

Article

From Lanzmann's Circle of Flames to Bodies in Pain: Anglo-American Holocaust Fiction and Representations of the Gas Chamber

David Dickson

Independent Researcher, Callander, Perthshire FK17 8JQ, UK; david.dickson86@gmail.com

Received: 24 July 2020; Accepted: 17 August 2020; Published: 25 August 2020



Abstract: This article discusses the apparent desire in Anglo-American Holocaust fiction to form a deeper connection to the horror of the Holocaust by recreating scenes of suffering in the gas chamber. Using Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*, Alison Landsberg's theory of 'prosthetic memory' and the concept of 'feeling-with' as outlined by Sonia Kruks, it discusses the motives underlying these representations and what an audience stands to learn from these bodily encounters with the Holocaust past. The article begins by discussing texts that explore the notions of temporal and emotional distance and the unreachability of the Holocaust dead, while also reflecting the corresponding impulse to reconnect with the murdered by physicalising them as bodies in pain. It then moves on to works that aim to make the experience of death in the gas chamber literally inhabitable for present-day nonwitnesses. In pursuing this argument, the article focuses on six representative texts: Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), Bryan Singer's *Apt Pupil* (1998), Tim Blake Nelson's *The Grey Zone* (2001), *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006 and 2008), for the book and film respectively), *In Paradise* (2014) by Peter Matthiessen and Mick Jackson's *Denial* (2016).

Keywords: Holocaust piety; prosthetic memory; gas chamber; Holocaust fiction; embodiment; bodies in pain

1. Introduction

In his essay 'From the Holocaust to the *Holocaust*', Claude Lanzmann launches an excoriating attack upon Marvin J. Chomsky and Gerald Green's 1978 *Holocaust* miniseries. He derides the de-Judaising of the central family, claiming that the Jewish victims presented in the programme were specifically designed to "differ in no way from the spectators or even from their executioners" (Lanzmann 1979, p. 138) and takes particular issue with the creators' desire to represent death in the gas chamber. It is here that he first states his frequently invoked moral prohibition that "a circle of flames" surrounds the Holocaust, and specifically the representation of mass extermination, as he contends that "a certain absolute horror" (p. 139) can never be transmitted by fictional representations of Holocaust pain. Every attempt to do so, he asserts, represents a transgressive and trivialising lie. As his essay establishes, this "absolute horror" relates to trauma, and specifically the extent to which it may be relived and witnessed. While Lanzmann's work generally relies on the re-traumatisation of living witnesses—as Dominick LaCapra notes, *Shoah* invokes the Holocaust in the present by staging "the incarnation, actual reliving, or compulsive acting out" (LaCapra 1997, p. 235) of past traumas—there are, as he puts it, no living witnesses to communicate the horror of the gas chamber, as none who went in "came back among us to testify" (Lanzmann 1979, p. 139). Despite its avoidance of graphic depictions, therefore, Lanzmann's work demonstrates a desire to connect to the tangible pain of the Shoah by invoking the trauma of living witnesses in the present. He may not be able to access the interior reality of their suffering, or to experience first-hand what they experienced, but he can create a tangible link

back to the Holocaust past by invoking the unprocessed pain of victims in the present and bearing witness to it. Building on this idea, this article sets out to explore how creators and audiences with no direct experience of the Holocaust seek to connect to the past in an age in which it is becoming increasingly distant. Like Lanzmann, it argues, modern creators and audiences share a desire to create a tangible connection to the Holocaust. Unable to access survivors and their lived trauma, however, they have resorted instead to creating and consuming graphic recreations of Holocaust suffering. Moreover, in their desperation to feel something of the atrocity on a bodily level, they have also increasingly sought to violate Lanzmann's ultimate taboo—by recreating scenes of death in the gas chamber. This article explores the emergence of this trend in Anglo-American Holocaust fiction, and its eventual culmination, by focusing on six texts—Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (Spielberg 1993), Bryan Singer's *Apt Pupil* (Singer 1998), Mick Jackson's *Denial* (Jackson 2016, *In Paradise*) (Matthiessen 2014) by Peter Matthiessen, Tim Blake Nelson's *The Grey Zone* (Nelson 2001) and both iterations of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (Boyne [2006] 2008; Herman 2008). These specific works have been chosen as, together, they represent the most graphic evocations of the gas chamber that exist in Anglo-American Holocaust fiction. Taken as a whole, they therefore represent the emergence of a growing compulsion in Western media to form a deeper connection with the Holocaust past by engaging with this particular space. While Spielberg and Singer's texts are used to highlight the feeling of emotional distance that has come to dominate fictional representations of the Holocaust, while also expressing a clear desire to explore the gas chamber interior, the 21st century texts featured show the culmination of this trend. Not only do they enter into the gas chamber space, but they aim to make the concept of Jewish mass extermination more approachable—and even inhabitable—to a non-Jewish audience.

2. Background

In his book *Fantasies of Witnessing*, Gary Weissman discusses the temporal and emotional distance that exists between present-day media consumers and the Holocaust. Specifically, his text addresses the attempts of nonwitnesses to form a felt connection with the Holocaust past by vicariously engaging with acts of violence. Using as a foundation George Steiner's assertion that those who remember the Holocaust "only by fiat of imagination" have a "fearful envy" and "dim resentment" (Steiner [1967] 1990, p. 330) of not having experienced it first hand, he contends that critics have ignored the potential that "many non-witnesses" (Weissman 2004, p. 122) do indeed desire to connect to the Holocaust on a deeper level—to have, in essence, experienced a part of it themselves. This is often achieved, he suggests, through imaginative encounters with bodies in pain. At the opening of his text he cites the example of Michael Lax, the son of a Holocaust survivor, who visited Mauthausen in an attempt to connect to his father's experiences. However, there was nothing about the "tidy camp" of the present day "that could help [Michael] imagine it full of walking skeletons. It had the cold soul of a museum" (p. 2). In short, Michael cannot bring the Holocaust to life in the present as the landscape of Mauthausen cannot possibly hope to conjure images of its Holocaust past. Instead, Michael begins to connect to the Mauthausen landscape only after imaginatively reintroducing the image of suffering prisoners into the space. When Michael visits the "lake of parachuters", he vividly connects to the image of the SS "throwing helpless prisoners off the cliff and pushing them down the stairs" (p. 3). This fills him with rage, creating a distinctly bodily response to historical suffering. Finally, as Weissman notes, the landscape of Mauthausen has come alive for Michael, as it no longer possesses the cold soul of a museum. Instead, he now feels that he has touched the essence of his father's Holocaust pain. However, as Weissman goes on to clarify, Michael's father had "never actually set foot in the Mauthausen quarry" (p. 4), and nor had he even seen it prior to this visit, and so Michael has not connected with his father's past. Instead, he has latched on to an evocative, powerful image of bodily suffering—one which was able to inspire a corresponding response in his own body. It is for this reason, I contend, that Anglo-American media is intent on representing death in the gas chamber. As Barry Langford argued, the "ultimate stages of the extermination process" had generally not been addressed by "popular realist" (Langford 1999, p. 32) Holocaust fiction. The gas chamber

door, he states, served as “a literal threshold of unrepresentability, a physical and textual marker of the point beyond which depiction ceases to be permissible or even possible” (p. 32). As such, as the one element of the Holocaust that avoided direct representation—and which, due to its previous unrepresentability, still possessed an untapped emotional charge—the gas chamber came to serve as an increasingly common means of connecting to the Holocaust in Anglo-American media following the turn of the millennium. As Langford argues, Lanzmann is “most transfixed by those sights he himself deems not only unrecorded but unrecordable” (p. 30), and it is precisely this idea of inaccessibility—this notion of a conceptual core of the atrocity that cannot be reached—that has led to visual and literary reproductions of scenes of death in the gas chamber. By engaging with these reproductions, latter day viewers and readers are able to touch the Holocaust past and, like Michael Lax, experience a moment of bodily engagement with historical suffering. This has come to represent, in the media of the post-memorial present, the last means of connecting with the atrocity and bridging the years of temporal and emotional distance that have led to the Holocaust feeling “distant, remote [and] unreal” (Weissman 2004, p. 24).

Returning briefly to the ethics of representation, it may also be argued that this new focus on the gas chamber interior would seem to imply, as Gavriel D. Rosenfeld has put it, that there are “no longer any limits—cognitive, moral or aesthetic—to representing the Holocaust” (Rosenfeld 2015, p. 27). Fiction has violated Lanzmann’s circle of flame, as the gas chamber door no longer represents the threshold of permissible representation but rather a portal that, as this article demonstrates, fiction now seeks to pass through—often literally acting out this moment of transition. As Terence Des Pres has outlined, a series of moral prescriptions previously governed the representation of the Holocaust. He identifies the first, and arguably most impactful, of these limitations as being: “The Holocaust shall be represented, in its totality, as a unique event, as a special case of its own, above or below or apart from history” (Des Pres 1988, p. 217). This insistence on the uniqueness of the Holocaust, and specifically the notion that it must not be normalised or homogenised, then set corresponding limits on the forms of representation that could theoretically be used to portray the atrocity. As Langford argues, a fear existed that the standard narrative forms that were used in cinema, given its particular reliance on genre tropes, were simply inadequate and endangering to the task of representing the Nazi genocide. Simply put, were the “generic resources” that brought us Sam Spade and Billy the Kid capable of “dealing with the pits, the gas chambers and the crematoria”? (Langford 1999, p. 33). The frequent representation of the gas chamber space within this medium, therefore, risked domesticating the Holocaust for Anglo-American audiences, and thereby making the atrocity all too fathomable and approachable. Underpinning this idea was Elie Wiesel’s famous warning regarding the unfathomability or unreachability of the Holocaust for those who did not experience it directly:

We speak in code, we survivors, and this code cannot be broken, cannot be deciphered, not by you no matter how much you try. A novel about Treblinka is either not a novel or not about Treblinka. A novel about Majdanek is about blasphemy. *Is* blasphemy. (Wiesel 1990, p. 7)

Wiesel, therefore, established a firm boundary between those who have direct experience of the Holocaust and all non-witnesses. A “wall that cannot be pierced” (p. 7) stands between the sufferer’s experiences, along with their particular wartime psychology, and those looking to connect with the Holocaust in the present. It is partially for this reason, therefore, that Holocaust fiction had come to adopt what Gillian Rose would term a commitment to “ineffability” (Rose 1996, p. 43). According to Rose’s concept of Holocaust Piety, Holocaust fiction frequently sought to obscure our understanding of the past—particularly on a psychological level—by seeking “to mystify something we dare not understand” (p. 43). It avoided morally complex character portraits and, in the fashion of *Schindler’s List*, instead relied on broad, inaccessible archetypes in order to keep the viewer at a distance from the character. Schindler is not a character with fathomable motivations and approachable flaws, Rose argues, but rather a “ludicrous saviour on a charger” (p. 45). As this article will go on to discuss, certain texts now aim to take a more impious approach to the psychology of the victims of

the Holocaust—Tim Blake Nelson’s *The Grey Zone*, specifically, tries to depict the psychology of the *Sonderkommando*—and yet, I contend, these attempts are always undermined by fiction’s desire to focus on the gas chamber. As fiction has become more focused on bodies in pain and graphic representations of the extermination process, it has moved further away from a genuinely impious approach to the victims of the atrocity. Mathew Boswell states that fiction has begun “striking out against ineffability and silence through vividly realistic representations of the killing and degradation that took place” (Boswell 2012, p. 4) during the Holocaust. This article will starkly oppose this idea by suggesting that, rather than contributing to our understanding of the Holocaust, these gratuitous representations of bodies in pain are in fact inherently pious. They do not create a “crisis of identity” (Rose 1996, p. 46) in the viewer’s breast, as they are made to understand precisely how the *Sonderkommando*, the *Judenrat* or the Jewish police became complicit in facilitating the Nazi genocide. Instead, due to the current focus on bodily engagement, viewers are unable to learn anything of the Holocaust as they are only able to engage with images of bodies in pain—bodies that can communicate nothing, as the work of Elaine Scarry will outline, beyond the all-consuming nature of their own pain.

3. Methodology

As this article aims to build on Weissman’s aforementioned assertions regarding present-day attempts to connect to bodies in pain, it will utilise the work of three authors who have addressed either the nature of physical pain or, relatedly, our capacity to connect to the pain of others—Elaine Scarry, Alison Landsberg and Sonia Kruks. Beginning with *The Body in Pain*, Scarry draws a firm distinction between the mind and the body. Consistently, the body is portrayed as an alien, burdensome element, uncontrollable in its randomness and with the capacity to erase self and language. It is described separately as a “colossus” to which one is “tied”, but with which they feel “no kinship” (Scarry [1985] 1987, p. 31), and an element that we, the thinking portion of the self, instinctively wish to flee in times of pain. She describes the fashion in which children and animals, in the “first moments of acute distress” (p. 47), try to take flight from their own bodies in an attempt to leave behind their physical selves. Adults, however, have learned to accept that the physical form is inescapable, though this does not diminish their sense of alienation. In Scarry’s text, physical pain is described as possessing the power to obliterate the “contents of the consciousness” (p. 30). In moments of extreme suffering, she suggests, “the name of one’s child” and the “memory of a friend’s face” are totally absent, as “all the mental content that constitutes both one’s self and one’s world” (p. 30) ceases to exist. For Scarry, therefore, the body in pain is effectively removed from its own past, as the material reality of physical suffering consumes the subject’s rational mind and shrinks their memory and conception of self to the point of nonexistence. At the root of Scarry’s writing, therefore, is the core presumption that there has always been a “latent disconnection” (p. 48) between self and body that is merely brought to the fore and highlighted by moments of extreme physical distress. This will be particularly relevant to the discussion of the texts featured in this article, as it lays the foundation for my rebuttal against Boswell’s assertion that graphic representations of Holocaust suffering can enhance our understanding of the Holocaust. If we are to adhere to a strict Gillian Rosean sense of impiety, then these moments of physical engagement are not instructive as we learn nothing about the victims of the Holocaust beyond the brute fact of their pain. As they are consumed by their suffering, and essentially removed from their own personal histories by the vividness of their pain, we are able to engage only a purely corporeal level.

As the article is focused on Anglo-American Holocaust media—the intention of which is, generally speaking, to provide a fictionalised portrait of the Holocaust for broadly non-Jewish audiences—it will also feature two theorists who focus on attempts at bodily engagement that cross ethnic and racial lines. There is, after all, a reason why the Weiss family in the *Holocaust* miniseries was framed as being “saintly, aspirationally *bourgeois* Jewish ‘representatives’”, who appear to be “whiter-than-white” (Langford 1999, p. 36). It was, in short, an attempt to facilitate audience engagement by presenting a series of bodies with which the intended audience could identify. In this way, audiences are

more likely to inhabit the characters' moments of suffering and so form a bodily attachment to their on-screen traumas. This idea of facilitating bodily engagement, and the possible limitations concerning engagement with bodies distinctly unlike our own, is explored using two concepts: "feeling-with", as defined by Sonia Kruks, and Alison Landsberg's "prosthetic memory".

Expanding upon Max Scheler's notion of *Mitgefühl*, or "fellow feeling", Kruks uses the idea of "feeling-with" in order to discuss the need for 21st century feminism to engage with the experiences of others with different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Particularly, she is interested in finding a form of engagement that is non-appropriative and does not result in "losing oneself in excessive identification" (Kruks 2001, p. 156). Rather than fully inhabiting the experiences of the Other, Kruks argues that feeling-with simply involves a sympathetic moment of discomfort—a reflexive feeling of unease in one's own body—that provides a tangible connection to the pain of the sufferer. Describing her own encounter with a victim of domestic abuse—a woman of Nigerian descent, whose cultural experiences were therefore entirely distinct from her own—Kruks describes her visceral response to the sight of the woman's injuries:

As I imagined the blows raining down on the woman's face . . . my own stomach knotted and I felt nauseous . . . Thus, while my primary attention was on her suffering and I could feel-with her pain, I was also sharply aware of my own body and discrete. (p. 166)

According to Kruks, therefore, feeling-with requires both an imaginative engagement with the suffering of the Other and a corresponding physical response in one's own body, which then stops the observer from trying to literally inhabit their felt pain. Kruks, in this instance, remained a discrete entity, conscious of the limits of her own body. Despite this, however, she also views this moment of sympathetic discomfort as having provided a bodily connection to the sufferer. As she puts it, the raw immediacy of the sympathetic response that she felt in her own body possessed the capacity to temporarily breakdown the cultural and ethnic differences between herself and the sufferer: "When I feel-with the pain of another, the immediacy of the experience temporarily suspends our social differences. I remain subliminally aware of them . . . but they remain at the periphery of my attention" (p. 161). While she is careful to note that she does not lose sight of the distinctions that separate her from those she is feeling-with, she does actively concede that her own physical response has physically linked her to the Nigerian woman's pain. For a moment, they are connected on a bodily level as they are both experiencing a felt response as a result of exposure to the same stimulus—namely, a previous act of violence and its resulting injuries. This bodily connection "momentarily" (p. 161) creates the experience of their being equals, breaking down the social and experiential differences that previously separated them. As such, it allows her to engage with the experiences of the racial and cultural Other, while still broadly respecting the boundaries of the person in question and not seeking to fully take on their experiences as her own. She has merely formed a visceral, felt connection to their bodily pain that has come to enhance her own worldview as she has reached beyond the limits of her "white, middle class, heterosexual" (p. 154) identity.

Correspondingly, Alison's Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memory is functionally identical to the notion of feeling-with, with the slight exception that her focus is on the power of cinema and commemorative institutions to foster feelings of bodily engagement. In parallel with Kruks, Landsberg stresses the power of these "experiential sites" to provide people in the present day with "a deeply felt memory of a past event" through which they "did not live" (Landsberg 2004, p. 2). These prosthetic memories derive their name from several key factors. Most notably, Landsberg highlights their artificiality—as they are entirely "mediated memories" derived from encounters with film, television and the exhibits displayed in memorial institutions and museums—and their bodily element. As she puts it: "these memories, like an artificial limb, are actually worn on the body; these are sensuous memories produced by an *experience* of mass-mediated representations" (p. 20). As with the concept of feeling-with, therefore, the deep feeling of prosthetic memory is derived from a felt physical response to being brought into close proximity to the suffering of others—albeit a simulation of suffering

rather than the real thing. Landsberg, for instance, discusses the feeling of bodily vulnerability that viewers may feel when watching Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*. Viewers "cringe and wriggle" (p. 125) in their seats when placed in close proximity to the vividly realised suffering of, for instance, the hingemaker who is menaced and then killed by Amon Goethe, the sexualised vulnerability of Helen Hirsch or the anxiety of the *Schindlerjuden* who fear they may be gassed following their arrival in Auschwitz. As such, in parallel with the concept of "feeling-with", the individual is brought into close contact with the experience of the cultural or ethnic Other—having been made to feel a sympathetic bodily response to their suffering—that then generates a deeply felt sense of connection to their plight, one that overcomes the "chasms of difference" (p. 3) that separate them from one-another. Indeed, Landsberg views prosthetic memory as a "powerful corrective" (p. 21) to identity politics, as the viewer or museum visitor may powerfully engage with the suffering of the Other while still maintaining a sense of their own identity.

A significant complication underpins both theories, however, as both are limited by the concept of bodily difference. While Kruks concedes that her "affective response to a man's pain is weaker", as she highlights the experiential boundaries that come from living in "sexed and gendered" bodies (Kruks 2001, p. 167), Landsberg suggests that audiences struggle to engage with bodies that are too physically and culturally dissimilar to their own. While Jewish audiences may be able to engage with the "emaciated, inhuman creatures" depicted in Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog*, she asserts, non-Jewish audiences require bodies with which they "might actually have a mimetic relationship" (Landsberg 2004, p. 124). These are bodies, she contends, almost identical to their own, that are both represented as being in the fullness of health and stripped of any particularising qualities—or, put another way, anything that may highlight their cultural distinctiveness. These notions are, therefore, particularly useful when discussing cinematic and literary attempts to portray Holocaust suffering, as Holocaust fiction continues to exhibit a tendency towards providing bodies that are designed to facilitate this kind of bodily engagement. Several of the texts featured display bodies that are either calibrated specifically to appeal to non-Jewish audiences, as in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, or provide bodies that have been entirely removed from any kind of humanising context—as in *Denial* and *The Grey Zone*.

By combining the works of Scarry, Kruks and Landsberg, therefore, this article seeks to highlight the inherently problematic nature of our current fictional preoccupation with the gas chamber. Audiences have been primed, it will argue, to engage with the Holocaust past through bodily engagement with the pain of others—with death in the gas chamber serving as the most potent and vital example of Holocaust pain.

4. *Schindler's List*, *Apt Pupil* and Emotional Distance

In his book *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation*, Michael Rothberg discusses Lanzmann's use of a handheld camera to explore the landscape of Auschwitz I and, in particular, his visual representation of the reconstructed crematorium. Though he technically maintains his anti-representational stance by focusing only on the present-day landscape, Rothberg contends that there is a dark impulse in Lanzmann's particular framing of the crematorium and its interior: "It seems to indicate a mute desire for a confirmation of horror beyond historical documentation, expressive affect, or the 'presence of absence' ... this mimetic gesture suggests a desire to touch the real in a more direct way" (Rothberg 2000, p. 237). Evident in Lanzmann's use of the handheld camera, therefore, is a desire to connect to the space in a more intimate, experiential fashion. It is not the static framing of the Auschwitz landscape, but a more active walkthrough of the space as the camerawork visually supplements Filip Müller's description of his first experience in the crematorium. This adds an extra element of engagement to the spoken word by supplementing the cognitive with the bodily. Anglo-American Holocaust fiction, correspondingly, is frequently gripped by this impulse to touch the Holocaust in a more direct way. However, rather than focusing on the present-day landscape

and keeping the dead at a respectful remove, it focuses instead on vividly realised scenes of bodily suffering and the corporeality of the murdered.

Two notable pre-21st century texts provide evidence of this as a growing trend in Holocaust fiction: *Schindler's List* and Bryan Singer's *Apt Pupil*. While Spielberg does not, in fact, represent a scene of mass death, he does provide the stylistic foundations that other filmmakers would later go on to utilise in their attempts to depict the "impossible space" (p. 238) of the gas chamber interior. He carries forward Lanzmann's desire to "touch" the horror of the Holocaust in a more direct way by once again using a handheld camera in order to better inhabit the scene. The viewer is made to feel part of the crowd of naked women as they are herded into the gas chamber, fully anticipating that they are about to die. Even though he ultimately determines that the graphic depiction of death in the gas chamber is "socially unrepresentable" (p. 238), the visual language of Spielberg's film does hint at his desire to place himself in close proximity to the murdered. Up to the point that the illusion is lifted, and the sequence is revealed to have been an editorial trick designed to heighten the viewer's anxiety, he did effectively simulate Jewish victims being led to their deaths. In effect, he therefore provided the template for a prosthetic memory of gassing, having established the means by which a filmmaker might—should they be so inclined—generate bodily engagement with the sufferer. This will be especially relevant to the later discussion of *The Grey Zone*, which serves as a counterpoint to Spielberg's restraint while also borrowing from his stylistic template.

Apt Pupil, by contrast, takes a rather more literal approach to the Anglo-American desire to touch the horror of the Holocaust by having a sequence in which the protagonist imagines himself into the gas chamber. The film focuses on a young man named Tom Bowden who, while working on a high school project about the Holocaust, discovers that his neighbour—a reserved older man named Arthur Denker—is in fact a Nazi war criminal. At the outset, the film can be read as an attempt to explore the idea—best articulated by Emily Miller Budick—that those investigating the Holocaust should ideally subject themselves to a kind of "psychoanalytic self-scrutiny" (Budick 2015, p. 13) in order to determine their true motives for focusing on the subject. Of particular concern to her is a "voyeuristic overinvestment in the subject of the Holocaust" (p. 14), that can lead to a sometimes prurient desire to root around in the horrors of the past—always at the expense of the victims' humanity. Tom Bowden is the perfect encapsulation of this idea, as his sole aim in seeking out the former Nazi is to have scenes of gratuitous bodily suffering described to him in minute detail. In their first discussion, he wishes to know of the precise details of the gassing process—from how long it took, to what state the bodies were in following its completion and what happened to the children. When the film focuses on his ever-growing pile of research material—which features atrocity imagery, assorted texts and a photograph of the gas chamber door—it is to highlight the excessiveness of his interest. In her essay 'A Pedagogy of Trauma (or a Crisis of Cynicism)', Janet Alsup discusses the lack of emotional affect that she witnessed in her students as they discussed the Holocaust and its representation. Instead of demonstrating the "sadness, horror and emotional overload" that she expected from them as they processed the texts, she noted that many responded to the course with either "passive acceptance of the teacher's agenda" (Alsup 2003, p. 78) or a cynicism that caused them to rebel against the teachers' presentation of the Holocaust—in one case, to the point of performative Holocaust denial. This stems, she argues, from the Holocaust becoming ever more "historical" to students and therefore less "real" (p. 78). The character of Tom Bowden, therefore, represents an extreme version of this Holocaust cynicism as, in his desperation to connect to the events and thereby make them less abstract, he seeks out a former Nazi and begins luxuriating in descriptions of bodily horror. This attempt to form a connection to the past is then literalised in a sequence in which Bowden, after entering the school showers, imagines himself into the gas chamber. As he stands under the shower, the camera pans to the left and then to the right in order to highlight the naked bodies of those who shower next to him. In a continuing, unbroken shot, the camera then pans back to the left to show the image of an emaciated internee. Bowden is now suddenly standing in between two gaunt, over-present bodies as they go through the motions of showering. The viewer is then shown extreme close-ups of a frail torso and

two aged, humane faces as the room fills with an obscuring smoke. This exaggerated emphasis on the physicality of the victims, from the deliberate focus on their worn faces and haunted eyes to the thinness of their bodies, represents a clear attempt to physicalise the victims of the Holocaust. They are no longer abstract, but immediate and here. Under ideal circumstances, this should serve as a chastening moment for Bowden, as the Holocaust has been effectively brought to life. This sequence is, after all, presented as a waking nightmare and so—within the context of a more reasonable film—should be read as his own unconscious chastening him for his Holocaust voyeurism. However, as Aaron Kerner has noted, this is not a meditative film about modern society's sometimes too prurient interest in Holocaust pain, but rather a “dramatic thriller” (Kerner 2011, p. 53) that chooses to pit its two central characters against one-another in a homoerotic war of wits. Bowden is not a reasonable character who might learn from this experience, but rather a sexual sadist who derives satisfaction only from the total mastery that he is able to exert over the ageing Denker. He is, in effect, Denker's young doppelgänger, who gradually metamorphoses into a young murderer. The film's ultimate descent into tawdriness, however, should not distract from the fact that it does initially contain an apt presentation of the Anglo-American tendency to focus on scenes of bodily pain and look for an engagement with the past that is purely mediated by the body. These themes are certainly present, even though they are overridden by the film's more salacious elements.

5. *Denial, In Paradise and Commemorative Spaces*

Both Mick Jackson's *Denial* and Peter Matthiessen's *In Paradise* focus on the reality of present-day Auschwitz and the concept of temporal and emotional distance from the Holocaust past. Beginning with Jackson's *Denial*, the film initially conveys the memory of the Holocaust using two key tools—material traces, in the form of the artefacts displayed in Auschwitz I, and a Lanzmannesque focus on absence. As Richard Rampton—British libel lawyer and leading council in Deborah Lipstadt's case against David Irving—tours the Auschwitz site in preparation for the case, the viewer is shown a series of common Holocaust images. Following initial glimpses of the Birkenau railroad, the camp barracks and the *Arbeit Macht Frei* entranceway, the film focuses on the material traces left behind by the Holocaust dead—from a pile of glasses, to a series of static shots of suitcases and finally a lingering look at the mountainous piles of leather shoes displayed in a series of parallel cases. This is significant, as Rampton had initially stated that he wished to visit Auschwitz as he believed that it would provide him with the “appetite” to pursue the case with the vigour that it deserved. He is looking for a re-vitalising connection to the Holocaust past that will steel him for his upcoming battle with Irving. However, in focusing on the artefactual, Jackson's film seems to hint at the insufficiency of artefacts and commemorative spaces to generate this kind of felt connection to the atrocity itself. As James E. Young notes in *The Texture of Memory*, these artefacts do not contribute to our understanding of the Holocaust past, but arguably exacerbate its remoteness and incomprehensibility. In a Gillian Rosean fashion Young asks, “what do we understand of the killers and victims through their remains?” (Young 1993, p. 132). By this he means, do these material traces revivify the dead and render them more approachable? And, in response, we must concede that they do not. Viewing the artefacts featured in the Auschwitz memorial museum cannot generate a sense of humanising understanding by making the psychology of the dead more approachable. As Young goes on to argue, they do not add humanising texture to the Holocaust dead, but render them as “memorial ghosts”:

Armless sleeves, eyeless lenses, headless caps, footless shoes: victims are known only by their absence, by the moment of their destruction ... For when the memory of a people and its past are reduced to the bits and rags of their belongings, memory of life itself is lost. (p. 132)

By their nature, therefore, these artefacts can only provide a pious understanding of the Holocaust, as they represent the murdered only as absent and entirely unreachable figures. We cannot form a clearer understanding of them, as they are present only in the “bits and rags” of their former lives. By featuring

these objects in his film, therefore, Jackson is—either actively or unconsciously—reinforcing the idea that the Holocaust dead are frustratingly remote.

This notion is further intensified at a later point in Rampton's tour around the remains of Birkenau, as Professor Robert Jan Van Pelt provides an overview of the workings of Crematoria II. As he describes the mechanics of gassing, the assembled group—including Rampton and Lipstadt—stand in the ruins of the gas chamber. In a fashion singularly reminiscent of Lanzmann, the focus is entirely on the present-day landscape with only the illustrations of David Olère and a structural diagram providing additional context. The dead, at this point in time, are not being revived. As Weissman notes, there is a mimetic quality to Lanzmann's first-person exploration of Auschwitz I, as the footage "illustrates the story Müller tells by retracing his footsteps" (Weissman 2004, p. 197). *Denial* parallels this, by having the characters follow the internees' progression from the undressing room through to the gas chamber. Each area is visually illustrated in tandem with the description and the characters occupy the physical space that the Holocaust dead once passed through. Just as Lanzmann seems to have tacitly hinted at a deeper desire to connect to the horror of the Holocaust past, however—to form a felt connection that goes beyond the commemorative present—Jackson's film struggles with the unreachability of the dead. This becomes apparent in a later sequence in which Lipstadt, having returned to Crematoria II to recite the *kaddish* for the murdered, is placed alongside the image of spectral victims walking down the stairs into the changing rooms. Barely visible over the image of the stairway, they are certainly present on the screen, but they are designed to be essentially faceless and indistinguishable from one-another. Though it is almost certainly unintentional, this idea cannot help but invoke Shimon Attie's 'Writing on the Wall' project that took place between 1991 and 1993. As Young notes, having moved to Berlin in 1991, Attie was struck by the felt absence of the Jewish population. In an attempt to literalise this present absence, he then chose to project images recovered from the local archive—largely of the unassimilated Hasidic Jews who occupied certain areas of the city in the 20s and 30s—back onto the streets of the present. As Young puts it, Attie "saw Jewish ghosts in Europe's every nook and cranny" and "chose to actualise these inner visions, to externalise them, and in so doing to make them part of a larger public's memory" (Young 2000, p. 65). Though Attie's ghostly projections were not faceless, they were essentially totemic. His choice to use overtly Jewish figures, displaying all of the visual characteristics typical of the *Ost-Juden* was designed to make visible the Jewishness of the largely assimilated Jewish population. As Young states: "even though they themselves were not representative faces of the Jews of Germany", Attie had to "rely on the image of the *Ost-Juden* to make visible the otherwise invisible Jews of Germany" (p. 71). As such, they are not the ghosts of particularising figures, whose presence provides a deeper connection to the Holocaust past, but rather they represent the Jewish dead as a collective. The spectres that haunt the Auschwitz landscape in *Denial*, therefore, serve the same purpose. The memory of the dead is present, and their absence is palpable, but they remain unsatisfyingly distant. They are faceless, contextless abstractions, with which the audience and those in film can form no kind of connection. It is for this reason, I contend, that the film then later attempts to revive and physicalise the dead by briefly imagining the horror of the gas chamber interior.

Kerner, in his discussion of Holocaust cinema, discusses the recurring trend of the peephole. Particularly, he highlights the dangers implicit in using it as a cinematic device as it has the potential to transform the horror of the Holocaust into a "spectacle" (Kerner 2011, p. 37). Within the context of film history, he argues, the peephole has tended to represent "the sadistic and fetishistic gaze of the spectator" (p. 44), as those looking through them are usually revelling in an act of violence or looking for an illicit sexual thrill. As evidence in support of this, for instance, he cites Norman Bates leering at Janet Leigh in *Psycho* and the use of the trope in Nazisploitation cinema—where the SS are frequently shown looking through peepholes at the results of their sexualised experiments. This definition, however, does not accord with the use of the peephole in *Denial*. Deborah Lipstadt is not a voyeur, looking to fetishise the pain of the dying. Instead, I contend, the peephole is used in this context to symbolise our collective status as outsiders. We are all, by definition, on the outside of the gas chamber, incapable of understanding its interior reality. As Lanzmann has noted, there are no direct witnesses of

this experience. And yet, it is an imaginative portal that works of fiction are now trying to pass through. As such, rather than simply representing the grim voyeurism behind the act of looking, it is increasingly marking the transition point between the historical and the imaginary. While it therefore concedes to the idea of memorial distance, as photographs of the door are used to symbolise the real and the evidentiary, the cinematic act of visually approaching the peephole symbolises the apparent need in Anglo-American culture to touch the Holocaust in a more direct way. In other words, to move beyond the commemorative and find a way to feel-with the victims. At one key moment during Lipstadt's trial, the camera rapidly approaches a photograph of the gas chamber door. The camera then goes beyond the peephole, transitioning from black and white to colour, in order to represent the internees inside. Though the images are onscreen for less than two seconds, the viewer is shown naked bodies as they scream and claw at the inner grate that protects the peephole. Despite their brevity, these images manage to convey the crush of bodies, their corporeal reality and their desperation. The panic of the dying is very much on screen and physicalised. These are not distant abstractions, but bodies in pain. Jackson's film has therefore moved from a Lanzmannesque desire to avoid direct representation to a transgressive recreation of mass death. Though this article will feature more elaborate examples, this does constitute a prosthetic memory of mass extermination. The viewer is made to feel-with the agony of the murdered, as they briefly register a stab of reflexive unease. This does generate a felt connection to the Holocaust past. However, as with the memorial ghosts on the stairway of Crematoria II, this image does not enhance our understanding of the Holocaust. In place of the humanity of the victims, we have merely encountered their material bodies—separate from their thinking selves. To borrow from Scarry, this recreation may remind us of “the incontestable reality of the body—the body in pain, the body maimed, the body dead and hard to dispose of” (Scarry [1985] 1987, p. 62) but it cannot create an impious connection with the Holocaust dead. Nothing is learned, because bodies without humanising context that are trapped in moments of all-consuming anguish impart nothing of themselves beyond the brute fact of pain. By engaging with them, we merely convince ourselves that we have touched—in an exclusively physical sense—the distant past.

Peter Matthiessen's novel *In Paradise* expands upon this theme of post-memorial distance by focusing once again on the attempts of a nonwitness to engage with the Auschwitz landscape. The story revolves around Clements Olin, a self-described “academic poet and historian” (Matthiessen 2014, p. 34) specialising in the works of Tadeusz Borowski, as he participates in an educational and spiritual pilgrimage to the Auschwitz camp. Finding himself in a group comprised of academics, psychologists, Buddhists and a small contingent of Carmelite nuns, he attempts to connect with the Auschwitz landscape in a general sense while also trying to vivify the memory of his mother, a young Jewess who died in Auschwitz-Birkenau. The text consciously explores the friction created between our memorial distance from the Holocaust—the story, it should be noted, takes place in 1996—and the need to physicalise the murdered. Towards the beginning of the novel, Olin expresses an anxiety that, when exploring the landmarks of Birkenau, the dead will become *too* present:

What if, in the coming days, his identity should be subsumed into a horde of doomed humanity milling and bumping around him on this platform? Not those blurred figures in the SS photos, those bulky shapes in dark overcoats with white blanks for faces but real live sweating human beings with real voices remembered in real communities back home? What if ... he no longer experienced the victims as ciphers separate from himself but as terrified creatures clamouring for water” (pp. 52–53)

Olin, therefore, as a nonwitness who has connected with the Holocaust only through the photographs that gradually emerged in the post-war years, understands the dead as faceless ciphers. They are not identifiable individuals with identifiable pain but, due to the nature of the photographs that he has encountered, are more generally represented as “a horde of doomed humanity”. As Janina Struk notes, the Lili Jacob album, now commonly referred to as ‘The Auschwitz album’, represents “the only surviving photographs known to have been taken of the sorting of the arrivals at the ramp at

Birkenau" (Struk 2004, p. 101). As such, they serve as our only visual resource for the arrival process, thereby limiting our capacity to imaginatively engage with and individualise the plight of the new arrivals. These photographs for Olin, therefore, represent a safe abstraction, in which he is kept at a distance from those being sorted on the Birkenau ramp. His paradoxical concern is that, in inhabiting the Auschwitz space, he will form a closer connection to the Auschwitz dead—that he will feel-with their pain, rather than viewing them simply as “bulky shapes” with “blanks for faces”. Specifically, he seems to be voicing a concern that their felt pain will become too immediate and therefore too approachable. He speaks of his panic about encountering “real live sweating human beings” and “terrified creatures clamouring for water”. The irony implicit in the story is that this is precisely what Olin is looking for. He is, after all, looking to add substance to the memory of his mother. At the start of the story she exists only as a “creased snapshot” of “a laughing girl with wind-danced curls and a comical air” (Matthiessen 2014, p. 114) and a name—Emi Allgeier. Olin’s journey is therefore about reconnecting with her on a tactile level—to add substance to her memory, to feel-with her pain and to tie her back to the physical spaces that she once passed through. He wants to revive her as a “real live sweating human being with a real voice” and it is for this reason that he eventually connects with the memory of her death in the gas chamber.

Tellingly, Olin is shown to have been drawn to the gas chamber as if by a primal need. The novel states that he “instinctively shunned” the “concrete tumble” of the gas chamber since his arrival at the camp, and yet it also states: “Then he turns—he *feels turned* rather” (p. 150) towards it. Similarly, the novel also concedes that in “some cranny of his brain . . . this place has awaited him all his life” (p. 150). While his conscious mind may resist, therefore, maintaining a Lanzmannesque sense of propriety, a visceral need resides within him to connect with this space on a bodily level. This becomes apparent as, when standing in the remains of the gas chamber, he “succumbs to the terrifying vision” (p. 151) of his mother’s death. In a fashion curiously reminiscent of the aforementioned sequence in *Apt Pupil*, the image of the gas chamber interior overrides Olin’s current reality and he experiences his mother’s death in minute detail: “The iron door, slamming, smashes feet and clawing fingers. A crack of light as, jammed by arms, the door reopens for a moment, is slammed again and bolted” (p. 151). After a brief interjection in which Olin imagines himself being “dandled in the New World” while his mother dies, the description continues in the present tense:

In the death struggle for the last exhausted air, the stronger clamber onto piles of weaker, and the young woman shrieks back at her voiceless sister as Peek is drawn beneath the human biomass that wipes her stare, the round hole of her mouth from the face of the earth. (p. 152)

The gas chamber space has provided Olin with the prosthetic memory of his mother’s death. As Landsberg notes, encounters with the traces of the Holocaust—be they the items stored in display cases, the ability to touch the interior of the cattle car in the USHMM or encounters with the spaces themselves—“positions [the visitors’ bodies] to be better able to understand an otherwise unthinkable event” (Landsberg 2004, p. 131). As she goes on to clarify, because these artefacts and locations “offer the illusion of unmediated proximity and because they do not, like the printed word and the photograph, operate on a principle of distance, your relationship to them becomes uncertain” (p. 133). It is clear that Olin has experienced a moment of sensuous engagement with the Holocaust past, as his mother’s pain was actively brought to life. He prosthetically experienced the “press of cold-fleshed bodies” and the “queer heat” (Matthiessen 2014, p. 151) that they gave off, and yet at no point did he lose track of himself. He remembered that he, as a separate entity, existed in the Americas. He felt-with her pain, therefore, but he did not claim it as his own. His reality did for a moment, however, become uncertain as he imaginatively connected with the gas chamber space. He formed a felt connection with the horror of the Holocaust by adding flesh and a specific pain to the memorial ghosts he spoke of previously. Once again, however, nothing of substance has been learned. He connected to his mother’s body, but she was entirely subsumed in a moment of agony. By the end of the novel, Olin has learned

nothing of his mother beyond the likelihood that she was indeed “probably Jewish” (p. 204) and so this encounter with the gas chamber stands as his only moment of connection with her memory. However, he does find his journey to Poland to have been satisfactory as he has, theoretically, “earned the right to bear a little witness after all” (p. 205). His mother has not been recovered as a “real voice” in a “real community” but he has found a felt, maternal connection to the gas chamber. Ultimately, therefore, the bodily overrode the cognitive. It is this kind of bodily connection to the Holocaust past, almost always at the expense of the victims’ humanity and voices, that modern media seems to be looking for, I contend. This is typified in the final two examples, which both aim to make the image of death in the gas chamber more accessible to the non-Jewish body.

6. The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas, the Grey Zone and Inhabitable Bodies

As Robert Eaglestone has argued, John Boyne’s *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is a work of “post-Holocaust kitsch” (Eaglestone 2017, p. 140). A work of kitsch, as Eaglestone defines it, is a text that attempts to “sever the connection between the Holocaust and our world” (p. 141) by taking a morally reductive view of the events and portraying characters only as simplistic embodiments of good and evil. As he goes on to concede, kitsch texts are therefore by definition pious texts, as they aim to keep the past ineffable by maintaining a psychological distance from the characters concerned. Of particular concern to Eaglestone is the presentation of Bruno in Boyne’s novel. As the son of the newly arrived camp commandant, Bruno should be thoroughly aware of the concept of anti-Semitism, given its prevalence in German society. And yet, as he goes on to note, Bruno is portrayed only as being innocently clueless: “*The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* fails because it does not show how a nation-state was turned into a genocidal state, precisely how boys Bruno’s age . . . would have been corrupted” (p. 154). Rather than facilitating a deeper understanding of the Holocaust therefore, by making the corruption of the perpetrator comprehensible to a modern audience, the text portrays Bruno as being almost faultlessly decent. As Anne Rothe has described it, Bruno is presented as a “mini-Schindler” or “an infantilised version of the good German figure” (Rothe 2011, p. 139). In short, he is a character designed to facilitate prosthetic engagement. Returning to Kruk and Landsberg’s shared contention that audiences may only engage with bodies that are in some sense comparable to their own, Bruno is designed to be rigorously inoffensive to the audience. Moreover, in contrast to Shmuel, the Jewish child that he befriends, Bruno serves as a body with which the intended audience “might actually have a mimetic relationship” (Landsberg 2004, p. 124). While Shmuel is continuously signified as the Other, with his skin that was “almost the colour grey” (Boyne [2006] 2008, p. 106) and his literal position on the opposite side of the dividing fence, the text continuously stresses Bruno’s openness, decency and essential blandness. His opinions and perspectives, rather than possessing an air of historical authenticity, are all universal platitudes, such as the following: “He knew that sometimes people who were sad didn’t want to be asked about it; sometimes they’d offer the information themselves and sometimes they wouldn’t stop talking about it for months on end” (p. 107). There is nothing particularising about these observations. Bruno, having been designed to engage a specific audience—the children Boyne is seeking to introduce to the concept of the Holocaust—merely regurgitates a series of uncontroversial, essentially human, reasonably sympathetic experiences and opinions. He is, quite literally, designed to maximise bodily engagement by serving effectively as a blank slate and it is for this reason that the text eventually places him in the gas chamber.

At the end of the novel, the entry into the gas chamber is related entirely using Bruno’s perspective. The reader experiences his boyish incomprehension as the gas chamber door closes with a “loud metallic sound” (p. 213). Heightening the implausibility and further divorcing the scene from reality Boyne notes: “Bruno raised an eyebrow, unable to understand the sense of all this, but he assumed that it had something to do with keeping the rain out and stopping people from catching colds” (p. 213). The novel, therefore, does not leave his subject position, and so the reader is trapped in a middle-class, Christian body during a uniquely Jewish moment of suffering. In the “chaos” (p. 213) that follows, Bruno continues to hold Shmuel’s hand and refuses to let go. It is impossible not to reach the conclusion,

therefore, that Boyne has displaced the horror of the Holocaust, as the particular tragedy of the scene stems not from the racial hatred that gripped the Third Reich but rather the injustice of a noble white child having been “swept along by the group of people” (p. 211) who were being marched to their deaths. Boyne, after all, wishes for the audience to find a genuine tragic irony in the statement: “I can’t go on a march. I have to be home in time for dinner. It’s roast beef tonight” (p. 210). The Jewish plight is displaced and rendered unreachable, as Boyne chooses instead to refocus the tragedy of death in the gas chamber onto a more culturally reachable body. One that does not understand the Jewish experience and cannot fathom the inner logic of Auschwitz, thereby paralleling the reader’s understanding of Holocaust history. Despite Boyne’s clear intention to tell a story about two children who, though outwardly and culturally dissimilar, find that they can form a kinship based on their underlying similarities, therefore, his actual text renders the Jewish victims of the Holocaust as unreachable Others. The tacit implication of his ending is that the gas chamber space can only be reached when inhabiting a body like your own, as the Jewish victims of the Holocaust are too distinct from the readership to be engaged with on a physical level. We may feel-with Bruno, but we can only engage with Shmuel through the benevolence of Bruno’s friendship.

While Mark Herman’s film is sparer in its use of sentiment—here, Bruno feels the apprehensive dread of the gas chamber rather than affirming that Shmuel is now his “best friend for life” (p. 213) moments before their deaths—the presentation of the sequence once again encourages the viewer to engage with Bruno’s suffering. The camera focuses on Bruno as Shmuel is left to recede into the ethnic background—tellingly, he does not speak again following their descent into the changing room of the crematorium. Moreover, Herman juxtaposes the scenes of Bruno being shepherded into the gas chamber with sequences of his family looking for him, fuelling the cinematic desire that he may be rescued just in the nick of time. It is, in essence, an inversion of Spielberg’s presentation of the gas chamber. While Spielberg revealed his ruse only at the last moment, having fully inhabited the sequence in which the *Schindlerjuden* were marched to their likely doom, Herman uses the conventional language of cinema—using the culturally ingrained image of the ‘last minute rescue’—to float the notion of a happy ending. In an inversion of Spielberg’s approach, however, the moment of gassing does proceed and so the audience is not allowed a reprieve. However, this once again rehomes the horror of death in Auschwitz by playing on the idea of trauma to the non-Jewish body. The Jewish characters, including Shmuel, are actively de-prioritised as the film tacitly endorses the idea that the death of a Christian child under these circumstances is aberrant, unnatural, noteworthy and therefore deserving of our focus. The Jewish internees surrounding Bruno therefore become practically irrelevant. They are a mass of foreign bodies with whom the viewer cannot identify. Ultimately, therefore, in seeking to make the notion of death in the gas chamber accessible to a non-Jewish audience—and to provide the image of a sufferer that they may feel-with—Herman and Boyne have quite literally appropriated Jewish trauma. They have touched the horror of death in the gas chamber in a more direct way, but they have done so using a middle-class Christian intermediary and so, in reality, all that they have created is a prosthetic memory of bodily pain that has been entirely removed from its ethnic past. In the truest sense, those engaging with *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* are engaging only with the threat of trauma to their own bodies. The text has not, as Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* did, made the ethnic or cultural Other more imaginable by establishing “the weight, solidity” and “injurability of their personhood” (Scarry 1998, p. 49), as it never leaves the non-Jewish body.

While *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* sought to rehome the prosthetic memory of death in the gas chamber in the Christian body, Tim Blake Nelson’s *The Grey Zone* arguably represents the most brazen attempt to physically decontextualise this on-screen experience. Capitalising on Steven Spielberg’s use of the handheld camera, Nelson positions the viewer in the body of a new arrival. While Spielberg’s use of the handheld was mimetic, as we were not inhabiting a specific internee but rather following in their footsteps, Nelson wants the viewer to engage with an actual body in pain. The camera looks up at the faces of those surrounding it, as we are herded into the gas chamber by the *Sonderkommando*. There is a palpable anxiety as the camera pans from one face to another, with perhaps an element of

confusion. It comes to focus on an older woman who is leading us by the hand. She encourages us not to let go as we filter into the space. The gas chamber door is closed, and the crowd begins to surge in response. While fiction, by necessity, conventionally places the viewers in or near bodies that are specifically gendered, classed and raced, the person that we are inhabiting is entirely departicularised. We understand, given the context, that they are Hungarian and Jewish, but they are entirely lacking in identifying features having not yet been introduced. Therefore, it may be argued that this presents the most rarefied example of prosthetic memory that exists in Anglo-American media. Nelson has circumvented the factors that can limit engagement, as defined by Landsberg and Kruk—from cultural specificity, to gender, to the condition of one's body—by presenting a body that has almost no context. We understand only that it is a child and so, having no mitigating factors, we are free to fully engage with their suffering. As a natural consequence, however, no other representation more thoroughly confirms Scarry's position regarding a mind/body dualism. Just as Scarry has argued that pain brings about "the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity" (Scarry [1985] 1987, p. 35) of one's own body, Nelson positions the viewer *inside* of a body that is entirely defined by its pain. It has no other humanising context, as the character is never allowed to speak—though, at the conclusion of the film, she does provide a non-diegetic voiceover that outlines its essential message—and so the viewer encounters only a body lacking any identifying features and incapable of self-expression. Indeed, the viewer only encounters the body from the outside, and therefore establishes the character's gender, after it has been gassed. As such, Nelson cannot be said to have furthered our cognitive understanding of the Holocaust past by providing a humanising insight into the victims of the Holocaust, but rather he has created a prosthetic memory of gassing that is designed to maximise audience engagement. He wishes you to feel the horror of the Holocaust on a deeply visceral level, having provided a uniquely intimate recreation of the gas chamber experience, but maintains a psychological distance from its victims.

As a possible counterpoint to this, Mathew Boswell has suggested that *The Grey Zone* is an impious text. Specifically, he cites Nelson's own contention that the film is designed to generate an impious engagement with the *Sonderkommando*. As Nelson once put it, he wished the audience to ask themselves the questions: "how would I have responded? What would I do to save my own life? How far would I go in sacrificing my own morality?" (Boswell 2012, p. 170). Had this proven to be the film's overriding message, then it may indeed have served as an impious work of fiction. However, I contend that the film's excessive focus on the mechanics of the extermination process and the corporealisation of the Holocaust dead override its attempts to engage with the *Sonderkommando*. As Boswell notes, Nelson's film is meticulous in its recreation of Crematorium II. An "80 percent scale replica" of the structure was built based on its "original architectural plans" (p. 162). Nelson even went so far as to scour Europe for the "correct sprinkler heads" (p. 162) for his gas chamber sequence, maximising the sense of historical authenticity. There is therefore an emphasis on the factual and the evidentiary that hints at a desire, to return to Lanzmann, to touch the real. In stark contrast to Lanzmann, however, the ultimate goal of Nelson's film seems to be to circumvent the "circle of flames" surrounding the gas chamber by providing a character who has survived the gas chamber experience and therefore come "back among us to testify" (Lanzmann 1979, p. 139). As she is nursed by the *Sonderkommando*, the Hungarian girl seems to remember back to her gas chamber experiences. We see her being pulled to the ground by her mother and the other women who surround her, as they all succumb to the effects of Zyklon-B. Nelson, therefore, is effectively adding a stamp of testimonial validity to his representation. He is, quite literally, flaunting Lanzmann's moral prohibition regarding representation by resurrecting one of the gassed and providing, through their on-screen memories, access to the gas chamber interior. This represents, I contend, the ultimate embodiment of the desire to facilitate a bodily encounter with the gas chamber interior. While the other texts featured throughout this article merely wished to touch the space, Nelson wishes to touch the space and to validate the act of looking. We are not merely looking at bodies in pain, but we are seeing through the eyes of a witness and feeling-with her experiences. This provides the viewer with the illusion that they have had unmediated access to the

Holocaust past—that, more than in any other production, they have touched the real—as Nelson is simulating the experience of genuine witnessing. This, I argue, overrides his stated attempts at impiety, as the film wishes to impart the message that the unrepresentable reality of death in the gas chamber can be and has been touched in fiction.

7. Conclusions

Contrary to Mathew Boswell's assertions, therefore, the vividly realistic depictions of violence that now feature in Anglo-American Holocaust media do not seem to counter the silence and ineffability that previous depictions opted for. There is a marked difference between what we may term Holocaust gratuity and Holocaust Impiety, as the vivid recreation of physical suffering does not add to our understanding of the Holocaust past. We are not brought into close proximity with the psychology of the sufferers, or even the broader context of the atrocity, as we are instead forced into close proximity with a series of overly present bodies. And, correspondingly, these bodies are able to communicate nothing beyond the all-consuming nature of their pain. Rather than countering the idea of ineffability, therefore, these graphic representations of death in the gas chamber may instead be thought of as being inherently pious. We cannot, after all, make the mechanics of the Holocaust and the motivations of those involved more comprehensible when we are trapped in the pure physicality of bodily suffering. This presents a profound problem for the future of Holocaust memory, as the body is now being positioned as the principle means of Holocaust engagement in Anglo-American media. As an educational tool, for instance, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* perpetuates the message that impiety represents a practical impossibility. The Jewish body is presented, in both the film and Boyne's original text, as the unreachable Other, and so the only means of connecting with the past is through bodily engagement with a form that is essentially indistinguishable from one's own. Future generations are therefore being primed with the understanding that the Holocaust can be touched, but it can never be understood. Though the ethics of representation may have moved on from Lanzmann, we are arguably closer to conceding to the ineffability of the past than ever before.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- Alsup, Janet. 2003. A Pedagogy of Trauma (or a Crisis of Cynicism): Teaching, Writing and the Holocaust. In *Witnessing the Disaster: Essays on Representation and the Holocaust*. Edited by Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer. Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 75–89.
- Boswell, Matthew. 2012. *Holocaust Impiety in Literature, Popular Music and Film*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Boyne, John. 2008. *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. London: Random House. First published 2006.
- Budick, Emily Miller. 2015. *The Subject of Holocaust Fiction*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Des Pres, Terence. 1988. Holocaust Laughter? In *Writing and the Holocaust*. Edited by Berel Lang. London: Holmes, New York: Meier, pp. 216–33.
- Eaglestone, Robert. 2017. *The Broken Voice: Reading Post-Holocaust Literature*. New York: Oxford University.
- Herman, Mark. 2008. *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. Los Angeles: Miramax.
- Jackson, Mick. 2016. *Denial*. New York: Bleecker Street.
- Kerner, Aaron. 2011. *Film and the Holocaust: New Perspectives on Dramas, Documentaries, and Experiential Films*. London and New York: Continuum.
- Kruks, Sonia. 2001. *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- LaCapra, Dominick. 1997. Lanzmann's *Shoah*: "Here There Is No Why". *Critical Inquiry* 23: 231–69. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Landsberg, Alison. 2004. *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*. New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press.
- Langford, Barry. 1999. 'You cannot look at this': Thresholds of Unrepresentability in Holocaust Film. *The Journal of Holocaust Education* 8: 23–40. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

- Lanzmann, Claude. 1979. From the Holocaust to the Holocaust. *Telos* 42: 137–43. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Matthiessen, Peter. 2014. *In Paradise*. London: Oneworld.
- Nelson, Tim Blake. 2001. *The Grey Zone*. Santa Monica: Lionsgate.
- Rose, Gillian. 1996. *Mourning Becomes the Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosenfeld, Gavriel D. 2015. *Hi Hitler! How the Nazi Past is Being Normalised in Contemporary Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rothberg, Michael. 2000. *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Rothe, Anne. 2011. *Popular Trauma Culture: Selling the Pain of Others in the Mass Media*. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press.
- Scarry, Elaine. 1987. *The Body in Pain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. First published 1985.
- Scarry, Elaine. 1998. The Difficulty of Imagining Other Persons. In *The Handbook of Interethnic Coexistence*. Edited by Eugene Weiner. New York: Continuum, pp. 40–62.
- Singer, Brian. 1998. *Apt Pupil*. Culver City: Sony Pictures Releasing.
- Spielberg, Steven. 1993. *Schindler's List*. Universal City: Universal Pictures.
- Steiner, George. 1990. 'Dying is an Art'. In *Language and Silence: Essays 1958–1996*. London and Boston: Faber and Faber, pp. 324–34. First published 1967.
- Struk, Janina. 2004. *Photographing the Holocaust: Interpretations of the Evidence*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris.
- Weissman, Gary. 2004. *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Wiesel, Elie. 1990. The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration. In *Dimensions of the Holocaust: Lectures at Northwestern University*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, pp. 5–19.
- Young, James E. 1993. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Young, James E. 2000. *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.



© 2020 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).