

Representations of the Holocaust:
The Grey Zone, Maus, and Shoah.

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One wonders how the Holocaust will be remembered in the coming decades when those who survived the tragic event or were witness to it are no longer with us. This is a dilemma facing historians of the Holocaust today, whose primary task is to give the future as accurate an account of the past as is as possible. Related to this are implications of representation. How one should represent the Holocaust based on witness testimony to the future is an area of immense debate. Many feel that, there is no way the Holocaust can be represented, in such a way that it begins to show what life was like for those who lived through it and even those who did not. While there are many surviving documents from the Holocaust, the most important source are witness testimony.¹ It is from these that representations have been and will continue to be made. It is the message that these representations leave with their audience that is central to this paper, because it is this message that will be left to the future. As more representations are made there is a greater risk that there may emerge a distorted or asymmetrical narrative of the Holocaust. Although it would be possible for anyone learning about the Holocaust to look at numerous accounts of testimony in order to try and get a more balanced picture, in today's world with popular culture's increased influence, it seems more likely that they would rather "see" the story of the Holocaust, rather than read about it.

There is a vast amount of material on the Holocaust that varies in its representation of it. Some of the materials produced in the form of books include the memoirs and diaries of those who witnessed it, as well as scholarly secondary ones written in contemporary times. There are also documentaries, television series and films that address the Holocaust in various ways. Beyond these are more avant-garde representations such as graphic novels and even much artwork depicting the Holocaust, which seems to be an every growing field.² This paper will look at three representations of the Holocaust that derive their content from witness testimony and are not productions of traditional history: the movie *The Gray Zone* by Tim Blake Nelson,³ *Maus*, written by Art Spiegelman,⁴ and Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*.⁵ Each of these representations takes a different approach in looking at and remembering the Holocaust. These three representations have been chosen due to their almost complete reliance on witness testimony as sources, and also because each deals with the problem of representing the Holocaust and illustrate three different perspectives on possible ways to represent the Holocaust.

The Gray Zone draws on survivor testimony to recreate conditions in Auschwitz and retell the story of the *Sonderkommando*, the typically Jewish prisoner squads that were responsible for running the crematoria in the extermination camps.⁶ *Maus*, which tells the story of a man who survived Auschwitz and his son who wishes to write about his father's experience. *Maus* uses animal caricatures as the people in the story, which sets it quite apart from traditional Holocaust Historiography, and lastly, *Shoah*, an approximately nine-hour visual recording of testimony given by people who were witness to the Holocaust. It has no re-created footage, or even any archival footage from the

period. Each representation approaches the visual aspect differently which provides three different methods to be analyzed.

There is much discussion and debate among scholars and even those outside of scholarly circles about how the Holocaust should or should not be represented. The question of historical accuracy is quite important when analyzing representations of the Holocaust. Accuracy here is whether or not the movie, film or comic book (or any other representation for that matter) is reflective of the primary sources, or the witness testimony on which it is based. In other words, does the representation convey the ideas that are presented in the primary sources without omitting or adding anything to them? Does it serve to add to the knowledge on the Holocaust in new ways, or does it serve to fragment one's understanding of what really happened? Although there are some in the academic world who would not agree, all three of the representations chosen here do meet this demand of accuracy, even if in varying degrees.

When representing the Holocaust for future generations, one must be careful not to distort or leave out anything that may change the meaning of the story. Beyond this it is hard to decide how much leeway a representation should have in changing the testimony. This is perhaps the most difficult aspect of making modern day representations of the Holocaust. Many representations give some basic knowledge, but in fact, and one hopes accidentally, distort the "historical narrative of the Holocaust." Others may only slightly change or emphasize aspects that are not in the witness testimony, which serves to either add or detract from the testimony itself, thereby distorting it.

What is the "most correct" way to represent the Holocaust? This is no doubt the most difficult question to answer, and there are many differing opinions on this matter.⁷ The representations that will be examined here, each add something to the ever growing subject of Holocaust Studies; in each there is a different aspect of the Holocaust that the audience is made aware of. I want to argue that while some representations do a better job than others of conveying messages about the Holocaust that in fact there can be many "correct" ways to represent the Holocaust, as long as they are rooted in a truthful, honest attempt to add to the existing material. All three of the representations chosen here add something different to the overall portrayal; they all shed light from different angles on the overall tragedy of the Holocaust. The biggest difference among them, although there are a few, is their mode of representation. Although it may be hard for many to accept some of the more controversial representations, such as *Maus*, I would argue when looked at collectively, each illuminates a different part of the Holocaust, and together they show that there is more than one proper way that the Holocaust can be represented.

The Grey Zone

Before addressing *The Grey Zone*, a few words about Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* will provide a background when looking at Hollywood productions as representations about the Holocaust. *Schindler's List* was one of the most controversial and groundbreaking films that tried to represent the Holocaust. Although there were many films made long before *Schindler's List*, it came at a time when the study of the Holocaust saw many changes. The film was released in 1993, the same year that the Holocaust Memorial Museum opened in Washington D.C.⁸ Spielberg's film has been not only a huge success but also the object of harsh criticism, which in turn, opened the

modern debate on representing the Holocaust. While the main strength that people see in *Schindler's List* is that it reached large numbers of people,⁹ and in the end, Oskar Schindler did save lives despite the circumstances, when many others did not.¹⁰ Beyond this there are a number of harsh, and yet valid criticisms of the film that should not be taken lightly, and can shed light onto many of the problems when trying to recreate and represent the Holocaust in popular media sources.

The most important criticism, in dealing with the characters of the film, has been that the film not only uses, but perpetuates the stereotypical notion prevalent in many films about the Holocaust, the image of the weak, feminized, passive Jew¹¹ in need of Christian benevolence to survive.¹² Other criticism has come in a quite unforgiving comparison. Although one would think that Spielberg, an American Jew, would be keenly attuned to the stereotypes that were ascribed to the Jews during the Third Reich, and therefore avoid them, many have pointed out that in fact many of the Jews in his film are strikingly similar to the ones portrayed by Julius Streicher in *Der Stürmer*.¹³ The actors in the film are also just that, actors. One redeemable aspect of *Schindler's List* is the fact that the real survivors, or "Schindler's Jews," do unite with those who portrayed them in the film, thereby legitimizing the role of the actor in the film. Beyond these criticisms is the fact that Spielberg's overall message that the viewers take away from the film is misleading. A story about a "good German" who saves the lives of almost 1,000 Jews during the Holocaust single-handedly was not a common event during that period. Many Jews died needlessly and were saved by no one. The implication of this film, in a future where it has become the "History of the Holocaust" for many, is alarming. This is not to say that there is nothing redeemable about Spielberg's film, he does in fact illuminate part of the Holocaust, but there is good reason to be concerned that the implications of this film have become all that some may know about the Holocaust.

The Grey Zone is now a film that was originally written and presented as a play. Tim Blake Nelson first thought of the endeavor after reading the chapter titled "The Grey Zone" in Primo Levi's book *The Drowned and the Saved*.¹⁴ Later adapted to the big screen, *The Grey Zone* retells the story of the uprising in Auschwitz led by the 12th *Sonderkommando* in Crematorium One late in 1944. The story takes place in its entirety within an 80% to scale model of the crematorium that Nelson had reconstructed for the film.¹⁵ The main plot starts with some of the workers in the women's camp smuggling out explosive powder from the munitions factory in which they are forced to work. The story then follows the powder over to the *Sonderkommando* who are part of the plot for the uprising within the camp. The viewer is guided through the string of events leading up to the uprising, but also what life was probably like for the *Sonderkommando* in the camps. Nelson has done an outstanding job at attempting to visually show the viewer what the Auschwitz crematorium looked like while in action. Beyond this he also conveyed many of the themes that arise when one researches the camps or the *Sonderkommando*. One must give Nelson credit for at least not making many of the mistakes that Spielberg was criticized for. Nelson even spoke out indirectly against the weak and helpless image of the Jew in recent films on the Holocaust, saying that he did this film because it went against this stereotype.¹⁶ While the film is an honest attempt at recreating the heroic story and also by facing the moral issues of the position of the *Sonderkommando*, when held up against the witness testimony on which it is supposed to be based on, there are aspects that are less commendable. One example is Nelson's

characterization of the witness, Dr. Miklos Nyiszli who wrote the testimony on which the film is supposed to be based.¹⁷ There is also much literary license used on Nelson's part, in his retelling of a story Nyiszli presents about a little girl in the camp.

Nelson's film is obviously made up of actors. The main characters are the 12th Sonderkommando of Crematorium 1, which also includes Dr. Nyiszli. Beyond this group there is also SS Oberscharführer Mussfeld,¹⁸ two prisoners from the women's camp who were smuggling the explosive powder to the *Sonderkommando* for the uprising and then the other prisoners and SS guards who are somewhat peripheral to the central story line, but are nonetheless part of the story of the camp. While it may seem needless, I nonetheless want to focus on the fact that the characters in the film, while based on real ones, are not witnesses to the events in which they are acting out, nor are they even receiving the testimony on which the film is based from a witness. Although it cannot be expected that every film that wishes to deal directly with the Holocaust can have witnesses testimony coming 'straight from the mouth' of a witness for each character, my point here is to draw attention to the contrast that this poses with the other representations to be discussed later.

Nelson's choice to make *The Grey Zone* into a film was indeed critical. There is much discussion and debate among those in Hollywood and those in scholarly circles over making the Holocaust into a Hollywood film. The negative connotation that comes with American Hollywood films was perhaps the hardest obstacle facing Nelson when his film was made. Many feel as though this Americanization of the Holocaust in Hollywood films is somewhat trivializing. Starting with *Schindler's List*, and growing ever since, there has been much questioning of Hollywood's motives for representing the Holocaust in film.¹⁹ As mentioned above, Nelson had an eighty percent to scale model of Auschwitz constructed for his film. Nelson wanted his set, not only to look authentic, but to actually be as close to the "real thing" as possible. For the construction of his model, he utilized actual architectural plans that were from the original building of Auschwitz, and he also used bricks from local edifices that were being torn down in the same fashion that the Nazis used pre-existing structure's materials to build the camp originally.²⁰ It can be said that despite Nelson's representation being a Hollywood film, he strove to make it as visually accurate as possible. Nelson's nearly perfect accuracy serves perhaps to show what Auschwitz most likely looked like while in operation.

Beyond the fact that some criticize the film for being "of Hollywood," there is reason to criticize Nelson's characterization of Dr. Miklos Nyiszli. This is the Hungarian doctor who was deported to Auschwitz and ended up being an assistant to the infamous Dr. Josef Mengele.²¹ Nelson portrays Nyiszli in somewhat of a negative light. Although he was also considered part of the *Sonderkommando*, therefore receiving better treatment, at least for a time, Nelson's Nyiszli is closer in friendship to the SS Mussfeld more so than the others who are facing the same horrors that Nyiszli is. While this notion is somewhat evident from the testimony of Nyiszli, it is not to say that he personally wanted the situation to be as such.

The story of the little girl in the film also diverges greatly from the story that Nyiszli presents in his book. Nyiszli traces the events that occurred one day in the camp following the gassing of many Jews. He tells about how it was one day that a man from the *Sonderkommando* come into his office with a small girl who had somehow survived the gassing. Nyiszli treats her and is confident that she will live. Moments later,

Mussfeld enters the office to find that the child has survived. In a moving dialogue of compassion between Nyiszli and Mussfeld, Nyiszli begs for the girl to be spared. Needless to say, Mussfeld saw this request as impossible, and shot the little girl at that moment.²² In the film, Nelson has the little girl live all the way through the uprising of the *Sonderkommando*, but she is still shot in the end. Nelson, it seems, lets the little girl live, only to die after she witnesses the brutal punishment, a bullet in the back of the neck, for all who were involved in the uprising. In the film the little girl begins to run away after the executions are complete, and it is at that time that an SS man pulls out his gun and kills her. The following quotation begins immediately after she is shot, and it is narrated by the little girl's voice. The scenes which follow along with the narration are of the new *Sonderkommando* who begin their new positions by removing and disposing of the previous ones:

"I catch fire quickly. The first part of me rises in dense smoke that mingles with the smoke of others. Then there are the bones, which settle in ash, and these are swept up to be carried to the river, and the last bits of our dust, that simply float there in the air around the working of the new group.

These bits of dust are grey. We settle on their shoes and on their faces, and in their lungs, and they begin to get so used to us that soon they don't cough and they don't brush us away. At this point, they're just moving. Breathing, and moving, like anyone else still alive in that place. And this is how the work continues."²³

With this final quotation and scene, Nelson's film ends. There is literary license in the feeling that viewers are left with; it is precisely the overwhelming sense of despair that looms so large over all aspects of the Holocaust that one takes away from the film.

Although the girls ending in the film is not in line with what Nyiszli's testimony, Nelson used her innocence to prove a point; that there really were no happy endings for those in the camps, be it the morally questionable, the heroic, or even the innocent. By concluding with these lines there is no false sense of closure or peace left with what the viewer can be left. Someone watching realizes that for the vast majority of those who were caught up in the Nazi machine, there was no happy ending. This is no doubt the strength of Nelson's film. He has succeeded in going against the common theme of the feminized Jew who went passively to their death in the gas chambers, but at the same time avoided an ending where the viewer feels at peace with the outcome.

Maus

Maus is a comic book that looks at a son's struggle to relate to his father, who was a survivor of the Holocaust. By recording and retelling his father's story in the form of a comic book Spiegelman depicts that struggle. The story that follows is about Artie, the son, who tries to come to grips with his life as the son of Holocaust survivors. When he is twenty his mother commits suicide, leaving only him and his father, until his father remarries. Beyond this tragedy there is the aspect of Artie's brother, Richieu, the first born son of Vladek and Anja, Artie's parents. Richieu was sent away by his parents in the early days of the Nazis coming to power in hope of saving his life, but tragically he perished in the camps, along with the other millions. The story is therefore not only about Artie's relationship with his father, but also about his coming to terms with those who are no longer alive, his mother and brother. Interwoven with these familial and personal struggles is Vladek's experience in Auschwitz, so that in some ways *Maus*, by using witness testimony, not only addresses post-Holocaust problems, but also attempts to represent what life was like in Auschwitz.

Maus uses a very unconventional medium through which to represent the Holocaust. As a pioneer in this genre Spiegelman has been highly criticized as well as highly praised. By combining both drawings and words, Spiegelman created a new way to represent the Holocaust with witness testimony. All of the characters in the graphic novel are drawn as different animal caricatures, which has been highly criticized. There are many people who believe that to draw the characters for something as serious as the Holocaust as animals is to disrespect the event. At the same time, readers with an open mind, upon reading past the first few pages of the comic book, if even that far, will begin to not even notice that the characters are animal figures, as they in a sense become “real people.”

One strength of the comic is that there are areas of the book that transcend the caricatures, and the lines are blurred between the animals and humans. For example, in *Maus II*, Vladek is in Dachau where he has contracted typhus. On his way to the toilet, he is forced to walk over those who went before him and perished on the way. The dead bodies of other mice litter the floor, yet in the corner of the last frame on the page, there is a human foot, amongst the dead mice.²⁴ Although it does not take long to see that this story is not about mice, it is times such as this that the readers are reminded yet again. This break in the typical drawing of the characters serves its purpose as well. In case a reader may forget that this was happening to real people, Spiegelman uses this break to unsettle the reader and remind them that the characters were not mice, but in fact real people.

Another related criticism Spiegelman receives is the fact that all ethnic groups are depicted by the same type of caricature. All Jews are represented as mice, all Germans as cats, Poles as pigs, Americans as dogs, Roma as moths, French as frogs, and the Swedes as reindeer, all without exception. While some may find this form of representation offensive, in many ways it seems Spiegelman employs the tactic to help to simplify the task he has set out for himself. To help simplify my own objective here I will only consider three of the caricatures: the mice, cats and dogs. What may strike a reader immediately, especially one knowledgeable about the Holocaust, is the depiction of Jews as mice. This choice is interesting due to the fact that the Nazi rhetoric often referred to the Jews as vermin. Instead of this being a racist depiction, I as well as others, found it to be a way for Spiegelman to throw the rhetoric “back down the speakers’ throats.”²⁵

Another, perhaps more simplistic reason that Spiegelman uses the animal caricatures is to simply show who the “good guys” are and who the “bad guys” are. No one is unaware of the stereotypical cat chasing the mouse, or the notion that dogs despise cats. While this differentiation along stereotypical lines serves to simplify, I believe it is also very problematic. For all of the good that *Maus* does, I believe that to categorize all of the characters with these stereotypes is to dismiss the fact that the lines were not this clear cut during the Holocaust. There is some blurring of lines, which only serve to reinforce the divisions that Spiegelman has made. For example, there are a few frames that tell the story of one of the “mice” who has been put into the camp as a Jew. The first frames show him pleading with the guards claiming he is in fact a German and yet the frame depicts him as a mouse. In the subsequent frame Vladek explains the he was indeed not a Jew, and the depiction switches, showing him as a cat.²⁶ This blurring reinforces the argument that the Germans definition of “what” people were was the only definition that mattered.

Despite the few references to divisions among the caricature being crossed, *Maus* overwhelmingly sticks to the division of caricatures. To say that all Germans were “cats” and therefore bad guys and that the Americans were all “dogs” or heroes is misleading. Despite the problems that the overgeneralization causes, the animal caricatures are still an effective way to depict Spiegelman’s characters. When the author was asked to elaborate on why he chose animals, he responded that he felt it would have been “counterfeit to try to pretend that the drawings [were] representations of something [that] actually [happened].”²⁷ I agree that in some ways it would have been wrong for Spiegelman to try and draw images that would not have been authentic, since he was not there. Spiegelman, by drawing animal caricatures in his representation, has indirectly admitted that he was not there during the Holocaust, but that due to his father’s oral testimony, he does have knowledge enough to represent the Holocaust in some fashion. While many may find the caricatures trivializing of the Holocaust, it seems as though it is one way that Spiegelman is trying to be honest with his readership.

One very important aspect of all Holocaust representations is the ending. That is, what are the viewers, or readers, left with as the message? In *Maus* there is a mixed message. Those who read through the entire comic are left with many loose ends. The final frame’s words are as follows, “I’m tired not Richieu, and it’s enough stories for now.”²⁸ They are the words of Vladek to his son, yet it is not to his deceased son that his is really speaking, but rather to Artie. Throughout the two volumes, Artie is struggling to deal with his past as having been a child of two Holocaust survivors. The story ends leaving with its audience is a feeling of disappointment, in the fact that the relationship between father and son, Artie, is never resolved and the loose ends are never tied up for Spiegelman’s audience. Artie is left still in the shadow of the brother he never knew, due to the fact that his life was taken during the Holocaust. What *Maus* illuminates for its reader is the issues surrounding post-Holocaust generations, seeking to understand the past and many times failing to do so successfully. This aspect is *Maus*’ biggest strength. Although Spiegelman is not able to tell us through his own words or images, what it was like to be in the Holocaust, he does give, indirectly, his readers an idea of what it is like to be part of the second generation of Holocaust survivors. *Maus* does more to illuminate the complexities that the Holocaust left behind than it does to summarize and teach what the Holocaust was and what life was like in the camps. The readers see Spiegelman, and Artie, grapple with the past, and struggle to find a correct way to represent that past. At the end Spiegelman, Artie, and the readership at large find that they are no further along than they were to start with. There are still ambiguities and uncertainties at the end of *Maus* and that will undoubtedly continue.

As to Spiegelman’s ability to use his father’s witness testimony to recreate his story of life in Auschwitz, he has no doubt succeeded, although very differently than the other representations being discussed. One of the best examples from *Maus* that conveys an aspect of camp life to the readers is the story of Mandelbaum, a man who the father Vladek had known from his hometown before being sent to the camp. Vladek one day runs into Mandelbaum in Auschwitz, and it is in his rendition of camp life to his son Artie, that he recounts the tragic story. Readers learn that Mandelbaum was in quite an unfortunate situation (which is not to say that others in the camp were much better off). Mandelbaum had received clothes and shoes after arriving at the camp, neither of which fit him, leaving him to struggle to merely hold up his pants and not lose grip of his soup

bowl. At one point, Mandelbaum has his bowl stolen, this meaning he was not able to receive the already meager rations served in the camp, due to the fact that his pants had begun to slip and he had tried to catch them.²⁹ Vladek is later able to, through some connections he had made in the camp, find a belt and fitting shoes for Mandelbaum. Upon giving the new items to Mandelbaum, the two men (mice)? began to cry.³⁰ Moments such as this one are no doubt moving, despite the fact that one is seeing mice embracing on the page; the story transcends the simplistic caricatures on the page. This moving moment is interrupted in the very next frame, when Mandelbaum is chosen by the Germans for forced labor; a task that Vladek says was most likely the death of him. He never saw Mandelbaum again.³¹ Through Mandelbaum's story, and indeed the entire comic book, Spiegelman is able to convey to his readers what life was like, according to his father's testimony. In an innovative way, Spiegelman has produced a moving narrative, to those readers who are willing to see that *Maus* is not a comic book in the sense that it is a totally fictional story written to entertain its readers, but is a true representation of one man's life, as it was and still is, impacted by the Holocaust.

Shoah

Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, the nine and a half hour visual recording of Holocaust witness testimony, is by far one of the most significant additions to the knowledge of the Holocaust. The film was released in 1985 and while his addition to the vast amounts of representations of the Holocaust is immense, it is not without its problems. Overall there is more positive to be said about it than negative. Lanzmann's film was eleven years in the making,³² and it is clear that he has put much effort into depicting the witnesses' testimony. *Shoah* differs from the other representations included here due to its lack of recreation in any way. Lanzmann adamantly decided not to recreate any images of the Holocaust whatsoever in his film.³³ The entire nine and a half hours includes recordings of the interviews with the witnesses and also footage of the camps and areas that were sites in the Holocaust. Traditional criticisms of Lanzmann's representation center on the idea that his film leaves out much of what was the Holocaust, yet this is not the most valid criticism due to the fact that his main objective was to look at the systematic murder of the Jews, perused by the Nazis.³⁴ It is against the claim that Lanzmann has not recreated the Holocaust that the most valid criticism could fall.

Shoah incorporates the testimony of more witnesses than perhaps any other representation made on the Holocaust. Lanzmann interviews survivors, bystanders, and perpetrators, all of whom are part of his film. There are no fictional characters, or caricatures, based indirectly on someone from the Holocaust. The audience sees real living people and hears straight from their own mouths what their experience with the Holocaust was like. The range of people that Lanzmann is able to question is enormous. The entire filming process took many years and it was from the vast number of interviews he had that Lanzmann compiled those he wanted to include in the film. While the footage may be less engaging visually, it is by far more emotionally engaging. To see real people tell their stories and experiences is in many ways far more moving than merely actors re-enacting events.

Shoah is by far in a genre all its own. While many people call its mode of representation many different things, *Shoah* is really nothing more, although this phrase is not to sound trivializing, than a visual recording of oral testimonies given by people

involved in the Holocaust, although I would argue that it is in fact another attempt, albeit different, to recreate the Holocaust in some way. What may be argued is that Lanzmann does not recreate visually anything from the period in which he is examining. This is not to say though that there is nothing “recreated” for his audience at all. There are many instances in which the camera retraces potential steps that the witness, who in these cases are mainly survivors of the camps, that they took on the modern day grounds of the place in discussion. The recreation is not visual in representation, but indeed there are many places where, had one not known from the outset that all filming was done in the present, it would be possible to believe what is on the screen is from the Holocaust itself. The best examples of this are the numerous camera shots of trains moving along tracks. The numerous shots are often only of the train wheels rolling down the tracks, and at times it is easy to believe that the trains could be carrying victims to the camps at that very moment.

In the nine and a half hours of mostly survivor testimony, other than the fact that those speaking survived, there is nearly nothing that is positive about the story Lanzmann recreates. It is hard to convey in words the feeling that one is left with after seeing the entire film. *Shoah* is indeed a difficult representation that may be too much information for those with limited knowledge about the Holocaust, and for those with an extensive knowledge it may in fact not illuminate anything entirely new to them. Nonetheless, *Shoah* has something to offer to anyone willing to devote the time to it. What *Shoah* offers is not hopeful or positive, but is in fact the very inverse of these words. The ending is reflective of the terrible nature of the Holocaust, more so than perhaps any other visual representation. It is painfully clear that the Holocaust was one of the most tragic events, if not the most tragic, in all of human history. Perhaps the biggest strength of *Shoah* is its ability to convey the inability to represent the Holocaust, which may seem ironic due to the fact that it is a representation of some sort. It is this paradox that gives *Shoah* its strength. If one can watch nine and a half hours about the Holocaust and still feel that there is no way to ever fully know or understand it, then there is doubtless, no way to ever know.

After seeing *Shoah* the viewer has a more personal understanding of what the Nazi machinery of death was like for those who experienced it. Although the intricacies of this can be read about in books, or comic books, and watched in movies, it is this personal level upon which the viewer is engaged with those people who were there, present at the very moments that was being carried out, that sets *Shoah* apart from the other representations discussed here. Viewers feel as if they “know” those who they have been watching the past nine or so hours and feel somewhat attached to them. It is possible to read testimonies or diaries from many of the people that are interviewed in *Shoah*, but that physical connection of seeing them “face to face” is missing when one reads about it. It is the connection that *Shoah* is able to make that other representations cannot.

Conclusion

In conclusion it seems that there is no real way that one can represent the Holocaust. A survivor himself, Elie Wiesel best describes the situation that all who try and represent the Holocaust face:

“There really are neither words nor means to capture the totality of the event...In spite of the testimonies, memoirs, and superhuman efforts of survivors, we will never know how Auschwitz and Treblinka were possible-for the killers as well as the victims.”³⁵

An event of that magnitude is at times beyond the comprehension of someone who was not witness to it, and even at times for those who did witness it, it seems still too much to grasp. Perhaps this is the proper way that the Holocaust should be represented; a way in which its complexity is the central theme. If indeed the Holocaust is not imaginable to those who were not there, this then should be the conclusion that representations leave with their viewers or readers; that there is no way for subsequent generations to truly understand what being part of the Holocaust was like. Despite this inability, knowledge nonetheless does have to be passed on to those in the future about the Holocaust, so that the event is not forgotten from history.

The Grey Zone, *Maus*, and *Shoah*, are all vastly different in the ways they go about representing the Holocaust. Each one illustrates a different aspect of the Holocaust as well. *The Grey Zone*'s largest achievement is in retelling the uprising that occurred in the last years of the war, while at the same time showing, as accurately as possible, what Auschwitz looked like from within. *Maus* is able to show what post-Holocaust life is like for those who survived, as well as what life was like in Auschwitz for some of the people there. *Shoah* is able to connect its viewers with those who are on screen giving their witness testimony as to how the Nazi death machinery operated. Through all of these representations the audiences see what life was like in the Nazi camp systems in one way or another from witness testimony. Despite their differences, each is a valid attempt to represent the Holocaust for future generations.

It should also be noted that a representation of the Holocaust needs to convey an overall feeling, not of hope or promise, but one more realistic, such as despair. To try and convey what the Holocaust was one must not lead their audience down a false path. Millions of lives were devoured in the Nazi death machine, and while some survived, most did not. It must also be noted that during the interim between the victims' previous, normal lives and then their unjust deaths, which was their time in a camp, the victims were part of a world that is beyond imagination for someone who did not experience that so-called "life." Although there were numerous acts of humanity among the prisoners and also at times involving the guards who were in charge at the camps, many times the effects of such acts were immediately reduced to nothing.³⁶ Each of the three representations discussed here do indeed leave their audience with an overwhelming feeling of just how life was for those who witnessed the Holocaust.

With such an unfulfilling conclusion, what is the point then of trying to represent the Holocaust? While there is nothing that can be complete, I would argue that it is for those who did and did not survive and their persistent desire for the future to remember that time in history that representations should and must be pursued. Representations may not be a perfect inclusion of all the events during the Holocaust, yet the ones done with good intentions and that are as close to accurate as possible with the witness testimony, do serve to aid memory. Also while there is no way to truly represent all aspects of the Holocaust, what can be done is representation on a smaller scale. Each representation, despite its mode, when taken collectively, or to the greatest extent possible, can serve memory in ways that are more beneficial than hurtful. Since there is no overall way to represent the Holocaust, therefore this collectivity is the closest one may get. It is possible for a portion or aspect of the Holocaust to be represented, such as the

conflicts between first and second generations, the survivor testimony, or a resistance movement, or even the unique story of a “good German” saving Jewish lives. To try and do much more than this, one runs the risk of presenting themselves as “all inclusive” when in fact this is impossible in relation to representing the Holocaust.

There indeed needs to be more general acceptance of different representations of the overwhelming event called the Holocaust. The future needs to be wary of any one representation becoming the predominant narrative of the Holocaust. To allow any one representation to be *the* memory of the Holocaust, no matter how complete it may seem, would be to undermine the Holocaust entirely. The collective examination of many different Holocaust representations may better serve to give an idea of what the Holocaust was for those who witnessed it. Future generations who will not have the privilege of living with survivors and witnesses, need to carefully consider what is and is not included in any representation of the Holocaust, and avoid letting any singular representation become the dominant way of retelling the Holocaust.

¹ See Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking this Holocaust*, p. 23-24 for his argument in how witness testimony is the most important source when researching about the Holocaust, due to its unique nature.

² For more information on avant-garde forms of representations see Barbie Zelizer ed. *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000. Her section titled “The Body” includes an interesting essay by Dora Apel, “The Tattooed Jew,” which examines arguably one of the most extreme ways of representing the Holocaust. Also see Stephen C. Feinstein’s article “Zbigniew Libera’s Lego Concentration Camp: Iconoclasm in Conceptual Art About the Shoah” in *Other Voices* 2, no. 1 (2000), <http://www.othervoices.org/2.1/feinstein/auschwitz.html> for another avant-garde representation involving Lego reconstructions of concentration camps. While they are not said to be exclusively based on Nazi camps they nonetheless contain many of the iconic images, such as the watchtowers and chimneys that were part of the Nazi camp system.

³ *The Grey Zone*, directed by Tim Blake Nelson. Lions Gate Entertainment, 2001.

⁴ Art Spiegelman. *Maus I*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986, and *Maus II*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1991.

⁵ *Shoah*, directed by Claude Lanzmann. Paramount Home Video, 1986.

⁶ See Primo Levi. *The Drowned and the Saved*. (New York: Summit Books, 1986): 50 for more information on the *Sonderkommando*.

⁷ I hope that the representations included in this article will speak for themselves as to this point. Claude Lanzmann, Art Spiegelman, and Tim Blake Nelson are three of the most diverse in what they feel is a “correct way” to view the Holocaust.

⁸ Yosefa Loshitzky ed. *Spielberg’s Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler’s List*. (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997): 12.

⁹ Judith Doneson. *The Holocaust in American Film*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002): 214.

¹⁰ Daniel Talbot, “Distributing Shoah,” in Loshitzky, *Spielberg’s Holocaust*, 58.

¹¹ Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film*, 206. Also see H. R. Shapiro’s review of the film in *In These Times* March 21, 1994.

¹² Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film*, 212.

¹³ For a brief description of the Julius Streicher and *Der Stürmer*, see Joseph Bendersky. *A History of Nazi Germany*. (Chicago: Burnham, Inc., Publishers, 2000):48. Streicher was an ardent Nazi who portrayed male Jews in a stereotypical racist manner and “pure” Aryan women together in almost pornographic ways in his newspaper, *Der Strumer*. For those who have compared Spielberg’s portrayal of Jews to Streicher see Loshitzky, *Spielberg’s Holocaust*, 114 and 167.

¹⁴ Tim Blake Nelson, interviewed by Jennifer Wood, *Movie Maker*. February 3, 2007, http://www.moviemaker.com/screenwriting/article/tim_blake_nelson_enter_the_grey_zone_2737/ (accessed November 24, 2007).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

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- ¹⁷ The beginning of the film notes that it is "...based in part on the eyewitness account of Dr. Miklos Nyiszli..." For his account see Dr. Miklos Nyiszli. *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account*, trans. Tibère Kremer and Richard Seaver. New York: Frederick Fell Inc., Publishers, 1960.
- ¹⁸ This spelling of Mussfeld is consistent with Nyiszli's spelling in his account, although it may also be spelled as Mussfeldt. For a closer look at Mussfeld, Nyiszli's account provides a starting place for insight into his role within Auschwitz.
- ¹⁹ For a further discussion of the place Hollywood films have when looking at history see, Barbie Zelizer, "Every Once and a While: *Schindler's List* and the shaping of History," in Loshitsky, *Spielberg's Holocaust*, 18-35.
- ²⁰ Tim Blake Nelson, interviewed by Jennifer Wood.
- ²¹ For more information in Josef Mengele see Lawrence Rees. *Auschwitz: A New History*. (New York: Public Affairs, 2005): 179-180.
- ²² Nyiszli, *Auschwitz*, 114-120.
- ²³ Lawrence Baron. "The Grey Zone: The Cinema of Choiceless Choices," in *Grey Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and its Aftermath*, eds. Jonathan Petropoulos and John K. Roth. (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005): 296-292.
- ²⁴ Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 95.
- ²⁵ Dominick LaCapra. *History and Memory after Auschwitz*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998): 160.
- ²⁶ Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 50.
- ²⁷ LaCapra, *History and Memory*, 169.
- ²⁸ *Maus II*, 136.
- ²⁹ *Maus II*, 29.
- ³⁰ *Ibid*, 34.
- ³¹ *Ibid*.
- ³² Stuart Liberman ed. *Claude Lanzmann's Shoah Key Essays*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007): 4.
- ³³ Raye Farr. "Some reflections on Claude Lanzmann's approach to the examination of the Holocaust," in *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representation in film and television since 1993*, eds. Toby Haggith and Joanna Newman. (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2005): 161.
- ³⁴ Liberman, *Claude Lanzmann's Shoah*, 11.
- ³⁵ Wisel quoted in Farr, "Some reflections on Claude Lanzmann's approach to the examination of the Holocaust," in *Holocaust and the Moving Image*, eds. Haggith and Newman, 163.
- ³⁶ Consider the story of Mandelbaum in Spiegelman's *Maus II*.