Chapter 1
Early Portrayals of the Wannsee Conference on American Television, 1960–1994

This chapter analyzes four television programs that depicted the Wannsee Conference on American television before *Conspiracy*: *Engineer of Death: The Eichmann Story* (1960), an episode of CBS' *Armstrong Circle Theatre*; the NBC miniseries *Holocaust* (1978); the ABC miniseries *War and Remembrance* (1988–1989); and the HBO film *Fatherland* (1994). *Holocaust* has been subject to major academic and media attention since its release and is the most well-known of the four television programs; however, previous analyses rarely discuss the series' brief portrayal of the Wannsee Conference. *Engineer of Death* and *Holocaust* directly depict the conference on screen, with *Engineer of Death* the first dramatic depiction of the conference in television history. *War and Remembrance* and *Fatherland* take a different approach and refrain from directly depicting the conference on screen, but instead use the Wannsee Protocol as a plot device or as an icon, much in the vein of Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann's argument. The last two productions in this chapter center on the Wannsee Protocol as evidence of a crime.[1]

Although Wannsee is a minor aspect of all four productions, it is important to note that each includes it as either a pivotal plot device or focuses on the protocol as the symbol of ultimate, bureaucratic, modern evil. These productions show how the Wannsee Conference was understood in American popular culture from the 1960s until the early 1990s, as well as how television rapidly responded to world events, with one example going into pre-production as soon as Eichmann's capture became public. The two miniseries discussed here were not obscure; they had massive budgets and publicity; it is only through our retrospective lens that *War and Remembrance* seems a footnote in television history. Lastly, it is important to recognize that most of these productions also represent a specific Jewish-American artistic response to the Holocaust and an increasing public desire to examine the motivations of Nazi perpetrators. The Wannsee Conference was a key aspect of this artistic response and, although not occupying as central of a role in

1 Ebbrecht-Hartmann, "Symbolort und Ikone," See also a published section of this piece, Ebbrecht-Hartmann, "Das Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz – vom Wassser aus gesehen," in *Einblendungen: Elemente einer jüdischen Filmgeschichte der Bundesrepublik*, ed. Johannes Praetorius-Rhein and Lea Wohl von Haselberg, Jüdische Kulturgeschichte in der Moderne Band 27 (Berlin: Neofelis, 2022), 132–136.

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Holocaust television as Auschwitz, it nevertheless was ever-present and became shorthand for modern, industrial-scale genocide.

1 Eichmann as Ultimate Evil: *Armstrong Circle Theatres*' "Engineer of Death: The Eichmann Story," 1960

On the evening of May 11, 1960, Israeli agents captured Adolf Eichmann as he walked home from a bus stop on a lonely road in Buenos Aires.[2] The highest-ranking Nazi tried after the war, Eichmann's televised trial became a global media sensation. Most scholarship has focused on Eichmann's capture and trial or Hannah Arendt's depiction of it in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. But philosophers, journalists, and historians were not the only ones interested in Eichmann. Filmmakers rapidly reacted as well, and screenwriter Dale Wasserman–most famous for *Man of La Mancha*, a 1966 musical adaptation of *Don Quixote* –signed a contract that August with the Madison Avenue-based Andrew Television Inc. for a television episode about Eichmann's life.[3] The episode, titled *Engineer of Death: The Eichmann Story*, aired on October 12, 1960 and was the first dramatic depiction of the Wannsee Conference on television or film. *Engineer of Death* was an episode of the CBS drama anthology series *Armstrong Circle Theatre*, which had previously aired on NBC in the 1950s and specialized in docudramas. Sponsored by the Armstrong World Industries Corporation, which specialized in manufacturing components for ceilings and walls, the series ran from 1950 until 1963.[4] *Armstrong Circle Theatre* was a prominent anthology series during the early days of television, though it has not enjoyed the longevity of other 1950s and 1960s anthology series like *The Twilight Zone* and *The Outer Limits*. Many important figures in early American television history worked on *Armstrong Circle Theatre* episodes, including *Twilight Zone* creator Rod Serling. Loring Mandel, for example, wrote the 1958 episode "Kidnap Story: Hold for Release" and future stars like Telly Savalas and Carroll O'Connor played roles in *Engineer of Death.* However, *Engineer of Death* is unavailable outside of television archives and has never been released on home media.[5]

2 Cesarani, *Eichmann*, 228–230.

3 Signed Contract for "Engineer of Death," August 25, 1960, Box 3, Dale Wasserman Papers, 1946–1983, U.S. Mss 67AN, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison, Wisconsin, 1.

4 *Armstrong Circle Theatre*, Drama (CBS Television Network, CBS, Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), 1950), https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0042074/.

5 Because of rights restrictions, this section will not contain screenshots from *Engineer of Death*. The episode is available to watch in-person at the Paley Center for Media in New York and at the

The episode aired in October 1960, several months before the Eichmann trial began. It is an example of the quick response to Eichmann's capture by television producers and writers and prefigures academic work on Eichmann – therefore, it is not an exercise in translation or distillation of academic findings for a lay audience.

Wasserman's research material for *Engineer of Death: The Eichmann Story* primarily consisted of journalistic accounts and was unable to rely on information later revealed during Eichmann's trial. Wasserman's sources included newspaper articles, magazines, wire services, and dossiers on Eichmann from various publications. One item he consulted was a June 1960 article from the Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America that described Eichmann as the Holocaust's architect and cites Gerald Reitlinger's *The SS, Alibi of a Nation, 1922 –1945* for information on Eichmann's role in the Holocaust. This article argued that if found guilty, Israel would not execute Eichmann but would instead extradite him to West Germany.[6] Wasserman's preliminary notes for the script, then titled *The Eichmann Case*, mentioned "The secret Wannsee Conference," which Wasserman referred to as "[t]he secret decision upon 'The final solution to the Jewish Question.' It means that 11 million Jews will be exterminated. Eichmann is put in charge."[7] The notes also mentioned the need to thematize "Eichmann's failure as a person and growing idolatry of Hitler. His character, weaknesses, psychology."[8] As Jeffrey Shandler has noted, Wasserman's episode "exemplifies [the] desire to probe the inner workings of the criminal mind."[9] The episode depicts Eichmann (Frederick Rolf) as a loser; resentful at being "mistaken for Jewish" and then seeking revenge on the Jews as a result of his ill treatment at the hands of his fellow Nazis.[10] Indeed, a scene where several SA members beat up Eichmann in an Aus-

UCLA Film & Television Archive. See https://www.paleycenter.org/collection/item/?q=head&p=46&item=T86:0077; *Armstrong Circle Theatre. Engineer of Death: the Eichmann Story* / Talent Associates Productions ; Producer, Robert Costello ; Director, Paul Bogart ; Writer, Dale Wasserman. 1961. [Rebroadcast of program originally aired October 12, 1960], https://search.library.ucla.edu/permalink/01UCS_LAL/1hnia1h/alma9944933506533/

6 Bernard Abrams and Joseph F. Barr, Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America, Headquarters Letter, Vol. 2. No. 4, June 1960, Box 3, Dale Wasserman Papers, 1946–1983, U.S. Mss 67AN, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison, Wisconsin, 1–3.

7 Dale Wasserman, Preliminary Outline, 1960, Box 3, Dale Wasserman Papers, 1946–1983, U.S. Mss 67AN, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison, Wisconsin, 1.

8 Wasserman, Preliminary Outline, 1.

9 Jeffrey Shandler, *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 122.

10 Wasserman, Preliminary Outline, 1.

trian barroom occurs shortly after he joins the Nazi Party and serves as a traumatic explanation for Eichmann's antisemitism. The scene is almost comical from today's perspective, with the SA men speaking with accents out of a 1930s Chicago gangster film. The episode intercuts its dramatic footage with newsreels showing the rise of the Nazis and the Second World War, emphasizing its "factual" basis.

Engineer of Death begins with a shot of Eichmann imprisoned in a basement as an off-screen narrator argues that Eichmann's capture "electrified the world" and that "[i]t was as though Hitler himself had been found alive." It overemphasizes the coincidence of Hitler and Eichmann attending the same Linz school, though at different times. It refers to Eichmann as "the other Adolf" and as a "surrogate figure," i.e., a stand-in for Hitler.[11] When introducing Eichmann, Wasserman's script contains a cut section which wildly exaggerates Eichmann's role. Initially, the narration almost prefigures Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, stating that "[h]e killed, neither in passion nor combat, but with the cold efficiency of a file-clerk."[12] But then, in the same passage from a section cut before filming, the narration strays off course, depicting Eichmann as the main driving force behind the Holocaust:

> Some of his victims he starved to death. Some he beat to death. Others he burnt alive. He shot more than one million of them, first making them dig their own graves. He tortured them with ghastly medical experiments. And still they did not die fast enough to please him, so he built a murder-machine with a production output of 20,000 human beings a day. Nine hundred an hour. Fifteen lives a minute, every minute of the day for five years.[13]

Later, Eichmann appears as the individual giving Rudolf Höss, the Auschwitz commandant, orders to shift to using poison gas. Wasserman greatly exaggerates Eichmann's authority in the aired production as well. *Engineer of Death* also recounts Eichmann's childhood, claiming that he was a misfit whose only friends were Jewish, and that he was a weakling and coward. In a scene set at the Nuremberg Trials, Eichmann's protégé, Dieter Wisliceny (Telly Savalas) describes him as "personally a cowardly man, but . . . also a fanatic. The rest of us were soldiers who did our duty . . . but with Eichmann, it was some sort of crusade."[14] Savalas' performance stands out, and during his interrogation, he asks his interrogator the following question about Eichmann which contradicts the above depictions of

11 Shandler, *While America Watches*, 124.

12 Dale Wasserman, Final Draft of "Engineer of Death: The Eichmann Story," October 6, 1960, Box 4, Dale Wasserman Papers, 1946–1983, U.S. Mss 67AN, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison, Wisconsin, Act 1 Page 1, Act 1 Page 2.

13 Wasserman, Final Draft of "Engineer of Death: The Eichmann Story," Act 1 Page 2.

14 Wasserman, Final Draft of "Engineer of Death: The Eichmann Story," Act 1 Page 19.

Eichmann as a fanatic: "Would you describe a gun as immoral? Eichmann was a gun. Someone aimed him. Someone pulled the trigger."[15]

The Eichmann of *Engineer of Death* fits popular 1960s beliefs about Holocaust perpetrators. He is a disturbed, possibly psychotic individual maladjusted to normal society but able to thrive in the criminal Nazi regime.[16] Shandler describes *Engineer of Death* as a "morality play" about Eichmann and includes it in a discussion of "responses to the Eichmann trial" which offered psychological explanations for Eichmann and a sense of resolution that the trial did not.[17] Shandler is correct when he notes that the episode "portray[s] [Eichmann] as an extravagantly sadistic villain."[18] In this sense, *Engineer of Death* sticks to intentionalist ideas about the Holocaust's inner workings and offers psychological rather than systemic explanations for Eichmann's crimes. Heydrich (Alvin Epstein) haughtily refers to a "plan" he is ready to implement as soon as war breaks out and describes measures to encourage Jewish emigration and confiscate Jewish assets. Heydrich treats Eichmann like his golden boy, emphasizing his future role in carrying out the "plan." Once the "plan" is mentioned, the episode cuts to a scene depicting the Wannsee Conference, which completes the episode's first act. The narrator mentions the date and Wannsee Conference by name, stating that "ministers of State [met] together with the executives of Department 4A-4B which deals with the so-called mongrel races."[19] The small conference room (here, only about half a dozen people are attending) contains a massive Nazi banner and photo of Hitler overlooking the table, which is surrounded with extremely high-backed chairs reminiscent of a gothic horror film. Contrary to the historical record, Wisliceny is present. After Heydrich orders all participants to maintain the meeting's secrecy, Eichmann discusses Göring's letter authorizing Heydrich's control over the "Final Solution" and discusses measures encouraging Jewish emigration up to that point. He then states that all European Jews are to be killed. In a cut passage, Eichmann also states that "the same procedures shall apply to England and the United States as soon as conditions shall make it feasible."[20] The episode's portrayal of Wannsee is very much that of a secret cabal meeting to discuss devious plans, with Eichmann even telling the participants that they "will now

15 Wasserman, Final Draft of "Engineer of Death: The Eichmann Story," Act 1 Page 20. This line comparing Eichmann to a gun prefigures a scene in *Conspiracy*, where Rudolf Lange (Barnaby Kay) positively compares a gun with the euphemistic, deceptive language of lawyers.

16 Evans, *Hitler's People*, 319–321.

17 Shandler, *While America Watches*, 121.

18 Shandler, *While America Watches*, 122.

19 Wasserman, Final Draft of "Engineer of Death: The Eichmann Story," Act 1, Pages 26–27.

20 Wasserman, Final Draft of "Engineer of Death: The Eichmann Story," Act 1, pp. 29–29.

proceed to the final solution of the Jewish Question." As soon as the scene ends, the program cuts to an advertisement for Armstrong ceiling tiles.

Dale Wasserman was not unaware of the tension between overt corporate sponsorship and depicting the Holocaust on network television. Shandler has noted that audiences actually welcomed the commercial breaks during *Engineer of Death* as an opportunity for relief, in contrast with later outrage over commercial breaks during NBC's *Holocaust* miniseries.[21] But Wasserman mentioned his disappointment with the production and how the requirements of 1960s American corporate broadcast television affected *Engineer of Death*. In an interview with *The New York Post*, Wasserman stated that he "was not happy" and accused CBS of censorship:

> I've never seen so many departments censoring a TV show . . . I personally, without hypocrisy, say I'm rather gratified that so much did survive in view of the number of restrictions and the multiple agencies of restriction, which included several legal departments, the continuity acceptance (censor) department of the network, the news and public affairs department of the network, the sponsors and the sponsor's agency, as well as the outside countries, organizations, individuals and companies . . . The fact that any show is done for profit, under such restrictions, challenges factuality and reality[22]

Wasserman's statement shows that television screenwriters were not naïve about the restrictions of American broadcast television and chafed at what they saw as censorship of artistic freedom. When scholars scoff at the inclusion of advertisements in older television depictions of history, they should keep in mind examples like this one, which show that screenwriters were often fully aware of the problems television standards and practices, corporate sponsors, and legal departments posed for their artistic freedom.[23]

Engineer of Death is the earliest known depiction of Adolf Eichmann in film and television, but few scholars besides Jeffrey Shandler have noticed it – likely due to its inaccessibility.[24] *Engineer of Death* was publicly shown at Purdue University during the Eichmann Trial's broadcast and accompanied by an academic

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21 Jeffrey Shandler, *Jews, God, and Videotape: Religion and Media in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 107.

22 Bob Williams, "On the Air," *The New York Post*, October 16, 1960, Box 3, Dale Wasserman Papers, 1946–1983, U.S. Mss 67AN, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison, Wisconsin, 14.

23 For a discussion of artistic freedom and pay cable networks like HBO as a response to this situation, see Chapter 5.

24 For example, Cesarani's Eichmann biography contains an extensive filmography, but *Engineer of Death* is not listed. Instead, the first film mentioned is Erwin Leiser's 1961 documentary *Eichmann und das 3. Reich*. See Cesarani, *Eichmann,* 441–442.

debate on the Holocaust's singularity. Shandler identifies this event as an example of mass media becoming part of what he terms the "popular, rather than official, civil religion of Holocaust remembrance."[25] CBS also re-aired *Engineer of Death* during the Eichmann Trial alongside documentaries and other reports on Eichmann broadcasted throughout the nation. Shandler notes that "American broadcasters offered more extensive television coverage of the Eichmann trial than did any other nation," arguing that this media event was central to the establishment of television as "a vehicle for world news coverage."[26] Although *Engineer of Death* has largely been forgotten, it also was part of the Eichmann Trial as a larger media event, even if it aired several months beforehand. In January 1961 in *The New York Times*, Dale Wasserman stated that he would edit "about 40 per cent [sic]" of the script for reshoots so that the episode could include new revelations about Eichmann in the leadup to the trial.[27] The rebroadcast episode, which aired on April 12, 1961, does not differ substantially from that originally aired in October 1960.[28] Furthermore, the Dale Wasserman papers do not contain any edited scripts dating after October 1960. What Wasserman wanted to change between the two scripts is something historians can only speculate about. His research files contain an interview with Eichmann printed in *Life* magazine dating from 1961.[29] Nevertheless, no corresponding revision materialized.

25 Shandler, *Jews, God, and Videotape,* 107–108.

26 Shandler, *While America Watches,* 95, 97.

27 "Eichmann Story Revised," *The New York Times,* January 25, 1961, Box 3, Dale Wasserman Papers, 1946–1983, U.S. Mss 67AN, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison, Wisconsin. See also https://www.nytimes.com/1961/01/25/archives/tv-show-feb-19-lists-stevenson-un-envoy-to-start-season-of-great.html?searchResultPosition=3.

28 *Armstrong Circle Theatre. Engineer of Death : the Eichmann Story* / Talent Associates Productions ; Producer, Robert Costello ; Director, Paul Bogart ; Writer, Dale Wasserman. 1961. [Rebroadcast of program originally aired October 12, 1960].
https://search.library.ucla.edu/permalink/01UCS_LAL/1hnia1h/alma9944933506533/

29 *Life*, "Eichmann Tells his own Damning Story," vol. 19. No. 22, November 28, 1960, Box 3, Dale Wasserman Papers, 1946–1983, U.S. Mss 67AN, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison, Wisconsin; Adolf Eichmann, "Them . . . to the Butcher," in *Life*, vol. 19. No. 22, November 28, 1960, Box 3, Dale Wasserman Papers, 1946–1983, U.S. Mss 67AN, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison, Wisconsin.

2 From "Flash in the Pan" to International Bombshell: NBC's *Holocaust* (1978)

Since the end of World War II, American cinema and television have portrayed, explored, and raised awareness of the Holocaust to American – and global – audiences. Television, however, was usually on the forefront of artistic depictions of the Holocaust, with major film studios only touching the subject in detail long after television paved the way. Although earlier films like *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959) and *The Pawnbroker* (1964), along with one-off episodes from 1960s television series including *Armstrong Circle Theatre*, *Combat!*, or *The Twilight Zone* dealt explicitly with the Holocaust, NBC's 1978 miniseries *Holocaust: the Story of the Family Weiss* "constitutes the most significant event in the presentation of the Holocaust on American television."[30] Most historiography and other academic literature about the American response to the Holocaust, particularly that concerned with film and television, includes *Holocaust* and considers it a watershed moment in this genre of historical film. Historian Judith E. Doneson states that *Holocaust* constitutes a paradigm shift in the purpose of Holocaust film, namely towards "teaching" a universal message:

> Holocaust has taught a contemporary moral lesson. At least in the evolution of American film of the Holocaust, the event is no longer a universal symbol or part of a shared history or even compared history but, rather, a universal metaphor. The destruction of European Jewry is the frame of reference for contemporary suffering; its lesson, a lesson for today.[31]

In addition to moral lessons, the series offers a (for the most part) correct narrative history about the Holocaust. Nevertheless, the series attracted widespread criticism for its narrative structure – telling the story of the Holocaust through the eyes of one Jewish family, which some critics denounced as depicting the Holocaust with the same methods and style of American soap operas. In other words, they saw the series as trivializing and profaning a sacred historical event. Most notably, Holocaust survivor and writer Elie Wiesel lambasted the series in a review for the *New York Times*. In his review, Wiesel denounced the series as "an insult to those who perished and to those who survived" and claimed that the Holocaust stood outside history, and constituting "the ultimate event, the ultimate

30 Shandler, *While America Watches,* 155.

31 Judith E. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film*. 2nd edition. (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 190.

mystery, never to be comprehended or transmitted."[32] Wiesel's criticism is often mentioned in any discussion of the merits or problems of the series; it is still referenced today in non-specialist publications, with one recent *Jacobin* author framing his takedown of Wiesel as a response to the latter's negative review of *Holocaust*, which he sees as key to Wiesel's self-branding as moral arbiter.[33] Wiesel's review is connected with larger academic and cultural debates about the Holocaust's uniqueness and the ethics of depicting it in fiction. Although this debate has cooled in recent years, it nevertheless forms a large part of academic and journalistic discussions of Holocaust film and literature.[34]

Most discussions of *Holocaust* focus on its portrayal of Jewish victims or on its reception in the United States and West Germany. In West Germany, *Holocaust* unleashed a wave of public debate about the Holocaust and Holocaust education vastly overshadowing the comparatively brief discussion in US media. This discourse consists of a vast number of pieces of varying quality; many articles simply repeat old arguments and summaries. A smaller set of literature examines how the series depicts perpetrators. The best recent account of the series' history and its reception is the final chapter in historian Frank Bösch's *Zeitenwende 1979: Als die Welt von heute begann*, a work covering global historical change during 1979. This chapter goes beyond the usual recounting of the series' West German reception, and instead also devotes attention to its international reception. Bösch also utilizes WDR (*Westdeutscher Rundfunk*) archives to illustrate the struggle television networks went through to get the series aired in West Germany, which breaks with older accounts that avoid archival material. The series contains one of the earliest depictions of the Wannsee Conference on film.[35] Although the scene depicting Wannsee only lasts around five minutes, it is a crucial scene because it marks the series' turning point; after the conference, the main characters – several of whom are forced laborers in concentration camps or are trapped in the Warsaw Ghetto – are now in danger of being murdered on an industrial scale. Additionally, the series' depiction of perpetrators, most notably Erik Dorf, is crucial to understanding its depiction of the Wannsee Conference. The conference

32 Elie Wiesel, "TV View," *New York Times*, April 16, 1978. https://www.nytimes.com/1978/04/16/archives/tv-view-trivializing-the-holocaust-semifact-and-semifiction-tv-view.html.

33 Corey Robin, "My Resistance to Elie Wiesel." *Jacobin*, June 7, 2016. http://jacobinmag.com/2016/07/elie-wiesel-holocaust-primo-levi-imre-kertesz/.

34 See Rich Brownstein's extensive and fair-minded discussion of Wiesel and Holocaust film: Brownstein, *Holocaust Cinema Complete*, 79–83.

35 Paul Mommertz's *Reinhard Heydrich – Manager of Terror* premiered in West Germany on ZDF in July 1977, one year prior to *Holocaust*.

scene is not isolated. The audience witnesses key developments prior to the conference (the Nuremberg Laws, Operation Barbarossa, the *Einsatzgruppen*) and the events that followed it (mass deportations from Western Europe, Auschwitz).

Holocaust, produced by Robert Berger and Herbert Brodkin for NBC, was a direct response to the success of the 1977 ABC miniseries *Roots*, a multi-century epic about an enslaved family in the American South. *Roots* was directed by Marvin J. Chomsky, who later directed *Holocaust*.[36] *Holocaust* can be seen as a Jewish version of *Roots,* especially considering its similar focus on individual victims while telling the story of a much larger historical process. In this sense, *Holocaust* prefigures recent twenty-first century comparisons of chattel slavery and the Holocaust (or simply comparisons of the public memory of both crimes).[37] *Holocaust* was a massive success for NBC; over 120 million watched it in the US and it garnered roughly a third of the audience share of Western European adults (20 million in West Germany).[38] Out of all of the productions in this study, *Holocaust* reached the widest audience with the greatest international impact. Less known in the US today, the series is still a household name in Germany, where it often invoked as shorthand for a shift in collective memory. It is also widely credited for popularizing the word "Holocaust" in the German language.[39] Screenwriter Gerald Green adapted *Holocaust* into a tie-in novel published in 1978. The novel's structure consists of the memoirs of Rudi Weiss; the sections featuring Dorf are composed of his diary, which is found by Rudi.

Holocaust centers on two Berlin families. The first and most important is the Weiss family; they are upper middle-class, assimilated Jews: Josef (Fritz Weaver), a doctor; Berta (Rosemary Harris), his wife; his sons Karl (James Woods), an artist; and Rudi (Joseph Bottoms), a soccer player and future resistance fighter. Karl's Christian wife Inga (Meryl Streep in her breakout, Emmy-winning role) initially escapes persecution but eventually finds herself in Theresienstadt after her search for the incarcerated Karl. The Weiss family storyline encompasses an array of Jewish experiences: initial persecution in Germany, incarceration and deportation, resistance or collaboration, death or survival, and emigration to Palestine.

The series also follows another Berlin family, the Dorfs. The Dorfs are Christians, but friendly with the Weiss family during the Weimar era. Erik Dorf (Michael Moriarty, who also received an Emmy for his performance) is a down-and-out

36 Frank Bösch, *Zeitenwende 1979: Als die Welt von heute begann* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2019), 369.
37 See Neiman, *Learning from the Germans*.
38 Bösch, *Zeitenwende 1979*, 363.
39 Jürgen Wilke, "Die Fernsehserie „Holocaust" als Medienereignis," *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 30, no. 4 (114) (2005): 16.

lawyer who curries favor with Reinhard Heydrich and eventually becomes his protégé. The series follows Dorf as he compromises his principles, culminating in his suicide when faced with Allied prosecution. A composite character based on several individuals, Dorf's biography most closely resembles Adolf Eichmann, even though Eichmann himself appears in several scenes. According to Lawrence Baron, the character of Dorf "epitomizes Arendt's concept of the 'banality of evil'" and owes much to Raul Hilberg's pathbreaking *Destruction of the European Jews*.[40] During the course of his SS career, Dorf is present at every major turning point in the history of the Holocaust; in this way, like Maximilien Aue, the protagonist of Jonathan Littell's 2006 novel *The Kindly Ones*, Dorf is a Nazi version of Forrest Gump. Dorf is present when the order for the November Pogroms (more commonly known as *Kristallnacht*) is issued, when the *Einsatzgruppen* are established, at the Babi Yar massacre, at the Wannsee Conference, and at the initial gassings in Auschwitz. He has frequent contact with members of the Weiss family, especially after Karl is arrested and sent to Buchenwald. It is through Dorf's storyline that the audience witnesses the Wannsee Conference and the Holocaust through the eyes of the perpetrators.

Michael Moriarty portrays Dorf as a calculating, careerist man who does not really believe in Nazi ideology. On the contrary, at the beginning of the series, he exhibits no real ill will towards Jews and is a regular patient of Dr. Karl Weiss, whom he advises to flee Germany as soon as possible. The series depicts him as a man beaten down by Depression-era unemployment who would do anything to get ahead; this personality trait makes him an ideal candidate for the SS and is what places him on the path to mass murder. The series further emphasizes his chameleon-like nature by mentioning rumors that he is a former member of the German Communist Party (KPD). His wife Marta (Deborah Norton), in contrast, is a true believer in Nazi ideology and constantly exhorts him to further devote himself to the goals of the Party and of the "New Germany." In this aspect, the series excels at showing the audience how the families of perpetrators also often fully believed in the regime's murderous policies. In one scene, Dorf breaks down in front of Marta and tells her about the mass executions he is responsible for and feels guilt over. She tells him to get over it because his work is important for their children's future. Although he occasionally expresses doubt about the course of the war or the morality of his actions, his wife remains untroubled and resolute until the end.

40 Lawrence Baron, *Projecting the Holocaust into the Present: The Changing Focus of Contemporary Holocaust Cinema* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 52.

By 1938, Dorf rises through the ranks of the SS and becomes Heydrich's (David Warner) right-hand man. Throughout the series (until Heydrich's assassination in May 1942), Dorf regularly meets with Heydrich and discusses how their efforts to exterminate European Jewry are faring. In contrast with the production's often-unconvincing portrayals of executions, these meetings with Heydrich consist of Dorf showing actual archival photographs or films taken by the SS which document their crimes. It is in these scenes that *Holocaust* transcends television melodrama and forces viewers to encounter the unvarnished historical evidence of mass murder – this is not the same as showing archival footage of German tanks crossing the Maginot Line or Stukas divebombing Soviet positions; these images are criminal evidence of genocide. Doneson notes that critics who claim that "one cannot portray the unimaginable" are faced with a paradox by these scenes: "[T]he stark reality of the stills does just that: it visually authenticates what cannot be imagined."[41] Using archival footage is not uncontroversial; the documentarian Claude Lanzmann refused to utilize any archival photographs or footage for his film *Shoah*, arguing that this use of perpetrator-created material would constitute an attempt "to illustrate," which he considered "out of the question."[42] Lanzmann went so far as to say that he "would have preferred to destroy" any footage of gas chambers in operation if he had found it.[43] It is in this respect that *Holocaust* rejects what film scholar Catrin Corell has dubbed a *Darstellungsverbot* (prohibition on images or representation) in Holocaust media.[44]

These conversations between Dorf and Heydrich also reinforce a stereotype about the upper echelon of Holocaust perpetrators being careerists who do not really believe in National Socialism or even antisemitism; Heydrich refers to Christian – not racial, which is curiously absent from the series – antisemitism as a tool, a useful lie to control the population: For him, it is the "cement that binds us together." Dorf gives off an air of cold rationality; he embodies the "banality of evil" trope and it is in this sense that one gets the impression that he serves as a fictionalized stand-in for Eichmann. He speaks in a monotone voice and rarely shows emotion; when he does, he only expresses emotions like anger, fear, guilt, or sadness when alone with his wife or when confronted with the reality of the

41 Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film*, 177.

42 Claude Lanzmann, Ruth Larson, and David Rodowick, "Seminar with Claude Lanzmann April 11, 1990," *Yale French Studies*, no. 79 (1991): 82–99, 97. For more on the ethics of archival footage of the Holocaust, see Fabian Schmidt and Alexander Oliver Zöller, "Atrocity Film," *Apparatus. Film, Media and Digital Cultures of Central and Eastern Europe*, no. 12 (March 10, 2021), 1–80.

43 Lanzmann et al, "Seminar with Claude Lanzmann, April 11," 99.

44 Corell, *Der Holocaust als Herausforderung für den Film*, 15.

murderous decisions made at his desk. The latter is exemplified by a pivotal yet puzzling scene when *Einsatzkommando* officer Paul Blobel (T.P. McKenna) forces Dorf to shoot a wounded man lying in an execution pit; Dorf is quite reluctant to do so but overcomes his inhibitions. The scene is implausible because Dorf is supposed to supervise all *Einsatzgruppen* operations on the Russian Front, yet Blobel, one of his subordinates, is giving *him* orders and essentially forcing him to commit murder at gunpoint. In subsequent scenes, Dorf complains about the "chaos" of mass executions and implores Heydrich to find a more orderly, rational alternative. With that in mind, *Holocaust* finally reaches its portrayal of the Wannsee Conference.

The series' depiction of the Wannsee Conference consists of one brief but pivotal scene in Episode 2, "The Road to Babi Yar." As in other filmic versions of the conference, Heydrich leads the proceedings and has the difficult job of managing rival individuals and factions present at the table. Since Erik Dorf is the star of the show and a composite character partially based on Eichmann, Eichmann himself has less to do at the meeting, as Dorf has established himself as Heydrich's heir apparent. The series manages to depict Wannsee in a fashion that succeeds at the broad strokes but falls flat upon closer examination. This faltering has more to do with the series' handling of the Dorf character than with the way it portrays the conference.

The Wannsee scene begins in an imposing government building in central Berlin – probably meant to resemble something like the Gestapo offices on Wilhelmstrasse – instead of the leafy suburbs of Wannsee. This change of setting immediately makes the conference seem more visually imposing than it was in reality – it was conducted outside of the governmental district and in an area of Berlin largely controlled by the SS. Various conference attendees arrive by car in quick succession and head upstairs past a large portrait of Hitler – he is literally "above" the attendees as they make their way into the conference room. Large swastika banners are clearly visible throughout this sequence, lending a campy atmosphere to the scene. Dorf and Heydrich ignore a greeting from Hans Frank (John Bailey), boss of occupied Poland (General Government), underscoring the fact that the SS is the agency dominating the proceedings and setting the meeting's tone. Frank did not attend the Wannsee Conference, so perhaps he is a stand-in for other civilian authorities present at the meeting who were active in the General Government, like Josef Bühler, who served as Frank's deputy and attended the Wannsee Conference as his representative.[45] More likely, the film-

45 See the GHWK's biographies of Meyer and Bühler: "Teilnehmer," Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz, accessed November 10, 2022, https://www.ghwk.de/de/konferenz/teilnehmer

makers did not want to introduce extra characters, as apart from Frank, Heydrich, Eichmann, and the fictional Dorf are the only named characters present in the scene. Everyone else is an unnamed extra. The novelization is more extensive and names other attendees like Alfred Meyer and Martin Luther, but they do not appear by name in in the episode. Frank also calls Heydrich a "part-Jew," which was a rumor later debunked by historians.[46] The episode illustrates the different factions present at the conference with costume design; it is clear to the viewer who belongs to the SS, the Nazi Party, or civilian ministries – even though the SS are dressed up in historically inaccurate black uniforms and swastika armbands, heightening the scene's overall feeling of campy exploitation. The meeting takes place in an opulent hall full of chandeliers and dominated by Nazi symbols such as eagles and swastikas (Figure 1.1). In contrast to later, more subtle screen depictions of the Wannsee Conference, *Holocaust* uses Nazi iconography in a maximalist, stereotypical fashion.

Figure 1.1: The Wannsee Conference in *Holocaust. Holocaust: The Story of the Family Weiss*. Titus Productions, NBC, 1978.

or the excellent recent biographical collection *The Participants: The Men of the Wannsee Conference*, edited by Hans-Christian Jasch and Christoph Kreutzmüller, (Oxford, New York: Berghahn, 2017).

46 Robert Gerwarth, *Hitler's Hangman: The Life of Heydrich*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 15. stere

Heydrich opens the meeting by outlining the total world population of Jews (11 million) and stating that "the Final Solution will deal with all of them." The filmmakers were clearly well-aware of the SS' policy of inventing euphemisms for killing, as evidenced by several scenes throughout the series where Dorf invents several such euphemisms ("special treatment") on the fly, but Heydrich dispenses with this convention and immediately encounters a comment from Hans Frank:

> HEYDRICH: The Fuehrer has ordered the physical extermination of the Jews.
>
> FRANK: Language, Heydrich, language!

Heydrich then explains how "natural attrition" will eliminate most Jews sent to labor camps in the East (quoting practically verbatim from the Wannsee Protocol). He then quickly abandons all pretense and discusses the use of poison gas as an extermination method to supplement the *Einsatzgruppen*, which arouses protest from State Secretary Martin Luther (not named in the series, but named in the novelization).[47] Luther stresses that the use of poison gas in the T4 Program, in which the German medical community murdered thousands of mentally ill and disabled persons, aroused protest from the German Catholic Church and that a return to such methods would only invite further protest and interference from Germany's Catholic community. This brief aside mentioning the Catholic Church is unique for films and television programs that depict the Wannsee Conference. No other portrayal of the conference mentions the Church and its possible objections. Both *Conspiracy* and *The Wannsee Conference* discuss the T4 Program at length, but not the German Catholic Church's protest. In fact, when the Catholic Church is depicted in Holocaust films, it is usually in the context of Pope Pius XIIs indifference to the fate of the Jews or the Vatican's support for the postwar "ratline" for Nazi war criminals escaping Europe.[48] *Holocaust* includes an earlier scene in which a priest, Father Lichtenberg (Llewellyn Rees), chastises members of his congregation and denounces Nazi atrocities. Dorf later confronts the offending priest and attempts to correct him; this comment about T4 is most likely a reference to this earlier scene, as the Wannsee Protocol does not mention the Catholic Church at any point.

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47 Due to the lack of available archival source material from the production's history, this section also consults screenwriter Gerald Green's 1978 novelization of the series. Any quotations from the novel are from Dorf's first-person perspective. Gerald Green, *Holocaust* (London: Corgi Books, 1978), 217.

48 The 2002 Costa-Gavras film *Amen.*, based on Rolf Hochmuth's play *Der Stellvertreter,* is the most prominent example (outside of the numerous 1970s and 1980s films that depict former Nazis hiding out in South America).

In short, *Holocaust* portrays the Wannsee Conference in a straightforward fashion while making room for Dorf, its antagonist, to contribute to it. The series manages to distill the infighting among the various factions of the German government and Nazi Party without much distortion given the brief time allotted for the scene (ca. 5 minutes). No one morally objects to Heydrich's plans. Instead, any objection consists of worries about arousing protest or crossing legal boundaries. Dorf brushes aside such concerns about the "legality" of the "final solution" by quoting Hitler: "Here I stand with my bayonets. There you stand with your law. We'll see which prevails."

The series makes clear that mass killings began before Wannsee and argues that Wannsee represents a decision made sometime between the invasion of the Soviet Union and the end of 1941; it coordinates earlier disparate killing programs under SS leadership. This is the standard, widely accepted interpretation of the conference today, though some aspects remain a mystery.[49] For a series made in the late 1970s, *Holocaust*, for all its flaws, manages to clearly illustrate the "functionalist" position of Holocaust historiography by emphasizing the initiative of mid-level SS functionaries. In *Holocaust*, these mid-level players play key roles in the evolution of the "Final Solution," even though Hitler always hangs over the proceedings like a shadow. In the first episode, Heydrich and Dorf describe pre-Wannsee mass murder as having "no aim, no pattern," and Dorf constantly complains about the circus-like atmosphere of mass executions with civilian spectators, photography, drunkenness, and general behavior that he characterizes as unprofessional, echoing Himmler's infamous October 1943 Posen speeches, which called for SS men to remain "decent" (*anständig*) while killing.[50] Bösch also emphasizes this point and provocatively claims that the series' shift between multiple perspectives, between victim, perpetrator, and bystander, (and individuals within those three categories) as well placing individual voices within a larger narrative, prefigures Saul Friedländer's narrative decisions in *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, a book noted for its "integrated history" approach combining the voices of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders.[51] This statement has some merit; after all, the relationship between historiography and historical culture (as expressed in novels, films, etc.) is not simply a one-way street in which artists and museum

49 See David Cesarani, *Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933–1949* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016), 453–459 and Kay, "Speaking the Unspeakable."

50 See Harvard Law School Nuremberg Trials Project, Item No. 3791, "Speeches concerning the SS and the conduct of the war [six speeches] Rede des Reichsfuehrer-SS Heinrich Himmler in Charkow. April 1943," http://nuremberg.law.harvard.edu/documents/3791-speeches-concerning-the-ss. Accessed January 28, 2018.

51 Bösch, *Zeitenwende 1979*, 372.

professionals simply translate the work of professional historians for mass audiences. Rather, the border is porous; sometimes cultural productions influence historians; it is not a clear top-down relationship where the historian delivers his or her knowledge to the artist, who then disseminates it to the uncritical masses.

Nevertheless, the series also has its flaws, particularly in the portrayal of Dorf as a sort of Forrest Gump figure who is present at every major step taken during the Holocaust while simultaneously not really believing in Nazi ideology. *Holocaust* takes Arendt's thesis about the banality of evil and runs with it. The only fanatical Nazis present are nameless SS and SA men carrying out the violence rather than signing orders behind a desk. In *Holocaust*, there are no true believers among the upper echelon – or even middle management – of the SS (except for Himmler, played here by Ian Holm), just careerists and opportunists concerned with increasing their own power and sating their financial, material, and sexual appetites. While it is not incorrect to say that the SS was full of such people, it blinds audiences to the fact that the architects of Nazi ideology tended to be so committed to it because they believed it, not just because they were opportunistic people who saw the regime as a means for career advancement. Dorf's character perfectly illustrates this problem. He is unemployed until Heydrich offers him a job and his wife constantly pushes him to do more, which is also brought up in the scene immediately following the portrayal of the conference. To be sure, careerists with no real ideological convictions existed, but it is a mistake to characterize the leadership of the SS and RSHA as such. Ideology was central to policy and did not merely serve as window dressing.[52]

After the conference, Dorf, Eichmann, and Heydrich retire to an adjacent room to discuss the day's events. This is based on Eichmann's testimony at his trial in Jerusalem, wherein he discussed a fireside chat over cognac that he had had with Heydrich and Gestapo head Heinrich Müller directly after the conference.[53] *Holocaust* uses this scene to further illustrate Dorf's careerism and underlying motivations. Heydrich sleeps in a chair while Eichmann and Dorf talk about the day's events. Eichmann and Dorf briefly talk about how they are just cogs in a machine following orders and that Hitler's word is supreme law. Eichmann then changes the subject and Dorf describes his family as the primary motivation for his work: "Our families, Eichmann, the women and children of Germany, they

52 See Michael Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation: The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office*, trans. Tom Lampert, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010).

53 "106. Sitzung des Gerichts am 21. Juli 1961: Vernehmung Adolf Eichmanns durch den beisitzenden Richter Yitzhak Raveh" in Norbert Kampe and Peter Klein, eds., *Die Wannsee-Konferenz am 20. Januar 1942: Dokumente, Forschungsstand, Kontroversen*, (Cologne: Böhlau, 2013), 104–107, 105–106.

give us courage, determination . . . we owe them a better world . . . like the decisions we made today . . . I look at my children and I know that I'm doing the right thing." When one compares this scene with the version of Eichmann and Heydrich's fireside drink in *Conspiracy*, in which they discuss their personal motivations, it is possible that the scene in *Conspiracy* is a direct response to this one in *Holocaust*. The conversation in *Conspiracy* is about the death of a man's abusive, hated father, a parable used to show that men like Heydrich and Eichmann need more than pure antisemitic hatred to have purpose in life after they have completed their murderous task. In *Conspiracy,* the scene is no longer about familial love, but about hate.

In its depiction of the Wannsee Conference, *Holocaust* also differs from later films. In contrast with other filmic depictions, the audience is presented with a gaudy room filled with Nazi iconography, such as *Reichsadler*-adorned chairs, table runners, a massive swastika above the entrance, and the previously mentioned Hitler portrait. Other productions' use of Hitler busts in the corner (*The Wannsee Conference*) or kitschy swastika-adorned candle holders (*Conspiracy*) seem subtle in comparison. *Holocaust*'s restaging of the Wannsee Conference in the center of Berlin, in a Nazi building straight out of an exploitation film, robs the viewer of one of the more troubling aspects of the Wannsee Conference: that such an infamous meeting took place at a picturesque lakeside location, in a charming villa designed by the architect responsible for the artist Max Liebermann's nearby residence.[54] Instead, the audience is presented with imposing marble entrances and stairwells plus a seemingly endless supply of swastikas and eagles. In short, the set chosen for the Wannsee Conference manages to distort Heydrich's intent for the meeting, which Mark Roseman describes in detail: "In selecting the villa as the venue for the meeting, Heydrich had thus eschewed more intimidating or business-like locations. Instead he had gone for expansiveness and informality."[55] Curiously, the series does not even mention that this scene is *the* Wannsee Conference – indeed, the name "Wannsee" is also absent. However, the scene obviously depicts the conference (same objectives, same discussion topics, same meeting between Heydrich and Eichmann by the fireside afterwards). Gerald Green's tie-in novel, however, makes it clear that the scene does in fact portray the Wannsee Conference, which he erroneously refers to as "The Gross-Wannsee Conference."[56] In this aspect, *Holocaust* does not treat Wannsee any differently than it does other aspects of the Holocaust. One of the

54 Johannes Tuchel, *Am Grossen Wannsee 56–58: Von der Villa Minoux zum Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz* (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1992), 9.

55 Roseman, *The Villa, The Lake, The Meeting*, 65.

56 Green, *Holocaust,* 213.

main – but often hackneyed – criticisms of the series is that it relies on melodrama like that of a soap opera, which it often does. The set designers also underscore the melodrama through the above-discussed reliance on Nazi kitsch elements in this, and other, scenes involving Dorf and Heydrich. Dorf's scenes set at the front or at home are mostly devoid of these elements, but his scenes with higher-level Nazis usually include these visual cues which unfortunately lend these scenes a cartoonish aesthetic that the series avoids on other occasions. Nevertheless, *Holocaust's* depiction of the Wannsee Conference is an overlooked but important aspect of this series and its legacy as a flawed yet pioneering moment in television history.

Another flaw of *Holocaust* is that, to contemporary viewers, the series appears dated. While *Holocaust* had a large budget and is a worthy successor to *Roots*, it sometimes strays into a soap opera-like aesthetic that most "prestige TV" of today seeks to avoid. Even if family series like *The Sopranos* borrow the soap opera format, they do not adhere to the genre's storytelling and visual conventions or melodramatic tone, which *Holocaust* does on occasion – just not as overtly as its worst critics have claimed. The most notable examples include a wide discrepancy in acting quality: James Woods (Karl), Meryl Streep (Inga), and Michael Moriarty (Erik Dorf) all perform their roles well. But Joseph Bottoms (Rudi Weiss), who is the series' hero figure, falls flat and is unconvincing – he is an all-American football star transplanted into 1940s Europe. Furthermore, his storyline, which eventually sees him become a committed Zionist and emigrant to Palestine, veers into Israeli nationalism.

The series mostly gets the history right, however; only two members of the Weiss family, Rudi and Inga, survive the war, a surprising outcome for a 1970s American broadcast network television series. As Judith E. Doneson notes, it is disingenuous to accuse *Holocaust* of having an "American" happy ending when only Rudi and Inga survive the series.[57] In fact, the series avoids many of the stereotypically "American" (and implicitly negative, when the term is used by European critics) aspects of historical film. There is no happy ending; most of the protagonists die, and not heroically. There are no scenes of GIs swooping in to save the day; the only American featured in a scene is a military prosecutor. The underdogs in the Resistance do not succeed in the end, unless success counts as the survival of the few that remain in 1945. The most "American" aspect of the series is that all of the actors speak English but have no consistent accents. American, British, German, and Eastern European accents are all thrown together, a common problem with American productions set in Europe. Because the series

57 Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film,* 159.

mostly focuses on assimilated German Jews, it shows the Holocaust as neighbors killing neighbors, not an event imposed on the victims by a foreign power (which it was for the vast majority of victims). When one looks at more recent television productions about the Second World War and the Holocaust, including European ones, it is hard to argue that *Holocaust's* flaws, such as soap opera-style storytelling, are exclusively American qualities or have gone by the wayside. On the contrary, several contemporary European productions about World War II, such as the ZDF miniseries *Unsere Mütter, Unsere Väter* (2013), the Sky Entertainment remake of *Das Boot* (2018–present), and the BBC epic *World on Fire* (2019–2023) all suffer from soap-operatic flaws such as contrived romances, repeat "chance encounters," maudlin music, melodramatic death scenes of "good" characters, and one-dimensional villains. These features may, indeed, be inherent to historical television productions created for either American broadcast network television or Western European public television – that is, program formats which are designed to reach the widest audiences possible. Still, Lawrence Baron is correct when he states that:

> [t]he concern expressed by scholars (towards *Holocaust*) . . . that docudramas blur the distinction between documentaries and feature films strikes me as overly alarmist. Only an extremely unsophisticated viewer could ignore the commercial interruptions, the professional quality of the acting, and the contrivances that link all of the characters together.[58]

Nevertheless, *Holocaust* does suffer as both a work of art and as a teaching tool because it appears dated and melodramatic. Television audiences today, at least in the English-speaking world, are acustomed to productions that rival the cinema in writing and production quality, and when given a choice between *Holocaust* and newer films about Wannsee, both audiences and educators would likely choose the more recent productions if they would like to learn more about the Wannsee Conference and the origins of the Holocaust.[59]

But what does *Holocaust* have to say about the Wannsee Conference? It shows that, although the SS was the leading governmental agency and was responsible for the planning, coordination, and killing, civilian authorities not only acquiesced, but also collaborated enthusiastically. It points to an unspecified, possibly verbal order from Hitler to exterminate all European Jews, which suggests

58 Baron, *Projecting the Holocaust into the Present*, 53.

59 See publications about the so-called "Golden Age of Television" beginning in the late 1990s, including Alan Sepinwall, *The Revolution Was Televised: The Cops, Crooks, Slingers, and Slayers Who Changed TV Drama Forever* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013); Kyle Paoletta, "Party Monsters: Punch-Drunk Critics in the Era of Peak TV," *The Baffler*, November 4, 2018, https://thebaffler.com/outbursts/party-monsters-paoletta.

the that the SS sought to keep its operations secret. At another point in the series, Dorf argues that this secrecy is dangerous, because it would make people think that the SS was ashamed of its crimes; he thinks that the camps should stand as monuments to what the Nazis had “achieved” for their people. The series correctly portrays the conference’s purpose as informing civilian ministries about a decision that higher-ups (Hitler, Heydrich, Goering, and Himmler) had already made; the SS was essentially telling the representatives of the other agencies present what the plan was, who was in charge, and how they were to cooperate. The time for questions was over; Heydrich would now only give orders. The series gets the broad strokes correct, but several aspects of its depiction of the Wannsee Conference, as noted above, are both problematic and, in some cases, flat-out incorrect.

The series distorts the history of the conference in several ways, the most important of which are its setting, the presence of the fictional Erik Dorf and of nonattendee Hans Frank, and its characterization of Eichmann. The setting and especially the gaudy set design reinforce tropes about the Nazi regime and approach caricature. The issue with Hans Frank has been discussed above, it is an odd choice to have him present at the conference when other attendees (Bühler) performed his role as representatives of the General Government. The problematic aspect of Erik Dorf’s presence at the conference also apply to his role in general. By making Dorf a composite character who is present at every stage of the Holocaust, the series inadvertently absolves real-world figures of guilt. For example, Dorf is shown as Heydrich’s right-hand man at the conference and serves as both organizer and expert witness; he holds some measure of authority over the other attendees. This results in Eichmann being relegated to the background, which is exactly how Eichmann portrayed himself in his defense: as an unimportant figure tasked with organizing the meeting. During the conference, he has nothing to do except glare menacingly or have a chat with Dorf by the fireside afterwards. Because the series focuses so much on the fictional Dorf, Eichmann comes across as a bit player who was relatively unimportant to the Wannsee Conference. This distortion inadvertently takes Eichmann’s testimony in Jerusalem at face value but goes even further. Eichmann was Heydrich’s right-hand man and organized the conference; Dorf ends up fulfilling the real-life function of Eichmann and Eichmann is relegated to the background. These criticisms aside, it is important to note that as the scene is so short, the production team likely lacked both the time and resources to get everything right; their choice of using the composite character Dorf for their antagonist also hamstrung them into placing him in most scenes containing perpetrators.

The series was especially popular in West Germany and is remembered in German-speaking countries much more so than in the Anglosphere. However, it

initially faced strong skeptical voices from the West German media. *Der Spiegel* devoted its January 29, 1979 cover story to the series before it aired in West Germany. In this report, *Spiegel* recounted the series' use combined with teaching material in schools, but mistakenly concluded that the series was a "flash in the pan" (*Strohfeuer*).[60] The West German foreign office even got involved; concerned about West Germany's international reputation, they supplied consulates with materials for debates about German guilt.[61] Members of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) opposed the series' airing, which caused the series to be aired on the so-called "third program," that is, on regional affiliates instead of the two national channels ARD and ZDF.[62] In fact, WDR argued internally that the series' positive reception in Israel contradicted the conservative argument that the series could offend Jewish viewers or spark a wave of anti-German sentiment.[63] In contrast, the German Democratic Republic (East Germany, or GDR) did not even bother showing the series, with officials arguing that doing so would be unnecessary because "GDR citizens had long been educated about the crimes of fascism in schools and through films."[64]

Holocaust unleashed a firestorm of reactions in Europe, particularly in West Germany and Austria, and was a watershed moment in memory culture and media history. Historians and journalists commented on the series in all major newspapers and magazines; academics and teachers drew up lesson plans and discussed the series' educational potential.[65] The individual *Bundesländer* produced educational material, and documentaries which contained interviews with Holocaust survivors.[66] For historian Frank Bösch, *Holocaust* represents a turning point in memory culture. To him, it "played a key role" in a 1970s shift towards greater prominence of the Holocaust in public memory.[67] Bösch correctly points out that academic historians reacted "helplessly" to the fact that a "Hollywood se-

60 "'Holocaust': Die Vergangenheit kommt zurück," *Der Spiegel*, January 29, 1979, http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-40350860.html.

61 Bösch, *Zeitenwende 1979*, 376–377. See also Jacob S. Eder, *Holocaust Angst: The Federal Republic of Germany and American Holocaust Memory since the 1970s* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

62 Bösch, *Zeitenwende 1979*, 364.

63 Bösch, *Zeitenwende 1979*, 374–375.

64 Bösch, *Zeitenwende 1979*, 375.

65 See Yizhak Ahren, *Das Lehrstück „Holocaust": Zur Wirkungspsychologie eines Medienereignisses* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1982).

66 Bösch, *Zeitenwende 1979*, 380–381.

67 Bösch, *Zeitenwende 1979*, 363. For a contemporary summary of West German debates, see Jeffrey Herf, "The 'Holocaust' Reception in West Germany: Right, Center and Left," *New German Critique*, no. 19 (1980): 30–52.

ries" provoked so much discussion of the topic and notes that the overwhelmingly negative German press coverage (before the series even aired) is "disconcerting" from today's perspective.[68] This coverage tended to accuse the series of "commercialization" and "trivialization" of victims' suffering, a charge still commonly leveled at historical film and television.[69] Audiences tended to react much more favorably than intellectuals, who, as Omer Bartov notes, "strongly resented" the series.[70] A sizable minority reacted unfavorably, some of whom protested the series as American and Jewish propaganda. Some neo-Nazi activists attacked transmission towers; SS veterans and other Nazis sent angry letters to WDR.[71]

The media and communications historian Jürgen Wilke has rightly pointed out that *Holocaust* was a unique "media event" in West Germany and deserves its reputation as a pathbreaker. However, he also points out that the Holocaust and Nazi Germany had been ever-present in German media since the end of the war. For him, these earlier productions paved the way for West Germany's embrace of the series.[72] In present-day Germany, one gets the impression that *Holocaust* was the first series in which Germans had seen a depiction of the Holocaust on television. It certainly was the case for many in the audience, but this has become a shopworn myth in the German press and, to a lesser extent, in the German historical community.[73] Whether plays like Peter Weiss' *The Investigation* (1965), films like the Rudolf Höss biopic *Death is My Trade* (1977) or Heinz Schirk and Paul Mommertz's *Reinhard Heydrich: Manager of Terror* (1977), Nazi crimes were present in German mass media before *Holocaust* but did not receive the same level of attention or reaction. In the case of the television productions analyzed in this study, the angry reaction and charges of demonization leveled at *Reinhard Heydrich: Manager of Terror* in *Die Zeit* serve as an example.[74] Frank Bösch also discusses the medial genealogy of *Holocaust* at length. He correctly points out that the 1968 generation (that is, the generation of student demonstrators) was not the

68 Bösch, *Zeitenwende 1979*, 364.

69 Bösch, *Zeitenwende 1979*, 370.

70 Bartov, *Murder in Our Midst*, 151.

71 Bösch, *Zeitenwende 1979*, 381–384.

72 Wilke, "Die Fernsehserie „Holocaust" als Medienereignis," 16.

73 Wilke, "Die Fernsehserie „Holocaust" als Medienereignis," 9. See also Siegfried Zielinski and Gloria Custance, "History as Entertainment and Provocation: The TV Series 'Holocaust' in West Germany," *New German Critique*, no. 19 (1980): 81–96, which argues that German television and film professionals reluctance to address the Holocaust was, in part, due to "the older generation of film directors" having pasts in the Nazi film industry. See the discussion on page 85.

74 See Walter Jens, "Der Große Dämon Reinhard H.," review of *Reinhard Heydrich: Manager of Terror*, dir. Heinz Schirk, *Die Zeit*, July 29, 1977, http://www.zeit.de/1977/32/der-grosse-daemon-reinhard-h.

first to represent the Holocaust in mass media. However, he argues that *Holocaust* is unique because it is the first time the stories of victims and perpetrators were combined in a single production. Bösch also notes that earlier West German television productions tended to focus on the National Socialist elite.[75] In 1980, in a special issue of *New German Critique* devoted to debates about the series, Andreas Huyssen convincingly argued that German aesthetic debates about *Holocaust* unwittingly revealed the German left's inability to handle emotions:

> To me, the key problem with critical appraisals of 'Holocaust' in Germany lies in their common assumption that a cognitive rational understanding of German anti- Semitism under National Socialism is per se incompatible with an emotional melodramatic representation of history as the story of a family. Left German critiques of 'Holocaust' betray a fear of emotions and subjectivity which itself has to be understood historically as in part a legacy of the Third Reich.[76]

Huyssen's observation would continue to hold true for later German reactions to depictions of the Holocaust on film. This underlying fear of emotions is a characteristic of more left-wing strains of German memory culture. In his "emotional history" of West Germany, Frank Biess has claimed that *Holocaust* helped break the emotional blockade and led to a shift in how West Germans grappled with the Nazi past.[77] Nevertheless, even today, it is common for German intellectual and journalistic critiques of the genre to focus on the supposed dangers of emotion.

While other, more recent Holocaust films are better suited for today's audiences, it is undeniable that *Holocaust* was a milestone in television history and introduced millions to this most difficult of histories. The series reached an audience of 120 million Americans and "initiated extensive discussion of Holocaust television and Holocaust remembrance. The responses to the American broadcast premiere, by and large, deemed Holocaust television to be an inherently problematic genre."[78] The West German reception, on the other hand, helps illustrate that international releases of historical films can provoke wildly different reactions. Although an American production, *Holocaust* proved to be more important to West German society than it did to the United States, where it arguably stands in the shadow of its predecessor *Roots*, which depicts a past much more immediate for most Americans. Holocaust film and television productions, because they de-

75 Bösch, *Zeitenwende 1979*, 368.

76 Andreas Huyssen, "The Politics of Identification: 'Holocaust' and West German Drama," *New German Critique* 19, no. 1 (1980): 117–136, 118.

77 Frank Biess, *Republik der Angst: Eine andere Geschichte der Bundesrepublik*, 2. edition (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Buchverlag, 2019), 332–342.

78 Shandler, *While America Watches*, 155.

pict a fundamentally transnational event, are ripe for transnational reception and are bound to be of greater interest to international audiences than media depictions of a historical event whose impact is only really known within the country in which it took place. Contrary to contemporary criticism, *Holocaust* is much more engaging and less historically flawed than the impression critics like Elie Wiesel have provided. It integrates personal stories of (fictional) victims into a larger narrative, manages to depict the evolution of genocidal policy in a relatively straightforward (albeit flawed) manner, and avoids painting Germans as one-dimensional monsters. Rather than grafting a typically American plotline with a happy ending onto the Holocaust setting, the series transcends the constraints of its network (such as the unavoidable commercial breaks) and ends with a sense of incalculable loss.

3 Warning the Allies: *War and Remembrance*

The ABC miniseries *War and Remembrance* (1988–1989) was the not only most expensive miniseries ever produced up to that point,[79] but also one of the last of the big-budget miniseries produced during the genre's heyday, which began in the 1970s with series like *Roots* and *Holocaust.*[80] Film and media studies professor John Caldwell sees miniseries like *War and Remembrance* are "loss leaders" or prestige projects, which, while they may not draw in large audiences, nevertheless earn critical acclaim and awards, thereby bolstering a network's reputation.[81] According to media scholar Barbara Selznick, miniseries like *War and Remembrance* were characterized by "factors such as their lavish mise-en-scéne, exotic locations, and unusual length," as well as by their tendency to place "style before story."[82] These big-budget miniseries largely fell by the wayside in the 1990s in favor of more profitable fare. One *New York Times* article even credited *War and Remembrance* with "sinking" the miniseries genre.[83] Miniseries reemerged in the

79 See Morgan Gendel, "ABC at 'War' Again with Miniseries, Maxi-Sequel," *Los Angeles Times*, September 6, 1986, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1986-09-06-ca-12868-story.html.

80 Barbara J. Selznick, *Global Television: Co-Producing Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 44.

81 John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality (Communication, Media, and Culture)* (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 160.

82 Selznick, *Global Television*, 45.

83 Andy Meisler, "Television/Radio; The Epic that Sank a Genre," *The New York Times*, November 3, 2002, https://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/03/books/television-radio-the-epic-that-sank-a-genre.html.

late 1990s in order to appeal to international audiences as television continued to globalize.[84] The genre of the epic, big-budget miniseries also saw a revival on cable networks like HBO later in the decade, with productions like the NASA-themed *From the Earth to the Moon* (1998) and the World War II combat drama *Band of Brothers* (2001). These later miniseries, however, tended to be between 8 and 12 hours long. *War and Remembrance* clocks in at almost 23 hours.

War and Remembrance is the direct sequel to the miniseries *The Winds of War* (1983). Both are based on novels by Herman Wouk, a Jewish-American novelist and World War II navy veteran known for his seafaring novel *The Caine Mutiny* (1951), which was also adapted into an acclaimed film starring Humphrey Bogart in 1954. *The Winds of War* and *War and Remembrance* are sweeping chronicles of two American families caught up in World War II, the Henrys and the Jastrows. Some critics interpret the novels as Wouk's attempt at writing an American version of *War and Peace*, and the length of the work as well as its impressive scope attest to that.[85] Critics usually consider Wouk a conformist voice promoting conservative values and Jewish assimilation into the American mainstream, though others have reassessed him in more recent publications, with one scholar even dubbing him a social historian.[86] Wouk consulted and befriended the pathbreaking Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg and credited his *Destruction of the European Jews* (1961) as the inspiration for depicting the Holocaust in his novels.[87] Wouk co-wrote the scripts for the *War and Remembrance* miniseries adaptation with director Dan Curtis and the writer Earl W. Wallace. Branko Lustig, an Auschwitz survivor (and later producer of *Schindler's List*), co-produced the series alongside Curtis and Barbara Steele.

War and Remembrance is a twelve-episode miniseries; its episodes are usually two and a half hours long but vary somewhat in length. It is nothing if not a comprehensive production. The series focuses on the family of US Navy captain "Pug" Henry (Robert Mitchum) and his experiences as a naval attaché in various

84 Selznick, *Global Television*, 45–46.

85 Zhang Yidong, "Two Panoramas About Great Wars," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 19, no. 1 (1985): 57–64, 57.

86 See Edward S. Shapiro, "The Jew as Patriot: Herman Wouk and American Jewish Identity," *American Jewish History* 84, no. 4 (December 1996): 333–351; Susanne Klingenstein, "Sweet Natalie: Herman Wouk's Messenger to the Gentiles," in *Talking Back: Images of Jewish Women in American Popular Culture*, ed. Joyce Antler (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1998), 103–122; Arnold Beichman, *Herman Wouk: The Novelist as Social Historian* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Routledge, 2004).

87 See Herman Wouk, "'Inescapable, and the Best': Tribute to Raul Hilberg," in *Perspectives on The Holocaust: Essays in Honor of Raul Hilberg*, ed. James S. Pacy and Alan Wertheimer (London: Routledge, 2019).

posts around the globe. His daughter-in-law, Natalie Jastrow (Jane Seymour), and her uncle, Aaron Jastrow (John Gielgud), a professor, are American Jews living in Europe when the war begins. The series follows these characters and their families throughout the war and visits locations ranging from the South Pacific to Auschwitz itself. The miniseries is particularly notable for likely being the first non-documentary productions to film at the actual Auschwitz memorial site. Holocaust historians and film scholars have neglected the series in general; however, its status as the first production to film in Auschwitz, as well as the scenes shot there, represent important milestones in television history. Most shockingly, *War and Remembrance* is perhaps the only mainstream Holocaust film or television program that violates the taboo of depicting the full extermination process in the Auschwitz gas chambers.[88]

The series does not directly depict the Wannsee Conference, but the Wannsee Protocol serves as a key fictional plot device in the second episode. Leslie Slote (David Dukes), Natalie Jastrow's former fiancé, is the first Undersecretary of the American legation in Bern, Switzerland. Slote gains possession of photostats of the protocol and tries to notify the US State Department, but encounters roadblocks at every turn.

The protocol is introduced into the plot when Jacob Ascher, a wealthy Jewish socialite in Bern, invites Slote to a cocktail party in order to put him in touch with a contact. Slote had previously drawn negative attention to himself by sending photographs of *Einsatzgruppen* mass shootings to the *New York Times* (which, in a nod to real-life downplaying of the Holocaust, ended up on the paper's back page), but this had attracted the interest of Bern's Jewish community. At the cocktail party, Slote flirts with Ascher's daughter Selma (Mijou Kovacs) and meets his contact, Father Martin (Aubrey Morris), a German priest. Father Martin walks with Slote through the streets of Bern and hints that he has conclusive evidence of "new, unbelievable atrocities" that could be of interest to the US government, but is skeptical of Martin's evidence. They arrange a later meeting at a cinema.

At a showing of Bing Crosby's musical *Road to Zanzibar* (1941), Father Martin leaves the theater, and an unidentified man takes his place next to Slote. This man hands Slote an envelope containing documents that turn out to be photostats of the Wannsee Protocol. Slote returns home and examines the documents: they are clearly facsimiles of the Wannsee Protocol (see Figure 1.2), but the viewer does not know this; only the ominous music, Slote's nervousness, and the sus-

88 For a detailed explanation of this taboo, see Chapter 3 of Aaron Kerner, *Film and the Holocaust: New Perspectives on Dramas, Documentaries, and Experimental Films* (New York: Continuum, 2011).

Figure 1.2: Leslie Slote examining the photostats of the Wannsee Conference Protocol in *War and Remembrance. War and Remembrance*. Dan Curtis Productions, ABC Circle Films, Jadran Film, 1988.

penseful nature of his encounter in the theater indicate the nature of this evidence. Curiously, the production added a *Reichsadler* stamp on the top left of the protocol's first page, to make it abundantly clear that this is indeed an official, top secret Nazi document.[89] Slote skims through the pages quickly, but page 6 of the protocol, which contains a list of the Jewish populations of Europe, is clearly identifiable.[90] In a frustrating plot turn, Selma Ascher calls Slote during this scene and asks him out to dinner – immediately. He agrees to and locks the documents in his desk. During their dinner, he asks her if Father Martin is reliable, which she confirms. When she drops him off at home, the car radio broadcasts news of German setbacks on the Eastern Front and Slote begins to fall in love with Selma – all while the documentary evidence of genocide sits in his desk. Visual storytelling is key to television histories and production archives can also help bolster arguments about these aspects. One version of Episode 2's script contains detailed handwritten instructions for the cinematographer, describing, for example, how the camera should film the photostats ("hi [sic] angle over Slote to documents") or

89 Herman Wouk, Earl W. Wallace, Dan Curtis, *War and Remembrance*, Part II, Second Draft, April 23, 1985, in Dan Curtis Productions Records, Box 122, Folder 3, UCLA Library Performing Arts Special Collections, 29.

90 See the scan of the Wannsee Protocol on the GHWK's website, pages 1 and 6: "Protokoll und Dokumente," Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz, accessed November 10, 2022, https://www.ghwk.de/de/konferenz/protokoll-und-dokumente.

when to use a close-up shot.[91] This piece of evidence helps illustrate the value of screenplay archives for writers of film and television histories wanting to focus on investigating the visual aspects of film production.

After they part ways, Slote returns to the apartment, lights a fire and his pipe, and reads through the documents until morning. Throughout this scene, his shocked and horrified expressions indicate his realization about just what the evidence is. He even exclaims "Oh my God!" while reading the protocol. The screenplay describes Slote's expression as "utterly ravaged," the diplomat is full of "profound, hopeless despair." It also explicitly identifies the document as the Wannsee Protocol.[92] That morning, Slote brings the photostats to his superior at the American legation and argues about their significance. He says that the protocol proves that Germans are committing "mass murder – perhaps genocide" and that the document is of "grave import." He urges his boss William Tuttle (Howard Duff) to notify Assistant Secretary Breckinridge Long and to send the photostats via airmail. Slote's colleague August van Winnaker (Lee Patterson) believes that the protocol is fraudulent and stems from an unreliable, biased (i.e., Jewish) source, because cabinet-level officials would never put such plans in writing. He also pokes fun of Slote and implies that he is a bleeding heart wasting their time. Slote angrily responds and says that "nothing is more German than reducing an inhuman plan to writing. Read *Mein Kampf*." He says that the documents are proof that "the Germans are committing a crime that's almost beyond human imagination" and that sending them overseas could help FDR "turn world opinion" against them. The scene ends with a discussion of the supposed logistical impossibility of requisitioning enough trains to transport Jews during wartime and Tuttle places the photostats in maximum security storage and warns Slote about contacting the *New York Times*. This section is intercut with the German diplomat Beck (Bill Wallis), who denies all German atrocities to the gullible (and ill-fated) Aaron Jastrow at his villa in Siena. The episode continues with the murder of Father Martin after he promises to provide Slote with corroborating evidence through the German Foreign Office, which could be a nod to the origins of the actual Wannsee Protocol (the only surviving copy stems from the archives of the German Foreign Office).[93] Oddly, this episode introduces Eichmann, though there

91 Herman Wouk, Earl W. Wallace, Dan Curtis, *War and Remembrance*, Part II, Annotated Script, undated, presumably late 1985, in Dan Curtis Productions Records, Box 124, Folder 2, UCLA Library Performing Arts Special Collections, 31.

92 Herman Wouk, Earl W. Wallace, Dan Curtis, *War and Remembrance*, Part II, Second Draft, April 23, 1985, in Dan Curtis Productions Records, Box 122, Folder 3, UCLA Library Performing Arts Special Collections, 35.

93 Roseman, *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution: A Reconsideration*, 3.

is no mention of his connection with the Wannsee Conference. The script describes him as "a professional bureaucrat" with "pale soft hands" but also as a "fanatical Nazi," which helps its depiction of Eichmann stand out from other filmic depictions of him as an unideological bureaucrat.[94] *War and Remembrance* also portrays Eichmann as a stereotypical Nazi – a creepy, possibly perverted individual who compares wooing Italy with seducing a virgin.[95]

Curiously, the word "Wannsee" or names of the conference participants are not mentioned at all during this episode (though they are in the script), but a scene in Episode 4 explicitly refers to the documents as the "Wannsee Conference photostats." In this episode, Tuttle reveals that he had sent the documents to the State Department's European division; however, they ignored it. His motivation was the release of a report by the Polish government in exile (most likely the Karski Report). Tuttle sends Slote back to Washington as a courier. In Episode 6, Slote delivers the documents to his colleagues in D.C. and expresses outrage at what he deems a "castrated" Allied joint statement on German atrocities. His colleague accuses him of being overly emotional. Slote is then called into a meeting with Breckinridge Long (Eddie Albert). In a menacing scene, Long attempts to convert Slote to his viewpoint and argues that the State Department is restricted by regulations preventing Jewish refugees from entering the country. Slote points out that visa requirements such as good conduct certificates from the German police can be waived. Long states that he is not an antisemite and that the press has libeled him as such. Long sidesteps Slote's critique of the joint statement and says that his British counterpart, Anthony Eden, drafted the statement and that the Allies should help "the Jewish race within the law." Immediately afterwards, Slote has dinner with "Pug" Henry and begs him to do anything within his power to get his daughter-in-law Natalie out of Europe before she is deported to a concentration camp. After this scene, the Wannsee Protocol disappears from the plotline and a disillusioned Slote quits the State Department and joins the OSS. He is later killed while on a mission in Normandy.

This alternative history of the Wannsee Protocol, in which US State Department investigators come into possession of copies and use it to try to warn their superiors about the true scale of the German mass murder program, is illustrative of the Wannsee Conference's place in American popular culture during this pe-

94 Herman Wouk, Earl W. Wallace, Dan Curtis, *War and Remembrance*, Part II, Final Shooting Script September 1985, July 28, 1986 Revision, in Dan Curtis Productions Records, Box 98, Folder 3, UCLA Library Performing Arts Special Collections, 144.

95 Herman Wouk, Earl W. Wallace, Dan Curtis, *War and Remembrance*, Part II, Final Shooting Script September 1985, September 24, 1985, in Dan Curtis Productions Records, Box 98, Folder 3, UCLA Library Performing Arts Special Collections, 145.

riod. First, the protocol is handled as a "smoking gun" type document that clearly spells out a plan for genocide; this is how *The New York Times* portrayed the conference when Heydrich's invitation letters to Otto Hofmann, chief of the SS Race and Settlement Office, were first discovered in 1945.[96] Because *War and Remembrance* was published in 1978, Wouk did not have access to later historiography that analyzed the conference in detail, but he undoubtedly relied on his friend Raul Hilberg's analysis of it in *The Destruction of the European Jews*.

Second, the multiple references to *Mein Kampf* (and additionally, the many scenes of Hitler ranting and raving at his generals throughout the series) indicate an intentionalist position regarding the unfolding of the Holocaust; this section contrasts with Hilberg's status as a pioneer of the functionalist school of Holocaust research. Most notably for its time, the series' depiction of the US State Department and Breckinridge Long echoes David S. Wyman's *The Abandonment of the Jews*, which portrays Long as an "extreme nativist" and possible antisemite who did everything in his power to limit Jewish immigration.[97] The rights agreement between Herman Wouk and the production company includes a clause stating that the miniseries adaptation of Wouk's novel must include several aspects from the novel, including "[t]he acquiring by Leslie Slote of the Wannsee Protocol; his effort to convince American authorities of the Final Solution; his resignation from the Foreign Service after the Bermuda Conference, and the circumstances of his death as a Jedburgh."[98] The Austrian exile Peter Zinner edited *War and Remembrance* alongside his daughter Katina. One sentence in Wouk's novels reads like a pitch for the HBO's later *Conspiracy*/*Complicity* project, in which Zinner had: ". . . history will say that the Jews of Europe were destroyed between the hammer of the Wannsee Conference and the anvil of the Bermuda Conference."[99]

War and Remembrance is an important forerunner to later high-budget, epic depictions of World War II in miniseries format such as *Band of Brothers* (2001), *The Pacific* (2010), and *Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter* (2013) and also serves as an example of the trend of network television miniseries produced during a boom in the genre between the mid-1970s and early 1990s. Its existence is evidence that

96 "Nazi Jewish Files Found: Berlin Papers Confirm Aim to Exterminate People in Europe," *The New York Times*, August 21, 1945, in Norbert Kampe and Peter Klein, eds., *Die Wannsee-Konferenz am 20. Januar 1942: Dokumente Forschungsstand Kontroversen*, (Cologne: Böhlau, 2013), 61–62.

97 Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, 190–191.

98 Fragment of purchase agreement between Herman Wouk and Paramount Pictures, July 7, 1983, in Dan Curtis Productions Records, Box 117, Folder 2, UCLA Library Performing Arts Special Collections, 16.

99 Wouk, *War and Remembrance* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1980), 752.

present-day marketing copy touting the high-budget, epic "originality" of depictions of the war on television are nothing more than hype. While hampered by its length and mammoth number of characters, the series does manage to depict Allied indifference towards the Holocaust in a relatively sober manner – even if the subplot about the Wannsee Protocol is complete fiction. However, it undenably suffers from clichéd Reagan-era flag-waving patriotism and the many soap-operatic aspects of its plot and dialogue, much more so than the critiques leveled at *Holocaust* could claim. Nevertheless, the series' engagement with the Holocaust is one of its strengths – but also potentially goes too far. *War and Remembrance's* graphic depiction of the Holocaust makes it unique among television productions. It brazenly violates taboos of "Holocaust piety" by filming at the Auschwitz memorial and showing the full killing process in a gas chamber – something that is still taboo in filmmaking today.[100] As Aaron Kerner has noted, such scenes are rare in Holocaust film.[101] Indeed, some critics labeled the 2015 Hungarian Auschwitz drama *Son of Saul* "pornography" because the film, which has no such scene inside a gas chamber, shows the gas chamber doors and confronts the audience with the off-screen victims' screaming and pounding on the doors.[102] Out of all of the big-budget productions analyzed in this study, *War and Remembrance* is the most violent and arguably least remembered.

The historical miniseries format has returned; the BBC series *World on Fire* (2019–2023) is somewhat of a spiritual successor to *War and Remembrance,* albeit with a more international (British, American, French, Polish, and German) cast of characters. *World on Fire*, like *War and Remembrance*, suffers because it has an impossible task: balancing a large list of characters located all across the globe. These series simply have too many characters and cannot fulfill their goals of depicting the war in a comprehensive manner. In *War and Remembrance*, events on the Eastern Front and in Japan, for example, are neglected while the series spends what seems like an inordinate amount of time on the US Navy. *World on Fire* limits itself to the European theater in order to mitigate the problem. Unlike *Band of Brothers*, a miniseries which limits itself to the story of a single American rifle

100 For a definition and discussion of "Holocaust piety" in film, see Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 43–48.

101 Aaron Kerner, *Film and the Holocaust*, 36.

102 See Susan Vahabzadeh, "Kinofilm 'Son of Saul' - Pornografie des Schmerzes," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 9, 2016, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/kinofilm-son-of-saul-pornografie-des-schmerzes-1.2897645 and Pau Bosch Santos, "Soft Porn for Refined People: *Son of Saul* within the History of Holocaust Representation," *East European Film Bulletin* (blog), January 6, 2018, https://eefb.org/perspectives/son-of-saul-within-the-history-of-holocaust-representation/.

company, the vast scope of this style of historical miniseries leads to shifts between locations and characters at a rate that can almost cause whiplash. *Holocaust* and *War and Remembrance* try to solve this problem through the conceit of focusing on two fictional families who happen to be at the center of historical events, much in the vein of epic historical novels like *War and Peace*. These two sprawling, epic miniseries are the polar opposites of the three chamber plays – *The Wannsee Conference*, *Conspiracy*, and *The Conference* – discussed in detail below, which restrict themselves to depicting the Wannsee Conference itself in its entirety. In this respect, these productions are unable to get at what makes the three Wannsee movies so compelling – by hyper-focusing on fictional individuals, they neglect the real people, ideas, structures, and organizations that made that history happen.

4 The Wannsee Conference as Detective Story: *Fatherland*

Fatherland, a 1994 HBO film based on Robert Harris' 1992 novel of the same name, uses the Wannsee Protocol as evidence in a murder investigation. *Fatherland* takes place in an alternative history, in 1960s Berlin. Nazi Germany has won the Second World War and presides over a united Europe. The protagonist, Xavier March (Rutger Hauer) is a *Kriminalpolizei* detective and member of the SS. During the course of a murder investigation, March discovers that the Gestapo is behind the murders of seemingly unrelated victims. These victims turn out to be officials who had attended the Wannsee Conference. In this story, the Holocaust has been kept secret from most Germans and Heydrich (who has survived the war in this story) is now eliminating those officials who had knowledge of its existence. The film adaptation of *Fatherland* has drawn considerably less critical and academic attention than Robert Harris' novel, probably because HBO's adaptation was a critical failure. Despite its cinematic failure, *Fatherland* is important to this study because of the way it uses the Wannsee Protocol: much like it did for Allied prosecutors, the protocol here serves as evidence of a crime. Only in this story, it functions as evidence on two levels: for the detective plotline, it serves as evidence that the murder victims are connected. On the larger, alternate history track, the protocol serves as documentary evidence of a massive crime that the Nazi regime has covered up and will kill to maintain its secrecy. Much like it does in *War and Remembrance*, the protocol functions as a documentary "smoking gun" for the Holocaust and the characters seek to reveal its forbidden knowledge to the proper authorities. Only in *Fatherland*, the authorities are the ones keeping the document secret. The novel and film retain a classic hardboiled tone; much as

in Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, over the course of his investigation, the detective March discovers that he too is "part of the nastiness now."[103]

In *Fatherland,* detective March initially discovers the body of Josef Bühler floating in the River Havel. As the story progresses, he learns that former *Staatssekretär* Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart has "committed suicide," and that former Foreign Office official Martin Luther is on the run. He later uncovers a list of Wannsee participants. All besides Martin Luther and Heydrich have died, most in recent years. After meeting American journalist Charlie Maguire (Miranda Richardson), March's investigation uncovers the fact that Bühler, Stuckart, and Luther sought to inform the new American president, Joseph Kennedy (in this alternate history, it is John F. Kennedy's anti-Semitic father who has won the 1960 presidential election), about the true fate of Europe's Jews. President Kennedy is scheduled to visit Berlin, which would signify normalized relations between the United States and Nazi Germany. Heydrich and his minions, including Odilo Globočnik, are racing against time to prevent the group from getting the word out and sabotaging the regime's diplomatic coup. Through various plot intrigues which involve visits to Swiss banks and the *Reichsarchiv,* the characters learn about the Holocaust and the existence of death camps like Auschwitz and Bełżec. The archivist Arlene Schmuland argues that authors like Harris "equate research into archives with the opening of gravesites" and that "archival records represent not only dead files, but ones that are deliberately buried."[104] Arlene Schmuland notes that *Fatherland* engages in a common literary device of discovered archival material "play[ing] an important role in political events."[105]

The film ends when March is killed in a shootout with the Gestapo as Charlie escapes. In the novel's climactic sequence, March travels to the site of Auschwitz II (Birkenau) and finds nothing except traces of destroyed buildings as Gestapo agents close in. Meanwhile, Charlie manages to inform the Kennedy administration, leading to the cancelation of his impending meeting. This contrasts with the novel, where she escapes to Switzerland with a briefcase full of documents, including the protocol, but whether she succeeds in informing the American government remains unclear.

Robert Harris distanced himself from the film adaptation of his novel: "My first novel, *Fatherland,* was made into a very bad film."[106] Michael Geisler includes the film in a subset of "de-historicized" Holocaust films, which employ ac-

103 Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2002), 230.
104 Arlene Schmuland, "The Archival Image in Fiction: An Analysis and Annotated Bibliography," *The American Archivist* 62, no. 1 (1999): 45.
105 Schmuland, "The Archival Image in Fiction," 48.
106 Charlotte Philby, "Hollywood Ate My Novel," *The Independent*, February 18, 2012, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/hollywood-ate-my-novel-novelists-reveal-what-it-s-like-to-have-their-book-turned-into-a-movie-6940772.html.

tual photographic evidence of the Holocaust or Nazi imagery (swastikas, SS uniforms) as devices for completely fictional plots that use Nazism to represent absolute evil instead of historical realities. For him, *Fatherland*'s instrumentalization of the Holocaust for an alternate history detective story is "trivialization," not a "historical" portrayal like *Holocaust* or *Schindler's List*.[107] He argues that in contrast with more historically-grounded productions, *Fatherland* is part of a subset of films whose fast-and-loose playing with the facts and morality (its protagonist is a member of the SS, after all) is dangerous, because "[f]rom here, it is a short leap of the imagination to question the historical accuracy of the Holocaust in the interest of an agenda of denial or relativization" and thus, the film engages in a "fictional reevaluation[s] of the SS."[108] For him, the danger here lies in how the imagery and figures of the Nazi past have been removed from their historical contexts and instead serve as "floating, nomadic signifiers of evil." He compares these de-historicized images of the SS with that of Erik Dorf and *Holocaust*, arguing that the latter is clearly preferable to the former.[109] Holocaust scholar Gavriel Rosenfeld is more open to *Fatherland*, noting that the film functions as a "critique of isolationism."[110] It is in this vein that the Wannsee Protocol in *Fatherland* occupies a similar function to that in *War and Remembrance*: it serves as evidence to persuade the United States to end its isolationist stance and its indifference to the fate of European Jews. For Rosenfeld, HBO's *Fatherland* is part of a wider American debate between interventionism and isolationism that appeared in various alternate histories during the 1990s.[111]

Ron Hutchinson's October 1993 *Fatherland* teleplay departs from the novel in many ways, but one key difference is the absence of the Wannsee Protocol. The script notes that the protocol existed but that Heydrich destroyed it. Only the invitations to the conference remain, as well as a fictional photograph of the Wannsee Conference participants standing in front of the villa.[112] Instead, March finds photos of corpses and receipts for Zyklon B.[113] One aspect missing from most critiques of *Fatherland* evidenced by the screenplay drafts is the writer's attempt to draw parallels between the 1960s US and a fictional Nazi Germany in this fictional

107 Michael E. Geisler, "If the Shoe Fits . . . Germans as Nazis on U.S. Television," *German Politics & Society* 13, no. 3 (36) (1995): 173–189, 181.

108 Geisler, "If the Shoe Fits," 182.

109 Geisler, "If the Shoe Fits," 183.

110 Gavriel Rosenfeld, "Why Do We Ask 'What If?' Reflections on the Function of Alternate History," *History and Theory* 41, no. 4 (2002): 90–103, 98.

111 Rosenfeld, "Why Do We Ask 'What If?'," 97–98.

112 Ron Hutchinson, "Fatherland – Teleplay by Ron Hutchinson", October 25, 1993, in Dennis Bishop Papers, Box 209, Folder 2, UCLA Library Performing Arts Special Collections, 61–62.

113 Ron Hutchinson, "Fatherland – Teleplay by Ron Hutchinson," 95–96.

timeline. Hutchinson's screenplay repeatedly references the Vietnam War, segregation, and a United States under the leadership of Joseph Kennedy, the "appeaser of and apologist for the dictators."[114] *Fatherland* was not simply a movie about clichéd Nazis, but originally intended to provoke self-reflection on the part of American audiences. An earlier draft of the screenplay credited to Stanley Weiser (both Weiser and Hutchinson received writing credits for the film) sticks closer to Harris' novel, with March discussing the protocol and driving to Auschwitz, which is absent from Hutchinson's version.[115] The final cut of *Fatherland* includes more discussion of the Wannsee Conference than either script draft available in the University of California archives. In a later study of alternate histories and Nazism, Gavriel Rosenfeld notes that the HBO adaptation strayed from Harris' novel due to "the nakedly patriotic happy ending forced upon the film by the network executives."[116] In the script drafts available in the UCLA archives, no direct evidence of network interference is present, but Ron Hutchinson's draft of the ending is more patriotic than Weiser's. Hutchinson's teleplay ends with March committing suicide and the American ambassador, acting on March's information, canceling Kennedy's meeting with Hitler.[117] In contrast, Weiser's version ends with the *New York Times* editorial board vowing to reveal the information March died to reveal.[118] Both screenplay versions and the final cut, even if they nod to 1930s American isolationism, ultimately insert faith in American institutions – whether governmental or the fourth estate – into a story where these institutions have no interest in the truth getting out.

Most critical and academic focus on *Fatherland* is concerned with Harris' novel. In her book on British portrayals of Nazi Germany, the Germanist and critic Petra Rau is more forgiving of *Fatherland* than Geisler, but not as much as is Rosenfeld. For her, documents such as the Wannsee Protocol function in the novel as a "material body of evidence," but because victims' voices are absent, this sole focus on Nazi documentation causes the readers to view "[the Shoah] with the perpetrators' eyes: 'such energy, such dedication.'"[119] Rau also finds that

114 Ron Hutchinson, "Fatherland – Teleplay by Ron Hutchinson," 50. For a nuanced discussion of Ambassador Joseph Kennedy Sr. and his interwar appeasement, see Fredrik Logevall, *JFK: Volume 1: 1917–1956* (London: Viking, 2020).

115 Stanley Weiser, "Fatherland – Teleplay by Stanley Weiser," August 18, 1993, in Dennis Bishop Papers, Box 209, Folder 2, UCLA Library Performing Arts Special Collections, 110–111.

116 Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made: Alternate History and the Memory of Nazism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 156.

117 Ron Hutchinson, "Fatherland – Teleplay by Ron Hutchinson," 118–121.

118 Stanley Weiser, "Fatherland – Teleplay by Stanley Weiser," 121–122.

119 Petra Rau, *Our Nazis: Representations of Fascism in Contemporary Literature and Film* (Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 73, 82.

Harris conflates contemporary Germany with its Nazi predecessor and implies that Nazism is just below the Berlin Republic's democratic façade. For her, such associations and comparisons are tied up with the Eurosceptic movement in Britain and that the book "renders traditional Germanophobia respectable for a middle-aged generation."[120] Echoing Geisler, Rau also notes that "continental neo-Nazis" have embraced the novel, arguing that "finding this book gripping in Germany betrays right-wing leanings; finding it gripping in the UK is supposedly a reassurance of one's democratic normality."[121] Nevertheless, Rau does not explain how Harris could be responsible for how readers from other cultures interpret his novel; it is also an exaggeration to say that German readers of the novel are most likely in the far right-wing camp. In a positive review, the transatlanticist German publisher Josef Joffe instead saw *Fatherland* as an allegory of Western détente towards the Soviet Union and China.[122] In contrast with both, Rosenfeld argues that while Harris analogized both the recently-collapsed Soviet Union and reunified Germany, he was mainly concerned with "the heightened sense of British decline . . . using the scenario of a Nazi wartime victory to engage in self-critique."[123] For Rosenfeld, Harris' novel is important for the attention it devotes to Allied collaboration and complicity, it is an example of "the pessimism required to de-heroize the British" – and, by extension, the Americans.[124]

When it comes to the Wannsee Conference, Harris relies on the archival record to move the plot forward. Throughout the novel, Harris quotes from historical documents, whether the Wannsee Protocol or extracts from Himmler's 1943 Posen speech. Just as in *War and Remembrance*, the copy of the protocol stems from Martin Luther and the Foreign Office, which is historically correct. It is important to also keep in mind that protocols were marked top secret (*Geheime Reichssache*) and each copy was numbered. March initially locates Heydrich's invitation letter to the conference, which Harris reprints in full. It is in this chapter, where March draws the connections between the murders and notes that other participants have died under mysterious circumstances in the recent past.[125] In contrast with *Holocaust*, Harris notes the incongruity of the setting with the subject matter:

> He looked back at the house. His mother, a firm believer in ghosts, used to tell him that brickwork and plaster soaked up history, stored what they had witnessed, like a sponge. Since then March had seen his share of places in which evil had been done and he did not

120 Rau, *Our Nazis*, 84.
121 Rau, *Our Nazis*, 83.
122 Josef Joffe, "The Mother of All Fatherlands," *The National Interest*, no. 29 (1992): 86–87.
123 Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made*, 80–81.
124 Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made*, 81.
125 Robert Harris, *Fatherland: 20th Anniversary Edition* (London: Arrow, 2012), 335–340.

> believe it. There was nothing especially wicked about Am grossen Wannsee 56/58. It was just a large, businessman's mansion, now converted into a girls' school . . .[126]

In his description of the setting, Harris nevertheless repeats a well-worn historical falsehood about the villa. He erroneously states that the villa "housed the German headquarters of Interpol" and that it was built in the nineteenth century.[127] At the novel's end, the history-soaked bricks of the Wannsee villa are contrasted with a brick March finds at Auschwitz. During an interrogation, Globočnik taunts March, saying "not even a brick" from the death camps remains and therefore his attempt to expose Nazi crimes is in vain.

The story is reaching its climax by the time March finds the protocol. Harris quotes from the protocol at length and invents a redacted page, a bit of historical invention which certainly leans credence toward Geisler's critique about alternate histories. This fictional page is attributed to Eichmann and is clearly a way to incorporate Eichmann's subsequent statements about participants speaking quite frankly about killing methods during the conference, something that is absent from the protocol.[128] The fictional page describes mass shootings, gas vans, and gas chambers at Auschwitz: "against this, in the margin, Heydrich had written 'No!'." This fictional page is then condensed into the phrase "there was a discussion of the various types of solution possibilities" and "[t]hus sanitised, the minutes were fit for the archives."[129] In this way, *Fatherland* uses the Wannsee Protocol differently from *War and Remembrance*. In *War and Remembrance,* the document is direct evidence of genocide, a smoking gun that is obvious to all except those American officials who are willfully in denial. In *Fatherland*, the document's constructed, edited nature is made apparent – the protocol only functions as a smoking gun by virtue of its inclusion with other documents of genocide: train timetables, eyewitness reports, and diagrams of Auschwitz. Neither production repeats the myth that Wannsee was where "the" decision about the Holocaust was made; they instead use the protocol as proof of the diabolical, perverse nature of Nazi planning – as Leslie Slote observes about Germans putting evil plans on paper. In Wouk's novel, a German general disingenuously argues that all nations have something like the Wannsee Protocol, but "[o]nly Germany suffered the ignominy of having her records unveiled. Only Germany was stripped naked."[130]

126 Harris, *Fatherland,* 388.
127 Harris, *Fatherland,* 384.
128 Roseman, *The Villa, The Lake, The Meeting*, 99.
129 Harris, *Fatherland*, 421–424.
130 Wouk, *War and Remembrance*, 160.

As an alternate history, *Fatherland* uses the Wannsee Conference as a plot device for its detective story set in a 1960s Nazi Berlin. From a post-2016 perspective, the film also seems to prefigure later alternate history television series depicting either a different outcome of the Second World War, such as the Amazon series *The Man in the High Castle* (2015–2019) or the BBC series *SS-GB* (2017), or a homegrown American fascist movement, exemplified by HBO's *The Plot Against America* (2020). But as Rosenfeld has shown, it was part of a larger, international wave of alternate histories about Nazi victory.[131] *Fatherland* exemplifies Anglo-American anxieties about a reunified Germany in the post–Cold War Era, just as these later series exemplify our own anxieties about a resurgent nationalist right.

Engineer of Death, *Holocaust*, *War and Remembrance*, and *Fatherland* each depict the Wannsee Conference as a key turning point in the history of the Holocaust. These four productions illustrate the presence of the Wannsee Conference in American popular culture and show it was not an obscure event by any means. *Engineer of Death* uses the Wannsee Conference to show audiences how Eichmann committed his crimes and why he was about to be put on trial in Israel. *Holocaust* integrates the conference into a functionalist narrative about SS functionaries trying to streamline the previously disjointed killing actions in the occupied Soviet Union. *War and Remembrance* uses an alternative history of the Wannsee Protocol to illustrate American indifference to the fate of European Jews and the futile efforts of those who tried to raise awareness of the Holocaust. Wouk's novel goes further and directly connects Wannsee with the 1943 Bermuda Conference and Allied "complicity," a topic that *War and Remembrance* editor Peter Zinner and others at HBO continued exploring during the 1990s and early 2000s, when they attempted to produce *Complicity* as either a sequel or companion film to *Conspiracy* or to combine both productions into a 3-hour consecutive epic telling the twin stories of these conferences. *Holocaust* and *War and Remembrance* also serve as examples of the big-budget, historical family miniseries genre that was popular during the 1970s and 1980s, only to fall by the wayside and return after the turn of the millennium. *Fatherland* is less directly relevant to later depictions of Wannsee, but nevertheless shows that HBO had previously thematized the Wannsee Conference, and it serves as a key early example of alternate television histories depicting a victorious Nazi Germany. Although these productions are of varying quality, they attracted large audiences and, in the case of *Holocaust*, influenced a global recalibration of Holocaust remembrance; they certainly were part of the shift to a global "cosmopolitan memory" noted by Daniel

131 Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made.*

Levy and Natan Sznaider.[132] *War and Remembrance* also marks a turn towards even more graphically violent depictions of the Holocaust (as exemplified by *Schindler's List* and *The Pianist*); its production history, especially the section of the series shot in Auschwitz, certainly merits more attention. These productions are all aware of the significance of the Wannsee Conference for the history of the Holocaust, but none investigate it in depth. It was there as an icon, as part of what Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann has called Wannsee's "cultural afterlife," but these productions were more interested in the conference as either shorthand for bureaucratic murder or in its protocol as a smoking gun document proving that the genocide indeed happened.[133] Here, Wannsee is not used to investigate how the Nazi government and ideology functioned, but is instead merely used as a backdrop.

Some West German filmmakers, such as Edgar Reitz and Paul Mommertz, saw their work as a corrective to what they considered the trivializations or simplifications of *Holocaust.* This study now turns to the production histories of the West German television films *Reinhard Heydrich: Manager of Terror* (1977) and *The Wannsee Conference* (1984), which help illustrate a shift in West German television and memory culture during the 1970s and 1980s. These television productions were in some ways responses to "fictionalized" and more overtly dramatic productions like *Holocaust* and sought to portray Holocaust perpetrators in a more sober, rational light based on the latest historiography. More importantly, they sought to confront a society in which many perpetrators still lived normal, unassuming lives. These filmic Nazis would not be composite characters like Erik Dorf – they were your neighbors.

132 See Levy and Sznaider, "Memory Unbound."

133 Ebbrecht-Hartmann, "Symbolort und Ikone," 202.