

CHAPTER 3

BRIDGING HISTORY AND CINEMA

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



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

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

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 The intersection of firsthand testimony, historical content, and filmic techniques in *Shoah*—along with Lanzmann’s positioning of Hilberg in the film—results in judgments of “privileged” Jews being developed in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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Positioning the Historian: Lanzmann and His Doppelgänger

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Grassler: Yes.

Lanzmann: "No power."

Grassler: Sure ... that was ...

Lanzmann: You Germans were the overlords.

Grassler: Yes.

Lanzmann: The overlords. The masters.

Grassler: Obviously.

Lanzmann: Czerniakow was merely a tool.

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

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

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

Constructing Oppositions: Continuing Anti-Semitism and Perpetual Victimhood

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lanzmann: What died in him in Chelmno?

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

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

Translator: For me it's not good.

Lanzmann: Then why is he talking about it?

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

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

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

Lanzmann: Why does he smile all the time?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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