

PROXIMITIES OF VIOLENCE: THE ZONE OF INTEREST

Amy Herzog

Let us make a film in which the representation of Fascism would engage with the fascism of representation.

—Gillian Rose

You can document everything to death for the Germans.... Yet the mass murderers walk around free, live in their little houses, and grow flowers.

—Joseph Wulf

In Jonathan Glazer's *The Zone of Interest*, a young mother (Sandra Hüller) carries her baby around a sunlit garden. The grounds are perfectly manicured, as is she, in a crisp green dress with rows of austere blond pin curls on her head. She bends to hold the baby close to the flowers, patiently identifying each plant (phlox, rose, dahlia), a dog romping in the grass beside her. The lush beds and vines of the garden belie an unseen horror. The woman is Hedwig Höss, wife of Rudolf Höss (Christian Friedel), the long-serving commandant of Auschwitz. And just over the garden wall is the death factory, where the crematorium furnaces belch plumes of smoke and ash into the sky.¹

Loosely drawing from the premise of Martin Amis's eponymous 2014 novel, Glazer's *The Zone of Interest* centers on the *Interessengebiet*, the approximately forty square kilometers of land surrounding the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in Poland, a zone that the SS cleared of local residents to create the housing and administrative facilities needed to run the camp. The film is primarily restricted to the house and grounds of the Höss family villa,

which directly abuts the camp, in view of the gate and the crematorium smokestacks. Glazer's unblinking, static cameras capture the daily life of the family's five children and house staff, never breaching the wall to depict the torture and death just feet away from the garden. But the sounds of anguished screams, gunshots, and the bellows of the furnaces maintain a continuous presence, punctuated by Mica Levi's urgent, dissonant score.

One would be hard-pressed to find a review of *The Zone of Interest* that does not refer to "the banality of evil." This phrase, drawn from Hannah Arendt's 1963 report on the trial of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann, has been rendered banal itself with overuse, repeated with an apparent presumption of transparency. The offhand way in which her words are often deployed not only oversimplifies Arendt's political argument, it reduces the complexity of Glazer's ambitious project. While the ordinariness of the Höss family is key to the film, that ordinariness belies a foundational link between fascism and the regulation of domestic life. Moreover, the film's focus on domesticity takes shape within a network of representational strategies that both echo and depart from existing tropes in Holocaust cinema. These include Glazer's intense focus on materiality and place, and his unorthodox approach to cinematography and performance. The film is shot entirely on location at Auschwitz, drawing on nearly a decade of archival research. The actors channel their characters on site before hidden cameras, without any crew present and with no sense of framing to direct their movements. Central here, too, are Glazer's shifts into experimental and abstract interludes, sequences that dissolve into slashing musical color fields, or infrared thermal imaging, quick-moving nighttime footage that disrupts the stasis of brightly lit family life. And throughout, Glazer foregrounds the routinization of labor and violence, what Arendt describes as "the facts of administrative massacre."²

The Zone of Interest is a formally perplexing work. For the domestic scenes, Glazer and cinematographer Łukasz Żal designed a complex network of cameras embedded throughout the garden and home (a real house, built by the

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Sandra Hüller as Hedwig Höss in *The Zone of Interest*.

production team to meticulously replicate the Höss home and constructed only yards away from the original site). The fleet of cameras were remotely operated by focus pullers from a nearby bunker, leaving the cast to perform in real time, with no artificial lighting or visible crew. The resulting images are strangely detached and flat, devoid of obvious emotional motivation or the comfort of nostalgia. Static long takes predominate. There are several abrupt shifts to nighttime scenes shot using thermal photography, negative images rendered in black-and-white, alive with movement as a girl furtively hides apples in the ditches and fields where the prisoners work. And there are extended interludes of pure abstraction, where the screen is filled with solid color fields—black, red, and white—as Levi’s score takes over in a wave of dissonant, violent strings.

This approach has elicited a range of critical responses, including critiques of the film’s cold gaze: austere, formal, clinical, “more hollow than hollowing . . . merely conceptual.”³ There is a tacit suggestion, here, that formalism is at odds with, or even an affront to, the emotional weight of the subject matter. I would counter that Glazer’s experiments with form and structure are deeply engaged with the politics of representing the Holocaust on film. His

unorthodox production process strikes me as key to understanding Glazer’s project. Glazer and producer Jim Wilson spent nearly ten years researching and writing *The Zone of Interest*, engaging in an extensive collaboration with the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum Archives. (Scenarios and dialogue are drawn directly from witness testimonies found there.) The production team spent months on location at Auschwitz building the house and planting the garden based on archival photographs. While the image itself may lack visible empathy, there is a reverence in the production’s attention to the materiality of the site, and in its commitment to strict production codes. The film’s ethical practice is reflected in the trust and risk-taking required of the actors, navigating the sites where their counterparts committed mass murder, as well as in the challenge posed to the spectator who is asked to bear witness.

“I didn’t want to feel like I was making a movie about this other period and putting it in a museum,” Glazer said about *The Zone of Interest*. “We can’t say . . . ‘It’s not us, we’re safe, it was eighty years ago.’”⁴ While Glazer carefully avoids depicting actual acts of torture and execution, this is not an elegiac meditation on a past that is nonrepresentable. There is in fact, for Glazer, an imperative to

retell the story of the Holocaust so that new generations are awakened to the connections between that history and the present moment. Artists “have to come at the subject using a new vocabulary.... It needs to feel absolutely prescient. Because it is.”⁵

In the sections that follow, I map some of the strategies Glazer utilized to develop a new vocabulary for representing fascism. Voyeurism, extended takes, and unstable points of identification create an ethical crisis for the viewer, who is left questioning the mechanics, and the limits, of empathy. The film offers a sensory bounty: tactile images, pastoral greenery, and heightened sounds. These surface-rich images in particular function in dialogue with a history of Holocaust cinema, complicating already vexing questions of cultural memory and political framing. And the pointed focus on the administration of fascism within the home exposes both the domestic implementation of a “blood and soil” ideology, and the ways in which intimacy and proximity can both uphold and erode the frameworks of war.

A Holocaust Ethnography

The politics of representation in Holocaust cinema are exceptionally fraught. The risk of aestheticizing genocide looms large; to exploit the horror and suffering for commercial entertainment feels like an extension of the crime itself.

There is, too, what Terri Ginsberg has called “the Adorno taboo,” derived from a misreading of Theodor W. Adorno’s statement “[T]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.”⁶ Taken out of context from an essay about the commodification of cultural criticism, the quote is frequently interpreted as suggesting Adorno believes that poetry, and by extension all artistic expression, is “impossible” in the wake of the Holocaust.⁷ This interpretation suggests that the Holocaust is so horrific, so singular in its cruelty, that it is ineffable, exceeding the bounds of artistic representation. As Ginsberg argues, this taboo extends to the formal analysis of films about the Holocaust, since engaging in this work is “tantamount to engaging in obscenity.”⁸ These questions of violence and aesthetics dovetail with politically fractious debates about how to historically frame the Holocaust in relation to other incidents of mass violence. Is the Holocaust an unprecedented event that is diminished in its specificity by comparisons with other atrocities? Or is it a genocide of unprecedented scale that can best be understood in relation to other genocides, and in relation to the social conditions that enabled it?

The Austrian director Michael Haneke took aim at commercial Holocaust films in an interview, calling *Downfall* (Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2004) “repulsive and dumb” and *Schindler’s List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) “unspeakable” in its crass emotional manipulation: “[T]here is a question



Rudolf Höss (Christian Friedel), the long-serving commandant of Auschwitz.

of responsibility, as not only a question of the person you are depicting ... but also your audience. The question is, How seriously do I take my viewer?"⁹ The philosopher Gillian Rose shared a similar loathing for *Schindler's List*, finding in the film and its critical responses a certain "Holocaust piety." Holocaust piety, for Rose, works to protect against knowledge and self-reflection. Sentimentality and mythologization allow the viewer to bask in vicarious moral certainty, without having to confront one's own position. It also resides, in her reading, in the taboo of representation: "[T]o argue for ... the witness of 'ineffability,' that is, non-representability, is to mystify something we dare not understand, because we fear that it may be all too understandable."¹⁰ What appears to be a position of veneration is in fact an exercise in willed, or feigned, ignorance.

In the place of Holocaust piety, Rose proposes a "Holocaust ethnography." Such an ethnography would eschew the sanctimony often found in "representations of Fascism." Commercial films about the Holocaust typically offer the spectator a relatively safe and predetermined position, comfortably distanced, where they can be assured of moral clarity and the satisfactions of pity and reverence. An ethnographic approach, for Rose, works to expose the underlying structures that enable fascism to exist, and moreover, to expose the manipulations of representation to offer viewers a false moral high ground ("the fascism of representation"). In the interest of understanding and preventing atrocities, Rose calls for films that put the viewer in the unsafe position of questioning their own identifications and their own capacity for violence.

Glazer and producer Jim Wilson explicitly cite Rose's work as informing *The Zone of Interest*.¹¹ And indeed, I find that *The Zone of Interest* accomplishes Rose's goals for a Holocaust ethnography more convincingly than her own examples, such as the Merchant Ivory adaptation *The Remains of the Day* (James Merchant, 1993). Located within the confines of a Nazi home, "the attractions of German Nazism are present in microcosm in the organization of the aristocratic household as a fascist corporation."¹² There is a profound disconnect between the compartmentalization the family enacts and "a political culture which we identify as our own, and hence an emotional economy which we cannot project and disown."¹³ The clarity of the image feels almost uncanny, devoid of the haze of period-film nostalgia, forensically recording details of the household. I experienced numerous moments of self-recognition, gestures or scenarios familiar to me as a parent and as a gardener, before recoiling in disgust. I felt nauseous for hours after the screening. This unease was less a reaction to the Hösses'

ordinariness than to the seamless and continued dovetailing of the attractions of middle-class family life and oppressive ideologies (colonialism, capital, fascism). This vacillation, and the accompanying self-questioning, seem to be precisely what Rose called for.

Topographies of Genocide

If Glazer's scrutiny of Nazi family life offers a version of a Holocaust ethnography, his attention to materiality and place also aligns with what Margaret Olin calls "the topography of the Holocaust film."¹⁴ In her analysis of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), Olin maps the geography of the film, which ranges from the current locations of the Holocaust survivors and perpetrators interviewed to the sites of genocide in the present day. Noting Lanzmann's careful attention to landscape, and his opposition to using archival footage or the direct representation of the violence, Olin describes the film's subtle shifts from the "pastoral to the infernal": the seemingly serene images of fields and forests giving way to the realization of the horrors that occurred there.¹⁵

Glazer's camera similarly lingers on shots of nature (the river and its banks, the fields, the garden beds) as well as the material remnants of atrocity (although filmed in the context of a fictionalized present, these are the real walls of Auschwitz, the spaces detailed renderings from real archival sources). This attention to geography in *The Zone of Interest* suggests a studied response to the history of Holocaust films, and to debates about the responsibilities of representation. Much like the tracking shots over fields and train tracks in *Shoah* and Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1956), *The Zone of Interest*'s focus on the actual grounds that surround the death camp, and its long, contemplative takes of trees and the river, produce a collapsing of present and past. The landscape itself is a silent witness.

Emma Wilson takes up Laura Marks's theories of hapticity to analyze tactile remnants and remains in *Night and Fog*. Marks writes about the silence and hesitation that often occur in films by diasporic filmmakers, spurred by "a lack of faith in the visual archive's ability to represent cultural memory."¹⁶ "Haptic cinema" responds to the failure of visual capture with evocations of touch, smell, and taste—embodied experiences that are deeply tied to individual and cultural memories. Wilson identifies a similar representational crisis emerging between Resnais's use of archival film and photographs and the footage he shot on site a decade later. There is intense proximity to images that fill the frame, temporarily unrecognizable: the shifting surface of the murky waters of a marsh, photographs



Auschwitz rises behind the Höss's garden wall.

of geometric shapes that come into focus as body parts, an alien land formation formed by a sea of human hair. The texture of these images at times verges into abstraction, and at others snaps the viewer into horrific awareness.

Glazer's decision to only use hidden cameras, without any artificial lighting, creates formal limitations and challenges. But the images retain an intense tactility: patterns on fabrics, the pull of harshly parted and pinned hair, fuzz on a bee that circles a blossom, the softness of a dog's muzzle, the glint of light reflected from an extracted human tooth. Close-ups punctuate longer observational takes, asserting the specificity of the surfaces that define this moment. The measured pacing of *The Zone of Interest* strikes me as distinct from the slow cinema tradition, where duration typically serves as a thematic focus. Instead, the length of the shots serves the function of extending the overarching tension. Glazer's long takes are often paired with an uncomfortable intensity in the soundscape (perhaps the sonic analogue to an uncomfortable close-up), making these moments less an invitation to haptic reverie than an overwhelming of the senses. Suspense, tension, and a nauseating realization about what remains unseen dominate the affect, increased by the long takes that never fully reveal or resolve. The impact feels similar to the way the mind retains a vividly detailed image of a mundane moment preceding a traumatic event that itself can't be fully recalled.

Judith Butler has argued that in the context of war, the mainstream media works to frame the world through strategic appeals to the senses, "restricting what we can feel, disposing us to feel shock and outrage in the face of one expression of violence and righteous coldness in the face of another."¹⁷ Yet photography and audiovisual media can also expose the operations of dehumanizing frames, particularly as images circulate in different contexts and elicit different affective responses (e.g., the shifts in meaning when the images of tortured prisoners at Abu Ghraib left the circle of torturers and entered the public sphere). The sensate world, for Butler, marks the realm in which shared vulnerability is both denied, via oppressive framing, and realized as interconnectedness and mutual responsibility when those framings fail to adhere.

Building on Butler's work, Fiona Jenkins outlines a model of "sensate criticism" focused on the shifting formal and temporal relations between images and spectators. Jenkins centers on those images that overwhelm the viewer and defy comprehension: images of horror, or the sublime, "re-presented," such as in a photograph, where the disconnect between the moment of capture and the moment of apprehension feels impossible to resolve.¹⁸ A "triumphalist" framework presents messages with "a clear point of identification for the viewer" and a "collective subject position," a "we" who reside on the side of the knowable.¹⁹ Yet those images that exceed the frame



A family outing by the river in *The Zone of Interest*.

of knowability destabilize points of view, categories of identity, and linear histories. As Jenkins observes:

The sensate cast as “impossible” indicates a zone in which we find our lives and ways of being in proximity to or touched upon by figures that our identity as subjects or humans or “civilized” often seems to depend upon setting at a distance, or even abjecting: perhaps the dead, the animal, or the cultural or barbaric other. It is in this “difficult” zone, however, that the image can press back against its capture by thought; it becomes mobile, provocative, alive with resistances.²⁰

Genocide exists at the outer limits of representability. No image could possibly capture the “truth” of violence and dehumanization on this scale. Yet it strikes me that this “difficult zone,” where the boundaries of human civilized subjects begin to dissolve, is precisely where *The Zone of Interest* situates itself, resisting the narrative and formal conceits of traditional historical cinema and, instead of looking away, letting the images press back in their detailed specificity.

Ashes in the Water

Having received a stunning wooden kayak for his birthday, Rudolf Höss, in *The Zone of Interest*, takes several of his children for an outing down the Soła River. Positioned behind Höss, the camera glides with the boat as it silently skims the still water, while Höss sits at ease in a white tank

top rather than his standard uniform. The camera’s gaze is nearly aligned with Höss’s. The children chatter with excitement, the tree-lined banks of the river cool, quiet, and green, sheltering them from the sunlight.

This scene closely echoes the opening of Lanzmann’s *Shoah*. Simon Srebnik, one of only two or three survivors of the extermination camp at Chelmno, sings as he rides in a boat gliding down the Ner River. Now forty-seven years old, Srebnik is singing a Polish folk song he sang as a thirteen-year-old prisoner at the camp; his soprano voice had entertained the Nazi guards, who compelled him to perform, his feet chained, on their journeys down the river and back. Srebnik’s face is placid as he sings about a little house that “lingers in my memory.... When I remember those blissful moments, my heart trembles.” The lush greenery of the trees on the riverbanks passes behind him. In a later scene, Srebnik describes the bodies that were burned in a clearing in the woods. The viewer then discovers the purpose of Srebnik’s daily boat trips. The boy was forced to help hide the scale of the murders taking place at the camp, filling sacks with human ashes and crushed bone from the pyres and dumping them into the river.

The river scene in *The Zone of Interest* offers a similar moment of abject realization, yet its impact is decidedly different. Having stopped by the banks of the river to fish, Rudolf wades waist deep in the water to cast a line, while the children play and swim at the water’s edge. Viewing him now from the front, the camera reveals that Rudolf’s white undershirt is embroidered with a stark black “SS” insignia.

His line becomes caught, and when he tugs it free, he sees that it has become entangled in a human jawbone. His face contorts. Throughout the scene the camera has hung close to Rudolf's point of view, encouraging identification as the audience takes in the pastoral scene from his position. My own shock at the sight of the jawbone seemed at first to align with Rudolf's reaction. But it quickly becomes clear that his horror has nothing to do with the fate of the prisoner whose bones he is holding, but rather with the feared contamination of his children, and himself, by the bones and ashes swirling about them. Rudolf rushes the children out of the water and paddles them home, where his wife and house staff vigorously scrub them clean.

The dialogue between the two films is difficult to parse. There are direct references in the cinematography, in the tactile images of the water, and in the discord between the view of natural tranquility and the knowledge of the remains of torture and death lurking just below the surface. Glazer introduces a new dynamic here, however, in his centering of Höss as the viewers' avatar. What feels initially like a moment of emotional coincidence disintegrates, for this viewer, into revulsion. Höss is enacting a familiar human instinct to protect his children at the same moment that his reaction is utterly, incomprehensibly, inhumane. This is perhaps what Rose refers to as "the fascism of representation": the manipulation of identification structured into the very apparatus of cinema, cinema's tendency to secure the frame of reference, indeed to establish for the viewer which lives are worth apprehending or caring for. The shift in psychological framing that Glazer enacts here exposes the capacity for violence central to the enterprise of representation, and the ease with which it can be weaponized toward political ends.

Blood and Soil in the Garden

In 2012, the BBC accompanied Rainer Höss, the grandson of Rudolf, on a visit to his family's former compound at Auschwitz. Rainer Höss is one of only a few descendants of the family willing to acknowledge and condemn its role in the genocide. When he enters the garden, he is overwhelmed with emotion. "What they built here at the expense of others. And the gall to say that it never happened.... A garden like this doesn't grow by itself."²¹

Margaret Olin observes in films such as *Shoah* a collapsing of the unspeakable past with the persistent materiality of the pastoral present. "[T]he very soil appears to be implicated in mass murder," she writes.²² The centrality

of the garden in *The Zone of Interest* speaks directly to this material and historical folding.

The re-creation of Hedwig's garden is one of the most fascinating aspects of the film's production. Working with photographs of the Höss family grounds, production designer Chris Oddy planted and grew the same flowers and trees. This is an extraordinary decision in terms of money and time, speaking to the investment placed in literally grounding the film in Auschwitz as a site. Oddy's first project was to plant saplings of the same species of trees that now stand over fifty feet tall on the original site, to show the space as it would have looked in the 1940s.²³ The hundreds of plantings throughout the garden had four months to establish, emerging as a strikingly accurate reproduction of Hedwig's designs, as seen in photographs from the era.

The garden scenes are the most idyllic and color saturated of the film. The Höss children run to the swimming pool as Hedwig and Rudolf entertain guests. Stone paths cut through lush green grass, a row of yellow sunflowers bob in the breeze next to dozens of fruit trees. Hedwig's pride in her creation is evident as she gives her mother a tour of the grounds, pointing out a place on the barbed-wire-capped concrete wall she is hoping to cover with vines. Hedwig giddily shares that Rudolf calls her "the queen of Auschwitz." "You've really landed on your feet, my child," her mother replies.

The testimony of the Hösses' gardener, Stanisław Dubiel, a Polish political prisoner at Auschwitz, was one of the texts Glazer drew from when writing the film.²⁴ Largely ignored by the family, the gardener was witness to their private conversations. In the film, the motionless hidden cameras, and the spectators, take up a similar post. Speaking dialogue drawn from the gardener's statement, Rudolf and Hedwig have a heated argument over his pending transfer to the concentration camp at Oranienburg in Germany. When Rudolf insists that it is their duty to leave, Hedwig snaps back: "No, *you* have to leave.... They'll have to drag me out of here. This is our home. Everything we want is right at our doorstep."

Hedwig's maniacal commitment to the "paradise" she had built reflects not only her self-centeredness, but her ruthless contribution to the colonization and "purification" of this Polish outpost. Her garden is a microcosm of the Nazi's "blood and soil" ideology, agrarian romanticism masking a genocidal land grab. Rudolf and Hedwig met as members of the Artaman League, a *völkisch* agrarian ethnonationalist organization.²⁵ Founded in 1923, the Artaman League promoted health, vigor, and racial purity

through a return to traditional rural practices, as personified by the soldier-peasant and the sturdy, fecund housewife.²⁶ Rudolf Höss also met Heinrich Himmler through the Artaman League, leading to his appointment to the Death's Head Formation of SS guards at Dachau.²⁷ The fetishization of idyllic rural peasant life in Artaman ideology was extended into a justification for taking over the Slavic land to the east, and for the eradication of “Jewish influence” in urban centers. The acquisition of fertile farmland was held up as the lifeblood of German survival. Richard Walther Darré’s 1930 book *A New Nobility Based on Blood and Soil* was embraced by the Third Reich, explicitly linking the settler-colonialist project of “blood and soil” to state-sponsored eugenics programs.²⁸

Thus the execution of Jews and Poles is not incidental to Hedwig’s garden; it is precisely part of the plan. The paradise she is building stakes a claim on the land that will soon be “purified,” a shining model for Nazi futurity. Rudolf’s investment in their garden is similarly manifest, if more administrative. He dictates a memo promising to punish anyone who pulls blossoms from the bushes that stand between the family garden and the gates to the camp: “SS members who pick lilacs in a thoughtless manner so the bushes bleed will be punished. This is in the interest of the whole community.” This strangely visceral concern for the lilacs, which bleed like a body when harmed, reflects the incomprehensible dehumanization of the Nazi project, a “community” in which the bodies of the bushes deserve more protection than the thousands of Jewish and Polish prisoners being slaughtered several feet away.

During the garden-tour scene with Hedwig and her mother, the camera pans over verdant rows of vegetables. Droning bees register as artificially loud. The crack of a gunshot intrudes. The pacing of the edits increases rapidly as the screen fills with extreme close-ups of individual flowers: burgundy climbing roses, pale purple sedum, yellow marigolds, a dahlia with lavender-tinged petals. Shouts and screams sound increasingly loud. The unnatural closeness of the blossoms shifts from idyllic hapticity into an aggressive, threatening immersion. The shouts and buzzing build to a crescendo as an extreme close-up of a red dahlia dissolves into a bloodred color field. The viewer is faced with a blank red screen and the sound of anguished screams, which abruptly cut to silence. This sequence is startling, and unexplained. But it registered, for me, as a kind of representational breaking point, where the denial we are witnessing had become not unrepresentable, but unbearable. The past reasserts itself through the material reality of flowers, grown in the same earth and in the same formation as those



A copy of the *NS-Frauen-Warte*, (the National Socialist Women’s Monitor) from 1944 celebrates (Aryan) mothers as the pillars of the Fatherland.

of the Höss garden nearly eighty years ago. If there is any doubt that this soil has been a witness to mass murder, a later scene reveals the secret of its perpetual abundance: a prisoner in a ragged striped uniform mixes shovelfuls of human ashes into the dirt as fertilizer.

The Immaterial Insistence of Sound

Sound, in *The Zone of Interest*, shifts the burden of representing violence out of the field of vision. “The idea of not showing, not reenacting, the atrocities or the violence was absolutely mandatory for me,” Glazer has stated. “There were two films, the one you see and the one you hear.”²⁹

Sound designer Johnnie Burn spent months in the archives researching and mapping exactly what it would have sounded like outside the walls of Auschwitz. He and his team then began recording and re-creating the sounds of the camp machinery as accurately as possible. The result is a continuous bed of sound that feels relentlessly present, at the cusp of intrusiveness.

The sounds of the death camp are omnipresent: grating metal and the blast of the crematorium furnaces, tortured

screams, gunshots, and shouts. This continuous seepage of violence thwarts immersion in the small family dramas that we witness, so forward in the mix that it registers almost inside the ear. Yet the impact of this proximity creates a distance, mirrored in the cinematography—a shock that pulls the viewer away from identification.

But who, in the film, hears this irrefutable evidence of death and suffering? Not the Höss family, it would appear, based on their lack of response or attention. Indeed, much of the creeping horror of the film arises from the failure of the Höss household to notice the din of death that surrounds them. Sound takes up the mantle of representing the atrocities absent from the image. The sounds of torture are immaterial, yet their presence proves the reality that has become routine to the Höss family.

Yet the sounds that the family no longer notice are audible to others. The family Weimaraner (played by Sandra Hüller's actual dog) is ever-present throughout the film, quietly roaming through the house and yard. But the dog interrupts the garden tour Hedwig is giving her mother, barking wildly at the noise of gunshots, shouts, and guard dogs, confirming what is clearly audible to the viewer, but ignored by Hedwig. Her mother hears too. Not yet anesthetized to the soundscape of extermination, she is startled by screams that her daughter appears not to notice. Awakened at night by the stench and roar of the crematorium furnaces, Hedwig's mother stares out the window at the glowing red sky, and a wave of recognition shifts her expression. She leaves the house the next morning without saying goodbye.

These moment of witnessing recognition via hearing serve several purposes. On the one hand, they offer a split second of humane connection between character and audience: you can hear this too, this is happening, someone hears this. Seeing the hearing, the acknowledgment of that soundscape, provides evidence: evidence that the massacre is real, and evidence that everyone present knows exactly what is happening. On the other hand, perhaps the viewers themselves have grown accustomed to the grinding and screaming and the rush of the furnaces, and have also begun to tune them out (as I confess I sometimes did). The moment of recognition then kicks the viewer back into awareness, perhaps with a queasy sense of guilt.

Administrative Massacre and Frames of Grievability

"I am entirely normal," Rudolf Höss told an interviewer during the Nuremberg trials. "Even while I was doing

extermination work, I led a normal family life."³⁰ He did express regret for allowing work to keep him away from his family. He recounts shepherding mothers with small children into the gas chambers, and the challenges this posed in terms of concealing his emotions. And after the Final Solution was initiated, Höss found it even more difficult to maintain a work–life balance. "I was no longer happy at Auschwitz once the mass exterminations had begun," he recalled. "My wife could never understand these gloomy moods of mine, and ascribed them to some annoyance connected with my work."³¹

This jaw-dropping account is consistent with many of the confessions of Nazi war criminals. Höss's memoir, which he was ordered to write in the time period between his arrest in 1946 and execution in 1947, is entirely self-serving. He takes no accountability for the leadership role he played in the murder of some 1 million human beings (the majority of them Jews, but also many thousands of Poles, Roma, Soviet POWs, LGBTQ people, and others), blaming the victims for their own fate.³² Yet his reflections tell us something of the mindset of a fascist executioner and are completely consistent with his depiction, as well as that of his wife, in *The Zone of Interest*.

In her report on the Adolf Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, Hannah Arendt notes the surprising ordinariness of this man, a mastermind of genocide across national borders. What she describes as "banal," however, is not only his mild-mannered presentation, but also his inability to speak coherently, instead stringing together series of meaningless clichés. He evades the prosecutors' attempts to locate some kind of bloodthirsty purpose behind his actions; his attitude toward his wife and children, as presented by a court psychiatrist, were "not only normal but desirable."³³ Eichmann testifies, instead, that he "personally" had no issues with the Jewish people, but as a law-abiding citizen of the Third Reich, he was compelled to follow orders.

I find the phrase Arendt arrives at—"administrative massacre"—useful in the context of *The Zone of Interest*. These inconceivably brazen *claims* of administrative innocence are presented using the empty jargon of industry and the law. The accused couldn't possibly be the monster the prosecutors describe because he is a bourgeois, white-collar, midlevel-management family man "just like you." Even when personal malice is clearly evident (as it often was), if a genocide is performed by an administration or a state, it becomes, at least from a legal perspective, almost impossible to prosecute. Either everyone in the system is guilty by association, or no one can be held guilty as an individual.

There are several recurring scenarios in Martin Amis's novel *The Zone of Interest* in which the unstable boundaries of an administrative massacre come into view. One takes place on the platform where Jewish transports—deceived about the terms of their deportation—disembark from “special trains.” They have been told to bring one piece of luggage and compelled to purchase their own tickets. (“One-way. Half price for children under twelve.”)³⁴ The passengers are led down a ramp to the site of “selection,” where they are divided into those who will serve for labor or for medical experiments, and those who will be marched straight to the gas chambers for execution (“special treatment.”) “Leave your suitcases here, please,” the commandant reassures one set of transports. “You can pick them up at the guest house. Tea and cheese sandwiches will be served immediately.”³⁵

A second scenario involves the psychological and verbal gymnastics the Nazi officers perform while ogling certain Jewish women laborers, sometimes “rescuing” ones they fancy for less grueling jobs and sexual favors. A commandant reflects on his professionalism in not “misbehaving” with prisoners, observing that “you’re seldom tempted, because so few of the women menstruate or have hair.”³⁶ I recall here, too, the scene in film where Rudolf washes his genitals in a utility sink after having sex with a female prisoner he keeps hidden in an underground cell.³⁷ In both instances—on the train platform and with the “laddish” sexual abuse—there is an uncomfortable slippage between referring to prisoners as relatable bourgeois subjects, not unlike the narrators, and returning to language of absolute dehumanization. As a reader, for me these moments were the novel’s most startling and effective: crises of proximity where the corporeal impact of genocidal violence becomes harder to compartmentalize.

The slippage that occurs in these scenes suggests a failure in what Judith Butler might call “framing.” As she argues in *Frames of War*, the perpetuation of violence relies on frames that “differentiate the lives we apprehend from those we cannot.”³⁸ Certain lives are valued and recognizable, while others are not seen as precarious and worthy of protection, grievable. While Glazer’s film has almost nothing in common with Amis’s novel in terms of plot, his laser focus on the domestic life of a Nazi executioner is similarly effective precisely because it is within the domestic space that the leakage and failure and reassertion of these framings of life are performed. And, for fellow bourgeois middle-class Western subjects, these faltering framings may strike very close to home.

The Household as Fascist Corporation

If a fascist household works as a corporation, then part of its administration involves propping up the frames that separate the family from those that are ungrievable. “It is here that my guilt actually begins,” Höss reported in his memoir, arguing that he ought to have requested reassignment for being “too soft.” “I ... should have explained that I was not suited to concentration camp service, because I felt too much sympathy for the prisoners.”³⁹ This is, of course, an insultingly perverse statement. Yet it does reveal something of the psychological work Nazi citizens were asked to perform: internalizing the frame of war so completely that a perceived failure of framing—even when never revealed to others—registers as the primary site of guilt, rather than the execution of hundreds and thousands of human beings.

One of the most significant contributions of *The Zone of Interest* is its highlighting of the gendered labor of the fascist regime. At work, and in conversation with other SS men, Rudolf upholds the austere efficiency of death as an industry, praised by one of his superiors for “putting theory into practice.” His frame is less secure at home, where he obsessively checks that the doors are locked late at night. There is no doubt that the massacre happening over the wall is part of Rudolf’s and his compatriots’ work in a gruesomely corporeal way. But *The Zone of Interest* also highlights the hands-on contributions of homemakers to the fascist agenda.

The management of the Höss home puts the bodies from both sides of the frame in direct contact. The workers in their striped uniforms tend to Hedwig’s plants, pruning and training, following her directives and harvesting food. The household staff, comprising German and Polish prisoners and local Polish employees, are even more directly integrated into the family’s personal care.⁴⁰ Between the hectic hallways and rooms, the servants and family are nearly tripping over each other. The staff wash and feed the children, wipe blood from the commandant’s boots, all the while privy to the most private of conversations. It is in these spaces, too, that the humanness of the victims asserts itself, despite the direct absence of their bodies. With a flourish, Hedwig dumps a parcel of silk lingerie on the kitchen table, and the female house staff are left to claim the undergarments stolen from the executed women in the camp. Hedwig retains for herself a fur coat, which she models before a mirror. When she finds a tube of lipstick in the pocket she pauses, perhaps because she suffers a brief moral twinge, or maybe disgust at her lips touching those of a dead Jewish woman by proxy? Regardless, she soon recovers and gently daubs the stain onto her lips. In such proximity, and with overlapping domestic duties, the distinction



Hedwig (Sandra Hüller) models the fur coat of an Auschwitz victim.

between legitimate personhood and crematorium fodder becomes harder to maintain. Hedwig snaps at the young servant Aniela after a perceived slight: “I could have my husband spread your ashes across the fields of Babice.” There is a knife’s edge to the reversals the war has brought. “I wonder if Esther Siberman is over there,” Hedwig’s mother asks, pointing at the wall. Siberman had once hired the mother to do housekeeping. “I got outbid on her curtains.” The hands-on work of dehumanization sometimes surfaces in shocking ways. One of the Höss boys asks his brother what he is playing with. As he answers, the camera reveals a handful of extracted human teeth, studded with gold fillings.

“Our Hearts Are Not Yet Cold”

Testimony from the Höss staff describes a network of resistance within the household. Janina Szczurek, Hedwig’s Polish dressmaker, described procuring medical supplies for the prisoner garden workers, and sharing with them news about the war. Under the pretense of picking flowers from the garden, Janina would stand watch while Aniela prepared packages of supplies and food to smuggle out.⁴¹ In 1941, a local fourteen-year-old girl, Aleksandra Bystron-Kolodziejczyk, joined the Polish resistance as a “łączniczką w AK” (liaison officer in the Home Army), providing food and medicine and helping to exchange messages for the

prisoners. She described hiding food at night, in the fields, for the prisoners to find when they returned to work.⁴² Aleksandra (Julia Polaczek) is portrayed in the most formally divergent sequences in *The Zone of Interest*: thermal night footage of her sowing ditches with apples and of her fielding messages left by the prisoners.

In a film governed by visual constriction, these thermal sequences register with a jolt. Glazer has suggested that his decision to shoot these sequences as he did was determined by his commitment to only using natural lighting. The result—images of the girl furtively darting through the work fields captured in negative and black-and-white—feels both precarious (given the dangerous act and the surveillance-like imagery) and filled with movement and life. These are some of the only moments of empathy that stretch beyond the circle of the family in the film, across the frame and over the wall.

In one of the thermal sequences, Aleksandra finds a container in a ditch containing the handwritten score for a song. She bicycles back to her home in the dark. Via voice-over, a man speaks in Yiddish, announcing, “Words by Joseph Wulf. Written in 1943 in Oświęcim, Auschwitz III.”⁴³ The lyrics in the found score are from the poem “Sunbeams,” written by Wulf, historian and survivor of Auschwitz, who organized concerts for the prisoners there. He wrote and performed several songs in Yiddish

while imprisoned, including “Sunbeams.” In the film, now in daylight, Aleksandra sits at a piano and picks out the notes to Wulf’s song. We hear only the piano and no voice. The lyrics in translation appear at the bottom of the screen:

*Sunbeams, radiant and warm,
Human bodies, young and old;
And we who are imprisoned here,
Our hearts are not yet cold.*

Wulf survived Auschwitz, and after his release in 1945 he devoted his life to documenting the atrocities committed by the Nazis, writing eighteen books. Yet his attempts to create a Holocaust archive were repeatedly thwarted, and he committed suicide in 1974.

With the benefit of this contextual knowledge, the thermal scenes take on new resonance. There was an active resistance, and collaboration between workers and prisoners of different backgrounds. And there was poetry. Understanding who Wulf is, and that it is his voice that announces the song, and realizing that the household staff organized to support the prisoners, dramatically changed my understanding of these sequences, and the film as a whole. Yet this required a sizable amount of independent research, retracing the work of the production team. Given that few viewers would be likely to invest this kind of attention and time, the film may have left too much of this history unspoken. When crosscut with Höss reading Hansel and Gretel to his children, the scenes of resistance take on an ethereal, fairy-tale-like quality that seems at odds with the film’s overriding resistance to sentimentality. This strikes me as a missed opportunity to represent the nuances of everyday resistance under the Third Reich in the context of the messy, intertwined lives of the prisoners, local residents, and perpetrators living in such close proximity.

Arbeit Macht Frei

The final scene of *The Zone of Interest* includes another rupture. Rudolf Höss, reassigned to an administrative post in Oranienburg, observes a gala party, replete with swastika ice sculptures and an atrium filled with high-profile guests. The audience hears him recount this to Hedwig on the phone; all he can think about, overseeing the revelers from an upper balcony, is how many units of gas it would take to kill them all within that architectural space. Alone in his office, Höss steps into the marble-tiled stairwell, where he begins to violently, and loudly, dry-heave.⁴⁴

The next cut is utterly unanticipated. From Höss gagging, the film relocates to the present-day (circa 2023) Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau after hours, when the custodial staff, all women, dust and vacuum the exhibits. The piles of shoes familiar from Resnais’s *Night and Fog* are visible, but safely enshrined in a glass display case waiting to be wiped down for another batch of visitors. What does it mean that this material evidence of genocide is also now a site of pilgrimage, a museum and tourist destination?⁴⁵ It feels almost obscene to think about Auschwitz as a place where people still work, but of course they do. This is a new chapter in the relationship of Auschwitz as a place, and as a place in relation to the local population and the local economy. The film snaps back to the fictional present of Höss in the stairwell. He regains his composure and departs down the stairwell. This sequence was, for me, the most effective and challenging in the film, where the realness of the location became meaningful in a palpable way, raising questions about place, memorialization, and perspective in the here and now.

The Zone of Interest screened at the New York Film Festival on October 8, 2023, one day after Hamas’s brutal attack on civilians in Israeli towns and a music festival near the border of Gaza. The Israeli carpet-bombing of Palestinians in Gaza began soon after; within weeks tens of thousands of civilians would be killed and many more displaced without water, food, shelter, medical aid, or electricity. It is impossible not to reflect on the frames of war that have come into sharp relief since. These events will recast the reception of *The Zone of Interest*, likely in ways that don’t fairly consider its project, which I read as a provocation for viewers to consider their own capacity for violence. The cold euphemisms and the detached tally of body counts in many Western reports on Gaza echo the bureaucratic rationalizations that Arendt associated with “administrative massacre”; some critics have read *The Zone of Interest* in this context.⁴⁶ Yet the film has also been cited as a justification of Holocaust exceptionalism and continued violence, or used as a surrogate for expressing solidarity with Israel.⁴⁷ (These latter interpretations are clearly at odds with Glazer’s intentions, but they persist nonetheless.) This seems like the most urgent time imaginable to undertake an unsentimental ethnography of the Holocaust, deeply rooted in material detail, in order to challenge viewers to confront how their positionality, identification, memory, and culpability might manifest themselves, in the present, when lives are at stake.

How is it that human beings can do this to other human beings? How do we understand our own locations in history, and what are the limits of our willingness to

question familiar points of view? How is everyday life lived on either side of the wall? And how do different administrative and domestic frameworks establish core ideas about which lives are grievable, and which are not? These are the questions I take away from *The Zone of Interest*. And this is precisely the moment when we cannot afford to stop listening, or to look away.

Notes

1. The epigraphs are from Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 50; and from a letter from Holocaust survivor Joseph Wulf to his son, written shortly before committing suicide in 1974, quoted in Steven Lehrer, *Wannsee House and the Holocaust* (London: McFarland, 2015), 133.
2. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 288, 294.
3. Katarina Docalovich, “Jonathan Glazer’s Holocaust Film *The Zone of Interest* Is More Hollow Than Hollowing,” *Paste*, September 11, 2023, www.pastemagazine.com/movies/jonathan-glazer/the-zone-of-interest-review.
4. Press notes for *The Zone of Interest* (2023), 7.
5. “The Filmmaker and the Rabbi,” conversation between Jonathan Glazer and Marc Soloway, *A Dash of Drash* (podcast), episode 71, July 4, 2018, <https://soundcloud.com/user-685353444/episode-71-the-film-maker-and-the-rabbi-jonathan-glazer-screen-writerdirector-in-conversation>.
6. See Terri Ginsberg, *Holocaust Film: The Political Aesthetics of Ideology* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007). Adorno’s statement appears in the conclusion of his essay “Cultural Criticism and Society,” in *Prisms*, trans. Sherry Weber Nicholsen and Samuel Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 34.
7. In the full context of Adorno’s essay, it is clear that the subject he is writing about is cultural criticism itself. Adorno later clarified that expression was an innate right of those who suffer. For an overview of the misreadings and Adorno’s somewhat confusing response, see James Schmidt, “Poetry after Auschwitz: What Adorno Didn’t Say,” *Persistent Enlightenment* (blog), May 21, 2013, <https://persistentenlightenment.com/2013/05/21/poetry-after-auschwitz-what-adorno-didnt-say/>.
8. Ginsberg, *Holocaust Film*, 3.
9. Michael Haneke, interview by Stephen Calloway, “Oscar Roundtables: The Writers,” *Hollywood Reporter*, November 15, 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_osgrcpes4.
10. Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 43.
11. Wilson: “Rose’s texts were foundational.” Press notes, *The Zone of Interest* (2023), 8.
12. Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 52.
13. Rose, 54.
14. Margaret Olin, “Lanzmann’s *Shoah* and the Topography of the Holocaust Film,” *Representations*, no. 57 (Winter 1997): 1–23.
15. Olin, 2. Stuart Liebman’s description of Lanzmann’s films as a “cinematic theater of and for memory” illuminates both the topographical and ethnographic facets of his work. See Liebman, “Lanzmann’s Memory Theater,” *Criterion Current* (March 4, 2014), <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/3084-lanzmann-s-memory-theater>.
16. Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 2. Also quoted in Emma Wilson, “Material Remains: *Night and Fog*,” *October* 112 (Spring 2005): 104.
17. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2009), 52.
18. Fiona Jenkins, “A Sensate Critique: Vulnerability and the Image in Judith Butler’s ‘Frames of War,’” in “Vulnerability,” ed. Simone Drichel, special issue, *SubStance*, issue 132, vol. 42, no. 3 (2013): 124.
19. Jenkins, 119.
20. Jenkins, 106.
21. BBC News, “Visiting the Family Villa at Auschwitz,” interview with Rainer Höss, May 23, 2012, www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-18180572.
22. Olin, “Lanzmann’s *Shoah*,” 3.
23. Press notes, *The Zone of Interest* (2023).
24. In a perverse twist, Rudolf Höss disguised himself as a gardener to avoid persecution after the war. See Elizabeth Renzetti, “Nazi Hunter: Exploring the Power of Secrecy and Silence,” *Globe and Mail*, November 7, 2013.
25. Rudolf Höss, *Commandant of Auschwitz: The Autobiography of Rudolf Hoess*, trans. Constantine FitzGibbon (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1959), 67.
26. The ideology of Artaman is still actively promoted by neo-Nazi, eco-fascist, and white-supremacist #tradwife gardening groups online. See, for example, www.facebook.com/artamanleague/.
27. Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power, 1933–1939* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 84.
28. In 2021, Antelope Hill Publishing, an explicitly white-supremacist US publisher, released an English-language version of the book. More information on Antelope Hill Publishing’s promotion of historical fascist texts is available at the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Hatewatch web page: www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2022/06/13/white-nationalist-book-publishers-revealed.
29. Jonathan Glazer, comments at the New York Film Festival, October 9, 2023.

30. Quoted in G. M. Gilbert, *Nuremberg Diary* (New York: Signet, 1961), 237.
31. Höss, 172–73.
32. See “Ethnic Origins and Number of Victims of Auschwitz,” Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, http://70.auschwitz.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=89&Itemid=173&lang=en. Höss wrote extensively about the different categories of prisoners at the camps he oversaw, including homosexual men and Jehovah’s Witnesses, throughout his autobiography.
33. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 26.
34. Martin Amis, *The Zone of Interest* (London: Vintage, 2014), 41.
35. Amis, 25.
36. Amis, 125.
37. The female prisoner depicted here is modeled on Eleonore Hodys, an Austrian political prisoner at Auschwitz. After Hedwig became suspicious of Rudolf’s interest in Hodys, who worked in their home, Höss kept Hodys in solitary confinement in an underground cell, where he regularly visited her. See Herlinde Pauer-Studer and J. David Velleman, “Rudolf Höss and Eleonore Hodys,” in *Konrad Morgen: The Conscience of a Nazi Judge* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
38. Butler, *Frames of War*, 12.
39. Höss, *Commandant of Auschwitz*, 87.
40. According to testimony, the Höss home staff included both local employees and prisoner-workers; the film includes characters named in the testimony. The head gardener, Stanisław Dubiel, was a Polish political prisoner who managed the grounds and supplies with other prisoner-workers. The children’s nanny, Elfryda, was a German employee who oversaw household staff. The domestic staff included several German Jehovah’s Witness prisoner-workers, including Sophie Stipel, and a local Polish employee, Aniela Bednarska. The local employees felt obligated to accept positions under orders of the occupying forces. Witnesses reported that Hedwig Höss refused to allow Jewish prisoners to work inside the home. See the testimony of Dubiel and Polish dressmaker Janina Szczurek in the appendices of *KL Auschwitz Seen by the SS: Höss, Broad, Kremer*, ed. Jadwiga Bezwińska and Danuta Czech (Auschwitz: Państwowe Muzeum w Oświęcimiu, 1972).
41. Bezwińska and Czech, 293–94.
42. “Aleksandra Kołodziejczyk,” Stowarzyszenie Auschwitz Memento / Projekt Pilecki, n.d., <https://auschwitzmemento.pl/relacje/aleksandra-kolodziejczyk/>. Other details about the Höss villa and staff were drawn from interviews held by the museum archive, including the diary of Aniela Bednarska, who meticulously described the décor. A number of these firsthand accounts are referenced in Lauren Ditty’s undergraduate honors thesis in history, “Knowledge and Complicity: High Society Women and the Third Reich” (Georgetown University, May 4, 2009), <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/555511/DittyLaurenThesis.pdf>.
43. The voice-over is taken from a recording of Wulf singing the song (n.d.). I presume the voice we hear speaking in the film is that of Wulf himself. See Joseph Wulf, “Joseph Wulf Sings ‘Sunbeams’ (in Yiddish), Written in Auschwitz III,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn671467>.
44. This scene references the final frames of Joshua Oppenheimer’s documentary *The Act of Killing* (2012). There, the Indonesian mass executioner Anwar Congo describes the executions he oversaw in his homeland, and is overcome with retching. *The Zone of Interest* has a great deal in common with *The Act of Killing*, particularly in terms of the elaborate pre-production process and the embedded, archivally informed performances, which could be considered a kind of fictionalized reenactment.
45. Robert Jan van Pelt, also cited by Glazer and Wilson as informing their production process, has written in moving ways about questions of identification and memorialization at Auschwitz. See Robert Jan van Pelt, “Auschwitz and the Architecture of the Reversed Gaze,” *e-flux Architecture*, October 2020, www.e-flux.com/architecture/monument/351167/auschwitz-and-the-architecture-of-the-reversed-gaze/.
46. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 288. One of the more thoughtful articles on *The Zone of Interest* presents this issue directly to Glazer, who recounts his distress over the killing of Israelis by Hamas as well as the weaponization of the Holocaust to justify attacks against Gaza; see Giles Harvey, “How Do You Make a Movie about the Holocaust?” *New York Times Magazine*, December 19, 2023, www.nytimes.com/2023/12/19/magazine/movies-holocaust-zone-of-interest.html.
47. See, for example, Matthew D’Ancona, “Israel Cannot Act Alone Again: The World Must Build a Post-Hamas Gaza,” *New European*, October 16, 2023, www.theneweuropean.co.uk/its-time-the-world-acted-to-defeat-the-hamas-terrorists-and-help-the-people-of-the-middle-east-rebuild/. For Glazer’s explicit rejection of exceptionalism, see Harvey, “How Do You Make a Movie about the Holocaust?” A *Newsweek* article on actress Amy Schumer’s endorsement of *The Zone of Interest* suggests how polarizing and chaotic the film’s reception has become; see Shannon Power, “Amy Schumer Sparks Backlash over Her ‘Movie of the Year,’” *Newsweek*, December 29, 2023, www.newsweek.com/amy-schumer-nazi-movie-year-israel-gaza-1856178.