Jews could have offered a small chance of forcing a different solution on Hitler. This conclusion is not an indictment of Jews living or dead, but an empirical finding of history."¹¹⁶ Such a statement overlooks the crucial importance of the ways in which historians construct the past in their research through their selection, arrangement, organization, and analysis of their evidence, and it raises the question of how these decisions impact on their representation(s) of "privileged" Jews. While stressing that historians should be aware of the influence of their own personal context and ideological outlook,

LaCapra notes that objectivity remains “a goal of professional historiography related to the attempt to represent the past as accurately as possible.”¹¹⁷ Significantly, he argues that Hilberg’s “unquestionably important and groundbreaking” study, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, reveals a marked “insensitivity” toward the *Judenräte*, portraying them “in a distanced and harshly critical way, largely oblivious to the double binds or impossible situations in which Nazi policy placed these councils.”¹¹⁸ LaCapra’s criticism of Hilberg’s negative judgment of “privileged” Jews necessitates the question of *how* Hilberg reveals this judgment in his publications. Chapter 2, “The Judgment of ‘Privileged’ Jews in the Work of Raul Hilberg,” investigates the ways in which Hilberg—who positions himself as aiming to “objectively” reveal how the Holocaust was possible—judges Jewish leaders of the time. A close analysis of the techniques used in Hilberg’s major text and subsequent writings examines whether his work shows any engagement with the choiceless choices that confronted “privileged” Jews.

Anna Reading notes that “historical texts are in continual re-articulation with other cultural forms through which the past is also handed down,” particularly films.¹¹⁹ An ever-expanding literature on Holocaust film has contributed much to legitimizing it as an important field of research,¹²⁰ however, little attention has been given to the ways in which films have represented “privileged” Jews. As noted earlier, Levi’s skeptical attitude toward the medium of film had a particularly strong influence on his conceptualization of the grey zone. In relation to the main concern of this book, relevant and notable examples of documentary films and fiction films are explored in order to highlight the possibilities each genre holds for the representation of “privileged” Jews.

An often neglected aspect of the crucial importance of Hilberg’s work and persona can be found in his influence on Claude Lanzmann’s seminal film, *Shoah*, which serves as an ideal bridge between my investigation of Hilberg’s writings and my subsequent analysis of various other films. In *Shoah*, Lanzmann uses the on-screen figure of Hilberg to represent the Jewish leader Adam Czerniakow in a considerably different manner from Hilberg’s scholarly publications. Indeed, *Shoah* may be viewed as challenging the strong dichotomy that has developed between discussions of “historical” and “imaginative” Holocaust texts and discourses (frequently at the expense of the latter).¹²¹ Some commentators argue that artistic representations are more capable of revealing a historical “essence.” Levi himself states that documentary evidence “almost never has the power to give us the depths of a human being; for this purpose the dramatist or poet are more appropriate than the historian or psychologist.”¹²² This book therefore investigates what poten-

tialities for representing "privileged" Jews are revealed in Lanzmann's film and other Holocaust documentaries. *Shoah*'s intricate relationship with history also highlights the need to distinguish between the genres of documentary and fiction film.

In an attempt to define the specificity of the documentary form, Guynn notes that "the documentarist—or rather the plurality of artists and technicians who produce the film—exclude and order, and form the discourse in a continuous succession of operations."¹²³ However, the same may be said of the process of producing a fiction film. Indeed, the boundary between nonfiction and fiction is often intentionally blurred in the medium of film, and some Holocaust-related productions self-consciously aim to situate themselves in between the two genres.¹²⁴ Nonetheless, while the stylistic features of documentary film invariably bear similarities to those of fiction film, along with the preeminence of narrative in both genres, documentary may be defined by a reliance on a so-called "truth claim." Keith Beattie identifies the presence of this "truth claim" as "a tacit contractual agreement or bond of trust between documentary producers ... and an audience that the representation is based on the actual socio-historical world, not a fictional world imaginatively conceived."¹²⁵ Documentary filmmakers portray "real" historical figures in certain ways, often through on-screen interviews that have been edited in postproduction. Of course, the possession of a truth claim—developed through this and other techniques—does not mean that documentaries by nature portray history more "accurately" than fictional representations (although many documentaries implicitly suggest this).

The influential theorist of documentary representation, Bill Nichols, exposes the strategies, structures, and stylistics of documentaries, showing them to be anything but objective vehicles of historical representation.¹²⁶ Reworking Nichols's contention that all documentaries convey "a particular viewpoint" or "argument,"¹²⁷ Noël Carroll characterizes such works as consisting of a "presumptive assertion," or assertive stance, that plays on audience expectations of what is "real."¹²⁸ Indeed, the fundamental tendencies of documentary film have been identified elsewhere as not only to "record," but to "persuade," "interrogate," and "express."¹²⁹ This reveals the prevalence of implicit (and often explicit) ideological positions within documentary work, hence it must be asked what implications the use of filmic techniques in constructing such "arguments" in Holocaust documentaries might have for the judgment of "privileged" Jews. Chapter 3, "Bridging History and Cinema: 'Privileged' Jews in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* and Other Holocaust Documentaries," will compare and contrast the representation of "privileged"

Jews in Lanzmann's singular film and in what may be considered more conventional Holocaust documentaries, principally Ben-Mayor and Seton's *Kapo*. Unlike *Shoah*, the latter film relies on devices such as narrative voiceover, archival footage, and a musical score. Lanzmann's film is particularly interesting in relation to the notion of a documentary film's "assertive stance," as at times Lanzmann seemingly eschews a concrete position regarding "privileged" Jews. On the other hand, *Kapo* directly engages with the problem of judgment by framing its representation with details of Israel's controversial Kapo Trials.

Like documentaries, fiction films also have ideological underpinnings, although the manner in which these are constructed reveals considerable differences between the two genres. First, there is the need to take into account the wider dissemination and commercial considerations of fiction films. The release of feature films in cinemas, their availability in the form of home (and online) entertainment, and their frequent use as educational resources in the classroom attests to their importance to collective memories of the Holocaust.¹³⁰ "Mainstream" films are primarily influenced by financial considerations in the form of box office receipts. While this acknowledgment does not suggest that fiction films are a subject unworthy of analysis, it is important to take into consideration the money-oriented goals of filmmakers within this genre. "Hollywood" films in particular prioritize entertainment and often draw on conventions such as action, romance, and sentimentality to attract the widest audience possible. In order to do this, Holocaust fiction films may romanticize or universalize Jewish resistance by portraying their protagonists heroically and ending on a sentimental note of survival, hope, and triumph. A filmmaker's employment of an emotive musical score and sympathetic characterization of certain figures, for example, can make strong appeals to audience identification. Such a strategy potentially lends itself to clear-cut moral judgments.

Providing an "accurate" portrayal of the Holocaust is generally not the primary concern of fiction filmmakers, although much of the literature on Holocaust film suggests an "authentic" representation of the event is a filmmaker's obligation.¹³¹ Fiction films are frequently the target of virulent criticism. Many descriptors are employed by scholars for what they perceive as filmmakers' alleged misuse of the Holocaust, including (among others) "trivialization," "banalization," "vulgarization," "manipulation," "simplification," "falsification," and "exploitation." This perspective is particularly prevalent in critiques of the "Americanization" or "Hollywoodization" of the Holocaust, reflected in Langer's statement that "upbeat endings seem to be *de rigueur* for the American imagination, which traditionally buries its tragedies and lets them fes-

ter in the shadow of forgetfulness."¹³² In response to widespread negative attitudes toward Holocaust cinema, the analysis of fiction films in the final substantive chapter of this book raises the question of whether or not the genre has the potential to provide a nuanced representation of "privileged" Jews. In contrast to documentary representations of actual historical figures on the screen, characters in fiction films are constructed through the use of actors and scripted dramatization. Chapter 4, "Portraying 'Privileged' Jews in Fiction Films: The Potential to Suspend Judgment?" analyzes two considerably different approaches by filmmakers in their fictional dramatization of "privileged" Jews, beginning with the representation of Jewish police in *Schindler's List*. The reliance on a redemptory aesthetic in Spielberg's film is then contrasted with a recent trend in Holocaust fiction films that rejects a number of mainstream conventions. By engaging directly with Levi's ideas on the problem of judgment, Nelson's depiction of members of an Auschwitz *Sonderkommando* in *The Grey Zone* will be shown to self-consciously resist and respond to Spielberg's sentimental strategies. Just as an exploration of Levi's multifaceted concept of the grey zone provides a highly valuable framework through which to understand the representation of "privileged" Jews in Nelson's film, the engagement with Levi's ideas within *The Grey Zone* reveals much about Levi's concept and its attendant problems (and possibilities) of judgment and representation.

The unease that addressing the subject of "privileged" Jews evokes is understandable, perhaps even necessary. Responses to the issue at Holocaust and Holocaust-related conferences and other public forums seem often to be split between intense dismissals of the subject and sincere interest in it. Tentative comments and questions that perhaps reveal an anxiety about "saying the wrong thing" are common. When I visited the Sydney Jewish Museum in Australia, in 2012, I was told by one guide that she dared not raise the issue when talking to students and other visitors; it was too difficult. On the other hand, when I organized a film screening relating to this subject at the Jewish Holocaust Centre in Melbourne that same year, the interactive discussion and debate between the panel of guest speakers and the audience lasted more than twice as long as the film itself. My experiences of how the issue is negotiated (or otherwise) in the public domain may be far from representative, yet two things seem to me to be abundantly clear: that judgments of "privileged" Jews are prevalent and that they are also frequently problematic. The same may be said of the treatment of these figures in Holocaust representations across many (or all) genres. In practical terms, given the extreme situations they confronted, where refusal to comply with their persecutors meant possible, likely, or even certain death, any

condemnation of the cooperation of “privileged” Jews—communicated explicitly or implicitly—is equivalent to pronouncing “you should have died instead (by your own hand or at the hands of the Nazis).” Such a judgment under any circumstances is a controversial one, and in the circumstances of Holocaust victims perhaps considerably more so. This is one reason why reflecting on the judgments of “privileged” Jews is of crucial importance, something that Primo Levi recognizes fully in his writing.

Notes

1. Quoted in Jadwiga Bezwinska, and Danuta Czech, eds., *Amidst a Nightmare of Crime: Manuscripts of Prisoners in Crematorium Squads Found at Auschwitz* (New York: Howard Fertig, [1973] 1992), 136, 139. Most of the approximately thirty buried testimonies were never discovered and only one of the authors survived the war. For further discussion, see Nathan Cohen, “Diaries of the *Sonderkommando*,” in *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, ed. Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Eugen Kogon, Hermann Langbein, and Adalbert Rückerl, eds., *Nazi Mass Murder: A Documentary History of the Use of Poison Gas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 142–45. Parts of this chapter have been published as Adam Brown, “Beyond ‘Good’ and ‘Evil’: Breaking Down Binary Oppositions in Holocaust Representations of ‘Privileged’ Jews,” *History Compass* 8, no. 5 (May 2010): 407–18.
2. Varying numbers of prisoners made up the *Sonderkommandos* in the death camps of Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka, and up to a thousand men at a time were assigned to work in the crematoria of Birkenau.
3. Lucie Adelsberger, *Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Story* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995), 79.
4. It is important to note that the terms *Ordnungsdienst* and *Sonderkommando* also designated military formations of German perpetrators and their collaborators.
5. See Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Michael Joseph, [1986] 1988), 22–51.
6. Levi highlights the widespread use of the term in his essay on the grey zone, to be discussed further. See Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 26–27.
7. Susan L. Pentlin, “Holocaust Victims of Privilege,” in *Problems Unique to the Holocaust*, ed. Harry James Cargas (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 39, 26.
8. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 9.
9. *Ibid.*, 41, 43.
10. *Ibid.*, 43, 49.
11. *Ibid.*, 9.
12. John K. Roth, *Ethics During and After the Holocaust: In the Shadow of Birkenau* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 60 (my emphasis).
13. See, for instance, the texts highlighted as key teaching resources in Robert Eaglestone and Barry Langford, “Introduction,” in *Teaching Holocaust Literature and Film*, ed. Robert Eaglestone and Barry Langford (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 7–8. Nelson’s *The Grey Zone* is also mentioned here.

14. Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Closing Remarks," in *Lessons and Legacies, Volume 1: The Meaning of the Holocaust in a Changing World*, ed. Peter Hayes (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 329 (author's emphasis).
15. See Marlene E. Heinemann, *Gender and Destiny: Women Writers and the Holocaust* (Westport: Greenwood, 1986), 87–108.
16. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 29.
17. For details of prisoner hierarchies in the camps, see Paul R. Bartrop, *Surviving the Camps: Unity in Adversity During the Holocaust* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000), 27–31.
18. On the various types and locations of ghettos, see Philip Friedman, *Roads to Extinction: Essays on the Holocaust* (New York: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1980), 74–76. Many smaller ghettos constructed later in the war were only short-lived, with the population being quickly deported to an extermination camp or disposed of by mass shootings.
19. Isaiah Trunk, "The Organizational Structure of the Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe," in *Yad Vashem Studies on the European Jewish Catastrophe and Resistance VII*, ed. Livia Rothkirchen (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1968), 147. For his major work, see Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Scarborough, [1972] 1977).
20. Krystyna Żywulska, quoted in Barbara Engelking, *Holocaust and Memory: The Experience of the Holocaust and Its Consequences: An Investigation Based on Personal Narratives* (London: Leicester University Press, 2001), 129.
21. Ghettos holding fewer than ten thousand Jews formed a council of twelve members, while councils of ghettos with more than ten thousand consisted of twenty-four members. In the Ukraine, a chairman was appointed in each location to select a (short-lived) council of three to ten members. See Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–44* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 32. While the main focus here is Eastern European ghettos, it is important to note that there were also centralized Jewish institutions formed in other countries.
22. According to one estimate, approximately 80 percent of *Judenrat* officials were killed by the Nazis. See Peter J. Haas, *Morality After Auschwitz: The Radical Challenge of the Nazi Ethic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, [1988] 1992), 161. Jewish leaders from Central or Western Europe were generally deported to Theresienstadt or Bergen-Belsen, and those in Eastern Europe to death camps.
23. Research points to at least forty acts of suicide by *Judenrat* officials. See Jacob Robinson, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight: The Eichmann Trial, the Jewish Catastrophe, and Hannah Arendt's Narrative* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1965), 186.
24. Calel Perechodnik, *Am I a Murderer?: Testament of a Jewish Ghetto Policeman*, trans. Frank Fox (Boulder: Westview, 1996), xxi. For another example of this rare testimony, see Stanislaw Adler, *In the Warsaw Ghetto 1940–1943: An Account of a Witness* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1982).
25. For further discussion, see Adam Brown, "Trauma and Holocaust Video Testimony: The Intersection of History, Memory and Judgment in the Interview Process," *Traumatology: An International Journal—Special Issue: History, Memory, and Trauma* 15, no. 4 (December 2009), 44–45.
26. This term is taken from the title of Rousset's highly influential work, published in English as David Rousset, *A World Apart*, trans. Yvonne Moyses and Roger Senhouse (London: Secker and Warburg, [1946] 1951).
27. Ella Lingens-Reiner, *Prisoners of Fear* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1948), 82.

28. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 27. While Levi's main focus is Auschwitz, it should be noted that there existed several different types of camps, including prison, transit, labor, extermination, and "multipurpose" camps. In all of these, "privileged" positions were occupied by prisoners. Auschwitz combined labor camps and extermination facilities, incarcerated a much larger number of Jewish prisoners, and saw a higher (though still extremely low) survival rate, thus giving rise to more postwar testimonies and other representations. In the extermination camps, where most arrivals were gassed within a few hours, only a small number of Jews were (temporarily) kept alive to work in the *Sonderkommandos*. There were approximately fifty survivors of Sobibor, forty from Treblinka, four from Chelmno, and two from Belzec. These numbers are taken from Lawrence L. Langer, *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), 254–55n.7.
29. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 62–63. "Prominents" was a category officially introduced by the Nazis in 1942.
30. See Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man; and, The Truce*, trans. Stuart Woolf (London: Abacus, [1979] 1995), 96–97. For further reflections on *Kapos* that highlight the varied circumstances and judgments that have been attributed to them, see Elie A. Cohen, *Human Behaviour in the Concentration Camp*, trans. M. H. Braaksma (London: Jonathan Cape, 1954), 200–203; Rousset, *A World Apart*, 78–81.
31. The literature on the evolution of the Nazis' genocidal policy is immense, although the vast majority of historians now hold that the "decision" to exterminate all European Jews occurred between June 1941 and early 1942. It should be noted here that the distinction made between the persecution of Jewish and non-Jewish victims is a historiographical one; no value judgment is being rendered about which group suffered "more" or "less."
32. Levi, *If This Is a Man; and, The Truce*, 32. Levi's account draws specifically on his experiences in the labor camp Buna-Monowitz (Auschwitz III).
33. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 27.
34. *Ibid.*, 33. In discussing the "blurred" dividing line during a 1984 interview, Levi stated that while both victims and perpetrators could be seen to have undergone "dehumanization," for the former it was imposed, and for the latter "more or less chosen." Quoted in Marco Vigevani, "Words, Memory, Hope (1984)," in *The Voice of Memory: Interviews 1961–87*, ed. Marco Belpoliti and Robert Gordon (Cambridge: Polity, [1997] 2001), 253.
35. Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 210n.18.
36. Didier Pollefeyt makes a useful distinction by defining both perpetrators and victims as "free" human beings on an anthropological level and positing a marked difference in the "freedom" of both groups on an ethical level. See John K. Roth, ed., *Ethics After the Holocaust: Perspectives, Critiques, and Responses* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1999), 128.
37. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 23.
38. *Ibid.*, 22.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Bryan Cheyette, "The Uncertain Certainty of *Schindler's List*," in *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List*, ed. Yosefa Loshitzky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 227.
41. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 25.
42. Victor Brombert, *In Praise of Antiheroes: Figures and Themes in Modern European Literature, 1830–1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 8–9.

43. Ronnie Landau, "The Holocaust: The Unique and the Universal," in *Film, History and the Jewish Experience: A Reader*, ed. Jonathan Davis (London: National Film Theatre, 1986), 11.
44. Reflecting on the "limits of morality," the philosopher John Kekes questions the assumption that morality is solely concerned with chosen actions and agents, preferring an Aristotelian-inspired "character-morality" that prioritizes "virtue" over a Kantian-influenced "choice-morality." Nonetheless, Kekes concedes that an evaluation of "choice" must be what judgment turns to when "unexpected or unusual situations occur for which moral education has not prepared agents." See John Kekes, *Facing Evil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 94.
45. For a detailed analysis of the intersection between Levi's grey zone and Langer's writings, see Ruth Leys, *From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 18–24.
46. Langer, *Versions of Survival*, 72.
47. *Ibid.*, 146.
48. Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 74. It is also noteworthy that Žižek gives attention to the notion of "forced choice," drawing on the "Sophie's Choice" of popular culture as a "limit case." See Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!*, 69–77.
49. Levi, *If This Is a Man*; and, *The Truce*, 104.
50. Irene Kajon, "Auschwitz as Crucial Experiment: The Lord's Suffering Servant in the Interpretation of André Neher and Emmanuel Levinas," in *Good and Evil After Auschwitz: Ethical Implications for Today*, ed. Jack Bemporad, John T. Pawlikowski, and Joseph Sievers (Hoboken: KTAV, 2000), 192 (my emphasis). For another example of this kind of interpretation, see Melissa Raphael, *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz: A Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
51. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (New York: Pocket, [1959] 1977), 212–13.
52. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart* (London: Penguin, [1960] 1988), 264. See also the (not always consistent) analyses of "Individual and Mass Behavior in Extreme Situations" and "Surviving" in Bruno Bettelheim, *Surviving and Other Essays* (London: Thames and Hudson, [1952] 1979), 48–83, 274–314. Importantly, Bettelheim had been incarcerated in the prison camps of Dachau and Buchenwald in 1938–39, hence arguably did not witness the kinds of persecution and situations facing the majority of Jews during the Holocaust.
53. Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1976] 1980), vii.
54. Lawrence L. Langer, "Redefining Heroic Behavior: The Impromptu Self and the Holocaust Experience," in *The Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath*, ed. Omer Bartov (London: Routledge, 2000), 237.
55. Langer, *Versions of Survival*, 74.
56. *Ibid.*, 95.
57. *Ibid.*, 97.
58. *Ibid.*, 4 (my emphasis).
59. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 129.
60. *Ibid.* Similar attitudes toward the *Judenräte* can be found in Robert Rozett, *Approaching the Holocaust: Texts and Contexts* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2005), 90; Haas, *Morality After Auschwitz*, 136; Berel Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 75.
61. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 23–24.
62. Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 134.

63. Massimo Giuliani, "Aberrant Freedom and Impious Heroism: Observations on Conscience and Suspension of Ethical Evaluation in the Auschwitz Case," in Bemporad, Pawlikowski, and Sievers, *Good and Evil After Auschwitz*; Abigail L. Rosenthal, "The Right Way to Act: Indicting the Victims," in *Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time*, ed. Alan Rosenberg and Gerald E. Myers (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); Richard L. Rubenstein, "Gray into Black: The Case of Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski," in *Gray Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*, ed. Jonathan Petropoulos and John K. Roth (New York: Berghahn, 2006). For a highly abstract discussion of the *Judenräte* (problematically termed "Selectors") that fails to address the complexity of their ethical dilemmas, see Frances M. Kamm, "Harming Some to Save Others from the Nazis," in *Moral Philosophy and the Holocaust*, ed. Eve Garrard and Geoffrey Scarre (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).
64. Rubenstein, "Gray into Black," 308.
65. See the many criticisms of Jewish behavior in David H. Jones, *Moral Responsibility in the Holocaust: A Study in the Ethics of Character* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 171–97.
66. Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 165 (my emphasis).
67. Hannah Arendt, *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age* (New York: Grove, 1978), 249.
68. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, [1951] 1966), 452.
69. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, revised ed. (New York: Penguin, [1965] 1994), 123. However, Arendt herself appears to contradict her argument when she accuses the Jewish *Sonderkommandos* of "commit[ing] criminal acts" when they were employed in the "actual killing process." *Ibid.*, 91. Members of the *Sonderkommandos* mainly worked with corpses and never handled the gas, therefore they were not involved in the "actual killing process." Similarities can be seen here between Arendt's reflection on the crematorium workers and the difficulty Levi encounters when representing those he argues should not be judged (addressed in chapter 1).
70. See, for example, Richard J. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), 161–63.
71. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 125. A similar controversy was sparked in the Netherlands by the work of Jacques Presser, who described the *Judenrat* as "inextricably involved in a *danse macabre* with Satan calling the tune." See Jacques Presser, *Ashes in the Wind: The Destruction of Dutch Jewry*, trans. Arnold Pomerans (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, [1965] 1988), 165 (author's emphasis).
72. See, in particular, Robinson, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight*, 142–226; Barry Sharpe, *Modesty and Arrogance in Judgment: Hannah Arendt's Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Westport: Praeger, 1999), 57–68, 71–83. Arendt's ideas are contrasted with Levi's writing on the grey zone in David H. Hirsch, "The Gray Zone or The Banality of Evil," in Roth, *Ethics After the Holocaust*, 97–103; Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 139–42. Curiously, in Arendt's only discussion of the Jewish councils prior to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, she praises Jewish historian Léon Poliakov for neither excusing nor accusing, but reporting "fully and faithfully what the sources tell him ... [about] the terrible dilemma of the *Judenräte*, their despair as well as their confusion, their complicity and their sometimes pathetically ludicrous ambitions." From Arendt's review of Poliakov's *Harvest of Hate* in *Commentary* (March 1952), quoted in *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 522n.56.

73. Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1933–45* (London: Penguin, [1975] 1990), 379.
74. For further discussion, see Dorothy Rabinowitz, *New Lives: Survivors of the Holocaust Living in America* (Lincoln: iUniverse.com, 2000), 177–81, 197.
75. Aaron Hass, *The Aftermath: Living with the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 117; Haas, *Morality After Auschwitz*, 155.
76. At one point, a newspaper called for “collaborators” to be “liquidated,” and during Eichmann’s trial, proceedings were interrupted by violent outbursts from the audience during the testimony of a member of Hungary’s *Judenrat*. See Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, trans. Haim Watzman (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 260; Raul Hilberg, *Documents of Destruction: Germany and Jewry, 1933–1945* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1972), 198–99.
77. For further discussion of the trials and their historical context, see Hanna Yablonka, “The Development of Holocaust Consciousness in Israel: The Nuremberg, Kapos, Kastner, and Eichmann Trials,” *Israel Studies* 8, no. 3 (Fall 2003); Orna Ben-Naftali and Yogev Tuval, “Punishing International Crimes Committed by the Persecuted: The Kapo Trials in Israel (1950s–1960s),” *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 4, no. 1 (March 2006); Hanna Yablonka, “The Formation of Holocaust Consciousness in the State of Israel: The Early Days,” in *Breaking Crystal: Writing and Memory After Auschwitz*, ed. Efraim Sicher (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 123–29. Legal trials of “privileged” Jews also occurred in other countries, an account of which is given in Peter Wyden, *Stella* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 273–76. The much-criticized Dutch authority titled the “Jewish Court of Honour” examined twenty-three “privileged” Jews, two of whom asked to be investigated. The “trial” of two council officials eventually broke down and resulted in what amounted to a “moral censure.” See Bob Moore, *Victims and Survivors: The Nazi Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands 1940–1945* (London: Arnold, 1997), 244–49.
78. Idith Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [2002] 2005), 42, 64, 66. It is noteworthy that Zertal draws on Levi’s grey zone. See *ibid.*, 70–71.
79. Quoted in Leora Bilsky, “Judging and Understanding,” *Law and History Review* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 183. For Kastner’s testimony, see Israel Rudolf Kastner, *Der Kastner Bericht über Eichmanns Menschenhandel in Ungarn* (Munich: Kindler, 1961).
80. Lawrence Douglas, *The Memory of Judgment: Making Law and History in the Trials of the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 156. See also Lawrence Douglas, “Language, Judgment, and the Holocaust,” *Law and History Review* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2001), 177–82. When Kastner sued Malchiel Gruenwald in 1955 for libel due to inflammatory remarks on his actions, the presiding judge concluded that Kastner had knowingly “collaborated” with the Nazis; nonetheless, subsequent calls to try Kastner as a “collaborator” were refused, and his name was cleared on appeal in 1958, just after he was murdered. A detailed account can be found in Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 253–320. For more on Kastner, see Ladislaus Löb, *Dealing with Satan: Rezső Kasztner’s Daring Rescue Mission* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008); Yehuda Bauer, *Jews for Sale?: Nazi-Jewish Negotiations, 1933–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 145–251; Ruth Linn, *Escaping Auschwitz: A Culture of Forgetting* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004). While the reasons behind Kastner’s assassination remain unclear, Asher Maoz contends that it was probably Halevy’s demonizing remarks “more than anything else, that led to the attack on Kastner and his fatal injuries two years after the delivery of the judgment.” Asher Maoz, “Historical Adjudication: Courts of Law, Commissions of Inquiry, and ‘Historical Truth,’” *Law and History Review* 18, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 592. The legacy of the Kastner trial

- is such that it inspired Motti Lerner's play, *Kastner*, staged in 1985, a controversial television miniseries by Uri Barbash, *The Kastner Trial* (1994), and two novels: Amos Elon, *Timetable: The Story of Joel Brand* (London: Hutchinson, 1980) and Neil Gordon, *Sacrifice of Isaac* (New York: Random House, 1995). A documentary film entitled *Killing Kasztner* has also recently been released.
81. Gerhard Hirschfeld, "Collaboration in Nazi-Occupied France: Some Introductory Remarks," in *Collaboration in France: Politics and Culture during the Nazi Occupation, 1940–1944*, eds. Gerhard Hirschfeld and Patrick Marsh (Oxford: Berg, 1989), 1–3.
 82. Timothy Brook notes that the "capacity of the word [collaboration] to judge, even before we know upon what basis those judgments are being made, interferes with analysis. ... As soon as the word is uttered, it superimposes a moral map over the political landscape it ventures to describe and thus prevents the one from being surveyed except through the other." Timothy Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 5. It must be noted here that while Levi employs the term "collaboration" in his essay on the grey zone, his use of the Italian word *collaborazione* does not evoke the negative connotations often associated with the word's English translation (which parallels the Italian word *collaborazioniste*).
 83. Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, [2001] 2002), 148.
 84. See the opposing views expressed in Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 2nd ed. (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), 1030–44, and Yehuda Bauer, *The Jewish Emergence from Powerlessness* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 27–40.
 85. See, for example, Reuban Ainsztein, *Jewish Resistance in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe, with a Historical Survey of the Jew as Fighter and Soldier in the Diaspora* (London: Elek, 1974); Shmuel Krakowski, *The War of the Doomed: Jewish Armed Resistance in Poland, 1942–1944*, trans. Orah Blaustein (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1984); Lucien Steinberg, *The Jews Against Hitler (Not as a Lamb)*, trans. Marion Hunter (London: Gordon and Cremonesi, [1970] 1978); Isaiah Trunk, *Jewish Responses to Nazi Persecution: Collective and Individual Behavior in Extremis* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979).
 86. Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, 119. As all Jews were targeted for extermination, survival itself constituted a passive means of subverting Nazi goals.
 87. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 30.
 88. Philip Friedman, "Problems of Research on the European Jewish Catastrophe," in *The Catastrophe of European Jewry: Antecedents, History, Reflections. Selected Papers*, ed. Yisrael Gutman and Livia Rothkirchen (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1976).
 89. See Gisella Perl, *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz* (Salem: Ayer, [1948] 1992); Miklos Nyiszli, *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account*, trans. Tibere Kremer and Richard Seaver (New York: Arcade, [1960] 1993).
 90. See, for instance, Wladyslaw Szpilman, *The Pianist*, trans. Anthea Bell (London: Phoenix, [1946] 2002), 105–106. For a discussion of how the behavior of Jewish leaders fits into the debate over Jewish resistance, see Dan Michman, "Jewish Leadership in Extremis," in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
 91. Lawrence L. Langer, "The Dilemma of Choice in the Deathcamps," in Rosenberg and Myers, *Echoes from the Holocaust*, 121.
 92. Quoted in Irving Howe, "Writing and the Holocaust," in *Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. Berel Lang (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988), 179.
 93. Quoted in Anthony Rudolf, "Primo Levi in London (1986)," in Belpoliti and Gordon, *The Voice of Memory*, 28.

94. This point is made in Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 122.
95. Reflecting on this, Dori Laub writes of "the imperative to tell" and the simultaneous "impossibility of telling." See Dori Laub, "An Event without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival," in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York: Routledge, 1992), 78–80.
96. For examples of this extensive literature, see R. Clifton Spargo and Robert M. Ehrenreich, eds. *After Representation: The Holocaust, Literature, and Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010); Ronit Lentin, ed., *Re-presenting the Shoah for the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Berghahn, 2004); Gary Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer, eds., *Witnessing the Disaster: Essays on Representation and the Holocaust* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003); Sue Vice, ed., *Representing the Holocaust: In Honour of Bryan Burns* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003); Shelley Hornstein and Florence Jacobowitz, eds. *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer, *Between Witness and Testimony: The Holocaust and the Limits of Representation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Lea Warnick Fridman, *Words and Witness: Narrative and Aesthetic Strategies in the Representation of the Holocaust* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000); Andrew Leak and George Paizis, eds., *The Holocaust and the Text: Speaking the Unspeakable* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000). For a useful overview of the literature on the representation of the Holocaust, see Tim Cole, "'The Holocaust Industry?': Reflections on a History of the Critique of Holocaust Representation," in *Contemporary Responses to the Holocaust*, ed. Konrad Kwiet and Jürgen Matthäus (Westport: Praeger, 2004).
97. Saul Friedländer, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), x.
98. Saul Friedländer, "Introduction," in Friedländer, *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 3 (author's emphasis).
99. Frank Stern relates the "limits of representation" to "privileged" Jews in another way, interpreting "limits" as "another word for *taboo* or the feeling of uneasiness when specific touchy topics of the Holocaust are the subject of aesthetic representation." He mentions the *Sonderkommandos* and *Kapos* as examples of such "taboos." See Frank Stern, "The Holocaust: Representing Lasting Images in Literature and Film," in Kwiet and Matthäus, *Contemporary Responses to the Holocaust*, 212 (author's emphasis).
100. Claire Colebrook, *Ethics and Representation: From Kant to Post-structuralism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 2.
101. For examples of this rare testimony, see Filip Müller, *Auschwitz Inferno: The Testimony of a Sonderkommando* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); Jan Potudniak, *Sonder: An Interview with Sonderkommando Member Henryk Mandelbaum*, trans. Witold Zbirohowski-Kościa (Oświęcim: Frap-Books, [1994] 2008); Rebecca Camhi Fromer, *The Holocaust Odyssey of Daniel Bannahmias, Sonderkommando* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993); Hermann Langbein, *People in Auschwitz*, trans. Harry Zohn (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, [1972] 2004), 191–202. Video testimonies of *Sonderkommando* members have been included in films such as Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), James Moll's *The*

- Last Days* (1998), Ralf Piechovak's *Hitler's Holocaust* (2000), and Laurence Rees and Catherine Tatge's *Auschwitz: Inside the Nazi State* (2005). Recent studies of *Sonderkommando* testimony include Gideon Greif, *We Wept Without Tears: Testimonies of the Jewish Sonderkommando from Auschwitz* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Eric Friendler, Barbara Siebert, and Andreas Kilian, *Zeugen aus der Todeszone: Das Jüdische Sonderkommando in Auschwitz* (Lüneburg: Klampen, 2002). The artwork of a former *Sonderkommando* member can be found in David Olère, *David Olère, 1902–1985: A Painter in the Sonderkommando at Auschwitz* (New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1989).
102. Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, trans. Jared Stark (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 18.
 103. Evaluations of the general attitude of “non-privileged” survivors towards “privileged” Jews are not always consistent. Alan Mintz describes Jewish “collaboration” as “rife and the object of deep and implacable hatred on the part of Jews who were its victims,” while Aaron Hass argues that most Holocaust survivors are reluctant to condemn “Jewish collaborators” due to the pressures they were put under to survive. See Alan Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 184; Hass, *The Aftermath*, 172.
 104. G. Thomas Couser, *Vulnerable Subjects: Ethics and Life Writing* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), xii.
 105. For a discussion of the “empathetic incomprehensibility” of the Holocaust, see Dan Magurshak, “The ‘Incomprehensibility’ of the Holocaust: Tightening up Some Loose Usage,” in Rosenberg and Myers, *Echoes from the Holocaust*, 422–25.
 106. James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 6 (author's emphasis).
 107. Oren Baruch Stier, *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 17. Similar calls for a self-reflexive acknowledgment of artifice can be found in Paul Eisenstein, *Traumatic Encounters: Holocaust Representation and the Hegelian Subject* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 3; Dan Stone, *History, Memory and Mass Atrocity: Essays on the Holocaust and Genocide* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006), 125–26; James Hatley, *Suffering Witness: The Quandary of Responsibility After the Irreparable* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 112.
 108. LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 30. LaCapra describes the free, indirect style of the “middle voice” as prioritizing intransitivity and self-referentiality over referential statements and truth claims, and suggests that such an approach is suitable for victims who found themselves “in double binds not of their own making.” *Ibid.*, 198. Crucially, the device of the “middle voice” has been characterized as “militat[ing] against facile and misleading oppositions.” See Brian Macaskill, “Charting J. M. Coetzee's Middle Voice: *In the Heart of the Country*,” in *Critical Essays on J. M. Coetzee*, ed. Sue Kossew (New York: G. K. Hall and Co., 1998), 80–81. Hayden White identifies stylistic characteristics of the middle voice as including the rejection of an “objective” perspective “outside” the text; the use of a doubtful or questioning tone in interpreting events; and the use of interior monologue to discourage any impression of a known “reality.” See Hayden White, “Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth,” in Friedländer, *Probing the Limits of Representation*, 50–51.
 109. William Guynn, *A Cinema of Nonfiction* (London: Associated University Press, 1990), 42.
 110. *Ibid.*, 15 (my emphasis).
 111. Richard Freadman, *This Crazy Thing a Life: Australian Jewish Autobiography* (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2007), 53.

112. See, for example, Charlotte Ross, *Primo Levi's Narratives of Embodiment: Containing the Human* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Jonathan Druker, *Primo Levi and Humanism After Auschwitz: Posthumanist Reflections* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Lina N. Insana, *Arduous Tasks: Primo Levi, Translation, and the Transmission of Holocaust Testimony* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Robert S. C. Gordon, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Primo Levi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Lucie Benchouiha, *Primo Levi: Rewriting the Holocaust* (Leicester: Troubador, 2006); Stanislao G. Pugliese, ed., *The Legacy of Primo Levi* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Joseph Farrel, ed., *Primo Levi: The Austere Humanist* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004); Carole Angier, *The Double Bond: Primo Levi, A Biography* (London: Penguin, [2002] 2003); Ian Thomson, *Primo Levi: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002); Roberta S. Kremer, ed., *Memory and Mastery: Primo Levi as Writer and Witness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Robert S. C. Gordon, *Primo Levi's Ordinary Virtues: From Testimony to Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Frederic D. Homer, *Primo Levi and the Politics of Survival* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001); Judith Kelly, *Primo Levi: Recording and Reconstruction in the Testimonial Literature* (Market Harborough: Troubador, 2000); Daniela Amsallem, *Primo Levi* (Paris: Ellipses, 2000); Gillian Banner and Colin Richmond, *Holocaust Literature: Schulz, Levi, Spiegelman and the Memory of the Offence* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2000); Paolo Momigliano Levi and Rosanna Gorris, eds., *Primo Levi: Testimone e Scrittore di Storia* (Florence: Giuntina, 1999); Myriam Anissimov, *Primo Levi: Tragedy of an Optimist*, trans. Steve Cox (London: Aurum, 1998); Anne Sizaire, *Primo Levi* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1997); Judith Woolf, *The Memory of the Offence: Primo Levi's If This Is a Man* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1996); Nicholas Patruno, *Understanding Primo Levi* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995); Mirna Cicioni, *Primo Levi: Bridges of Knowledge* (Oxford: Berg, 1995); Anthony Rudolf, *At an Uncertain Hour: Primo Levi's War Against Oblivion* (London: Menard, 1990).
113. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 29.
114. See Saul Friedländer, "Afterword: The Shoah between Memory and History," in Slicher, *Breaking Crystal*.
115. Saul Friedländer, "Trauma, Memory, and Transference," in *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 263.
116. Bettelheim, *Surviving and Other Essays*, 269.
117. LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 99.
118. *Ibid.*, 100.
119. Anna Reading, *The Social Inheritance of the Holocaust: Gender, Culture and Memory* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 76.
120. Works published in the last several years alone include Marek Haltof, *Polish Film and the Holocaust: Politics and Memory* (New York: Berghahn, 2012); Libby Saxton, *Haunted Images: Film, Ethics, Testimony and the Holocaust* (London: Wallflower, 2008); Giacomo Lichtner, *Film and the Holocaust in France and Italy, 1956-1998* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008); Terri Ginsberg, *Holocaust Film: The Political Aesthetics of Ideology* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007); Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Shadow of Auschwitz* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Caroline Joan Picart and David A. Frank, *Frames of Evil: The Holocaust as Horror in American Film* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006); Toby Hagith and Joanna Newman, eds., *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television Since 1933* (London: Wallflower, 2005); Omer Bartov, *The "Jew" in Cinema: From The Golem to Don't Touch My Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Lawrence Baron, *Projecting the Holocaust into the Present* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005); Janet Walker, *Trauma Cinema: Document-*

- ing Incest and the Holocaust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Joshua Hirsch, *Afterimage: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).
121. For a forceful critique of this opposition, see Ernst van Alphen, *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).
 122. Primo Levi, *Moments of Reprieve*, trans. Ruth Feldman (London: Abacus, [1981] 1990), 99–100.
 123. Guynn, *A Cinema of Nonfiction*, 17.
 124. Here I am thinking of films that merge oral testimony with fictional reenactment, such as Lena Einhorn's *Nina's Resa [Nina's Journey]* (2005) and Rees and Tatge's *Auschwitz*. Bill Nichols identifies a "blurring" of fiction and nonfiction forms as a central process within many documentary representations. See Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).
 125. Keith Beattie, *Documentary Screens: Nonfiction Film and Television* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 11.
 126. See, in particular, Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).
 127. *Ibid.*, 125.
 128. Noël Carroll, "Fiction, Non-Fiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion: A Conceptual Analysis," in *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures: An Anthology*, ed. Noël Carroll and Jinhee Choi (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 162–65.
 129. Michael Renov, ed., *Theorizing Documentary* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 21.
 130. See Eaglestone and Langford, *Teaching Holocaust Literature and Film*; Jeffrey Shandler, *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Daniel Anker's documentary film *Imaginary Witness: Hollywood and the Holocaust* (2004) also gives a valuable indication of this.
 131. Annette Insdorf, for example, writes that "filmmakers confronting the Holocaust must assume a special responsibility, commensurate with its gravity and enormity." See Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1983] 2003), 4.
 132. Lawrence L. Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 159.

CHAPTER 1

LA “ZONA GRIGIA”

THE PARADOX OF JUDGMENT IN PRIMO LEVI’S “GREY ZONE”



Having measured up the meanders of the *gray zone* and pushed to explore the darkest side of Auschwitz, not only for judging but mainly for understanding the true nature of humans and their limits, is one of the most inestimable contributions made by Levi to any future moral philosophy.

—Massimo Giuliani, *Centaur in Auschwitz: Reflections on Primo Levi’s Thinking*

Considerable attention has been paid by a number of scholars to Levi’s controversial notion of the “grey zone.” The concept proved fundamental to his understanding of his Auschwitz experiences and has since been appropriated, often uncritically, in the fields of Holocaust studies, philosophy, law, history, theology, feminism, popular culture, and human rights issues relating to the Abu Ghraib prison scandal.¹ In spite of this, there has been no attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of the influences on the concept and its evolution, and little has been written on Levi’s moral judgments of “privileged” Jews. Recent interpretations and appropriations of the grey zone often misunderstand, expand upon, or intentionally depart from Levi’s ideas. This chapter returns to Levi’s original concept in order to investigate how he judges

the "privileged" Jews he portrays, namely *Kapos*, *Sonderkommandos*, and Chaim Rumkowski of the Lodz Ghetto. The analysis reveals that even Levi himself could not abstain from judging those he argues should not be judged. Paradoxically, it would seem, the conceptualization of the grey zone warns against judgment but at the same time requires it.

Influences on Levi's Judgment: The Evolution of the Grey Zone

Primo Levi was born in Turin, on 31 July 1919, into a highly assimilated Italian-Jewish family. A prolific reader who excelled in school, Levi had a withdrawn and self-effacing nature, which remained with him throughout his life. He obtained his degree in chemistry in July 1941 despite the increasing anti-Jewish measures introduced by Mussolini's government, with this persecution contributing to his belated sense of Jewish identity.² Joining an untrained and ill-equipped group of partisans in late 1943, Levi was soon captured and, after revealing his Jewish background, sent to the Fossoli concentration camp.³ He was then deported to Auschwitz, where he was incarcerated from 22 February 1944 to 27 January 1945. Levi was selected for work at the Buna/Monowitz subcamp (Auschwitz III), several kilometers from the gas chambers of Birkenau. Exposed to harsh and degrading conditions, he endured manual labor for many months before obtaining a specialist position in a chemical laboratory. Levi survived the Lager due only to a combination of this "privileged" position, perseverance, outside aid, and luck. On his return to Italy, Levi told his story obsessively to all around him, compiling two memoirs. He worked as a chemical analyst and manager at SIVA, a paint factory, for many years and then devoted his retirement to writing and talking, participating in hundreds of interviews and visits to schools, and compiling a multitude of stories, essays, and poems.⁴ Amidst frequent bouts of acute depression and other health and family problems, Levi continued to write and talk about the Holocaust until 11 April 1987, when he took his own life.

Publishing his essay on the grey zone less than a year before his suicide, Levi addressed a subject that had troubled him since his liberation. During an interview in 1979, shortly before he began writing *The Drowned and the Saved*, he gave a clear indication of the impetus to return to the Lager:

I feel in my stomach, in my guts, something that I haven't quite digested, connected to the theme of the *Lager* seen again from thirty-five years' distance. After all the polemic about the identification between victim and oppressor,

the theme of guilt, the extreme ambiguity of that place, the grey band that separated the oppressed from the oppressors [*sic*].⁵

From Levi's initial memoirs of his wartime experiences through to his last essays in *The Drowned and the Saved*, all of his writings, whether concerning chemistry, science fiction, or the Holocaust, are preoccupied with the complex nature of humanity. The question of what constitutes a "man" was the central enigma that concerned Levi even before his incarceration in Auschwitz. It was the camp, perhaps, that allowed him to reach some tentative answers, although his ideas were not always consistent, and to the end of his life he would fluctuate between optimism in humanity's potential and despair at its fallibility.

Lawrence L. Langer argues that Auschwitz had completely "sabotaged the ethical vision that [Levi] cherished as a human being."⁶ Nonetheless, Levi was unable or unwilling to abandon his humanist foundations completely. While some commentators have credited Levi with establishing a new ethical system,⁷ others contend he was never able to escape the ethical abyss left in the Holocaust's wake.⁸ Stanislaw Pugliese sees in Levi's testimony not just an effort to "bear witness," but also "to search for an ethical line of conduct and moral reasoning based on classical humanism but cognizant of humanity's changed moral status after Auschwitz."⁹ Similarly, Bryan Cheyette succinctly outlines the "ethical uncertainty" at the heart of Levi's Holocaust writings. Emphasizing "the division between Levi's renowned scientific detachment and his profound uncertainties about the efficacy of any intellectual or moral system," along with his "tremendous distrust of words," Cheyette qualifies the common impression of Levi as the dispassionate observer to show him caught between the necessity and impossibility of representation.¹⁰ Cheyette stresses Levi's "agony" at contemplating the vulnerability of Holocaust representations to succumbing so easily to stereotypes, with this agony including his own fear of betraying his and others' experiences.¹¹ In an interview in 1975, Levi explicitly demonstrated his awareness that "a human being is a 'unique,' complicated object" and that "when that object is reduced to a page, even by the best writers, it's reduced to a skeleton."¹²

The problems of judgment and (mis)representation were major dilemmas for Levi in many more of his writings than just "The Grey Zone." Ian Thomson's biography points to Levi's almost obsessive preoccupation with this theme from the time of his liberation from Auschwitz:

It is not true that Levi turned to unprecedentedly bleak themes in *The Drowned and the Saved* or, as some romantic critics like to believe, that a wave of shame and pessimism had washed over him. Bianca Guidetti Serra [a

longtime friend] first heard the words "grey zone" from Levi in 1946. "Right from the beginning," she told me in 1992, "there was always this problem of understanding what had happened and why men had behaved in the way they did. *The Drowned and the Saved* could just as easily have been Primo's first book as his last book."¹³

After choosing a career in science over literature, Levi always insisted he had never seriously considered writing before Auschwitz, although he did engage in sporadic creative writing throughout his youth, some of which shows a strong interest in the (not always virtuous) nature of human beings. According to another of Levi's biographers, "Uomo" ("Man"), an unpublished piece written during the war, tells the story of a man searching within himself in an attempt to understand his nature, only to find darkness and incomprehensibility.¹⁴ While Levi's experience in Auschwitz was the watershed event that triggered his interest in what would evolve into the grey zone, the concept arose from numerous personal, social, and cultural influences. Mapping out the development of Levi's ideas on judgment, representation, and the grey zone over time reveals that Levi's reflections on the issue of "privileged" Jews grew out of much more than a mere retrospective contemplation of his eleven months in the Lager.

A number of commentators have discussed at length Levi's deeply ingrained humanist sensibilities,¹⁵ yet his wartime experiences fundamentally challenged his strong belief in human dignity, rationality, and responsibility. Levi found himself in close proximity to moral compromise even before his arrival in the Lager. Vanda Maestro, a Jewish inmate he fell in love with at Fossoli, spent the night with the camp's Italian commandant in an unsuccessful attempt to save herself from deportation.¹⁶ Arturo Foà, a 67-year-old Jewish poet who had fanatically praised Fascist ideology, was also deported in the same cattle car as Levi. Foà's fellow occupants undoubtedly felt he had betrayed them, and he did not survive the journey, although the reasons for his demise remain uncertain. Foà's relatives believe other prisoners on the train beat him to death. Levi never wrote about these episodes, and when he was asked about Foà, he either denied the alleged murder had occurred or he broke down in tears.¹⁷ Describing the journey to Auschwitz in his memoir, Levi writes: "Many things were then said and done among us; but of these it is better that there remain no memory."¹⁸ This obscure line reveals a tension between memory and forgetting, representation and silence, the impulse to judge and its inappropriateness. Levi would return to these dilemmas in his later work.

The corrupting influence of Auschwitz on human beings arguably disturbed Levi most and would eventually be depicted with greatest clarity

in "The Grey Zone." As noted earlier, Levi himself survived partly due to the "privileges" he obtained from his position in the Buna chemical laboratory during the last few months of his imprisonment. Although this position did not involve the kind of "moral compromise" that he would write about in *The Drowned and the Saved*, he nonetheless dwelt much on the subject of survivor guilt.¹⁹ Levi does not hesitate to admit to his "condition of privilege" as a chemical specialist and to having "deeply assimilated the principal rule of the place, which made it mandatory that you should first of all take care of yourself."²⁰ Levi expressed much shame over this, particularly in the later years of his life, even though he knew such shame was unjustified.

Eager to observe and understand the world around him, Levi took mental notes of everything he could, preserving detailed memories of the minutiae of camp life that would form the backbone of his memoirs. He commented more than once that Auschwitz had been for him a kind of university.²¹ At the beginning of *If This Is a Man*, he writes that his memoir "has not been written in order to formulate new accusations; it should be able, rather, to furnish documentation for a quiet study of certain aspects of the human mind."²² Levi's astuteness and determination to analyze rather than evoke hatred or pity, aided by his training as a chemist, evolved into a scientific and philosophical quest to explain—both to himself and the world—the phenomenon of the Lager. "The Drowned and the Saved," the central chapter and working title of Levi's first memoir, reveals his preoccupation with the issue of victim behavior in the camps. Levi provides case studies of four "privileged" individuals: Schepschel, who steals to survive and betrays an accomplice in order to gain "privilege"; Alfred L., who cleans the eating pots of Polish workers for extra rations and has no pity for any fellow prisoners who cross his path; Elias, an "insane dwarf" and deceitful functionary who "insolently and violently" supervises other inmates; and lastly, Henri, who survives by stealing, cultivating the pity of others, and maintaining a cold indifference toward those around him. Rachel Falconer notes the "veiled judgment" in Levi's method of "'gradating' the 'crimes' committed in Auschwitz" in this chapter,²³ which is not unlike the moral spectrum he delineates in the concept of the grey zone, to be discussed further.

Levi writes that "Henri," an alias for Holocaust survivor Paul Steinberg, was sometimes pleasant to talk to and seemed capable of affection. However, Levi's negative judgment is evident in his portrayal of Henri as "intent on his hunt and his struggle; hard and distant, enclosed in armour, the enemy of all, inhumanly cunning and incomprehensible like the Serpent in Genesis. . . . I know that Henri is living today. I would give much to know his life as a free man, but I do not want to see him

again."²⁴ While Levi wrote in an afterword of his deliberate use of "the calm, sober language of the witness" in order to avoid explicit judgments of his persecutors (much less his fellow victims), it is clear that elements of his representation of "privileged" Jews, not least of all his biblical allusion in the above passage, position them as blameworthy.²⁵

As it happened, Steinberg published his own (aptly titled) memoir, *Speak You Also: A Survivor's Reckoning*, in 1996. The precariousness of the act of passing judgment that Levi engaged in is evident when taking into account Steinberg's traumatized narrative of his own desperate efforts to stay alive through various "privileged" means. A guilt-ridden Steinberg twice interrupts his story with chapters he calls "Digressions" in order to address Levi's portrayal of him. He notes that he was only eighteen at the time (four years younger than Levi had claimed) and represents himself as "helplessly kicked around by events."²⁶ Yet Steinberg fluctuates from self-justification to despair at his own behavior, mournfully conceding that

[Levi] must have been right. I probably was that creature obsessed with staying alive. ... Now I feel a sharp sense of regret. Primo Levi is gone, and I'd never realized what he thought of me. ... Maybe I could have persuaded him to change his verdict by showing that there were extenuating circumstances. ... Can one be so guilty for having survived?²⁷

The fact that Steinberg at times *agrees* with Levi's characterization of him complicates matters for the reader even further. Even Levi's long-time friend Hermann Langbein challenged his negative generalizations about political prisoners.²⁸ *If This Is a Man* contains numerous other portraits of morally "compromised" characters, ranging from the cruelly indifferent to the savagely violent. Levi's subsequent writings provide many more similar portraits, although his judgments tended to shift over time.

Despite feeling he had regained his "humanity" after his return to Italy, developments in Levi's personal and professional life continued to impact strongly on the evolution of his thoughts about the grey zone. In 1978, while holding a frustrating managerial position at SIVA, he came under investigation for allegedly involuntarily endangering his workers' lives following several workplace accidents.²⁹ He subsequently alluded to Auschwitz when discussing factory life on several occasions.³⁰ Indeed, Thomson writes that Levi had found himself in "a difficult situation: the more orders he gave at SIVA, the more he felt uncomfortably like an Auschwitz *Kapo*."³¹ Recent biographies also place much emphasis on the personal anxieties, frequent depressions, and occasional thoughts of suicide that plagued Levi throughout his life.³² His depres-

sions became particularly acute in the 1970s, and in 1975 he began to see a psychiatrist.

In September of 1975, Levi proposed to his publisher that he translate *The Night of the Gironde*, a semi-fictional novel written by the Dutch-Jewish historian Jacques Presser. The novel constructs a story of a young Dutch Jew who survives in the holding camp of Westerbork by loading fellow Jews onto trains headed for Auschwitz. Granted permission for this foray into the shadowy world of "privilege," Levi completed the translation only after considerable mental anguish. He states in his foreword to the translation that he had read the book repeatedly and was unable to relinquish its hold on his mind. Levi goes on to write what would be repeated in almost identical words a decade later in his essay on the grey zone:

It is naive, absurd and historically inaccurate to maintain that an evil system like Nazism sanctifies its victims: quite the reverse, it leaves them soiled and degraded, it assimilates them, and all the more so to the degree that the victims are at their disposal, virginally innocent of any political or moral constructs.³³

Here, Levi's preoccupation with the behavior of Jewish victims is clear. His early engagement with the problem of how this behavior might be judged can also be seen in his statement that "a typical feature of criminal systems like Nazism is that they debilitate and cloud our judgment."³⁴ At the same time, Levi's use of descriptors such as "soiled" and "degraded" in the passage above reveals that judgment has already been passed.

Levi's involvement in the late 1970s in a documentary being filmed about Dr. Eduard Wirths, a controversial SS physician in Auschwitz, served to reignite his interest in corruption, "collaboration," and, plausibly, the grey zone.³⁵ In 1983, Levi's heaviest depression since the 1960s coincided with his traumatic translation of Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, a novel that explores the disparity between legality and morality, and the subsequent problems of judgment.³⁶ Levi began to see connections between Kafka's dark tale of state-induced self-destruction and his own work, commenting in an interview that the Lager's "distortion of the world," where degradation corrupts persecutor and victim alike, is "Kafkaesque."³⁷ Likewise, Langbein's reflection on "those who got blood on their hands while wearing the striped garb of the inmates" in his study *People in Auschwitz* also anticipates the kind of problems Levi's grey zone evokes.³⁸ Another text seldom cited as important to Levi's ideas on the grey zone is Ella Lingens-Reiner's memoir, *Prisoners of Fear*, which Levi quotes in *The Drowned and the Saved*.³⁹ A German

political prisoner deported for helping Jews, Lingens-Reiner served as a doctor in the Women's Camp at Birkenau for twenty-six months. In her 1947 memoir, Lingens-Reiner argues, like Levi, that prisoners survived not by behaving with "exemplary correctness," but by "break[ing] every rule governing civilian life."⁴⁰ Indeed, at the beginning of her reflections, Lingens-Reiner contends:

It is the final condemnation of a system when it proves to be destructive and evil under the most detached and dispassionate examination, taking all the mixed human and social motives into account and transmitting the halftones as well as the black or white of the extremes.⁴¹

Other literary influences that bear direct connections to Levi's development of the "grey zone" are Alessandro Manzoni's *The Betrothed* and Dante's *Inferno*, to which I will return.⁴²

The decline of Levi's mother into senility and the indignities of old age, the death of several close friends, and Levi's own failing physical health were major causes of his depressive episodes during the final years of his life.⁴³ Throughout all of this Levi was struggling with *The Drowned and the Saved*, which was laboriously written, often no more than one page per day, between the years 1980 and 1986.⁴⁴ On 11 January 1987, only three months before his death, Levi published a review in *La Stampa* of one of his favorite childhood books, Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*.⁴⁵ The story follows Buck, a dog deported into slavery, who becomes the leader of his team by killing his vicious predecessor. In describing the transformation of Buck's "dignity" through his adjustment to his harsh environment, Levi explicitly identifies a similarity between the protagonist's situation and that of "privileged" prisoners in the Lager. He writes that Buck "has killed the leader of the team, he is the new team leader. He will be a chief (a *Kapo*?) even more efficient than Spitz, better at keeping order."⁴⁶ Many commentators have connected Levi's suicide to his experiences in Auschwitz, his conceptualization of the grey zone, and his apparent despair at the fallibility of humankind.⁴⁷ While such a controversial connection need not be made here,⁴⁸ it is evident that the grey zone remained with Levi until the end.

Levi's reasons for writing his last book were many, yet perhaps the most important factor to influence the development of "The Grey Zone" was the failings he perceived in others' memories, reception, and representations of the Holocaust. In 1987, Levi noted in retrospect that he had acted on "an immense need to put things in order, to put order back into a world of chaos, to explain to myself and others."⁴⁹ In his preface to *The Drowned and the Saved* he wrote of his intention "to contribute to the clarification of some aspects of the Lager phenomenon which still

appear obscure."⁵⁰ The words "know" and "understand" permeate the collection, as does a concern over the failure of individual and collective memory to grasp the unprecedented horror of the Holocaust. Levi felt that this problem of reception was particularly evident in young people, and by 1983 his frustrations led him to cease visiting schools.⁵¹ Even Levi's own children evaded his past.⁵² Another factor that strengthened his need to acknowledge the "grey zone" of ambiguity and "compromise" was a growing anxiety about the misleading influence of stereotypes. This was undoubtedly triggered in part by Levi's strong and public opposition to the controversial military activities of Israel, for which the twin images of the "heroic" and universally victimized Jew had been appropriated.⁵³

In a passage Levi wrote in his 1975 foreword to *The Night of the Girondists*, which he repeated almost verbatim in "The Grey Zone" (quoted in the introduction), he states:

There are enough signs to indicate that the time has come to explore the space that divides the victims from their executioners, and to go about it with considerably more delicacy and clearheadedness than has been evident, for instance, in certain well-known recent films. It would take a Manichean to argue that such a space is empty. Empty it is not: it is studded with sordid, deplorable or pathetic creatures (occasionally the three at once).⁵⁴

This not only anticipates Levi's negative attitude toward the "sordid, deplorable or pathetic creatures" of the grey zone, but also highlights his suspicion of the trivializing effects of popular representations, particularly in the medium of film. By the time he wrote his pivotal essay, a decade of cinema and the production of many more popular representations of the Holocaust had not changed his mind. He condemned the Italian director Liliani Cavani's 1974 psychosexual film, *The Night Porter*, which portrays a tormented postwar sexual relationship between a former Nazi officer and an inmate he had raped in the camp. In "The Grey Zone," Levi argues that Cavani's simplistic rhetoric, which claims that all people are victims and murderers and accept these roles voluntarily, is—like her film—"false."⁵⁵

Levi was also skeptical of the preoccupation with the Holocaust in the United States. In several articles written about the influential NBC television miniseries *Holocaust: The Story of the Family Weiss* (1978), Levi accuses the production of being fundamentally flawed in terms of its historical substance and generic conventions.⁵⁶ In a letter to a friend Levi acknowledged the benefits of the mass dissemination of the miniseries, but wrote that "it is, however, sad to think that in order to reach the man on the street [*sic*], history has to be simplified and digested

to such an extent."⁵⁷ In 1985, Levi had even more reason to question Hollywood's integrity when he was informed that his resistance novel *If Not Now, When?* was unlikely to be made into a film. Bernard Gordon, a friend who had initially found Levi a Hollywood agent, wrote to him that any work that "attempts seriously to deal with the human condition is immediately suspect in these precincts."⁵⁸ The representation of "privileged" Jews in film, a medium Levi looked on with considerable suspicion, will be examined in later chapters. First, Levi's own representation of the grey zone—and the "privileged" Jews within it—must be analyzed.

The Multifaceted Concept of the Grey Zone

Upon close examination, the "grey zone" defies a clear-cut definition, as Levi's writings on the subject elicit many theoretical tensions, shifting meanings, and contradictions. To illustrate the complexity of Levi's concept, Erna Paris paraphrases Christopher Browning's characterization of the grey zone as "that foggy universe of mixed motives, conflicting emotions, personal priorities, reluctant choices, opportunism and accommodation, all wedded, when convenient, to self-deception and denial."⁵⁹ At times, Levi restricts his grey zone to the "privileged" Jews focused on in this book, while at other times he seems to incorporate all prisoners and persecutors within "ill-defined outlines which both separate and join the two camps of masters and servants."⁶⁰ Furthermore, Levi and many others argue that the grey zone and the associated problems of judgment and representation apply not only to the camps, but to the ghettos as well, and perhaps further.⁶¹ There is also a constant tension in Levi's writings between the grey zone as a metaphorical concept and the grey zone as a physical space with specific biopolitical origins. While in the most abstract sense the grey zone signifies the "grey" nature of all human behavior, the concept simultaneously refers to the sociological product of the unprecedented persecution that was the Holocaust. In this way, the concept reflects the much broader debate over the universality and "uniqueness" of the event.⁶² Additionally, the grey zone exhibits a tension between being an indecipherable realm and a moral spectrum, which gives rise to a paradox of judgment—a paradox that has significant implications for Levi's representation of "privileged" Jews.⁶³

In his essay on the grey zone, Levi is concerned with human behavior that resists a simplistic, black-and-white classification of "good" or "evil." In a similar manner to Tzvetan Todorov's more recent reflections on the camps, Levi's writing portrays the victims as neither

"heroes" nor "saints," and their persecutors as neither "monsters" nor "beasts."⁶⁴ In Levi's mind, both perpetrators and victims were capable of selfless and selfish acts. From this perspective, the grey zone can be seen as a metaphor for the ambiguities of human nature in general. As Levi said in an interview in 1983, "There are good people and less good people, each of us is a mixture of good and not so good."⁶⁵ Black-and-white Manichean stereotypes only mislead when human beings are overwhelmingly "grey." On various occasions, Levi utilized other linguistic variants, such as "grey band," "grey conscience," and "grey man."⁶⁶ And throughout "The Grey Zone" Levi makes various comments regarding human nature, not least of all through his use of a pivotal quotation regarding the corrupting nature of power from Manzoni's *The Betrothed*: "Those who provoke or oppress, all those who do any wrong to others, are guilty not only of the harm they do, but also of the twists they cause in the minds of those they have injured."⁶⁷ While Levi's primary focus is "privileged" Jews, at times his discussion of "the fundamental theme of human ambiguity fatally provoked by oppression" takes on a much broader dimension.⁶⁸ In a similar vein to Manzoni, Levi frequently shifts from observations of individual cases of ambiguous behavior to universal generalizations on human nature. Indeed, Levi writes that the figures of the grey zone are "indispensable to know if we want to know the human species, if we want to know how to defend our souls when a similar test should once more loom before us."⁶⁹ In this sense, the grey zone is, in Omer Bartov's words, "a rumination on the condition of humanity itself."⁷⁰

On the other hand, the grey zone possesses an important spatial element, with the word "zone" connoting a physical area that is cut off from its surroundings. From a literary standpoint the camp is intrinsically linked in Levi's writings to the color grey. Throughout *If This Is a Man* he makes numerous connections between greyness and various aspects of the Auschwitz environment, including bread, clouds, fog, snow, sky, dawn, and, most frequently, the inmates themselves: "Everything is grey around us, and we are grey."⁷¹ These references continue in *The Truce*, with the Lager described as "a grey and turbid nothing."⁷² However, while the grey zone is strongly attached to certain physical settings, its ultimate focus is on moral compromise in extreme situations. Indeed, it was both the unprecedented circumstances *and* environments—the Holocaust's historical specificity—that forced prisoners into what Levi calls the "grey zone." As explained in the introduction, Jews obtained "privileged" positions through dehumanizing experiences in specific settings, namely the Nazi concentration camps and the ghettos of Eastern Europe. At times Levi also appears to situate prisoners other than the

"privileged" within the grey zone, as if all victims might be seen as having in some way committed morally ambiguous acts—large or small, frequently or infrequently—in order to prolong their lives. Even in his first memoir, Levi argued that "survival without renunciation of any part of one's own moral world" was practically impossible.⁷³

In his essay on the grey zone, Levi stresses the impact of extreme coercion on the behavior of all prisoners in Auschwitz. He gives a detailed account of the "entry ritual, and the moral collapse which it promoted," which led to a Hobbesian-like environment permeated by a "desperate hidden and continuous struggle."⁷⁴ Yet this is counterbalanced by his assertions that many individuals, including many of the "privileged" prisoners he discusses, were *predisposed* to morally ambiguous behavior, persecution notwithstanding. Following this line of thinking, Levi reverts to the universal, claiming that "it is likely that a certain degree of man's domination over man [*sic*] is inscribed in our genetic patrimony as gregarious animals."⁷⁵ In a clear example of the tension between prisoners being coerced and predisposed to act "immorally," Levi writes that the majority of those who held positions of power in the Lager were "human specimens that range[d] from the mediocre to the execrable."⁷⁶ This ever-present tension between the particular and the universal, between extreme coercion leading to moral compromise and a preexisting human inclination to it, is an unresolved—and unacknowledged—aspect of Levi's grey zone. Another tension in Levi's writing that reveals judgment underpinning his analysis is the simultaneous characterization of the "grey zone" as indecipherable realm and moral spectrum.

In light of Levi's warning against judging "privileged" Jews, the grey zone seems to take on the characteristic of an indecipherable realm of ambiguity in which preexisting moral frameworks do not apply. Early in his essay, Levi writes: "The world into which one was precipitated was terrible, yes, but also indecipherable: it did not conform to any model, the enemy was all around but also inside, the 'we' lost its limits."⁷⁷ Indeed, even in his first memoir, Levi reflected on the value of acknowledging one's lack of a "moral system" in the incomprehensible camp environment.⁷⁸ At other times, however, the grey zone gives the impression of involving a spectrum of (im)morality that requires close and careful deliberation, along which inmates and persecutors alike can be situated. His analysis of a brief moment of reluctance on the part of SS *Oberscharführer* Eric Mühsfeldt, who was assigned to supervise the killing process at Birkenau, concludes that he, too, must be placed, "though at its extreme boundary, within the grey band."⁷⁹ Further evidence of Levi's formulation of a scale of judgment is visible when he writes that the grey zone is made up of prisoners who "collaborate[d] to a varying

extent with the Lager authorities."⁸⁰ In short, while the grey zone as an indecipherable realm entails specific, unprecedented conditions in relation to "privileged" Jews and appears to undermine any moral judgment of them, it is equally clear that Levi's grey zone incorporates a moral spectrum that implies the culpability of one's behavior.⁸¹

Significantly, Levi alluded to the idea of a moral spectrum as early as 1947, in *If This Is a Man*. Binary oppositions such as "the good and the bad" are far less distinct than is generally supposed, he wrote, and human behavior allows for "numerous and complex intermediary gradations."⁸² Seldom did individuals inhabit the far extremes, he claimed; "saints" or "sadists" were, for Levi, an exiguous minority. Amassed toward one end of the moral spectrum are the victims, including those who "compromised" themselves in minor ways, while the perpetrators in their darker shades are positioned toward the opposite edge. In Massimo Giuliani's words, Levi uses the grey zone concept to describe "the area between the lowest level of victims and the highest level of Nazi executioners."⁸³ Levi's characterization of "privileged" Jews demonstrates that he places them somewhere in the middle of these extremes. Briefly moving beyond the camps and reflecting on the broad reach of the "grey zone," he writes at one point that "within this area must be catalogued, *with different nuances of quality and weight*, Quisling in Norway, the Vichy government in France, the Judenrat in Warsaw, the Saló Republic in Italy, right down to the Ukrainian and Baltic mercenaries employed elsewhere for the filthiest tasks ... and the *Sonderkommandos*."⁸⁴ Here Levi implies that the *Judenräte* and *Sonderkommandos* may be compared to and contrasted with collaborators for whom the level of coercion was of an entirely different kind, if coercion existed at all (which in some cases it did not). Indeed, the fact that the collaborationist Vichy regime in France's unoccupied zone, for example, was motivated by entrenched anti-Semitism disqualifies any comparison with the forced cooperation of the Jewish leaders and crematorium workers.⁸⁵ Paradoxically, Levi is caught between the need to suspend judgment and the simultaneous inescapability of doing so.

The paradox of judgment is also revealed in Levi's use of a metaphor that underpins all of his Holocaust testimony. Inspired by Dante's *Inferno*, which also explores the problematic zone between good and evil, many of Levi's reflections pivot on Dante's two categories: "*I sommersi e i salvati*"—"the drowned" and "the saved." The "drowned," Levi writes, consist of the *Muselmänner*, or "Muslims," the name given by camp inmates to the barely conscious "skeletons" of the camps, those nameless, voiceless prisoners who merely *existed* on the threshold of death and invariably perished in a short period of time.⁸⁶ In contrast to the

"drowned," the "saved" are those who were able to survive by obtaining some means of "privilege." In an oft-quoted passage, Levi clearly judges these prisoners:

The "saved" of the Lager were not the best, those predestined to do good; the bearers of a message ... Preferably the worst survived, the selfish, the violent, the insensitive, the collaborators of the "grey zones," the spies. It was not a certain rule (there were none, nor are there certain rules in human matters), but it was, nevertheless, a rule. ... The worst survived—that is, the fittest; the best all died.⁸⁷

The distinction between "saved" and "drowned" seemingly parallels that of the survivors and the dead; however, not all "privileged" Jews survived—indeed, most did not.

In another important sense, Levi consigns the "privileged" to the ranks of the "drowned." Giuliani points out that the "drowned"/"saved" distinction has a double meaning and that the category of the "saved" is intrinsically ambiguous.⁸⁸ While all those who died in the camps were certainly "drowned," those who "collaborated," whose "dignity" was degraded in a different but no less real way from the *Muselmänner*, were also "drowned," whether or not they survived until liberation. As Levi wrote in *If This Is a Man*:

The personages in these pages are not men. Their humanity is buried, or they themselves have buried it, under an offence received or inflicted on someone else. The evil and insane SS men, the Kapos, the politicals, the criminals, the prominents, great and small ... all the grades of the mad hierarchy created by the Germans paradoxically fraternized in a uniform internal desolation.⁸⁹

According to Levi, very few prisoners were able to preserve their dignity *and* survive; the degrading effects of National Socialism were practically inescapable. Yet generalizing those who survived as being indelibly "compromised"—indeed, as the "worst" human specimens in the camp—unquestioningly attributes blame to "privileged" prisoners, whom Levi argues constituted the vast majority of survivors.⁹⁰ Levi clearly sees some parallels between Dante's nine circles of Hell and Auschwitz, and while he recognizes the intertextual irony that Jewish prisoners had committed no crime, it is significant that both Levi and Dante share notions of varying levels of culpability along which people can be judged.⁹¹

Levi's shifting opinions over time regarding the *Kapos* in the camps further reveal the paradoxical tension in his writings between the need to judge and the importance of suspending judgment. Indeed, the *Kapo* is an omnipresent figure in survivor testimonies, generalized and demonized to such an extent that the psychoanalytical memoir of Elie Cohen,

who spent sixteen months in Auschwitz, identifies the *Kapo* as "that type of man who has completely adjusted himself to the camp, which he regards as his definitive life, and which he desires nothing more than to continue. . . . The *Kapo* was cruel, and his cruelty must to my mind be explained by his identification with the SS."⁹² When revising his initial version of *If This Is a Man*, Levi toned down some of his previous descriptions of camp "prominents." "Alex," a character based on one of the *Kapos* who supervised Levi, was initially portrayed as an "ugly, violent brute, and treacherous," a harsh description that was removed from later editions. Thomson argues this alteration stemmed from Levi's fear of retribution from survivors, although perhaps a case can also be made for a growing acknowledgment by Levi of the grey zone.⁹³ To be sure, Levi's narratives contain numerous references to prisoner-functionaries who, while certainly not allies, were not necessarily repugnant. Exhibiting a desire to distinguish between various kinds of supervisors on several occasions, Levi points out that due to language barriers among prisoners of different nationalities, the reasons for a *Kapo's* beating were often ambiguous, as such a beating could be interpreted as an almost "friendly" incitement to work, a warning, a punishment, or as completely senseless.⁹⁴

Importantly, the vast majority of prisoner-functionaries whom Levi describes in his memoirs are criminals and political prisoners, not Jewish inmates. He refers to this crucial distinction in *If This Is a Man*, describing one *Kapo* as "not a *Kapo* who makes trouble, for he is not a Jew and so has no fear of losing his post."⁹⁵ Levi later notes that he is "more particularly interested in the Jewish prominents, because while the others are automatically invested with offices as they enter the camp in virtue of their natural supremacy, the Jews have to plot and struggle hard to gain them."⁹⁶ Due to their low position in the Nazis' racial hierarchy, Jewish *Kapos* held their life-prolonging "privileged" positions much more tentatively. Although Levi acknowledges this, his judgments are foreshadowed by his use of words such as "plot," "betrayal," "hateful," "cruel," and "tyrannical." To these descriptors he adds the controversial thesis that a Jewish prisoner-functionary's "capacity for hatred, unfulfilled in the direction of the oppressors, will double back, beyond all reason, on the oppressed; and he [*sic*] will only be satisfied when he has unloaded on to his underlings the injury received from above."⁹⁷ In contrast to this negative judgment, some years later, in *The Truce*, Levi constructed a relatively sympathetic portrayal of Henek, the fifteen-year-old *Kapo* of the children's block who personally performed the "selections" for the gas chambers among his subordinates. Describing Henek as a "good companion" who "enjoyed splendid physical and spiri-

tual health," Levi blandly recounts Henek's insistence that he felt no remorse for performing the "selections" as he could not have survived any other way.⁹⁸ Restraint is also shown in Levi's short story "The Juggler," which narrates an incident when "Eddy," a criminal prisoner and *Kapo*, discovered Levi writing a letter in Auschwitz and dismissed him with a warning rather than a severe punishment.⁹⁹

While Levi had fluctuated in his judgment of the *Kapos*, by the time "The Grey Zone" was written, he clearly saw them as to some extent blameworthy and positioned them along the moral spectrum. Levi writes in his essay that "few survivors feel guilty about having deliberately damaged, robbed, or beaten a companion: those who did so (the *Kapos*, but not only they) block out the memory."¹⁰⁰ This, of course, implies that they *should* feel guilty. Indeed, although Levi distinguishes Jewish from non-Jewish *Kapos* as he had before, at no point does he explicitly suggest the former should be exempt from judgment, as he does for the *Sonderkommandos* and Rumkowski. He makes certain blanket statements about all "privileged" prisoners, such as his declaration that "before such human cases it is imprudent to hasten to issue a moral judgment ... the concurrent guilt on the part of the individual big and small collaborators (never likeable, never transparent!) is always difficult to evaluate."¹⁰¹ Yet Levi's bracketed personal opinion again reveals the paradoxical bind he finds himself in. Even in emphasizing the inappropriateness of hasty judgment, he slides into a discourse implying the blameworthiness and distastefulness of his subjects. Shortly afterward, Levi notes that "if I were forced to judge, I would lightheartedly absolve all those whose concurrence in the guilt was minimal and for whom coercion was of the highest degree,"¹⁰² listing a "picturesque fauna" of positions that does not include that of a *Kapo*. Again, in suggesting that neither he nor anyone else should cast judgment, Levi communicates his moral evaluation nonetheless.

Levi again evokes the notion of a moral spectrum when he writes that "judgement becomes *more delicate and varied* for those who occupied commanding positions."¹⁰³ He finds the *Kapos* to be a case in point, then reveals his own judgment both when he mentions the possibility of resistance by "privileged" prisoners and when he asserts that *Kapos* were individuals predisposed to certain behavior: "Power of such magnitude overwhelmingly attracted the human type who is greedy for power."¹⁰⁴ Negative judgment is further evident in the list of "infinite nuances and motivations" that Levi claims influenced the actions of *Kapos*: "terror, ideological seduction, servile imitation of the victor, myopic desire for any power whatsoever, even though ridiculously circumscribed in space and time, cowardice, and finally lucid calculation aimed at eluding the

imposed orders and order."¹⁰⁵ Most of the motives Levi identifies as the driving forces behind *Kapo* behavior suggest more about the internal nature or personality of the individual and their supposed freedom of choice than the more obvious factor, that of the extreme coercion *Kapos*—and particularly Jewish *Kapos*—were confronted with. In describing at length the “atrocities” committed by *Kapos* on fellow inmates, Levi does not mask his judgment, stating that “the power of these small satraps was absolute.”¹⁰⁶

The paradoxical bind Levi finds himself in is evident toward the end of this section of “The Grey Zone”:

It remains true that in the Lager and outside, there exist grey, ambiguous persons, ready to compromise. The extreme pressure of the Lager tends to increase their ranks; they are the rightful owners of a quota of guilt (which grows apace with their freedom of choice), and besides this they are the vectors and instruments of the system’s guilt. ... In reality, in the enormous majority of cases, their behavior was rigidly preordained.¹⁰⁷

This passage reveals the unresolved tensions in Levi’s writing between the particular and the universal; the human predisposition to “compromise” and the unprecedented pressures determining action; and between the moral spectrum where blame increases with free will and the indecipherable realm of the Lager that “rigidly preordained” one’s behavior, thus ruling out moral responsibility. In the end, the need to avoid hasty judgment of those who were nonetheless “rightful owners of a quota of guilt” places both writer and reader in a situation where judgment is impossible, but yet inevitable. While Levi concedes that survival until liberation ultimately came down to chance,¹⁰⁸ it is clear that he does judge the *Kapos* and other “privileged” Jews, even those he explicitly argues should not be judged.

Representing Those Beyond Judgment

As late as 1979, Levi had not yet committed himself to his call to suspend judgment, stating in an interview that the oppressed “were more or less forced into compromises, sometimes very grave compromises, which it is very hard indeed to judge. ... But they should be judged, and above all we should be aware of them and not ignorant.”¹⁰⁹ By the time *The Drowned and the Saved* was complete, however, Levi seems to have reached the conclusion that one should not pass judgment on “privileged” Jews. Merging the generic boundaries of a survivor’s account with philosophical reflection, “The Grey Zone” sees Levi tentatively

take upon himself the task of testifying to the experiences and behavior of these liminal figures. Importantly, survivor testimony, which has inspired a considerable critical literature, is a genre made up of texts that exhibit a wide range of devices, strategies, and intertextual meanings, with survivor narratives constructed through the use of such devices as chronology, description, characterization, dialogue, metaphor, and narrative perspective.¹¹⁰ An analysis of the literary techniques Levi employs reveals that he is unable to fulfill his own requirement of avoiding judgment when representing the extreme situations of "privileged" Jews. His reflections on the Jewish crematorium workers who made up the *Sonderkommandos*, for whom Levi wrote judgment should be suspended, exemplify this.

Levi's "Crematorium Ravens"

Levi describes the conception and organization of the *Sonderkommandos* as "National Socialism's most demonic crime."¹¹¹ He details at length the horrific duties the *Sonderkommandos* performed under the threat—or better, *reality*—of imminent death, qualifying his description of the material benefits their work afforded them with the statement, "Here one hesitates to speak of privilege."¹¹² However, when Levi begins to describe the few acts of resistance by the "special squads," he constructs a binary opposition underpinned by judgment. Levi notes the exception of a group of four hundred Jews from Corfu who refused to undertake the gruesome work and were then subsequently killed. Additionally, he praises the twelfth *Sonderkommando* in Birkenau, which undertook an armed revolt in October 1944, destroying one crematorium in the process.¹¹³ Levi had previously mentioned the Birkenau uprising twice in his writings but made little comment on the daily activities of the *Sonderkommandos*. He characterizes the *Sonderkommando* resisters in *If This Is a Man* as "helpless and exhausted slaves like ourselves, [who] had found in themselves the strength to act, to mature the fruits of their hatred."¹¹⁴ In "Resistance in the Camps," an article published in 1966, Levi describes the *Sonderkommando* revolt as "the most important episode of active rebellion against Nazi power in the extermination camps," praising its "desperate boldness."¹¹⁵

Levi uses similar language in his essay on the grey zone; however, here he draws a clear distinction, contrasting the *Sonderkommando* resisters with "the miserable manual labourers of the slaughter ... the others, those who from one shift to the next preferred a few more weeks of life (what a life!) to immediate death."¹¹⁶ While Levi immediately follows this by reiterating, "I believe that no one is authorised to judge

them, not those who lived through the experience of the Lager and even less those who did not live through it,"¹¹⁷ the implicit judgment in Levi's characterization of these "others" is evident. The binary opposition between "resistance" and "cooperation" on the part of different *Sonderkommando* members is further revealed in a comment Levi made in an interview in 1983, when he pondered whether he would have resisted rather than become one of these "others":

My first reaction is to say that there is no possibility of resilience in the face of such violence. I ask myself what I would have done if it had happened to me, whether I would have had the courage to kill myself, to let myself be killed if I had been offered the task? Perhaps they didn't understand at first what they were being asked to do. There are some cases of people who preferred to let themselves be killed rather than join the *Sonderkommando*, but there are many who didn't.¹¹⁸

While Levi cannot definitively answer the question he asks of himself, his judgment is nevertheless evident when he notes that to prefer immediate death required "courage," which he appears to consider more virtuous than continuing with the work.

Levi's somewhat negative judgment of the crematorium workers is revealed in various ways throughout his essay, such as when he inaccurately suggests they were "in a permanent state of complete debasement and prostration" due to the alcohol to which they had access.¹¹⁹ While drinking was used as a coping mechanism in the *Sonderkommandos*, the prisoners had to be both physically and mentally capable of enduring the grueling work, which often lasted twelve hours or longer at a time. Levi also makes an arguably disparaging claim regarding the *Sonderkommando* testimonies written amidst the inferno and buried for posterity at Birkenau. He asserts that "from men who have known such extreme destitution one cannot expect a deposition in the juridical sense of the term, but something that is at once a lament, a curse, an expiation, and an attempt to justify and rehabilitate themselves."¹²⁰ While the memoirs and manuscripts of the *Sonderkommandos* do sometimes contain elements of self-justification, they also provide detailed statistics and descriptions of the extermination process and those involved. In any case, Levi's statement might be seen to suggest that the members of the "special squads" need to "justify and rehabilitate" themselves.

Perhaps the most telling indicator of Levi's judgment of the *Sonderkommandos* is his literary allusion to the *monatti* of Manzoni's canonical Italian work, *The Betrothed*. A constant intertextual element throughout Levi's writings, Manzoni's historical novel depicts the city of Milan ravaged by plague in the mid-seventeenth century. The figures of the

monatti are based on the men who removed corpses from the houses and streets to mass graves, transported the sick to the *lazaretto* (containment area), and burned or fumigated any potentially infected matter. Manzoni's characterization of the *monatti* is overwhelmingly negative. He writes:

The only men who generally took on the work of the *monatti* ... were those more attracted by rapine and licence than terrified of contagion or susceptible to natural feelings of revulsion. ... They entered houses as masters, as enemies, and (not to mention their thieving or treatment of the wretched creatures reduced by plague to passing through their hands) they would lay those foul and infected hands on healthy people, on children, parents, wives, or husbands, threatening to drag them off to the *lazaretto* unless they ransomed themselves or got others to ransom them with money. ... [They] let infected clothes drop from their carts on purpose, in order to propagate and foster the plague, for it had become a livelihood, a reign, a festival for them.¹²¹

Later in the novel some of these "depraved creatures" are described as drinking alcohol while sitting on a pile of corpses, with one exclaiming, "Long live the plague, and death to the rabble!"¹²² While the historical parallel with the *Sonderkommandos* may in some ways seem apt, Levi's intertextual reference also draws on Manzoni's judgment.

At one point, Manzoni describes a "filthy *monatto*" as briefly showing "a kind of unusual respect and involuntary hesitation" when faced with the body of a young girl killed by the plague.¹²³ It is here that Levi makes a connection to a unique incident in Birkenau, when a young girl survived the gas chamber and was temporarily cared for by the *Sonderkommando* members who found her. Levi describes these Jews, "debased by alcohol and the daily slaughter," as "transformed" by the survivor's presence, although she was discovered and executed soon after.¹²⁴ The parallel Levi makes between Manzoni's *monatti* and the *Sonderkommandos* seems to involve more than a brief moment of pity, particularly when considering Levi's concluding comment that "compassion and brutality can coexist in the same individual and in the same moment."¹²⁵ Employing a rhetorical shift from the particular to the universal, Levi seems to suggest that the crematorium workers were in some way predisposed to undertake the work they did. In the words of the poet Michael O'Siadhail, in Levi's representation, the *Sonderkommandos* had "fallen beyond his compassion's greyest zone."¹²⁶ While Levi, albeit unsuccessfully, stresses that the *Sonderkommandos* should not be subject to moral evaluation, he argues that "the same *impotentia judicandi* paralyses us when confronted by the Rumkowski case."¹²⁷

Judging Chaim Rumkowski

Levi concludes his essay on the "grey zone" with a detailed discussion of Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski (1877–1944), an elderly, failed Jewish industrialist who served as the president of the Lodz Ghetto from October 1939 to August 1944.¹²⁸ Due to being located in Poland's most important manufacturing region, the financial and material value of the Lodz Ghetto to the Nazis helped ensure that it was the longest surviving of all the ghettos, although its peak population of approximately 160,000 was continuously whittled away by starvation, disease, and deportations. The constant vulnerability of Jews in the Lodz Ghetto is indicated by the Nazis' "firm promise" to the city administration in mid-1940, just as the ghetto was sealed off, that Jews would be "completely removed" from it by early October of that year.¹²⁹ By maintaining the required levels of production, the Jewish community's officials believed that even as the extermination of Jews was well under way (although the time when this became clear to Jewish leaders is difficult to evaluate), at least a remnant could be saved. This seems to be the theory that Rumkowski based his actions on, and he was not unique among *Judenrat* leaders in thinking this. Appointed *Älteste der Juden* ("Elder of the Jews") in late 1939,



Figure 1.1. Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, head of the Jewish Council in the Lodz Ghetto, and other officials pose for a group portrait underneath a banner and a large portrait of Rumkowski (#25335). *Courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives*

the fact that all other members of the Jewish Council were executed and replaced soon after, and that he himself later died in Auschwitz, demonstrates the precariousness of such a "privileged" position.

Rumkowski oversaw the running of the Lodz Ghetto until its liquidation just several months before the end of the war. It has been hypothesized that without the Soviet army's controversial decision to delay its advance into Poland by halting at the Vistula River, little more than 100 kilometers from Lodz, up to 80,000 Jews may have been saved and Rumkowski may have been memorialized as a savior rather than a traitor.¹³⁰ It is undeniable that Rumkowski himself suffered persecution at the hands of the Nazis. We know that he was physically beaten and that his phones were tapped.¹³¹ Nonetheless, for various reasons, Rumkowski has become the most despised "privileged" Jew in all survivor testimony concerning the Lodz Ghetto. Such is the controversy surrounding Rumkowski that Lucille Eichengreen's memoir, *Rumkowski and the Orphans of Lodz*, is structured around her scathing critique of the Jewish leader.¹³² A frequent point of reference in representations of Rumkowski is his so-called "Give me your children!" speech of 4 September 1942, in which he reportedly explained the need to "sacrifice" those less likely to survive in order to save the ghetto's remaining population.¹³³ In a recent memoir, Abraham Biderman describes Rumkowski as a "medieval despot" who "play[ed] poker with the devil."¹³⁴ Even Jacob Robinson, who vigorously defended the *Judenrat* officials against Hannah Arendt's polemics, contends that "Rumkowski's behaviour is open to criticism."¹³⁵ While Levi's negative judgment of Rumkowski is usually (though not always) more subtle than this, his evaluation of the Jewish leader is evident throughout "The Grey Zone."

Levi's interest in Rumkowski was piqued long before he wrote *The Drowned and the Saved*. Indeed, the analysis he provides in his last book is almost identical to his earlier attempt to come to grips with the Jewish leader's behavior described in Levi's "Story of a Coin," which began as a newspaper article and was eventually published in 1981 in *Moments of Reprieve*.¹³⁶ The fact that Levi had previously written only about "privileged" Jews in settings and situations he had witnessed or experienced directly is indicative of his personal compulsion to explore the case studies of Rumkowski and the *Sonderkommandos*. While Levi does not seem prepared, at least consciously, to condemn Rumkowski, he does write that Rumkowski's apparent "natural" will to power "does not exonerate him from his responsibilities":

If he had survived his own tragedy, and the tragedy of the ghetto which he contaminated, superimposing on it his histrionic image, no tribunal would

have absolved him, nor certainly can we absolve him on the moral plane. But there are extenuating circumstances: an infernal order such as National Socialism was, exercises a frightful power of corruption, against which it is difficult to guard oneself. ... To resist it a truly solid moral armature is needed, and the one available to Chaim Rumkowski ... together with his entire generation, was fragile.¹³⁷

In this passage Levi seems to suggest that Rumkowski is legally and morally guilty (since the absolution that he suggests is inappropriate implies guilt). On the other hand, he also points to the inefficacy of legal institutions and moral faculties in judging "privileged" Jews. Levi's argument that Rumkowski cannot be judged due to "extenuating circumstances" is therefore contradicted by his suggestion that the Jewish leader had "contaminated" the ghetto, a statement which distracts one from the extreme coercion that he and other Jewish council members were subjected to. Having already mentioned the production of ghetto currency, stamps, and songs that Rumkowski had dedicated to himself, Levi reinforces his judgment that the Jewish leader forced "his histrionic image" on the ghetto's inhabitants.¹³⁸

While conceding that Rumkowski's position was "intrinsically frightful," Levi also writes that "the four years of his [Rumkowski's] presidency or more exactly, his dictatorship, were an astonishing tangle of megalomaniacal dream, barbaric vitality, and real diplomatic and organizational ability."¹³⁹ While Levi portrays Rumkowski as demonstrating a genuine concern for many of his subordinates at times, he also characterizes him as possessing an arrogant sense of self-importance that proved detrimental to many of the ghetto's Jews. His representation of the much reviled Jewish leader is replete with negative descriptors such as "authoritarian," "renegade," and "accomplice."¹⁴⁰ Levi also links Rumkowski with the moral standards (or lack thereof) that he perceives in the *Kapos*, describing him as a "corrupt satrap" who displays the "identification with the oppressor" condemned earlier in his essay.¹⁴¹ Indeed, Levi becomes more explicit toward the end of "The Grey Zone," not only drawing a parallel between Rumkowski and "the *Kapos* and Lager functionaries," but also with "the small hierarchs who serve a regime to whose misdeeds they are willingly blind; of the subordinates who sign everything because a signature costs little; of those who shake their heads but acquiesce; those who say, 'If I did not do it, someone else worse than I would.'"¹⁴² By generalizing Rumkowski's "complicity" in this way and making reference to the postwar excuse common among captured Holocaust perpetrators, Levi arguably verges on blurring the distinction between victim and persecutor, a distinction he had gone to great lengths to emphasize several pages earlier.



Figure 1.2. Rumkowski leaves the site of a public demonstration in the Lodz Ghetto after delivering a speech to calm the people's fear and anger about food provisioning in the ghetto. Also pictured are Leon Rozenblat (walking with Rumkowski) and Shmuel Eizmann (the Jewish leader's bodyguard, behind Rumkowski, to the right) (#63024). *Courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives*

Confidently claiming that Rumkowski “passionately loved authority,” Levi positions him as a self-proclaimed “King of the Jews” who “rode through the streets of his minuscule kingdom, streets crowded with beggars and postulants.”¹⁴³ This reflects the fact that Levi was influenced by Leslie Epstein’s controversial 1979 novel, *King of the Jews*, which was also initially to be the title of Levi’s “Story of a Coin.”¹⁴⁴ By turns scandalous, compassionate, and perverse, the protagonist of Epstein’s fictionalized narrative develops an almost mythological aspect, fluctuating between dedicated representative and egotistical dictator of the ghetto. Levi’s representation also shifts between positive and negative evaluations of Rumkowski’s character, which arguably results in a more nuanced portrayal of the Jewish leader than is generally found elsewhere. Nonetheless, the precariousness of Levi’s undertaking is evident in the manner in which he frequently prefaces his critical comments about Rumkowski. When Levi writes that his subject “*must have* progressively convinced himself that he *was* a Messiah,” that “*it is probable* that Rumkowski thought of himself not as a servant but as a Lord,” and that “he *must have* taken his own authority seriously,” his representation reveals certain assumptions underpinning his judgment, despite the extremely

complex circumstances at issue.¹⁴⁵ In any case, Levi clearly expects that the reader will adopt his judgment.

In the same way that Levi implies the *Kapos* and crematorium workers were to some extent predisposed by nature to morally ambiguous behavior, there is a clear sense that he thinks the same of Rumkowski. After explicating the addictive and corruptive qualities of "power," Levi writes:

If the interpretation of a Rumkowski intoxicated with power is valid, it must be admitted that the intoxication occurred not because of, but rather despite, the ghetto environment; that is, it is so powerful as to prevail even under conditions that would seem to be designed to extinguish all individual will.¹⁴⁶

Significantly, this is the first time Levi explicitly prioritizes the influence of the human predisposition to "compromise"—in this case, Rumkowski's alleged lust for power—over the impact of external factors, namely the choiceless choices imposed by the Nazi regime.

Most tellingly of all, when Levi states that Rumkowski "must be placed in this band of half-consciences," he adds that "whether high or low it is difficult to say."¹⁴⁷ The imagery invoked of a "band" along which "privileged" Jews are situated at various points returns us to the paradoxical conceptualization of the grey zone as both an indecipherable realm and a moral spectrum. Reflecting on where Rumkowski should be positioned on this moral continuum, Levi alludes to the impossibility of judgment through his expression of uncertainty, his acknowledgment that "it is difficult to say." Levi's call for a suspension of judgment is also evident in his self-reflexive, rhetorical movements from the particular to the universal. The end of his essay, for example, transforms into a general digression on the corruptive influence of power. Having questioned the possibility of judging the Jewish leader, Levi states, "We are all mirrored in Rumkowski, his ambiguity is ours."¹⁴⁸ Nonetheless, Levi's judgment is again revealed in his allusion to Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. Just as Levi drew on Manzoni's demonized *monatti* in his judgment of the *Sonderkommandos*, he explicitly compares Rumkowski with Angelo, the devious and hypocritical villain of Shakespeare's play, who uses his position of power for personal gain and attempts to have a man executed for a crime he himself committed.¹⁴⁹

Levi's search for a universal lesson in the experiences of "privileged" Jews, who are both ostensibly beyond—but at the same time subject to—his judgment, is again highlighted in the closing lines of his essay. Shifting once more from the particular to the universal, Levi provides another self-reflexive, pessimistic extrapolation from the historically



Figure 1.3. Rumkowski in conversation with Hans Biebow, head of the *Gettoverwaltung* [German ghetto administration] (#29112). *Courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives*

specific ethical dilemmas confronting "privileged" Jews to a despairing social commentary on human nature:

Like Rumkowski, we too are so dazzled by power and prestige as to forget our essential fragility: willingly or not we come to terms with power, forgetting that we are all in the ghetto, that the ghetto is walled in, that outside the ghetto reign the lords of death and that close by the train is waiting.¹⁵⁰

Raniero Speelman argues that "this may be the most pregnant of Levi's sayings and the nucleus of his philosophy. These words link the Shoah to us, just like we are already linked to the Shoah."¹⁵¹ In placing us in the position of the Jewish leader—or at the very least acknowledging the possibility that we may one day be faced with such pressures under similar circumstances—Levi makes a genuine, if ultimately unsuccessful, effort to suspend judgment of Rumkowski.

Levi's essay on the grey zone starkly reveals the limit of judgment one confronts when engaging with the unprecedented ethical dilemmas of "privileged" Jews. Returning to Levi's original ideas in relation to the grey zone, this chapter has exposed a paradox of judgment underpinning his reflections, as it would seem to be the case that even if moral judgment of "privileged" Jews is inappropriate, it is also inevitable. The product of a multitude of personal, social, and cultural influences, Levi's attitude toward the problem of judgment and the behavior of "privileged" Jews changed over time. He was strongly influenced by what he perceived to be misrepresentations of the Holocaust, particularly in history and film. Warning of "excessive simplifications," Levi nonetheless holds that the grey zone comprises "a phenomenon of fundamental importance for the historian, the psychologist and the sociologist,"¹⁵² revealing his belief that modes of representation other than survivor testimony *should* engage with the sensitive issue of "privileged" Jews.

Toward the end of "The Grey Zone," Levi raises a crucial point that cannot be easily set aside: like most "privileged" Jews, the only words about Rumkowski that we lack and can never obtain are his own. Levi writes that only Rumkowski could clarify his situation "if he could speak before us, even lying, as perhaps he always lied, to himself also; he would in any case help us understand him, as every defendant helps his judge."¹⁵³ Faced with this problem, it has been the ongoing task of the scholar to piece together the debris of the past to approach a better understanding of it. Judgment plays a crucial role in this. By explicitly and self-reflexively engaging with this complex issue, Levi invokes the need to suspend judgment when representing "privileged" Jews yet is himself compelled to judge Rumkowski. As noted in the introduction,

the behavior of Jewish leaders has been a subject of considerable controversy. This is particularly evident in the treatment of the *Jüdenräte* in the work of Raul Hilberg, to which I now turn.

Notes

1. For specific examples of the influence of the grey zone in these areas, see, respectively, Petropoulos and Roth, *Gray Zones*; Tzvetan Todorov, *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps*, trans. Arthur Denner and Abigail Pollack (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, [1991] 1999); David Luban, "A Man Lost in the Gray Zone," *Law and History Review* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2001); Tim Cole, *Holocaust City: The Making of a Jewish Ghetto* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 248–49; John K. Roth, "In Response to Hannah Holtschneider," in *Fire in the Ashes: God, Evil, and the Holocaust*, ed. David Patterson and John K. Roth (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 53–54; Claudia Card, "Groping through Gray Zones," in *On Feminist Ethics and Politics*, ed. Claudia Card (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999); Bryan Cheyette, "The Uncertain Certainty of *Schindler's List*," in Loshitzky, *Spielberg's Holocaust*; Seymour M. Hersh, "The Gray Zone," *The New Yorker* 80, no. 13 (24 May 2004). Levi's concept has also been applied to legal trials of former "privileged" prisoners in René Wolf, "Judgment in the Grey Zone: The Third Auschwitz (Kapo) Trial in Frankfurt 1968," *Journal of Genocide Research* 9, no. 4 (December 2007). Further appropriations of the grey zone are cited below.
2. For further discussion, see Sergio Parussa, "A Hybridism of Sounds: Primo Levi between Judaism and Literature," in Pugliese, *The Legacy of Primo Levi*.
3. Had Levi been treated as a partisan, he would have been immediately executed.
4. Most of Levi's writings have now been published in English, and full details can be found in the bibliography.
5. Levi goes on to note that these themes are already present in his earlier memoirs and short stories. See Giuseppe Grassano, "A Conversation with Primo Levi (1979)," in Belpoliti and Gordon, *The Voice of Memory*, 131.
6. Lawrence L. Langer, "Legacy in Gray," in Kremer, *Memory and Mastery*, 198.
7. See, for example, Gordon, *Primo Levi's Ordinary Virtues*; Massimo Giuliani, *Centaur in Auschwitz: Reflections on Primo Levi's Thinking* (Lanham: Lexington, 2003).
8. See Adam Katz, "On 'Maelstroms Large and Small, Metaphorical and Actual': 'Gray Zones' in the Writings of Primo Levi," *Cultural Studies* 13, no. 3 (1 July 1999).
9. Stanislaw G. Pugliese, "Trauma/Transgression/Testimony," in Pugliese, *The Legacy of Primo Levi*, 10.
10. Bryan Cheyette, "The Ethical Uncertainty of Primo Levi," in *Modernity, Culture and "the Jew"*, ed. Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), 271.
11. *Ibid.*, 272.
12. Quoted in "Germaine Greer Talks to Primo Levi (1985)," in Belpoliti and Gordon, *The Voice of Memory*, 6.
13. Thomson, *Primo Levi*, 470. Similarly, Carol Angier writes in her psycho-biography: "Already now, in Auschwitz itself and on his return, [Levi] began his research into the 'grey zone' of human behaviour, the compromise with evil. And already now he saw that it was inescapable: that in extremity many compromise entirely, and almost all to some extent." Angier, *The Double Bond*, 346.
14. See Angier, *The Double Bond*, 215–18.

15. See, for example, Fred Misurella, "A Clear Eye on Life: Renaissance Style in Primo Levi's Writing," in Pugliese, *The Legacy of Primo Levi*.
16. Angier, *The Double Bond*, 281. Maestro, whom Levi had known at university and as a fellow partisan, was the secret addressee of Levi's love poem, "25 February 1944." See Primo Levi, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, [1984] 1988), 7.
17. Thomson, *Primo Levi*, 163; Angier, *The Double Bond*, 286–87.
18. Levi, *If This Is a Man*; and, *The Truce*, 22.
19. See the essay entitled "Shame" in Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 52–67.
20. *Ibid.*, 113, 59.
21. See, for example, Anna Bravo and Federico Cereja, "The Duty of Memory (1983)," in Belpoliti and Gordon, *The Voice of Memory*, 234.
22. Levi, *If This Is a Man*; and, *The Truce*, 15.
23. Rachel Falconer, "Selfhood in Descent: Primo Levi's *The Search for Roots* and *If This Is a Man*," in Vice, *Representing the Holocaust*, 215. Curiously, Falconer maintains that Levi refuses to judge "Henri."
24. Levi, *If This Is a Man*; and, *The Truce*, 106.
25. *Ibid.*, 382.
26. Paul Steinberg, *Speak You Also: A Survivor's Reckoning*, trans. Linda Coverdale and Bill Ford (New York: Henry Holt and Company, [1996] 2000), 105.
27. *Ibid.*, 130–31. Significantly, Steinberg also offers a considerably different perspective on Levi's demonized dwarf "Elias." See *ibid.*, 46, 51–52, 119. For an in-depth discussion of both memoirs, see Susanna Egan, "The Drowned and the Saved: Primo Levi and Paul Steinberg in Dialogue," *History and Memory* 13, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2001).
28. Langbein, *People in Auschwitz*, 147–48, 159, 169–70.
29. Thomson, *Primo Levi*, 302, 304, 325, 338, 364–66.
30. During an interview in 1979, Levi addressed some unionists' characterizations of the workplace as consisting of "assembly-line slaves and evil bosses" by stating that "there is a whole band in between those extremes where work is neither punitive nor alienating." See Silvia Giacomini, "The Wrench (1979)," in Belpoliti and Gordon, *The Voice of Memory*, 95. See also Mirna Cicioni's connection of Levi's fictional short story entitled "Our Fine Specifications" to "The Grey Zone" in Cicioni, *Primo Levi*, 64.
31. Thomson, *Primo Levi*, 339.
32. In addition to the books by Angier and Thomson, see Anissimov, *Primo Levi*, 388–406.
33. Primo Levi, "Foreword" to Jacques Presser, *The Night of the Girondists*, trans. Barrows Mussey (London: Harvill, [1957] 1992), ix–x.
34. *Ibid.*, x.
35. See Thomson, *Primo Levi*, 369. Levi also wrote a preface to Rudolf Höss, *Death Dealer: The Memoirs of the SS Kommandant at Auschwitz*, trans. Andrew Pollinger, 2nd ed. (New York: De Capo, [1985] 1996).
36. Franz Kafka, *Il processo* [The trial], trans. Primo Levi (Turin: Einaudi, [1925] 1983).
37. Federico DeMelis, "An Assault Called Franz Kafka (1983)," in Belpoliti and Gordon, *The Voice of Memory*, 159.
38. See Langbein, *People in Auschwitz*, 519–20. Indeed, Levi describes with admiration Langbein's aim "not to accuse or to move, but to facilitate understanding." See Primo Levi, *The Search for Roots: A Personal Anthology*, trans. Peter Forbes (London: Allen Lane, [1981] 2001), 207.
39. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 59.
40. Lingens-Reiner, *Prisoners of Fear*, 22.
41. *Ibid.*, ix.

42. For a detailed discussion of the influence of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" on Levi's grey zone, see Insana, *Arduous Tasks*, 56–92.
43. For further discussion, see Angier, *The Double Bond*, 602, 630–31.
44. *Ibid.*, 605–6.
45. Jack London, *The Call of the Wild* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, [1903] 1915), 81–82.
46. Primo Levi, "Jack London's Buck," in *The Critical Response to Jack London*, ed. Susan M. Nuernberg (Westport: Greenwood, [1987] 1995), 81–82. For another connection to London's book, see Levi, *If This Is a Man; and, The Truce*, 49.
47. For the most (in)famous example of this thesis, see Cynthia Ozick, "Primo Levi's Suicide Notes," *New Republic* 198, no. 12 (21 March 1988). See also Alvin H. Rosenfeld, "Primo Levi: The Survivor as Victim," in *Perspectives on the Holocaust: Essays in Honor of Raul Hilberg*, ed. James S. Pacy and Alan P. Wertheimer (Boulder: Westview, 1995).
48. Indeed, there are good reasons for avoiding the assumption that Auschwitz eventually "claimed" Levi. For further discussion, see Alexander Stille, "The Biographical Fallacy," in Pugliese, *The Legacy of Primo Levi*; Jonathan Druker, "On the Dangers of Reading Suicide into the Works of Primo Levi," in Pugliese, *The Legacy of Primo Levi*.
49. Quoted in Roberto DiCaro, "The Essential and the Superfluous (1987)," in Belpoliti and Gordon, *The Voice of Memory*, 174.
50. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 9.
51. Bravo and Cereja, "The Duty of Memory (1983)," 230. Levi writes of one disillusioning encounter with a child unable to understand the nature of the Lager in his chapter, "Stereotypes." See Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 127–28.
52. See Angier, *The Double Bond*, 477–78.
53. See Giampaolo Pansa, "Primo Levi: Begin Should Go (1982)," in Belpoliti and Gordon, *The Voice of Memory*; and Gad Lerner, "If This Is a State (1984)," in Belpoliti and Gordon, *The Voice of Memory*.
54. Levi, "Foreword" to Presser, *The Night of the Girondists*, x.
55. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 32.
56. See, for example, Primo Levi, *The Black Hole of Auschwitz*, trans. Sharon Wood (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 56–66.
57. Quoted in Thomson, *Primo Levi*, 376–77.
58. Quoted in *ibid.*, 445.
59. Erna Paris, *Long Shadows: Truth, Lies and History* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2001), 313.
60. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 27.
61. Along with mentioning various collaborating governments, such as those of Norway, Vichy France, and Italy, Levi situates SS *Oberscharführer* Mühsfeldt within the grey zone. See Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 27–28, 40–41. Furthermore, Levi makes it clear that the grey zone is also evident in the Soviet Gulag. See *ibid.*, 25, 27, 31. Other scholars apply the grey zone to bystanders, resister-collaborators, or groups and individuals in situations unrelated to the Holocaust. See Joram War-mund, "The Gray Zone Expanded," in Pugliese, *The Legacy of Primo Levi*; Doris L. Bergen, "Mourning, Mass Death, and the Gray Zone: The Ethnic Germans of Eastern Europe and the Second World War," in *Symbolic Loss: The Ambiguity of Mourning and Memory at Century's End*, ed. Peter Homans (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000); Pamela Ballinger, "Who Defines and Remembers Genocide After the Cold War?: Contested Memories of Partisan Massacres in Venezia Giulia in 1943–1945," *Journal of Genocide Research* 2, no. 1 (2000); Dariusz Stola, "Jedwabne: Revisiting the Evidence and Nature of the Crime," *Holocaust and Genocide Stud-*

- ies 17, no. 1 (Spring 2003); Beth Griech-Polelle, "Image of a Churchman-Resister: Bishop von Galen, the Euthanasia Project and the Sermons of Summer 1941," *Journal of Contemporary History* 36, no. 1 (January 2001); Stefano Levi Della Torre, "The Limit and the Unlimited," in Bemporad, Pawlikowski and Sievers, *Good and Evil After Auschwitz*; Eric D. Weitz, "Racial Politics without the Concept of Race: Reevaluating Soviet Ethnic and National Purges," *Slavic Review* 61, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 27; Victoria Sanford, "The 'Grey Zone' of Justice: NGOs and Rule of Law in Postwar Guatemala," *Journal of Human Rights* 2, no. 3 (September 2003); Lynne Viola, "The Grey Zone," *The Nation* 277, no. 11 (13 October 2003). Viola makes no explicit reference to Levi and uses the concept to discuss the morally ambiguous behavior of bystanders in Soviet Russia. For further feminist interpretations of the grey zone that discuss patriarchal repression and violence, see Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Lynne S. Arnault, "Cruelty, Horror, and the Will to Redemption," *Hypatia* 18, no. 2 (2003). For another, less developed, application of the grey zone, in this case to psychiatric care, see Mary V. Seeman, "Therapy in the Grey Zone: Psychiatry Recalled," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 171, no. 12 (7 December 2004).
62. For more on this issue, see Norman Geras, "In a Class of Its Own?," in *Moral Philosophy and the Holocaust*, eds. Eve Garrard and Geoffrey Scarre (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); Michael Berenbaum, *After Tragedy and Triumph: Essays in Modern Jewish Thought and the American Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 17–32; part 1 of John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *Holocaust: Religious and Philosophical Implications* (New York: Paragon House, 1989); Nathan Rotenstreich, "The Holocaust as a Unique Historical Event," *Patterns of Prejudice* 22, no. 1 (1988).
 63. These ideas were first developed in Adam Brown, "The Trauma of 'Choiceless Choices': The Paradox of Judgment in Primo Levi's 'Grey Zone,'" in *Trauma, Historicity, Philosophy*, ed. Matthew Sharpe, Murray Noonan and Jason Freddi (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007).
 64. Todorov's work is heavily influenced by the rejection of ethical Manicheanisms in Levi's writings. See Todorov, *Facing the Extreme*, 262.
 65. Bravo and Cereja, "The Duty of Memory (1983)," 232.
 66. Levi uses the "grey band" and "grey, ambiguous persons" in his essay "The Grey Zone." See Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 33, 40. Levi refers to "a vast zone of grey consciences" in his earlier discussion of Chaim Rumkowski. See Primo Levi, *Moments of Reprieve*, trans. Ruth Feldman (London: Abacus, [1981] 1990), 171. The phrase "grey man" is taken from Risa Sodi's interview with Levi, during which he spoke of Austrian collaborator Kurt Waldheim as "*uomo grigia*" (grey man), which Sodi translates as "grey zoner." See Risa Sodi, "An Interview with Primo Levi," *Partisan Review* 54, no. 3 (1987): 365.
 67. Alessandro Manzoni, *The Betrothed*, trans. David Forgacs and Matthew Reynolds (London: J. M. Dent, [1827] 1997), 31; Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 29.
 68. *Ibid.*, 43.
 69. *Ibid.*, 26.
 70. Omer Bartov, "Introduction," in Bartov, *The Holocaust*, 11.
 71. Levi, *If This Is a Man; and, The Truce*, 77.
 72. *Ibid.*, 379.
 73. *Ibid.*, 75.
 74. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 23–25.
 75. *Ibid.*, 30.
 76. *Ibid.*

77. *Ibid.*, 23.
78. Levi, *If This Is a Man; and, The Truce*, 47.
79. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 40. In contemplating the grey zone as a moral spectrum, it is especially important to remember that victims and perpetrators must still be distinguished from each other. Ilona Klein stresses this to the point of defining two "grey zones": one between the Jewish prisoners, and "another entirely different gamut of ambiguous shades of grey" between the prisoners and the Nazis. See Ilona Klein, "Primo Levi: The Drowned, the Saved, and the 'Grey Zone,'" *The Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual* 7 (1990): 85.
80. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 28 (my emphasis).
81. This reflects the tension in Levi's writings identified by Cicioni between "a view of the universe as hurtling meaninglessly toward its own destruction and a humanist attempt to discover and mediate meanings." See Cicioni, *Primo Levi*, 144.
82. Levi, *If This Is a Man; and, The Truce*, 93–94.
83. Giuliani, *Centaur in Auschwitz*, 44.
84. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 27–28 (my emphasis).
85. Envisaging such a comparison being made in the early postwar years, Rudolf Kastner wrote that "it would be entirely out of place to compare the *Judenrat* with the ordinary Quislings and collaborationists, because only the Jews were haunted by the nightmare of total physical destruction: every other nation had at its disposal some means of self-preservation, self-defense, and self-assertion." Quoted in Robinson, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight*, 181. For one account among many of French collaboration, see Michael R. Marrus, "Coming to Terms with Vichy," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1995).
86. Levi, *If This Is a Man; and, The Truce*, 96.
87. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 62–63.
88. Giuliani, *Centaur in Auschwitz*, 57.
89. Levi, *If This Is a Man; and, The Truce*, 127–28.
90. Note that Levi's application of the notion of the "privileged" here is different from the way in which the term is used in this book.
91. For further discussion of Levi's relationship to Dante, see Risa Sodi, *A Dante of Our Time: Primo Levi and Auschwitz* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990); Nicholas Patruno, "Primo Levi, Dante, and the 'Canto of Ulysses,'" in Pugliese, *The Legacy of Primo Levi*.
92. Cohen, *Human Behaviour in the Concentration Camp*, 200–201.
93. Thomson, *Primo Levi*, 230.
94. See Levi, *If This Is a Man; and, The Truce*, 73; Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 55; Grassano, "A Conversation with Primo Levi (1979)," 132.
95. Levi, *If This Is a Man; and, The Truce*, 72.
96. *Ibid.*, 97.
97. *Ibid.*
98. *Ibid.*, 199.
99. Levi, *Moments of Reprieve*, 25–33.
100. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 59.
101. *Ibid.*, 28.
102. *Ibid.*, 29.
103. *Ibid.* (my emphasis).
104. *Ibid.*, 30–31.
105. *Ibid.*, 28.
106. *Ibid.*, 31.
107. *Ibid.*, 33.

108. *Ibid.*, 33–34.
109. Quoted in Grassano, "A Conversation with Primo Levi (1979)," 131–32.
110. For more detail on this point, see Robert Eaglestone, "Identification and the Genre of Testimony," in Vice, *Representing the Holocaust: In Honour of Bryan Burns*; Lawrence L. Langer, "Interpreting Survivor Testimony," in Lang, *Writing and the Holocaust*, 8.
111. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 37.
112. *Ibid.*, 34.
113. *Ibid.*, 41.
114. Levi, *If This Is a Man; and, The Truce*, 155.
115. Levi, *The Black Hole of Auschwitz*, 20.
116. Levi also writes that "it must be remembered that it was precisely the Special Squad which in October 1944 organised the only desperate attempt at revolt in the history of the Auschwitz Lager." See Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 41–42.
117. *Ibid.*, 42.
118. Quoted in Bravo and Cereja, "The Duty of Memory (1983)," 245. Significantly, Levi proceeds to respond to the interviewer's next question by noting how rare suicides were due to the extreme dehumanization imposed by the camp setting: "There was no time to think about killing yourself." *Ibid.*, 246.
119. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 36.
120. *Ibid.*
121. Manzoni, *The Betrothed*, 454–55.
122. *Ibid.*, 487.
123. *Ibid.*
124. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 39. The account of the incident Levi draws on is taken from Nyiszli, *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account*, 114–20.
125. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 39.
126. See the poem "Ravens" in Michael O'Siadhail, *The Gossamer Wall: Poems in Witness to the Holocaust* (St. Louis: Time Being, 2002), 72.
127. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 43.
128. The following analysis was first developed in Adam Brown, "Traumatic Memory and Holocaust Testimony: Passing Judgement in Representations of Chaim Rumkowski," *Colloquy: Text, Theory, Critique*, no. 15 (June 2008).
129. See Götz Aly, "'Jewish Resettlement': Reflections on the Political Prehistory of the Holocaust," in *National Socialist Extermination Policies: Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies*, ed. Ulrich Herbert (New York: Berghahn, 2000), 63–64. While the intended method of "removal" at this time was relocation rather than mass murder, the breaking of this early "promise" still highlights the longevity of the Lodz Ghetto in the face of Nazi ideological pressure.
130. Notably, Yehuda Bauer ponders the possible outcomes had this scenario occurred: "Would we have erected a statue in his memory, as a hero of the Jewish people, or would we have sentenced him to death for having knowingly caused the murder of thousands upon thousands of helpless Jewish children, old people, and sick people? The moment we raise the question, we instinctively pass judgment, even though we might say that we have no right to judge. Frankly, I would vote for the gallows, not the statue; but I realize that there are two sides to the story." Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, 132. See also Alan Adelson and Robert Lapides, eds., *Lodz Ghetto: Inside a Community Under Siege* (New York: Penguin, [1989] 1991), 489.
131. For further details, see Lucjan Dobroszycki, ed., *The Chronicle of the Łódź Ghetto, 1941–1944* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 504.
132. Lucille Eichengreen, *Rumkowski and the Orphans of Lodz* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 2000).

133. For details of Rumkowski's speech, see Josef Zelkowitz, *In Those Terrible Days: Writings from the Lodz Ghetto*, trans. Naftali Greenwood (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2002), 279–85.
134. Abraham Biderman, *The World of My Past* (Milsons Point: Vintage, 1995), 124, 83. Later in his memoir, Biderman questions the appropriateness of judging Rumkowski, concluding: "I leave it for history to judge." See *ibid.*, 186–88.
135. Robinson, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight*, 178.
136. Levi, *Moments of Reprieve*, 161–72.
137. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 49–50.
138. Levi also notes that Rumkowski adopted the oratorical devices of Hitler and Mussolini, and demanded that schoolchildren praise him in their essays. *Ibid.*, 45–46.
139. *Ibid.*, 45.
140. *Ibid.*, 44, 46.
141. *Ibid.*, 46, 32.
142. *Ibid.*, 50.
143. *Ibid.*, 45.
144. Leslie Epstein, *King of the Jews* (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1979).
145. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 46 (my emphasis).
146. *Ibid.*, 49.
147. *Ibid.*, 50.
148. *Ibid.*
149. See William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure* (New York: Penguin, 2000). Levi quotes Isabella's generalized reflection on the corruption of "Man" who "Dressed in a little brief authority,/ Most ignorant of what he's most assured,/ His glassy essence, like an angry ape,/ Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven/ As make the angels weep." Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 50.
150. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 51.
151. Raniero M. Speelman, "Primo Levi's Short Stories: A Modern Midrashim," in Pugliese, *The Legacy of Primo Levi*, 29.
152. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 9.
153. *Ibid.*, 50.

CHAPTER 2

THE JUDGMENT OF “PRIVILEGED” JEWS IN THE WORK OF RAUL HILBERG



To a Jew this role of the Jewish leaders in the destruction of their own people is undoubtedly the darkest chapter of the whole dark story. It had been known about before, but it has now been exposed for the first time in all its pathetic and sordid detail by Raul Hilberg.

—Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*

The limit of judgment in relation to “privileged” Jews is crucially important to a consideration of Hilberg’s work, the widespread impact of which cannot be underestimated. His seminal study, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, has been praised by many as “the single most important work on the Holocaust,” and Hilberg himself has been characterized as “the single most important historian” in the field.¹ Furthermore, the above epigraph makes clear that Arendt’s controversial arguments regarding Jewish leaders (see the introduction) drew heavily on Hilberg’s pioneering work. This chapter investigates the part of Hilberg’s work that deals with “privileged” Jews, in order to provide a thematic analysis of the means by which Hilberg passes his overwhelmingly negative judgments on this group of Holocaust victims.

Hilberg’s judgments are conveyed in diverse ways due to the eclectic nature of his publications, in which the subject of the *Judenräte*—which has received considerable attention in Holocaust historiography—

makes frequent appearances. From situating Jewish councils within the institutional framework of the Nazi perpetrators to constructing a moral spectrum along which individual Jewish leaders are placed, Hilberg’s reliance on retrospective evaluations, his selection of sources, and his use of emplotment, commentary, irony, and organizational charts represent “privileged” Jews in an often problematic manner. His arguments regarding Jewish passivity have inspired a large number of strong responses, and Hilberg’s controversial persona has impacted heavily on the vigorous debates relating directly or indirectly to the issue of “privileged” Jews.

In *The Drowned and the Saved*, Primo Levi places great importance on the potential of historians to counter the problems he perceives in popular representations of the Holocaust. At one point, he describes “the gap that exists and grows wider every year between things as they were down there and things as they are represented by the current imagination fed by approximate books, films and myths.” Levi emphasizes that it remains “the task of the historian to bridge this gap.”² Nonetheless, he remained suspicious of the prevalence of misleading ethical Manicheanisms in Holocaust history, and little explicit reference to Levi’s ideas is made in Hilberg’s numerous publications. In his contribution to a recent anthology inspired by Levi’s concept of the grey zone, Hilberg acknowledges Levi’s “command not to make judgments” but does not take the opportunity to reflect upon his own controversial evaluations of Jewish behavior.³ Indeed, the notion that one should suspend judgment of “privileged” Jews is entirely absent from Hilberg’s work, which rarely reflects on the choiceless choices confronting these liminal figures and gives little indication of the problematic “area” that Levi identified.

Significantly, Hilberg and Levi’s very different approaches to attempting to understand the Holocaust were key influences on Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* (1985), the principal film to be discussed in chapter 3. Indeed, key elements of Lanzmann’s film pivot on the on-screen presence of Hilberg himself. As we will see, Hilberg’s work, particularly his preoccupation with the Warsaw Ghetto leader Adam Czerniakow, constitutes an intrinsic part of *Shoah*’s mode of representation. For these reasons, Hilberg’s work and persona occupy a crucial mediatory position between Levi’s writings and Holocaust film. A close analysis illustrates that the judgment of Jewish leaders in Hilberg’s work differs substantially in nature from Levi’s attempt to suspend judgment. Yet, as in the case of Levi, Hilberg’s personal background can be seen to shed some light on the processes of judgment he engages in.

Born in Vienna, in 1926, Raul Hilberg was barely an adolescent when his country became part of the Third Reich, his parents’ assets were

expropriated, and his father was briefly arrested. This persecution triggered his family's emigration to the United States in 1939. After a relatively brief and uneventful experience serving as an American soldier in Europe, Hilberg learned that much of his extended family had died in the Holocaust. In the war's aftermath, he worked as a member of the United States' War Documentation Project, which gave him access to extensive German records. He immersed himself in countless Nazi documents for many years, completing his studies and starting work in 1948 on a PhD, upon which *The Destruction of the European Jews* (first published in 1961) was based. With something like the feverish impulse of those survivors who feel compelled to testify, Hilberg undertook the task of exposing the mechanisms underpinning what he termed the "destruction process."⁴ Explaining the bureaucratic nature of the Holocaust's implementation became, in Hilberg's words, "the principal task of my life."⁵ Hilberg held an academic position as a political scientist at the University of Vermont in Burlington from 1956 until his retirement in 1991. Throughout his long career, he found himself at the center of many disputes regarding Jewish behavior, which will be detailed further. Hilberg died in 2007.

Just as several scholars have identified the development of an ethical system in Levi's writings, John K. Roth devotes a complete chapter of his volume *Ethics During and After the Holocaust* (2005) to the "ethical insights" in Hilberg's work, in which he writes:

If one is looking for Hilberg's ethics in the projects that have occupied his life, the task is a complex one of detection because there is a need to consider not only what he says overtly and explicitly, but also what is not said but still conveyed, what is left in silence but nonetheless voiced, what is pointed at but not directly.⁶

Amidst his discussion of Hilberg's moods, principles, virtues, and ethical groundings, Roth only briefly refers to his subject's moral judgments of Jews. He notes that Hilberg "assesses responsibility where he must, but with empathy for the constraints and pressures that faced a Jewish leader such as Czerniakow, who led the Jewish Council in the Warsaw Ghetto."⁷ Hilberg's strong preoccupation with the role of Czerniakow will be discussed further, although considering Roth's earlier engagement with the difficult case of Calel Perechodnik, a member of the Jewish police, and his later discussion of Levi's grey zone, it is curious to note that he does not question Hilberg's apparent imperative to judge.⁸ Roth's analysis of Hilberg's ethics identifies three sources of the historian's "moral insight": his lifelong commitment to Holocaust studies, after having been spared from the war himself; his resultant under-

standing that the Holocaust “reveals an immense moral failure” of ordinary people (rather than “bloodthirsty killers”); and his methods of research and (by extension) representation.⁹ These are also the sources and products of Hilberg’s judgment in his writings, evident in the devices he uses to portray the Nazis’ persecution of European Jewry. By positioning “privileged” Jews as cogs in the “machinery of destruction,” Hilberg passes judgment through, to use Roth’s words, “what is not said but still conveyed, what is left in silence but nonetheless voiced, what is pointed at but not directly.”

Cogs in the Machine: The Place of Jewish Leaders in the Destruction Process

Hilberg’s *The Destruction of the European Jews*, which focuses on the step-by-step implementation of the Holocaust by its perpetrators, has taken on an almost Whitman-esque evolution, gradually transforming through various editions and translations.¹⁰ However, from the publication of the first edition of his book in 1961 to the release of the third edition in 2003, the judgments Hilberg makes regarding “privileged” Jews remain consistent. In the preface to the first edition, he writes: “We shall not dwell on Jewish suffering, nor shall we explore the social characteristics of ghetto life or camp existence.”¹¹ While he generally held to this guideline, Hilberg’s brief evaluation of Jewish behavior has stirred up more controversy than any other aspect of his research. Of the more than a thousand pages in Hilberg’s study, little more than a few dozen are dedicated specifically to the behavior of Jews. These sections are mostly located in the introductory and concluding chapters, which provide a narrative frame for his detailed account of the “destruction process.” This notable disproportion may be due to Hilberg’s prioritization of an institutional analysis over a reflection on individual responses to the structural mechanisms involved, an analysis that by nature is much more speculative and more difficult to fit into an institutional framework.

The thematic structure of Hilberg’s study can also be seen to contribute to the way in which judgment of “privileged” Jews, namely the Jewish leaders in the ghettos of Eastern Europe, is constructed. Dan Stone notes that while *The Destruction of the European Jews* breaks with the “conventional narrative form” based on chronological order, “it only does so by replacing it with an even more strongly determined sociological narrative.”¹² Stone adds that since Hilberg “conceives of the Holocaust as being ruled by rigid laws of historical logic emplotted in

the narrative as a threefold procedure of definition, concentration, and annihilation, it is odd that Hilberg feels able to judge the actions of the Jews.¹³ Notably, Hayden White writes in his study *Tropics of Discourse* that "as a symbolic structure, the historical narrative does not *reproduce* the events it describes; it tells us in what direction to think about the events and charges our thought about the events with different emotional valences."¹⁴ While only a subsidiary theme of Hilberg's study as a whole, his judgment of victims as being in many ways complicit in their own demise is communicated using various methods.

By stating in his opening line that "the Jewish collapse under the German assault was a manifestation of failure,"¹⁵ Hilberg immediately makes his position clear, although his moral judgments of "privileged" Jews are usually more subtle in nature. Significantly, he uses the word "cooperation" rather than "collaboration" to characterize the behavior of "privileged" Jews. Hilberg positions himself throughout his study as a political scientist who aims to reveal *how* the Holocaust was possible. His explicit focus is the bureaucratic process that enabled the extermination of European Jewry to take place rather than the reasons *why* it happened and was able to continue. In the second edition of *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Hilberg writes that "the 'how' of the event is a way of gaining insights into perpetrators, victims, and bystanders. ... The Jewish community, caught in the thicket of [Nazi] measures, will be viewed in terms of what it did and did not do in response to the German assault."¹⁶ Long after publishing his research, Hilberg wrote: "I did not want to deal with the Jewish Councils. ... But I could not stop in the middle without completely facing the problem which is quite simply: how were the Jews destroyed? Not why, but how?"¹⁷ It is already clear from these statements how difficult, if not impossible, it is to divorce one's recounting of *how* things happened from one's judgment of *why* they happened—or, importantly, *who is to blame for it*.

Not only does Hilberg make vast generalizations about members of the *Judenräte*, but these are frequently subsumed under his blanket criticisms of European Jewry as a whole. He begins his explanation of how the Holocaust happened with a chapter on its "precedents," contending that European Jews had become trapped within a "ghetto mentality," which consisted of traditional reactive patterns to persecution that drew only on strategies of "alleviation" and "compliance." He writes that while "preventive attack, armed resistance, and revenge were almost completely absent in Jewish exilic history ... alleviation attempts were typical and instantaneous responses."¹⁸ This perspective reflects a major facet of Hilberg's argument regarding Jewish behavior, which he also spoke of in a lecture he delivered in 1988, at which

he described "an eighteen hundred year diaspora in which Jewry was always helpless."¹⁹ Through several controversial comparisons between examples of Jewish behavior under the Nazis and Jewish responses to centuries of persecution, Hilberg prioritizes direct "opposition to the perpetrator" as the appropriate response to the Nazis.²⁰ This notion of direct physical action essentially spells out his definition of "resistance," presented in the introduction to be somewhat narrow. By claiming that since a Nazi "agency could marshal only limited resources for a particular task, the very progress of the operation and *its ultimate success* depended on the mode of the Jewish response,"²¹ Hilberg implies that resistance would have been effective in slowing down or even halting the Holocaust, a claim that current historiography strongly contests. Indeed, at one point Hilberg directly accuses the European Jewish community (although this was far from a unified group to begin with) of "hastening its own destruction."²²

In his extensive critique of *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Nathan Eck labels Hilberg's argument as "slander," condemning it for ignoring historical facts and being full of contradictions, errors, and unsupported theories. Listing several Jewish revolts that Hilberg does not mention, Eck points out that the behavior of Diaspora Jews over the centuries—and during the Holocaust—should be understood in terms of the specific socio-historical context, or "objective circumstances," in which Jews found themselves, rather than in terms of the "subjective qualities" Hilberg prioritizes.²³ While providing a comprehensive analysis of Hilberg's argument, Eck is mainly concerned with Hilberg's criticism of Jews in general and does not focus specifically on the manner in which Hilberg judges victims in "privileged" positions. Indeed, Eck does not question the appropriateness of judgment, stating that an awareness of the state of Jewish knowledge is essential for "whoever seeks to pass judgment on the conduct and reactions of the Jews."²⁴ Although Hilberg passes judgment on *all* European Jews, the "privileged" members of the ghetto councils occupy much of his attention.

In a retrospective contemplation (or justification) of his views on Jewish responses to Nazi persecution, Hilberg writes in his memoir:

I had included the behavior of the Jewish community in my description because I saw Jewish institutions as an extension of the German bureaucratic machine. I was driven by force of logic to take account of the considerable reliance placed by the Germans on Jewish cooperation.²⁵

As shown in this passage—which is one of several similar passages—Hilberg refers to the content of his major work as a "description." Inspired by the historian Hans Rosenberg's course on bureaucracy and Franz

Neumann's analysis of the hierarchical organization of the Nazi state,²⁶ Hilberg's model of the "machinery of destruction" implies a degree of "objectivity" and moral neutrality. Hilberg notes in his autobiography that "the methodological literature that I read emphasized objectivity and neutral or value-free words. I was an observer, and it was most important to me that I write accordingly."²⁷ Similarities can be seen here between the linguistic strategies Hilberg uses and Levi's statement that he "deliberately assumed the calm, sober language of the witness" in his own writings.²⁸ However, while Hilberg reflects on his avoidance of emotive words such as "murder" and "executions," he does not consider the more subtle mechanisms or techniques through which judgment can be passed.

Hilberg frequently makes use of short, sharp sentences that are bereft of emotion and superfluous elaboration. For example, when evaluating Jewish efforts to buy enough time to live out the war, his judgment is left implicit as he simply writes: "The Jews could not hold on; they could not survive by appealing."²⁹ He also blends both brevity and judgment in his conclusion to the "Precedents" chapter early in his study: "We see, therefore, that both perpetrators and victims drew upon their age-old experience in dealing with each other. The Germans did it with success. The Jews did it with disaster."³⁰ In his concluding chapter, "Reflections," in which he returns to addressing "the role of the Jews in their own destruction,"³¹ Hilberg employs repetition and lists to stress the complicity of the *Judenräte*:

The German administration did not have a special budget for destruction, and in the occupied countries it was not abundantly staffed. By and large, it *did not* finance ghetto walls, *did not* keep order in ghetto streets, and *did not* make up deportation lists. German supervisors turned to Jewish councils for information, money, labor, or police, and the councils provided them with these means every day of the week.³²

The portrayal of Nazis "turning to" *Judenrat* officials rather than forcing them to cooperate arguably positions the reader to judge these "privileged" Jews as *willing* participants. Just as Hilberg contends that widespread resistance would have hampered the genocidal goals of the Nazis, he implies that a refusal to cooperate on the part of the councils (although he would not have defined this as resistance) would also have made a significant difference.

Hilberg's frequent use of irony is also intrinsically linked to his moral judgment, as in his statement: "It is a fact, now confirmed by many documents, that the Jews made an attempt to live with Hitler. In many cases they failed to escape while there was still time and more often still,

they failed to step out of the way when the killers were already upon them."³³ The repeated use of "failed," along with the dubious notion of Jews being able to "step out of the way," again reflects his negative view of Jewish behavior. At other times, Hilberg's tone moves from ironic to sarcastic. Mapping what he characterizes as the continuity of the idea among European Jews that economic usefulness could serve as a safeguard against all-out persecution, he curtly notes: "Among some Jews the conviction grew that Jewry was 'indispensable.'"³⁴ This mocking remark has curious implications. Does Hilberg mean that the Jews should have developed and sustained a mentality that told them they could be disposed of at any time? Immediately afterward, he links this accusation of self-righteousness to the mentality of the Jewish leadership but only offers one piece of evidence to support this: the 1922 publication of Hugo Bettauer's *The City Without Jews*, a fantasy novel that seems to suggest Jews were an irreplaceable facet of society.³⁵

The nature of Hilberg's scholarship leads him to focus on human decisions, their implementation and their consequences; hence the issue of moral responsibility inevitably arises, even if he does not address it explicitly. He uses an abundance of tables, statistics, lists, maps, organizational charts, and flow diagrams to document the destruction process, all of which reveal the implicit workings of his judgment. In his chapter on the Holocaust's "precedents," Hilberg employs a simple visual illustration of what he sees as the five categories of Jewish behavior: "Resistance," "Alleviation," "Evasion," "Paralysis," and "Compliance." Under these terms (which are given this order), Hilberg provides two parallel horizontal lines that are joined by groups of vertical strokes of varying numbers under each heading, implying that certain Jewish responses (i.e. those with more lines accompanying them) were more prevalent than others. This image graphically represents, seemingly in a quantifiable, authoritative manner, what is essentially Hilberg's opinion alone. The historian offers no explanation for why he allocates ten marks each to alleviation and compliance, two marks each to evasion and paralysis, and none to resistance (despite later conceding there were several examples of this during the war). Instead, Hilberg makes the vague comment that in his illustration, "the evasive reaction is not marked as strongly as the alleviation attempts."³⁶ While the use of a diagram such as this reinforces the sense of accumulated statistics and careful, "objective" deliberation, the table is, in short, unquantifiable, and serves only as a vehicle for passing judgment.

Just as Hilberg includes numerous tables to show the hierarchical structure of the Nazi bureaucracy, he employs similar devices to represent what he sees as the Jewish leadership's involvement in events. In

his discussion of the "concentration" of German Jews leading up to the war, Hilberg uses a large tree diagram to show the position of the Jewish "official community," or *Reichsvereinigung*, underneath the supervision of the Reich Security Main Office. On the next page, the Jewish leadership is depicted in more detail through a list of positions and names shown in a table that resembles the many others throughout Hilberg's study that identify Nazis and collaborators involved in the "machinery of destruction."³⁷ Another tree diagram shows the "German Controls over Jewish Councils," and, more significantly, a simple three-way chart links the three individuals forming the "Deportation Machinery in Salonika," including the president of the Jewish community, Chief Rabbi Koretz.³⁸ After visually connecting Koretz's name closely to the two Nazi authorities above him, Hilberg reinforces his judgment of Koretz in the written text by describing him as "an ideal tool for the German bureaucrats."³⁹

In one of the few philosophical discussions of alleged *Judenräte* "complicity," Abigail Rosenthal summarizes Hilberg's charges against Jewish leaders as consisting of "fatalism"; "anticipatory compliance"; "administrative and executive support"; "popular opposition to armed resistance"; "self-deception"; "self-aggrandizement"; "corruption"; "class privilege"; and "selection."⁴⁰ Despite his assertion early in *The Destruction of the European Jews* that Jewish leaders could have effectively resisted the Nazis in practical terms, on a few occasions Hilberg seems to sympathize with the extreme situations in which they found themselves. Toward the end of his study, he even describes them positively as

... genuine if not always representative Jewish leaders who strove to protect the Jewish community from the most severe exactions and impositions and who tried to normalize Jewish life under the most adverse conditions. ... The councils could not subvert the continuing process of constriction and annihilation.⁴¹

Immediately following this passage, however, Hilberg alters his view somewhat, commenting that the "Jewish councils were assisting the Germans with their good qualities as well as their bad."⁴² After discussing the Nazis' deception of their Jewish victims, which convinced Jews at each stage that the worst had already transpired, Hilberg passes judgment by resorting to a sardonic insult that implies their stupidity: "And so it appears that one of the most gigantic hoaxes in world history was perpetrated on five million people noted for their intellect."⁴³ He then proceeds to claim that the Jews were more victims of self-deception than Nazi deception, again expressing negative judgment.

The manner in which Hilberg judges “privileged” Jews can also be seen through his reliance on retrospective evaluations. In writing about the “grey zones” in Hilberg’s work, Gerhard Weinberg warns against moral judgment through hindsight, arguing that “it makes little sense to attack [*Judenrat*] leaders and members for not knowing what no one else on earth knew at the time: precisely how the tide of battle on the Eastern Front would shift and when and how the war would end.”⁴⁴ After stressing at one point how limited the information available to Jewish leaders was, Hilberg writes, “Seldom did the councils ask themselves if they should go on without reliable indications that everyone would be safe.”⁴⁵ Curiously, he follows this with two specific examples of *Judenrat* leaders repeatedly requesting information regarding deportations and being lied to. Hilberg’s claim that some Jewish leaders were able to find out more than others suggests that situations varied markedly at different times and in different places, although he continues to employ far-reaching generalizations. He also blames Jews for adopting, like the Germans, the coping mechanism of euphemistic language.⁴⁶ Hilberg’s sounding of an imperative that even Jews in closed ghettos “had to become conscious of a growing silence outside”⁴⁷ seems somewhat contradictory considering that some of these ghettos were, for all practical purposes, hermetically sealed.

Hilberg’s reliance on retrospective judgments raises a crucial issue for Holocaust historiography, one that has been explicated in detail by Michael Bernstein in his study *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (1994). Noting in particular the Zionist interpretations of Jewish persecution that position the Holocaust as the destined result of Jewish life in the Diaspora, Bernstein writes:

Every interpretation of the Shoah that is grounded in a sense of historical inevitability resonates with both implicit and often explicit ideological implications, not so much about the world of the perpetrators of the genocide, or about those bystanders who did so little to halt the mass murder, but about the lives of the victims themselves.⁴⁸

Bernstein contends that problematic judgments of victim behavior are widespread in early historical accounts. He understands these judgments through a phenomenon he terms “backshadowing,” through which “the shared knowledge of the outcome of a series of events by narrator and listener is used to judge the participants in those events *as though they too should have known what was to come*.”⁴⁹ Bernstein is particularly interested in those historical writings, biographies, and novels that construct and condemn the “blindness” and “self-deception” of Austro-

German Jews, who were apparently unwilling "to save themselves from a doom that supposedly was clear to see."⁵⁰ However, the concept of backshadowing can also be utilized when considering assessments of "privileged" Jews, not least in the work of Hilberg, whose reliance on retrospect leads at least in part to his passing of clear-cut judgments on their behavior.⁵¹

Further aspects of Hilberg's methodology reveal how judgment of "privileged" Jews is passed in his work. Again on the subject of the *Judenräte*, Hilberg claims that "Jewish efficiency in allocating space or in distributing rations was an extension of German effectiveness,"⁵² rather than a method of sustaining Jewish life in the ghettos. This statement not only communicates moral judgment, but reveals the potential problems that arise from relying heavily on the sources and perspectives of the perpetrators. In his autobiography, Hilberg expresses his conviction that the destruction process needed to be viewed through the eyes of the Nazis: "That the perpetrators' perspective was the primary path to be followed became a doctrine for me, which I never abandoned."⁵³ As will be discussed further, this caused problems for Hilberg when he tried to find a publisher. Hilberg's footnotes provide several instances of his problematic use of Nazi sources to support his judgment of Jewish behavior. For example, in his discussion of Jewish "paralysis" (a negative term in itself), Hilberg seems to take at face value a German's observation of "symptomatic fidgeting" amongst a community awaiting death in Galicia. Even more significantly, he appears to accept uncritically the connection made by Franz Stangl, Nazi commandant of Sobibor and Treblinka, between Jewish victims and "lemmings."⁵⁴ Hilberg reinforces his judgment of Jewish leaders in particular when he quotes a high-ranking SS officer who stated that the Jews "had no organization of their own at all, not even an information service. If they had had some sort of organization, these people could have been saved by the millions; but instead they were taken completely by surprise."⁵⁵ Hilberg introduces this passage with two lines that reflect his source's opinion at every turn: "On a Europeanwide scale the Jews had no resistance organization, no blueprint for armed action, no plan even for psychological warfare. They were completely unprepared."⁵⁶ It would seem that the judgments of the perpetrators have influenced the historian.

Hilberg is skeptical of the representativeness and usefulness of survivor accounts, noting that "survivors are not a random sample of the extinct communities, particularly if one looks for typical Jewish reactions and adjustments to the process of destruction. . . . Understandably the survivors seldom speak of those experiences that were most humiliating or most embarrassing."⁵⁷ Hilberg's distrust of survivor testimony

is equally clear in his statement that "I did use survivor testimony, but I also had to acknowledge that the Jewish view of what was happening was extremely limited. How far do you see when you are boxed in to a ghetto or a camp? A few hundred yards?"⁵⁸ Ironically, the lack of perspective to which Hilberg alludes can be directly connected to the lack of knowledge for which he criticizes Jewish leaders. In his 1971 volume, *Documents of Destruction*, Hilberg characterizes the *Judenräte* and their police forces as "agents of the Germans. They continued to obey orders and efficiently produced results. Several million Jews were consequently trapped, not only in the Nazi Reich but in their own communities as well."⁵⁹ Noting pointedly that the number of "'Prominent' Jews did not shrink as fast as the ghetto population at large," Hilberg provides several documents that seem to back up his assessment, further revealing how his selective use of sources invokes negative judgment of "privileged" Jews.⁶⁰

While Nazi documents clearly reveal the bureaucratic nature of the destruction process, they render the victims anonymous and are unlikely to shed more than a superficial light on the ethical dilemmas confronting "privileged" Jews in the camps and ghettos.⁶¹ Saul Friedländer, who incorporates multiple perspectives in his own history of the Holocaust, points out that "the victims' testimony is our only source for the history of their own path to destruction. Their words evoke, in their own chaotic way, the depth of their terror, despair, apathetic resignation—and total incomprehension."⁶² Likewise, Israeli historian Dan Diner argues that historians can better comprehend the difficulties in judging the extreme situations of the Holocaust if they adopt the perspective of the *Judenräte*.⁶³

Even if one dismisses the radical strand of postmodern thought that rejects all conceptions of "truth" and "reality," it is nonetheless widely acknowledged that historical representation is governed by a scholar's selection, sequencing, and expression of "the facts" and is thus ultimately incapable of an exact mimesis of the past. All that can be achieved in recording history is an approximation of what has occurred; "objectivity" in its larger sense does not exist. While *The Destruction of the European Jews* is arguably the most influential study of the Holocaust, it is evident that the conventions at work in Hilberg's representation of "privileged" Jews in the ghettos reveal strong negative judgment, despite his implicit claims to impartiality. Indeed, in the last paragraph of his concluding chapter entitled "Reflections," Hilberg's moral evaluation of Jewish behavior is explicit: "For the first time ... the Jewish victims, caught in the straitjacket of their history, *plunged themselves* physically and psychologically into catastrophe."⁶⁴ As cogs in Hilberg's

"machinery of destruction," "privileged" Jews could not escape death, just as they were unable to escape his judgment. Later, in undertaking a more balanced use of archival and testimonial sources, Hilberg expressed his judgment in a substantially different form.

A "Spectrum" of Behavior: Levels of Judgment in Hilberg's Writing

In contrast to *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Hilberg's tripartite analysis in *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933–1945*, first published in 1992, focuses on individuals and groups of people rather than organizations and events. This constitutes a major shift in Hilberg's style, which he bluntly characterizes in his autobiography as "an abandonment of political science."⁶⁵ His footnotes testify to an expansion in his research to include numerous Jewish sources—both primary documents in the form of survivor testimony and, owing to the time of writing, a more diverse range of historical interpretations—as well as material originating with the Nazis. Perhaps in response to the criticism of his earlier views, Hilberg acknowledges in his preface that Jews "have remained an amorphous mass."⁶⁶ Nonetheless, while he stresses in his opening paragraph that victims are a distinct, indissoluble group not to be blurred with any other,⁶⁷ his representation of "privileged" Jews reveals that he continues to find them culpable for their behavior.

Hilberg's book is divided into three parts of relatively equal length, focusing on the Holocaust's perpetrators, victims, and bystanders respectively. Hilberg essentially invented this taxonomy, which continues to exercise considerable influence in Holocaust studies and other fields of inquiry. The first chapter of the section on victims—and, significantly, the chapter that immediately follows the section on Holocaust perpetrators—deals with the "Jewish leaders." Providing a general account of the numbers employed in the many Jewish councils, how the positions were filled, the pressures their members faced, and the various activities they undertook, he notes that all *Judenräte* were "burdened with problems as crushing as any."⁶⁸ However, Hilberg soon turns his attention to individuals, providing successive representations of several Jewish leaders: Rabbi Leo Baeck of Germany; Dr. Josef Löwenherz of Austria; Adam Czerniakow of Warsaw; Chaim Rumkowski of Lodz; Ephraim Barasz of Bialystok; and Jacob Gens of the Vilna Ghetto. In fact, Hilberg describes his book as consisting of "brief descriptions and capsule portraits of people, known and unknown."⁶⁹ His use of these

vignettes results in a very different mode of representation from his predominantly institutional analysis in *The Destruction of the European Jews*; thus his judgment takes on a very different form from that which appeared in his previous work.

Hilberg's discussion of "privileged" Jews in *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders* reveals a process of judgment that in some ways resembles the moral spectrum represented in Levi's essay on the grey zone. However, while Levi relies on a spectrum of behavior along which various groups are situated, Hilberg constructs a spectrum of individuals, with some Jewish officials implicitly classified as better or worse than others. The clearest indication that Hilberg presents a moral spectrum lies in his own admission that his case studies reveal a "spectrum of leaders and types of leadership, from old officeholders to emerging crisis managers, and from a traditional superintendency to the aggressive and internally unhampered decision making of a dictator."⁷⁰ Hilberg characterizes individual leaders, from Baeck through to Gens, within this framework. In doing so, he briefly sketches each official's personal background along with some of their experiences and actions in their respective organizations.

Hilberg is highly selective and concentrates mainly on those Jewish leaders he views negatively, particularly those situated on the "darkest" end of the spectrum. In this way, the order in which Baeck, Löwenherz, Czerniakow, Rumkowski, Barasz, and Gens are progressively discussed is significant, as Hilberg creates the impression that each leader was more "compromised" than the one preceding. Beginning with Baeck, Hilberg initially represents the elderly leader of Germany's *Reichsvereinigung* in a positive light, even implying that he possessed a measure of bravery: "Having turned down all opportunities for emigration, he was determined to stay at his post as long as ten Jews were left in Germany. Baeck projected reliability and respectability to the remaining Jews, and together with his associates he also presented to the community a constellation of reassuring faces."⁷¹ While there is perhaps a hint of Hilberg's customary irony present here, suggesting that such reassurance was a problem, any judgment of Baeck is far from condemnatory. Even when Hilberg notes the increasingly ambiguous actions of the *Reichsvereinigung*, particularly the supervision of the "efficient conduct of the deportations," he draws on primary documents to portray Baeck, who chaired council meetings as "only a shadowy figure who did not speak."⁷²

Hilberg's negative judgment moves up a level when he turns to Löwenherz of Austria. Describing an incident in which the Jewish leader was slapped by SS Lieutenant Adolf Eichmann, Hilberg makes an ini-

tial observation that admits to the powerless position of Jewish leaders, who were at the whim of the Nazi authorities. However, characterizing Löwenherz as "managerial" and "stately," Hilberg includes him in his matter-of-fact assessment of the "diligent assistance of the community machinery" in the country's fatal deportations of 1941–42. In addition to his reference to Jewish organizational "machinery," Hilberg employs a strategy often used in *The Destruction of the European Jews* by paraphrasing Eichmann's comment that he "had the Jewish leaders trotting along and working diligently."⁷³ This leaves the perpetrator's judgment of the victims' behavior unquestioned. Interestingly, Hilberg only devotes four sentences to Czerniakow. Nonetheless, the somewhat positive nature of Hilberg's judgment is clear in the selection of only one aspect of Czerniakow's leadership. In one of his trademark short sentences, Hilberg writes: "As chairman of the Warsaw Jewish Council he [Czerniakow] had harsh words for Jewish leaders who had fled or emigrated right after the German invasion. He considered them deserters."⁷⁴ Such a fleeting portrayal of Czerniakow is considerably different from his preoccupation with what he otherwise sees as the Jewish leader's naivety and shortsightedness (to be discussed further).

In *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*, Hilberg provides a stark contrast between Czerniakow and Chaim Rumkowski (discussed in chapter 1). He notes that both leaders rose to the position of council president due to the emigration of their predecessors, but describes Rumkowski as "a deputy of another kind."⁷⁵ He goes on to characterize Rumkowski's transformation from a failed yet honest businessperson who "managed several orphanages with devotion" to an egotistical and immoral "autocrat":

Increasingly self-assured, Rumkowski accustomed himself to power. Now he could reward friends and intimidate adversaries. With every step he focused attention on his unique position. When he married again, he chose a woman less than half his age. When bank notes were printed in the ghetto, they bore his likeness. ... Rumkowski presided over his community through periods of starvation and deportations for almost five years.⁷⁶

Hilberg's vignette of Rumkowski's behavior, which also refers to his oft-criticized speeches, makes it clear that Hilberg views every aspect of the "privileged" Jew's personal and professional life as leaving much to be desired. Hilberg's preoccupation with judging Rumkowski precludes any acknowledgment that he arguably contributed to Lodz's status as the longest surviving ghetto, which was also the closest to being liberated before its total destruction. Instead, his reference to Rumkowski's five-year rule serves only to highlight the length of time the council elder

"presided" over Jewish suffering. There is no sign here of the need to suspend judgment, as stressed in Levi's representation of Rumkowski in "The Grey Zone." Similarly, in his brief account of Barasz's position of power in the Bialystok Ghetto, Hilberg draws on a lone Jewish Council document to argue that the once "genuine manager of the community organization" became the all-encompassing "man in charge."⁷⁷

Hilberg portrays the apparent thirst for power on the part of "privileged" Jews as most virulent in his last example, Jacob Gens, who was not a council official but the chief of the Jewish police in the Vilna Ghetto. Hilberg depicts Gens as the "prime mover" of the ghetto's "militarization" and a corrupt underling who impressed his Nazi overseers. He describes at length Gens's education, military involvement, and radical Zionist political inclinations, creating an overall impression of a quite unsavory individual. Interestingly, Hilberg does acknowledge the opportunities Gens had to escape the ghetto, writing that he "chose to remain and be judged by history."⁷⁸ He then immediately proceeds to elucidate what this judgment should be, drawing a parallel with the behavior of other Jewish leaders and then suggesting that Gens crossed the line of complicity even further by being "in competition" with the ghetto's resistance movement:

In emphasizing a policy of accommodation and production, Gens did not differ from other ghetto potentates. ... Sure of himself, [he] persisted in his course, even while the resisters were in a quandary over the question of risking severe German retaliation for a chance to fight. In this contest Gens prevailed. He drove a wedge between the organizers of resistance and the ghetto community. The people followed *him*.⁷⁹

Hilberg's use of italics not only reveals his exasperation that the Jews followed their leaders rather than engaging in extremely risky armed resistance, but also his judgment of Gens as being far from suitable for the position he held. Also of significance is that while Hilberg identifies the ethical dilemma regarding the Nazis' policy of collective responsibility that faced members of the Resistance,⁸⁰ he does not acknowledge that Jewish leaders such as Gens faced this very same dilemma.

With his condemnation of Gens, Hilberg's moral spectrum is complete and is then clarified even further through his criticisms of the Jewish leadership in France and Romania. At the end of his chapter, Hilberg returns to the subject of Jewish councils in general, reiterating many of the arguments he proposes in *The Destruction of the European Jews*: that Jewish leaders only desired stability; relied on petitions and compliance; and stressed the need to sustain the ghettos' economic output to avoid becoming superfluous to their Nazi persecutors.⁸¹ By

emphasizing small, last-minute concessions such as requests for milk to be supplied to children being deported, attempts to reduce deportation quotas, and pleas for deportations to be undertaken in a "humane spirit," Hilberg implies that such strategies were not only ineffective, but hopelessly shortsighted. Yet, reflecting that Jewish leaders were themselves victims caught up in the "cauldron," Hilberg asks: "How, in these circumstances, did they judge their own positions?"⁸² He finds that *Judenrat* officials, at least those whose self-perception might be gauged, did not view themselves as complicit—although Hilberg makes it clear that they should have. Writing that Jewish leaders "did not think that they enjoyed undeserved privileges, even though they were aware that they ate better and were housed more spaciously than most other Jews," his (seemingly confident) gesture toward the mindset of "privileged" Jews reveals negative judgment.⁸³

In a move reminiscent of Levi's conclusion to his essay on the grey zone, Hilberg begins the chapter's last paragraph by shifting from the particular to the universal. He states that "Jewish leaders were, in short, remarkably similar in their self-perception to rulers all over the world, but their role was not normal and for most of them neither was their fate."⁸⁴ Taking this statement into consideration, Hilberg's seemingly detached, dispassionate list of the grim ends that greeted many of the Jewish leaders he discussed reveals more a sense of irony than tragedy. Even so, the closeness of Hilberg's representation at this point to what Hayden White would identify as a discourse of tragedy is significant.⁸⁵ The ironic inducement of the archetype of the tragic (male) figure who "falls" (dies) due to "his" own fundamental flaw(s) could be seen to be consistent with the nature of Hilberg's judgment elsewhere. Hilberg does not question the legitimacy of the attempts to impose legal proceedings on some former council members after the war, and his implicit judgment of Rabbi Benjamin Murmelstein, elder of the Theresienstadt Ghetto, is equally evident. Hilberg simply reports that Murmelstein had "prudently chose[n] a life of anonymity" in Rome and seems to agree with the decision of the Jewish community, which "refused to bury him near his wife, but allowed him a plot at the edge of the cemetery."⁸⁶

While *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders* contains no chapter on "resisters" as such, Hilberg includes Jews who engaged in direct, armed opposition to the Nazis in a chapter titled "The Unadjusted," a category which also includes those who hid, escaped, or committed suicide. Significantly, this constitutes the second-to-last chapter of the section on the victims, followed only by a chapter on "The Survivors," another small minority. Hilberg summarizes his chapter on "The Unadjusted" in

his book's preface by constructing a binary opposition that is more reflective of his earlier work: "Whereas most victims adjusted themselves step by step ... there was a minority, however small, that did not share the adaptations of the multitude."⁸⁷ Importantly, Hilberg's monograph makes only one brief mention of a case where "privileged" Jews engaged in an act of resistance, generally portraying them as either the indefatigable obstacle to, or target of, others' resistance efforts. Indeed, he gives the impression that "privileged" Jews in the ghettos strongly disapproved of any kind of opposition to the Nazis, thereby indicating what he thinks they should have done:

In the Jewish councils, no pamphlets were composed and no arguments were made to show that any German action was hurtful and morally wrong. No ill will was expressed to the Germans. No threats were made to the life of any German. No rumors were started that the Allied powers would retaliate for the destruction of the Jews.⁸⁸

Of course, Hilberg does not elucidate what effects such activities might have had on the destruction process. Indeed, in mentioning the possibility of Allied retaliation, Hilberg temporarily ignores the issue of Nazi retribution, which he acknowledges at length elsewhere. In terms of the assumed need for the *Judenräte* to demonstrate that Nazi persecution was "morally wrong," few would argue that Jews needed much convincing.

Lastly, in what marks a strong contrast to Levi's portrayal of the majority of survivors as having been "privileged" or "compromised" in some way, Hilberg contends that those who survived comprised "a remnant of persisters and resisters," whose psychological makeup consisted of "realism, rapid decision making, and [a] tenacious holding on to life."⁸⁹ This reinforces his implicit argument that the tide of the Holocaust could have been turned had a greater number of Jews opposed their persecutors more directly. In depicting the "unadjusted" as refusing to cooperate "with the perpetrator or their own leadership,"⁹⁰ Hilberg implies that the actions of the *Judenräte* always had a detrimental effect on the ghetto populations. While a number of familiar conceptual threads, as well as marked differences in methodology and style, serve to both connect and separate Hilberg's earlier pioneering study and *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*, his blatant judgment of "privileged" Jews in the former is no less evident in the latter. Indeed, Hilberg's work has profoundly influenced the historiographical debate surrounding the contentious issues of Jewish "resistance" and "collaboration" during the Holocaust, and his controversial persona itself has played a significant role in this.

A Holocaust Historian and His "Thirty-year War": Hilberg's Controversial Persona

Although they are expected to maintain a degree of critical distance, historians are always influenced by their personal context and the historical context in which they live. In his autobiographical work, *The Politics of Memory: The Journey of a Holocaust Historian* (1996), Hilberg makes little effort to hide his propensity to cast judgment, and he expresses dismay at others' reactions to his ideas. In the final lines of the memoir, Hilberg cites H. G. Adler's characterization of him as representative of a generation that is "bewildered, bitter and embittered, accusing and critical not only vis-à-vis the Germans ... but also the Jews."⁹¹ Reflecting on the first time he read this, Hilberg states, "I felt as though Adler had peered directly into the core of my being."⁹² The tension between the universal significance and "unique" character of the Holocaust, which contributes to the paradox of judgment in Levi's "grey zone" (see chapter 1), also appears to have some bearing on Hilberg's thought. In 1999, he commented: "For me the Holocaust was a vast, single event, but I am never going to use the word *unique*, because I recognize that when one starts breaking it into pieces, which is my trade, one finds completely recognizable, ordinary ingredients."⁹³ Significantly, when Hilberg elaborates on other genocides and draws a specific comparison between Rwandan Tutsis and Dutch Jews, it is to make a point about the passivity of the victims. So while Hilberg may well agree that the Holocaust was an unprecedented phenomenon, there is no evidence—indeed, much to the contrary—that he views the event and the human behavior involved in it as undermining preexisting moral categories.

At no point in his memoir does Hilberg deny passing judgment on Jews, although he does seem to position himself as possessing a greater measure of moral neutrality than a close reading of his writings might suggest. Contemplating the opposition to his views on Jewish behavior during the war, Hilberg writes somewhat patronizingly of the criticism of *The Destruction of the European Jews*:

The fragile nature of the objections hurled against me did not impair their durability... The opposition did *not* die. Added to the repetition of these charges was the accusation that in my subsequent writings I had reiterated and elaborated what I had first said in 1961 about compliant Jewish reactions to destruction. I had waged a thirty-year war against the Jewish resistance.⁹⁴

Setting aside the issue of whether such criticisms are "fragile" and the telling use of the militaristic reference to a "thirty-year war," it is Hil-

berg's claim to a certain "objectivity" in his work that has been shown not to stand up to closer scrutiny. Throughout his esteemed career, Hilberg has been a key figure of controversy, encountering strong and consistent opposition to his views on Jewish behavior during the Holocaust, from the very beginning of his research. Indeed, a brief survey of Hilberg's personal and public experiences demonstrates that the problematic issue of judging Jews proved a crucial facet of his life and career.

Previously considered to be only potential historical sources at best, autobiographies have increasingly been thought of as representations of the past in themselves. In his volume on autobiographies by historians, Jeremy Popkin views this subgenre as "an ambiguous supplement to the fields of history on the one hand and autobiography on the other."⁹⁵ It is to be expected that life writing by historians will engage with not only their own personal histories, but also the histories they have focused on in their research. Furthermore, autobiographies always claim some form of historical verifiability. While inevitably introducing an explicit subjectivity into their memoirs, historians still invariably reinforce their conviction that historiography is concerned with reconstructing "historical truth."⁹⁶ Nonetheless, although first-person narratives by historians generally reflect the form and tone of historical writing and attempt to gain the reader's confidence through their historical perspective, life writing arguably allows more opportunities for judgments to be made without the author's usual scholarly scrupulousness. Hilberg is no exception to this. Popkin even suggests that Hilberg implicitly claims in his memoir that his "methods produce a representation of past events that is in some sense truer and more accurate than that of those who were actually there."⁹⁷ This is particularly important when considering Hilberg's earlier dismissal of survivor testimony. Throughout his recollections Hilberg engages at length with the theme of Jewish behavior during the Holocaust, primarily by responding to the many criticisms of his views by survivors, historians, publishers, and critics alike. In its merging of historical and life writing, Hilberg's memoir stresses the legitimacy of the arguments presented in his earlier publications.

Hilberg notes in his memoir that when he submitted his trial master's essay for review, his sponsor "objected only to one passage in the conclusion ... that the Jews had cooperated in their own destruction."⁹⁸ In reworking this essay into his doctoral dissertation, which eventually became *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Hilberg deleted the passage as requested, although he notes that he was "silently determined to return it to my larger work."⁹⁹ Even the very first person to read Hilberg's manuscript—his father—expressed concern over the issue.¹⁰⁰ In 1958, in what proved to be the first of many setbacks on Hilberg's road to publi-

cation, Yad Vashem, the prominent Holocaust research and educational institution in Jerusalem, anticipated "hostile criticism" of Hilberg's work and refused to participate in the publication of his manuscript. Hilberg was given two reasons for this decision: first, the editorial board was concerned that his history relied primarily on German sources; and second, it had reservations regarding his "appraisal of the Jewish resistance."¹⁰¹ Interestingly, after quoting the offending letter from Dr. J. Melkman, then the general manager of Yad Vashem, Hilberg asserts in his memoir that Melkman survived in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands through "a precarious privileged position, first in Amsterdam, then in the transit camp of Westerbork, and finally in Bergen-Belsen."¹⁰² While Hilberg states that Melkman's decision was motivated by Yad Vashem's ideological stance, which prioritized Yiddish and Hebrew sources and the theme of resistance, his accusation of "parochial self-preservation" may be seen to imply a double-meaning when taking into account Melkman's "privileged" status during the war. Hilberg's argument regarding Jewish behavior became a further obstacle in 1965 to publication in Germany, where it was feared by a potential publishing company that the volume could have "very dangerous consequences."¹⁰³

Amidst the controversy over Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (see the introduction), with which his approach was frequently aligned, Hilberg reiterated his views on the *Judenräte* at a 1963 symposium, only to be loudly booed by the forum's audience and denounced in the open discussion that followed.¹⁰⁴ He had used an example of a woman and her young child standing "passively" while waiting to be shot at the edge of a mass grave to illustrate a controversial point about what he saw as "the outcome of Jewry's age-old policy" of compliance.¹⁰⁵ Hilberg, who was accused of "sadism" during question time, later described his disposition during the symposium pithily, in short sentences: "I was not friendly. I did not yield, and I was oblivious to the fact that I was tearing open unhealed wounds. I was not allowed to finish."¹⁰⁶ At times, his self-representation in his memoir almost takes on the aspect of a lone crusader:

It has taken me some time to absorb what I should always have known, that in my whole approach to the study of the destruction of the Jews I was pitting myself against the main current of Jewish thought, that I did not give in, that in my research and writing I was pursuing not merely another direction but one which was the exact opposite of a signal that pulsed endlessly through the Jewish community... The philistines in my field are everywhere. I am surrounded by the commonplace, platitudes, and clichés.¹⁰⁷

This somewhat glorified self-representation is equally evident in Hilberg's short article "The Judenrat: Conscious or Unconscious 'Tool.'"

Responding here to Gideon Hausner's queries about his views on Jewish behavior, Hilberg aggressively invokes what he sees as "a generational problem" defined by "the willingness or the unwillingness to ask questions."¹⁰⁸ He describes his evaluation of Jewish complicity not only as "critically important" but also "very obvious," and he ends his article with an uncharacteristic exclamation: "If you have difficulty with me, watch the next generation!"¹⁰⁹ In a sense, Hilberg constructs a binary opposition between different interpretations of Jewish behavior, with himself at one extreme and the entire academic establishment at the other. There appears to be no room for compromise, no room for nuance or doubt regarding "the active role of the Jews in their own destruction."¹¹⁰

Elsewhere in *The Politics of Memory*, Hilberg uses personal attacks on academics to reiterate his judgment of "privileged" Jews. He deliberately distances himself from Arendt and opposes the parallels that have often been drawn between his position and her remarks regarding Jewish leaders in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Hilberg dismisses Arendt's highly influential (and controversial) concept of the "banality of evil" out of hand and makes a sharp distinction between her evaluation of Jewish behavior and his own. Whereas for Arendt the Jewish leaders effectively betrayed the communities for which they were responsible, Hilberg argues that for him, "the problem was deeper":

The councils were not only a German tool but also an instrument of the Jewish community. Their strategy was a continuation of the adjustments and adaptations practiced by Jews for centuries. I could not separate the Jewish leaders from the Jewish population because I believed that these men represented the essence of a time-honored Jewish reaction to danger.¹¹¹

This reveals a new dimension of Hilberg's judgment of Jews, with his criticism of those in "privileged" positions during the Holocaust being in no way diminished simply because at times he paints his judgments with a broader brush. Indeed, the distinctions he draws in his various publications between "privileged" and "non-privileged" Jews (despite not using these specific terms) have been clear. While Hilberg's work avoids the polemical tone and hypothetical statements of Arendt's book, there are some similarities in their views on Jewish complicity, as much as Hilberg denies this. Hilberg also denigrates the work of the Holocaust historian Lucy Dawidowicz, who criticizes his "rashness in generalizing about" Jewish history and claims he "has flawed his otherwise valuable work with uninformed comments and distorted conclusions about Jewish behavior."¹¹² Hilberg offers only an offhand rebuttal of Dawidowicz's view that nothing could effectively have been done by Jews to prevent or halt the Holocaust.¹¹³

Unlike Levi, Hilberg never questions the appropriateness of judging "privileged" Jews. Although the historian laments his premature dismissal or misinterpretation of historical documents over the years,¹¹⁴ he never expresses any doubt about his position in relation to the Jewish councils. Indeed, his memoir's account of the opposition he came up against is very self-assured. As Mitchell Hart points out in his analysis of *The Politics of Memory*, Hilberg provides "a sense of his self-perceived heroic isolation, of a battle ... waged between the solitary soldier for truth and all the rest who are satisfied with myth.... He sets himself up as a scholar under siege, surrounded on all sides by ineptitude, bad taste, and dishonesty."¹¹⁵ After interviewing Hilberg in 1999, Erna Paris describes her impression of the historian who, then in his early seventies, was still furious with the criticism of his evaluation of Jewish behavior: "His mouth is etched with deep creases, and his speech carries a bitter, ironic edge after a lifetime of unending controversy over his work.... At the forefront of his concerns is his reputation and his legacy."¹¹⁶ The complexity and controversial nature of Hilberg's persona is no more evident than in his prolonged engagement with the diary of Adam Czerniakow.

Remnants of the Past: The "Ghost Inside Czerniakow's Office"

Around the same time Hilberg was writing *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*, he published a very critical—in some passages, scathing—analysis of the Jewish councils entitled "The Ghetto as a Form of Government," which reviewed Isaiah Trunk's major study, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (1972). Here, in writing that "Jewish executives, like the Germans in charge, could make use of coercion and take advantage of helplessness," Hilberg seems to imply a similarity in behavior that borders on blurring the distinction between victim and perpetrator, a distinction that the taxonomy of *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders* upholds.¹¹⁷ Reiterating his theory that the councils were "an essential link in the chain of destructive steps," he passes judgment using his customary irony and short sentences: "First the Jewish councils handed over money; then they delivered human beings."¹¹⁸ He also blames Jewish leaders for being "completely nonprovocative"; emphasizes their "corruption" and other "vices"; and claims, using phrasing reminiscent of Arendt, that the actions of the Jewish police (and presumably the councils) constitute "one of the greatest moral disappointments of the Holocaust."¹¹⁹

In the final lines of "The Ghetto as a Form of Government," however, Hilberg distinctly changes the tone of his discussion, noting that "the moral questions raised over so many years have not been closed; they have only become more complicated."¹²⁰ He briefly reflects on the fate of three Jewish leaders—Rumkowski, Gens, and Czerniakow—writing: "They were different men by background as well as in their ideas, but in the end all three declined to save themselves after they had not succeeded in saving their people."¹²¹ The way Hilberg connects these three "privileged" Jews in this essay differs from the way he positions them along a spectrum in *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*, although further details of their behavior provided earlier in the essay perhaps indicate a negative evaluation of them overall. Nonetheless, Hilberg's increased efforts to engage with the situations of those "privileged" Jews he holds to account reveal differences in the way he passes judgment, a development most evident in his role as coeditor of the English translation of Czerniakow's diary.

Hilberg's six-year involvement, if not obsession, with Czerniakow's diary further complicates the analysis of judgment in the historian's work. He writes in his autobiography that the "diary became a place, a strange locality that I was entering for the first time. I was a voyeur, a ghost inside Czerniakow's office, unobserved, and the longer I inhabited that enclosure, the more I saw."¹²² Hilberg's explanatory footnotes, which briefly refer to abbreviations used and individuals or places named, accompany the majority of pages comprising Czerniakow's painstakingly recorded entries. Describing Czerniakow as having a "unique" vantage point due to his "privileged" position, Hilberg writes: "The ghetto marked a sharp separation between perpetrator and victim, but Czerniakow was like a bridge."¹²³ While Czerniakow served as the sole link between the Nazi authorities and his fellow Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto in a literal way, Hilberg's choice of word comparing Czerniakow to a bridge might also be construed as briefly gesturing to a "grey" area beyond the "sharp separation" of persecutor and persecuted. Indeed, Hilberg's wording is somewhat reminiscent of Levi's characterization of the grey zone as comprising "ill-defined outlines which both separate and join the two camps of masters and servants."¹²⁴

There have been many positive accounts of Czerniakow.¹²⁵ While stopping short of approaching what might be considered empathy, Hilberg's negative judgment of Jewish leaders in general became dulled to some extent due to his engagement with Czerniakow's diary. This may be partly due to the fact that after refusing to publish *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Yad Vashem agreed to participate in a joint publication venture of the diary, albeit with the highly significant proviso

that "Hilberg's footnotes must be factual, identified as his, and *under no circumstances ... evaluative*."¹²⁶ Noting Hilberg's disillusionment with the less-than-enthusiastic reception of the diary due to its challenging of the binary opposition of "good" and "evil," Annette Wieviorka writes: "Reading Czerniakow entails adopting a state of mind that does not judge. It entails trying to understand a man and the historical role he chose to assume, a role that forced him to face an absolute aporia, until he could bear it no longer and committed suicide."¹²⁷

Importantly, Hilberg's introduction to the diary, which is cowritten with another of the book's editors, Stanislaw Staron,¹²⁸ is preceded by another introduction. This piece, written by the diary's third editor, Josef Kermisz, gives an overwhelmingly glowing account of Czerniakow's "moral strength" and "devotion to his people."¹²⁹ Kermisz stresses the Jewish leader's extensive contribution to the ghetto's educational, religious, and cultural activities; the personal suffering he experienced at the hands of the Nazis, including multiple arrests; and his opposition to the corruption displayed by those surrounding him. Exercising unwavering positive judgment, Kermisz seldom broaches the controversy surrounding the Jewish leader's behavior, instead writing that Czerniakow "would surrender nothing of his dignity and honor. ... In his feeling of responsibility, his devotion and persistence, which knew no bounds, Czerniakow was outstanding."¹³⁰ In one section, Kermisz suggests that "perhaps [Czerniakow] did not pay sufficient attention to the rumors in the ghetto and to the serious portents concerning the ghetto's fate"; however, he also implies that this was because Czerniakow was so thoroughly "immersed" in his activities elsewhere.¹³¹

One can only hypothesize what the reason might be for the English translation of the diary to be given two introductions, but it is in any case clear that the essay to which Hilberg contributes represents Czerniakow in a radically different manner than Kermisz does. Writing in a seemingly more formal, "objective" tone than Kermisz, Hilberg compiles a detailed record of the Warsaw Ghetto's history by drawing on both archival documents and Czerniakow's diary entries. Toward the beginning of his introduction, he writes:

What sort of man was he? One is tempted to speak of him as overwhelmingly ordinary. Often enough, he has been recalled as a kind of non-villain and non-hero, non-exploiter and non-saint. Several of his contemporaries have even attributed to him all of the qualities of nonleadership.¹³²

Here, Hilberg evokes the impressions of others who seem to neither offer outright praise of nor ascribe blame to Czerniakow. Allocating the Jewish leader the status of "non-villain and non-hero" might be interpreted

as positioning Czerniakow as a figure of moral ambiguity; however, a close reading of the introduction reveals that judgment is constructed in implicit and familiar ways. First, Hilberg situates Czerniakow and other members of the Jewish Council within several of the organizational charts typical of *The Destruction of the European Jews*. Shortly after utilizing a tree diagram that displays the Nazi authorities above Czerniakow and the various divisions, including the Jewish police, below him, the written text interprets the significance of the power relations displayed: "To be sure, the police were entitled to some important nonmonetary benefits, mainly, as we shall see, meals and larger bread rations. Czerniakow, incidentally, remained loyal to his controversial police."¹³³ In the use of phrases such as "to be sure" and "incidentally," Hilberg's customary irony implicitly judges the "privileges" the *Ordnungsdienst* received and Czerniakow's complicity in this, despite the statement in the previous paragraph that the ghetto's German *Kommissar* had absolute power over the Council.

Hilberg describes the progression of events by employing subheadings based on what he classifies as major phases of Nazi activities, leading up to "Phase V: The Deportations." The description present in the first sentence of this section is significant: "In February 1942, Czerniakow watched a Jewish workman install stained-glass windows in the Council chambers."¹³⁴ This immediately positions the reader to adopt a negative attitude toward the Jewish leader's state of knowledge. Several pages of examples from the diary are then used to further illustrate Czerniakow's fluctuation from apparently being certain of the Nazis' intentions to doubting them—going from despair to hope. After commenting on a notice regarding changes to the Krakow Ghetto and its *Judenrat*, which Czerniakow had found in the official newspaper distributed by the Nazis, Hilberg succinctly writes in one of his characteristically short sentences: "Czerniakow cut the report out of the paper and placed it into the diary."¹³⁵ The details that follow reinforce the implicit judgment behind Hilberg's position, including references to a chess tournament and concerts that took place in the ghetto while rumors of atrocities continued to circulate.

Characterizing Czerniakow as "clinging to residual hopes," Hilberg writes that the Jewish leader "tried not to accept the truth until the very last moment."¹³⁶ He links what he evidently interprets as Czerniakow's naivety directly to what he wrote daily into his notebooks:

In his diary, Czerniakow does not ask where the deported Jews of Lwów, Lublin, or Kraków had been taken. It was not a question commonly verbalized by ghetto leaders. There was in fact no Jewish intelligence network, no systematic acquisition of information, no organized verification of rumors

and reports. At that very moment, Nazi Germany was "solving" the "Jewish problem" in death camps created on Polish territory.¹³⁷

Hilberg is evidently suggesting that Czerniakow *should* have asked such questions and thus should have taken measures, such as the unlikely ones Hilberg lists, to acquire the answers. He makes a similar argument regarding all Jewish councils in *The Destruction of the European Jews*. Indeed, by relying on retrospective evaluations, Hilberg's reference in his introduction to the diary to the systematic killing of Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland overlooks his later comment that Czerniakow inhabited a "world of recurring nightmarish problems."¹³⁸ Hilberg later wrote about the issue of Czerniakow's state of knowledge in his autobiography, revealing an apparent transformation in his judgment on the matter, perhaps partly due to his involvement in Claude Lanzmann's film, *Shoah*.

Hilberg's fascination with Czerniakow, along with his participation in Lanzmann's film, complicates the role of his controversial persona even further. Hilberg notes that after filming was finished, Lanzmann said to him: "You were Czerniakow."¹³⁹ While Roth interprets Lanzmann's comment as relating to the "understated" linguistic expression that Hilberg and Czerniakow seemed to share,¹⁴⁰ it may also reflect their obsessive need to record. In fact, Hilberg's memoir reflects explicitly on the plausible reasons he became so attached to Czerniakow, pointing to aspects of the council elder's character with which he seems to identify. Hilberg notes with apparent admiration the Jewish leader's "sense of honor, of not being allowed to desert his post."¹⁴¹ In relation to the issue of Czerniakow's state of knowledge, Hilberg goes on to stress the Jewish leader's eventual realization of the ultimate fate of Jews under the Nazis by interpreting the fragmentary information and rumors to which he was exposed. Hilberg even appears to view this in a positive light: "Without an intelligence organization of any kind, relying only on chance remarks by Germans, veiled newspaper accounts, and ever-present rumors, he anticipated the bitter end."¹⁴² The positive connotations of this statement contrast strongly with Hilberg's negative appraisal of Czerniakow in his earlier publications, where he criticizes the Jewish leader's allegedly willed ignorance. Indeed, Hilberg's last reflection on Czerniakow in his autobiography is a frank and unembellished sentence, perhaps signifying a softened judgment, if not approaching a more "neutral" position: "When the deportations began, he wanted to save the Jewish orphans, and when he could not secure even their safety, he killed himself."¹⁴³

Any gesture to Levi's grey zone or Lawrence L. Langer's choiceless choices is notably absent from Hilberg's representation(s) of Jewish leaders. Writing at one point of the "options" council officials faced, he

states his position clearly: “We deal with a sequence of steps in such a way that if step one is taken, one becomes a prisoner of that step; if step two is taken, one becomes a prisoner of step two; if step three is taken, one becomes a prisoner of step three.”¹⁴⁴ The idea that Jewish leaders may have been prisoners of the “steps” *before* they were taken—that these steps were, as Zygmunt Bauman points out, the only *rational* steps to take—does not appear to be a possibility for Hilberg.¹⁴⁵ His publications reveal that negative judgment is passed in diverse ways, both explicit and implicit, depending on the form his representation takes. Whether explicating through “force of logic” the place of the Jews in the “destruction process,” positioning individual Jewish leaders along a spectrum of culpability, or seeking answers from Czerniakow’s diary, Hilberg’s personal and professional engagement with the extreme situations of “privileged” Jews during the Holocaust is engulfed by judgment. This would seem to underline Friedländer’s point that “the link between the writing of the history of the Holocaust and the *unavoidable* use of implicit and explicit moral categories in the interpretation and narration of the Nazi era remains a major challenge.”¹⁴⁶ The same might be said of the representation of “privileged” Jews in Holocaust films, the focus of the remainder of this book.

Significantly, Hilberg was approached in the early 1980s by the renowned American director Stanley Kubrick, who had admired *The Destruction of the European Jews*, for advice on a potential Holocaust film project. Hilberg had recommended basing a film on Czerniakow’s diary. Perhaps reflecting the widespread negative judgments of “privileged” Jews to which Hilberg himself contributed, Kubrick rejected the idea because he believed such a film would be anti-Semitic.¹⁴⁷ This potential interaction between Hilberg and the medium of film did not therefore eventuate; however, the historian would play a crucial part in Lanzmann’s *Shoah*. In this landmark film, the “ghost inside Czerniakow’s office” becomes the filmmaker’s *doppelgänger*.

Notes

1. See George M. Kren, “The Holocaust: Moral Theory and Immoral Acts,” in Rosenberg and Myers, *Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time*, 245; Bartov, “Introduction,” in Bartov, *The Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath*, 3. As further testimony to Hilberg’s impact, see Pacy and Wertheimer, *Perspectives on the Holocaust*.
2. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 128.
3. Raul Hilberg, “Incompleteness in Holocaust Historiography,” in Petropoulos and Roth, *Gray Zones*, 89.

4. For Hilberg's account of his motivation, see Raul Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory: The Journey of a Holocaust Historian* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 58–59.
5. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 1st ed. (London: W. H. Allen, 1961), ix.
6. Roth, *Ethics During and After the Holocaust*, 57.
7. *Ibid.*, 64.
8. *Ibid.*, 27–33, 75–97.
9. *Ibid.*, 58–59.
10. The following analysis of *The Destruction of the European Jews* was first published in Adam Brown, "'Privileged' Jews, Holocaust Representation and the 'Limits' of Judgement: The Case of Raul Hilberg," in *Europe's Expansions and Contractions: Proceedings of the XVIIth Biennial Conference of the Australasian Association of European Historians (Adelaide, July 2009)*, ed. Evan Smith (Unley: Australian Humanities Press, 2010).
11. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 1st ed., v.
12. Stone, *History, Memory and Mass Atrocity*, 117.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 91.
15. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 2nd ed., 5. Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent references to Hilberg's major study are to this edition.
16. *Ibid.*, ix.
17. Raul Hilberg, "The Judenrat: Conscious or Unconscious 'Tool,'" in *The Nazi Holocaust: Historical Articles on the Destruction of European Jews*, 6.1 "The Victims of the Holocaust," ed. Michael R. Marrus (Westport: Meckler, 1989), 162.
18. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 23.
19. Raul Hilberg, *The Holocaust Today* (New York: Syracuse University, 1988), 5.
20. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 1035.
21. *Ibid.*, 22 (my emphasis). This view is even more clearly pronounced in a 1998 essay in which Hilberg argues that "the Holocaust was an event in which—let's face it—the victim hardly resisted, and for that very reason it was the utterly unprovoked unilateral relentless killing of one-third of the Jewish people of the world by an organized machine of destruction." See Hilberg, *The Holocaust Today*, 7 (my emphasis).
22. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 28.
23. Nathan Eck, "Historical Research or Slander?," in Marrus, *The Nazi Holocaust*, 118–22.
24. *Ibid.*, 131.
25. Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 126.
26. For details, see Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 57–58, 61–63. For the source of much of his inspiration, see Franz Neumann, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism* (London: Gollancz, 1942).
27. Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 87.
28. Levi, *If This Is a Man; and, The Truce*, 382.
29. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 1035.
30. *Ibid.*, 28.
31. *Ibid.*, 1030.
32. *Ibid.*, 1037 (my emphasis).
33. *Ibid.*, 26.
34. *Ibid.*, 27.
35. *Ibid.*, 28.
36. *Ibid.*, 26.
37. *Ibid.*, 185–86.

38. Ibid., 219, 694, also 725.
39. Ibid., 694.
40. Rosenthal, “The Right Way to Act,” *passim*.
41. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 1037–38.
42. Ibid., 1038.
43. Ibid., 1039.
44. Gerhard L. Weinberg, “A Commentary on ‘Gray Zones’ in Raul Hilberg’s Work,” in Petropoulos and Roth, *Gray Zones*, 75.
45. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 1040.
46. Ibid., 1041.
47. Ibid., 1039–40 (my emphasis).
48. Michael André Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 13.
49. Ibid., 16 (author’s emphasis).
50. Ibid.
51. Indeed, while the motivations or reasons for Hilberg’s judgments are not crucial to the present discussion, Bernstein’s characterization of the “almost irresistible pressure” to interpret the Holocaust as the “simultaneously inconceivable and yet fore-ordained culmination of the entire brutal history of European anti-Semitism”—due not least of all to the sheer and unprecedented extremity of the event—may help to explain Hilberg’s position, particularly given the early context of his writing. See Ibid., 10.
52. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 1038.
53. Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 61–62. Ironically, Hilberg identifies Rudolf Kastner, discussed in the introduction, as the source of one of the founding hypotheses for his thesis. See *ibid.*, 63. Eck devotes much space to what he terms Hilberg’s “inspiration from the Nazis.” See Eck, “Historical Research or Slander?,” 141–52.
54. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 26, 1037.
55. Ibid., 1030.
56. Ibid.
57. Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 132–33.
58. Quoted in Paris, *Long Shadows*, 318.
59. Hilberg, *Documents of Destruction*, 6.
60. Ibid., 7. Hilberg’s collection includes documents regarding a deportation exemption for the relative of a “privileged” Jew made by the Jewish leadership in France; the testimony of a member of Rhodes’ *Judenrat* criticizing associates; the role of Slovakian Jewish leaders in deportations; and the failure of Hungary’s *Judenrat* to cope with news of Auschwitz. See *ibid.*, 154–55, 169, 176–80, 191–99.
61. For more on Hilberg’s “anonymizing” of the victims, see Weinberg, “A Commentary on ‘Gray Zones’ in Raul Hilberg’s Work,” 79.
62. Saul Friedländer, “History, Memory, and the Historian: Facing the Shoah,” in *Disturbing Remains: Memory, History, and Crisis in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Michael S. Roth and Charles G. Salas (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2001), 279. For his recent historical writing, see Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, Volume 1: The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997); Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, Volume 2: The Years of Extermination, 1939–1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007). Commenting on the lack of attention given to the victims, Yehuda Bauer praises Friedländer for “achiev[ing] a synthesis of the parallel stories of perpetrators, victims and (German) bystanders, something that up until now had not been done. . . . In many ways, it seems, Friedländer might well have been the harbinger of a new and more satisfactory methodology of presenting an immensely complicated subject matter.” Yehuda Bauer, “Contempo-

- rary Research on the Holocaust," in Kwiet and Matthäus, *Contemporary Responses to the Holocaust*, 8.
63. Dan Diner, "History and Counter-Rationality: The *Judenräte* as a Point of View," *Zmanim*, no. 53 (1995): passim.
 64. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 1044 (my emphasis).
 65. Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 190.
 66. Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933–1945* (New York: HarperPerennial, [1992] 1993), x.
 67. *Ibid.*, ix.
 68. *Ibid.*, 106.
 69. *Ibid.*, xii.
 70. *Ibid.*, 112.
 71. *Ibid.*, 107–8.
 72. *Ibid.*, 108.
 73. *Ibid.*
 74. *Ibid.*, 109.
 75. *Ibid.*
 76. *Ibid.*
 77. *Ibid.*, 110.
 78. *Ibid.*, 111.
 79. *Ibid.*, 111 (author's emphasis). In a later chapter, Hilberg labels Gens a "dictator." *Ibid.*, 180.
 80. See also *ibid.*, 175–76.
 81. *Ibid.*, 114–15.
 82. *Ibid.*, 116.
 83. *Ibid.*
 84. *Ibid.*
 85. On the tropics of history in relation to Holocaust studies, see, in particular, Hayden White, "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth," in Friedländer, *Probing the Limits of Representation*.
 86. Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*, 117.
 87. *Ibid.*, xi. Likewise, in his autobiography, Hilberg describes resisters as "the independently minded breakaway Jews [who] made a sharp distinction between themselves and all those others who had not joined them." See Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 136.
 88. Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*, 178.
 89. *Ibid.*, xi, 188.
 90. *Ibid.*, 170.
 91. Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 202–3.
 92. *Ibid.*
 93. Quoted in Paris, *Long Shadows*, 335 (author's emphasis).
 94. Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 127–28 (author's emphasis).
 95. Jeremy D. Popkin, *History, Historians, and Autobiography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 277–78.
 96. *Ibid.*, 278.
 97. *Ibid.*, 222.
 98. Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 66.
 99. *Ibid.* For further discussion of this incident, see Friedländer, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, 127–28.
 100. Hilberg, "The Judenrat: Conscious or Unconscious 'Tool,'" 162.
 101. Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 110.
 102. *Ibid.*, 111.

103. Ibid., 162.
104. Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, 360.
105. Hilberg had made a similar case in the first edition of his seminal work, arguing that “the supreme test of the compliance reaction came in front of the grave.” See Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 1st ed., 669.
106. Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 152–54.
107. Ibid., 129, 140.
108. Hilberg, “The Judenrat: Conscious or Unconscious ‘Tool,’” 162.
109. Ibid.
110. Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 127.
111. Ibid., 150–51.
112. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews*, 521–22n.2.
113. See Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 145–47. Hilberg also questions the status of Arendt and Dawidowicz as scholars, a doubt that is not widely shared in the academic community.
114. Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 76–80.
115. Mitchell B. Hart, “The Historian’s Past in Three Recent Jewish Autobiographies,” *Jewish Social Studies* 5, no. 3 (1999), 152–53.
116. Paris, *Long Shadows*, 316–17.
117. Raul Hilberg, “The Ghetto as a Form of Government,” in Marrus, *The Nazi Holocaust*, 181.
118. Ibid., 190–91.
119. Ibid., 183–85, 192.
120. Ibid., 192.
121. Ibid.
122. Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 126.
123. Ibid., 185.
124. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 27.
125. See, for example, Nachman Blumental, “A Martyr or a Hero?: Reflections on the Diary of Adam Czerniakow,” in *Yad Vashem Studies on the European Jewish Catastrophe and Resistance VII*, ed. Livia Rothkirchen (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1968); Aryeh Tartakower, “Adam Czerniakow: The Man and His Supreme Sacrifice,” in *Yad Vashem Studies on the European Catastrophe and Resistance VI*, eds. Nathan Eck and Aryeh Leon Kubovy (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1967).
126. Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 182 (my emphasis). Despite this, Hilberg describes this cooperation as “remarkably smooth,” with the only issue he notes being Yad Vashem’s refusal to incorporate photographs showing Jews working in factories for the Nazi authorities, which Hilberg labels “not a totally insignificant omission, considering Czerniakow’s daily efforts to increase production in the ghetto.” See *ibid.*, 182–83.
127. Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, 20.
128. While this coauthorship must be kept in mind, the proceeding discussion will refer to Hilberg as the author of the piece.
129. Raul Hilberg, Stanislaw Staron, and Josef Kermisz, eds., *The Warsaw Diary of Adam Czerniakow: Prelude to Doom*, trans. Stanislaw Staron and the staff of Yad Vashem (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), 5.
130. Ibid., 17.
131. Ibid., 22.
132. Ibid., 25–26.
133. Ibid., 42.
134. Ibid., 60.
135. Ibid., 61.

136. Ibid., 62–63.
137. Ibid., 62.
138. Ibid., 64.
139. Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 188.
140. Roth, *Ethics During and After the Holocaust*, 64. Notably, Hilberg describes Czerniakow as a “detached observer in his writings.” See Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 185.
141. Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, 187.
142. Ibid.
143. Ibid.
144. Hilberg, “The Judenrat: Conscious or Unconscious ‘Tool,’” 163.
145. For Bauman’s discussion of the Jewish councils (highlighted in the introduction), see Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 117–50.
146. Friedländer, “History, Memory, and the Historian: Facing the Shoah,” 278 (my emphasis).
147. Hilberg had also encouraged Kubrick to make a film simply titled *Auschwitz* that chronicled the destruction process. See Geoffrey Cocks, *The Wolf at the Door: Stanley Kubrick, History, and the Holocaust* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 157, 161. As it happened, Hilberg may have felt that his recommendation to Kubrick was at least partly fulfilled through Lanzmann’s *Shoah*.

CHAPTER 3

BRIDGING HISTORY AND CINEMA

“PRIVILEGED” JEWS IN CLAUDE LANZMANN’S *SHOAH* AND OTHER HOLOCAUST DOCUMENTARIES



Just as various prefigurative choices in the use of language signal the moral point of view of a historian, “the camera’s gaze” may signal the ethical, political, and ideological perspective of the filmmaker.

—Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*

Claude Lanzmann’s influential film *Shoah* (1985) may be viewed as a bridge between history and documentary film. Widely believed to be “the most important film about the Holocaust ever made,”¹ *Shoah* has been praised by John K. Roth as “a cinematic counterpart to Hilberg’s monumental writing.”² Indeed, Lanzmann’s film exhibits a complex relationship with history, not least of all through the crucial impact Raul Hilberg had on the film’s conceptualization and his on-screen presence in pivotal scenes. The intersection of firsthand testimony, historical content, and filmic techniques in *Shoah*—along with Lanzmann’s positioning of Hilberg in the film—results in judgments of “privileged” Jews being developed in intricate ways. Complicating generic boundaries, Lanzmann’s groundbreaking film is a complex, conflicted, and often incoherent work that is the result of various influences. Embracing the

early writings of Primo Levi and Hilberg, Lanzmann shuns traditional modes of representation to create a singular film that still commands widespread attention today. The fact that *Shoah* has been so influential attests to the importance of discussing it here, but also necessitates the qualification that its mode of representation cannot be considered characteristic of the documentary genre as a whole.

The introduction indicated that nuanced distinctions can be made between documentary and fiction films. While the two forms share many narrative conventions and styles (and even, in the case of drama documentaries, enacted characters), documentaries are distinguishable from fiction films by their assertion of a "truth claim" and their qualitatively different appeals to audience expectations of the "real" through the use of "actual people, settings, and situations."³ Thus, making a distinction between documentary and fiction film is useful, particularly in the context of how judgment is passed within the two genres. Annette Insdorf has expressed a strong preference for documentary over fiction films, claiming that documentaries "tower above ... the cheap packaging of 'Hollywood' motion pictures—manipulative music, melodramatic clichés, [and] literal violence."⁴ While a value judgment of this kind is not pertinent to the present discussion, it suffices to point out that the "historical figure" portrayed on the screen in innumerable Holocaust documentaries is generally not the product of dramatization as in fiction films, but is (re)presented as a "real" person who "was there." Lanzmann's ambiguous characterization of *Shoah* as, among other things, a "fiction of the real"⁵ seems to reflect a certain claim to "truth," although an equally important attribute of a documentary film's engagement with its audience is the presence of an argumentative thrust. Documentary films not only make an implicit claim to represent the "truth" of a situation, but construct an argument in the process of attempting to do so. The treatment of "real" figures throughout all stages of the production process consists of varying levels of manipulation, thus the conventions available to Holocaust documentary filmmakers in the construction of a film's internal argument result in judgments of "privileged" Jews being developed in a number of ways.

The limit of judgment plays an intrinsic part in representations of "privileged" Jews; however, these depictions in Holocaust documentaries are both few and brief. Notable exceptions include *Night and Fog* (1955), *Photographer* (1998), *Lodz Ghetto* (1989), *Partisans of Vilna* (1986), and *Kapo* (1999), although the degree of attention given to the issue of "privileged" Jews varies with each film. As in *Shoah*, Holocaust documentaries seldom focus specifically on their morally ambiguous behavior, although Tor Ben-Mayor and Dan Setton's *Kapo* is one work

that has done so.⁶ “Conventional” documentaries such as this film comprise a clear narrative trajectory constructed from an argumentative thrust, which is often communicated through authoritative voiceover narration and other familiar techniques. Lanzmann’s somewhat “unconventional” mode of documentary representation puts forward its argument(s) much more implicitly than in other Holocaust documentaries, having important repercussions for the ways in which “privileged” Jews are represented in *Shoah*. Thus the clear assertive stance of *Kapo* serves as a valuable point of contrast to Lanzmann’s film.

While many documentary filmmakers seek to construct a coherent narrative from the debris of the past, Lanzmann’s anti-redemptory mode of representation in *Shoah* attests to the impossibility of such an undertaking, engaging self-consciously with the notion of the “unrepresentability” of the Holocaust. Even so, the impossibility of avoiding judgment remains evident in the filmic medium. Yet in contrast to Hilberg’s work, the exposure of the image in the filmmaking process arguably offers a heightened potential for the experiences of “privileged” Jews to be depicted in a nuanced manner. Produced at the same time Levi was writing *The Drowned and the Saved*, Lanzmann’s film can at times be seen to make the kind of clear-cut judgments Levi warns against, while at other times it seems to work toward the suspension of judgment that Levi requires.

Beyond the Conventional: The Complexity of Judgment in *Shoah*

An assimilated French Jew who organized an anti-Nazi student resistance group at the age of seventeen, Lanzmann worked as a writer, journalist, editor, and filmmaker after the war and spent over a decade making *Shoah* before its release in 1985. The editing process itself took over five years, during which 350 hours of footage was cut down to 566 minutes.⁷ Lanzmann, who studied historical literature on the Holocaust intensely before and during the making of his film,⁸ focuses solely on the annihilation of Jews in Poland. His film primarily consists of interviews he conducted with victims, persecutors, and onlookers, often at the geographical sites of destruction and sometimes (when questioning former perpetrators) using a hidden camera. Lanzmann received death threats, and on one occasion, after he was discovered secretly filming a former *Einsatzgruppe* officer who had been involved in mass shootings, he was beaten so badly that he spent eight days in the hospital.⁹ Despite its unusual format and running time, *Shoah* has been seen by

millions of viewers worldwide, although its current dissemination might be considered limited when compared with more "popular" films, such as *Schindler's List*.

In addition to his film's influence, Lanzmann's often polemical comments have contributed much to broader debates on the Holocaust. Lanzmann argues that it is an event beyond comparison: "No one can mistake it, deny the Holocaust its specific character, its uniqueness."¹⁰ The filmmaker's emphasis on the incommunicability of the Holocaust is epitomized early in *Shoah*, with his inclusion of the words of the survivor Simon Srebnik on returning to Chelmno: "No one can describe it. No one can recreate what happened here. ... And no one can understand it."¹¹ The impossibility of understanding forms the foundational rule of Lanzmann's philosophy. His comments in relation to what he sees as *Shoah*'s utter superiority to other Holocaust films in every respect also reveals how he positions himself and *his* representation of the Holocaust. Lanzmann has described *Shoah* as "more thoroughly provocative and powerful than anything else" and uses words such as "reality" and "truth" frequently when describing the film.¹² Lanzmann was strongly influenced by Levi's memoir *If This Is a Man*, particularly its vignette of a Nazi officer who informs Levi that "there is no why" in Auschwitz.¹³ Nonetheless, in being so dismissive of representations of the Holocaust (other than *Shoah*), Lanzmann takes the limits of representation much further than Levi intended.

Lanzmann's strategies, which may be seen as further developments of those found in other influential French films dealing with aspects of the Holocaust,¹⁴ subvert many generic conventions of documentary film. He shuns all use of archival photographs and film footage, and rejects voiceover narration, the use of a musical score, the construction of a linear narrative, and closure. Indeed, Lanzmann has even claimed that *Shoah* is *not* a "documentary" or in any way "representational."¹⁵ Nonetheless, Lanzmann represents former "privileged" Jews using a variety of means, from his selection and editing of footage to his depiction of facial expression and voice. While he repudiates any mimetic recreation of events, his interviews often encourage "reenactments" in a different sense, and the director has frequently referred to his interviewees as "actors" since his film's release.¹⁶ The ways in which the filmmaker positions his characters through on-screen prompting or interruption and postproduction editing reveal an intricate process of judgment in *Shoah*. Furthermore, as many of Lanzmann's "actors" are former *Sonderkommando* members, an analysis of *Shoah* provides a necessary and revealing counterpoint to the significantly different representation of "privileged" Jews in more conventional documentary films, such as *Kapo*.

Much has been written about Lanzmann's complex accumulation, contrasting, and blending of settings, witnesses, and languages; and his controversial representation (and judgment) of German perpetrators and Polish onlookers has occupied a number of scholars and other commentators. Referring to *Shoah*'s representation of Germans, the filmmaker Marcel Ophüls notes that "Lanzmann felt that his camera should act as a substitute for a gun or a court of law; he put himself in the role of judge and jury."¹⁷ Likewise, Shoshana Felman argues that "*Shoah* embodies the capacity of art not simply to witness, but to take *the witness stand*."¹⁸ Nevertheless, very little attention has been paid to the judgment of "privileged" Jews in the film. Significantly, Lanzmann has described himself as having been obsessed throughout filming with the question of when it was too late for Jews to resist effectively. Although he denied that this historiographical problem is also a moral issue, he did note that all "questions of content were immediately questions of technique and questions of form"¹⁹—and the technique and form of *Shoah* reveal the passing of moral judgment(s).

Lanzmann's own multifaceted role in *Shoah* is crucial to the manner in which former perpetrators and "privileged" victims are portrayed against one another, as well as how the historian Hilberg is depicted in several key scenes. Most discussions of the film comment in some way on the filmmaker's dominant presence, which is variously characterized as sympathetic, encouraging, cajoling, controlling, intrusive, aggressive, and unrelenting. Lanzmann himself has described his interviewing method as having an "obsessional character."²⁰ Whether Lanzmann is within or just outside the frame, his controversial interviewing techniques involve either eliciting specific emotional reactions from the survivors upon remembering their experiences or demanding they provide this testimony even against their own wishes. There has been considerable criticism of Lanzmann's manipulation of survivors;²¹ however, this has not previously been linked to the issue of "privileged" Jews.

Lanzmann portrays himself throughout *Shoah* not only as a moral authority, but as a quest figure in search of "the truth," an image he partly establishes through long scenes showing his van journeying to the residences of Raul Hilberg and Franz Schalling.²² Indeed, the interaction between Lanzmann and Hilberg on-screen renders the historian a kind of *doppelgänger* of the filmmaker. While Lanzmann has been viewed as having a tripartite role of narrator, interviewer, and inquirer,²³ the following analysis posits a fourth role: Lanzmann as a figure of judgment. While *Shoah* has sometimes been characterized as presenting a "compassionate and admiring look" at the victims,²⁴ this is not always the case. As a figure of judgment, Lanzmann intertwines the

often dichotomized realms of history and film through *Shoah's modus operandi*. This is no more evident than in the filmmaker's multifaceted representation of *Judenrat* leader Adam Czerniakow, which passes judgment in a highly sophisticated manner.

Positioning the Historian: Lanzmann and His Doppelgänger

Both Hilberg and Lanzmann have praised each other for having a profound impact on their respective works. While Hilberg acknowledged Lanzmann in *The Destruction of the European Jews* for reinforcing him in his "own quest on many occasions," Lanzmann described Hilberg's volume as his "bible," which he reread constantly.²⁵ The convergence of their philosophies and their roles in passing judgment are developed in several scenes throughout the course of *Shoah*. That Hilberg is the only historian to appear on-screen in the film is highly significant, particularly given that Yehuda Bauer, whose views on Jewish resistance and cooperation lie in stark opposition to Hilberg's, served as a historical advisor to Lanzmann.²⁶ While Felman rightly notes that Hilberg is "neither the last word of knowledge nor the ultimate authority on history" in *Shoah*, the absence of a direct counterpoint to his views gives them considerable weight.²⁷ Hilberg's responses to Lanzmann's questions bear a strong resemblance to comments made in his publications; nonetheless, it must be kept in mind that—to use Lanzmann's own term—Hilberg is an "actor" in *Shoah*, who, like other interviewees, is subject to the filmmaker's selection and juxtaposition of both visual footage and soundtrack. This complex positioning of the historian using a filmic mode of representation engenders an effect completely unlike that engendered in written historical discourse. Indeed, Lanzmann's editing of his interviews may be read as challenging Hilberg's judgments at times. In these instances, the film invokes, intentionally or not, a degree of ambivalence toward Czerniakow's behavior.

Lanzmann not only includes Hilberg's physical person in the film but also highlights and endorses his historical approach to the Holocaust. In the historian's first appearance, almost three hours into the film, Lanzmann's focus on the annihilation process is temporarily sidelined to demonstrate the historical methods, standards, and authority that Hilberg embodies. Sitting at his desk in his study in Vermont—a much more formal setting than the sites of memory hitherto appropriated in the film—Hilberg is framed in a close-up as he declares in a sober and assured tone:

In all of my work I have never begun by asking the big questions. . . . I have preferred therefore to address these things which are minutiae or detail in order that I might then be able to put together in a gestalt a picture which, if not an explanation, is at least a description, a more full description, of what transpired.²⁸

This passage of dialogue succinctly captures the conceptual framework informing *Shoah*. Lanzmann can be seen throughout the film constantly pressing his witnesses for small details, placing emphasis on the “how” rather than the “why.”²⁹ Furthermore, during Hilberg’s subsequent evaluation of the Nazis’ reliance on incremental anti-Semitic measures, Lanzmann’s comments portray an utmost respect—if not reverence—for the historian. Unlike numerous other moments in *Shoah* when Lanzmann interrupts, disagrees with, or unsettles his interviewees, the questions he poses to Hilberg seek only to clarify aspects of his interpretation, acquire more detail, or at times express surprise at what has been said, giving the impression that the historian is almost a mentor figure to the inquiring filmmaker.

Hilberg’s thus far unquestioned authority and influence on Lanzmann is equally visible in his second appearance, during which Hilberg, again seated at his desk, interprets a German railroad timetable, *Fahrplananordnung* 587, to explain the role played by “special trains” to deport Jews to the Treblinka death camp. While Lanzmann peers over Hilberg’s shoulder to examine the document, his shadow covers half of the historian’s face. Hilberg estimates that “we may be talking here about ten thousand dead Jews on this one *Fahrplananordnung* right here.”³⁰ When Lanzmann suggests “more than ten thousand,” Hilberg implicitly agrees through his body language but makes a qualification: “Well, we will be conservative here.” Lanzmann simply replies, “Yes.”³¹ Hilberg’s authority is also reinforced by Lanzmann’s positioning of this scene immediately after the evasive testimony of Walter Stier, a former chief of a Reich railways department who organized deportation trains for Jews. The viewer’s awareness that Lanzmann assumes an alias, “Dr. Sorel,” and uses a hidden camera to film Stier, grants the entrusted and trusting Hilberg authority even before one considers what the interviewees say.³² Stier’s repeated claim that he had no knowledge at all that “deportation” meant death is refuted by Hilberg’s calm and precise analysis of what the document clearly revealed to the bureaucrat about the return of the empty train.³³

In the scenes involving Hilberg, he often talks with downcast eyes, only glancing at Lanzmann occasionally and a few times at the camera. Hilberg’s grim contemplation rests in stark contrast to Stier’s shifting

gaze and signs of physical discomfort under Lanzmann's prodding. At the same time, the dominant physical presence of Hilberg within the frame bears a striking resemblance to Lanzmann in terms of age and body size, with both men having similar postures, hair color, and thick-rimmed glasses. These connections, along with the two men's seemingly unshakeable confidence in what they say and the fact that they concur with each other at all times on-screen, in a way render Hilberg the filmmaker's *doppelgänger*. Indeed, when Lanzmann somberly comments that the trains depicted in the document signify "death traffic," Hilberg repeats these words in agreement.³⁴ However, the construction of this on-camera relationship and how it bears on the judgment of "privileged" Jews is most evident in their joint discussion of Adam Czerniakow, the only Jewish leader explored in the film.

After the release of *Shoah*, Lanzmann emphasized that he saw Hilberg as something of a flesh-and-blood substitute for Czerniakow in the film, that the historian "take[s] the place of a dead man. He is, entirely, Adam Czerniakow."³⁵ There are several indications that Hilberg bears similarities to Czerniakow, which will be discussed below. This, along with Hilberg's previously established historical and moral authority, create the impression that he is the most appropriate person to judge the Jewish leader. Lanzmann's confidence in the historian's ability to represent Czerniakow (in a double sense) is exemplified by the filmmaker's exclusion from *Shoah* of the first—and longest—interview he recorded, which was with Benjamin Murmelstein, the last Jewish "elder" of the Theresienstadt Ghetto. Although Murmelstein's testimony produced around fourteen hours of film, Lanzmann decided it did not fit with the tone and style he wanted for *Shoah*, and he omitted the interview from the final cut.³⁶ Lanzmann's decision to exclude Murmelstein's recollections grants Hilberg considerable authority; however, despite Lanzmann's conviction that the "actor" Hilberg stood in for—or *as*—Czerniakow, there is a sense of critical distance that the historian assumes through his discussion and judgment of the Jewish leader's character and behavior. In addition to Hilberg's role in transmitting judgment through his perception of Czerniakow's shortsightedness, Lanzmann's own contributions to these nine scenes are pivotal to how the film evaluates the "privileged" Jew.

Just as Hilberg's earlier appearance in the film was contrasted with Stier's interview in order to demonstrate Hilberg's moral superiority and relay the filmmaker's judgment of Stier, Lanzmann juxtaposes four sections of Hilberg's reflections on Czerniakow's diary with parts of his interview with another perpetrator—the "forgetful" and self-deluding Franz Grassler, who served as assistant to the Nazi commissioner of the

Warsaw Ghetto.³⁷ The way in which Lanzmann incorporates Czerniakow's testimony into *Shoah* contrasts strongly with the use of the diary in the documentary film *A Day in the Warsaw Ghetto* (1991). In that film the Jewish leader (whose diary is read by narrative voiceover) is not distinguished from the "non-privileged" authors of other ghetto documents the film draws on.³⁸ The mode of representation in *Shoah* reveals that Czerniakow's position as Jewish leader—even if it is not characterized explicitly in the film as "privileged"—is under scrutiny.

Early in his discussion of Czerniakow, Hilberg testifies to how one is able to judge the *Judenrat* leader by using his diary: "Perhaps because he wrote in such a prosaic style we now know what went on in his mind, how things were perceived, recognized, reacted to."³⁹ This is reminiscent of Hilberg's comment in his introduction to the English translation of the diary that it not only contains valuable facts, but "reveals also the man—his beliefs, attitudes, and above all his style."⁴⁰ However, Hilberg works toward his judgment of Czerniakow in *Shoah* by first addressing the issue of "privilege" more broadly, with the historian's moral authority evident in the following exchange:

Hilberg: He [Czerniakow] is sarcastic enough, if that is the word, in December 1941 to remark that now ... members of the intelligentsia were starving to death. And he even has—

Lanzmann: Why does he mention specifically the intelligentsia at this time?

Hilberg: He mentions it because there is a difference, owing to the class structure within the ghetto, in vulnerability to starvation. The lower classes died first. The middle class died a little bit later. The intelligentsia were of course at the top of the middle class, and once they started dying, the situation was very, very, very bad. And that's the meaning of that.⁴¹

Several key observations can be made here. First, the fact that the scene moves from several panning shots of Warsaw's desolate streets to Hilberg shifts more attention to his authoritative interpretation. It is also telling that Lanzmann, on one of the rare occasions he interrupts Hilberg, prompts the historian to digress on the issue of socioeconomic status in the ghetto. Furthermore, Hilberg's foregrounding of Czerniakow's sarcasm suggests a quality he shares with his subject, perhaps reflecting the connection Lanzmann perceives between the two men. Hilberg, who later refers to Czerniakow's "rather sardonic comments about death," had himself demonstrated a predisposition to moments of dark humor several times in previous scenes.⁴² Indeed, the historian adopts a sarcastic tone when he describes the "class structure" of the Warsaw Ghetto. While Hilberg does not explicitly pass judgment on this situation, he becomes very animated in his explanation of the "intelligentsia" and ends

the discussion with a final, authoritative pronouncement: "And that's the meaning of that." The effect of the film's audio-visual depiction of Hilberg's emotive commentary on the "intelligentsia," influenced directly by the filmmaker's interruption, is considerably different from that achieved by Hilberg's writings. For instance, the complex way in which Hilberg's judgment is portrayed in this scene differs markedly from the section of his review essay "The Ghetto as a Form of Government," in which he delivers the same information as he does in *Shoah*: "Czerniakow himself made the point obliquely at the end of 1941 when he observed that the intelligentsia were dying now."⁴³

The influence on *Shoah* of Hilberg's historical research is also evident in the next scene. When Lanzmann seeks further information on Czerniakow's state of mind, Hilberg becomes more direct in his judgment. Asked if Czerniakow ever seemed "revolted" by the situation Jews faced, Hilberg replies that "he doesn't express the disgust except with other Jews, Jews who either deserted the community by emigrating early, or Jews who like Ganzweich collaborat[ed] with the Germans."⁴⁴ Hilberg seldom uses the term "collaboration" when discussing Jews, but in adopting Czerniakow's framework of judgment here, he makes a clear distinction between different "privileged" Jews, thereby making distinctions that might be likened to the spectrum along which he situates Jewish leaders in *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders* (see chapter 2). The indirect representation of the issue of "privilege" in this scene arguably discourages any clear-cut judgment of Czerniakow by the viewer. In drawing on the Jewish leader's testimony and judgment, Lanzmann's positioning of the somber Hilberg implies neither a positive nor a negative evaluation of his behavior. Nonetheless, this changes in the next scene that focuses on Hilberg, in which he begins to address what he sees as the problem with the ghetto, particularly in terms of the activities of its leaders.

While Lanzmann invokes Czerniakow's own identification in his diary as the captain of a sinking ship, the camera's focus on Hilberg's contemplative state suggests he is engaged in deep thought prior to making his judgment. The camera closes in on the historian's highly emotional facial expression and body language, his flat hands joined before pursed lips, as if praying. When Lanzmann refers to the Warsaw Ghetto's cultural activities, Hilberg suddenly adopts a particularly emphatic, if not aggressive, tone. He proclaims that such activities were "not simply *morale-building* devices, which is what Czerniakow identifies them to be."⁴⁵ Instead, Hilberg characterizes these instances of passive resistance as self-deluding and "symbolic of the entire posture of the ghetto."⁴⁶ Lanzmann's depiction of Hilberg's sharp alteration of

tone exemplifies the way in which *Shoah* points out that judgment is being passed on the “privileged” Jew in question. Although changes in tone can be noticeable to readers of the written word, the aural and visual communication of a judgment made by the historian on-screen arguably opens up more space for the audience’s critical engagement with the issue of “privileged” Jews. This adds an important element to Hilberg’s critique of the *Judenräte* in “The Ghetto as a Form of Government,” in which he briefly writes: “Many ghetto activities, especially in education and culture, bordered on illusionary behavior.”⁴⁷ Here, the historian’s attitude toward the Jewish councils is communicated in a considerably more straightforward manner than in the film. The self-reflexive nature of *Shoah* is particularly important when Hilberg’s judgments of Czerniakow become increasingly clearer.

Hilberg’s distaste for what he perceives as the flawed policy of alleviation and compliance, spelled out so clearly in *The Destruction of the European Jews*, can be seen in *Shoah* when he links his generalized view of the behavior of the ghetto population as a whole with Czerniakow’s state of knowledge regarding German intentions:

Hilberg: [The ghetto] is in the process of healing or trying to heal sick people who are soon going to be gassed ... is trying to educate youngsters who will never be growing up ... is in the process of trying to find work for people and increase employment in a situation which is *doomed* to failure. They are going on *as though* life were continuing. They have an official faith in the survivability of the ghetto, *even after all indications are to the contrary*. The *strategy* continues to be: “We must continue, for this is the only strategy that is left. We must *minimize* the injury, *minimize* the damage, *minimize* the losses, but we must continue.” And continuity is the *only* thing in all of this.

Lanzmann: But obviously when he compares himself to this captain of a sinking ship, he knows that everything ...

Hilberg: *He knows, he knows*. I think he *knew* or he *sensed* or he *believed* the end was coming, *perhaps* as early as October 1941, when he has a note about alarming rumors as to the fate of Warsaw Jewry in the spring.⁴⁸

Lanzmann’s role in prompting Hilberg’s judgment is again crucial here, for his suggestion directs Hilberg to focus more specifically on Czerniakow’s state of knowledge. Although Hilberg’s tone is never overtly critical, negative judgment is evident in the emphasis he places on the words indicated in italics above. His pronouncement, “And continuity is the *only* thing in this,” which he stresses by raising his hands, is reminiscent of his earlier authoritative statement: “And that is the meaning of that.” Likewise, Hilberg’s use of the present tense might serve to cre-

ate the impression that his evaluation is not reliant on the problematic phenomenon of "backshadowing" discussed earlier. Also telling are the several examples of repetition Hilberg uses in his characterization of the ghetto and that he begins to speak in the first person inclusive, as if from Czerniakow's point of view: "We must continue, for this is the only strategy that is left. We must *minimize* the injury, *minimize* the damage, *minimize* the losses, but we must continue." This reflection is then linked back, through his response to Lanzmann's suggestion, to Czerniakow's state of knowledge. Such a connection further reveals Hilberg to be engaging in a process of judgment, albeit through a radically different discourse from that which he uses in his publications. Hilberg seldom evokes hypothetical thoughts of his subjects in his writings as he does in this scene from *Shoah*.

In an earlier scene, Hilberg details the rumors, reports, and anxieties recorded in the diary that lead him to believe that Czerniakow knew a great deal about Nazi intentions. He criticizes Czerniakow implicitly for focusing on peripheral concerns that were essentially useless in the long term when his knowledge meant more could have been done to resist Nazi oppression.⁴⁹ However, his wording of the final sentence in the later scene quoted above suggests some uncertainty: "I think he *knew* or he *sensed* or he *believed* the end was coming, *perhaps* as early as October 1941." Hilberg's ambivalent phrasing is significant when contrasted to his confident assertion earlier in this scene that Czerniakow "takes for granted, he assumes, he anticipates everything that is happening to the Jews, including the worst."⁵⁰ Furthermore, Hilberg's uncertainty is not present in any of the publications discussed in the previous chapter, again highlighting the extra dimension that documentary film can add to written texts.

Lanzmann's influence on Hilberg's judgment is again evident immediately after the historian's seemingly uncertain comment about Czerniakow's state of knowledge. The camera fixes on the site of the Belzec extermination camp, the destination of many Polish Jews deported in 1942, while Lanzmann again asks Hilberg to comment on Czerniakow's understanding of the rumors about the deportations.⁵¹ Although Hilberg concedes that Czerniakow never wrote about any destination, as the image shifts to a close-up of a rolling train, he stresses: "But we cannot really decide that he had no knowledge whatsoever about these camps. All we know is that he didn't mention them in the diary."⁵² Significantly, Hilberg now distances himself from the primary document—until this moment a completely reliable source and "window" for him⁵³—at a time when his reliance on its content threatens to reinforce the impossibility of judgment. Also noteworthy is that, on-screen at least, Lanzmann

expresses agreement with Hilberg's judgment, responding to the historian's argument regarding the inconclusiveness of the diary with a brief, confident statement: "That's right." Hilberg then implies that it is almost certain that Czerniakow was aware of more than he revealed in his diary: "We also know, of course, from other sources, that the existence of death camps was already known in Warsaw, certainly by June."⁵⁴ This exposes the tension between the problems involved in relying on retrospect and the need to decipher the ultimately unknowable realities of the past. Hilberg's use of verbal repetition further reveals his judgment when he laments that even on the day before Czerniakow committed suicide, he "*keeps appealing*. He wants certain exemptions. He wants the Council staff to be exempt. He wants the staff of the welfare organizations to be exempt."⁵⁵ However, having addressed Czerniakow's controversial role as *Judenrat* leader throughout his interview with Hilberg, Lanzmann's portrayal of Czerniakow's final hours arguably questions the possibility of judging the "privileged" Jew.

In Hilberg's last appearance in *Shoah*, the film's focus shifts to Czerniakow's relationship with the ghetto's orphans. Asked by Lanzmann to elaborate on the subject, Hilberg meditates at length on the Jewish leader's strong attachment to children. When the visual image shifts to a cemetery, panning slowly over gravestones, Hilberg's somber intonation might be seen to imply that Czerniakow had been forced into an impossible situation: "If he cannot take care of the children, *what else can he do?* Some people report that he wrote a note after he closed the book on the diary in which he said, 'They want me to kill the children with my own hands.'⁵⁶ Here the historian speaks as if from Czerniakow's perspective, producing a markedly different effect from his previously cold, analytical stance. Additionally, just as Hilberg speaks these last words, the camera comes to rest on a tombstone engraved with the barely readable name "Adam Czerniakow." Hilberg's commentary on Czerniakow's death parallels Rudolf Vrba's earlier discussion in *Shoah* of the suicide of Freddy Hirsch, the informal leader of the "Czech Camp" in Auschwitz. Vrba describes Hirsch as a man of "upright behavior and obvious human dignity" whose concern with the children's welfare discouraged him from supporting a revolt.⁵⁷ The convergence of sympathy and judgment here is signaled by the fact that there is more than one way to interpret Czerniakow's suicide, which has elsewhere been condemned as an act of weakness or cowardice.⁵⁸

While not necessarily contradicting his belief that more could have been done earlier by Czerniakow, Hilberg's final words can be interpreted as portraying the *Judenrat* leader in a positive light. Indeed, the effect of this prolonged scene is very different from the noticeably brief sentence

Hilberg uses to note Czerniakow's death in *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*: "Adam Czerniakow in Warsaw committed suicide when the deportations began and when he realized that he could not save the Jewish orphans."⁵⁹ On the other hand, another perspective on this scene might suggest that the gravestones—or the Jewish deaths they represent—are to be seen as a consequence of Czerniakow's actions, thus reinforcing Hilberg's judgment of his naivety.⁶⁰ This underlines the multiplicity of meanings that can arise from the ambiguity of the visual image in film. Felman aptly describes both Lanzmann and Hilberg as "catalysts—or agents—of the process of *reception*,"⁶¹ and in this way they also mediate the film's judgment. In the scene analyzed above, however, the complex, unconventional mode of representation seems to eschew a clear assertive stance regarding Czerniakow's behavior. This part of *Shoah* reveals the potential of documentary film to position an audience to—in Levi's words—"meditate" on Czerniakow's ethical dilemma with "pity and rigor," while seeming to suspend (a final) judgment on him.⁶²

Most important, like the testimony of other people in *Shoah*, Hilberg's contributions do not float freely within the film but are mediated by Lanzmann's construction of a sequence of interview fragments. André Colombat interprets Hilberg's role in *Shoah* as "gather[ing] the disseminated testimonies heard in one general and clear historical interpretation."⁶³ However, there are aspects of Lanzmann's editing technique that serve to challenge Hilberg's judgments. Reflecting the filmmaker's commitment to a nonlinear structure, the representation of Czerniakow's situation in mid-1943 is situated a few scenes from the film's end, after the death camps and the annihilation process have been explored in detail. As a consequence of this, the viewer has already been exposed to hours of accounts of what happened to Jewish victims, including those from Warsaw, after deportation. The numerous testimonies of the horrific shock Jews experienced when discovering the purpose of the camps on arrival provide a broader context for the viewer that points to the sheer unprecedentedness of the Holocaust and the problem of clarifying how Jewish leaders perceived events as they transpired. The inclusion of Franz Grassler's interview before and after Hilberg's final appearances in *Shoah* offers a strong contrast between the historian's reading of Czerniakow's last diary entry and the perpetrator's dishonesty and denial of any personal culpability.

While the majority of Hilberg's discussion of Czerniakow portrays the Jewish leader as a somewhat shortsighted figure, Lanzmann's juxtaposition of his interviews with Hilberg and Grassler reveals a different preoccupation, focusing on the gulf between heartless perpetrator and helpless victim. Indeed, the diary itself is used as a tool of judgment against Grassler at the beginning of the filmmaker's interrogation of

him. A determined Lanzmann, reinforcing his own moral authority, responds to the bureaucrat's claims of memory loss with the statement, "I'll help you remember," and dutifully informs Grassler that "this is Czerniakow's diary. You're mentioned in it."⁶⁴ Furthermore, when Lanzmann argues with Grassler about the purpose of the ghetto, again with assistance from Czerniakow's diary, the filmmaker presses him to admit that the Jews "couldn't do anything" against Nazi persecution.⁶⁵ The positioning of this admission highlights the utter helplessness of the Holocaust's victims just moments before showing Hilberg's negative evaluation of Czerniakow's state of knowledge. While Lanzmann seems to agree with Hilberg's judgment on-screen, the contrast between interviews is significant. The juxtaposition of Hilberg's analysis of Czerniakow's diary with Grassler's suspect testimony elicits an effect that differs considerably from Hilberg's reliance on Nazi documents in *The Destruction of the European Jews*, which occasionally led him to adopt the perpetrators' judgments (see chapter 2). Lanzmann's depiction of the continued evasion—if not self-deception—of the former perpetrator with whom Czerniakow was forced to deal may be seen to challenge Hilberg's evaluation of the Jewish leader's actions. In this way, Hilberg's criticism of Czerniakow's lack of awareness or understanding, as expressed in *Shoah* and in publications such as "The Ghetto as a Form of Government," is brought into question by Lanzmann's editing decision.⁶⁶

Hilberg's judgment regarding Czerniakow's alleged awareness of the intentions of the Nazis is followed by Grassler's absurd suggestion that due to their "excellent secret services," Jews in Warsaw knew more than their Nazi captors.⁶⁷ Again, this could be seen to counter the argument Hilberg makes in both his writings and in the film that Jewish leaders should have been more responsive to wartime developments. Further to this, during Grassler's final appearance in *Shoah*, the camera holds his face in a steady close-up as Lanzmann interrogates him:

Lanzmann: Czerniakow wrote, "We're puppets, we have no power."

Grassler: Yes.

Lanzmann: "No power."

Grassler: Sure ... that was ...

Lanzmann: You Germans were the overlords.

Grassler: Yes.

Lanzmann: The overlords. The masters.

Grassler: Obviously.

Lanzmann: Czerniakow was merely a tool.

Grassler: Yes, but a good tool. Jewish self-management worked well, I can tell you.⁶⁸

This is the only scene in the entire film in which Lanzmann loses his patience. Exuding a loud sigh and raising his voice, he continues arguing with the obtuse former perpetrator for several minutes. Grassler even appropriates Czerniakow's claim, "I had no power," after which Lanzmann gives up trying to convince him (or make him admit) otherwise. While Lanzmann does not get Grassler to concede any responsibility for his actions, by showing Grassler's description of the *Judenräte* as efficient, the viewer is positioned to be repelled only by the perpetrator. This juxtaposition—what Lanzmann calls "corroboration"—of interviews reveals the complex mode of representation at the heart of the film.

In a sense, the displacement of the perpetrator's deceptions and anti-Semitism has the effect of calling into question Hilberg's judgment of Czerniakow by contextualizing the historian's evaluation of his behavior. Nonetheless, while the moral ambiguity of Czerniakow's perilous situation is highlighted through Lanzmann's multilayered depiction of Hilberg's persona and perspective, the portrayal of former members of the *Sonderkommandos* engenders a very different outcome. Lanzmann's aggressive interviewing techniques and editing practices ensure that his film constructs a binary opposition between former "privileged" Jews and other figures in the film.

Constructing Oppositions: Continuing Anti-Semitism and Perpetual Victimhood

Closely reflecting the central contention of Levi's essay on the grey zone, Ilan Avisar argues in his early volume on Holocaust film that it is "impossible to judge, and at times even to understand" the members of the *Sonderkommandos*, and that "it would be absurd and heartless to view them as collaborators."⁶⁹ Reflecting on Lanzmann's film, Avisar writes that *Shoah* "imposes a state of mind which confronts agonizing, occasionally unbearable recognitions on the spectrum of possible human behaviour and moral decisions under extreme circumstances."⁷⁰ In some ways, Lanzmann seems to take little interest in the formerly "privileged" status of many of the Jewish survivors he interviews, but rather seeks their testimony due to their close proximity to the extermination process. On the other hand, the victims' ethical dilemmas are exposed (if only briefly) in some of his interviews with former crematorium workers. Notwithstanding these instances, Lanzmann's representation of their trauma reveals the impossibility of suspending judgment. His displacement of the perpetrators' continued anti-Semitism and evasiveness, and his simultaneous emphasis on the perpetual suffering and victimhood of survivors, constructs a binary opposition that disallows a detailed examination of the issue of "privilege." Instead, Lanzmann's

treatment of the survivors he interviews reveals a process of making clear-cut moral judgments, pointing to an argumentative thrust that was less evident in his examination of Czerniakow.

Through the filmmaker's self-representation and vigorous approach to gaining the information—and emotional response—he desires, Lanzmann, in the words of Tzvetan Todorov, “revives a kind of Manicheanism.”⁷¹ In his Levi-inspired discussion of Holocaust representation, Todorov writes that *Shoah* “succeeds in *telling* us the events of the past, and it does so with great power, but it also leads us to *judge* these events in so oversimplified a fashion that it does not always help us *understand* them.”⁷² Focusing his analysis on the film's depiction of Germans and Poles, Todorov argues that Lanzmann confirms “the familiar oppositions: us and them, friends and enemies, good and wicked. For him, in the domain of moral values at least, everything is simple and straightforward.”⁷³ Sami Nair adopts even stronger language, arguing that Lanzmann “rehabilitates the survivors from the Jewish work commandos who assisted the Nazis in murdering their [Jewish] brothers and sisters ... and transfigures them here into saints by revealing their inner innocence.”⁷⁴ While this comment itself reveals a stark moral evaluation, earlier chapters have revealed that Levi opposes these kinds of black-and-white judgments, particularly in relation to the *Sonderkommandos*. Several scholars have criticized Lanzmann's failure to engage with the fact that the majority of his Jewish witnesses were “privileged” in some way; indeed, some commentators explicitly refer to Lanzmann's unwillingness to differentiate between victims and thereby acknowledge Levi's grey zone.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, no analysis of how Lanzmann conveys his judgment of these liminal figures has previously been undertaken.

Lanzmann's personal attitude toward “privileged” Jews—and perhaps one reason he rarely engages with their controversial positions in *Shoah*—can be seen in his aggressive criticism of Andrzej Wajda's 1991 film *Korczak* for portraying Jewish police, black marketeers, and thieves. Lanzmann declared that this issue “has no importance whatsoever, this exists in every society and it happened there less than in other places. The truth, the only thing that matters, is to represent the tragedy in its immensity, *in its purity*.”⁷⁶ The term “purity,” a problematic term in any discussion of the Holocaust, would seem to preclude any exploration of the ambiguous circumstances of “privileged” Jews. Through his use of the camera, construction of interviews, and editing of footage, Lanzmann's positive and negative judgments of survivors and perpetrators respectively are revealed in his often intense manipulation of his subjects to achieve his ends.

Just as Lanzmann juxtaposes Hilberg with Stier and Grassler, his editing of interviews with former members of the *Sonderkommandos*

to appear alongside the interviews of German perpetrators or Polish onlookers helps construct the Manichean framework of judgment that Todorov identifies. In a sense, Lanzmann *revictimizes* his Jewish interviewees in two ways: by implying that their persecution persists through continued anti-Semitism and by pushing them to the point of emotional breakdown. The filmmaker's accumulation, selection, and juxtapositions of footage, as well as the intrusiveness of the camera, represent the former *Sonderkommando* members as permanent victims. Indeed, Brian Winston argues that the positioning of the subject as victim in certain documentary films involves the filmmaker arrogating to her or himself the authority to control the representational outcome, thereby denying the subject the "voice" that the filmmaker claims to (freely) allow.⁷⁷ This characterization of the "victimization" of subjects can be applied to Lanzmann's *Shoah*. While the scenes between Lanzmann and Hilberg are often constructed as inquisitive conversations or even lessons, Lanzmann's discussions with other witnesses, particularly former "privileged" Jews, are substantially different in their coerciveness. The filmmaker interviews several men who were former members of the *Sonderkommandos*, including Michaël Podchlebnik, Simon Srebnik, Richard Glazar, Filip Müller, and Abraham Bomba, most of whom have also testified elsewhere.⁷⁸ Lanzmann went to great lengths to obtain these witnesses, as they were for him "spokesmen of the dead."⁷⁹ When reflecting on his choice of survivors for the film, he noted that he "wanted very specific types," not because they held the kind of "privileged" positions at issue in this book, but because they "had been in the very charnel houses of the extermination, direct witnesses of the death of their people."⁸⁰ Locating these witnesses and obtaining their agreement to participate in the film proved difficult. Lanzmann stated in 1985: "The real question was to convince them to talk. This was not easy."⁸¹ An analysis of select examples serves to elucidate how Lanzmann judges former "privileged" Jews.

While claiming not to have been interested in the psychology of his witnesses,⁸² Lanzmann's treatment of survivors suggests otherwise. Early instances of this include his short exchanges with Podchlebnik, one of two survivors of the Chelmno extermination camp. The following crucial encounter takes place between Lanzmann, Podchlebnik, and a translator in one of *Shoah*'s opening scenes:

Lanzmann: What died in him in Chelmno?

Translator: Everything died. But he's only human, and he wants to live. So he must forget. He thanks God for what remains, and that he can forget. And let's not talk about that.

Lanzmann: Does he think it's good to talk about it?

Translator: For me it's not good.

Lanzmann: Then why is he talking about it?

Translator: Because you're insisting on it. He was sent books on Eichmann's trial. He was a witness, and he didn't even read them.

Lanzmann: He survived, but is he really alive, or ... ?

Translator: At the time, he felt as if he were dead, because he never thought he'd survive, but ... he's alive.

Lanzmann: Why does he smile all the time?

Translator: What do you want him to do, cry? Sometimes you smile, sometimes you cry. And if you're alive, it's better to smile.⁸³

This exchange serves to establish the filmmaker's convictions regarding testimony and (non)recovery. Lanzmann seems to assume that survivors of the *Sonderkommandos* are obligated to record—even *relive*—their experiences for posterity. The confrontational method of questioning is prolonged and exacerbated by the impersonal adoption of the third person by both filmmaker and (with one brief exception) his translator.

While Lanzmann rarely engages directly with the issue of “privilege” in relation to former *Sonderkommando* members, he persistently seeks an emotional reaction from them in his interviews. The underlying assumption being communicated here is that bearing witness is a positive—if not healing—act for the survivor, despite Podchlebnik's disagreement. While Avisar praises the “magic” of *Shoah* for visibly transforming the survivors through “emotional and mental crises,”⁸⁴ Bill Nichols's discussion of the ethics of documentary filmmaking and the limits of provocation contemplates whether viewers can assume that Lanzmann's promptings are as “therapeutic” as the filmmaker seems to suggest.⁸⁵ Indeed, scholars have noted that some survivors' re-engagement with their pasts has brought about more harm than healing.⁸⁶ That Podchlebnik's face is held in a constant close-up throughout the scene signifies the process of judgment conducted through the screened image. Under close, unrelenting examination, Podchlebnik's smile and good-humored replies become increasingly forced as he is confronted with the imperative to “relive” his victimhood.

Lanzmann's initial encounter with Podchlebnik is immediately followed by his interview with another cigarette-smoking inquirer, Hanna Zaidel, the daughter of a Holocaust survivor and the only member of the second generation portrayed in the film. Asked about her curiosity regarding her father's experiences, Zaidel states: “I never stopped questioning him, until I got at the scraps of truth he couldn't tell me

... I had to tear the details out of him."⁸⁷ The effect of this segment is to elucidate the approach that Lanzmann himself takes throughout *Shoah*, not unlike his adoption of Hilberg's philosophy of avoiding "big questions." When Podchlebnik is briefly shown again several minutes later, his smile has disappeared and the viewer can only guess at how much prodding Lanzmann has instigated before asking the question that ensures Podchlebnik breaks down. This is, apparently, the only moment worth screening. Lanzmann asks the translator: "How did he react, the first time he unloaded the corpses, when the gas van doors were opened?" While this question can be seen to indirectly point to the ethical dilemma Podchlebnik faced, the focus of Lanzmann's agenda is again on the victim's suffering, not the tasks he was forced to perform. Podchlebnik quickly loses his composure and weeps openly. Lanzmann's assistant translates as Podchlebnik testifies to his utter helplessness in broken dialogue: "What could he do? He cried. The third day he saw his wife and children. He placed his wife in the grave and asked to be killed. The Germans said he was strong enough to work, that he wouldn't be killed yet."⁸⁸ Having convinced Podchlebnik to speak about what he preferred to "not talk about," Lanzmann subsequently provokes his tears despite the survivor's conviction that "it's better to smile." The gruesome work of the *Sonderkommando* is subordinated by Lanzmann's desire to reveal (or construct) the survivor's perpetual victimhood.

Moral oppositions are implied again by Lanzmann in the second half of *Shoah* through the contrast he draws between the testimonies of Franz Suchomel, an SS *Unterscharführer* at Treblinka, and Müller and Glazar, Czech-Jewish survivors of Auschwitz and Treblinka respectively. Significantly, this section engages to some extent with the ethical dilemmas that faced "privileged" Jews, with the subject matter of the precarious existence of the *Sonderkommandos* connecting consecutive scenes.⁸⁹ The "corroboration" of the testimonies begins with Müller describing what he calls the Auschwitz *Sonderkommando*'s "crisis situation." While images of moving trains fill the screen, Müller's voice can be heard lamenting that the continued existence of the "special squads" relied on transports of victims and that "when there were fewer trainloads, it meant immediate extermination for us."⁹⁰ Then, as the camera's gaze turns to his face, Müller emphasizes with a clenched fist that the members of the *Sonderkommando* still found meaning in their dire circumstances:

With our own eyes, we could truly fathom what it means to be a human being ... the situation taught us fully what the possibility of survival meant. For we could gauge the infinite value of human life. And we were convinced that

hope lingers in man as long as he lives. Where there's life, hope must never be relinquished. That's why we struggled through our lives of hardship.⁹¹

Müller's account of the attempts by crematorium workers to come to terms with their traumatic situation points to the choiceless choices they confronted; nonetheless, the editing of Suchomel into the next scene redirects the focus back to the bifurcation of victims and perpetrators.

Suchomel admits that Treblinka's Jewish workforce was reduced once the transports decreased, with the Nazis employing starvation rather than shooting or gassing in order to discourage resistance; however, the former SS officer goes on to give a very different impression of the *Sonderkommando*'s will to live. Tapping his finger on the table as if blaming the victims, who he has just noted were dying of hunger and disease, Suchomel states: "The Jews stopped believing they'd make it... It was all over... It was all very well to say ... I ... we kept on insisting: 'You're going to live!' We almost believed it ourselves. If you lie enough, you believe your own lies. Yes. But they replied to me, 'No, chief, we're just reprieved corpses.'"⁹² This last line is even delivered with a chuckle. Lanzmann's inclusion of the perpetrator's appropriation of the "voice" of his victims positions the viewer to be repelled by the anti-Semite's efforts to absolve himself. Suchomel not only fails to reveal a conscience about (nor apparently any awareness of) how his own actions destroyed the hope he seems to value, but he also goes so far as to posit an atmosphere of camaraderie on the threshold of death. As in his interview with Stier, Lanzmann signals Suchomel's fundamental unreliability through his employment of a hidden camera. Suchomel's revealing testimony and unsympathetic body language, covertly trapped within the frame, shows that he then lacked—and continues to lack—humanity. Müller's words, on the other hand, suggest he and his fellow Jews *in extremis* discovered "what it means to be a human being," constructing a binary opposition between cold malignity and humane virtue, and thereby marginalizing the issue of "privilege."⁹³ This judgment is further reinforced in the next scene, in which Glazar briefly dwells on the ethical dilemma of his *Sonderkommando*.

Glazar describes the starving special squad's guilt-ridden relief when "transports" of Jews started arriving again at Treblinka: "Then an awful feeling gripped us, all of us, my companions as well as myself, a feeling of helplessness, of shame. For we threw ourselves on their food."⁹⁴ Lanzmann asks Glazar whether this realization of being compromised came instantly at this time, revealing the filmmaker's desire to clarify how the *Sonderkommando*'s behavior should be judged. Most significantly, Lanzmann wonders whether the relatively strong and healthy

deportees looked like “fighters.” With this inducement, Glazar almost loses his composure when he replies, “Yes, they could have been fighters.”⁹⁵ Reiterating the shame induced by the admirable qualities of the deportees completely ignorant of their fate, Glazar describes the determination of the special squad that “this couldn’t go on, that something had to happen.”⁹⁶ He then makes reference to the *Sonderkommando*’s forthcoming armed revolt, which marks the end of the scene. Lanzmann’s editing of this testimony—the last words Glazar speaks in the film—suggests that Treblinka’s “privileged” Jews had not been corrupted as they feared, but it does imply a judgment of their desire (in Glazar’s words) “to survive until the rebellion” as the height of dignity.

Reflecting Felman’s point that “to testify is always, metaphorically, to take the witness stand,”⁹⁷ Lanzmann sets the perpetrators’ ongoing anti-Semitic prejudice and deception against the stories of the victims, who painfully and truthfully—if not always willingly—“re-live” their suffering. The filmmaker’s strong desire to depict what he perceives as the “courage” and “heroism” displayed by the members of the *Sonderkommandos* is highlighted with vigor in Lanzmann’s recently published memoir, *The Patagonian Hare* (2012). Listing the names of several crematorium workers he deeply admires and providing a detailed and sympathetic account of their suffering before and during their forced labor in the gas chambers, Lanzmann writes:

The other members of the special unit who shared this Calvary with Filip Müller, noble figures, gravediggers of their own people, at once heroes and martyrs, were, like him, simple, intelligent, good men. For the most part, despite the hell of the funeral pyres and the crematoria ... they never gave up their humanity.⁹⁸

While the phrase “for the most part” seems to imply exceptions to his general rule, Lanzmann does not explore further (either in his film or his memoir) what he might mean by this. Fitting his interviews of survivors of the *Sonderkommandos* into a very specific agenda, Lanzmann engages to some degree with the extreme ethical dilemmas they faced, but only within a broader Manichean framework of judgment.

Framing “Privileged” Jews: The Construction of Authorities and Defendants in Holocaust Documentaries

The ethical dilemmas faced by “privileged” prisoners in the camps and ghettos are rarely explored in Holocaust documentaries in a substantial manner. The six-part miniseries *Hitler’s Holocaust* (2000), a film that

purports to represent the Holocaust in its totality, offers no engagement with “privileged” Jews, not even in the episode entitled “Ghetto.”⁹⁹ Likewise, despite a lengthy segment on the Lodz Ghetto in another five-hour miniseries, *The Nazis: A Warning from History* (1997), the ghetto’s infamous leader Chaim Rumkowski is not mentioned.¹⁰⁰ This is not to say that Holocaust documentaries are obligated to explore the situations of “privileged” Jews, but it is significant that coverage of them has been limited. The notion of “moral compromise” on the part of the victims of the Nazis is touched on in several works, although rarely as a central theme. While not specifically dealing with the “privileged” Jews who are the focus of this book, the film *Prisoner of Paradise* (2002) focuses on the story of how the famous German-Jewish filmmaker Kurt Geron was forced to create the Nazi propaganda film, *The Führer Gives a City to the Jews*, while incarcerated in Theresienstadt. In *Bach in Auschwitz* (1999), on the other hand, former members of the women’s orchestra in Auschwitz only briefly recount the “privileges” they received for deceiving prisoners with their music during “selections.”

Clear-cut negative judgment of “privileged” prisoners can be found in Alain Resnais’s landmark production, *Night and Fog* (1955), which persistently condemns the behavior of *Kapos*. While seldom distinguishing Jewish from non-Jewish victims in its eclectic selection of archival footage, Resnais’s mode of representation stresses the “privileges” *Kapos* were awarded for their participation in beatings and torture. While the voiceover often questions the film’s potential to capture the “reality” of the camps, the narrator emphasizes that *Kapos* were “almost always” common criminals and makes little distinction between prisoner-functionaries and perpetrators, at one point comparing the SS directly with the “privileged *Kapos*. These are the bosses of the camp, the elite.”¹⁰¹ The use of archival footage—a practice Lanzmann rejected outright—has proven a particularly powerful vehicle of expressing judgment in a number of cases, and this is no more evident than in recent productions that portray the Lodz Ghetto.

Photographer (1998) and *Lodz Ghetto* (1989) both situate the behavior of Chaim Rumkowski within broader narratives that seek to encapsulate the experiences of the doomed population of the longest-surviving ghetto. Visually speaking, the films rely on a combination of purpose-shot and archival images, including hundreds of color photographs taken during the ghetto’s existence by Walter Genewein, the ghetto’s chief accountant. The use of material originating with the Nazi perpetrators is widely considered to be problematic due to the fact it was invariably intended for propaganda purposes.¹⁰² Indeed, Dariusz Jablonski’s *Photographer* is considerably different from *Lodz Ghetto* in this respect, as

it self-consciously reveals an awareness of the artificiality of its source material and exposes the "persistent Nazi gaze" therein.¹⁰³ With little use of a guiding narrator, *Photographer* juxtaposes lingering shots of the photographs, fragments of wartime speeches and writings read out by actors, and the testimony of the film's only on-screen presence, Arnold Mostowitz, who worked as a doctor in the Lodz Ghetto and survived five concentration camps. Significantly, the film begins by questioning the reliability of the photographs. Mostowitz expresses his deep-seated "unease" that "though this was the ghetto, it was not the ghetto; though [the photographs] were real, they did not show the truth."¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, the manipulation of this same source material soon afterward has the effect of evoking judgment of Rumkowski.

At one point in *Photographer* the camera zooms in on a photograph of the Jewish leader meeting Heinrich Himmler, the head of the SS.¹⁰⁵ The image is overlaid with the reenactment of an apparently cordial conversation between the two men regarding work in the ghetto. While one might argue that the power relations of such a meeting are impossible to recreate, the exchanged words between Rumkowski and Himmler, recited by actors, seem to suggest that the film captures the situation "as it really happened." The seeming civility with which this conversation is represented on the soundtrack, which in no way acknowledges the ethical dilemma Rumkowski faced, reveals a negative judgment of the "privileged" Jew. This scenario is depicted in an almost identical manner in *Lodz Ghetto*, although the conversation is reenacted in this film with somewhat more sinister overtones and accompanied by an intense drumbeat on the soundtrack.¹⁰⁶ Both films take photographic material out of its (already questionable) context on various other occasions in order to depict a sharp rift between public statements made by Rumkowski and the conditions suffered by the inhabitants of the ghetto.

The use of archival footage and authoritative voiceover are only two ways in which Holocaust documentaries may judge "privileged" Jews, as the construction of various subject positions within a film's narrative often orient the viewer in similar ways. The positioning of "witnesses," "defendants," "authorities," and "evidence" within the frame is crucial to how some filmmakers have represented (and judged) "privileged" Jews. In Josh Waletzky's *Partisans of Vilna*, conventional techniques are employed in a much more subtle manner than in many other documentaries; nonetheless, the film's attention to the issue of "privileged" Jews is relatively short and somewhat overshadowed by its main focus on resistance fighters.¹⁰⁷ Through the filmmaker's editing technique, several often-conflicting fragments of testimony from various individuals describe Jacob Gens, the chief of the Jewish police in the Vilna Ghetto.

These fragments range from acknowledging the ways in which Gens aided the partisans, to admitting the difficult situation he faced, to highlighting the ambivalent attitudes of members of the Resistance toward Gens's controversial activities. By juxtaposing contradictory viewpoints (and judgments), the film gives the impression that a final judgment, if any can be made, is either unattainable or, at the very least, should be left for the viewer to make. As the film also reveals the impossible ethical dilemmas that confronted members of the partisans, it might be argued that it presents no final authority on the subject of Gens's behavior. Ben Smith has praised *Partisans of Vilna* for "not taking up an obvious position" on whether "collaboration" or resistance was preferable.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, Waletzky's use of multiple viewpoints bears similarities to Lanzmann's method of juxtaposing different perspectives on the role of Czerniakow, further revealing that documentary film has the potential to provide a nuanced representation of "privileged" Jews.¹⁰⁹

Ewout van der Knaap seems to touch on this point when he notes that the "black and white" representation of prisoner-functionaries in *Night and Fog* contrasts strongly with *Kapo*, which he argues depicts "privileged" prisoners "with shades of gray": "Here, in a situation of oppression, the ethics of survival are arbitrary."¹¹⁰ However, while the portrayal of "privileged" Jews in *Kapo* often entails less explicit judgments than those put forward in *Night and Fog*, the mode of representation in the former film still reveals a distinct process of moral evaluation. Very little has been written about Ben-Mayor and Setton's *Kapo*, which is generally relegated to a footnote;¹¹¹ nonetheless, the similarities and differences between *Kapo* and Lanzmann's *Shoah* serve to further highlight the possibilities for, and limits of, representing the ethical complexities facing Holocaust victims *in extremis*.

From the Legal to the Moral: Jewish "Collaborators" in Kapo

Although Israeli cinema initially ignored the Holocaust to a large extent, a spate of documentaries on the subject emerged from the late-1980s dealing with issues of the second generation, postmemory, and identity.¹¹² Amidst this development, *Kapo* drew on Israel's so-called "Kapo Trials" (discussed in the introduction) to focus specifically on the behavior and judgments of "privileged" Jews. Despite such an explicit undertaking, *Kapo* does not subscribe to Levi's pronouncement on the need to suspend judgment. In its portrayal of "privileged" Jews and the postwar attempts to prosecute them, the film's preoccupation with legal judgment hastily transforms into a moral evaluation of its subjects.¹¹³

Standing in stark contrast to Lanzmann's dialogic approach to representing the Holocaust, *Kapo*'s expository strategies involve the use of traditional documentary devices to engage directly with the problem of what is frequently termed Jewish "collaboration."

Various stylistic features serve to bolster the film's assertive stance in relation to liminal figures. The narrative in *Kapo* begins by contextualizing its investigation within the volatile postwar environment in Israel and then branches off to several "case studies" of former "privileged" Jews, first in the ghettos and then in the camps. Fragments of contemporary interviews filmed in Germany, Poland, Israel, and Australia are interspersed with archival documents, photographs, and film footage to develop a narrative that encompasses acts of seeming "complicity" and "resistance" on the part of several women who had held various positions in Auschwitz and a former member of the Jewish police who refused to be interviewed.¹¹⁴ In addition to the testimony of former "privileged" Jews, further on-screen interviews are given by carefully chosen authorities, including Holocaust survivors who did not hold a "privileged" position but who have firsthand knowledge relating to those under scrutiny; the retired Israeli Supreme Court judge Haim Cohen; and Michael Gilad, a survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau and former war crimes investigator. Whereas the plurality of perspectives portrayed through Lanzmann's positioning of Hilberg and Grassler provides a multilayered representation of the figure of the "privileged" Jew, the views espoused by authority figures in *Kapo* are never challenged through the film's other devices.

Unlike Lanzmann's unconventional mode of representation, *Kapo* is permeated by an authoritative voiceover narration. This constitutes the central technique of a "conventional" or "expository" documentary film that ties all of its other attributes together and guides the viewer to adopt the text's ideological stance. Nichols states that "the adoption of direct address has run the perennial risk of dogmatism, using the voice of a commentator to authoritatively, if not authoritarily, assert what is, and what is not, the case."¹¹⁵ The advantage of direct representation that Nichols notes, namely "analytical precision," would seem to be of limited value if attempting to negotiate the ethical dilemmas of "privileged" Jews. The use of narrative voiceover in *Kapo* is complemented by the notable absence of any of the filmmakers' questions during the interview fragments it includes. This contrasts strongly with the constantly visible and audible impact that Lanzmann's dominant persona has on *Shoah*. Ben-Mayor and Setton's less interactive mode of representation has significant implications for the ways in which former "privileged" Jews are judged in the film.¹¹⁶

Despite the problematic nature of the Kapo Trials, the film's "omniscient" narrator seldom reflects on their validity, nor is the use of the term "collaboration" questioned. The constantly deep, assertive tone of the voiceover is always intense, never sympathetic, and adds to the impression that judgment can—and *must*—be passed. Even when defining the term *Kapo*, the narrator appears to be making a moral pronouncement, loudly declaring that they inhabited "the lowest rung on the Nazi ladder of command. Either voluntarily or by force, the *Kapos* were made the instruments of the Nazis, those who delivered the terror, deprivation, slave labor and, ultimately, death to the prisoners."¹¹⁷ The archival photographs selected to follow this, including an image of two Nazis torturing a prisoner and several shots of starved victims after liberation, bear little connection to "privileged" Jews but reveal a clear process of judgment taking place. After a brief summary of the Kapo Trials, the camera scans over numerous court transcripts. These scenes occur at frequent intervals throughout *Kapo* and are displayed with overlapping excerpts being read out by actors via voiceover, usually regarding alleged acts of brutality by *Kapos* during the war. This repeated motif not only serves to make negative judgments, but also creates the impression that the problem of Jewish "collaboration" has a particularly wide scope.

Within the film's first five minutes, attention turns to one of its major case studies, Zvi Hanek Barenblat, the former chief of the Jewish police in the Bedzin Ghetto. Through the use of a musical score evoking suspense and horror, the film represents Barenblat's denunciation, arrest, and trial as a dramatic series of events. Reuban Vaxelmann, a survivor of the Bedzin Ghetto and Barenblat's sole accuser in *Kapo*, had testified at Barenblat's trial and is consequently used as a "witness" in the film. The inclusion and framing of Vaxelmann using an almost legalistic discourse implies judgment in itself. Additionally, rather than focus on an account of Barenblat's behavior, *Kapo* prioritizes Vaxelmann's description of his emotional reaction at just hearing Barenblat's name: "I started trembling, the hair on my hands stood up, and I lost control." The misleading use of archival footage is also evident when a film fragment is included of a member of the Jewish police strolling past two naked corpses in a street. The images used originate from a Nazi propaganda film of the Warsaw Ghetto, thus *Kapo* imposes the perpetrators' perspective on—and judgment of—Jews onto the viewer. Further to this, immediately after a passage is recited from Calel Perechodnik's diary regarding the impossible situation facing "privileged" Jews in the ghettos, Vaxelmann is portrayed soberly condemning them for their access to material "privileges": "The policemen and the different collaborators

had fantastic conditions. They had unlimited food and no restrictions on their movements.”

Only after these elements of *Kapo* are woven together in a blanket of judgment does the film return to Barenblat's story (and its intimidating musical score). The narrator points out that the Nazis *randomly* appointed all members of the local orchestra, of which Barenblat was the conductor, to be Jewish police, although the effect of this revelation is arguably lost due to the scenes preceding it. Significantly, *Kapo* gives no indication that during Barenblat's 1961 trial, his prosecutor conceded that he had saved between ten and twenty Jews.¹¹⁸ After Vaxelmann is shown emphasizing the fear other Jews had of Barenblat, Gilad authoritatively underlines his judgment: "Under such circumstances some have moral integrity and stand by their principles. And others simply ... turn into creatures who would do anything to survive." As Gilad raises his finger and repeats "Anything," the camera returns to images of starving children and corpses in the Warsaw Ghetto. Just as Vaxelmann's role as "witness" is prioritized, the positioning of Gilad in relation to "privileged" Jews points to another key facet of the film's mode of judgment, namely its construction of a binary opposition between "authorities" and "defendants."

Whereas Lanzmann concentrates his attention in much of the editing process on setting victims against persecutors, the filmmakers of *Kapo* stress the distinction between "privileged" and "non-privileged" prisoners in the camps and ghettos, placing significantly limited emphasis on the role of the Nazi perpetrators. Gilad is established as a moral authority throughout his several appearances in *Kapo*. One of only three survivors in the film who did not hold a "privileged" position, his testimony is of crucial importance, serving to guide the viewer's judgment(s). In his first scene, after the narrator clarifies the role of "privileged" Jews in the ghettos, Gilad delivers a general statement that may be seen to apply more broadly to the camps as well:

Nobody knew what could happen in five minutes time. So it's hard to say ... Most of the people with positions were chosen at random. It's true that those selected could have refused. Refused and maybe paid for it with their lives. Still, it was possible. Those willing to sacrifice their lives for their principles did not have to accept the position.

Seated in front of a wall stacked with rows of books, Gilad appears in a considerably more studious setting than other interviewees. The nature of his judgment is clear in his emphatic tone and the authoritative way in which he raises his hand when declaring it was possible (and preferable) to "sacrifice" one's life and refuse "privilege." While he also

concedes that “it’s hard to say,” or, in other words, “difficult to judge,” this and subsequent appearances by Gilad confirm that he is capable of judgment, a point sustained throughout the film by his continued input during the examination of specific “privileged” Jews.

During the brief appearance of another authority, Judge Cohen, who had presided over some of the Israeli trials of former “privileged” Jews, *Kapo* seems on the verge of suggesting that judgment of these liminal figures should be suspended. Toward the end of the film, a contemplative Cohen delivers this pivotal statement:

I could not escape the feeling that we are not at all able to judge these people, or even to put ourselves in their shoes, as one must do to judge someone. If a person acts under the threat of death to himself or his children [*sic*], solidarity with others doesn’t come into the equation. His solidarity is first of all to himself and his children. It’s not only natural but also moral and permissible. I had sleepless nights for over a year. I sometimes felt ... great pity for the person I had to judge and accuse. But sometimes I was also disgusted.

Here Cohen seems to acknowledge the impossibility of judgment but is simultaneously compelled to pass it; his final admission that he could not help but be “disgusted” suggests that he may be, like Levi, caught in a paradox of judgment. While Cohen implies that “privileged” Jews should be pitied for being forced into extreme situations, he also suggests that one cannot resist being repulsed at times by their behavior. Cohen’s verdict on judgment is, in any case, surrounded by a plethora of evidence that the “privileged” Jews depicted in *Kapo* are subject to a process of moral evaluation, developed in part through the editing of interviews with several survivors who are essentially placed “on trial.”

The filmmakers’ positioning of former “privileged” Jews as “defendants” is revealed most clearly in the representation of Magda Hellinger, a Czech Jew who at one point became responsible for 30,000 women as *Lagerälteste* [Camp Eldest] of the Women’s Camp in Birkenau. Hellinger held the (notably low) prisoner number of 2318 and survived three and a half years in Auschwitz. *Kapo*’s overwhelming focus on Hellinger’s experiences as a “privileged” Jew is significant, as this marginalizes her experiences as a prisoner before and after her “privileged” period, which are detailed in her memoir.¹¹⁹ Barely surviving both malaria and paratyphus, Hellinger narrowly escaped several “selections” and was even pulled from a line heading for the gas chamber. In her memoir and the video testimony she recorded for the Jewish Holocaust Centre in Melbourne, Australia, Hellinger represents herself as consistently generous, self-sacrificing, and protective of others.¹²⁰ Reportedly held in high esteem by the camp’s Resistance, she describes her situation as

"fight[ing] a daily battle to save the lives of fellow prisoners of war."¹²¹ During her nearly six-hour-long video testimony, Hellinger speaks with an invariably relaxed, even tone, often gentle expression, and occasionally humorous engagement with her interviewers.

In *Kapo*, Hellinger is presented to the viewer with what seems to be a very different persona. At one point she sternly explains her willingness to punish those beneath her if they did not meet her expectations: "I was very strict, to myself and to others." Delivering her statements in an increasingly aggressive voice and pointing her finger at the interviewer at times, Hellinger exhibits a somewhat unfriendly disposition. It is also noteworthy that during this scene, the footage of Hellinger speaking is bisected with archival footage of female prisoners calmly conversing in a barrack, images obviously filmed after the war. In this way, the film not only ignores the extreme environment in which "privileged" Jews operated, but implicitly dilutes it. On the other hand, Hellinger is shown recounting how she "suffered" from being utterly helpless during Mengele's "selections." Notably, this is preceded by the sole instance when Gilad expresses doubt in his ability to judge. Reflecting on whether a member of the *Sonderkommando* could have shouted a warning to Jews on the unloading ramp, he sincerely concludes: "How could he have helped us by doing it? I don't know. I simply don't know." Echoing this, Hellinger asks: "How could I stop it, I thought. How could I stop it? I can't!" Yet there is a strong dissonance between such moments and the means by which the filmmakers proceed to depict victim behavior *in extremis*.

Later in *Kapo*, Hellinger recounts with apparent satisfaction how she quelled the "brewing" of a group of prisoners by using the threat of physical violence. She follows this with a description of the personal consequences of her "privileged" position: "It sounded [as if] I am so strong, and you know, I was showing so strong [*sic*]. But when I came home, in my room, then I cried, and I cried ... and I cried." An emotional Hellinger seems on the point of losing her composure in this shot's final moment; however, the film immediately cuts to footage of Auschwitz, including what appears to be the corpse of a child. Interestingly, while Lanzmann prioritizes—and actively seeks—the emotional breakdown of former "privileged" Jews, Ben-Mayor and Setton move away from this. Instead, the narrator of *Kapo* reflects on Hellinger's situation:

But was it truly essential at the threshold of death to maintain order and obedience? We will never know. In hindsight, it appears that manipulating Jews to collaborate in return for their lives was yet another component in the Nazi plan to rid Europe of its Jews. In reality, apart from a few insignificant attempts to rebel, the camp's routine continued uninterrupted.

Despite the narrator's significant—though somewhat ironically spoken—statement that “we will never know,” subsequent observations seem to imply that there were options other than “collaboration.” Indeed, the narrator's reference to the need “to maintain order and obedience” distracts from the reason why “privileged” Jews behaved as they did: to attempt to survive. The narrator's comment might almost be seen as transferring the desire to maintain camp discipline from the Nazi perpetrators to the prisoner-functionaries they coerced into obeying *them*.

Judgment is also brought to bear on Hellinger after she finishes her story, via the film's reintroduction of Vaxelmann. Until now only used as a witness to Barenblat's behavior, which he witnessed firsthand, Vaxelmann is now positioned as an authority qualified to make an unchallenged judgment on “privileged” Jews in general. His aggressive pronouncement, echoing Arendt's criticism of the role of Jewish leaders (see the introduction), can be seen to constitute the film's climax: “Today, more than ever, I'm convinced that without the collaboration of Jews they wouldn't have succeeded in murdering six million Jews.” The film now fades to black and cuts to footage of the liberation, signaling the end of the section on wartime experiences. While *Kapo* engages to some degree with the problem of judgment, the film's clear argumentative thrust frequently conveys negative judgments of former “privileged” Jews. Having established the defendants and authorities, the film's denouement clarifies the filmmakers' judgments by constructing a moral spectrum not unlike that seen in the writings of Levi and Hilberg.

The final section of *Kapo* highlights the lynchings and mock trials of “collaborators” in the war's aftermath, before it returns to the trials in Israel with which the film began. The narrator recounts the various convictions of Jewish “collaborators” without criticism, including Barenblat's sentence of five years imprisonment, which was later overturned. Vaxelmann delivers his final, emotional verdict: “There is no forgiveness. There is no resurrection.” The demonization of Barenblat is further reinforced when the filmmakers go in search of the former “privileged” Jew, who has remarried and moved to Germany. Footage is shown from a moving car that seems to be seeking him out. At the same time, the authoritative voiceover declares: “To this day, Barenblat refuses to make any reference to his past. He leads a quiet life and asked not to be interviewed for this film.” Just as this sentence begins, the camera zooms in on a building window, showing the back of an old man reading a newspaper. The invasive shot of this figure, presumably Barenblat, implies that this “privileged” Jew has an obligation to testify and has failed to do so. Arguably, as he is not willing to subject himself to the scrutiny of the camera, Barenblat is subjected to moral condemnation.

The "defendants" who have testified throughout *Kapo* fare better on the film's moral spectrum. Unlike Barenblat, these individuals are referred to by their first names and are shown relaxed in their homes. As the film's musical score comes to a halt, Vera Alexander, a former Auschwitz prisoner-functionary who was responsible for a prisoner barrack, is shown peacefully tending her garden at her home in Israel. Nonetheless, in the narrator's ironic observation that Alexander "does not see a moral problem in the fact that she held a position in the camps," there seems to be a suggestion that there *is* a moral problem—and one that should be recognized. In the next frame, Alexander is shown sitting in her house. Clearly annoyed, Alexander tells the interviewer: "No, it wasn't the power. I don't know. Today I don't know what it is. This passion to live. *To live.*" After Alexander stresses the last phrase, the camera lingers on her while she calmly smokes a cigarette. This scene illustrates the crucial importance of the filmmakers' questions being left out of the final cut. From Alexander's attitude toward the unseen interviewer(s) and because of the initial words she uses to attempt to explain her motivation—"No, it wasn't the power"—it is evident that she has been asked a particularly loaded question. While Lanzmann's provocation of emotional responses from former "privileged" Jews is shown on-screen, this process is disguised in *Kapo* behind a curtain of silence and anonymity.

The viewer is positioned to be similarly discomfited by the final appearance of Hellinger, who, according to the voiceover, to this day "justifies her life story on that far planet called Auschwitz." An intrusive humming sound is heard on the soundtrack as the former *Lagerälteste* polishes ornaments in a cabinet, which might be viewed as an implicit reference to the material benefits that Hellinger had access to in Auschwitz due to her "privileged" position. The camera then captures her final, intensely spoken words in a close-up: "I feel that I was chosen by fate, chosen by fate, to save, to help ... by every step [that] I did [*sic*]." The omission of any context for this claim—we do not hear the interviewer's comments or questions—again has implications for how judgment is passed. However one interprets the statement made by Hellinger, the inclusion of it in *Kapo* without any acknowledgment of her numerous recollections of saving prisoners, as recorded in her memoir and video testimony, reveals that the film positions her claim to come across as ludicrous.

The next scene represents Francis Kousal, who also held a "privileged" position in Auschwitz, in a completely different manner from the previous portrayals of Barenblat, Alexander, and Hellinger. Judgment of Kousal is passed primarily through the depiction of her present-day

friendship with Thea Kimla, a “non-privileged” prisoner who had been in the barrack that Kousal had supervised. The camera tracks Kimla and Kousal as they walk down a busy commercial street, chatting happily with each other. The narrator states in a calmer tone than is generally used in the film’s voiceover that while “Francis was neither questioned nor tried for her conduct during the war ... Thea chose to forgive, and despite the vast difference in status, Thea, a common prisoner, and Francis, a block commander, became close friends.” Seated in another domestic setting, an emotional Kimla is shown describing what she terms the “spark of life” that drove prisoners in the camp to survive and her perception of Kousal during her incarceration: “Everybody, including myself, did anything to survive. I knew she was a prisoner like I was, so I didn’t blame her that she took a position, because she wanted to survive—which I could very well understand.” Kousal, who is shown sitting on a nearby sofa and humbly listening to Kimla’s words, is redeemed through her friend’s testimony.¹²² The authoritative narrator’s unambiguous pronouncement that “Thea chose to forgive” explicitly reinforces this judgment.

The last word on “privileged” Jews in *Kapo* is given to the authority Gilad, who represents himself almost as a historian in his own right: “And I keep on researching this period and the more I research ... the less I understand. I’m glad about one thing, that I myself didn’t lose my human dignity. And that I did not lose faith in humanity, although I came very close.” Gilad’s final words progress from showing visible sorrow that a full understanding of the time cannot be obtained to expressing relief that conventional notions of dignity and humanity remain intact. This may be seen to reflect the findings of the film as a whole. Although *Kapo* seems to question the possibility of judgment through the inclusion of Cohen’s reflections (as noted earlier), this is overwhelmed by the adoption of a redemptory discourse that positions the film’s case studies along a moral spectrum. While Lanzmann’s multifaceted involvement in *Shoah* produces a more reflexive process that seems to entail the possibility of suspending judgment at times, *Kapo*’s linear structure, manipulative musical score and direct, unquestioning mode of expository address result in clear-cut judgments, casting aside the ethical uncertainty to which the film briefly refers.

In their efforts to bridge history and witness testimony with the medium of film, documentary filmmakers have utilized numerous means of representing the Holocaust. In some ways, the exposure of the image through the camera can be seen to offer a heightened potential for providing a nuanced representation of “privileged” Jews; nonetheless, the preceding analysis of the discursive differences between *Shoah* and

other documentaries highlights the distinct ways in which the problem of judgment informs—and is informed by—the genre. Situated between the conventional narrative tropes common to fiction films and the direct, expository address most often adopted in documentaries, Lanzmann's editing technique serves not to create a coherent whole but to construct paradigmatic relations between two groups, namely victims and perpetrators. On the other hand, the editing of interviews and archival material in *Kapo* often sets "privileged" and "non-privileged" victims against one another. Indeed, judgment may be seen as intrinsic to the interview process itself, which Nichols describes as "a form of hierarchical discourse deriving from the unequal distribution of power, as in the confessional and the interrogation."¹²³ While the interview process in *Kapo* is markedly rigid, the internal structuring and comparative openness of *Shoah* allows for Hilberg's judgment of Czerniakow to be exposed and challenged.

Overall, the documentary films analyzed here offer only limited awareness of—and insight into—the indecipherable realm of Levi's grey zone. Yet this has not always been the case in the genre of fiction film. Through substituting "real" people with fictionalized characters, some fiction filmmakers self-consciously engage with the problem of judgment in relation to "privileged" Jews. Indeed, when taking into account the significant differences between the traditional documentary format and Lanzmann's conceptualization of his interviewees as "actors," it would seem logical that fiction films would employ very different modalities when representing liminal figures. The final substantive chapter will examine what implications the limit of judgment has for Holocaust fiction films and what potential the films of this genre have to suspend judgment of "privileged" Jews.

Notes

1. Stuart Liebman, "Introduction," in *Claude Lanzmann's Shoah: Key Essays*, ed. Stuart Liebman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.
2. John K. Roth, "Raul Hilberg's 'Minutiae': Their Impact on Philosophical and Religious Inquiries After Auschwitz," in Pacy and Wertheimer, *Perspectives on the Holocaust*, 167.
3. James McEnteer, *Shooting the Truth: The Rise of American Political Documentaries* (Westport: Praeger, 2006), xv. For further discussion of the documentary audience's "sense of the real," see Guynn, *A Cinema of Nonfiction*, 224.
4. Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows*, 240.
5. See Raye Farr, "Some Reflections on Claude Lanzmann's Approach to the Examination of the Holocaust," in Haggith and Newman, *Holocaust and the Moving Image*,

162. Sara Horowitz has noted that *Shoah* lies “outside the conventional boundaries of both art and historical writing.” Sara R. Horowitz, “Auto/Biography and Fiction after Auschwitz: Probing the Boundaries of Second-Generation Aesthetics,” in Sicher, *Breaking Crystal*, 281. For a detailed discussion of the tension between fiction and documentary in relation to *Shoah*, see Bryan Burns, “Fiction of the Real: *Shoah* and Documentary,” in Vice, *Representing the Holocaust*.
6. Another film directly confronting this subject, Gaylen Ross’s *Killing Kasztner* (2008), was yet to be commercially released at the time of writing.
 7. While I generally comment on the camerawork and editing as Lanzmann’s, it should be noted that other individuals also played a role.
 8. Liebman, “Introduction,” 8.
 9. *Ibid.*, 10, 21n.29.
 10. Claude Lanzmann, “From the Holocaust to ‘Holocaust,’” in Liebman, *Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah*, 28.
 11. Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah: The Complete Text of the Acclaimed Holocaust Film* (New York: Da Capo, [1985] 1995), 3. As the published transcript’s renderings of the film’s English dialogue are occasionally different from that spoken in the film, I will sometimes reference the latter. Unless otherwise indicated, I rely on the written text for other languages, as its translations are generally an improvement on the film’s subtitles.
 12. Marc Chevrie and Hervé Le Roux, “Site and Speech: An Interview with Claude Lanzmann about *Shoah*,” in Liebman, *Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah*, 41.
 13. See Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man; and, The Truce*, trans. Stuart Woolf (London: Abacus, [1979] 1995), 35. For Lanzmann’s own elaboration on this, see Claude Lanzmann, “*Hier ist kein Warum* [Here there is no why]” in Liebman, *Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah*.
 14. For example, the interviewing practices in Marcel Ophüls’s *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1969) and complex construction of time in Alain Resnais’s *Night and Fog* (1955) may be seen as precursors to Lanzmann’s film. For further discussion, see Hirsch, *Afterimage*, 64–74; Ilan Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema’s Image of the Unimaginable* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 30–31. Hirsch also points to the re-creation of past environments to elicit testimony in Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch’s *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961).
 15. Claude Lanzmann, Ruth Larson, and David Rodowick, “Seminar with Claude Lanzmann, 11 April 1990,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 79 (1991): 96–97. For further discussion, see Farr, “Some Reflections on Claude Lanzmann’s Approach,” 162–63. In his recent autobiography, Lanzmann writes that due partly to its lack of narrative voiceover, *Shoah* “defies and eludes the categories of documentary [and] fiction.” See Claude Lanzmann, *The Patagonian Hare: A Memoir*, trans. Frank Wynne (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, [2009] 2012), 490.
 16. See, for example, Claude Lanzmann, “Raul Hilberg, Actor in *Shoah*,” in Pacy and Wertheimer, *Perspectives on the Holocaust: Essays in Honor of Raul Hilberg*.
 17. Quoted in André Pierre Colombat, *The Holocaust in French Film* (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1993), 307. For discussions of Lanzmann’s selective representation of Poles and the ensuing scandal, see Jean-Charles Szurek, “*Shoah*: From the Jewish Question to the Polish Question,” in Liebman, *Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah*; Wladyslaw T. Bartoszewski, *The Convent at Auschwitz* (London: Bowerdean, 1990), 21–27.
 18. Shoshana Felman, “The Return of the Voice: Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*,” in Felman and Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing*, 206 (author’s emphasis).
 19. Lanzmann, Larson, and Rodowick, “Seminar with Claude Lanzmann, 11 April 1990,” 89–90.
 20. Quoted in Chevrie and Roux, “Site and Speech,” 43.

21. See, for example, Omer Bartov, *Murder in Our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 172–73.
22. Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah* (United States: New Yorker Films, [1985] 2003), DVD, disc 4, chapter 9; disc 2, chapter 7. Lanzmann also walks along in front of the camera with several of his witnesses. See, for example, Lanzmann, *Shoah*, disc 1 chapters 4, 9 and 42. Stuart Liebman writes that Lanzmann is “the audience’s testy surrogate; the mediator of the conversations he conducts; a questing, questioning hero seeking truth, always persistent, sometimes exasperating, often ironic or condescending, or all of these simultaneously.” Liebman, “Introduction,” 18.
23. For further discussion, see Felman, “The Return of the Voice,” 216–20.
24. Yosefa Loshitzky, “Holocaust Others: Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* versus Lanzmann’s *Shoah*,” in Loshitzky, *Speilberg’s Holocaust*, 115.
25. See, Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 2nd ed., ix; Dominick LaCapra, “Lanzmann’s *Shoah*: ‘Here There Is No Why,’” in Liebman, *Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah*, 216.
26. Lanzmann expresses gratitude to Bauer in his introduction to the DVD. See Lanzmann, *Shoah*, disc 1, chapter 1.
27. Felman, “The Return of the Voice,” 213.
28. Lanzmann, *Shoah*, disc 2, chapter 6.
29. For a detailed account of Lanzmann’s obsessive “war against the question why,” see Ron Rosenbaum, *Explaining Hitler: The Search for the Origins of His Evil* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 251–76.
30. Lanzmann, *Shoah*, disc 3, chapter 11.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Lanzmann posed as a historian and offered money for his interviews of perpetrators. See Colombat, *The Holocaust in French Film*, 98.
33. Lanzmann, *Shoah*, disc 3, chapters 10–11.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Lanzmann, “Raul Hilberg, Actor in *Shoah*,” 187. In 1987, Lanzmann stated that he chose Hilberg “so that he will incarnate a dead man, even though I had someone alive who had been a director of the ghetto.” Quoted in Felman, “The Return of the Voice,” 216. Another Jewish leader is briefly portrayed by proxy in the interview with Jan Karski. See Lanzmann, *Shoah*, disc 4, chapter 7.
36. Stefan Grisseemann, “Between Hammer and Anvil,” in *Jewish News from Austria* (22 October 2007). For more on Lanzmann’s reasons for excluding certain testimonies, see Jonathan Davis, “Lanzmann in Oxford,” in Davis, *Film, History and the Jewish Experience*, 50–51. The transcript of Marmelstein’s interview is located in the Steven Spielberg Archive at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, and Lanzmann’s complete footage as it stood before the editing process is now available for viewing. Lanzmann used other interviews not included in *Shoah* to make *Un Vivant Qui Passe* [A visitor from the living] (1999) and *Sobibor, 14 Octobre 1943, 16 Heures* [Sobibor, 14 October, 1943, 4 p.m.] (2001).
37. For this thirty-nine-minute section, see Lanzmann, *Shoah*, disc 4, chapters 8–16.
38. Jack Kuper, *A Day in the Warsaw Ghetto, 19.9.41: A Birthday Trip into Hell* (Australia: Makor Library, 1991), off-air videorecording.
39. Lanzmann, *Shoah*, Disc 4, Chapter 9.
40. Hilberg, Staron, and Kermisz, *The Warsaw Diary of Adam Czerniakow*, 67.
41. Lanzmann, *Shoah*, disc 4, chapter 9.
42. Hilberg also subsequently points out two of Czerniakow’s vignettes portraying “dignity” and “virtue” displayed by Jews, suggesting that Czerniakow himself possessed these qualities, which he obviously admires. See *ibid.*, disc 4, chapters 9 and 11.
43. Raul Hilberg, “The Ghetto as a Form of Government,” in Marrus, *The Nazi Holocaust*, 186.

44. Lanzmann, *Shoah*, disc 4, chapter 11. Abraham Ganzweich (Gancwajch) was a particularly controversial figure in the Warsaw Ghetto, who founded the much-criticized “Group Thirteen” organisation, which consisted of several hundred officers and became engaged in a power struggle with the ghetto’s *Judenrat*.
45. *Ibid.*, disc 4, chapter 13 (my emphasis).
46. *Ibid.*
47. Hilberg, “The Ghetto as a Form of Government,” 186.
48. Lanzmann, *Shoah*, disc 4, chapter 13 (my emphasis).
49. See *ibid.*, disc 4, chapter 11.
50. *Ibid.*
51. It should be noted here that Treblinka was the primary destination for Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto.
52. Lanzmann, *Shoah*, disc 4, chapter 13.
53. Hilberg praises the diary in an earlier scene as a “window through which we can observe a Jewish community in the terminal hours of its life, a dying community.” See *ibid.*, disc 4, chapter 9.
54. *Ibid.*, disc 4, chapter 13.
55. *Ibid.*, disc 4, chapter 15 (my emphasis).
56. *Ibid.* (my emphasis).
57. *Ibid.*, disc 4, chapters 2 and 4.
58. See Jacob Sloan, ed., *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto: The Journal of Emanuel Ringelblum* (New York: Schocken, 1974), 316; Marek Edelman, *The Ghetto Fights* (London: Bookmarks, [1945] 1994), 56.
59. Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*, 86.
60. Many thanks to Pam Maclean for pointing this out.
61. Felman, “The Return of the Voice,” 213 (author’s emphasis).
62. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 43.
63. Colombat, *The Holocaust in French Film*, 332.
64. Lanzmann, *Shoah: The Complete Text*, 162.
65. *Ibid.*, 171.
66. For details, see Hilberg, “The Ghetto as a Form of Government,” 187–92. Here, Hilberg even labels the ghettos as “self-destructive machinery.”
67. Lanzmann, *Shoah: The Complete Text*, 173.
68. *Ibid.*, 177.
69. Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust*, 27.
70. *Ibid.*, 25.
71. Todorov, *Facing the Extreme*, 276.
72. *Ibid.*, 273 (author’s emphasis).
73. *Ibid.*, 275.
74. Quoted in Gertrud Koch, “The Aesthetic Transformation of the Image of the Unimaginable: Notes on Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*,” in Liebman, *Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah*, 126 (author’s emphasis).
75. See Mariane Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, “Gendered Translations: Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*,” in *Gendering War Talk*, eds. Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 10; LaCapra, “Lanzmann’s *Shoah*,” 214. Likewise, Ron Rosenbaum criticizes Lanzmann’s “unquestioning adoption ... of the point of view of an inmate witness who survived by keeping fellow Jews about to be murdered in the dark—that raised questions in my mind about his judgment.” Rosenbaum, *Explaining Hitler*, 252.
76. Quoted in Colombat, *The Holocaust in French Film*, 115 (my emphasis).
77. For further discussion, see the chapter entitled “Poor, Suffering Characters: Victims and Problem Moments,” in Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), 40–47.

78. Rudolf Vrba, another important interviewee in *Shoah*, also occupied a somewhat "privileged" position in Auschwitz before his escape from the camp. Podchlebnik, Srebnik, and Vrba testified at the Eichmann trial. Glazar's account is central to Gitta Sereny, *Into That Darkness: From Mercy Killing to Mass Murder* (London: Pimlico, [1974] 1995). See also Richard Glazar, *Trap with a Green Fence: Survival in Treblinka*, trans. Roslyn Theobald (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995); Rudolf Vrba, *I Escaped from Auschwitz* (London: Robson, [1963] 2006); Müller, *Auschwitz Inferno*.
79. Lanzmann, Larson, and Rodowick, "Seminar with Claude Lanzmann, 11 April 1990," 99.
80. Chevrie and Roux, "Site and Speech," 38.
81. Quoted in Felman, "The Return of the Voice," 251n.28. Lanzmann has recounted trying repeatedly to convince a former member of an Auschwitz *Sonderkommando* to testify but did not succeed before the survivor died. See Chevrie and Roux, "Site and Speech," 45.
82. See Rosenbaum, *Explaining Hitler*, 261.
83. Lanzmann, *Shoah: The Complete Text*, 4-5; Lanzmann, *Shoah*, disc 1, chapter 6. Both texts are cited here, as each omits some key words.
84. Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust*, 27.
85. Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 46. Nichols notes that there is nonetheless an element of "honesty" in that Lanzmann reveals the processes of information retrieval, from which the audience can weigh the gains against the costs. Janet Walker also defends Lanzmann's "integrity as filmmaker and historian" in this regard. See Walker, *Trauma Cinema*, 135.
86. William B. Helmreich, *Against All Odds: Holocaust Survivors and the Successful Lives They Made in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 224.
87. Lanzmann, *Shoah: The Complete Text*, 5.
88. *Ibid.*, 7.
89. See Lanzmann, *Shoah*, disc 3, chapters 12-14. The communication of judgment through this editing technique is also evident in Podchlebnik's final appearance, which is preceded by Lanzmann's interview with a perpetrator, the naïve and probably dishonest Franz Schalling (a former police guard at Chelmno), and followed by the prejudiced Frau Michelson, an evasive German settler in Chelmno. See *ibid.*, disc 2, chapters 7-9. See also the direct (re-)victimization of Srebnik, who Lanzmann surrounds with Polish villagers in Chelmno who express anti-Semitic views as they crowd around him. Lanzmann, *Shoah*, disc 3, chapter 26.
90. Lanzmann, *Shoah: The Complete Text*, 135.
91. *Ibid.*
92. *Ibid.*, 136.
93. As further evidence of the importance of such contrasts for an understanding of the film's judgments, Lanzmann has declared off camera: "I think that one has to compare the deep humanity, the compassion of the Jews of the *Sonderkommando* toward the people who were about to die, with the [throat-cutting] gesture of the Poles, which I am utterly convinced is not a gesture of warning." Lanzmann, Larson, and Rodowick, "Seminar with Claude Lanzmann, 11 April 1990," 86.
94. Lanzmann, *Shoah: The Complete Text*, 137.
95. *Ibid.*
96. *Ibid.*, 137-38. Curiously, after emotion does creep into Glazar's voice, the camera cuts away to a scenic shot, perhaps because he did not break into tears as other *Sonderkommando* members do in the film.
97. Felman, "The Return of the Voice," 204.
98. Lanzmann, *The Patagonian Hare*, 28.

99. Ralf Piechovak, *Hitler's Holocaust* (Australia: Siren Visual Entertainment, [2000] 2004), DVD, part 3. While the episode "Factory of Murder" briefly invokes the notion of "moral compromise" on the part of "non-privileged" prisoners and later incorporates interviews with several former *Sonderkommando* members, no attention is given to the issue of "privilege" as such. See part 4, chapters 7 and 11.
100. Laurence Rees and Tilman Remme, *The Nazis: A Warning from History* (United States: BBC Video, [1997] 2005), DVD, part 4, chapters 5–6.
101. Alain Resnais, *Night and Fog* (United States: Criterion Collection, [1955] 2003), DVD, chapter 4.
102. For further discussion of this issue, see Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *What Is the Use of Jewish History?* (New York: Schocken, 1992), 145–56.
103. Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge: MIT, 2002), 171. Baer's detailed analysis of *Photographer* devotes little attention to the representation of Rumkowski.
104. Dariusz Jablonski, *Photographer* (United States: Koch Lorber Films, [1998] 2004), DVD, chapter 1.
105. *Ibid.*, chapter 8.
106. Kathryn Taverna and Alan Adelson, *Lodz Ghetto* (United States: Jewish Heritage, [1989] 2008), DVD, chapter 3.
107. Josh Waletzky, *Partisans of Vilna: The Untold Story of Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust* (United States: Docurama, [1986] 2005), DVD.
108. Ben Smith, "Public Memory and Active Recall: *Partisans of Vilna* (1986) and *Come and See* (1985)," in *Vice, Representing the Holocaust*, 91.
109. For a more detailed analysis of *Lodz Ghetto* and *Partisans of Vilna*, see Adam Brown, "Narratives of Judgement: Representations of 'Privileged' Jews in Holocaust Documentaries," *LISA e-Journal—Special Issue: Narrative Practices and Documentary Film-Making in the English-Speaking World: From Propaganda to Dissent* (in press).
110. Ewout van der Knaap, "The Construction of Memory in *Nuit et Brouillard*," in *Uncovering the Holocaust: The International Reception of Night and Fog*, ed. Ewout van der Knaap (London: Wallflower, 2006), 26.
111. Idith Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [2002] 2005), 87n.105. The film is not mentioned in Caroline Joan Picart, ed., *The Holocaust Film Sourcebook, Volume 2: Documentary and Propaganda* (Westport: Praeger, 2004).
112. For a useful survey of these developments, see Yosefa Loshitzky, "Hybrid Victims: Second Generation Israelis Screen the Holocaust," in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, ed. Barbie Zelizer (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001).
113. Significantly, Winston contends in his discussion of documentary film that a "legal framework is too loose to compel or even much encourage ethical practice in documentary film-making." Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited*, 230.
114. Despite its accepted historical definition, the film uses the term "*Kapo*" in a broad manner, incorporating members of the *Ordnungsdienst*, *Judenräte*, *Sonderkommandos*, and camp prisoner-functionaries.
115. Bill Nichols, *Ideology and the Image: Social Representation in the Cinema and Other Media* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 183.
116. The concept of an "interactive" mode of representation, as opposed to an "expository" mode, is taken from Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 34–38, 44–56.
117. Tor Ben-Mayor and Dan Setton, *Kapo* (Australia: University of Melbourne, [1999] 2002), off-air videorecording. As there are no chapters to cite in a videorecording, subsequent quotations from the film will not be referenced.

118. "Jew against Jew," in *Time* (22 March 1963).
119. Magda Blau, *From Childhood to Auschwitz Birkenau* (Melbourne: Self-published, 2003 [?]). (Copy held at the Makor Jewish Community Library, Caulfield South, Victoria, Australia). The memoir is published under Hellinger's unmarried name.
120. Magda Blau, *Video testimony, No. 459* (Melbourne: Jewish Holocaust Centre, 1994), DVD. The issue of judgment in video testimonies, including Blau's, is addressed in Adam Brown, "Confronting 'Choiceless Choices' in Holocaust Videotestimonies: Judgement, 'Privileged' Jews, and the Role of the Interviewer," in *Interrogating Trauma: Collective Suffering in Global Arts and Media*, eds. Mick Broderick and Antonio Traverso, eds. (London: Routledge, 2011).
121. Blau, *From Childhood to Auschwitz Birkenau*, 4.
122. Similarly, the Lodz survivor Mostowitz is positioned as a moral authority in Jablonski's documentary film, *Photographer*; at the end of which his testimony is used to absolve Rumkowski. See Jablonski, *Photographer*; chapters 12–13.
123. Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 47. Keith Beattie also highlights the interview's predisposition to judgment, situating it between "conversation" and "interrogation." See Beattie, *Documentary Screens*, 121.

CHAPTER 4

PORTRAYING “PRIVILEGED” JEWS IN FICTION FILMS

THE POTENTIAL TO SUSPEND JUDGMENT?



In one of his last essays, which was first presented at an academic conference on the grey zone, Raul Hilberg emphasizes the inevitable incompleteness of empirical historiography, noting that in contrast to written history’s “scattered images,” more complete “descriptions” are attempted by novelists and filmmakers.¹ In relation to literary and filmic works that represent the Holocaust, Hilberg writes: “To fill the gap they promise an imaginative reconstruction, but given the manifest difficulties it is often imaginary.”² Considerable scholarly attention has been directed at fiction films dealing with the Holocaust, particularly Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993) and Roberto Benigni’s *Life Is Beautiful* (1998), with many commentators condemning their apparently reassuring messages of spiritual triumph and selfless heroism.³ Such arguments are reflected in the title of Lawrence L. Langer’s essay “Life Is Not Beautiful,”⁴ and chapter 1 of this book highlights how Primo Levi’s skepticism toward Holocaust films partly motivated him to develop his concept of the grey zone in the first place. Nonetheless, Holocaust cinema has had a significant impact on collective memories of the war and for this reason alone is an important topic of discussion. This chapter

explores representations of "privileged" Jews in fiction films—of which there have been many—through a comparative analysis of Spielberg's *Schindler's List* and Tim Blake Nelson's *The Grey Zone* (2001).

In contrast to what is often perceived to be the close relationship to historical "reality" displayed in documentary films, fictional representations on film generally devote less attention to ideas of "truth" and "accuracy." The dramatization of "privileged" Jews using actors differs considerably from the representational strategy used in documentaries of placing historical figures themselves before the camera. Additionally, just as varied modes of judgment were shown to be at work in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* and other documentary formats, two categories can be identified within the fiction films being looked at here—what may be considered "conventional" and "unconventional" representations of "privileged" Jews. There is insufficient space here to do justice to the immense variety of these depictions, and it is important to keep the diverse strategies of filmmakers in mind when grouping films in such a broad manner. However, a distinction such as this is useful for the purposes of this analysis, which focuses on two key films that can be seen in many ways to exemplify both categories. As in the previous chapter, in contrasting Holocaust films in this way, the overt purpose is not to express a preference for one film over another, but to point to the different modes of representation and judgment that are adopted and resisted in the fictional space.

First, "conventional" or "mainstream" filmic representations of "privileged" Jews portray the Holocaust using traditional narrative conventions, often concentrating on incidents of resistance and rescue, and relying on moral distinctions between what is constructed as the "good" and the "bad."⁵ These common thematic concerns of mainstream films, which frequently attract a widespread theatrical release and prominent cast, invariably go hand in hand with the importance placed on financing and profits. Reflecting what is thought to garner commercial success, a film's audience is positioned to identify with the "good" characters and think negatively of the "bad" characters through sympathetic or unsympathetic characterization, with the aid of many other devices. As suggested previously, this kind of binary opposition extinguishes the moral complexities involved in the experiences of "privileged" Jews. Like documentary filmmakers, fiction filmmakers are under no obligation to represent "privileged" Jews; nonetheless, it is interesting to note that those who do portray these liminal figures generally marginalize the importance of their experiences and behavior.⁶ Commonly portrayed as minor, insignificant characters, "privileged" Jews are repeatedly represented in a negative light, often before being absolved by their own

or others’ courageous acts. A close analysis of *Schindler’s List* reveals that the film’s classical Hollywood narrative formula has considerable implications for its portrayal of “privileged” Jews, as the majority of the film pivots on clear positive and negative moral judgments.

On the other hand, several recent films deviate from themes of bravery and martyrdom, and focus on issues of survivor trauma, guilt, and compromise. While in mainstream productions the ethical dilemmas confronting Jews in the camps and ghettos are frequently overshadowed by glorified feats of courage, some other films do represent the complexities of survival by adopting an anti-redemptory approach. Such productions utilize unconventional characterization and reject traditional “Hollywood” tropes, such as heroism, romance, sentimentality, and closure. The self-reflexive aspects of such films seem to question whether definitive moral categories can be applied when exploring the extreme situations of “privileged” Jews. In so doing, these films move toward the suspension of judgment required by Levi. Such an undertaking is exemplified in Nelson’s response to Levi’s writings in his film *The Grey Zone*, which is also in many ways a response to *Schindler’s List*.

From Heroic Deeds to Happy Endings: Hollywood’s Compromise

The cinematic representation of the Holocaust arguably faces a vast number of obstacles. Many critics have denounced mainstream filmmakers for trivializing the event through their use of conventions perceived as necessary to draw large audiences—and thus box office returns. A major part of what has frequently—and negatively—been characterized as the “Americanization” of the Holocaust has been the “Hollywoodization” of it, a development Tim Cole sees as exemplified by *Schindler’s List*. Cole writes that “Spielberg hasn’t given us a documentary film in *Schindler’s List*, but *the* contemporary example of the Hollywood ‘Holocaust.’”⁷ Other scholars contend that even melodramatic *misrepresentations* can foster awareness.⁸ Exemplifying the tension between mass dissemination and historical “simplification” is Marvin Chomsky’s seven-hour miniseries *Holocaust: The Story of the Family Weiss* (1978), which reached hundreds of millions of viewers worldwide and helped to establish the Jewish particularity of the Holocaust, while simultaneously igniting a fiery debate over “trivialization.”⁹ Claude Lanzmann has himself condemned *Holocaust* and *Schindler’s List*, claiming the former “perpetrates a lie, a moral crime; it assassinates memory.”¹⁰ Indeed, a binary opposition has arisen in the critical discourse on Holo-

caust film that sets Lanzmann's *Shoah* against Spielberg's film, evoking contrasts between "high" and "low" culture, "art" and "kitsch," invariably to the detriment of *Schindler's List* and mainstream representations in general.¹¹

Some scholars maintain that Holocaust films must be "judged by historical standards," as "given their role in public memory work, their status as works of art cannot absolve them of a responsibility to history, particularly when they set themselves up as 'authentic historical documents.'"¹² However, certain "reworkings" of accepted historical details, an all-pervasive and inevitable part of the fictionalizing process, can be both legitimate and valuable. Judith Doneson, a renowned analyst in the area, prioritizes a Holocaust film's faithfulness to "the actual event" as a whole, rather than the literal "accuracy" of "precise detail."¹³ Doneson's perspective is crucial to the way this chapter understands fiction film, as it underlines the potential of works in the genre to capture the "essence" of the Holocaust without losing track of its historical specificity. I argue later in the chapter that it is through a flexible relationship with historical chronology and literal "facts" that Nelson's film engages directly with the ethical dilemmas of "privileged" Jews. On the other hand, these liminal figures are invariably subjected to clear-cut moral judgments in Hollywood-style narratives, judgments that can be readily connected to the filmmaker's preoccupation with certain themes.

Annette Insdorf has observed that while the first two decades of Holocaust feature films focused on "Jewish victims and Nazi villains," the "second wave," beginning in the mid-1980s, has concentrated on resistance and rescue.¹⁴ The release of *Schindler's List* perhaps only hastened this trend, with stories of Gentile saviors and Jewish fighters rushing to the screen ever since.¹⁵ Whether or not "privileged" Jews are represented in such films is only partly determined by the settings in which their narratives take place. While the far-reaching plot of the *Holocaust* miniseries represents *Kapos*, *Judenrat* officials, Jewish police, and members of the *Sonderkommandos*, it relegates all "privileged" Jews to brief appearances or relatively minor roles, a strategy common to many productions. In films concentrating on ghetto experiences, Jewish police in particular are depicted negatively, as seen, for example, in the Polish film *Korczak* (1990) and the more recent NBC production *Uprising* (2001). Both films treat the *Judenrat* leader Adam Czerniakow more sympathetically than members of the *Ordnungsdienst*, yet they still pass judgments redolent of Hilberg's (see chapter 2). In *Korczak*, Czerniakow is contrasted with the morally superior savior of orphans, while the highly exaggerated depiction of the Warsaw Ghetto revolt in *Uprising* sees the Jewish leader portrayed as naïve (and at times

seemingly on the brink of madness), unlike the many heroic resistance fighters who choose to respond to Nazi oppression differently.¹⁶ Such examples of the distinction made between "resistance" and "cooperation" typify the judgments passed by many filmmakers. A small number of mainstream Holocaust films position "privileged" Jews as protagonists, although such films generally portray "privileged" positions as being held by virtuous or heroic main characters with whom the audience is positioned to identify, and issues of moral ambiguity and "compromise" are generally overwhelmed by their emphasis on resistance.

While Hollywood's *Triumph of the Spirit* (1989) represents dehumanization, theft, and conflict between "non-privileged" prisoners in Auschwitz, its narrative strategies work to avoid confronting the ethical dilemmas of the Jews holding "privileged" positions in the camp. The film dramatizes the story of Salomo Arouch, a Greek-Jewish boxer from Salonika who was deported with his family to Auschwitz, where he gained "privileges" after being enlisted to fight for the entertainment of the SS. Significantly, while every prisoner-functionary in the film is represented as cold and violent, all visible camp insignia and dialogue indicate that they are, without exception, criminals, political prisoners, or Gypsies. On the other hand, Gillo Pontecorvo's Italian film *Kapò* (1959), a somewhat "Americanized" production with a Hollywood star and musical score, portrays a fourteen-year-old Jewish girl named Edith inadvertently gaining a position of "power" in a forced labor camp.¹⁷ After taking on a false identity as the non-Jewish "Nicole," Edith gains "privileges" at first by becoming a sexual companion to a Nazi guard and later by becoming an emotionally callous *Kapo*, a position that earns her the resentment of the other prisoners. By the film's end, however, Edith's conscience and identity are reignited by a love interest in the Resistance. She is sacrificed during a prisoner uprising, absolving herself by shutting off the camp's electricity while the other inmates escape, thereby establishing the film's depiction of the "privileged" Jew as martyr.

The representation of "privileged" Jews within the common paradigm of resistance and rescue, and the simultaneous emphasis on redemption, has important implications for how they are judged. At first demonized for their behavior, the "morally compromised" individuals must then be absolved in some way before they can be acknowledged as victims of the Nazi perpetrators. The typology of the corrupt "privileged" Jew who is eventually redeemed is exemplified in *Schindler's List*, an adaptation of Thomas Keneally's historical novel, *Schindler's Ark* (1982). Spielberg's film engages with the Holocaust through a sentimental, Hollywood lens. Anthony Savile condemns the use of sentimentality in general, characterizing the mode as a (self-)deceptive attempt to disguise difficult

and uncomfortable realities of the world. He argues that "a sentimental mode of thought is typically one that idealizes its object under the guidance of a desire for gratification and reassurance."¹⁸ An analysis of Spielberg's various appeals to audience emotion reveals that the many strategies used in the making of his blockbuster have a significant impact on the representation and judgment of "privileged" Jews.

Redeeming the "Privileged" Jew: Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*

Schindler's List focuses on the deeds of the German industrialist Oskar Schindler, whose rescue of approximately 1,100 Jews from Nazi-occupied Krakow has become one of the most widely known, if far from representative, stories of the Holocaust.¹⁹ With its release coinciding with the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and a general lack of public awareness of the Holocaust (particularly on the part of young people), *Schindler's List* ignited fiery debates over the representation of the Holocaust. Miriam Hansen provides a useful overview of the main academic criticisms of Spielberg's film, which center on its status as a "Hollywood" product; its "fictionalized," "classical," or "realist" narrative; its appropriation of the perspective of perpetrators; its alleged portrayal of Jewish stereotypes; and its supposed violation of the "taboo on representation."²⁰

Assuming that the film is likely to be the sole source of information about the Holocaust for countless viewers worldwide, many critics feared the public would perceive its story to be the norm rather than the exception, constituting a paradigm shift of significant proportions.²¹ As Omer Bartov contends, Spielberg's "tale is so unique as to be untrue."²² Although hardly an inspiring figure initially, Schindler is the hero of the film in the sense of both protagonist and virtuous savior. The film's much-discussed exaggeration and simplification of Schindler's actions and its simultaneous depiction of "his" Jews as overwhelmingly dependent on him has the dual effect of overemphasizing altruistic rescue by Gentiles and neglecting the issues of Jewish resistance and cooperation. Many aspects of the film's representation of Schindler's behavior are not only inconsistent with Keneally's novel, but have been contradicted by Schindler's wife's memoir and David M. Crowe's recent biography of Schindler.²³ In his romanticization of his film's protagonist, Spielberg omits many of Schindler's more dubious qualities, including his time as a loyal branch office director of German counterintelligence who persecuted foreign spies and collaborated with German occupiers. Schindler's

assault of a Jewish retailer, originally included in the shooting script, was also left out of the final cut.²⁴ Significantly, the film's earlier screenwriter, Kurt Luedtke, abandoned the task after almost four years of struggling with personal doubts about Schindler's heroism.²⁵ Despite the often aggressive criticism of *Schindler's List*, Spielberg's film is unquestionably an accomplished production, which broke new ground in the cinematic representation of the Holocaust, at least in part due to its stylistic appeals to historical "authenticity" through black-and-white cinematography, chiaroscuro lighting, complex editing, and handheld camerawork. However, in its indebtedness to film noir and the broader classical Hollywood tradition, *Schindler's List* may still be considered a conventional Holocaust film.

Many scholars have criticized Spielberg's strict adherence to stereotypes of good and evil.²⁶ Significantly, Sara Horowitz argues that *Schindler's List* "softens the unrelenting nature of atrocity during the Holocaust and the moral complexities of survival that Primo Levi refers to as the 'grey zone.'"²⁷ However, only cursory attention has been given to Spielberg's representation of "privileged" Jews. Bryan Cheyette argues in his Levi-inspired critique of *Schindler's List* that the ethical uncertainty evoked in the early parts of the film's narrative breaks down into a Manichean aesthetic. He asserts that "the dehumanization and enforced complicity of the victims of genocide is left unrepresented," but offers little analysis of Spielberg's depiction of members of the *Ordnungsdienst*, who make frequent appearances in the film.²⁸ Likewise, Gillian Rose only briefly mentions that the novel's preoccupation with the "growing viciousness of the Jewish police" is "barely evident" in the film.²⁹ Spielberg's overwhelming focus is on the redemption and heroism of the German rescuer, although this also allows for the redemption of the corrupt "privileged" Jew.

Negative judgment of "privileged" Jews is communicated throughout *Schindler's List*, primarily in the characterization of Marcel Goldberg and Wilek Chilowicz. These figures become Jewish police early in the film and contrast strongly with other Jewish characters and Schindler himself. A binary opposition is also constructed between Goldberg and another somewhat "privileged" figure, Itzhak Stern, who is judged in a positive manner (to be discussed later). Curiously, the representation and judgment of these "privileged" Jews frequently rely on the film's employment of humor. Still widely considered to be taboo, Holocaust humor nonetheless plays an important part in the representation of this traumatic event. The use of humor in Holocaust or Nazi-related films has a long history, often drawing (ironically or otherwise) on German and Jewish stereotypes for the purposes of audience entertainment, but

also exhibiting considerable potential to invoke the tragic. However, in the case of *Schindler's List*, which can by no means be classified as a comedy, much of the humor embedded in the film serves as a vehicle of judgment. The Jewish police are initially portrayed somewhat ambivalently through the use of humor, although this soon reverts to a clear-cut negative judgment of their behavior.

Goldberg and Chilowicz are depicted in one of the film's opening scenes as smugglers meeting their acquaintance, Poldek Pfefferberg, to barter black-market goods in a Catholic church. It is Pfefferberg whom the camera follows to the church, encouraging the viewer, if not to identify with him, then at least to consider him the most worthy of attention. However, the viewer is not yet positioned *against* the apparently benign figures of Goldberg and Chilowicz. Located in the middle of the frame between the two men, it is nonetheless clear from the start that Pfefferberg is not overly friendly with them. He threatens to report Chilowicz to the Nazi authorities for delivering shoe polish in breakable glass rather than metal containers, and their statements back and forth are playfully echoed by a smiling, sarcastic, and seemingly harmless Goldberg. When Schindler suddenly turns around in the seat in front of them to inquire after Pfefferberg's shirt, which causes the other smugglers behind them to hastily depart, Goldberg comically pretends to pray before also abandoning his seat with Chilowicz. Walking down the aisle, the two men stop and look back, apparently waiting for Pfefferberg. Again situated in the middle of the frame, the seated Pfefferberg is symbolically positioned between the German businessman foregrounded on his left and the two Jewish smugglers in the distance on his right, visually highlighting the choice that Pfefferberg hesitates to make. After a prolonged pause, he accedes to Schindler's request for goods and smirks wryly as he looks back at his former companions. The parting of these characters soon takes on a broader significance, with Goldberg and Chilowicz joining the Jewish police while Pfefferberg becomes a reliable helper and primary procurer of goods for Schindler. Although the important moral implications of Pfefferberg's choice are not crystallized until subsequent scenes, his decision clearly becomes one between good and evil. Indeed, shortly afterward, the Goldberg character transforms from a source of the film's humor to its target, and his initially innocent chuckle takes on a more sinister edge.

In the next scene, which depicts the ghettoization of Krakow's Jews, Goldberg cheerfully confronts Pfefferberg in his new *Ordnungsdienst* uniform. Their brief exchange reinforces the lack of friendliness on Pfefferberg's part and introduces the film's judgment of Goldberg as a "privileged" Jew:

Pfefferberg: What's this?

Goldberg: Uh, the *Judenrat* has its own police now.

Pfefferberg: You don't say.

Goldberg: *Ordnungsdienst*. I'm a policeman now, could you believe it? I know it's hard to believe.

Pfefferberg: Oh, no, it's not hard to believe.

Goldberg: It's a good racket, Poldek. The only racket here.³⁰

The ambivalence evoked in the representation of the previously good-humored (though somewhat disliked) Goldberg is undone by the strong contrast between Pfefferberg's assured sarcasm and Goldberg's nasal tone and nervous disposition, which makes it clear with whom the viewers are positioned to align themselves. When Goldberg offers to help Pfefferberg join the *Ordnungsdienst*, he reveals that his motivation for having joined himself was solely monetary profit and in no way based on survival: "Come on, they're not as bad as everyone says ... well, the worst that everyone says, but it's a lot of money. A lot of money."³¹ Indeed, it might be argued that this scene's emphasis on the financial machinations of its Jewish characters (along with the previous scene in the church) feeds into the film's much-criticized representation of anti-Semitic stereotypes.³²

Goldberg's sole preoccupation with material wealth throughout *Schindler's List* cements the overwhelmingly negative depiction of the "privileged" Jew. Yet despite his obvious self-interest and apparent position of power, Goldberg is invariably portrayed as more of a degraded comic figure than one who is to be taken seriously. As Pfefferberg rejects Goldberg's offer without hesitation, his wife sarcastically tells the "privileged" Jew, "You look funny in that hat Goldberg. You look like a clown, you know!" Goldberg then adjusts his uniform in an absurd manner while another woman passing by glares at him hatefully. The binary opposition established here between the "innocent" victims and "corrupt" functionary is even more significant in light of the fact that the historical Pfefferberg actually did join the Jewish police and was later a *Blockälteste* (block eldest) in the Plaszow labor camp. Significantly, Keneally writes that "Pfefferberg could stand as a token of the ambiguity of being a member" of the *Ordnungsdienst*.³³ The omission of this from the film allows its Manichean framework to remain unchallenged.

Members of the ghetto police in the film are portrayed as absurd caricatures on several occasions. Immediately after Goldberg adjusts his uniform in the shot noted above, the scene changes and another member of the *Ordnungsdienst* is shown being teased by a group of children he is unsuccessfully trying to catch. Excited children's voices can be heard

on the soundtrack as the small figures dance around his truncheon.³⁴ Indicative of the film's overall marginalization of "privileged" Jews, this scenario occurs only momentarily in the background. The focus of the scene is Schindler's attempt to woo Jewish investors.

Goldberg and Chilowicz, who are both wearing Jewish police uniforms, are next seen together during the Nazis' separation of "essential workers" from other Jews. Otherwise unoccupied, the two men walk calmly among the long lines of vulnerable Jewish victims, loudly taunting Pfefferberg, who is also waiting to be assessed by German officers:

Goldberg: Enjoying the weather, Poldek?

Chilowicz: Enjoying the lines?

Goldberg: Need some shoe polish?

Chilowicz: In a metal container maybe?³⁵

Unlike the earlier scene in the church, the viewer is positioned to reject the humor shared by Goldberg and Chilowicz. The former's insidious laugh and Pfefferberg's refusal to respond imply the depths to which the Jewish police have allowed themselves to sink.

Humor is again employed in a scene portraying the various attitudes of captive Jews toward their situation in the Podgorze Ghetto. Talking with a group of Jews standing in the street, Pfefferberg is able to turn the previous sarcasm of the Jewish police back on Chilowicz, who is openly derided by those around him. When Chilowicz ironically states that he likes the ghetto due to its sense of "ancestral squalor," an old man reprimands him for his cooperation with the Nazis: "You are a slave to these people!" After Chilowicz responds "I'm smart," humor is again deployed as Pfefferberg ridicules him and knocks his cap down over his eyes. Pfefferberg declares dismissively, "You're a real genius."³⁶ With an impetuous expression on his face, Chilowicz adjusts his cap and continues to joke with the others, signifying the lack of seriousness afforded to his role by both fellow Jews and the film alike.³⁷ Thus while humor is often used to endear the viewer to the characters of Schindler and Stern, the device is also employed to cast negative judgment on the Jewish police. These figures are also judged in later scenes portraying the involvement of the *Ordnungsdienst* in the liquidation of the Podgorze Ghetto, which is one example of what are generally perceived to be the most controversial activities of the Jewish police.

The liquidation of the ghetto is portrayed in a pivotal scene that juxtaposes the Nazis' "*Aktion*" with Schindler's witnessing of the event while out riding his horse on a nearby hilltop. Significantly, the film includes only one of the several instances of rescue by members of the

Jewish police described in Keneally’s novel, although even this is sentimentalized by replacing the adult “collaborator” with an innocent child wearing an *Ordnungsdienst* uniform, who is not involved in the violence of the liquidation.³⁸ In relation to the role of the Jewish police in expropriating and arresting Jews during the event, the film again relegates them to the background and offers no engagement with the ethical dilemmas they faced; attention is once again focused on Schindler and his perspective. While observing the chaos taking place below him, Schindler glimpses a little Jewish girl wearing a red coat as she slowly navigates her way through the streets. Adapted loosely from Keneally’s portrayal of Schindler’s sighting of “Red Genia,” many commentators have interpreted the sequence as sparking the protagonist’s redemptive transformation.³⁹ In a rare use of color, Spielberg juxtaposes intense close-ups of Schindler’s anguished expression with an image of the little girl vanishing into a doorway. These images are accompanied by the sentimental singing of a children’s choir. Schindler can be seen giving one last contemplative stare, and a flash of resolute determination flickers across his face as he turns and rides away. As will be detailed in the next section, Spielberg’s transformation of Schindler from shady industrialist to heroic savior has clear implications for his representation and judgment of “privileged” Jews.

From Absurdity to Absolution: Forgiving the Jewish Police

I went to an OD who had been involved with drawing up the list, Marcel Goldberg, and asked to be reinstated, insisting I knew that my name had been on it. He began to hit me around the face and head until I fell to the ground, and still he continued to beat me. Many people claimed afterwards that because of his greed some members of their family lost their lives. Others stated that he was their saviour and didn’t take a penny for it.⁴⁰

The above passage from Anna Rosner Blay’s *Sister, Sister* is one of many accounts that testify to Goldberg’s ambiguous behavior, demonstrating that he can readily be situated within Levi’s grey zone.⁴¹ Throughout the section of *Schindler’s List* that portrays events in the Plaszow labor camp, members of the *Ordnungsdienst*—often encapsulated in the figure of Goldberg—are shown participating in prisoner registrations, roll calls, supervision of work details, “selections,” and deportations at regular intervals. Goldberg even shadows SS commandant Amon Goeth, the film’s main perpetrator figure and Schindler’s (im)moral opposite, as his personal assistant. However, Goldberg’s most criticized activity, namely his contentious involvement in the creation and revisions of the

list of Jews to be rescued by Schindler, was left out of the final cut. Another significant omission from Spielberg's film in relation to "privileged" Jews is the controversial behavior of Chilowicz, who was head of the *Ordnungsdienst* in Plaszow before being murdered along with his family by Goeth.⁴² After Chilowicz is depicted in the film taking a roll call with Goldberg, he is not seen again.

While Daniel Schwarz briefly notes that Spielberg "is not as hard as Keneally is on Goldberg," the film passes clear-cut negative judgment on him, particularly by contrasting him with another "privileged" Jew in Plaszow, the omnipresent, morally infallible Stern. The latter character is a fictionalized amalgamation of the historical Stern, Abraham Bankier, Mietek Pemper, and Goldberg himself.⁴³ The positive judgment of Stern, who serves as the protagonist's conscience on several occasions in the film, sets up a similar opposition between Stern and Goldberg to that between Schindler and Goeth.

In his first appearance in *Schindler's List*, Stern is linked to Krakow's Jewish Council. Keneally's novel describes the activities of the *Judenrat* and *Ordnungsdienst* in detail, sometimes with negative judgment but often displaying an awareness of the ethical dilemmas they faced.⁴⁴ Whereas an early script instructed the camera to pan over "empathic but ultimately powerless administrators" of the Council, Spielberg's film portrays the humble Stern as the institution's primary representative, who soon leaves to work for Schindler.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, the impossible situation of the *Judenrat* is briefly acknowledged. As Schindler makes his way past a long line of Jews waiting to have their complaints heard, the activities of the Council are summarized in a legend, which informs the viewer that it comprised "24 elected Jews personally responsible for carrying out the orders of the regime in Krakow, such as drawing up lists for work details, food, and housing."⁴⁶ The panning shots of the massive number of people waiting to speak to a Council representative as Schindler carelessly walks past them to the front of the line highlight the vast scope of the obstacles facing Jews in "privileged" positions. The scene briefly shifts to a chaotic room, where arguments are ensuing between *Judenrat* workers and anxious Jewish civilians regarding the Nazi decrees. Complainants angrily tell various clerks, "You don't know anything!" and "Aren't you supposed to help?" A frustrated clerk offers the defense: "Please, I only know what they tell me, and what they tell me changes from day to day!" The difficult context within which the Council is forced to operate is further indicated when a woman recently dispossessed of her home threateningly asks another clerk what will happen if she takes off the armband identifying her as a Jew. The first clerk, who is sitting at a desk behind her, turns and bluntly tells her

that the Nazis "will shoot you. Now why don't you stop with your silly talk."⁴⁷ Yet after the film briefly addresses the obstacles faced by Jewish councils in these ways, Schindler enters and all attention shifts to him as the room falls silent in his presence.

Hesitantly revealing his identity to the intimidating German figure, Stern takes Schindler to another room. The dialogue turns immediately to Schindler's business venture and Stern's future role in running it. A heavily ironic Stern informs Schindler, "By law, I have to tell you, sir, I'm a Jew."⁴⁸ This line, along with Spielberg's positioning of the two men at opposite edges of the frame, signifies the (political, social, and moral) divide that separates them during the first part of the film. Indeed, Stern displays a marked reluctance on several occasions while playing a major role in Schindler's activities. Nonetheless, Stern's behavior is invariably represented positively, particularly when he is shown rescuing Jews. It is Stern, after all, who instigates the initial gathering of Jewish workers into Schindler's factory, saving them from seemingly certain death. Stern's desperate efforts to save Jews from being loaded onto trucks by recruiting them as "essential workers" are juxtaposed with the diligent cooperation of Jewish functionaries (including Goldberg and Chilowicz) aiding in the separation process. At one point, a cunning Stern literally pulls a former schoolteacher from the grasp of the Jewish police in order to get him work in Schindler's factory.

Stern's relationship with Schindler gradually transforms, in several pivotal scenes, from one of suspicion and aloofness to a bond of warmth and trust. Keneally describes Stern as a "substantial spiritual influence on Oskar" and his "only father confessor."⁴⁹ While it might be too much to interpret Stern as the main orchestrator of Schindler's redemptive character arc, he is undeniably a constant moral presence in Spielberg's film who serves as (and appeals to) the protagonist's conscience on several occasions. In mortal danger himself at Plaszow, Stern only worries about Schindler's business and the Jews it protects: "*Herr Direktor*, don't let things fall apart, I worked too hard."⁵⁰ In Keneally's novel, Stern deposits the "crucial dictum" of Schindler's future virtue during his first conversation with Schindler by ironically invoking the Talmudic verse, "He who saves the life of one man, saves the world entire."⁵¹ The film relegates this to its climactic scene, transforming the verse into a gesture of gratitude offered by Stern on behalf of all the "Schindler Jews." Stern's twin role as Schindler's moral compass and critical-then-admiring observer recurs throughout the film, often made possible through his newly acquired "privileged" status as Goeth's accountant in Plaszow. Stern's behavior in this role contrasts strongly with the selfish disposition of Goldberg.

The differences between Golberg and Stern are rendered most clearly during the scene in which Goeth explains Stern's new position to him. A high angle shot of what is to be Stern's office shows Goldberg scurrying back and forth carrying books and moving furniture, while a fearful Stern stands submissively in the center of the room. In yet another denigration of the Jewish police as somewhat absurd and "morally compromised" figures, Goeth pushes back the table Goldberg is comically struggling to lower to the ground as he tells Stern, "Goldberg and Chilowicz make sure I see my cut from the, umm, factory owners in this camp, leaving you to take care of my main account, the Schindler account." Once Goeth has finished his instructions, he orders Stern to look at him, with the sole purpose of intimidation. Intense close-ups highlight Stern's vulnerability. After Goeth punctuates the silence with an ominous threat—"Don't forget who you are working for now"—he leaves the room. Goldberg obediently follows, turning back to glance at Stern unsympathetically.⁵²

In addition to renewed danger, Stern's "privileged" position also grants him further access to Schindler's heroics. On one occasion, Stern watches intently in the background as Schindler initiates the hosing down of a train full of suffocating Jews before it departs from Plaszow.⁵³ The film's depiction of an increasingly obsessed Schindler bribing Nazi soldiers and guiding the hose to each cattle wagon himself simplifies the more complex scenario that actually took place. Many of the Jews on this train, which was bound for the Mauthausen concentration camp, had been taken from Schindler's factory shortly beforehand. Schindler had personally undertaken the "selection" of 300 workers (starting, as Crowe notes, with the "most important Jews") to stay behind and dismantle his factory, which was then being closed down, while the remaining 700 Jews were sent to Plaszow.⁵⁴ Thus Spielberg glosses over the more controversial aspects of Schindler's involvement with the Nazis and the fact that a large number of the deportees who had previously been working for him perished in Mauthausen.⁵⁵ Little sense is given in the scene described above of the impending fate of the victims about to be deported; a concerned Stern simply stands and watches as Schindler does his best to comfort the train's dehydrated occupants.

The contrast between Stern and Goldberg is also evident when Goeth pays a visit to a metalworks staffed by Jewish prisoners, during which he attempts to shoot Rabbi Lewartow for working slowly. Goldberg enters the factory first, announcing Goeth's presence loudly in German and following him attentively with a clipboard. When Goeth explains to Lewartow that he needs to make room for incoming deportees and asks for the origin of the new arrivals, Goldberg leans forward from his

position in the background and dutifully informs Goeth: "Yugoslavia, *Herr Kommandant*."⁵⁶ After Goeth's malfunctioning weapon provides a reprieve for Lewartow, Goldberg's eagerness to please is matched by Stern's eagerness to save innocent lives. In the scene that follows, Stern convinces Schindler to take Lewartow into his own factory. Schindler, now in the early stages of the film's "sentimental deification" of his character,⁵⁷ provides Stern with valuable items three times in order to bribe Goldberg to add vulnerable Jews to Schindler's workforce. Through elaborate editing, the sequence reveals a cigarette lighter, a cigarette case, and a wristwatch moving from the hands of Schindler to Stern to Goldberg. This process facilitates the rescue of individual Jews whose plight Stern or other Jews bring to Schindler's attention.⁵⁸ The sequence incorporates only brief shots of Goldberg accepting the bribes, focusing more on Schindler's generosity and the positive outcome for the workers being transferred to his factory; hence the editing technique used here works more toward establishing Schindler's growing heroism than revealing Goldberg's ambiguous activities.

During the last of the three instances of rescue mentioned above, the film's emotive musical score is linked to Schindler's actions for the first time. Frequently criticized for being overly "sentimental and melodramatic,"⁵⁹ the film's main theme dominates the soundtrack as the Perlman couple follows Goldberg from the roll call in Plaszow to march enthusiastically through Schindler's gates. The same melancholic music that initially accompanies Jewish suffering alone is now linked with Schindler's deeds, shifting the film's focus away from what Keneally describes as the industrialist's "ambiguity that he worked within or, at least, on the strength of, a corrupt and savage scheme."⁶⁰

As the intermediary between Schindler's growing compassion and Goldberg's increasing corruption, the virtuous Stern continues to provide a clear moral contrast to the "privileged" Jew motivated by greed. While Goldberg is portrayed as Goeth's enthusiastic assistant, Stern is revealed to be Goldberg's opposite in his role as Schindler's loyal sidekick. In one of the film's most emotive scenes, when the closure of Plaszow looms, Stern implies his awareness that the camp's Jews are to die in Auschwitz: "I know the destination, these are the evacuation orders. I'm to help organize the shipments, put myself on the last train."⁶¹ While this admission briefly evokes the moral ambiguity of Stern's task, the scene is primarily geared toward developing Schindler's visible sympathy for Stern's situation and thus the German character's incremental redemption. After having declined Schindler's offer of a drink in several earlier scenes, a tearful Stern now agrees to drink with him, suggesting that the audience, too, should accept the compassionate

Gentile. Although Schindler's most "heroic" deeds in the film are yet to eventuate, it is evident that the "good" "privileged" Jew has forgiven the German profiteer for his previous misdeeds.

Sue Vice points out that criticism of Keneally's novel has generally focused on issues of "accuracy" and "representativeness."⁶² Nonetheless, it is significant that the film's source text contains numerous details relating to "privileged" Jews that were omitted or altered in Spielberg's production. Most crucially, Spielberg leaves out Goldberg's ultimate control over the list and, by doing so, marginalizes Goldberg's involvement in the process of saving the 1,100 *Schindlerjuden*. The manner in which the list was actually constructed resulted in many names being added and erased, although as demonstrated in the above epigraph, Goldberg's role was certainly ambiguous. Keneally nicknames Goldberg the "Lord of the Lists," describing in detail his inclusion and exclusion of names, sometimes according to payments he demanded from fellow prisoners.⁶³ Whatever the exact nature of Goldberg's actual involvement, the importance of his role is clear from a remark made by Schindler after the war, when confronted by angry survivors who had not been on the list. Schindler told them that he "couldn't stand over Goldberg's shoulder keeping track all the time."⁶⁴ Crowe's detailed research for his biography of Schindler leads him to argue that "in reality, Oskar Schindler had absolutely nothing to do with the creation of his famous transport list."⁶⁵ In fairness to Spielberg, Keneally also seems at times to view Schindler as the primary influence on the list, describing Goldberg at one point in his novel as having only "the power to tinker with its edges."⁶⁶ Nonetheless, the film's focus on Schindler drastically marginalizes Goldberg's role, even when compared with its source text.

Goldberg's involvement in making the list is replaced entirely by the highly sentimentalized sequence in which Schindler and Stern compile the names of Jews to be transported to safety. Through emotionally manipulative editing, the desperate efforts of Schindler and Stern to accumulate names from memory are juxtaposed with Schindler's payment of bribe money to Goeth and unsuccessful attempt to persuade another German industrialist, Julius Madritsch, to join his altruistic venture. At the end of the dramatic scene, the bright light within the room forms a halo around Schindler's head as Stern delivers perhaps the film's most sentimental dialogue: "The list is an absolute good. The list is life. All around its margins lies the gulf."⁶⁷ With strong biblical connotations, Stern holds the list up as if admiring the newly received Ten Commandments, inspiring many scholars to denounce the film's depiction of Schindler as a "prodigal son" and "Christ-like savior."⁶⁸ Furthermore, the other lists that Stern was to make of Jews destined

for Auschwitz are not mentioned again. As Cheyette writes, "The fact that Stern takes the part of Goldberg fatally idealizes his actions so that Stern can only provide Schindler with an absolutely scrupulous moral framework for him to recognize eventually."⁶⁹ By splitting the activities historically associated with Goldberg between the two on-screen characters of Stern and Goldberg, the film essentially divides the complex figure of the "privileged" Jew into two different people, one representing the "good" and one, the "bad."

Lists are a central motif throughout *Schindler's List*; as Amy Hungerford points out, "Those who are on the list are powerless, those making the list powerful."⁷⁰ In dispossessing Goldberg of his controversial role in the making of the list of prisoners to be saved, the film further marginalizes the issue of "privileged" Jews. Equally, in suggesting that the list was under Schindler's control, Spielberg avoids any moral complications surrounding the rescuer. Crowe notes that if Spielberg "had linked Schindler with Goldberg, he would simply have strengthened the sense that what really drove Oskar Schindler in all of this was money."⁷¹ Indicative of the complexity (and judgment) surrounding the creation of the actual list, the survivor Jack Mintz has asserted that "if you selected from the eleven hundred [on the list], maybe three hundred should go in a concentration camp after the war. There were a lot of crooks and *Kapos* [on the list]."⁷² Ultimately, *Schindler's List* avoids such moral complexities. Significantly, the film's screenplay, describing Goldberg as a "blackmailing collaborator," originally contained several scenes that involved Goldberg typing his own name onto the list, demanding bribes from other Jews to be included, and being beaten by Pfefferberg when he threatens to take Pfefferberg's name off.⁷³ A later scene in which Schindler punishes Goldberg for his past behavior by making him shovel coal for the remainder of the war was also scripted, but left out.⁷⁴ Instead, Spielberg's final cut reverses this negative judgment of Goldberg, going from a message of condemnation and punishment to forgiveness and redemption.

Exemplifying the strong criticism of *Schindler's List's* redemptory aesthetic, Rose writes that the film "degenerates into myth . . . betray[ing] the crisis of ambiguity in characterization, mythologization and identification, because of its anxiety that our sentimentality be left intact."⁷⁵ Rather than acknowledge Goldberg's involvement in making and maintaining the list and his subsequent disappearance with the money and diamonds of fellow Jews (as described in Keneally's novel),⁷⁶ the last appearance of Goldberg in the film takes place as the "Schindler Jews" are being transported to (apparent) freedom. A shot of Goldberg's brightly lit smile is foregrounded as he states his name to be checked off on the

list of the rescued. Spielberg's employment of chiaroscuro lighting and a sentimental score to enhance Schindler's transformation from rogue to Christ figure is now applied to Goldberg's redemption. Schindler's face, half hidden in shadow in the film's early scenes, is later bathed in light when he performs virtuous acts. Similarly, no longer wearing his *Ordnungsdienst* uniform, a well-lit Goldberg is pictured within the frame as he reverts from his selfish demeanor as a corrupt Plaszow functionary to his earlier, smiling self, as depicted in the church at the beginning of the film. In this way, Schindler's heroism renders Goldberg just another face in what have been described as the film's "supernumeraries and huddled masses,"⁷⁷ reducing him to a kind of anonymity despite being named and effectively absolving him from his past transgressions.

The film's plot is then relocated to Zwittau-Brinnlitz, in the former Czechoslovakia, where Schindler oversaw his last wartime factory. Here there is no sight of Goldberg. Instead, Schindler's sentimental transformation is completed, with the film deviating from the historical record to portray him racing to personally rescue Jewish women from Auschwitz, pledging (and seeming to maintain) fidelity to his wife, bankrupting himself to save his slave laborers, and finally, in another invented scene, breaking down in Stern's comforting arms as he laments rescuing such a small number.⁷⁸ Spielberg further sentimentalizes the figure of Schindler when he emphasizes the Stockholm syndrome-like attachment of "his" Jews. In an emotionally cathartic scene, Stern ceremoniously presents the rescuer with a gold ring etched with the Talmudic saying, "Whoever saves one life, saves the world entire."⁷⁹ This line epitomizes the overall redemptive message borne by and through the Gentile savior.

The film's denouement depicts actual *Schindlerjuden* placing rocks on Schindler's grave and the Schindler character looking down on the tombstone. The film thus implies there are no loose ends to this history, in spite of Schindler's less-than-glorious fate, the survivors' lost relatives and continuing trauma, and the postwar controversy relating to Goldberg.⁸⁰ Spielberg's redemptory discourse leaves the "privileged" Jew absolved of his former "guilt" and therefore disallows a nuanced engagement with the ethical dilemmas that confronted many victims during the Holocaust.

A similar process of judgment is evident in more recent mainstream productions that portray "privileged" Jews within the paradigm of rescue and resistance, such as Jon Avnet's television miniseries *Uprising* and Roman Polanski's film *The Pianist* (2002). Along with *Schindler's List*, the dramatization of Jewish police in these films clearly invokes the issue of "privilege" to some degree; however, any potential to suspend judgment of these liminal figures is drowned out by the filmmak-

ers’ condemnation and then absolution of their behavior. On the other hand, a number of other Holocaust films have rejected the rhetoric of heroic deeds and happy endings, with several of these unconventional representations engaging directly with themes of moral ambiguity and “compromise” in relation to “privileged” Jews.

Moving Away from the Mainstream: Confronting Moral Ambiguity

In *Frames of Evil: The Holocaust as Horror in American Film* (2006), Caroline J. S. Picart and David A. Frank conclude that “historical explanations of the Holocaust, particularly of perpetrators and victims, are vastly more complicated than the clean depictions of monsters and their prey seen in the cinematic representations of the Holocaust.”⁸¹ Focusing in part on the black-and-white representation of perpetrators and victims in *Schindler’s List* and Bryan Singer’s *Apt Pupil* (1998), the volume briefly mentions Levi’s grey zone but does not address the issue of “privileged” Jews nor the films that have dealt with them in a substantial manner.⁸² Indeed, in his foreword to the book, Dominic LaCapra notes that the authors’ analysis “leaves [the] reader with a number of questions that merit further thought and inquiry”:

Even if attempts to transcend fully an implication in trauma and its aftereffects are illusory, are there nonetheless significant differences in the manner in which films (or other artifacts) address problems with greater or lesser degrees of critical acumen? Is one forever complicit in the victim-perpetrator dynamic, and are the affirmation of complicity and the radical blurring of distinctions (such as that between perpetrator and victim) the only alternatives to deceptive binary oppositions between the innocent self and the monstrous “other”? Can one recognize the other in oneself and still acknowledge not only differences between perpetrators and victims but also a variable gray area of complicity between them, indeed an uncanny zone of perpetrator-victims?⁸³

In effect, LaCapra seems to issue a call similar to Levi’s for a nuanced representation of moral ambiguity and a recognition of the grey zone of victim behavior. While Levi argues that there is a need to suspend judgment when representing “privileged” Jews, LaCapra suggests there are “alternatives to deceptive binary oppositions.”

The notion of “moral compromise” on the part of victims of Nazi persecution is hardly new to films that evoke the Holocaust. Examples abound of representations of victims—not always Jewish prisoners—being placed or placing themselves in situations that confront them with

ethical dilemmas. A well-known example is Alan Pakula's *Sophie's Choice* (1982), which has been linked to both Levi's grey zone and Langer's concept of choiceless choices.⁸⁴ Through flashback, the film depicts a Polish woman being forced to "choose" which of her two children will be killed. Additionally, Ilan Avisar notes that despite the lack of explicit focus on the Holocaust in Israeli cinema, *Tel Aviv-Berlin* (1987) and *A New Land* (1994) incorporate in their narratives a combination of "collaborators" and women who became victims of sexual exploitation in order to survive or save others.⁸⁵ Behavior that is portrayed as morally compromising, sexual or otherwise—of Jewish or non-Jewish victims—and undertaken for survival or revenge, appears in various forms in films as diverse as *Europa, Europa* (1990), *Bent* (1997), *Train of Life* (1998), *The Ninth Day* (2004), *The Good German* (2006), *Black Book* (2006), and *A Secret* (2007).⁸⁶ However, the various invocations of "compromise" in these films are not related in any way to the positions of "privilege" focused on here.

Chapter 1 highlighted that Levi was motivated to write about the grey zone in part because of what he saw as the simplifying tendencies of fiction films. He was dismayed by Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* (1974), which he accused of blurring the distinction between victims and perpetrators.⁸⁷ In *Seven Beauties* (1975), another Italian film controversial for its portrayal of sexuality, a (non-Jewish) murderer and rapist is sent to Auschwitz, where he is made a *Kapo* after seducing a grotesque female SS officer. Subsequently, and with only brief hesitation, the "privileged" protagonist "selects" six prisoners to be killed, including one of his friends whom he is himself forced to shoot.⁸⁸ The infamous films *Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS* (1975), *Salon Kitty* (1976), and many other Nazi (s)exploitation films have been criticized as encouraging a perverse voyeurism and form part of what Saul Friedländer characterizes as "a vast pornographic output centered on Nazism."⁸⁹ Indeed, the common use of interconnecting themes of Nazism, sex, death, and moral compromise in a wide array of films forms a problematic cultural context for any filmmaker who attempts to represent "privileged" Jews on the screen.⁹⁰ However, even Levi does not necessarily disqualify fiction film as a genre that might be able represent the complex situations that gave rise to the grey zone, and LaCapra's questions quoted above appear to suggest fiction films are capable of representing liminal figures.

Several films released in recent years veer away from mainstream Holocaust productions and engage directly with the issue of "privileged" Jews. These films can be seen to self-consciously reflect on, or respond to, key ideas entailed in Levi's grey zone or Langer's choiceless choices. Implicitly rejecting Spielberg's sentimental depiction of survival as result-

ing from heroic acts of defiance, some filmmakers have helped establish a new trend in Holocaust film that focuses on issues of survivor trauma, guilt, and compromise. One such example is Lajos Koltai's Hungarian film *Fateless* (2004), an adaptation of the novel by Nobel laureate Imre Kertész, who has condemned *Schindler's List* as "a mistake for a person who knows exactly what happened. . . . It's unacceptable because all the horror is pictured like it's about the victory of humanity, but humanity will never get over the Holocaust. So it's a totally fake interpretation, a lie."⁹¹ Judgments of "privileged" prisoners are nonetheless evident in *Fateless*, which depicts the harrowing experiences of an adolescent Hungarian Jewish boy incarcerated in several Nazi concentration camps. The sadistic and sexually perverse *Kapo* in the film is clearly labeled a criminal prisoner, while the Jewish assistant who shadows him is given little attention. On the other hand, "privileged" Jews have been the central focus of several other recent films.

In his essay on Holocaust representation and its perceived limits, Frank Stern mentions Nelson's *The Grey Zone*, which was yet to be released, and predicts that more "films that are preoccupied with problematic or marginal aspects of the Shoah will doubtlessly follow in the coming years. Beyond all questionable and purely market-oriented film productions, this development indicates a shift in cinematic culture."⁹² This has indeed been the case. Joseph Sargent's made-for-television production *Out of the Ashes* (2003) was screened shortly after the release of Nelson's film. It focuses on Gisella Perl, a Hungarian-Jewish prisoner doctor in Auschwitz who assisted Josef Mengele's medical experiments while covertly performing a large number of abortions on fellow inmates to save them from being gassed.⁹³ Sargent structures his representation of Perl's ambiguous behavior through the use of a "trial," a technique also adopted in the considerably more melodramatic, politically motivated miniseries *The Kastner Trial* (1994), which "scandalised the Israeli public even prior to its actual broadcasting due to its revisionist post-Zionist reading of the affair."⁹⁴ While the structure of these films reveals clear processes of moral evaluation, they nonetheless draw attention to the problem of judgment.

Similar strategies to those at work in Nelson's *The Grey Zone* (the focus of the remainder of this chapter) can also be seen in Audrius Juzenas's recent German film *Ghetto* (2005) and Stefan Ruzowitzky's *The Counterfeiters* (2007). The former takes Jacob Gens, the controversial chief of the Jewish police in the Vilna Ghetto, as one of its main characters, while the latter portrays the ambiguous existence of a group of "privileged" Jews assigned to a Nazi counterfeiting operation in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Caught between "resisting" and

"cooperating," the irresolvable ethical dilemmas confronting these "privileged" Jews are exposed to the viewer through various means. Such works are not unconventional or postmodern in the sense that they attempt to undermine realist principles, as does Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's highly fragmented film *Hitler: A Film from Germany* (1977). They are unconventional rather in terms of their subversive uses of characterization and anti-redemptory rhetoric, which, to varying degrees, exhibit a questioning, self-reflexive approach to the issue of "privileged" Jews. Avoiding "the affirmation of complicity and the radical blurring of distinctions" that LaCapra is wary of, these films explore the ethical dilemmas that occupied Levi in a sophisticated manner. *The Grey Zone*, in particular, strongly repudiates the narrative conventions deployed in *Schindler's List*, working instead toward the suspension of judgment that Levi requires.

Into the Crematoria: Responding to Levi in Tim Blake Nelson's *The Grey Zone*

Nelson's *The Grey Zone* is not the first fiction film to be made as a direct response to Levi's writings, nor is it the first to portray Jewish prisoners in the *Sonderkommandos*. Firmly situated within European art cinema, Francesco Rosi's *The Truce* (1997) represents Levi's journey through Eastern Europe before his return to Italy. While Levi's second memoir is commonly thought to be the more optimistic (or less pessimistic) of his testimonies, strong signs of what would become his somber meditation on the grey zone were already present in this earlier work (see chapter 1). However, Rosi's film omits the former "privileged" prisoners portrayed in Levi's opening chapters and makes little reference to his more ambivalent reflections on victim behavior in the camp. At one point in the film, the Levi character defends a woman being derided for selling her body in Auschwitz, lecturing a group of liberated prisoners that starvation, torture, and murder were not the peak of Nazi crimes: "The worst thing they did was to crush our souls, our capacity for compassion, filling the void with hatred, even toward each other."⁹⁵ Soon afterward, however, the film's narrative shifts to an invented romantic encounter between the woman and Levi. In a blatant appeal to audience emotion, Rosi arguably draws on the Christological image of Jesus and the adulteress, and renders Levi himself a vehicle of redemption.

The portrayal of the situation(s) of the *Sonderkommandos*, despite being seemingly convenient plot devices in several films, has been limited. Barry Langford argues that the *Sonderkommandos* "figure in Holocaust

films out of all proportion to their actual numbers or (arguably) historical significance."⁹⁶ However, the appearances of crematorium workers in fiction films often reveal disparate ideological agendas and seldom dwell on the ethical dilemmas they faced. In the heavily politicized film *Exodus* (1960), experiences in an Auschwitz *Sonderkommando* form the traumatic background of an Irgun fighter in Palestine. The complicity of the Vatican with Nazi Germany in *Amen* (2002) is contrasted with the fictional priest Father Riccardo's refusal to leave his persecution in the crematoria, thereby sacrificing his life in protest. Similarly, when Rudi and Karl Weiss are enlisted to work in the *Sonderkommandos* in Auschwitz and Sobibor respectively in the *Holocaust* miniseries, they are "liberated" shortly afterward through armed revolt and artistic creation. And when the brother of protagonist Salomo Arouch is drafted as a crematorium worker in *Triumph of the Spirit*, he refuses to undertake the work on first glimpsing the ovens. Although Salomo himself is later sent to the *Sonderkommando*, the squad begins its armed revolt at the same instant he arrives, thus preventing him from being able to perform any duties. Another resistance film, *Escape from Sobibor* (1987), focuses on the "privileged" death camp inmates charged with greeting deportees upon arrival and sorting their belongings. The ethical dilemmas inherent in their situation are briefly raised in the film's early scenes; however, the majority of this television movie is preoccupied with the preparations for, and implementation of, the uprising, ending with the surviving prisoners streaming out of the camp and into the forest amidst a jubilant musical score. In these ways, the experiences of the *Sonderkommandos* have been appropriated to communicate messages of Zionist legitimacy, Christian martyrdom, and the triumph of Jewish resistance. *The Grey Zone* is the only Holocaust fiction film to engage in a substantial and serious manner with the extreme circumstances of those prisoners forced to work in the "special squads."

In addition to using Levi's essay, writer-director Nelson, whose mother was a Holocaust refugee, drew his material and inspiration for *The Grey Zone* from a range of sources, including the memoirs of Miklos Nyiszli and several other survivors, the unearthed manuscripts written and buried by *Sonderkommando* members, and a considerable amount of historical research.⁹⁷ Nelson adapted his screenplay from his earlier stage production, a process that can present certain difficulties, evident in the occasional criticism of his film for being "stagnant" and slow-moving.⁹⁸ Yet perhaps partly owing to Nelson's combination of unorthodox characterization, a claustrophobic setting, ambient noise, and staccato dialogue, his film convincingly represents the inherently complex nature of "resistance" and "cooperation" in a world of industrialized death.

Nelson shuns many of the narrative-driven tropes of conventional filmic representations and portrays the ethical dilemmas of "privileged" Jews without romanticizing or condemning them. By resisting spiritual triumph, emotional simplification, and cathartic heroism, *The Grey Zone* has often been praised for its lack of sentimentality and contrasted favorably with Spielberg's film.⁹⁹ Nelson himself explicitly positioned his film against *Schindler's List* and *Life Is Beautiful*, proposing for *The Grey Zone* a "jagged and hard realism" that is "fast, not mournful; cold, not sentimental."¹⁰⁰ In reviewer Kristin Hohenadel's words, Nelson's production is "a Holocaust horror story without a Schindler."¹⁰¹

While *Escape from Sobibor* contains only a momentary image of Jewish workers standing exhausted outside the gas chambers,¹⁰² Nelson's film is set almost entirely within the crematoria. It is important to note that Nelson chose to depict the twelfth special squad (out of thirteen) to work the extermination machinery in Birkenau, as this included the group of men who instigated the armed revolt of 7 October 1944, the only such event to occur in the camp. Numerous contradictory accounts exist regarding how this insurrection began, what weapons were available, the duration of the revolt, the leadership of the uprising, the number of crematoria destroyed, and the extent of German losses.¹⁰³ There is widespread agreement, however, that around 450 *Sonderkommando* members (all 300 active participants along with many others) perished in the uneven conflict or were shot shortly afterward in retaliation. Furthermore, the uprising had no effect on the extermination policies of the Nazis.¹⁰⁴ Nelson's film represents the event with unsentimental detachment, making clear that the revolt was ultimately futile. For this reason, among others, it would be simplistic to classify *The Grey Zone* as a resistance film alone.

The focus of Nelson's film remains fixed on the choiceless choices faced by "privileged" Jews. He vowed prior to the commencement of filming that the rebellion would "feel haphazard, clumsy, and poorly organized, as it probably was" and would involve "no mass slaughter of Germans followed by a heroic escape."¹⁰⁵ A scene depicting the unsuccessful escape of several men was omitted from the final cut, reinforcing the sense of hopelessness that surrounds the insurrection and reflecting Nyzisli's lamentation in his memoir that "after so much effort and loss of life, still no one had succeeded in escaping to tell the world the full story of this hellish prison."¹⁰⁶ Unlike the mass escape depicted in *Escape from Sobibor*, *The Grey Zone* portrays the remaining *Sonderkommando* members sitting passively on the ground after the revolt, waiting to be shot. Nelson nonetheless admits that without the uprising, "the movie's but a bleak portrait of the twelfth *Sonderkommando*, and I dare say it

would have no audience."¹⁰⁷ His comment reveals that even his film, which was produced under the assumption that it would not return a profit,¹⁰⁸ is still to some extent geared by a need to satisfy perceived audience expectations.

Nelson has written that *The Grey Zone* "does not pretend to be a historical document. Rather, it's meant to strike at the essence of the predicament faced by the *Sonderkommandos*, those unluckiest of death camp inmates offered the most impossible bargain humanity could propose to itself."¹⁰⁹ In his fictional reconstruction of events, the filmmaker conflates two actual but separate incidents: the *Sonderkommando's* revolt and the attempt by several prisoners to save a young girl who survived the gas chamber, which actually occurred long before the uprising.¹¹⁰ A significant intertextual connection here is the relationship of Nelson's film to the first German production to focus specifically on the camps, Frank Beyer's *Naked Among Wolves* (1963). The discovery of a young child by a group of Polish prisoners in Buchenwald, which both threatens their resistance preparations and leads to the rekindling of their "humanity," serves as the central plot device in Beyer's film and makes it a notable precursor of *The Grey Zone*. However, the focus on moral ambiguity in Nelson's film, along with its very different setting, renders its narrative much more contentious. On more than one occasion, members of the *Sonderkommando* debate whether or not they should kill the girl to protect their resistance plans. Shortly after the dying girl has been revived, one crematorium worker argues that killing the girl would be an act of mercy: "It's better we do it than them."¹¹¹ Emphasizing the need for "brutal and relentless accuracy," Nelson wrote in his notes to his cast and crew, "Even with a helpless adolescent and an inchoate uprising, we're not going to sentimentalise this world."¹¹²

The only characters based on real people in the film are Josef Mengele, the chief medical officer at Auschwitz; Nyiszli, Mengele's pathologist and, although Jewish, doctor to all crematoria personnel; Mühsfeldt, SS *Oberscharführer* of the crematoria; Rosa Robota, a smuggler of gunpowder to the *Sonderkommando*; and the young girl. Apart from Nyiszli and Mühsfeldt, the film's main characters—Rosenthal, Schlermer, Abramowicz, and Hoffman—are invented. Nelson's characterization of Hoffman, however, often draws on the firsthand account of Salmen Lewenthal, with whose testimony this book began.¹¹³ Importantly, Nelson's film has no protagonist, much less a "heroic" one, and the central Jewish characters are not only involved in the resistance preparations, but are also portrayed as deeply entangled in the extermination process. This has the effect of blurring Levi's own moral distinction between the

Sonderkommando members who planned and took part in the uprising and the "the miserable manual labourers of the slaughter ... the others, those who from one shift to the next preferred a few more weeks of life (what a life!) to immediate death, but who in no instance induced themselves, or were induced, to kill with their own hands" (see chapter 1).¹¹⁴ Nelson complicates this situation even further by portraying several of his central characters—in the midst of simultaneously resisting and cooperating—directly killing other Jews for often ambiguous reasons. This serves to disrupt formulaic appeals to audience identification and empathy. Anton Kaes has noted in an early work on Holocaust-related cinema that a violation of the mainstream conventions of representation established by traditional feature films serves to "enable, if not to force, the viewer to maintain [a] critical distance."¹¹⁵ This strategy can be seen as central to Nelson's portrayal of "privileged" Jews.

Obtaining Critical Distance: Portraying "Privileged" Jews in Auschwitz

By adopting an anti-redemptory aesthetic, Nelson avoids what Avisar characterizes as the problematic "inducement of emotional involvement with the fate of the characters" in sentimental Holocaust films.¹¹⁶ By employing various filmic devices in an unconventional manner, Nelson works to position the audience of *The Grey Zone* at an emotional and intellectual remove from the "privileged" Jews he represents. In contrast to the sentimentalized scenes between Schindler and Stern, which encourage the viewer to admire their growing bond and empathize with the heroic deeds that eventuate, Nelson's film self-consciously destabilizes viewer identification. All of the film's main characters are constantly at odds with one another, seldom exchanging friendly words or sharing intimate moments. Before filming *The Grey Zone* Nelson noted, "In its storytelling and acting styles, this film will never try to be liked. If it seems to be doing so, given the clear aesthetic of the script, we've failed. The characters aren't out to be liked either. ... Their interactions are never sentimental or quaint."¹¹⁷ The resulting unorthodox characterization of the crematorium workers and prisoner doctor Nyiszli is a major aspect of the film's apparent attempt to suspend judgment.

Many sequences in *The Grey Zone* are deliberately made to be hard to watch, further discomfiting the audience in their "witnessing" of the activities of the *Sonderkommando*. In scenes that often resemble short vignettes throughout the first half of the film, the different aspects of the prisoners' daily routine—including their deception of Jews about to be gassed, the cleaning of the chambers, and the transporting, pillaging,

and burning of the corpses—are graphically portrayed for the viewer at frequent intervals. All of the film’s characters treat their duties with an air of normality, reflecting Lewenthal’s statement that the workers “of necessity [got] used to everything.”¹¹⁸ The rough, handheld camerawork depicts violent images of the *Sonderkommando*’s gruesome tasks. The lingering camera shots *The Grey Zone* does contain are far from emotionally intimate. During a gassing that takes place near the beginning of the film, for example, the camera slowly zooms in on Schlermer, who, almost completely enveloped by shadow, continuously drinks from a bottle while hundreds of Jews are being gassed in the adjacent chamber. When the ventilators are activated, he calmly puts on a gas mask and walks through the door to collect the bodies.¹¹⁹

In another early scene, Nelson visually depicts the many “privileges” afforded to the crematorium workers for their labor. While a group of *Sonderkommando* members rests between work shifts, the camera pans over their relatively spacious barracks. Well-clothed prisoners are shown eating and bartering jewelry at a table laden with various kinds of food, alcohol, and cigarettes, presenting a considerably different picture from the brief scenes that depict emaciated, silent, and expressionless munitions-factory workers residing in the camp proper. After a new trainload of Jews is exterminated, Abramowics distastefully comments in an early scene: “Looks like we got some good food in: smoked oysters, some meats, a few cakes. We’ll do all right tonight.”¹²⁰ Furthermore, unlike *Schindler’s List*, on no occasion does Nelson seek to influence audience emotions through the use of a sentimental musical score. The soundtrack of *The Grey Zone* is instead immersed in ambient noise, most notably the constant roar of the crematorium furnaces, which serves as an ever-present reminder of the industrial genocide taking place and offers no calming respite, for either characters or viewers.

The majority of the film’s plot and thematic details are communicated through staccato-like dialogue. Speaking in sharp tones, the characters often interrupt one another; their curses, insults, and threats are full of expletives. At other times, their measured dialogue emphasizes the seemingly universal distrust permeating the crematoria. The constant conflicts between the characters reveal tensions and internecine hatreds between Jews from different national backgrounds—tensions which are rarely acknowledged in Holocaust films.¹²¹ One example highlighting this is when Rosenthal, a Hungarian Jew, angrily denounces the hesitancy of the Polish Jews to start the uprising: “If we were burning Polish Jews we wouldn’t be waiting. . . . What’s another week to these guys? Another ten thousand Hungarians? They don’t care about us. They never have.”¹²² Frequent arguments regarding the planned rebel-

lion or what to do about the girl also arise between Jews of the same country of origin, with their personal biases and inner shame seldom resolved. At one point in the film, a heated argument develops between Rosenthal and Abramowics about the *Sonderkommando's* involvement in the extermination process, revealing both their hatred for each other and themselves:

Rosenthal: It's not pulling the trigger!

Abramowics: It's locking them in. You leave the room, bring them in, say it's safe, you'll see them when it's over. Who put her inside? Now you think she made it through, God knows how—you're going to be a hero?

Rosenthal: Not a hero.

Abramowics: Not a hero, not a killer. What are you, Max?¹²³

Through this brief exchange, the staccato dialogue spoken by each of the characters points to the anti-redemptory project of *The Grey Zone*. The destabilizing of binary oppositions and questioning of moral absolutes are thematized explicitly in the film, with the above argument pointing to the space—or grey zone—between “heroes” and “killers.” The two men almost come to blows. Rosenthal screams, “I’ll fucking kill you!” at Abramowics, as other characters attempt to separate them. Neither the dispute nor their enmity for each other is resolved, for Abramowics is suddenly executed by Mühsfeldt.¹²⁴

In these ways, Nelson provides a detailed depiction of the involvement of the *Sonderkommando* characters in the extermination—or, in Nyiszli’s case, experimentation—process; the “privileges” these Jewish prisoners gain as a result of their cooperation; and their invariably indifferent or spiteful attitudes toward each other. In doing so, Nelson’s representation of “privileged” Jews is far from sympathetic. Yet the seemingly universal conflict between the characters also discourages the viewer from identifying *against* any of these figures. The prevalence of character conflict can be seen to reflect the point stressed in Levi’s essay on the grey zone, that the common desire or need of human beings to divide themselves neatly between “us” and “them” fails to capture the impact Auschwitz had on human relations: “The world into which one was precipitated was terrible, yes, but also indecipherable: it did not conform to any model, the enemy was all around but also inside, the ‘we’ lost its limits.”¹²⁵ Even though the plot of Nelson’s film revolves around the preparations for armed resistance, the filmmaker’s use of “anti-Hollywood” conventions alludes to a dystopian environment similar to that which Levi describes. Further reinforcing the alienating effect(s) imposed on the viewer, both Abramowics and Schlermer propose kill-

ing the girl when her presence threatens their resistance plans, while Rosenthal and Hoffman are shown killing fellow prisoners with their own hands.

Crucially, Nelson's representation of "non-privileged" prisoners, namely the women who smuggle the gunpowder to the *Sonderkommando*, also lacks any appeal to audience sentiment. Rosa Robota, idealized as a martyr elsewhere,¹²⁶ is depicted as callous and unfriendly. Robota's refusal to surrender information under prolonged torture is not shown but is communicated only by implication.¹²⁷ By portraying "non-privileged" prisoners, like the members of the *Sonderkommando*, as emotionally hardened by their situation, the film works to discourage the viewer from judging "privileged" Jews by not making a moral distinction between the two groups. Nelson's film thus avoids the kind of clear-cut binary opposition that is developed in *Schindler's List* between Goldberg and other Jewish characters. Instead, Nelson represents all Jews as subjected to a harsh and degrading environment, which, in Levi's words, resulted in a "desperate" and "continuous struggle."¹²⁸

Although Nelson portrays his Jewish characters as unsympathetic to others, he takes care to maintain a clear distinction between victims and perpetrators, avoiding the kind of blurred boundaries that Levi criticized *The Night Porter* for alluding to. Indeed, it is interesting to note that Nelson chose to omit any reference to the controversial soccer game played between members of the *Sonderkommando* and the SS. This is a particularly problematic scenario for Levi, who characterizes the soccer match in "The Grey Zone" as revealing that the SS to some extent recognized the "veterans of the squad" as "colleagues, by now as inhuman as themselves, hitched to the same cart, bound together by the foul link of imposed complicity."¹²⁹ Rather than echo this negative judgment, Nelson constantly reminds the viewer of the vulnerability of "privileged" Jews to the whims of their Nazi overseers. Indeed, the theme of survival permeates the film's narrative, albeit in a considerably different manner from how the same theme is developed in *Schindler's List*. Nyiszli writes in his memoir that members of the *Sonderkommando* seldom lived longer than four months, noting that "no one had ever come out of [the crematoria] alive, either from the convoys or from the *Sonderkommando*. . . . We would all perish here and we were well aware of it."¹³⁰ This statement is reflected in *The Grey Zone* when Schlermer tells the on-screen prisoner doctor in typically blunt dialogue, "We're almost four months. We're dead. Our time's up."¹³¹ Early in the film, Mühsfeldt tries to deceive the group of *Sonderkommando* members: "We're going to be moving you soon. . . . We're thinking of a reprieve."¹³² The crematorium workers, however, have no delusions. Nonetheless, even the temporary

stay of execution that the film's "privileged" Jews are given is depicted ambivalently, particularly in the case of Nyiszli.

Nyiszli admits in his memoir to obtaining a "favored position" by dissecting the bodies of hundreds of murdered twins and Jews with physical deformities as part of Mengele's medical experiments.¹³³ He sums up the ambiguity of his position on the first page: "As chief physician of the Auschwitz crematoriums, I drafted numerous affidavits of dissection and forensic medicine findings which I signed with my own tattoo number."¹³⁴ Throughout his testimony, Nyiszli displays little awareness of the implications of his actions and seems at times to support the ends, if not the means, of Nazi medical experimentation. He proudly refers to the dissecting room as "my responsibility" and to Mengele as "my superior," and writes, "I planned to carry out [Mengele's] orders to the best of my ability."¹³⁵ Described by Ilona Klein as a "fully-fledged Jewish collaborator," Nyiszli allegedly obtained "enormous prestige" as Mengele's pathologist and was a highly disliked figure in the camp, although his memoir (perhaps predictably) offers no evidence of this.¹³⁶ It is also clear that Nelson's construction of Nyiszli on-screen is influenced by his own judgment of the prisoner doctor. The filmmaker states that "Nyiszli's complicity, while arguably not as gruesome in scale as others' we'll see, amounts to the most universally assailable in the world of this film."¹³⁷ However, while Nelson finds Nyiszli to be "dizzily thick," he endeavors to make the "privileged" Jew "more aware of the compromises he's making, and therefore more sympathetic than I believe he comes off in his own book."¹³⁸ By using Nyiszli's memoir as a "resource" rather than directly transposing its narrative in an attempt at "fidelity," Nelson works to develop a critical distance between his representation of Nyiszli and his film's viewers.¹³⁹ In a way, the filmmaker's resistance to his own judgments allows him to expose the moral ambiguity elucidated in Levi's grey zone.

Nelson's film engages directly with Nyiszli's controversial behavior. Played with very limited emotion by Allan Corduner, Nyiszli is depicted in *The Grey Zone* as benefiting from many "privileges," including a spacious, well-stocked office. In an early scene, he tells Mengele that the dissection findings are waiting on his desk and asks the SS officer if the lenses he requires have arrived. Nonetheless, moments after exhibiting this diligent demeanor, Nyiszli is shown to be immensely vulnerable. When Mengele tells him, "We're going to be increasing the volume of our research," a lingering close-up shows Nyiszli's distraught face, on the brink of tears, his bottom lip visibly quivering. Restraining himself, Nyiszli simply replies, "I shall need more staff."¹⁴⁰ By avoiding explicit appeals to audience emotion, Nelson maintains Nyiszli's ambiguity.

This representation of Nyiszli contrasts strongly with the brief yet romanticized portrayal of the Jewish doctor and nurse during the liquidation of the Podgorze Ghetto in *Schindler's List*. These minor characters in Spielberg's narrative administer poison to their bedridden patients before the SS arrive at the ghetto "hospital," standing defiantly as the soldiers burst through the door.¹⁴¹ The behavior of Nyiszli in Nelson's film, on the other hand, is clearly motivated by a turbid combination of self-interest, self-preservation, and mortal terror.

In *The Grey Zone*, the successful rescue of Nyiszli's family is represented without recourse to sentimentality, omitting the detailed descriptions in Nyiszli's memoir of his efforts to save his wife and daughter.¹⁴² Nelson utilizes creative license in having Mühsfeldt, the film's main perpetrator figure, instigate the rescue, constructing the character as a considerably different kind of German rescuer from Spielberg's hero. Unlike Schindler, *Oberscharführer* Mühsfeldt's gesture comes at a price, for the perpetrator demands that the doctor pass on any information he obtains regarding the rumored prisoner uprising. As revealed in many other instances throughout the film, the extreme circumstances of "privileged" Jews such as Nyiszli expose the seemingly antithetical concepts of "resistance" and "cooperation" as being intrinsically connected. The complexity of the situation represented in the film is further reinforced through Nyiszli's later attempt to enlist Mühsfeldt in the efforts to save the girl who survived the gas. In reply to Nyiszli's pleas, Mühsfeldt invokes the paradoxical nature of survival in the camp, asking the "privileged" Jew, "And who is to die in her place? No one lives here without someone else dying. ... It's a fact of the camp. ... To save her is a meaningless lie."¹⁴³ This sentiment regarding one prisoner surviving only in place of another, so often reiterated in survivor testimony, is absent from *Schindler's List*.

The controversial nature of continuing to live by cooperating with the Nazis is exemplified in Nelson's portrayal of the antipathy of the crematorium workers toward Nyiszli. In an early scene Nyiszli admits to Mühsfeldt, with whom he is on semi-cordial terms, that his fellow Jews distrust him: "I'm their doctor but they know what I do."¹⁴⁴ This conflict is particularly clear in Schlermer's seething accusations after Nyiszli revives the girl. The dialogue between the two prisoners, delivered with stone-cold expressions, evokes many complex questions without providing solutions:

Nyiszli: I never asked to be doing what I do.

Schlermer: You volunteered.

Nyiszli: They wanted doctors for a hospital.

Schlermer: You knew the sort of work you'd be doing and you continue to do it.

Nyiszli: I don't kill.

Schlermer: And we do?

Nyiszli: I didn't say that.

Schlermer: You give killing purpose.

Nyiszli: We're all just trying to make it to the next day. That's all any of us is doing.¹⁴⁵

While Schlermer is the character in *The Grey Zone* most focused on armed resistance, he is far from a traditionally heroic figure. His dismissive order to Nyiszli to "get rid of this fucking girl" discourages the viewer from adopting his aggressive judgment of the prisoner doctor. Schlermer's clear dislike for, and judgment of, Nyiszli is balanced by the latter's seemingly logical rebuttal of the former's accusations, along with the viewer's knowledge that Nyiszli was able to use his position to save his family (a fact that is much despised by Schlermer). Likewise, the viewer is encouraged to question the harsh judgments of Nyiszli when they are proffered by Mühsfeldt, who implies a parallel between the victim's role and the oppressor's: "We're each of us a part of it, once any of you decide to live this way, and you especially."¹⁴⁶ Later the SS officer asserts that Nyiszli's expertise has "quintupled the torture of children in this camp, and that is fact!" Nyiszli's impassioned reply that "to live isn't to kill, *Herr Oberscharführer*, because we're not doing the killing," maintains the separation of victim and persecutor, and undermines the perpetrator's attempt to blur this distinction.¹⁴⁷

Nelson's apparent commitment to suspend judgment is also revealed in his portrayal of the ethical dilemmas confronting the crematorium workers. This is evident from the opening scene, which is loosely adapted from Nyiszli's account.¹⁴⁸ While Hoffman retrieves Nyiszli from his quarters, several *Sonderkommando* members surround a bed where an old man lies unconscious, apparently dying. Although the man is clearly alive, Rosenthal casually orders one of the other men to "cover his head anyway." Nyiszli enters and revives the man with an intravenous injection but is soon pushed away. Held back by Schlermer, Nyiszli looks on with a horrified expression as Rosenthal smothers the unconscious Jew with a pillow, stating matter-of-factly, "What he wanted. That's all."¹⁴⁹ It is not until much later in the film that the audience learns that the man had poisoned himself after cremating his own family a week beforehand. Only then does the apparently cold-blooded murder make sense. When Rosenthal later tells Nyiszli that "we're not murderers," the doctor displays some understanding and concedes, "I hadn't been

here long enough."¹⁵⁰ This can be seen to reflect Nyiszli's comment in his memoir that "the purely human side of my nature was forced to admit that the [crematorium workers] had been right" to take the man's life.¹⁵¹ However, Nyiszli's conversation with Rosenthal in the film omits any explicitly positive judgment, instead leaving the problem somewhat unresolved for the viewer to contemplate. The ambiguous act of killing a fellow victim that opens *The Grey Zone* later serves as the catalyst for the film's most direct attempt to implicate the audience in the ethical dilemmas of the *Sonderkommando*, to be discussed in the next section. Nelson's anti-redemptory, self-reflexive mode of representation positions viewers to maintain a critical distance from the "privileged" Jews he depicts, encouraging them to contemplate the emotionally and morally loaded question of what they would do themselves if confronted with the same extreme situation.¹⁵²

"We Can't Know What We're Capable Of": Toward a Suspension of Judgment?

In concluding his essay on the grey zone, Levi's reflection that "We are all in the ghetto" evokes the contemporary relevance of the Holocaust's ethical dilemmas for his readers.¹⁵³ Likewise, Nelson writes that his film "tries to put its audience squarely in the position of having to face what these men faced: As an audience member you ask yourself, how would I have responded? What would I do to save my own life?"¹⁵⁴ Nelson reveals an acute awareness of the tension between the Holocaust's historical specificity and universal significance, noting that while the context of *The Grey Zone* is the Holocaust, "It's a film about being human. . . . This movie, while accurate to period in every way, must feel for the audience as though it's happening *now*."¹⁵⁵ By asking the same self-reflexive question of his audience as Levi does, namely what would one do under the same circumstances, Nelson explores the issues of moral ambiguity and "compromise" in a particularly sophisticated way. The filmmaker's direct confrontation with the problem of judgment can be viewed as evoking an understanding of the need to suspend moral evaluations of "privileged" Jews; nonetheless, his representation of these liminal figures reveals that judgment *is* passed, albeit in a much more subtle manner than in many other Holocaust films.

On the subject of the *Sonderkommando*'s discovery of the girl who survived the gas chamber, Levi writes in his essay that "these slaves, debased by alcohol and the daily slaughter, are transformed; they no longer have before them the anonymous mass. . . . They have a person."¹⁵⁶ Nelson's representation of the efforts to save the girl communicates a

similar sentiment. The girl's revival by Nyiszli ignites a glimmer of hope in some of the film's crematorium workers, not in terms of survival, but in terms of finding some means of dealing with their self-loathing and perhaps regaining a semblance of the "humanity" they feel they have lost. Rosenthal, who suffocated the old man in the first scene, pleads with Nyiszli to "save her ... you've gotta fucking save her!"¹⁵⁷ Similarly, the quiet-spoken Hoffman, whose constantly nervous disposition makes him seem the youngest and most emotionally vulnerable of the crematorium workers, tells the girl, "I pray to God we save you."¹⁵⁸ However, there is no sense of heroism and redemption here akin to *Schindler's List*. Before the "privileged" Jews can find a way to rescue the girl, Mühsfeldt discovers her. When Mühsfeldt asks Nyiszli if he believes he can redeem his past behavior "with the life of this one girl," the doctor answers, "I don't pretend."¹⁵⁹ While explicitly dismissing any hope of absolution, the implication remains that Nyiszli may require this judgment.

In *Schindler's List*, the girl in the red dress is positioned as the symbol of hope, innocence, and tragedy, who instigates the redemptory transformation of Schindler—the audience surrogate. On the other hand, the young girl in *The Grey Zone* becomes, to some degree, the audience surrogate herself and the medium through which the dehumanized crematorium workers confront their ethical dilemma. In previous scenes depicting the journey to Auschwitz inside a cattle car, the process of deception in the undressing room, and the entry into the gas chambers, the camera briefly adopts the point of view of the girl who, significantly, remains speechless in her role as observer throughout the film. Just before the revolt breaks out, the girl is left alone in a room with Hoffman, whom she previously witnessed beating a man to death for refusing to surrender his watch. The two prisoners stare at each other through a wall of chain mesh, perhaps symbolizing the obstacles to understanding one another. After a prolonged pause, Hoffman nervously ventures over to her "side of the fence," as he seemingly feels compelled to explain his extreme situation:

I used to think so much of myself... What I'd make of my life... We can't know what we're capable of, any of us... How can you know what you'd do to stay alive until you're really asked? I know this now ... for most of us, the answer is anything.¹⁶⁰

Hoffman's slow monologue is punctuated by pauses that seem ill-fitting alongside the film's otherwise fast-paced exchanges. In this sequence, the film's hitherto realist mode of representation breaks down.

While Hoffman's monologue is spoken, a slow-motion image of workers pulling gold teeth from the mouths of naked corpses is followed by a

close-up shot of an anonymous crematorium worker crying hysterically as he rocks back and forth. The film then moves back in time to show the old man whom Rosenthal suffocated in the film's opening scene straining at a furnace. Hoffman's contemporary voiceover explains that the man had taken poison a week after placing the bodies of his entire family inside the ovens. Hoffman then explains the manner of the man's subsequent death to the girl: "We smothered him with his own pillow, and now I know why. You can kill yourself. That's the only choice."¹⁶¹ This traumatized admission may be interpreted as invoking a notion similar to Langer's concept of choiceless choices. Indeed, Hoffman's monologue is arguably the most pivotal passage in the film. In one sense, the spoken words of the "privileged" Jew amount to what might be seen as a confession. More importantly, Hoffman's self-reflexive question concerning what one would do to stay alive in extreme circumstances confronts the film's viewers with the dilemma of how they themselves might behave in the same situation. Nonetheless, the film finishes by making some tentative suggestions about what one's behavior in such circumstances would be.

Tormented by the daily activities of the *Sonderkommando*, Hoffman asks the girl (and, by extension, the audience): "You can hear me, can't you?" When the girl motions with a subtle nod of her head, Hoffman breathes a sigh of relief and almost manages a smile. He repeats the words, "I thought so," revealing a highly restrained appeal to audience emotion.¹⁶² This appeal is repeated just before Hoffman and Rosenthal are shot in the aftermath of the revolt. Lying face down awaiting execution, the two men briefly reminisce about their homes and families, discovering that they could have been neighbors. Their smiles quickly fade as they remember their imminent deaths. Referring to their attempted rescue of the girl, Rosenthal tries to comfort Hoffman and himself with the proposition, "We did something," to which his companion agrees with a simple "Yes."¹⁶³ Both men are then killed. The final moments of these characters' lives are perhaps intended to reflect the statement in Lewenthal's manuscript that "so long as man [*sic*] is able to do anything, has the energy, can undertake risks, so long does he believe that by his conduct he may achieve something."¹⁶⁴ Even Langer concedes that the Holocaust "so threatens our sense of spiritual continuity that it is agonizing to imagine or consent to its features without introducing some affirmative values to mitigate the gloom."¹⁶⁵ While Nelson appears to end *The Grey Zone* with a positive judgment of the crematorium workers who are killed because of their attempted revolt, he deploys subtle techniques to represent Nyiszli in a somewhat negative manner. By the end of the film, the audience is positioned *against* identifying with Nyiszli.

As the only surviving Jewish character in the film, Nyiszli is an anomaly. Indeed, Nyiszli comments in his memoir that "the fact that I had come away with my life gave me neither comfort nor joy."¹⁶⁶ The ambiguous nature of the character's survival in *The Grey Zone* is epitomized in Mühsfeldt's closing comment to him: "You will continue with your work ... because that's what the living do. We will have saved each other then. We needn't save anyone else!"¹⁶⁷ Accordingly, Nyiszli's survival through cooperating is represented without evoking audience empathy. Nelson portrays the prisoner doctor hiding under his dissecting table wearing a bloodied lab coat during the rebellion.¹⁶⁸ When Mühsfeldt informs him that he is to live and continue with his experiments, the doctor retches violently. In contrast to Spielberg's representation of the "Schindler Jews," Nelson does not romanticize Nyiszli's survival—even though one of the producers of *The Grey Zone*, Avi Lerner, wanted a "heroic story" with a "happy ending" that focused on "the one guy who did get away."¹⁶⁹ As the girl is forced to look on while the remaining crematorium workers are executed, Nyiszli, dressed in a clean, black suit and tie, coolly smokes a cigarette and watches the proceedings with interest. Surrounded by SS officers, the terrified girl seems to glance at Nyiszli and quickly look away. The "privileged" Jew displays no emotional reaction to the girl, watching from a distance as she is shot by Mühsfeldt.¹⁷⁰ Thus Nelson's representation of Nyiszli ends by implying that he has "compromised" himself.

Whereas Spielberg offers a "happy" ending, Nelson resists the closure of most mainstream feature films. In what equates to the antithesis of Spielberg's redemption of Goldberg, Nelson omits Nyiszli's lengthy account of his subsequent survival of Auschwitz and several other camps, along with his optimistic concluding remark in his memoir that, after being reunited with his family, he was resolved to rebuild their lives: "Life suddenly became meaningful again."¹⁷¹ This is replaced in the film by a single caption referring to Nyiszli's later death, the death of his wife, and the unknown fate of his daughter. Unlike *Schindler's List*, *The Grey Zone* does not end with the triumphant continuation of life beyond the Holocaust, but with a sequence of shots portraying exhausted crematorium workers continuing their labor, although these images are stylized in a form that deviates from the majority of the film. The slow-motion, almost surrealist, images of the workers attached to the replacement *Sonderkommando* show them cremating their predecessors. This visual element is accompanied by the young girl's disembodied narrative voiceover, a technique that Charles Affron identifies as a subtle means of provoking audience sentiment through a "pathos of absence."¹⁷² Focusing on the continuation of the extermination process, the girl's voice describes her own incineration by the new crematorium workers:

We settle on their shoes and on their faces, and in their lungs, and they become so used to us that soon they don't cough, and they don't brush us away. At this point they're just moving. Breathing and moving, like anyone else still alive in that place. And this is how the work continues.¹⁷³

The girl's unsentimental narration reflects the comment in Nyiszli's memoir that “life soon resumed its normal course. . . . [The new squad] would get used to all this before long.”¹⁷⁴ More importantly, the fact that the girl as audience surrogate literally merges in fire and ash with the massacred crematorium workers connotes a similar merging of the *Sonderkommando* members with the film's viewers. The tenuousness of this connection between audience and “privileged” Jew is indicative of the film's critical distancing of the viewer and discouragement of empathic identification, yet at the same time, the girl's monologue can be read as another limited appeal to audience emotion.

Through Nelson's minimalist approach to affecting audience sentiment and rigorous exploration of the complexities of Jewish behavior *in extremis*, *The Grey Zone* can be seen to move toward the suspension of judgment recommended by Levi. The anti-redemptory discourse of the film provides a complex and nuanced engagement with the ethical dilemmas of “privileged” Jews. Nonetheless, the subtle presence of certain positive and negative judgments in Nelson's film again points to the inevitability of taking a moral position when portraying these liminal figures. Drawing on Levi's concept of the grey zone and the issue of “privileged” Jews in his essay on teaching the Holocaust through visual culture, David Bathrick asks: “Can one visualize as an artist creatively, or for that matter perceive, a traumatic circumstance and at the same time resist the ‘need to judge?’”¹⁷⁵ In whatever way this question is answered, qualifications are required. Fiction films represent “privileged” Jews through considerably different means than written memoirs, historical writing, and documentaries, yet despite their distinct approaches to depicting the past, the films of both Spielberg and Nelson reveal a crucial reliance on testimony and history. An opening legend of *The Grey Zone* establishes that it “addresses true events,” which are “based in part on the eyewitness account of Dr. Miklos Nyiszli,” whereas Spielberg's film is validated by the on-screen presence of actual *Schindlerjuden* in its final scene.¹⁷⁶ While both filmmakers make claims—to varying degrees—of historical and moral authority by their use of survivor testimony and representation of historical situations, they utilize their resources in very different ways.

The clear-cut judgment of “privileged” Jews in Spielberg's film underlines the importance of Levi's acknowledgment of (and call to others to acknowledge) the fraught ethical issues involved in attempting to rep-

resent the experiences of "privileged" Jews. This is not to suggest that mainstream narratives are completely incapable of offering a nuanced representation of these liminal figures. While a certain ambivalence can be found in the CBS television movie *Playing for Time* (1980), which portrays a group of women who hold positions in the Auschwitz prisoner orchestra, the audience is nonetheless provided with a virtuous protagonist with whom to identify.¹⁷⁷ Indeed, *Schindler's List* also briefly evokes the moral ambiguity inherent in the situations of "privileged" Jews, although this is quickly displaced by Spielberg's employment of humor, heroism, and sentimentality.

Nelson's emotional and intellectual distancing of the audience, on the other hand, allows *The Grey Zone* to lean more toward the suspension of judgment required by Levi. Through the filmmaker's merging of chronologically separate events, inclusion of fictional characters, and concentration on the ethical dilemmas that "privileged" Jews faced, *The Grey Zone* reflects Doneson's aforementioned preference for faithfulness to the Holocaust's historical "essence" over literal "accuracy" of "precise detail."¹⁷⁸ The use of an unconventional mode of fictional characterization as opposed to traditional Hollywood tropes seems to grant a heightened potential for portraying "privileged" Jews in a nuanced manner. Nelson's film also reveals that the judgments of source texts may be resisted, as in his innovative use of Nyiszli's memoir and Levi's essay. However, as was the case for Levi's writings examined in chapter 1, an analysis of *The Grey Zone* suggests that a suspension of moral judgment may be impossible. The question posed to the audience through Hoffman's monologue—namely, "What would you have done?"—is a rhetorical one, and reveals the paradox of judgment intrinsic to Levi's grey zone. In directly engaging with the ethical dilemmas of "privileged" Jews, Nelson and his audience are caught between the impossibility and inescapability of passing judgment, the idea with which this book concludes.

Notes

1. Raul Hilberg, "Incompleteness in Holocaust Historiography," in Petropoulos and Roth, *Gray Zones*, 88.
2. Ibid.
3. The scope of this criticism is too vast to list here, although substantial studies include Loshitzky, *Spielberg's Holocaust*; Kobi Niv, *Life Is Beautiful, but Not for Jews: Another View of the Film by Benigni* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2003); Grace Russo Bul-laro, ed., *Beyond Life Is Beautiful: Comedy and Tragedy in the Cinema of Roberto Benigni* (Leicester: Troubador, 2005), 177–321.
4. See Lawrence L. Langer, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 30–47.

5. Commenting on the overwhelming focus on rescue and survival in *Schindler's List*, Mark Rawlinson writes that "escape, resistance and rebellion invoke ideals of free agency and moral determination which in themselves connote subjectivities and realities alien to the regime of the death camps." See Mark Rawlinson, "Adapting the Holocaust: *Schindler's List*, Intellectuals and Public Knowledge," in *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, eds. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (London: Routledge, 1999), 118.
6. The marginalization of "privileged" Jews in mainstream fiction films is elaborated upon in Adam Brown, "Marginalising the Marginal in Holocaust Films: Fictional Representations of Jewish Policemen," *Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies* (online journal), no. 15 (June 2009).
7. Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler: How History Is Bought, Packaged, and Sold* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 76 (author's emphasis).
8. See Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows*, 249; Omer Bartov, *Germany's War and the Holocaust: Disputed Histories* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 193.
9. For a detailed discussion of the reception of *Holocaust*, see Shandler, *While America Watches*, 155–78. See chapter 2 for Levi's attitude toward the miniseries.
10. Lanzmann, "From the Holocaust to 'Holocaust,'" in Lanzmann, *Shoah: Key Essays*, 30.
11. For a forceful critique of this binary opposition, see Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Schindler's List Is Not Shoah: Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory," in Loshitzky, *Spielberg's Holocaust*.
12. Picart and Frank, *Frames of Evil*, 14.
13. Judith E. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film*, 2nd ed. (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 181–82.
14. Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows*, 247. Films focusing on rescue go back to 1944, with Leopold Lindtberg's Swiss film, *The Last Chance*. Also see Michel Mitrani's *Les Guichets Du Louvre* [Black Thursday] (1974), James F. Collier's *The Hiding Place* (1975), Peter Lilienthal's *David* (1979), François Truffaut's *The Last Metro* (1980), Beda Docampo Feijóo and Juan Bautista Stagnaro's *Debajo del mundo* [Under the Earth] (1987), Anthony Page's *Forbidden: A True Story* (1984), Agnieszka Holland's *Angry Harvest* (1984), Ed Sherin's *Lena: My 100 Children* (1987), Kjell Grede's *Good Evening, Mr. Wallenberg* (1990), and Jan Lomnicki's *Just Beyond This Forest* (1991). For examples of films focusing on Jewish resistance, see Aleksander Ford's *Border Street* (1948), Andrzej Wajda's *Samson* (1961), Frank Beyer's *Jacob the Liar* (1975), Robert Markowitz's *The Wall* (1982), and Edward Zwick's *Defiance* (2008).
15. On this point, see Robert Sklar, "The Holocaust in Contemporary Cinema," *Dimensions* 14, no. 2 (2000): 11. For a selection of films featuring Gentile rescuers after the release of *Schindler's List*, see Joan Micklin Silver's *In the Presence of Mine Enemies* (1997), Matej Minac's *All My Loved Ones* (1999), Jan Hřebejk's *Divided We Fall* (2000), Eric Till's *Bonhoeffer: Agent of Grace* (2000), John Grey's *Haven* (2001), Lionel Chetwynd's *Varian's War* (2001), Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* (2002), Margarethe von Trotta's *Rosenstrasse* (2003), John Daly's *The Couple* (2004), Richard Dembo's *Nina's Home* (2005), and Gilles Paquet-Brenner's *Sarah's Key* (2010).
16. A little known film that judges the controversial behavior of Chaim Rumkowski positively is Noel Penn's single-actor production, *The Emperor of the Ghetto* (1992). Written by a Lodz survivor sympathetic to Rumkowski, the film's narrator-protagonist explicitly rejects the judgments imposed on the Jewish leader by historians and praises him as a tragic hero.
17. Levi briefly mentions Pontecorvo's *Kapò* in "The Grey Zone" but does not comment on its representation of "privileged" Jews. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 29. For further discussion of *Kapò* in relation to Levi's grey zone, see David Bathrick,

- "Teaching Visual Culture and the Holocaust," in *Teaching the Representation of the Holocaust*, eds. Marianne Hirsch and Irene Kacandes (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2004), 292–93.
18. Anthony Savile, "Sentimentality," in *Arguing About Art: Contemporary Philosophical Debates*, eds. Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (London: Routledge, 2002), 340.
 19. The story of Schindler has also appeared on-screen in Jon Blair, *Oskar Schindler: The Story of the Man* (Great Britain: Video Classroom, 1983), VHS; Ted Newsom, *Oskar Schindler; Adolf Hitler and the Holocaust* (United States: Simitar Entertainment, 1994), VHS.
 20. Hansen, "Schindler's List Is Not Shoah," 80–85. For further discussion of the film's reception, see Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory*, 125–58; Haim Bresheeth, "The Great Taboo Broken: Reflections on the Israeli Reception of *Schindler's List*," in Loshitzky, *Spielberg's Holocaust*; William J. Niven, "The Reception of Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* in the German Media," *Journal of European Studies* 25, no. 98 (June 1995); Scott Denham, "Schindler Returns to Open Arms: *Schindler's List* in Germany and Austria," in *Lessons and Legacies, Volume 3: Memory, Memorialization, and Denial*, ed. Peter Hayes (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999); Nigel Morris, *The Cinema of Steven Spielberg: Empire of Light* (London: Wallflower, 2007), 214–38.
 21. For further discussion, see Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism*, 243–44. Similar sentiments are expressed in Richard L. Rubenstein and John K. Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz: The Holocaust and Its Legacy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 293.
 22. Bartov, *Murder in Our Midst*, 168.
 23. Emilie Schindler, *Where Light and Shadow Meet: A Memoir*, trans. Dolores M. Koch (St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1997); David M. Crowe, *Oskar Schindler: The Untold Account of His Life, Wartime Activities, and the Story Behind the List* (Cambridge: Westview, 2004).
 24. Steven Zaillian, *Schindler's List: Screenplay. 3rd Revisions, 3/24/92* (Geelong: Copy held by Deakin University, 1992), 35–36. See also Thomas Keneally, *Schindler's Ark* (London: Sceptre, [1982] 1988), 76, 85–87, 425. Other disparities between the film and its source text are explored in Daniel Mark Fogel, "Schindler's List in Novel and Film: Exponential Conversion," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 14, no. 3 (1994).
 25. Anne Thompson, "Making History: How Steven Spielberg Brought *Schindler's List* to Life," in *Oskar Schindler and His List: The Man, the Book, the Film, the Holocaust and Its Survivors*, ed. Thomas Fensch (Forest Dale: Paul S. Eriksson, 1994), 68.
 26. See, for example, Joseph Natoli, *Speeding to the Millennium: Film and Culture, 1993–1995* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 90.
 27. Sara R. Horowitz, "But Is It Good for the Jews?: Spielberg's Schindler and the Aesthetics of Atrocity," in Loshitzky, *Spielberg's Holocaust*, 136.
 28. Bryan Cheyette, "The Uncertain Certainty of *Schindler's List*," in Loshitzky, *Spielberg's Holocaust*, 233.
 29. Gillian Rose, "Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation," in Cheyette and Marcus, *Modernity, Culture and "the Jew"*, 244–45.
 30. Steven Spielberg, *Schindler's List* (Australia: Universal Pictures, [1993] 2004), DVD, disc 1, chapter 5.
 31. Interestingly, Mark Ivanir, who played Goldberg, may have deviated from the script slightly here, with the subtitles translating the character's dialogue as: "Come on, they are not as bad as everyone says. Well, they're worse than everyone says." While perhaps less explicit, the judgment still remains. The film's screenplay, which positions Chilowicz in this scene rather than Goldberg, has the "privileged" Jew state:

- "They're not as bad as everyone says. Well, maybe they *are*, but—." See Zaillian, *Schindler's List: Screenplay*, 19 (author's emphasis).
32. For an example of such criticism, see Horowitz, "But Is It Good for the Jews?," 125–26.
 33. Keneally, *Schindler's Ark*, 107. Pfefferberg eventually faked sickness to be dismissed from his position. See *ibid.*, 107–11.
 34. Spielberg, *Schindler's List*, disc 1, chapter 6.
 35. *Ibid.*, disc 1, chapter 7.
 36. *Ibid.*, disc 1, chapter 11.
 37. This simultaneous judgment and assertion of unimportance is similarly evident in the film *Nina's Journey*, in which the protagonist makes fun of her brother's decision to join the *Ordnungsdienst* by putting his cap on and saluting comically. See Lena Einhorn, *Nina's Resa* [Nina's Journey] (Sweden: AB Svensk Filmindustri, 2005), DVD, chapter 5.
 38. Spielberg, *Schindler's List*, disc 1, chapter 14; Keneally, *Schindler's Ark*, 133, 140, 156–57, 166, 206–8.
 39. See, for example, David Brenner, "Working through the Holocaust Blockbuster: *Schindler's List* and *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, Globally and Locally," *Germanic Review* 75, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 302.
 40. Anna Rosner Blay, *Sister, Sister* (Alexandria: Hale and Iremonger, 1998), 141. For a similar evaluation of Goldberg, see Jack Mintz's recollections in Elinor J. Brecher, *Schindler's Legacy: True Stories of the List Survivors* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1994), 497.
 41. This point is also made in Sue Vice, *Holocaust Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2000), 196n.16.
 42. Chilowicz's activities and murder in Plaszow were originally scripted. See Zaillian, *Schindler's List: Screenplay*, 66, 86, 110–11. These events are detailed with reference to Levi's grey zone in Crowe, *Oskar Schindler*, 334–43. Also see Stella Müller-Madej, *A Girl from Schindler's List* (London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1997), 140; Malvina Graf, *The Kraków Ghetto and the Plaszów Camp Remembered* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1989), 130–31. Chilowicz was also designated *Lagerältester* (camp leader) of Plaszow.
 43. Daniel R. Schwarz, *Imagining the Holocaust* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999), 231. Pemper's own testimony can be found in Mietek Pemper, *The Road to Rescue: The Untold Story of Schindler's List*, trans. David Dollenmayer (New York: Other, 2008).
 44. See Keneally, *Schindler's Ark*, 72–73, 87–89, 107–11, 132–33, 139–41, 150, 166, 276.
 45. Zaillian, *Schindler's List: Screenplay*, 13.
 46. Spielberg, *Schindler's List*, disc 1, chapter 3.
 47. *Ibid.*, disc 1, chapter 3.
 48. *Ibid.*, Disc 1, chapter 3.
 49. Keneally, *Schindler's Ark*, 75, 318.
 50. Spielberg, *Schindler's List*, disc 1, chapter 16.
 51. Keneally, *Schindler's Ark*, 52–53.
 52. Spielberg, *Schindler's List*, disc 1, chapter 16.
 53. *Ibid.*, disc 1, chapter 26.
 54. Crowe, *Oskar Schindler*, 326–27. See also Solomon Urbach's testimony in Blair, *Oskar Schindler*.
 55. For details of this, see Abraham Zuckerman, *A Voice in the Chorus: Memories of a Teenager Saved by Schindler* (Stamford: Longmeadow, 1991), 85–87.
 56. Spielberg, *Schindler's List*, disc 1, chapter 17.
 57. This phrase is used in Bryan Cheyette, "The Holocaust in the Picture-House," *The Times Literary Supplement* (18 February 1994): 19.

58. Spielberg, *Schindler's List*, disc 1, chapters 18–19.
59. On this point, see Hansen, "Schindler's List Is Not Shoah," 85.
60. Keneally, *Schindler's Ark*, 16.
61. Spielberg, *Schindler's List*, disc 2, chapter 1.
62. Vice, *Holocaust Fiction*, 90. Vice positions Keneally's novel as a work of "faction."
63. Keneally, *Schindler's Ark*, 316–27. For more on Goldberg's ambiguous involvement in the making of the list(s), see Aleksander B. Skotnicki, *Oskar Schindler in the Eyes of Cracovian Jews Rescued by Him* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo, 2008), 86, 128, 144, 208, 289; Pemper, *The Road to Rescue: The Untold Story of Schindler's List*, 146–50; Schindler, *Where Light and Shadow Meet*, 63; Crowe, *Oskar Schindler*, 316, 337–38, 361–86. Noting the numerous obstacles in analyzing the construction of the list(s), Crowe has qualified the negative criticisms of Goldberg, concluding that: "In the end, there is no doubt that there was a concentrated effort by Goldberg to save as many members of the same families as possible." *Ibid.*, 381.
64. Keneally, *Schindler's Ark*, 321.
65. Crowe, *Oskar Schindler*, 361.
66. Keneally, *Schindler's Ark*, 316.
67. Spielberg, *Schindler's List*, disc 2, chapter 2.
68. For further discussion of this point, see Horowitz, "But Is It Good for the Jews?," 125; Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Movies as Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 102–3.
69. Cheyette, "The Uncertain Certainty of *Schindler's List*," 235.
70. Amy Hungerford, "Surviving Rego Park: Holocaust Theory from Art Spiegelman to Berel Lang," in *The Americanization of the Holocaust*, ed. Hilene Flanzbaum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 112.
71. Crowe, *Oskar Schindler*, 363. Indeed, the transfer of workers and industry to rear territories was common practice in 1944. See Michael Wildt, "The Invented and the Real: Historiographical Notes on *Schindler's List*," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 41 (Spring 1996): 246.
72. Quoted in Brecher, *Schindler's Legacy*, 412–13. Crowe points out that in addition to Schindler having very little to do with the list's creation, only one third of the Jews on it had previously worked for him, as "many of those who were put on Goldberg's list were prominent prewar Cracovian Jews or important Jewish officials in Płaszów." See Crowe, *Oskar Schindler*, 316.
73. Zaillian, *Schindler's List: Screenplay*, 127–30.
74. *Ibid.*, 141–42. Illustrating the director's involvement, the initial script grew from 130 to 190 pages after Spielberg's alterations. See Franciszek Palowski, *The Making of Schindler's List: Behind the Scenes of an Epic Film*, trans. Anna Ware and Robert G. Ware (Secaucus: Birch Lane, [1993] 1998), 72.
75. Rose, "Beginnings of the Day," 246.
76. See Keneally, *Schindler's Ark*, 415; Spielberg, *Schindler's List*, disc 2, chapter 3.
77. Richard Wolin, "Schindler's List and the Politics of Remembrance," in Fensch, *Oskar Schindler and His List*, 229.
78. Various sources point out that Schindler never visited Auschwitz; continued his adultery at Brinnlitz and after the war; maintained substantial profits from his black market dealings; and made a nervous, hurried departure from the camp, laden with diamonds, with eight Jews for protection from the Soviets, his wife, and a mistress.
79. Spielberg, *Schindler's List*, disc 2, chapter 10. That the film portrays an emotional Schindler admiring the gift and panicking when he accidentally drops it disguises the fact that after the war he shamelessly confessed that he had sold the ring for schnapps. See Eric Silver, *The Book of the Just: The Silent Heroes Who Saved Jews from Hitler* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1992), 154.

80. Goldberg emigrated to Argentina, where he became a builder and then, ironically, a factory owner. After a fellow survivor spotted him by chance, a document condemning his wartime behavior was written, signed by 65 "Schindler Jews," and submitted to the police for his arrest. However, the attempt was rejected by the Argentine authorities due to what they saw as Goldberg's humanitarian work in the country, being "loved" by the 120 workers he supported with a "very good salary." Goldberg died in the mid-1970s and was buried in a prominent part of the *Cemetario de Tablada*, near its Holocaust memorial. One story holds that the protests of a "Schindler Jew" resulted in Goldberg being disinterred and reburied in the section of the cemetery reserved for Jewish pimps and prostitutes. See Crowe, *Oskar Schindler*, 464–66; Brecher, *Schindler's Legacy*, 363–64.
81. Picart and Frank, *Frames of Evil*, 145.
82. *Ibid.*, 15.
83. *Ibid.*, x.
84. These connections have been pointed out in R. Clifton Spargo, "Sophie's Choice: On the Pedagogical Value of the 'Problem Text,'" in Eaglestone and Langford, *Teaching Holocaust Literature and Film*, ed. Robert, 153; David Gershom Myers, "Jews without Memory: *Sophie's Choice* and the Ideology of Liberal Anti-Judaism," *American Literary History* 13, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 513; Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust*, 80.
85. Ilan Avisar, "Personal Fears and National Nightmares: The Holocaust Complex in Israeli Cinema," in Sicher, *Breaking Crystal*, 151–53.
86. Significantly, *Europa, Europa*, a film in which the protagonist hides his Jewish identity by joining the Hitler Youth, was perceived to be commercially unsuccessful due to its evocation of "moral compromise" and because of its lack of redemptive quality. Frank Stern, "The Holocaust: Representing Lasting Images in Literature and Film," in Kwiet and Matthäus, *Contemporary Responses to the Holocaust*, 207–8.
87. See Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 32–33.
88. Lina Wertmüller, *Seven Beauties* (United States: KOCH Entertainment, [1975] 2006), DVD.
89. Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*, trans. Thomas Weyr (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 74.
90. Commenting on the perversion of history for fetishistic reasons, Bartov criticizes such films for their "detached, amoral, *nonjudgmental*, complacent, and yet highly dangerous morbid curiosity about extremity." Bartov, *Murder In Our Midst*, 128 (my emphasis).
91. See "Novel, Film, State of the World: Imre Kertész on *Fateless*" (Special Feature on DVD), Lajos Koltai, *Fateless* (United States: ThinkFilm, 2004).
92. Stern, "The Holocaust," 213.
93. The film draws on Gisella Perl, *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz* (Salem: Ayer, [1948] 1992), and, to a lesser extent, Olga Lengyel, *Five Chimneys: The Story of Auschwitz* (New York: Howard Fertig, [1947] 1983). For a detailed discussion of Perl and her depiction in *Out of the Ashes*, see Adam Brown, "'No One Will Ever Know...': The Holocaust, 'Privileged' Jews, and the 'Grey Zone'" *History Australia* 8, no. 3 (December 2011).
94. Yosefa Loshitzky, *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 17.
95. Francesco Rosi, *The Truce* (United States: Miramax Home Entertainment, [1997] 2003), DVD, chapter 14.
96. Barry Langford, "Mass Culture/Mass Media/Mass Death: Teaching Film, Television, and the Holocaust," in Eaglestone and Langford *Teaching Holocaust Film and Literature*, 73.

97. For further discussion of the film's sources, see Tim Blake Nelson, *The Grey Zone: Director's Notes and Screenplay* (New York: Newmarket, 2003), 139–67.
98. See, for example, Elbert Ventura, "The Grey Zone," in *PopMatters* (31 October 2002).
99. Such evaluations have been made in Kristin Hohenadel, "The Grey Zone: A Holocaust Horror Story without a Schindler," in *The New York Times on the Web* (7 January 2001); Rob Blackwelder, "Concentration Camp Quandary," in *Splicedwire* (2002).
100. Nelson, *Director's Notes*, 163.
101. Hohenadel, "The Grey Zone." Significantly, as revealed in this article, Nelson began *The Grey Zone* after spending eighteen months writing the story of his mother's escape from Germany and then abandoning it as too formulaic—"the same old survivor's tale from the Holocaust."
102. Jack Gold, *Escape from Sobibor* (United States: Digital Works, 1987), chapter 5. Sobibor's death machinery was serviced by a separate group of Jewish prisoners isolated from those who were able to take part in the uprising.
103. See Nyiszli, *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account*, 162–67; Müller, *Auschwitz Inferno*, 144–60; Południak, *Sonder*, 80–87; Tzipora Hager Halivni, "The Birkenau Revolt: Poles Prevent a Timely Insurrection," *Jewish Social Studies* 41, no. 2 (Spring 1979); Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, [1986] 1990), 743–50; Henryk Swiebocki, *Auschwitz 1940–1945: Central Issues in the History of the Camp, Volume 4: The Resistance Movement*, trans. William Brand (Oswiecim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, [1995] 2000), 117, 245–49; Ainsztein, *Jewish Resistance in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe*, 813; Steinberg, *The Jews Against Hitler*, 286–87; Konnilyn G. Feig, *Hitler's Death Camps: The Sanity of Madness* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979), 363–64.
104. Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, 159.
105. Nelson, *Director's Notes*, 159.
106. Nyiszli, *Auschwitz*, 166; See also "Deleted Scenes" on the DVD and Nelson, *Director's Notes*, 118, 24–25. The film's script leaves little doubt that the escapees would be killed.
107. Nelson, *Director's Notes*, 158–59.
108. See Hohenadel, "The Grey Zone."
109. Nelson, *Director's Notes*, ix.
110. For various references to this or a similar incident, see Nyiszli, *Auschwitz*, 114–20; Ralf Piechovak, *Hitler's Holocaust* (Australia: Siren Visual Entertainment, [2000] 2004), DVD, part 4, chapter 11; Stanislaw Jankowski's manuscript, quoted in Jadwiga Bezwinska and Danuta Czech, eds., *Amidst a Nightmare of Crime: Manuscripts of Prisoners in Crematorium Squads Found at Auschwitz* (New York: Howard Fertig, [1973] 1992), 65.
111. Tim Blake Nelson, *The Grey Zone* (United States: Lions Gate Home Entertainment, [2001] 2003), DVD, chapter 16.
112. Nelson, *Director's Notes*, 145.
113. On this point, see *ibid.*, 157.
114. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 42.
115. Anton Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 114.
116. Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust*, 35.
117. Nelson, *Director's Notes*, 158.
118. Quoted in Bezwinska and Czech, eds., *Amidst a Nightmare of Crime*, 139.
119. Nelson, *The Grey Zone*, chapter 5.
120. *Ibid.*, chapter 8.

121. As Nelson informed his colleagues before filming: "It's important we avoid the easy and convenient image of banding together effortlessly in victimhood. The fact is conditions in the camp, and particularly the Sonderkommandos, brought out shameful qualities in men [*sic*], the most benign of which were mistrust, greed, xenophobia, and self-hatred (anti-Semitism)." Nelson, *Director's Notes*, 157.
122. Nelson, *The Grey Zone*, chapter 8. Filip Müller, a rare survivor of the *Sonderkommandos* who is discussed in chapter 3, writes that the special squad consisted of 450 Hungarian, 200 Polish, 180 Greek, and a handful of Slovak and German Jews, resulting in last-minute conflicts within the crematoria over the uprising. See Müller, *Auschwitz Inferno*, 132–33, 146–47.
123. Nelson, *The Grey Zone*, chapter 16.
124. *Ibid.*, chapter 17.
125. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 23.
126. See, for example, Yuri Suhl, "Rosa Robot: Heroine of the Auschwitz Underground," in *They Fought Back: The Story of the Jewish Resistance in Nazi Europe*, ed. Yuri Suhl (New York: Schocken, 1975).
127. Nelson, *The Grey Zone*, chapter 12. The characterization of the other "common" prisoners, namely Dina and Anja, also lacks explicit appeals to audience sympathy.
128. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 23–24.
129. *Ibid.*, 38. A short scene relating to the soccer match was scripted by Nelson but left unfilmed. Another brief scene showing prisoners kicking a ball outside the crematoria was omitted from the final cut. See "Deleted Scenes" on the DVD and Nelson, *Director's Notes*, 79. For a detailed analysis of the controversial soccer match, see Brown, "Beyond 'Good' and 'Evil,'" 413–14.
130. Nyiszli, *Auschwitz*, 117, 123.
131. Nelson, *The Grey Zone*, chapter 15.
132. *Ibid.*, chapter 3.
133. Nyiszli, *Auschwitz*, 30.
134. *Ibid.*, 11.
135. *Ibid.*, 41, 56, 34.
136. Klein, "Primo Levi," 83. For a less condemnatory discussion of the ambiguity of Nyiszli's position, see Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (Basic Books, [1986] 2000), 370.
137. Nelson, *Director's Notes*, 148.
138. *Ibid.*, 156.
139. The term "resource" is taken from developments in adaptation theory, which work to replace the privileged status of "fidelity" to the original text with an emphasis on intertextuality. See Brian McFarlane, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 10.
140. Nelson, *The Grey Zone*, chapter 3.
141. Spielberg, *Schindler's List*, disc 1, chapter 14. While Keneally devotes a significant section of his novel to exploring this ethical dilemma, Spielberg's film avoids such moral complexities. See Keneally, *Schindler's Ark*, 192–98.
142. Nyiszli, *Auschwitz*, 139–47.
143. Spielberg, *Schindler's List*, chapter 19.
144. Nelson, *The Grey Zone*, chapter 6.
145. *Ibid.*, chapter 15. Intertextually, the casting of Daniel Benzali as Schlermer is significant in view of the actor's prior role in the film *A Day in October* (1992), in which he plays the somewhat "morally compromised" Jewish bookkeeper of a Nazi arms factory in Denmark who overcomes his fear of reprisals by reverting from cooperation to sabotage.
146. Nelson, *The Grey Zone*, chapter 6.

147. Ibid., chapter 19.
148. Nyiszli, *Auschwitz*, 108–9.
149. Nelson, *The Grey Zone*, chapter 1.
150. Ibid., chapter 13.
151. Nyiszli, *Auschwitz*, 109.
152. Libby Saxton's brief discussion of Nelson's film makes similar points about its complex positioning of the audience "disrupting Manichean oppositions between good and evil" and "refuting the myth of the neutral or guiltless bystander"; however, she does not dwell on the problem of judgment in relation to "privileged" Jews. See Saxton, *Haunted Images*, 84.
153. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 51.
154. Nelson, *Director's Notes*, ix. Similarly, reflecting on the "beautiful" cinematography of *Schindler's List*, director of photography Russel Fine states that he gave *The Grey Zone* an "intentionally rough, hand-held look; made the images less romantic and less heroic. We want it to feel like you're there." Quoted in Hohenadel, "*The Grey Zone*."
155. Nelson, *Director's Notes*, xiii, 141 (author's emphasis).
156. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 39.
157. Nelson, *The Grey Zone*, chapter 17.
158. Ibid., chapter 18.
159. Nelson, *The Grey Zone*, chapter 19.
160. Ibid., chapter 18. This parallels the statement in Lewenthal's diary that "everyone is subconsciously mastered by ... the aspiration to live at any cost." Quoted in Bezwinska and Czech, *Amidst a Nightmare of Crime*, 136.
161. Nelson, *The Grey Zone*, chapter 19.
162. Ibid., chapters 18–19.
163. Ibid., chapter 22. The film's indirect encouragement of viewer identification with the members of the *Sonderkommando* may also be seen in the pronounced American accents of many of the film's Jewish characters in contrast to the German accents of the perpetrators.
164. Quoted in Bezwinska and Czech, *Amidst a Nightmare of Crime*, 136.
165. Lawrence L. Langer, "The Dilemma of Choice in the Deathcamps," in Rosenberg and Myers, *Echoes from the Holocaust*, 118.
166. Nyiszli, *Auschwitz*, 161.
167. Nelson, *The Grey Zone*, chapter 22.
168. Ibid., chapter 21.
169. Quoted in Hohenadel, "*The Grey Zone*."
170. Nelson, *The Grey Zone*, chapter 23.
171. Nyiszli, *Auschwitz*, 222.
172. Charles Affron, *Cinema and Sentiment* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 51.
173. Nelson, *The Grey Zone*, chapter 23.
174. Nyiszli, *Auschwitz*, 168–69.
175. Bathrick, "Teaching Visual Culture and the Holocaust," 292.
176. Nelson, *The Grey Zone*, chapter 1; Spielberg, *Schindler's List*, disc 2, chapter 12.
177. An analysis of the complex representation of the Holocaust in *Playing for Time*, primarily in relation to perpetrators, can be found in Adam Brown, "Screening Women's Complicity in the Holocaust: The Problems of Judgement and Representation," *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 17, no. 2–3 (Summer/Autumn 2012).
178. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film*, 181–82.

CONCLUSION

“AND WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE DONE?” NEGOTIATING THE PARADOXICAL BIND



The Holocaust did not pronounce the death of ethics, but it did prove that ethics is immensely vulnerable, that it can be misused and perverted, and that no simple reaffirmation of pre-Holocaust ethics, as if nothing had happened, will do any more. Too much has happened for that, including the fact that the shadow of Birkenau so often shows Western religious, philosophical, and ethical traditions to be problematic.

—John K. Roth, *Ethics During and After the Holocaust: In the Shadow of Birkenau*

Even though the far-reaching implications of the Holocaust have caused many scholars to take little for granted when reflecting on ethics, I do not argue that the event has propelled humanity into an ethical abyss. It would perhaps be too easy to exclaim “Enough!” and banish the Holocaust from human history and discourse, into some transcendental realm that is beyond all hope of understanding. Yet the *necessity* of continued efforts to represent and—to whatever extent possible—comprehend the magnitude of the event and the extreme experiences it entailed counterbalances any claim that the Holocaust is fundamentally impossible to come to grips with. Drawing on Primo Levi’s aversion to Manichean allegories and his warning against moral judgment, Shoshana Felman writes that “the moral implications of the Holocaust

are such that our task today is to find ways, precisely, to *rearticulate* the question of ethics outside the problematic—and the comfort—of a judgment that can be delegated to no human tribunal.”¹ While replete with unresolved tensions, shifting meanings, and contradictions, the value of Levi’s attempt to do this in his writing on the grey zone is clear. The common tendency to judge “privileged” Jews according to clear-cut moral distinctions reveals that the problems of judgment and representation are ongoing.

The field of philosophy has recently granted the Holocaust substantial attention, although the vast majority of texts have focused on subjects other than the behavior of victims. Major themes include the “ordinariness” of the perpetrators who committed this extraordinary evil, the utter incomprehensibility of this evil, and the theological problems associated with the existence of God amidst such evil. The contemporary philosopher Giorgio Agamben appropriates Levi’s concept of the grey zone in his call for a radical revision of how ethics is conceived in the wake of the Holocaust. While Agamben does not focus on “privileged” Jews in his discussion of what he perceives as the disintegration of an ethics founded on human dignity, he does briefly dwell on the liminal figures of the *Sonderkommandos*. Meditating, albeit somewhat abstractly, on the grey zone, Agamben notes a crucial obstacle to any attempt at understanding—namely, the problem of judgment: “The unprecedented discovery made by Levi at Auschwitz concerns an area that is independent of every establishment of responsibility, an area in which Levi succeeded in isolating something like a new ethical element.”² However, Agamben’s blurring of persecutors and the persecuted in his characterization of the grey zone as a realm in which “victims become executioners and executioners become victims” clearly signals a departure from Levi’s ideas.³ As Dominick LaCapra points out in his critique of Agamben’s work, Levi’s grey zone raises “the question of the existence and extent of problematic—at times more or less dubiously hybridised—cases, but it does not imply the rashly generalized blurring or simple collapse of all distinctions, including that between perpetrator and victim.”⁴

In popular culture in particular, but also in other areas, the glorification of victims and demonization of perpetrators arguably remains the dominant paradigm of Holocaust reflection and representation. Given the immense suffering of the victims and the invariably enigmatic nature of perpetrator and collaborator behavior, this is perhaps understandable, but a Manichean framework is also dangerous. Many contemporary university students whom I have met still share these clear-cut ideas about “good” and “evil” in relation to the Holocaust; nonetheless, they *are* open to (and interested in) the ambiguities of the grey zone. Such ambi-

guities need not be taboo. Cultural and historical representations—and the continued scholarly criticism of these—play an important role in mediating the emotionally and morally fraught issue of “privileged” Jews. With this in mind, this book has explored the interconnected problems of representation and judgment in relation to these victims. Constituting an intrinsically important, frequently overlooked, and hastily judged facet of the Holocaust, the issue of “privileged” Jews needs to be traversed with care and sensitivity, and I hope that this study takes one of many steps toward a more complex and nuanced understanding of “privileged” Jews’ experiences.

Debates over Holocaust representation are ongoing. Alvin H. Rosenfeld has recently warned of the devastating impact of cultural *misrepresentations* such as Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*, which he sees as contributing to “the end of the Holocaust” in public consciousness.⁵ The prioritization of “authentic” or “faithful” representations over “false” or “simplistic” ones (although it is difficult to define exactly what these categories involve) can be justified by pointing to the danger of misrepresentations leading to “an incipient rejection of the Holocaust rather than its retention in historical memory.”⁶ Indeed, Ronald Aronson contends that language “must be rethought in light of both the massive masking and distorting functions it assumed during the Holocaust, and its weakness in rendering what happened.”⁷ The paucity of language, or what Lawrence L. Langer describes as “the inadequate mediating efforts of the world,”⁸ is particularly evident in attempts to represent the ethical dilemmas of “privileged” Jews.

On the other hand, Libby Saxton’s dismissal of the notion of the “limits of representation” informs her recent argument, which I believe has considerable merit, that depictions of the Holocaust on film can be the “object and vehicle of ethical inquiry.”⁹ At the same time, I would argue that Saxton’s contention that “to articulate moral limits or interdictions on representation can become a strategy for evading a properly ethical confrontation with the event” does not encompass the difficulties inherent in the representation of “privileged” Jews.¹⁰ Indeed, it is the articulation and investigation of the limit of judgment that enables one to understand the possibilities for representing these liminal figures in the first place. The obstacles to, and potentialities of, Holocaust representation are interconnected. While admitting that “completely resolving the uncertainties and ambiguities” of the behavior of “privileged” Jews in the ghettos—and, by extension, the camps—is impossible, Martin Dean emphasizes the need for nuanced reflections on their extreme situations: “Reconstructing the dilemmas of those caught in the Nazi trap and attempting to understand their perception is now more important

than engaging in further harsh moral criticism of Jewish responses to this unprecedented threat.”¹¹

In its contribution to the debates over Holocaust representation, this book has highlighted the need for continuing (re)evaluations of the limits and the possibilities of portraying “privileged” Jews. The introduction outlined their extreme situations and explored the crucial juncture between judgment and representation that underpins various interpretations of, and controversies over, their behavior. I suggested that the ethical dilemmas faced by “privileged” Jews challenge, if not undermine, traditional notions of heroism, dignity, and choice, and pose considerable obstacles for the analyst (and the artist) in the continual search for understanding. Taking into account the problems raised by Levi’s paradigmatic essay on the grey zone, I then analyzed the limit of judgment in Levi’s writings, Raul Hilberg’s work, and in examples of documentary and fiction films. The analysis revealed that the conventions deployed by survivors, historians, and filmmakers frequently influence the ways in which they convey judgment.

In response to the frequent tendency to appropriate, often uncritically, the concept of the grey zone for purposes other than to engage with the issue of “privileged” Jews, chapter 1 returned to Levi’s original concept. Undertaking a close analysis of Levi’s work and influences, the chapter exposed the paradox of judgment at the center of his conceptualization of the grey zone. This paradox consists of an irresolvable tension between the grey zone being simultaneously an indecipherable realm and a moral spectrum, revealing that Levi himself could not abstain from judging those he argues should not be judged. Through his use of literary analogies and other devices, Levi judges, albeit in a nuanced manner, the “privileged” Jews he represents.

The close reading of Hilberg’s work in chapter 2 revealed that he judges “privileged” Jews in diverse ways, both explicit and implicit, depending on the analytic framework employed in his representation. The various techniques used in Hilberg’s seminal text, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, position Jewish leaders as cogs in the “machinery of destruction,” while Hilberg’s tripartite analysis in *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders* constructs a moral spectrum of culpability along which individual *Judenrat* officials are placed. Hilberg’s work is characterized by a certainty that judgment can be made; he seldom reflects on the choiceless choices confronted by “privileged” Jews. His intense engagement with the diary of Adam Czerniakow is also replete with moral judgment—even though he seems to empathize with the Jewish leader at times. The crucial importance of Hilberg’s controversial work and persona is further evident in the mediatory position he fills between

Levi's writings and Holocaust film, particularly through his crucial influence on, and presence in, Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*.

While a considerable literature has recently explored the representation of the Holocaust in film, this book provides the first analysis of how "privileged" Jews are portrayed in the medium. Chapter 3 investigated the ways in which documentary filmmakers convey judgments according to the modes of representation they adopt. By positioning Hilberg and his judgments within the frame, Lanzmann's *Shoah* reveals that the possibilities for the depiction of "privileged" Jews in film differ considerably from those in Hilberg's history. Indeed, Lanzmann's editing technique can be seen to challenge Hilberg's negative evaluation of Czerniakow's state of knowledge and behavior. Nonetheless, implicit judgments are constructed in *Shoah* through the juxtaposition of continued anti-Semitism on the part of perpetrators and what Lanzmann portrays as the perpetual suffering of surviving members of the *Sonderkommandos*. Lanzmann's employment or rejection of certain film techniques was compared and contrasted with more conventional Holocaust documentaries, principally Tor Ben-Mayor and Dan Setton's *Kapo*. Engaging directly with the issue of "privileged" Jews, the expository mode of representation in *Kapo*, which relies on an authoritative narrative voiceover, an emotive musical score, and the inclusion and problematic use of archival footage, results in clear-cut judgments. The more self-conscious, open-ended aspects of Lanzmann's *Shoah*, on the other hand, which seem at times to eschew adopting a clear assertive stance, appear to reveal some potential to approach a suspension of judgment in documentary film.

In the final substantive chapter, I argued that the exposure of the image in self-reflexive representations of "privileged" Jews has the potential to provide a particularly nuanced representation. Even so, the preoccupation of many mainstream films with themes of resistance and rescue frequently results in the behavior of these figures being marginalized. Spielberg uses humor and sentimentality to construct binary oppositions between several of his characters in *Schindler's List*. The film's main "privileged" figure, Marcel Goldberg, is judged negatively in order to emphasize Schindler's exploits and then redeemed by the German rescuer's virtuous deeds. On the other hand, several recent fiction films reject Spielberg's redemptory aesthetic. Through a sophisticated emotional and intellectual distancing of the audience; a flexible adaptation of sources; an unconventional portrayal of unsympathetic, fictionalized characters; and a rejection of Hollywood tropes such as sentimentality, Tim Blake Nelson's *The Grey Zone* captures the "essence" of the unprecedented ethical dilemmas that confronted "privileged" Jews. Counter to

Levi's skepticism of the possibility of representing these liminal figures on film, I argued that Nelson's dramatization of members of the twelfth Auschwitz *Sonderkommando* depicts their traumatic experiences in a nuanced manner and approaches the suspension of judgment that Levi requires—even though, as a close analysis of the film revealed, a subtle form of judgment remains.

While the subject of “privileged” Jews has often been considered taboo and no study has previously focused specifically on the problem of judgment in representations of their experiences, “privileged” Jews appear, to varying degrees, in Holocaust representations of all kinds. There are therefore many potential avenues of future research. Indeed, despite the intense controversies surrounding *Judenrat* officials of Eastern European ghettos, continued calls have been made for a comprehensive account of Jewish leaders.¹² The analysis of Hilberg's work and several films highlighted major examples of representations of “privileged” Jews in historical writing, documentaries, and fiction films; however, there are many other depictions within these genres that deserve critical attention. Likewise, many more histories and films will undoubtedly be produced in future years that engage with notions of moral ambiguity and “compromise” in relation to victim behavior. Particularly significant is the explicit engagement with the issue of “privileged” Jews in a growing number of fiction films. The fact that the most recent feature of this kind, Stefan Ruzowitzky's *The Counterfeiters*, won widespread critical acclaim and the 2008 Academy Award for best foreign language film perhaps signifies—or has even resulted in—an increased interest in the ethical dilemmas that “privileged” Jews confronted during the Holocaust. Filmmakers' expectations of their audience and audiences' expectations of films are subject to constant readjustment, rendering any discussion of the representation of “privileged” Jews in continual need of reappraisal.

The examination of the treatment(s) of “privileged” Jews can also be extended to other genres. An exploration of how judgments are passed in written survivor testimonies other than Levi's can extend further the findings of chapter 1,¹³ whereas an analysis of the role of the interviewer in Holocaust video testimonies reveals that judgments of “privileged” Jews are constructed in considerably different ways from those highlighted in this book.¹⁴ Other forms of representation beyond the scope of the present discussion include literature, visual art, theater, and Holocaust monuments and museums. Furthermore, while this book analyzes the representation of Jews who held “privileged” positions during the Holocaust, it must be kept in mind that in the camps, Jewish inmates comprised a minority of prisoner-functionaries. The judgment and rep-

resentation of “privileged” prisoners of the Nazis in general is also an important area of future research.

Expressing sentiments akin to Levi, and even gesturing to the paradox of judgment central to the grey zone, Saul Friedländer writes:

In the face of simplified representations of the past, the historian’s duty is to reintroduce the complexity of discrete historical events, the ambiguity of human behavior, and the indeterminacy of wider social processes. The task is daunting, especially given the difficulty of conciliating the nuanced results of scholarship and the necessary reference to historical, moral, and philosophical categories.¹⁵

I noted earlier that Yehuda Bauer’s attitude toward the behavior of “privileged” Jews in *Rethinking the Holocaust* (2001) is somewhat more sympathetic than Hilberg’s, yet this was not the first time he addressed the issue. In an essay written in the 1980s, he asks: “Have we a moral right to consider this subject? Is there not an insufferable pretentiousness in our discussion which pronounces judgment, gives a verdict on these Judenrat Councils ...?” Bauer acknowledges the problem of judgment here and the potential need to suspend it, but he points out that judgment cannot be lightly cast aside—that it is, indeed, inevitable. He goes on to write that “this is just where the trouble lies: if we seriously intend to refrain from passing judgment, we must stop studying these events entirely, for every historian judges where he will or not [*sic*], through the very selection of the facts which he recounts.”¹⁶ The paradoxical impossibility and inevitability of judging “privileged” Jews can thus be considered paramount in addressing the ways in which historians (and others) represent them. Bauer continues by proclaiming that: “The responsibility is terrible. We have no right to judge; nobody authorized us to do so: we judge without being appointed for the task, because we have no alternative.”¹⁷ Just as scholars and artists will and should continue to represent the circumstances and behavior of “privileged” Jews, judgments of these figures will undeniably follow.

In approaching the ethical dilemmas of “privileged” Jews such as Salmen Lewenthal, with whom this book began, even such a nuanced and sophisticated concept as the grey zone cannot satisfy its own requirements of suspending judgment. In the case of the *Sonderkommandos*, for instance, it would seem impossible to completely fulfill Levi’s dictum that we “meditate on the story of ‘the crematorium ravens’ with pity and rigour, but [let] a judgement of them be suspended.”¹⁸ The need to imagine the unimaginable, represent the unrepresentable, and judge those who should not be judged has been shown to cause fundamental and unresolved problems for Levi and many others. The simultaneous

impossibility and inevitability of judgment may be termed a paradoxical bind in which Levi himself was entangled. Indeed, I opened this book with the qualification that my own judgments might well impinge on the analysis undertaken. Other readers or viewers of the texts examined may also be located within this bind, which is most evident when considering the self-reflexive but nonetheless rhetorical question asked of the audience by Nelson's film: "What would you have done in the same situation?"

How then are we to understand the experiences of "privileged" Jews? Perhaps one approach is to reflect on the choiceless choices of these liminal figures with, to use Levi's words, "pity and rigour," and to continuously ponder the unanswerable question of what we ourselves might have done if faced with their extreme situation. Following this line, Günther Anders's 1961 poem entitled "What Would You Have Done?" self-consciously addresses the problem of attempting to comprehend the experiences of the *Sonderkommandos* and would seem a fitting note with which to end:

Did you busily scrape the dust of friends and relatives
out of the oven?
And did you cart the wagon through the snow
to the ash heap of those who were burned?
Was the word meant for you: "You will live as long
as the oven smokes,
For you are needed?"
Covered with such dust, did your mouth
give the report in barracks language?
That extra soup, was it for the work of your shovel?
And the double ration for the sweat you shed?
And was the word for you: "Only late, at some unknown time,
After the coal comes the collier, too?"
Not you, not I. We remain untested.
Thus you may scrape the ovens every night,
And, in your dreams, at his side, push the wagon.
But you cannot grasp a jot of what was in the man's mind,
only that now and then he looked up, as if he were
thinking,
"And what would you have done?"¹⁹

Notes

1. Shoshana Felman, "After the Apocalypse: Paul de Man and the Fall to Silence," in Felman and Laub *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing*, 123 (author's emphasis).

2. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone, 2002), 21.
3. Ibid., 17. For more on Agamben's problematic appropriation of Levi's grey zone, see Adam Brown, "The Trauma of 'Choiceless Choices': The Paradox of Judgment in Primo Levi's 'Grey Zone,'" in Sharpe, Noonan and Freddi, *Trauma, Historicity, Philosophy*, 148–52; Dominick LaCapra, "Approaching Limit Events: Siting Agamben," in Bernard-Donals and Glejzer, *Witnessing the Disaster*; Debarati Sanyal, "A Soccer Match in Auschwitz: Passing Culpability in Holocaust Criticism," *Representations* 79, no. 1 (2002).
4. LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 79.
5. Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *The End of the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).
6. Alvin H. Rosenfeld, "Another Revisionism: Popular Culture and the Changing Image of the Holocaust," in *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 91.
7. Ronald Aronson, "The Holocaust and Human Progress," in Rosenberg and Myers, *Echoes from the Holocaust*, 223.
8. Langer, *Versions of Survival*, 5.
9. Saxton, *Haunted Images*, 3.
10. Ibid., 2.
11. Martin Dean, "Life and Death in the 'Gray Zone' of Jewish Ghettos in Nazi-Occupied Europe: The Unknown, the Ambiguous, and the Disappeared," in Petropoulos and Roth, *Gray Zones*, 218.
12. See Yehuda Bauer, "Contemporary Research on the Holocaust," in Kwiet and Matthäus, *Contemporary Responses to the Holocaust*, 10–11.
13. For an example of this kind of analysis, see Brown, "Traumatic Memory and Holocaust Testimony."
14. See Brown, "Confronting 'Choiceless Choices' in Holocaust Videotestimonies: Judgment, 'Privileged' Jews, and the Role of the Interviewer." *Continuum: Journal of Media and Communication Studies—Special Issue: Interrogating Trauma: Arts & Media Responses to Collective Suffering* 24, no. 1 (February 2010).
15. Friedländer, "History, Memory, and the Historian," in Roth and Salas, *Disturbing Remains*, 279.
16. Yehuda Bauer, "The Judenräte: Some Conclusions," in Marrus, *The Nazi Holocaust*, 165.
17. Ibid., 166. It is nonetheless interesting that Bauer distances himself both from "the anti-Judenrat approach," which transforms the term "*Judenrat*" into "a sharply derogatory term," and from what he calls the "super-apologetic attitude ... which understands everything and forgives everything." Ibid., 172. This sentiment evidently bears similarities to Levi's ideas on the problem of judgment.
18. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 43.
19. Quoted in Robinson, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight*, 201–2.

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