People on Tuesday: An Introduction

> "The abyss is bordered by tall mansions." – Eric Vuillard, *The Order of the Day*

On Tuesday, January 20, 1942, representatives of the German government attended a meeting chaired by Reinhard Heydrich, head of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) and the man in charge of radical anti-Jewish policy, to discuss and coordinate what he called "the Final Solution." The meeting took place in an ornate villa on the shores of Wannsee, a lake in Berlin's western suburbs. This top-secret meeting would later gain infamy after U.S. Army investigators discovered a typewritten protocol outlining what took place there. Later dubbed the Wannsee Conference, the meeting quickly stood for "the most emblematic and programmatic statement of the Nazi way of genocide."[1] Adolf Eichmann drafted the meeting minutes, usually referred to as the Wannsee Protocol. In bureaucratic language that is shocking in its brutality, Eichmann rendered the men's words palatable. As the historian Mark Roseman recounts in his study of the conference:

> The Wannsee Protocol is emblematic of the Holocaust not just in its methodical blueprint for murder. On the one hand, the protocol exists, its authenticity undeniable, its leaden matter-of-factness as unanswerable as it is unfathomable. It reminds us that the Holocaust is the best-documented mass murder in history.[2]

This type of meeting – attended by *Staatssekretäre* (state secretaries, roughly equivalent to a U.S. undersecretary of state), their subordinates, and members of the SS, including representatives of the Reich Security Main Office – was not unique, but according to Roseman, followed the form of a routine type of meeting which, for the Nazi regime, was "in effect a substitute for cabinet government."[3] Wannsee later became shorthand for genocide conducted by modern bureaucratic states, though it was not subject to detailed historical studies until the 1990s. One historian has noted that Wannsee marks the transition from local mass killings to genocide, arguing that it "had cleared the way for the mass mur-

1 Mark Roseman, *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution: A Reconsideration* (London: Folio Society, 2012), 3.

2 Roseman, *The Wannsee Conference*, 5.

3 Roseman, *The Wannsee Conference*, 61. See also Darren O'Byrne, "Nazi Constitutional Designs: The State Secretaries' Meetings and the Annexation of East Central Europe," *European History Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (April 2024): 337–357.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111579450-001

der of Jews in the different German-occupied territories to be placed on a centralised, pan-European footing."[4]

Historians have long debated the significance of the Wannsee Conference. Was it where the Nazis made "the decision" to commit genocide? The current consensus is that that decision was not made at Wannsee, but this impression remains in the popular imagination.[5] Mark Roseman identifies the Wannsee Conference as a "signpost indicating that genocide had become official policy" and repeatedly refers to the conference protocol as a type of "keyhole" through which we can observe a transitional period in the history of the Holocaust.[6] Roseman disagrees with historians like Eberhard Jäckel, who contend that the conference was "relatively unimportant."[7] The on-screen depictions necessarily agree with historians like Roseman: no one would make a film about something they considered "unimportant." Historians still debate Wannsee's significance. In *Wannsee: The Road to the Final Solution*, Peter Longerich integrates the Wannsee Conference into the wider context of the war and occupation policies, but not as central to the Holocaust's unfolding as other scholars have emphasized. For him, the conference was a key turning point in the integration of the "Final Solution" into the war effort.[8]

4 Alex J. Kay, *Empire of Destruction: A History of Nazi Mass Killing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 91.

5 The most important monographs on the Wannsee Conference are Mark Roseman's *The Villa, The Lake, the Meeting: Wannsee and the Final Solution* (London: Allen Lane, 2002) and Peter Longerich's *Wannsee: The Road to the Final Solution,* trans. Lesley Sharpe and Jeremy Noakes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022). Both works (and historians of the Holocaust in general) owe a great deal to sources in former Warsaw Pact countries that only became accessible to Western scholars after 1990. Longerich's study is particularly valuable because it includes a page-by-page commentary on the protocol. Note that Roseman's book was published in the US with the title *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution: A Reconsideration.* A 2012 edition published by the Folio Society (with a new foreword) uses the American title.

6 Roseman, *The Wannsee Conference*, 110.

7 Roseman, *The Wannsee Conference,* 66–67.

8 Longerich, *Wannsee*, 106. Curiously, he ignores Roseman's book, but instead cites a historiographical essay Roseman wrote for an edited volume. This is likely explained by Longerich's positive review of Roseman's book that nevertheless noted that Roseman offers no "really new interpretation." See Longerich, "Buch im Gespräch: Mark Roseman 'Die Wannsee- Konferenz,'" *Die Zeit*, January 17, 2002. https://www.zeit.de/2002/04/200204_p-wannsee.xml. A glance at both works' bibliographies does reveal that Longerich used more archival sources than Roseman, who relied more on secondary works and re-printed sources – but still wrote the standard English-language work on Wannsee.

In a 2022 article for the *New York Review of Books*, the historian Christopher Browning discussed the debate on Wannsee's significance, noting that although it was not where "the" decision was made, it "clearly was an important step along the way."[9] Browning's argument here largely conforms to the historiographical consensus about Wannsee. It was important more for what it illustrates about the inner workings of the Nazi government, not because the protocol serves as a kind of "smoking gun" for a master plan. In contrast to Longerich, Richard J. Evans has argued that "Heydrich made it abundantly clear to the participants in the conference that the end result would be the extermination of the entire Jewish population across the continent."[10]

The Wannsee Conference has also repeatedly attracted the attention of artists, writers, and filmmakers seeking to explore and explain what happened at the villa on the path to genocide.[11] It is a shadow presence in television history – it has been present in television depictions of the Nazi regime in every decade since the 1960s, but these productions have not received the same critical and scholarly attention devoted to either big-budget theatrical films or European art cinema about the Holocaust. This book investigates dramatic, fictionalized depictions of the Wannsee Conference, centering on the acclaimed docudramas *The Wannsee Conference* (1984), *Conspiracy* (2001), and *The Conference* (2022).[12] Contrary to stereotypes or even prevailing dramatic conventions, these three docudramas depict the Wannsee Conference and Nazi perpetrators in a minimalistic and "almost analytical perspective on internal hierarchies and political agencies," as film scholar Axel Bangert has noted.[13]

9 Christopher R. Browning, "When Did They Decide?," *The New York Review of Books*, March 24, 2022, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2022/03/24/wannsee-the-road-to-the-final-solution-peter-longerich/.

10 Richard J. Evans, *Hitler's People: The Faces of the Third Reich* (London: Allen Lane, 2024), 314.

11 I conducted a preliminary investigation into this topic in my master's thesis, Nicholas K. Johnson, "HBO and the Holocaust: *Conspiracy*, the Historical Film, and Public History at Wannsee" (MA Thesis, 2016).

12 Documentaries, other visual art, poetry, and novels are beyond this study's scope. For example, the photographer Werner Zellien published an exhibition catalog consisting of his 1988 photographs of the then-abandoned Wannsee villa. See Werner Zellien, *Villa Wannsee - Melancholy Grandeur*, (Oslo: Werner Zellien, 2008). Claude Lanzmann also discusses Wannsee in his 1985 documentary *Shoah* and includes footage of the villa in his outtakes, but many other television documentaries have covered the conference.

13 Axel Bangert, *The Nazi Past in Contemporary German Film: Viewing Experiences of Intimacy and Immersion* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), 58. Bangert refers here to the 1984 docudrama *The Wannsee Conference*, but I argue that this judgment applies to all three docudramas.

All productions explore the juxtaposition, or incongruity, between the conference's elegant, refined setting and its criminality. While some productions reenacted the Wannsee Conference in real time (as in the case of the three abovementioned docudramas), other filmmakers only referenced it obliquely – for instance, by discussing the meeting's minutes or attendees. Almost all are sparse, minimalist, dialogue-driven productions, apart from the two miniseries *Holocaust* and *War and Remembrance*. The minimalism of these television productions echoes a predominantly minimalist aesthetic in Holocaust literature.[14] They all, to various degrees, engage with an idea expressed by the novelist Eric Vuillard: "The abyss is bordered by tall mansions."[15] This study seeks to determine why and how filmmakers have portrayed Wannsee in dramatic form since the 1960s – and, of course, whether they responsibly depicted that history.

1 The New Film History and Production Histories

In keeping with the tenets of the New Film History,[16] this study is a cultural history of Wannsee on television. It relies heavily on production documents, screenplays, oral history interviews, and research material assembled by screenwriters and historical advisors. The sites from which these source materials were gathered range from large archives, like the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, to small, private collections. Working through these production histories, this book charts a dialogue between the filmmaker and the historian, a dialogue that, I argue, ultimately enhances our understanding of the processual nature of filmmaking *as* historiographic intervention. In this, my study deviates from a range of film studies approaches, and, to some degree, this approach is independent of the films' eventual plurivocal "meanings." I take for granted that the productions themselves may unwittingly counteract, revise, or at times deviate in unforeseen ways from the collective, authorial input of their production. This project, rather, considers production history as intimately entangled with the question of how filmmakers depict the past.

In doing so, however, the mediality of film and of television features significantly in this book. Following Rebecca Weeks, I am concerned with history *on screen* and draw from scholarship on historical film *and* television. As Weeks notes, "[m]any of the arguments made and conclusions drawn in studying the le-

14 Daniel R. Schwarz, *Imagining the Holocaust* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), 37.

15 Eric Vuillard, *The Order of the Day*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (London: Picador, 2019), 129.

16 See J. Chapman, M. Glancy, and S. Harper, eds., *The New Film History: Sources, Methods, Approaches*, (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

gitimacy and possibility of putting history into film apply to television."[17] A strict distinction between these two media forms is arguably untenable in this age of streaming and home media, but is doubly problematic when one considers that my three main objects of study are television films.[18] However, when necessary, I discuss the network- and production-related historical contexts specific to the television medium, particularly when it comes to issues of public versus private television or the wave of independent filmmakers moving to HBO during the 1990s as a result of Hollywood's shift towards blockbusters. Additionally, while I take questions of authorial intent and historical context seriously, I do not claim that these productions are the work of single authors. They are collaborative, industrial products and even the screenplays are informed by both screenwriter biographies and larger, structural forces such as network policies, historical and national contexts, and the input from producers, directors, and historical consultants. In addition to my cultural history perspective, I consider these productions as examples of public history. As part of the *Public History in European Perspectives* series from De Gruyter and the Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C2DH), this book argues that the filmmakers, screenwriters, actors, historical consultants, and producers consulted here all "did history" in a way largely in keeping with the values and goals of the public history movement.[19]

Following screenwriter and film historian Bruno Ramirez's approach, this study argues that screenwriting is the crucial step in historical filmmaking that permits us to see a particular production's historiographical argument, message (or, in some instances, educational impulse), and where compromises – such as fictionalization – were made. For Ramirez, screenwriting "constitutes a sort of bridge between research-generated historical knowledge and the visual language through which a film will speak to viewers."[20] Some film scholars investigate screenwriting "as a research artefact," that is scriptwriting as a form of academic research, though these scholars primarily investigate screenwriting practices

17 Rebecca Weeks, *History by HBO: Televising the American Past* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2022), 17. Although she focuses on television, Weeks also draws on Robert Rosenstone's, Bruno Ramirez's, and Robert Toplin's work on historical film.

18 The only theatrical films discussed in detail here are *The Man with the Iron Heart* and *The Zone of Interest*.

19 Thomas Cauvin, *Public History: A Textbook of Practice*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2022), 168–171. Although my most prominent case study, *Conspiracy*, is a product of the US television network HBO, that does not mean that it solely offered an American perspective on Wannsee. Its production team included both British and Austrian-American producers, and initially began as a collaboration with the German studio UFA.

20 Bruno Ramirez, *Inside the Historical Film* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 37.

within the academy, not as research artifacts from non-academic contexts, such as commercial scripts written by professional screenwriters.[21] This study considers television screenplays important research artifacts and, in the case of historical films like the ones analyzed here, are collaborative historiographical interventions. Furthermore, this collaborative aspect of film production also parallels the public history movement, which historian Denise Meringolo strongly associates with collaborative work and negotiations between a wide variety of experts and stakeholders.[22] In their landmark 1998 survey of American attitudes towards history, Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen identified film and television as the most common ways Americans "encountered" the past.[23] A recent German survey on public memory of the Nazi past exhibited similar findings.[24] This study does not view public history or Holocaust education as simply sitting down and watching a movie. This simplistic view of historical education and cinema is not represented by any proponent of using films in an educational setting or those advocating for historical film's potential. The educator and film scholar Rich Brownstein discusses this dilemma at length, arguing for a nuanced assessment of Holocaust films and their role in education:

> [T]eaching "The Holocaust" cannot be done with only one film. Using narrative Holocaust films as the primary source for Holocaust education would be educational malpractice, even if a single film could encompass all aspects of the Holocaust. Holocaust film is an educational supplement, which can be used to fill-in and give life to difficult sub-topics within Holocaust study.[25]

Brownstein is by no means the only voice on Holocaust education and film, but his work deserves serious consideration when discussing how Holocaust films can be used in the classroom – though this study considers Holocaust education, public history, and historical education in a sense much broader than classroom implementation.

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21 Craig Batty and Dallas J. Baker, "Screenwriting as a Mode of Research, and the Screenplay as a Research Artefact," in *Screen Production Research: Creative Practice as a Mode of Enquiry*, ed. Craig Batty and Susan Kerrigan (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 67–83.

22 Denise D. Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), xxiv.

23 Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 31.

24 See "MEMO-Studie," accessed October 31, 2022, https://www.stiftung-evz.de/was-wir-foerdern/handlungsfelder-cluster/bilden-fuer-lebendiges-erinnern/memo-studie/.

25 Rich Brownstein, *Holocaust Cinema Complete: A History and Analysis of 400 Films, with a Teaching Guide* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co Inc, 2021), 157.

In the Anglo-American and German historical communities, serious attention to historical films[26] and their uses and abuses follows several approaches. This study will combine both the more established cultural- or film studies-influenced approach, initiated by scholars like Robert Rosenstone and continued by Alison Landsberg, with the larger fields of public history and historical culture.[27] It is important to note that Holocaust films come with their own special set of challenges and controversies. Critiques of historical films are well known by now: they simplify, fictionalize, sensationalize, impart "dangerous" emotions, and do not meet the standards of written scholarship. One cannot dismiss these critiques out of hand, but they hold little value when analyzing historical films and their potential beyond the surface level. Historical films are here to stay. Audiences will still watch historical films even if historians completely dismiss them. Audiences will also continue to consume and absorb the messages of historical films and other depictions of history in mass culture, whether in museums, video games, or on YouTube. If historians want to understand how memory culture is developing in our current era, it is essential that they also devote our attention to these productions and their idiosyncratic modes of becoming, which complement (rather than compete with) comparable film and media studies – disciplines which have, for example, been fruitfully utilizing production histories for decades.[28]

Filmmakers, as this study traces, rarely set out to "teach" history in a didactic, schoolmaster-like manner. Nevertheless, the medium has the power to affect viewers pedagogically – most of all in the sense of fostering historical empathy for people quite unlike themselves. The educationalist film scholar Elvira Neuendank stresses that every film contains "pedagogical structures" and "embedded pedagogy."[29] This statement is more about education in the sense of the German word *Bildung*, which connotates cultivation and is not as top-down of a process as the English word "education" may imply. As Tim Zumhof notes, film and televi-

26 I use the term "historical film" much in the way Robert Toplin and Robert Rosenstone use it. I do not mean a film "from the past," but a film that depicts the past in some way.

27 For a detailed discussion of the overlaps and differences between historical culture, public history, and popular history, see Tim Zumhof, "Historical Culture, Public History, and Education in Germany and the United States of America: A Comparative Introduction to Basic Concepts and Fields of Research" in *Show, Don't Tell: Education and Historical Representations on Stage and Screen in Germany and the USA,* eds. Nicholas K. Johnson and Tim Zumhof (Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt, 2020), 15–30.

28 See Barbara Klinger, "Film History Terminable and Interminable: Recovering the Past in Reception Studies," *Screen* 38, no. 2 (July 1997): 107–128.

29 Elvira Neuendank, *Film als pädagogisches Setting: ein Medium als Vermittlungs- und Vergegenwärtigungsinstanz* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2022), 9–13.

sion "teaching audiences lessons from history" is "[a] misleading notion."[30] Instead, films have the potential to impart historical information and raise awareness about a particular topic to a mass audience, rather than functioning as overtly didactic, paint-by-numbers enterprises – they are an example of public history; they are a "history type" worthy of historical investigation.[31]

In his article "Cinematic History: Where Do We Go From Here?" the historian Robert Toplin argues that most historians analyze individual films as texts; that is, they watch films and then write about them. Some historians go further and will touch on a film's historical context and the background of its creators. Toplin divides historical film analysis into three levels: 1) A film as a primary source. For example, this approach could use D.W. Griffith's racist love letter to the Ku Klux Klan, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) to illustrate the early-twentieth-century "nadir of American race relations." 2) Exploring a film's historical context, background, and reception. In the case of *The Birth of a Nation*, this approach would examine the early years of Hollywood, the United States shortly before the outbreak of World War I, and the film's initially positive critical reception. 3) A production history of the film in question, based on archival materials (such as scripts, memos, and correspondence) and interviews.[32] For example, Thomas Cripps examined the "paper trail" of the 1918 film *The Birth of a Race*, a film meant to refute racist stereotypes propagated by *The Birth of a Nation*, to prove that the film's originally intended message was "dampened by the wavering commitment of white liberals."[33] This level is much rarer among historians[34] and guides my

30 Zumhof, "Historical Culture," 27.

31 See Thorsten Logge, "'History Types' and Public History," *Public History Weekly*, June 28, 2018, https://public-history-weekly.degruyter.com/6-2018-24/history-types-and-public-history/.

32 Robert Brent Toplin, "Cinematic History: Where Do We Go From Here?," *The Public Historian* 25, no. 3 (August 2003): 86–87.

33 John E. O'Connor, "History in Images/Images in History: Reflections on the Importance of Film and Television Study for an Understanding of the Past," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (1988): 1200–1209, 1205; Thomas Cripps, "Following the Paper Trail to *The Birth of a Race* and Its Times," *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 18, no. 3 (1988): 50–62.

34 Recent studies that engage in historical film analysis at this level include Nicholas Evan Sarantakes. *Making Patton: A Classic War Film's Epic Journey to the Silver Screen*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012); J. E. Smyth, *From Here to Eternity*, (London: Palgrave, 2015); Smyth, *Fred Zinnemann and the Cinema of Resistance*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014). Recent archive-based studies of historical films which deal with the Holocaust specifically include Sue Vice, *Claude Lanzmann's 'Shoah' Outtakes: Holocaust Rescue and Resistance* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021); Vice, *Shoah* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Jennifer Cazenave, *An Archive of the Catastrophe: The Unused Footage of Claude Lanzmann's Shoah* (Albany, NY:

own research into the films that depict the Wannsee Conference. Toplin describes this "third level" in detail:

> Only a few historians, though, are taking the analysis of film to a third and still deeper level. Investigations of this nature may examine the production histories behind the movies. They can extend the range of primary sources to include a wide assortment associated with the crafting of a motion picture. In this case historians can examine film treatments (story narratives and descriptions), inter-office memos from studios and production companies, letters between individuals involved in production, drafts of the script, and other materials. Analyses at this third level often include original interviews with principal artists and business managers involved in a production. The scholarship may feature evidence drawn from conversations with the cinematographer, writer, director, producer, or studio executive. This form of research also focuses on efforts to publicize a movie. It can include study of publicity blurbs, press kits, statements by the director to the press, and other documents.[35]

As noted above, this study's use of script archives, production documents, associated marginalia, and oral history interviews places it within this longer academic tradition described by Toplin. While such studies are rare among studies of *dramatic* on-screen depictions of the Holocaust, my three main examples (*The Wannsee Conference*, *Conspiracy*, and *The Conference*) are particularly suited to such an analysis. Each of these films portrays the same event in roughly the same running time, each exemplifies historiographical trends from their respective production periods, and each respectively stands out as an example of trends in television history in West Germany and the United States during the 1980s, late 1990s, and early 2020s. Additionally, each screenwriter (Paul Mommertz, Loring Mandel, and Magnus Vattrodt) either donated their research material and screenplay drafts to archives or made them available for this study.

2 Public History and History on Screen

Since the 1990s, historians have devoted more attention to historical film and television. In the Anglosphere, historians like Robert Rosenstone and Robert Brent Toplin spearheaded this new movement among historians to analyze historical films as sources in their own right, not just as artifacts of cultural production from their respective historical eras. The American Historical Association (AHA) and the National Council on Public History (NCPH) have dedicated film review

SUNY Press, 2019); and Simone Gigliotti, *Restless Archive: The Holocaust and the Cinema of the Displaced* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2023).

35 Toplin, "Cinematic History," 86–87.

sections in their journals (*The American Historical Review* and *The Public Historian*) and have even devoted special issues to history and film, both of which will be explored below. Nevertheless, historians (and, obviously, film and media scholars) had been analyzing film long before Rosenstone and Toplin. The journal *Film & History*, for example, has published material since the 1970s. Historians have been engaging with film since the early days of the medium; Bruno Ramirez has pointed out that film and professional history emerged in roughly the same era and were always engaged in a dialogue that was often characterized by "rivalry."[36]

One key early publication on history and film is a 1988 special issue of *The American Historical Review* which included contributions by Rosenstone, Toplin, Hayden White, and others. Toplin notes that while films do not engage with historiographical debates at first glance, they nevertheless "take sides." For Toplin, historical films are relevant to serious historical analysis because they

> contribute to the controversies that animate historical writing. Indeed, many producers fashion their films as statements on these debates, for they draw their conclusions from the theses of influential monographs. The connection, then, between media and print-oriented interpretation is often significant, even though film reviews rarely take note of the relationship.[37]

In his last sentence, Toplin makes a point similar to one made by Ramirez: the film and print worlds talk past each other even though they are intimately linked. As the later analysis of Wannsee films and their production materials will show, filmmakers utilized then-cutting-edge historiography when preparing their screenplays. They did not simply consult encyclopedias and create dramas with the Wannsee Conference as window dressing. The writers included bibliographies and footnotes with their scripts. One wrote a film about the Wannsee Conference long before historians had devoted monographs to it. For Toplin, screenwriters (and other filmmakers) "become historians" and that if they are acting as historians, "[w]e need to know, for instance, how the filmmaker operates within the context of historiography." This is not merely an academic exercise: Toplin notes that if historians fail to devote attention to historical films, filmmakers can operate without serious historical scrutiny.[38] As medieval historian David Herlihy

36 Ramirez, *Inside the Historical Film*, 24.

37 Robert Brent Toplin, "The Filmmaker as Historian," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (1988): 1210–1227, 1218.

38 Toplin, "The Filmmaker as Historian," 1226–1227.

notes, "[m]ovies own no immunities; like every other representation of the past, they must answer for their messages in the high court of historical criticism."[39]

Toplin's characterization of filmmakers as historians echoes Rosenstone, the strongest advocate of visual history as a historical method, who argues for the need of "the historian to accept the mainstream historical film as a new kind of history . . ."[40] For Rosenstone, the historical film may be evidence of a "challenge to history" similar to "the challenge of written history to the oral tradition."[41] Rosenstone's arguments are essential to this study, but can be moderated, especially with regard to the written word. Additionally, I consider screenwriters, producers, historical advisors, and other filmmakers as types of "quotidian intellectuals," a term introduced by historian Tiffany Florvil to describe Black German activists working outside of mainstream German academic intellectual culture.[42]

Historical films still largely rely on the written text for their sources, and their screenplays are still written documents. This study takes the "paper trails" of the films seriously. It is through these paper trails that we can prove intent and identify historiographical positions, identify tensions within productions, and determine how filmmakers justified instances of fictionalization.[43] Through the script archives, one can trace a film's historiographical lineage and argument. It is important to note, as Thomas Cripps has pointed out, that film historians previously neglected archival sources because they simply were not available.[44] Film studios are very protective of their intellectual property, and archival material has only become available at a slow pace.

In 1976, William Hughes noted that "the historian's professional training provides no guarantee of cinematic literacy."[45] Although many contemporary graduate programs offer courses in visual history or media literacy, this is not always the case; moreover, many historians start with the premise that film is inherently dangerous (an understandable position considering twentieth-century experience

39 David Herlihy, "Am I a Camera? Other Reflections on Films and History," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (1988): 1186–1192, 1192.

40 Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), 60.

41 Rosenstone, "History in Images/History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (1988): 1173–1185, 1184.

42 Tiffany N. Florvil, *Mobilizing Black Germany: Afro-German Women and the Making of a Transnational Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020).

43 See Cripps, "Following the Paper Trail."

44 Cripps, "Following the Paper Trail," 51.

45 William Hughes, "The Evolution of Film as Evidence," in Paul Smith, ed., *The Historian and Film* (Cambridge, 1976), 51. Quoted in Toplin, "The Filmmaker as Historian," 1212.

with mass manipulation via propaganda films). Such a hardline attitude would be throwing the baby out with the bathwater, as John E. O'Connor has noted. O'Connor argues for the importance of media literacy but advises caution: "It would be easy to teach students to be cynics (or to reinforce them in their cynicism), but this would be neither productive nor educational." For him, media literacy encourages students to become "thoughtful citizens" and that in a "free society," "the goal of history teaching . . . must go behind simply informing people . . . it should be a given therefore that we teach our students to use audiovisual sources as stimuli to thought."[46] Similar efforts by leading German theorists of history didactics echo this approach and emphasize a combination of historical awareness and civics education (*politische Bildung*) that examines encounters with history outside of the classroom.[47]

It is important to note that historians concerned with the depiction of the past on screen, like Ramirez, Rosenstone, Weeks, and Toplin, or media scholars like Alison Landsberg, are not naïve about the potential flaws of film and television – none of them write unabashed praise of films; Toplin concedes that the majority of historical films do not meet the standards of professional historiography. Nevertheless, he points out that the "challenge" for historians is "to examine the record of film productions and discern achievements amid the general wreckage."[48] Examining those achievements amid the wreckage is one of the chief aims of this study.

Thomas Cauvin has referred to the problem of defining public history as a "difficult task," which is complicated at the international level by imprecise or ambiguous translations. Cauvin notes that early public historians "adopted a defensive, and anxious, tone" and saw themselves "in opposition to what they perceived as a traditional academic and isolated history that ignored the public."[49] Furthermore, Cauvin notes that demarcating public history as simply all history done outside of the classroom oversimplifies the situation. Although the public history movement began to unite historians working outside of the traditional academic sphere (government historians, park rangers, historical society employees, consultants, archivists, etc.), public history actually encompasses a wider

46 O'Connor, "History in Images/Images in History," 1208–1209.

47 See Karl-Ernst Jeismann, "Geschichtsbewußtsein als zentrale Kategorie der Didaktik des Geschichtsunterrichts," in *Geschichte und Bildung. Beiträge zur Geschichtsdidaktik und zur Historischen Bildungsforschung*, ed. Wolfgang Jacobmeyer and Bernd Schönemann (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000), 46–72.

48 Toplin, "The Filmmaker as Historian," 1211.

49 Cauvin, *Public History*, 12.

range of practitioners.[50] Other definitions of public history focus on its communicative aspect. Philip V. Scarpino defines public history as "a way of understanding and practicing the craft of history" and argues that the "communication" of history to diverse audiences distinguishes public history from "traditional" history.[51] For Cauvin, a strict division between "academic history" and public history is a relic of the American historical community's struggles during the 1970s and no longer reflects the current state of the field.[52]

Recent European scholarship has both complicated and enhanced our understanding of public history as a concept and methodological tool.[53] In an article discussing the difficulties of defining public history in the German context, Jacqueline Nießer and Juliane Tomann claim that public history is closely related to applied history (*angewandte Geschichte*) and that the fields function like "two sides of a hinge." They propose this model due to the institutional division of historical scholarship in German universities, which maintain organizational divisions between research historians and history didacticians. For Nießer and Tomann, public history is concerned with "the *forms* of history" and applied history is concerned with "the *agents* of history."[54] So, a film would count as a "form" of history whereas the individuals who made the film would be the "agents" of history. They therefore argue that:

> the "public historian" functions as a translator, whereas the "applied historian" acts as a moderator and facilitator of historical dialogue. In this way the public historian interprets history in popular forms for nonexperts, whereas the applied historian facilitates nonexpert participation in the production of historical knowledge.[55]

This division between the public and "applied" historians does not appear as neatly bifurcated when one considers that American public historians have been utilizing the concept of "shared authority" for the past few decades without demarcating themselves into another subfield (applied history).[56] Shared authority

50 Cauvin, *Public History*, 19–20.

51 Philip V. Scarpino, "Some Thoughts on Defining, Evaluating, and Rewarding Public Scholarship." *The Public Historian* 15, no. 2 (April 1993): 55–61, 56.

52 Cauvin, *Public History*, 20–22.

53 See Jacqueline Nießer and Juliane Tomann, "Public and Applied History in Germany: Just Another Brick in the Wall of the Academic Ivory Tower?," *The Public Historian* 40, no. 4 (November 1, 2018): 11–27, and Marko Demantowsky, "What is Public History" in *Public History and School: International Perspectives,* ed. Marko Demantowsky, (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019), 1–38.

54 Nießer and Tomann, "Public and Applied History in Germany," 24.

55 See Nießer and Tomann "Public and Applied History in Germany," 24–25.

56 See Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (SUNY Press, 1990) and Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski, *Letting Go?: Shar-*

refers to historians collaborating with the public, as no one can "own" the past.[57] For example, an exhibit on public housing in an American city would include input from public housing authorities and residents during the creative process, turning it into a collaborative process instead of a top-down project where the expert historian teaches locals about their own community. The shared authority concept has become a buzzword in the American public history community; Cauvin rightly points out that in some instances, sharing authority does not mean an anything-goes style relativism, that "[t]here is a difference between sharing and giving up authority."[58] In a response to Nießer and Tomann, Brazilian public historian Ricardo Santhiago acknowledges the difficulty of navigating "the collision between established, native practices and the prevalent US public history model,"[59] but questions the necessity of the article: "A public historian's toolkit should not comprise a field thesaurus."[60] Cord Arendes takes a similar tack when he argues that while Nießer and Tomann's model is useful, its central argument illustrates that "integrated [historical] practice is still a long way off for public history in Germany."[61] This is important to keep in mind when discussing public history in the German context. Regardless of American public historians' fears about "academic history," public history at the university level remains an established discipline in the US, and history didactics do not exist as a field of study there as they do in the German context. Thus, this specific division between applied history (or history didactics) and public history is a specifically German debate that has little bearing on public history practice internationally. In a response article, Thomas Cauvin notes that the authors' distinction between public and applied history is "quite uncommon on the international scene" and that countries outside of Germany do not apply this distinction in a "clear cut" manner.[62]

Where do historical films fit into the public history landscape? Although earlier definitions of public history ignored film (or only focused on documentaries), film is acknowledged as an established "strand" of the public history framework.

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ing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World (Philadelphia: The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, 2011).

57 Cauvin, *Public History*, 47–50.

58 Cauvin, *Public History*, 51.

59 Ricardo Santhiago, "Public History as a Thesaurus?," *The Public Historian* 40, no. 4 (November 1, 2018): 46–50, 46.

60 Santhiago, "Public History as a Thesaurus?," 50.

61 Cord Arendes, "So, What Difference does it Make?" *The Public Historian*, 40, no. 4 (November 1, 2018): 51–55, 55.

62 Thomas Cauvin, "What Public History Do We Want? Views from Germany", *The Public Historian*, 40, no. 4 (November 1, 2018), 42–45, 44.

One of the ways in which European public historians distinguish themselves from their North American counterparts is a stronger emphasis on media.[63] For example, the International Federation for Public History (IFPH) includes a dedicated section on film and media in their annual conferences.[64] One way to gauge the acceptance of film in the international public history movement is that IFPH's 2022 conference hosted a keynote panel by the creators of the acclaimed German television drama *Babylon Berlin*, which depicts the end of the Weimar Republic.[65] In his *Public History: A Textbook of Practice*, Thomas Cauvin includes documentary and dramatic films in his chapter on "Radio and Audio-Visual Production." He discusses the tension between historians and filmmakers mentioned above, includes guidelines for historians wanting to help create films, and briefly sketches the role of the historical advisor.[66] The inclusion of film in Cauvin's textbook, plus the practical information he provides for historians wishing to participate in film projects, is further evidence that film has become an established part of the wider public history world.

One of the most fruitful examples of public historians' attention to film is a 2003 issue of *The Public Historian* devoted to film and history. *The Public Historian* is the most well-established public history journal in the world and is the official publication of the National Council on Public History (NCPH), the largest public history organization worldwide. Like the 1988 *American Historical Review* issue discussed above, the 2003 issue on film and history contains contributions from Robert Rosenstone and Robert Toplin. The issue's introduction, written by Shelley Bookspan, notes that the charge of "creative license" applied to filmmakers can also be applied to historians, who – although they work with established historical "facts" – nevertheless also engage in a sometimes arbitrary process when collecting sources and choosing which to emphasize and which to ignore. She calls for "the disciplines of history and film to cross-fertilize" and that students and public historians should be trained in media analysis.[67] Robert Rosenstone's piece is of particular importance to this study. He argues for film as a modern medium of expression (echoing early German filmmakers and media

63 This is not to say that the North American public history field ignores media, only that it occupies a greater share of attention at the international level than in the US and Canada.

64 See "6th World Conference of the International Federation for Public History," *6th World Conference of the International Federation for Public History* (blog), accessed November 4, 2022, https://www.ifph2020.berlin/program/index.html.

65 See "6th World Conference of the International Federation for Public History."

66 Cauvin, *Public History*, 170–171.

67 Shelley Bookspan, "History, Historians, and Visual Entertainment Media: Toward a Rapprochement," *The Public Historian* 25, no. 3 (August 1, 2003): 9–13. 10–13.

scholars like Fritz Lang and Walter Benjamin) and notes the connection between film and public history by stating:

> . . . the historical film can do "history" – that is, recount, explain, interpret, and make meaning out of the people and events in the past. Like written history, it utilizes traces of that past, but its rules of engagement with them are structured by the possibilities of the medium and the practices it has evolved. So its claims on us will inevitably be far different from those of written history.[68]

In this passage, Rosenstone articulates the potentials of historical films. For him, films also interpret the past, but in a different format. Rosenstone has made a career out of analyzing (and promoting) historical films. His radical stance advocates for film as the ideal medium for depicting history. He divides historical films into three categories: history as drama, history as document, and history as experiment (his favorite category).[69] Similar to Toplin, Rosenstone claims that films "cannot exist in a state of historical innocence" and necessarily operate within historiographical frameworks.[70]

This issue of *The Public Historian* also includes the essay by Robert Toplin discussed above. In addition to his valuable illustration of the three levels of film analysis, Toplin's article also defends historical films against the charge of "fictionalization" by admitting that fictionalization takes place as a necessary component of film as a medium:

> Cinema needs to take audiences behind closed doors and expose viewers to the thoughts and actions of people living in the past. Yet evidence of those thoughts and actions is often not recorded in the archives. Invention helps to remedy this problem. The movie's fictional scenes offer informed speculation, educated guesses about the way ideas and behavior could have found expression in those unrecorded settings. Thus, dramatic invention is a critically important component of the filmmaker's craft. It is employed abundantly, even in the most sophisticated productions, including those designed with serious educational purposes.[71]

One of the most common complaints about historical films is that they fictionalize real people and events. None of the works surveyed here deny that fictionalization takes place, but rather that fictionalization is inevitable, and filmmakers must always grapple with the degree of fictionalization they are willing to permit. Toplin rightly points out that "gotcha"-style critiques in the press, which focus on

68 Robert A. Rosenstone, "The Reel Joan of Arc: Reflections on the Theory and Practice of the Historical Film," *The Public Historian* 25, no. 3 (August 1, 2003): 61–77, 70.

69 Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, 50.

70 Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, 71–72.

71 Toplin, "Cinematic History," 89.

minutiae instead of the overall historical message conveyed by a film, "seem irrelevant."[72] It is unfortunately also common to see similar judgments pass as serious film criticism in the historical community. The production histories examined in this study will show that the issues of fictionalization, speculation, and just how much "entertainment" was permissible in films about the Wannsee Conference were ever-present during production and were not merely a marketing gimmick to provide cover so that networks could claim that the films were "based on a true story." One important aspect of the above quote is Toplin's use of the term "informed speculation." Loring Mandel utilized this exact terminology to describe how he wrote dialogue for *Conspiracy* when he could not rely on direct quotes from the archive.[73] A deeper analysis of Mandel's "informed speculation" methods will be discussed later.[74]

Toplin's book *Reel History: In Defense of Hollywood* argues in favor of the Hollywood blockbuster (as opposed to the avant-garde "art films" promoted by Rosenstone). He claims that large budgets prevent complex stories from being told, which, while undoubtedly the case for theatrical blockbusters, is less so for cable and streaming networks like HBO and Netflix.[75] For example, *Conspiracy* had already aired by the time of publication and HBO had already been offering more complex cable drama series and films for several years.[76] One of the key strengths of Toplin's book is its discussion of the rift between film scholars and historians. He argues that film scholars often rely on jargon-laden "European"

72 Toplin, "Cinematic History," 89–90.

73 Simone Gigliotti, "Commissioning Mass Murder: *Conspiracy* and History at the Wannsee Conference," in *Repicturing the Second World War: Representations in Film and Television*, ed. Michael Paris (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 119–133, 125.

74 The question of "informed speculation" and its legitimacy is also why many dismissals of fictionalization out of hand prove unsatisfying. For example, one master's thesis on the Wannsee film *concludes* its argument by saying *The Wannsee Conference* and *Conspiracy* are "audiovisual speculations," which is the starting point of this study. See Christian Papesch, "Die Darstellung der Wannsee-Konferenz im Doku-Drama. Eine vergleichende Analyse der Filme DIE WANNSEE-KONFERENZ und CONSPIRACY." MA Thesis, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 2012.

75 Robert Brent Toplin, *Reel History: In Defense of Hollywood (*Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 40–41.

76 For HBO's role in the changing television landscape, see Gary R. Edgerton and Jeffrey P. Jones, *The Essential HBO Reader*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), and Dean J. DeFino, *The HBO Effect*, (New York, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). For more on recent cable television and the (serial) historical drama, see Chapter 2 of Alison Landsberg's *Engaging the Past: Mass Culture and the Production of Historical Knowledge*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

film theory at the expense of deeper historical analysis.[77] He also takes historians to task for their tendencies to view films in a vacuum; that is, without looking at the broader historical and production contexts of a particular film or engaging with film scholarship. Furthermore, he notes an obsession with "truth" which sometimes leads to a myopic focus on historical detail, thereby blinding historians to the broader historical ideas and themes present in films.[78]

This book takes the challenge of public history seriously and shows that filmmakers, particularly screenwriters, can, in the words of Rebecca Weeks, "do history." The creators of the three docudramas central to this study acted as historians. The film scholar and practicing screenwriter Barry Langford argued that screenplays should become objects of research within film studies and that they had been previously neglected.[79] He also noted that screenplays can be both acts of creativity and research, using his own screenplay, the Holocaust film *Torte Bluma*, as an example.[80] Bruno Ramirez, also a historian and screenwriter, argued along similar lines.[81] Rebecca Weeks' *History by HBO* investigates key aspects of historical TV drama such as set design, sound, and art departments. She holds up HBO series like *Deadwood*, *Band of Brothers*, *Boardwalk Empire*, and *Treme* are examples of responsible ways of "doing history" on film.[82] Weeks argues that scholars have largely neglected historical television, with the exception of documentaries.[83] This claim is borne out when one looks at recent studies of Holocaust film and television which engage with production history. Most are concerned with Claude Lanzmann's documentary *Shoah* and few engage with fictional, dramatic productions, though recent scholarship, particularly on projects which remain unproduced, has begun investigating dramas which deal with the Holocaust.[84] Weeks even contends that HBO's *Treme*, a drama depicting post-

77 Toplin, *Reel History*, 171.

78 Toplin, *Reel History*, 160–161.

79 Barry Langford, "Beyond McKee: Screenwriting in and out of the Academy," in *Analysing the Screenplay*, ed. Jill Nelmes (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 2010), 251–262, 253–256.

80 Langford, "Beyond McKee,"259–260.

81 See Ramirez, *Inside the Historical Film*.

82 Weeks, *History by HBO*, 13.

83 Weeks, *History by HBO*, 17–18.

84 For example, see: Vice, *Claude Lanzmann's 'Shoah' Outtakes*; Simone Gigliotti, *Restless Archive*; See also recent work on unmade dramatic Holocaust films: Caitlin Elizabeth McDonald, "Examining the Legacy of Nazism in Emeric Pressburger's Unmade Films," *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 17, no. 3 (July 2024): 292–309; Vice, "Stanley Kubrick's Quest for the Heroic: Turning Wartime Lies into Aryan Papers," *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 17, no. 3 (July 2024): 328–345. For media history which discusses a more oblique grappling with the Holocaust on German tele-

Katrina New Orleans, largely fulfills the standards of academic history.[85] *Scripting Genocide* takes these claims seriously and uses the methods of the New Film History to prove that screenwriters can and do act as public historians.

3 The Holocaust and Film

The academic literature on Holocaust films is vast and is inextricably bound to the discourse on memory culture and memory studies. The sociologists Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider claim that by the 1990s, Holocaust memory transformed into a "cosmopolitan memory," that is, a transnational historical memory "unbound" by national borders.[86] Studies of collective memory usually are demarcated by time and place: memories of World War I in France, the American Civil War in Louisiana, or imperialism in Japan. Levy and Sznaider argue that the Holocaust has transcended these boundaries and become a global, or "cosmopolitan," memory shared by people whose societies were not directly involved with or affected by the Holocaust. The authors contend that the post–Cold War era in the West is characterized by a "compromise that is based on the mutual recognition of the history of the 'Other,'"[87] a statement which also prefigures the German public historian Marko Demantowsky's definition of public history, which refers to public history as "a complex past-related identity discourse" which "serves the mutual recognition of narratives."[88] Levy and Sznaider's concept is, however, a product of the post-1989 optimism bolstered by Francis Fukuyama and seems overly optimistic in our era. Contemporary historians have reassessed Levy and Sznaider's thesis.[89]

In her groundbreaking *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, Alison Landsberg outlines her concept of "prosthetic memory," which she defines as a "new form of public cultural memory" that "emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narra-

vision, see Haydée Mareike Haass, *Herbert Reinecker: NS-Propagandist und bundesdeutscher Erfolgsautor: Eine mediale Verwandlungsgeschichte* (Berlin: Metropol-Verlag, 2024).

85 Weeks, *History by HBO*, 182.

86 See Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider. "Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory." *European Journal of Social Theory* 5.1 (2002): 87–106.

87 Levy and Sznaider, "Memory Unbound," 103.

88 Demantowsky, "What is Public History," 26.

89 See Thomas Pegelow Kaplan, "The Universalisation of the Holocaust as a Moral Standard," in *Beyond "Ordinary Men," Christopher R. Browning and Holocaust Historiography,* ed. Kaplan, Jürgen Matthäus, and Mark W. Homburg, (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2019), 159–175. 160.

tive about the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theater or museum."[90] She views prosthetic memories as a result of "commodified mass culture" which can "creat[e] the conditions for ethical thinking precisely by encouraging people to feel connected to . . . the 'other.'"[91] Landsberg's prosthetic memory concept has intriguing implications for historical films viewed by audiences worldwide:

> The person [filmgoer, museum visitor] does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person's subjectivity and politics.[92]

For Landsberg, prosthetic memory (acquired through engagement with mass culture) has the potential to foster "ethical thinking" and therefore transform – and educate – people. It can influence people to "rethink and reshape" themselves.[93] Echoing Levy and Sznaider, she argues that "[m]ass culture has had the unexpected effect of making group-specific cultural memories available to a diverse and varied populace."[94] For Landsberg, film is the key driver of prosthetic memory formation alongside other "experiential" methods like museum exhibits. Drawing on Frankfurt School theorists like Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, she stresses mass culture's educative and transformative potential and explicitly rejects Theodor Adorno's critique of the culture industry as manipulating and hoodwinking mass audiences, writing that "commodities and commodified images are not capsules of meaning that spectators swallow wholesale but are the grounds on which social meanings are negotiated, contested, and sometimes constructed."[95] Tim Zumhof echoes Landsberg when he asserts that "this kind of criticism [i. e., criticism following Adorno's perpective] neglects and demotes the audience's perspective and its critical abilities. Adorno's one-sided view on popular culture reduces audiences to 'victims' of the culture industry."[96] Critics often cite (and often misquote) Adorno's well-known aphorism that "to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric."[97] Landsberg is not naïve about the dangers of mass cul-

90 Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 2.
91 Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 9.
92 Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 2.
93 Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 9.
94 Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 11.
95 Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 34.
96 Zumhof, "Historical Culture," 26.
97 This misquotation stems from a longer sentence: "Kulturkritik findet sich der letzten Stufe der Dialektik von Kultur und Barbarei gegenüber: nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch, und das frisst auch die Erkenntnis an, die ausspricht, warum es unmöglich ward,

ture and its well-known negative examples; she acknowledges that her vision is "utopian."[98] Nevertheless, she contends that "capitalist commodification and mass culture have created the potential for a progressive, even a radical, politics of memory."[99]

The Holocaust in American culture is one of Landsberg's primary examples. She contends that *Schindler's List* "stages – and acts as an instantiation of, – the possibility of a responsible mass cultural transmission of memory."[100] She highlights the pedagogical potential of affect, empathy, and discomfort when viewing Holocaust films. For example, she discusses a scene in *Schindler's List* where Amon Göth (Ralph Fiennes) executes a hinge-maker for ostensible inefficiency: "Our discomfort [during this scene] derives from the power of the image to move us and to make intelligible and visceral what we cannot comprehend in a purely cognitive way."[101] She notes that many historians have been critical of affect or "the experiential mode," arguing that it is "anathema to most academic historians." She points, however, to a counterexample found within the recent historiography of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust: Saul Friedländer's integration of Jewish diaries and letters in his *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Extermination*, the latter of the two volumes which comprise the current standard work of Holocaust history which focuses on both victims and perpetrators.[102]

The televisual representations of the Wannsee Conference serve as examples of a *responsible* mass cultural transmission of memory. They are interventions into our historical memories; the Wannsee Conference occurred in secret and its protocol was supposed to have been destroyed. It is an event that was not supposed to have been remembered – and yet it is. As Landsberg notes, "visual representation is crucial to rendering an event thinkable."[103] Drawing on Walter Benjamin, she argues that prosthetic memories of the Holocaust "may inspire action":

> Representing the Holocaust is about making the Holocaust concrete and thinkable. It is about finding ways to "burn in" memories so that they might become meaningful locally, so that they can become the grounds for political engagement in the present and the future.[104]

heute Gedichte zu schreiben." – Theodor W. Adorno. *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 10.1: Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft I, Prismen. Ohne Leitbild, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977). 30.

98 Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 113.

99 Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 143.

100 Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 111.

101 Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 125–126.

102 Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, 8.

103 Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 126.

104 Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 138–139.

Landsberg's recent work, *Engaging the Past: Mass Culture and the Production of Historical Knowledge*, discusses "historically conscious television dramas" in detail, but also expands on her prosthetic memory concept.[105] For Landsberg, twenty-first-century television and online landscapes "pose some fundamental challenges for our sense of what constitutes history in the twenty-first century."[106] Landsberg does not seek to denigrate traditional academic historiography, but rather rejects the prevailing academic attitude which "treat[s] all popular engagements with the past as watered-down, oversimplified melodrama," which causes historians to "[miss] an opportunity to think productively about how ordinary people use the past and how contemporary technologies and modes of perception have the potential to provoke historical thinking."[107] One of her concepts she develops to explain the potential of historical films is "affective engagement", which she notes is "qualitatively different from identification in that it explains how a film draws the viewer into proximity to an event or person in the past, fostering a sense of intimacy or closeness but not straight-forwardly through the eyes of someone living at that time."[108] Drawing on Walter Benjamin's concept of "distraction," Landsberg further points out that affective engagement can also "disorient" the viewer – an important concept for the films depicting the Wannsee Conference, as they certainly do not try to get viewers to "identify" with the conference participants, but rather place viewers in the Wannsee villa with them: "the potential for the production of useful historical knowledge is at its greatest when the viewer does not identify with the characters on the screen."[109] This is not to say that the Wannsee films demonize the perpetrators (even if they sometimes play with or utilize some well-worn pop culture tropes about Nazis).[110] Nevertheless, these films undoubtedly succeed at fostering "a recognition of a sense of difference between oneself and the person figured on the screen."[111]

105 Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, 61–62.
106 Landsberg, *Engaging the Past,* 10.
107 Landsberg, *Engaging the Past,* 24.
108 Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, 27.
109 Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, 33–34.
110 It is important to keep in mind that the term "Holocaust perpetrator" is imperfect. The historian David Cesarani has argued that it is inadequate to truly represent what it intends to signify, instead preferring the French term *génocidaire*, a term originally used for those guilty of the Rwandan genocide, because the French term "is rather more effective . . . since it identifies the actor with the crime." David Cesarani, *Eichmann: His Life and Crimes* (London: Vintage Books, 2005), 357.
111 Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, 35.

It is obviously a generalization to state that Anglo-American views on a subject broadly fit into one category whereas German views fit into another. And, of course, there are views from countries beyond the German/US dichotomy.[112] Nevertheless, some trends are visible. German historians or media scholars tend to devote a great deal of attention to the debates surrounding depicting the Holocaust and some (like Wulf Kansteiner) go further than most Anglo-American scholars in their promotion of media as a valid object of historical inquiry and form of historical culture. Within the professional historical communities, the Anglo-American sphere seems overall friendlier to an analysis of films and television, owing much of its willingness to embrace the medium to Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer (see Rosenstone and Landsberg) whereas the German historical community often seems tied to the Adornian mode of suspicion towards the "culture industry." One example of this phenomenon can be seen in the academic literature on *The Wannsee Conference* and *Conspiracy*: most publications on either film are in English. When one reads the various German publications on the Wannsee Conference, the conference's place in memory culture is also barely present except for mentions of Joseph Wulf, the first historian and individual to campaign for a Wannsee Conference memorial and research center, or jabs against inaccuracies in the films. In the media and critical landscapes of both cultures, the lines are more blurred. One can find journalists and critics of all stripes, in either German or English, either defending depicting the Holocaust on film or considering it distasteful. Perhaps this particularity of the German historical community is due not to an innate conservatism among Germans in general (after all, if that were the case, German journalists and film critics would pan every single historical film produced), but rather due to the split within the historical discipline in Germany between "hard," research-based history and the fields of history didactics and public history, which have been concerned with historical culture, including film, for decades.[113] This split in attitudes seems attributable to the more entrenched institutional division of labor in the German university system when compared to American history departments and to different intellectual genealogies: Benjamin and Kracauer versus Adorno. Note, however, that within the

112 Rich Brownstein has shown that most Holocaust films are produced in the United States or Germany, making these two countries of outsized importance when discussing depictions of the Holocaust on screen. Germany has produced just as many Holocaust films as the United States. See Brownstein, *Holocaust Cinema Complete*, 60–62.

113 See Christian Bunnenberg and Nils Steffen, eds., *Geschichte auf YouTube: Neue Herausforderungen für Geschichtsvermittlung und historische Bildung*, *Geschichte auf YouTube* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019) and Susanne Popp et al., eds., *Zeitgeschichte - Medien - Historische Bildung*, (Göttingen: V&R unipress GmbH, 2010).

field of public history, German public history MA programs are actually more open to media and film studies influences than their longer-established American counterparts.

The most important controversy surrounding Holocaust and film is the debate between mimesis and the prohibition on images or representation (*Bilderverbot* and *Darstellungsverbot*).[114] Scholars, critics, and filmmakers have debated for decades about whether it is appropriate to depict the Holocaust either in a fictionalized manner or on film at all.[115] As mentioned earlier, this enduring debate pits one group, which roughly shares Theodor Adorno's suspicion of the "culture industry," against another, which argues for dramatic film's potential. This debate has been exhaustively documented and is a common feature of university courses on the Holocaust and film.[116] On the critical side, the French documentarian Claude Lanzmann is usually held up as an avatar (alongside Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel) of those arguing that due to its status as a uniquely horrific and barbaric event, depicting the Holocaust is beyond the boundaries of acceptable taste.[117] For example, one scholar has gone so far as to claim that the 2015 Hungarian Auschwitz drama *Son of Saul* (and Academy Award Winner for Best Foreign Language Film) is "soft porn for refined people."[118] Usually, scholars involved in this debate contrast Lanzmann with Steven Spielberg, with *Schindler's List* representing the ultimate problematic contrast to Lanzmann's *Shoah*–, usually because, since it focuses on survivors rather than the dead, it utilizes a conventional filmic structure – or simply because it is a "Hollywood" film. However, as early as 1996,

114 Catrin Corell, *Der Holocaust als Herausforderung für den Film: Formen des filmischen Umgangs mit der Shoah seit 1945: Eine Wirkungstypologie*, (Bielefeld: transcript, 2009), 14–15. Corell also notes the religious connotations of a prohibition on images.

115 One important recent intervention into this debate is Georges Didi-Huberman's, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012). Didi-Huberman argues that this debate overlooks the fact that Auschwitz prisoners risked and lost their lives taking photographs of mass killing.

116 See Barry Langford, "Mass Culture/Mass Media/Mass Death: Teaching Film, Television, and the Holocaust," in *Teaching Holocaust Literature and Film*, ed. Robert Eaglestone and Barry Langford, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 63–77.

117 Waltraud Wende, "Medienbilder und Geschichte – Zur Medialisierung des Holocaust," in *Geschichte im Film: Mediale Inszenierungen des Holocaust und kulturelles Gedächtnis*, ed. Waltraud Wende (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002), 12–13.

118 Pau Bosch Santos, "Soft Porn for Refined People: *Son of Saul* within the History of Holocaust Representation," *East European Film Bulletin*, Volume 69, November 2016, https://eefb.org/perspectives/son-of-saul-within-the-history-of-holocaust-representation/. Aside from its polemics, Santos' article provides an easy to understand introduction to the genre's history.

Miriam Hansen cautioned against setting up a "false dichotomy" between *Schindler's List* and Lanzmann's *Shoah.*[119] She noted the key issue at hand:

> A fundamental limitation of classical narrative in relation to history, and to the historical event of the Shoah in particular, is that it relies on neoclassicist principles of compositional unity, motivation, linearity, equilibrium, and closure – principles singularly inadequate in the face of an event that by its very nature defies our narrative urge to make sense of, to impose order on the discontinuity and otherness of historical experience.[120]

Imposing order on discontinuity is common to all genres of historical writing, whether for academic book projects, museum exhibits, or even films. In this sense, the long discussion surrounding Holocaust representation could also be helpful for those depicting other historical atrocities or events, as Susan Neiman has recently attempted in her comparison of German memory culture with that of the American South.[121] Perhaps the "limit case" nature of the Holocaust is what makes this discussion so alluring to critics and scholars, some of whom have borrowed language and arguments from this debate when discussing other historical films like *12 Years a Slave.*[122] It is important to note that in the years before his death, Lanzmann had a kind of rapprochement with Spielberg; the two collaborated on the latter's oral history project and Lanzmann praised *Son of Saul*, a fictional story set during the October 1944 uprising of the Auschwitz Sonderkommando.[123] Rich Brownstein has also argued that Elie Wiesel's initial "condescension" towards Holocaust films had more to do with the old animosity between so-called high and low culture, arguing that Wiesel's views epitomized elite, literary taste.[124] As early as 1996, the Holocaust historian Omer Bartov suggested that scholars "might as well try to influence the media by constructive criticism or involvement, rather than dismiss

119 Miriam Bratu Hansen, "'Schindler's List' Is Not 'Shoah': The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory," *Critical Inquiry* 22, no. 2 (1996): 292–312.

120 Hansen, "'Schindler's List' Is Not 'Shoah,'" 298.

121 See Susan Neiman, *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

122 See Richard Brody, "Should a Film Try to Depict Slavery?," *The New Yorker*, October 21, 2013, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/should-a-film-try-to-depict-slavery and Isaac Chotiner, "Why Can't Critics Deal With Films About Slavery?," *The New Republic*, October 23, 2013, https://newrepublic.com/article/115304/12-years-slave-reviews-highbrow-critics-are-wrong.

123 Jordan Cronk. "'Shoah' Filmmaker Claude Lanzmann Talks Spielberg, 'Son of Saul,'" *The Holly-wood Reporter*, May 2, 2016, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/shoah-filmmaker-claude-lanzmann-talks-869931 Accessed April 1, 2020.

124 Brownstein, *Holocaust Cinema Complete*, 81–83.

anything that does not meet our expectations."[125] Bartov has remained consistent. In 2023, he published *The Butterfly and the Axe,* a touching, searing novel about the Holocaust and memory set in Israel and Ukraine based on his own family history.[126]

Much writing on Holocaust representation refers to "representing the unrepresentable," that is, how to make sense out of a senseless event – though Holocaust historians would likely argue that we can make sense out of this event and can explain how and why it happened – claiming otherwise would be admitting defeat. Analyzing this Sisyphean task is common to much writing about this topic, but perhaps the best depiction of it from a creator's point of view is Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, which deeply explores the author's ethical and creative dilemma when depicting his father's story in comic form.[127] This dilemma is ever-present: historian Alex J. Kay titled his recent article on *Conspiracy* "Speaking the Unspeakable."[128] Catrin Corell has noted that the "central difficulty" of representing the "unrepresentable" Holocaust on film is what she calls *Erfahrbarmachung*, which roughly translates to "making (something) experienceable."[129] The interplay between history, memory culture, and media is not a one-way street: Sometimes, the historiography of a particular topic has to reach a critical mass before it begins to become an attractive subject for media representation. In other cases, artists and filmmakers are the first to explore a particular topic, to which historians then later devote increased attention.

In an article on film and history, the film scholar and Germanist Anton Kaes used a quote from Siegfried Kracauer's 1960 *Theory of Film* to illustrate how society can deal with the horrors of the twentieth century via film:

> The mirror reflections of horror are an end in themselves. As such they beckon the spectator to take them in and thus incorporate into his memory the real face of things too dreadful to be beheld in reality. In experiencing the rows of calves' heads or the litter of tortured human bodies in the films made of the Nazi concentration camps, we redeem horror from its invisibility behind the veils of panic and imagination. And this experience is liberating in as much as it removes a most powerful taboo. Perhaps Perseus' greatest achievement was

125 Omer Bartov, *Murder in Our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 174.

126 Bartov, *The Butterfly and the Axe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Publishers, 2023).

127 See Art Spiegelman, *The Complete MausS* (London: Penguin, 2003) and Spiegelman, *MetaMaus: A Look Inside a Modern Classic, Maus* (New York: Viking, 2018).

128 Alex J. Kay, "Speaking the Unspeakable: The Portrayal of the Wannsee Conference in the Film *Conspiracy*," *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of History and Culture* 27, no. 2 (August 2021): 187–200.

129 Corell, *Der Holocaust als Herausforderung für den Film,* 17.

> not to cut off Medusa's head but to overcome his fears and look at its reflection in the shield. And was it not precisely this feat which permitted him to behead the monster?[130]

It is time to reapply Kracauer's quote to this era: As Kaes notes, Perseus' shield is no longer a cinematic canvas. It is a television (or tablet, or laptop, or even smartphone) screen.[131] The most responsible examples of Holocaust film and television seek to make the invisible visible, to make the unspeakable speakable. At their best, Holocaust film and television seek to make a hitherto ignorant public aware of just how the crime unfolded to prevent it from happening again. In the case of the Wannsee films, they also seek to make the "unfilmable" filmable. This task is what lay before the German, American, and British filmmakers who sought to tell the story of the secret meeting that took place in a charming lakeside villa in January 1942.

There are surprisingly few examples of academic writing on the films and television programs that have depicted the Wannsee Conference. The notable exception is NBC's 1978 miniseries *Holocaust*, which has been the subject of numerous academic studies, especially due to the series' popularity in West Germany. The two films by Heinz Schirk and Paul Mommertz (*Reinhard Heydrich: Manager of Terror* and *The Wannsee Conference*) have, in contrast, received scant scholarly attention.[132] *Reinhard Heydrich: Manager of Terror* is almost entirely absent from the literature – one could call it a forgotten film, which is unsurprising considering it is only watchable in an archival setting (to this date there has been no DVD or online release). *The Wannsee Conference* has received more attention, but usually in passing – for example, in lists of Holocaust films considered worth including in a school curriculum or as a subsection of wider studies on German memory culture or Holocaust film. *Conspiracy* has received greater attention from historians, but only in recent years. There are five academic articles that analyze *Conspiracy* in depth and one scholarly review of the film by Alan Steinweis.[133] In the

130 Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960). 306.

131 Anton Kaes, "History and Film: Public Memory in the Age of Electronic Dissemination." *History and Memory* 2, no. 1 (1990): 117.

132 See Bangert, *The Nazi Past in Contemporary German Film*, 58; Nicholas Johnson, "'I Am a Historian as Well.' - The West German Reception of *Die Wannseekonferenz* (1984) and Portraying Holocaust Perpetrators in Public Television Drama," *VIEW Journal of European Television History and Culture* 11, no. 21 (August 3, 2022): 19–35.

133 See Gigliotti, "Commissioning Mass Murder," 119–133; Stefanie Rauch, "Understanding the Holocaust through Film: Audience Reception between Preconceptions and Media Effects," *History & Memory* 30, no. 1 (March 2018): 151–188; Kay, "Speaking the Unspeakable"; Steffen Hantke, "Horror and the Holocaust: 'Prestige Horror' and Frank Pierson's *Conspiracy* (2001)," *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 69, no. 4 (December 2021): 413–429; and Nicholas K. Johnson, "'A

recent crop of German publications on the Wannsee Conference, the films sometimes appear, but either as one-off notes or as the propagators of errors that historians need to correct. In short, the films have received some scholarly attention, but nothing that goes beyond a reading of the films as such – the available archival sources have hitherto been neglected (outside of master's theses).[134] In other words, they remain footnotes.

This study complements an existing body of academic literature. Only one of the studies cited above (Gigliotti's) engages with any of the films on Toplin's third level of analysis; the rest stick to a traditional reading of the films as texts without looking into their production histories or consulting statements made by the filmmakers themselves. Furthermore, German-language academic literature on these productions is clearly lacking – only *Holocaust* has received major attention and the docudramas *The Wannsee Conference* and *Conspiracy* only appear as curiosities or as examples of "bad history" that the authors need to correct. This study sees critiques and characterizations of the television docudramas as "speculation" as a mere starting point. The truly valuable aspects of these films are how they provide snapshots of German and American remembrance cultures within specific historical and television contexts. These films are historiographical interventions themselves and deserve far more than passing mention. The production histories explored here will bring a much-needed empirical and historical grounding to studies of dramatic Holocaust film, particularly from a public history angle, as film scholars and film historians have long used production histories fruitfully.[135] Finally, I argue that television is not inferior to cinema when it comes to depicting history – in fact, as Alison Landsberg has noted, television is where we can see the latest and most intellectually rewarding developments in the historical film genre. Besides studies discussing NBC's *Holocaust* miniseries, the academic literature on Holocaust film tends to ignore television – an oversight not unique to Holocaust studies, but also common in film histories and literature on depicting the past on screen, which tend to privilege either blockbuster films or art cinema to the neglect of television history.

Classroom History Lesson Is Not Going to Work': HBO's *Conspiracy* and Depicting Holocaust Perpetrators on Film," in *Show, Don't Tell,* 172–196. I also conducted a preliminary investigation into this topic in my master's thesis: Nicholas K. Johnson, "HBO and the Holocaust: *Conspiracy*, the Historical Film, and Public History at Wannsee" (MA Thesis, 2016). Lastly, see Nicholas K. Johnson, "Shadow Quality TV: HBO's *Complicity* and the Failure to Portray Allied Indifference to the Holocaust, 1995–2003," *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 17, no. 3 (July 2024): 269–291.

134 See Papesch, "Die Darstellung der Wannsee-Konferenz."

135 See Chapman et al, *The New Film History*; Smyth, *Fred Zinnemann and the Cinema of Resistance* and *From Here to Eternity*. See also Vice, *Claude Lanzmann's 'Shoah' Outtakes*, and Klinger, "Film History Terminable and Interminable."

This study investigates the production histories of film and televisual depictions of the Wannsee Conference in chronological order, beginning with 1960. Echoing film scholar Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann, historical television episodes and films which depict both the Wannsee Conference villa and protocol as icons also comprise this study's filmography, but its main focus lies on direct depictions of the conference.[136] The first chapter covers four American television productions which portray Wannsee, beginning with "Engineer of Death: The Eichmann Story," an episode of the docudrama anthology series *Armstrong Circle Theatre,* which was the first depiction of Wannsee on screen. The chapter then moves to the 1978 NBC miniseries *Holocaust*, which, through the character Erik Dorf, depicts Holocaust perpetrators in surprisingly rigorous, if sometimes stereotyped, detail. HBO's 1994 film *Fatherland*, an alternate history and crime drama about the murder of Wannsee Conference attendees in a victorious Nazi Germany, and ABC's sprawling 1998 miniseries *War and Remembrance*, which uses the Wannsee Conference protocol to interrogate Allied indifference to the Holocaust, round out this chapter. Chapter 2 analyzes the 1979 West German television film *Reinhard Heydrich: Manager of Terror*, an important predecessor to the first docudrama about Wannsee. *Manager of Terror* is notable as both the first German-language television depiction of Wannsee and as an experiment in explaining Nazi crimes via psychology. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the production history and reception of *The Wannsee Conference*, a pioneering West German television docudrama reenacting the conference in real time. These chapters argue that *The Wannsee Conference* was an important intervention in West German remembrance culture and historiography because it drew wide attention to the Wannsee Conference when no historians had yet published studies about Wannsee. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 discuss the production history, reception, and lasting influence of *Conspiracy*, a 2001 HBO/BBC coproduction about Wannsee which has become a cult classic. *Conspiracy* was the most prominent docudrama depicting Wannsee, had the highest budget, and most recognizable star power. These chapters also explore this film's unmade sequel, *Complicity*, which would have depicted the 1943 Bermuda Conference and Allied antisemitism. An adaptation of David S. Wyman's *The Abandonment of the Jews*, *Complicity* was a damning indictment of the American and British governments which never saw the light of day.[137] Sections covering *Complicity*

136 Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann, "Symbolort und Ikone – Das kulturelle Nachleben der Wannseekonferenz," unpublished manuscript, 2021. The author would like to thank Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann for providing this draft. Hartmann also discusses the Wannsee villa as a visual reference in contemporary Israeli cinema.

137 See David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941–1945* (New York: Pantheon, 1984).

also contribute to a growing body of film histories focusing on the unmade.[138] The final chapter focuses on depictions of the Wannsee Conference after the global resurgence of the far right. It centers around *The Conference*, a third docudrama about Wannsee released on German public television in early 2022, but also covers other, more oblique artistic references to Wannsee in response to a changed political climate.

4 People on Tuesday

Most studies of Berlin's film history gloss over filmic depictions of the city's "Nazi blights on collective and prosthetic memory," which, for one film historian, end up as just one of the "many versions of Berlin available" for the city's boosters.[139] But Berlin, which one public historian recently termed "the Rome of contemporary history," does not let you escape that blighted past for long.[140] Even one of its most influential contributions to film history leaves us with unintentional foreshadowing; other filmmakers and writers have noticed this connection. *People on Sunday*, a 1930 silent classic created by later Hollywood icons and film noir greats Robert Siodmak, Edgar G. Ulmer, Billy Wilder, and Fred Zinnemann, is a slice-of-life film about a group of young Berliners on a typical Sunday. The friends meet up and go swimming in the Wannsee lake; it is a film about "undramatic normality."[141] *People on Sunday* is notable because it is "a portrait of a city through intimate, anecdotal looks at some representative inhabitants."[142] Billy Wilder biographer Joseph McBride notes that "the Wannsee Conference . . . would take place in the same location, retrospectively throwing the shadow of historical catastrophe over the initially heedless but gradually downbeat proceedings onscreen."[143]

McBride is not the only person to have played with this contrast between *People on Sunday* and Wannsee's darker legacy. In its sixth episode, the German Weimar-era crime and political drama *Babylon Berlin* features a scene where its female protagonist, Charlotte Ritter (Liv Lisa Fries) goes on a weekend outing to

138 James Fenwick, Kieran Foster, and David Eldridge, eds., *Shadow Cinema: The Historical and Production Contexts of Unmade Films* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

139 Brigitta B. Wagner, *Berlin Replayed: Cinema and Urban Nostalgia in the Postwall Era* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 195.

140 Hanno Hochmuth, *Berlin. Das Rom der Zeitgeschichte*, (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2024).

141 Jens Bisky, *Berlin: Biographie einer großen Stadt*, 1st Expanded Edition (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2023), 510.

142 Joseph McBride, *Billy Wilder: Dancing on the Edge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 87.

143 McBride, *Billy Wilder*, 88.

Wannsee. The scene, filmed on location at the *Strandbad Wannsee*, plays like an homage to *People on Sunday*, whether via the 1920s bathing costumes, jazz, or just the carefree young people enjoying an ordinary Sunday. During the scene, two characters the show has previously led us to believe are communist activists have a conversation – about Hitler. The two are actually Nazis. By locating this scene at Wannsee, in the middle of an homage to *People on Sunday*, the creators of *Babylon Berlin* also play with the contrasts of German history, all centered at the same lake in the nation's capital.

The Wannsee Conference has been a shadow presence in transnational television history for decades, even if contemporary German intellectuals ignore it.[144] A 2023 issue of the intellectual history magazine *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte* is devoted to the place of Wannsee within the history of ideas. None of the films discussed in this book were deemed worthy of serious consideration in the texts featured here, with one exception. In one contribution, a conversation with Deborah Hartmann, current director of the House of the Wannsee Conference Memorial, her interviewers allege that "our image space [*Bildraum*] is infiltrated by films about the Wannsee Conference," followed by clearly dismissive comments on "actors in Nazi makeup."[145] The word choice here, namely "infiltrated," is characteristic for German high-cultural suspicion of film and television as intellectual pursuits. In her response, Hartmann does not address the comments about the television movies, but instead discusses the difficulties faced in communicating this history at the historic site and museum without artifacts: "for us, it's less about the suggestion of authenticity than about historical significance." At no other point are the television productions *Scripting Genocide* investigates mentioned in the issue. In contrast, the British historian Dan Stone, in his recent survey *The Holocaust: An Unfinished History* convincingly argues for the cultural significance of Wannsee:

> Wannsee is not just important as one of the key moments in the unfolding of the Nazis' genocidal mindset, however. When one pictures the fifteen leading Nazis sitting around the table in the sumptuous villa that Heydrich planned to claim for himself after the war – which we can easily do, as the site is now a museum and the setting of the film *Conspiracy*,

144 See Jochen Arntz and Holger Schmale, *Wannsee: An den Ufern deutscher Geschichte*, (Freiburg, Basel, Vienna: Herder, 2024), which only mentions *People on Sunday*, but leaves the televisual explorations of Wannsee's darker history unmentioned. Arntz and Schmale do discuss the Wannsee Conference, but the cultural exploration of it, which is arguably more prominent and certainly longer than other filmic depictions of the lake, remains ignored.

145 Deborah Hartmann, "20. Januar 1942, Tagesordnungspunkt Völkermord. Ein Gespräch mit Deborah Hartmann," ed. Martin Hollender, Hedwig Richter, and Michael Matthiesen, *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte Heft XVII/2* Sommer 2023: Wannsee XVII, no. 2 (May 12, 2023): 23–32, 31–32.

> one of the few largely convincing historical reconstructions of the Nazi period – it becomes clear that the optics and aesthetics of the meeting were equally significant. The meeting looks, in retrospect, like an exemplary scene in the Nazis' staging of their own myth as the master race. These smug, self-satisfied men, sure of their own superiority, discussed, while being fed fine food and wine, the intricacies of mass murder and the legal problems that arose from them. They laughed and joked, argued and fell into line – and the massive disjunction between their self-performance and the reality of what it all meant is devastating.[146]

The Berlin historian Jens Bisky has noted that Wannsee is a location where high and low culture have historically clashed. His example is that of proletarian bathers, depicted so lovingly by Heinrich Zille, and the neighborhood's bourgeois property owners, exemplified by the painter Max Liebermann. This book investigates another meeting between high and low culture, between historiography and that medium often derided as synonymous with low culture: television.[147] The television depictions investigated here also focus on a seemingly undramatic normality at Wannsee: a meeting of Nazi officials on an otherwise ordinary Tuesday in January 1942.

146 Dan Stone, *The Holocaust: An Unfinished History*, (London: Pelican, 2023), 139.
147 Bisky, *Berlin*, 427–428.