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 *mis*representations 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 have 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, Dominick 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 "stagy" 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 organised, 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 Nyiszli'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, Abramowics, 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 discomforting 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 "dizzyingly 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 Bullaro, 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 Płaszów 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 Robota: 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.