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"a monstrously difficult subject": Stanley Kubrick's Aryan Papers (1991-1993)

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3 **“a monstrously difficult subject”**: Stanley Kubrick’s *Aryan Papers* (1991-1993)
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7 Stanley Kubrick was obsessed with all things German. Whether this was because he was
8 a Jew growing up in the post-Holocaust era or because of his marriage to Christiane Harlan, the
9 niece of the director of the notoriously antisemitic *Jud Süß* (dir. Veit Harlan, 1940), or both, we
10 cannot precisely know. But Harlan’s family background had a major influence on Kubrick. Her
11 uncle had been a Nazi filmmaker – Kubrick watched all his films and even met him. Her parents
12 were cultured performers. Born in New York in 1928, Kubrick grew up as Hitler rose to power
13 in Germany and as the war raged in Europe. An awareness of the war was something he was
14 familiar with: Fifteen years old in 1943, he was surely alert to Allied advances, German defeats,
15 and the fate of the Jews. The radio in his home gave constant updates, and war remained a topic
16 of conversation in his family. “I’ve never seen a history of Nazi Germany I didn’t like,” he said.¹
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19 Kubrick’s preproduction research was legendary and exhaustive. Over previous films, he
20 had mastered a diverse range of topics including nuclear disarmament, the space race, Napoleon,
21 and the Vietnam War and his research for *Aryan Papers* was no different. Kubrick’s interest in
22 history as well as where we were headed as a species is firmly grounded in his approach to
23 filmmaking as a New York Jewish intellectual as discussed by Nathan Abrams.² In some ways,
24 Kubrick’s research for his Holocaust film was more intense and lasted longer because he took
25 such a personal interest in the topic and had been considering making a movie on the topic for
26 such a long time. Kubrick ordered and watched videotapes of documentaries on the Second
27 World War, the Nazis and antisemitism, as well as copies of newsreel and archive footage from
28 the 1930s and 1940s. Feature films of Polish, Czech, Danish, German, Russian, and American
29 origin with subject matter largely oriented around the Second World War and its consequences
30 on the everyday life of places occupied by the Third Reich. Some were official releases, and
31 some had been recorded from the television.³ His personal library contained hundreds of books
32 on the topic.
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48 But this researched failed to translate into a concrete project. For decades, Kubrick
49 struggled to make a film about the Second World War and more specifically, the Holocaust. It
50 has even been suggested that his interest was sparked as early as his time between 1945 and 1950
51 as a rookie photographer for *Look* magazine when “Henry Koerner’s eyewitness account of the
52 persecution of the Jews, the horror of the concentration camps, and the devastation of the
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3 bombed-out cities more than likely had sown the first seeds of a film project” about the
4 Holocaust.⁴ Such a topic, however, understandably presented obvious logistical problems but
5 also clashed with Kubrick’s long-held refusal to tackle Jewish issues directly and head-on. How
6 would a director who famously wrote the Jewish characters out of his screenplays only to
7 reinsert them in a subtextual fashion tackle a film specifically about the persecution and
8 extermination of Jews? Indeed, he had talked about the problems involved in it with many of the
9 writers he had worked with on his other films: Diane Johnson, Michael Herr, David Cornwell
10 (John Le Carre), and Riccardo Aragno but he failed to find a way to channel everything he had
11 read and studied into a single story. Kubrick told Michael Herr that Raul Hilberg’s *The*
12 *Destruction of the European Jews* (1961) was “monumental” and “that, probably, what he most
13 wanted to make was a film about the Holocaust, but good luck in getting all that into a two- hour
14 movie.”⁵ He approached various individuals like Isaac Bashevis Singer but to no avail. His
15 search intensified following *The Shining* (1980) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) when his interests
16 included such topics relating to the Second World War as Josef Goebbels’s propaganda machine,
17 the film industry in Germany during the Third Reich, the brilliance of the British codebreakers,
18 intrigue within the British Intelligence Service, and the Holocaust. After years of looking for a
19 suitable story to adapt, the search ended on January 3, 1991, when, through Michael Herr,
20 Elisabeth Sifton at Knopf sent Kubrick the bound galleys of Louis Begley’s *Wartime Lies* five
21 months before its release. Begley’s semi-autobiographical story of the struggle for survival of a
22 young Jewish boy and his aunt in Nazi-occupied Poland struck Kubrick as the ideal story and
23 starting point for his Holocaust project.⁶

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By July 1991, Kubrick began assembling the necessary components to pitch *Wartime Lies* as his next project and to obtain the necessary financing. He asked Warner Brothers, the studio that had been financing his films since *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), to option the rights (which they still own today) and set about working on the screenplay by himself. He tasked the host of readers he employed with undertaking “Polish research.”⁷ Kubrick kept his preparations secret and confined to his inner circle (even his readers did not know who they were working for) that included his brother-in-law Jan Harlan and his son-in-law, Philip Hobbs, as co-producers, his assistant, Tony Frewin, Roy Walker who was hired as production designer and Terry Semel and Eric Senat at Warner Bros. Chris Brook was hired as director of photography and Barbara Baum as costume designer. Work on the screenplay, locations, casting, and

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3 extensive preproduction was proceeding smoothly towards a Fall 1993 start date for the shooting
4 until when, in November 1993, the project, now entitled, *The Aryan Papers*, was abruptly put on
5 indefinite hold and, on November 15, it was officially announced that *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*
6 was set to be Kubrick's next project.
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10 Kubrick, however, was consistently unable to confront the Holocaust head-on and this
11 project was no different as he could not bring himself to complete his Holocaust film. It was, in
12 his words, "a monstrously difficult subject," which had depressed him too deeply.⁸ Whether this
13 was because it made him confront his own status as a Jew, the darkness in his wife's family's
14 history, the logistical issues, because *Aryan Papers* would have been Kubrick's only film to
15 feature more than one explicitly Jewish character for which there was no precedence or because
16 Warner Brothers, his backers, asked him not to, we will ultimately never know. In exploring
17 Kubrick's attempt to adapt *Wartime Lies*, this article will draw upon the latest insights in the
18 emerging field of Kubrick Studies. Specifically, it will utilize but also add to the growing work
19 on Kubrick's Jewishness, as well as the "new historical turn," which is based on exploiting
20 material now deposited in the Stanley Kubrick Archive (SKA) at the University of Arts,
21 London.⁹
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32 **Why *Wartime Lies*?**

34 Louis Begley's semi-autobiographical novel was based on his own life story. Born Ludwik
35 Begleiter in 1933 in Styry, Poland, Begley had survived the Holocaust before emigrating to the
36 United States in 1947. After attending prestigious private schools and Harvard College, as well
37 as serving in the military and being stationed for some time in Goppingen, he studied at Harvard
38 Law School. By the time, he published *Wartime Lies*, he had a career as a brilliant lawyer
39 specializing in international joint ventures and was a partner in the prestigious firm of Plimpton
40 & Debevoise in New York.
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46 *Wartime Lies* follows a young boy named Maciek, the son of a fully assimilated
47 respectable Jewish doctor in the Polish town of T, as he grows up in a Jewish family in Nazi-
48 occupied Poland. Maciek, along with his beautiful aunt Tania, assumes a Catholic identity to
49 obtain their "Aryan papers" – forged identity documents that Jews hiding in Nazi-occupied
50 Europe had to obtain to prove their non-Jewish origins – to evade Nazi persecution by hiding in
51 plain sight. Maciek conceals his circumcised penis – lest he fails the "trouser test" – and even
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3 considers a skin graft while Tania pretends to be a prostitute. Maciek takes communion and
4 studies scripture with a pastor, while Tania leads a group huddled in a cellar singing Polish
5 hymns to the Virgin. Understandably frightened, and enduring hardship, they travel from city to
6 city to avoid being caught, and eventually come to work as black marketeers in a remote peasant
7 village. They survive owing to a combination of chutzpah, sheer luck, and a gift for deceit,
8 pretense, and mimicry. Lying is so key to his survival, that Maciek loses his sense of self and
9 hence it is a core theme of the novel itself.

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15 The novel's first-person, intimate, and contemplative tone presented a possible way to
16 make a two-hour Holocaust film and, as a piece of fiction, it offered more possibilities than a
17 factual account. It also appealed on other levels. As Marat Grinberg has written, "Begley's prose
18 is devoid of any pathos in presenting the picture of the mundane hell of survival, interspersed
19 with ruminations on Dante's *Inferno*."¹⁰ Kubrick was also attracted to its notion of the fallibility
20 and perishability of memory and its characters as "adepts of fraudulence," in the words of
21 Frederic Raphael who collaborated on Kubrick's final film, *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999): "Its routines
22 of evasive deception must have appealed to Stanley; he maintained his unique standing in the
23 movies by the creation of an elusive persona who no one, not even studio heads, cared (or,
24 finally, dared) to challenge."¹¹ Given that the story was mostly about Jews masquerading as
25 gentiles, these elements of disguise and concealment offered Kubrick a way for him to avoid
26 having to deal with Jewishness explicitly – something he successfully achieved over his entire
27 career, *Eyes Wide Shut* notwithstanding. Kubrick deliberately and systematically erased overt
28 Jewishness from his source material. He repeatedly wrote Jewish characters out of his
29 screenplays from *The Killing* (1956), through *Paths of Glory* (1957), *Spartacus* (1960), *Lolita*
30 (1962), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *Barry Lyndon* (1975), and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987).

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43 Religion, and specifically Catholicism, had also featured in Kubrick's work from his
44 photography and earliest documentaries through to *Full Metal Jacket*. The Stanley Kubrick
45 Archive contains a series of reviews of *Wartime Lies* which Kubrick read and annotated. They
46 also provide some insight into what appealed to him about the novel and how he was thinking of
47 adapting it. In a June 1991 review by Janet Malcolm in the *New York Review of Books*, for
48 example, he highlighted the following sentence, "What happens to a child's soul when he lives
49 his childhood in constant fear for his life and witnesses atrocities that no child should know of,
50 no less witness?"¹² Further highlighting revealed a fascination with the character and
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3 temperament of Tania who acts as a surrogate mother to Maciek whose Oedipal wishes appear to
4 have been fulfilled as a result. Kubrick was well-read in the work of Sigmund Freud, whose
5 many themes and motifs had been included in his previous films and, as Geoffrey Cocks points
6 out, Begley drew “extensively on Freud to describe the heavily charged Oedipal scenario of a
7 young boy living alone and being protected by his audacious and courageous aunt Tania, who
8 had always been his surrogate mother, replacing the real mother who had died giving him
9 birth.”¹³ As with both sides of Kubrick’s family – the Kubricks and the Pervellers – Maciek’s
10 family are prosperous and distinguished assimilated Jews and Maciek is the son of a doctor and
11 hails from Galicia just like Kubrick’s father and his relatives. Finally, the horror of the Holocaust
12 as refracted through the prism of the fairy tale story of survival also appealed.
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22 **Story Development**

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24 Kubrick commenced work on the development of a film treatment, working on the
25 screenplay alone, something he had done on only three previous occasions for his realized
26 projects – *Napoleon*, *A Clockwork Orange*, and *Barry Lyndon*. In his pre-release copy of the
27 novel, he annotated the margins, scribbling down his initial ideas wondering whether to narrate
28 the movie from the perspective of Tania or Maciek. His notes contained more than just questions
29 about the narrative, dates, possible endings but also included considerations of characters,
30 casting, props, and costumes. Kubrick’s notes reveal that he aimed to depict the nine key
31 characters as they appear in a “pampered comfortable childhood sequence” before attempting to
32 “show the mild bureaucracy leading to murder.” At this stage, as he wrote down, he was not sure
33 whether to show immediate random cruelty and killings” or to build suspense by showing how
34 “relatively peaceful” some places were in the first days of occupation. By August 20, 1991, he
35 had completed the first draft. Others soon followed, aided by correspondence with Louis Begley
36 in September 1991 to confirm story points and areas of historical accuracy.¹⁴ Significantly,
37 Kubrick never communicated with Begley directly, leaving this task up to Jan Harlan. On a fax
38 from Begley to Harlan, dated August 31, 1991, Kubrick wrote: “Does the book read as if the
39 story is told by a 9-year-old, or by a grown Maciek? The film will have to have a more objective
40 reality.” Begley answers the question by writing back, “Maciek’s understanding of the actions of
41 grownups is limited. The lack of an omniscient narrator leads to a sort of child’s logic.” By
42 February 1992, Kubrick’s breakdown of the novel led him to conclude that he could not tell the
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3 story purely from Maciek's viewpoint. He wanted to include more dramatic elements, revealing
4 events that Maciek had not witnessed firsthand, including some sexual material.¹⁵ By June 1992,
5 Kubrick had developed a 126-page draft treatment, including some camera annotations scribbled
6 in the margins, as he began to think about turning the screenplay into a film.¹⁶
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10 Kubrick did not stray far from the novel's structure, sticking closely to what he would
11 have described as Begley's "beats," meaning the rhythm of the text. But, as he had done with all
12 his adaptations from *The Killing* (1956) onward, Kubrick removed many of the novel's scant
13 specific references to Judaism, and in only a few cases added to them. Significantly, Tania joins
14 the partisans, telling them, "I have never particularly thought of myself as a Jew, but now I know
15 I am. Hitler taught me that. I'm tired of running like a frightened animal. I want to join you."¹⁷ In
16 becoming a resistance fighter, Tania defies the stereotypical image of the Jewish victim,
17 participating in their undercover missions, during which she exposes a Nazi collaborator. In later
18 treatments, however, these elements were pruned. Kubrick's October 5, 1992, 126-page
19 treatment included 208 scenes, including an epilogue in which Maciek and Tania are rescued by
20 Jewish partisans and, in what appears to be a strongly Zionist ending, make Aliyah.¹⁸ "Their
21 ordeal finally ended in 1948 when they reached the new state of Israel... They were then free to
22 pick up the pieces of their lives. The End," Kubrick wrote.¹⁹
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32 By April 14, 1993, the length of the draft remained the same but now contained 256
33 scenes. Kubrick had penned the following prologue:
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36 "The Final Solution, Hitler's plan to systematically kill Europe's ten million Jews, was
37 initiated in the summer of 1941.
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39 Though it was given the highest priority there were still many practical problems
40 to solve in order to find the shortest way to kill so many people.
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43 But the ingenuity and resourcefulness of German bureaucracy were put to work
44 and factory-efficient death camps were built where thousands of Jews would arrive on a
45 train in the morning and be gassed and cremated by afternoon; their clothes and
46 belongings sorted, their hair shorn, their gold teeth pulled, and the killing mess washed
47 away not to alarm the next arrivals.
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51 When the war ended six million Jews had been killed.
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3 The outside world did remarkably little about this, the Allies even refusing to
4 bomb the few railway lines the Germans depended on to maintain the flow of victims to
5 the death camps.
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8 Thus it was left to every Jew to survive as best as they could.²⁰
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10 This version ends in 1945 with an epilogue in a forest somewhere in Poland. The reference to
11 Israel has been dropped. With every new draft, Kubrick never departed or differed significantly
12 from Begley's book, other than suggesting that events were not to be narrated in the first-person
13 voice of Maciek. Kubrick, though, did give more presence to the character of Tania who, at
14 times, developed into a more dominant character than Maciek, possibly because of the need of
15 the lead actor to bear the weight of the acting in the film.
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22 **Realism**

23 Kubrick was committed to authenticity as befitting a director who had meticulously recreated the
24 interior of a B-52 bomber in *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the*
25 *Bomb* (1964), the view of Earth from outer space in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), eighteenth-
26 century interiors and exteriors in *Barry Lyndon* (1975) and the bombed-out city of Hue (in then-
27 South Vietnam), in *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). Ever since the 1950s, especially with his film noir,
28 *Killer's Kiss* (1955), Kubrick expressed a desire for cinematic realism. And when it came to the
29 war genre, Kubrick was convinced that the movies have never really treated war with genuine
30 realism. By contrast, his war (and other) movies were praised for their authenticity. While he
31 favored voiceover narration, little dialogue, a documentary visual style, combined with maps, his
32 approach was flexible enough to abandon documentary for the dramatic (and even melodramatic
33 at times) and the artistic in his depiction of history.
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43 Realism and authenticity guided Kubrick's thinking when engaged in the pre-production
44 for *Aryan Papers* and would have been at the movie's core, especially in the need to get the
45 details right. Kubrick, for example, insisted on original uniforms that were almost impossible to
46 obtain at times, at least not in the quantity he required, but which were sourced in London,
47 Vienna, Munich, and Berlin. His Production Manager, Philip Hobbs, was tasked with finding
48 1000 Mauser rifles, as well as Schmeisser submachine guns, MG 34s and MG 42s, and numerous
49 Soviet, German, and Polish artillery. Such particulars were important to his vision of
50 representing war and history with realism and authenticity. Among the many books he read on
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3 the subject were two editions of George Markham's *Guns of the Reich: firearms of the German*
4 *forces, 1939-1945* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1989/1991).

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6 The desire for realism guided his search for suitable and authentic locations. Despite
7 having reproduced the war-torn South Vietnamese city of Hue in a disused London gasworks
8 complete with transplanting palm trees for *Full Metal Jacket*, Kubrick never considered making
9 his Holocaust film in England. Why not is a question that has yet to be fully answered but surely
10 one of the reasons for this was the lack of authentic locations required in Britain, hence why
11 continental Europe was more desirable than British cities. A second reason was that Kubrick
12 required Maciek's role for a longer period than was allowed for child actors by unions in the
13 United Kingdom. Together, these considerations necessitated a search for locations in
14 continental Europe, so Kubrick instructed Philip Hobbs to gather research on film studios in The
15 Netherlands.²¹ So important was the project to him, that Kubrick even took the unusual step of
16 leaving England – something he rarely did – with Jan Harlan and his erstwhile assistant Leon
17 Vitali to look at the Dutch locations himself. Harlan was later sent to scout locations in Poland,
18 Hungary, and Slovakia where hundreds of photographs of locations were taken because Kubrick
19 wanted a central European look for his Holocaust film something which was possibly
20 unattainable in the UK. Kubrick also sent his assistants around continental Europe to take photos
21 of the towns and villages described in the book and studied the style and architecture of buildings
22 and interiors of the period with his art director Roy Walker. In Berlin, Austria, and Potsdam, for
23 example, hundreds of photographs of locations were taken.²² Given that in the years after World
24 War II and during his planning for the film, European cities would have been completely rebuilt,
25 Kubrick had to discover places whose architecture remained intact.

26
27 Following Spielberg's decision to shoot *Schindler's List* (1993) in Central and Eastern
28 Europe, Kubrick dispatched Harlan and Hobbs to scout for locations and studios in the region
29 directly inspired by the younger director's decision. They concentrated their efforts in the cities
30 of Brno and Bratislava in the Czech Republic and Slovakia respectively with Kubrick flip-
31 flopping between the two locations.²³ This was where the scenes that take place in Maciek and
32 Tania's hometown – now renamed Nikolaev in Kubrick's script rather than "T" as in Begley's
33 novel – were to be shot. Eventually, Kubrick settled on the cities of Brno, Bratislava and Prague
34 and negotiations on locations, film permits, and technical requirements commenced with the
35 relevant Czech and Slovak authorities and companies. Harlan arranged deals with local
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3 authorities to be able to undertake location shooting, including an extensive and costly deal with
4 the Brno city council to close the center for one weekend and recreate Nazi-occupied Warsaw.
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6 Nazi flags were to be placed on buildings and authentic 1940s trams were to be borrowed from a
7
8 local museum. Indoor scenes were to be shot in a film studio in Bratislava.²⁴
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10 **Casting**

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12 As the locations were being finalized and Kubrick was working on the script, he was also in the
13 process of casting. Understanding why Kubrick cast for certain roles is a black hole in studies of
14 his films. He left few casting notes and was not always forthcoming in interviews about his
15 reasoning. Consequently, in their absence, scholars, critics, and fans fill the gaps with their own
16 speculations. However, on a sticky note on a folder labelled “Jewish Partisan Woman,” Kubrick
17 wrote, “Top actors for every part.”²⁵ Along these lines, Kubrick’s initial thoughts about who
18 should play the lead role of Tania contained a mixture of well-known Hollywood, British, and
19 Eastern European actors. But early in the process, his preference for the lead was either Uma
20 Thurman or Julia Roberts.²⁶ By December 1992, however, Kubrick changed his mind and
21 approached the lesser-known Dutch actor Johanna Ter Steege.²⁷ Born in May 1961, she had
22 featured in various movies but was most familiar to audiences for her role in George Sluzier’s
23 1988 film *The Vanishing*. Kubrick watched all her films several times and perhaps was drawn to
24 what Janet Maslin described as “a radiant and compelling figure” whose “unaffected loveliness”
25 and “captivating warmth” was captured by Ter Steege in *The Vanishing*.²⁸ “He was convinced
26 that he had found an actress whose performance would catapult a new star to the forefront of
27 international stardom and give this dark and serious film the needed ‘gloss,’” Jan Harlan said of
28 Ter Steege.²⁹
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41 For the role of her nephew, Maciek, Kubrick wanted Joseph Mazzello. Born in
42 September 1983, in Rhinebeck, and raised in Hyde Park, New York, he had first appeared in a
43 small role in *Presumed Innocent*, in 1990, starring Harrison Ford. He then went on to appear in
44 *Radio Flyer*, *Jersey Girl*, and the TV film *Desperate Choices: To Save My Child* in 1992. But
45 his big breakthrough was his casting as Tim Murphy in Steven Spielberg’s *Jurassic Park* (1993).
46 Mazzello had the Spielberg imprimatur and having met and auditioned Mazzello, Kubrick was
47 convinced he was “perfect for the role as well as polite, intelligent, and calm, which were three
48 indispensable qualities in his opinion,” his right-hand man, Emilio D’Alessandro, recalled.³⁰ The
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3 consideration here seemed to be less about performance than about the character of the child
4 actor with whom he was required to work.
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7 In terms of the other roles, there is less information. Kubrick had Heritage Films in
8 Warsaw send him screen tests they had done for *Schindler's List*. He considered casting Armin
9 Mueller-Stahl as a German officer, even though he was too old to play the part. Steven Berkoff,
10 the Jewish actor who had appeared in *A Clockwork Orange* and *Barry Lyndon* says he was
11 offered a role, but which role exactly is not known. Undoubtedly, Kubrick would have hired
12 locals as extras.
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17 It is significant how few of these choices were Jewish. But then Kubrick had never cast
18 for an explicitly Jewish role up to this point in his career possibly because of commercial
19 considerations. More than just an intellectual, Kubrick wanted to mainstream his material. A
20 serious filmmaker as well as a businessman and later a producer, he felt constrained by the need
21 to make a commercial return on his films. And his initial desire for a big-name and non-Jewish
22 star for *Aryan Papers* may well have been the result of profit imperatives guided by his backers
23 at Warners as it was not imperative for a Holocaust movie.
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32 **“Holocaust, The Movie”** 33

34 What would this film have looked like and what sort of detail about the genocide would it
35 have contained? Was *Aryan Papers* going to be about the Nazi extermination of the Jews?
36 Looking at the source text and draft screenplays, we can draw several conclusions. There is what
37 might one describe as an element of typical Kubrick avoidance, as well as something resonant, in
38 taking the story of a Jew passing as a gentile, thus avoiding direct treatment of Jewishness and
39 Judaism. In terms of the mechanics of the extermination, the film was to feature epic scenes of
40 the Jewish ghettos in Warsaw being cleared, with Kubrick using aerial filming, as well as a mass
41 shooting with graphic scenes of mass rape. “They raped them publicly, singly, in groups, on the
42 ground, leaning them against broken walls of houses. Some women were made to kneel, soldiers
43 holding them from the back by the hair, their gaping mouths entered by penis after penis.”³¹
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51 A Kubrick screenplay, however, only tells us so much. One of the reasons for this is that
52 it was typically changed during shooting, owing to rehearsals, improvisations, and other factors
53 unaccounted for in the pre-production process. It is by no means a blueprint and typically did not
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3 contain much information on cinematography (although, as noted above, the treatment dated
4 June 12, 1992, did include some scribbled camera annotations³²) and, most importantly, music
5 which was essential to Kubrick's aesthetic, particularly his use of preexisting rather than
6 composing new music. There was the consideration of voiceover narration, as had featured in
7 many of Kubrick's films, as well as in the use of newsreel and maps were to be used to depict the
8 Anschluss and German advance into Sudetenland and Poland.
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11 To gain further insight, we can also look to the past for clues, and these are presented by
12 Kubrick's proposed but never realized *Napoleon* project. Kubrick explained to Joseph Gelmis in
13 1970 how he planned to return to the use of a narrator and even animation or charts to illustrate
14 and explain the battle tactics and campaigns for his abortive *Napoleon* script for the film that was
15 to follow *2001: A Space Odyssey* in 1968, but was shelved sooner after.³³ He had, by that point,
16 directed two war movies – *Paths of Glory* (1957) and *Spartacus* (1960) – both historical films
17 that respected realism but also manifested his elision of direct Jewish references. The latter was
18 noted, in 1960, for its brutality and many scenes were cut in the original release version only to
19 be restored in 1991. Kubrick had also rejected earlier offers to direct a Spanish Civil War epic, a
20 biography of Simon Bolivar, and a biopic of the life of Oliver Cromwell.³⁴ In rejecting them, he
21 had written to MGM's Ron Lubin that, "representing a broad panorama of history has always
22 proved to be the undoing of film makers." He recommended that such a movie must have
23 voiceover narration, little dialogue and a "documentary visual style." He added that "costume
24 war scenes tend to look like so many extras thoughtlessly dressed on a beautiful hill... the thing
25 that usually makes movie battles idiotic is that the terrain is senseless. Almost all battles are
26 shaped and finally decided by the terrain itself."³⁵ Narration, little dialogue, documentary visual
27 style, and terrain were all central concerns for Kubrick's vision of the Holocaust in *Aryan*
28 *Papers*.
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32 Kubrick's notes on the *Napoleon* screenplay offer further hints. The massacre of 3,000
33 captured Turkish soldiers at Jaffa on March 7, 1799, caught Kubrick's attention when he read it
34 in Felix Markham's 1963 biography of the emperor, *Napoleon*. He noted that this event seemed
35 like a "good scene," and wondered how a mass shooting of this kind could have been managed
36 from a purely logistical point of view. In subsequent conversations with Markham, Kubrick
37 grilled the historian about the size of the task involved in killing three thousand men: "How do
38 you suppose he did it? I mean, was it done methodically, or was it just 'run amok,' or...how was
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3 it done?" In addition to the mechanics, Kubrick wanted to know if the soldiers knew they were
4 going to be shot and requested from Markham "a lot of details."³⁶ Kubrick displayed a morbid
5 fascination with the technicalities and a version of this event found its way into his *Napoleon*
6 which, according to Eva-Marie Magel "provide[d] a very explicit, indeed cynical picture" in
7 keeping with Kubrick's approach of juxtaposing extreme violence with "macabre, cool, almost
8 playful elements of comedy."³⁷ Although this screenplay was written some two decades before
9 *Aryan Papers*, the discussion and interest in the logistics of mass killing provide some insight
10 into how Kubrick would have approached this in his own Holocaust film.

11
12 We can also look at his completed films. This is illustrated in *Full Metal Jacket* where
13 production designer Anton Furst recalled:

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15 We saw about 6,000 photographs of the Vietnam War. We took what we thought were
16 the most powerful images with the most impact. For instance, when the squad went into
17 the burned-out city of Hue, we had every building on fire. That was probably an
18 exaggeration. We had seen some shots where it looked like everything was on fire. We
19 weren't going for complete historical accuracy. So we built sculptural images and lit that
20 whole section of the film with available light and fire. We didn't want blue skies. If the
21 sun came out, Stanley didn't shoot. It was supposed to be the image of hell.³⁸

22
23 Despite the extent of the research to recreate an authentic Vietnam, realism was subsumed by the
24 need to produce a heightened image of spectacle as a key component of Kubrick's realist
25 photographic aesthetic. As Jan Harlan said of *Aryan Papers*, "Stanley was not interested in a
26 documentary. He wanted a dramatic and artistic depiction of the lowest point in human history."
27 But at the same time, he described Kubrick's screenplay thus: "It is not a drama that is over-the-
28 top and has lots of action. It is a very silent film, a very serious film. The tension is in this
29 horrendous, low valley of humanity that existed because of the Nazis."³⁹

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31 That Kubrick admired the sixteen-hour German television serial about a small town
32 during the Third Reich, *Heimat*, which aired in 1984, is telling, and may have guided his
33 thinking about cinematography.⁴⁰ Jan Harlan recalled how Kubrick was impressed by how the
34 story had been told and how its director, Edgar Reitz, had convincingly conveyed the *mise en*
35 scene without special effects.⁴¹ *Heimat* provided a model for a cost-effective yet credible
36 recreation of history so key to Kubrick's historical realist vision. Kubrick kept a still image taken
37 from *Heimat* that he especially liked: an image of a coffin standing in the street in the rain. What
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3 exactly appealed is not known but it is a ghostly, spectral, and haunting black and white image,
4 suggesting more than it reveals: The loneliness of extermination; the Jews on their own,
5 unprotected, dead in the rain, un-mourned, and unwanted. As photographer Diane Arbus, who
6 took a rookie Kubrick under her wing, said “a photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it
7 tells the less you know.” We can hear an echo of this in Kubrick’s explanation, “I think for a
8 movie or play to say anything really truthful about life, it has to do so very obliquely, so as to
9 avoid all pat conclusions and neatly tied up ideas.”⁴² On the recommendation of Reitz, Kubrick
10 hired *Heimat*’s designer and set dresser, Fritz Bauer, who would have achieved this blend of the
11 realist with the dramatic.
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32 Kubrick was also a fan of director Krzysztof Kieślowski’s ten-part series for Polish
33 Television on the Ten Commandments, released in 1988 and 1989. Each episode based on one of
34 the Ten Commandments, *Dekalog* wove narratives of loss, blunders, missteps, human frailty, and
35 missed opportunities in its moody and melancholic reflections. The films of the *Dekalog* are tightly
36 framed and, while there is much dialogue, it is pointed and poignant, spoken without melodrama,
37 understated, as is the complex morality the undergirds each of the episodes. Kieślowski’s visual
38 style and use of color relieved the potential claustrophobia of the films, which take place in and
39 around a huge apartment block in Warsaw. Kubrick recognized the emotion latent in the *Dekalog*
40 and wrote a preface to the published screenplay by Kieślowski and his coauthor, Krzysztof
41 Piesiewicz:
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49 I am always reluctant to single out some particular feature of the work of a major
50 filmmaker because it tends inevitably to simplify and reduce the work. But in this book of
51 screenplays by Krzysztof Kieslowski and his co-author, Krzysztof Piesiewicz, it should
52 not be out of place to observe that they have the very rare ability to dramatize their ideas
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3 rather than just talking about them. By making their points through the dramatic action of
4 the story they gain the added power of allowing the audience to discover what's really
5 going on rather than being told. They do this with such dazzling skill, you never see the
6 ideas coming and don't realize until much later how profoundly they have reached your
7 heart.⁴³
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11 It was a rare occasion that Kubrick undertook such writing outside of his films, and he did it at
12 precisely the same time as he was embarking on *Aryan Papers* suggesting a key cinematic
13 influence on Kubrick: conciseness; concentrated, suggested emotion.
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17 These two series pointed to the minimalist, almost journalistic, Kafka-esque style that had
18 guided Kubrick's other movies most explicitly *The Shining* (1980). Kubrick was especially
19 attracted to what he called Kafka's "almost journalistic" accounts of the grotesque inherence of
20 horror in the quotidian and like Kafka's works, his films consistently combined irony, the
21 absurd, the uncanny, elements of surrealism, and black humor that undercut his simultaneous
22 insistence on realism – consistent features of Kubrick's cinema and central to the works of
23 Kafka.⁴⁴
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29 Here we must also remember Kubrick's beginnings as a photographer because a
30 photographic aesthetic permeated his work. As Djana Metlič has pointed out, his "cinematic
31 style was undoubtedly shaped during the years he spent as a staff photographer at *Look*."⁴⁵ And
32 Pratap Rughani argues that the Stanley Kubrick Archive demonstrates Kubrick's interest the
33 Vietnam War was culturally processed in photography but also news and documentary footage,
34 including the 1980 CBS TV mini-series *A Rumor of War*. The work of photographer of Philip
35 Jones Griffiths whose 1971 *Vietnam Inc.* was a key source for Kubrick.⁴⁶ He even cut eighty-five
36 pages out of it as a reference for source imagery, just as he did with the artwork featured in *Barry*
37 *Lyndon*. The pages focused on the soldiers when not in battle, on women and children around the
38 US presence and above the impact of the war on civilian life and the extent of Vietnamese
39 casualties.
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48 No doubt *Aryan Papers* would have drawn heavily on wartime and documentary footage
49 with a striving for realism. Indeed, as noted above, his October 1922 treatment contained the
50 word "stock" indicating that intended to use documentary stock footage sequences throughout
51 the movie. As Marat Grinberg has written, "The treatments reveal his deep engagement with the
52 history and dilemmas of representing the Holocaust on screen, such as the inclusion and purpose
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3 of documentary footage of the atrocities, an issue central to *A Clockwork Orange* and *Full Metal*
4 *Jacket*, which Kubrick might have learned from Sam Fuller's *Verboten!* (1955).⁴⁷ Yet, at the
5 same time, Kubrick was, in general, ambiguous about cinematic "realism" which was never as
6 important for Kubrick as the perfect image. Jack Nicholson reports how Kubrick told him, "In
7 movies you don't try and photograph the reality [. . .] you try and photograph the photograph of
8 the reality."⁴⁸ He told Mathew Modine while filming *Full Metal Jacket* that "real is good;
9 interesting is better."⁴⁹ After all, in his early career as a photojournalist, his job was to make the
10 real interesting, to turn what there is in the world into something unusual within the photographic
11 frame. And although he admired the style and methodology of the Hollywood studios, none of
12 Kubrick's films fits comfortably into the confines of the conventional style of Hollywood
13 realism with its transparent editing; its eye-level, rarely moving camera; its neutral color palette;
14 its dependence on over-the-shoulder cutting for simple dialogue scenes.

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17 Thus, as Grinberg, one of the few scholars to have considered the aesthetic of *Aryan*
18 *Papers*, points out,

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20 In preparation for *Aryan Papers*, Kubrick was poring over, cutting from books, and
21 copying hundreds and hundreds of reproductions of photos dealing with the Holocaust
22 and pre-war life. The entire film was meant to have the look of a photograph, the defining
23 art of the 20th century, of which he was a supreme practitioner and the primary means by
24 which we have come to view the Holocaust. Like *Full Metal Jacket*, which presented
25 "Vietnam, the movie" by replicating much of the Vietnam-era photography and film
26 journalist footage, *Aryan Papers* would have been "Holocaust, the movie."⁵⁰

27
28 Grinberg shows how, while realism and authenticity would have underpinned the mise en scene
29 (costumes, locations, props), in terms of style and aesthetic, in *Aryan Papers* Kubrick would
30 have photographed the photograph of the reality to produce something interesting, something
31 better than just real. It is significant, then, in this respect that Kubrick was planning to shoot over
32 the winter months as the lack of sunlight would have had a significant impact on the look of the
33 film, giving it a darker and colder feel, more in keeping with the black and white photography of
34 Holocaust-era film and still pictures. Yet, Kubrick was not going to shoot the film in black and
35 white.⁵¹

36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 **Reasons for Failure**

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3 The main reason cited for the failure of *Aryan Papers* was the prospect of Steven
4 Spielberg's *Schindler's List* looming on the horizon. As Kubrick was dithering over the
5 preproduction minutiae of the screenplay, locations, casting, and even when and where to shoot
6 his film, *Schindler's List* went into production on March 1, 1993, in Krakow, Poland. By
7 November, influenced by the enormous amount of publicity ahead of *Schindler's List's* release in
8 the United States later that month, Kubrick decided to suspend work on the project indefinitely.
9 "were still shuffling index cards," Kubrick's assistant Tony Frewin told *Vice*.⁵² Kubrick, who
10 had seen Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (dir. Oliver Stone, 1986) come out just before *Full Metal*
11 *Jacket*, was concerned about having his Holocaust picture and Spielberg's being released so
12 close together. Kubrick and Warner Bros. decided that it was a poor business decision to follow
13 *Schindler's List* with a similar topic. Jan Harlan feels it was Terry Semel, then co-chief of
14 Warner Bros., who suggested that Kubrick abandon *Aryan Papers*, aware of the problems of
15 preproduction and because they were pressuring him towards projects, they believed to be more
16 commercially viable.⁵³ For his part, super-agent Michael Ovitz claims credit. "I knew there was
17 room for only one Holocaust film; two would dilute the box office and spark unfortunate
18 comparisons [and] 'The Aryan Papers' wasn't as good – or as commercial – as 'Schindler's
19 List.' It had no complex protagonist, no Oskar Schindler, for an audience to engage with. And
20 because Stanley took longer than Steven in development, plus forty weeks or more to shoot
21 (roughly twice the norm), he'd be in theaters second, putting him at a major disadvantage." Ovitz
22 claims he told Kubrick that *Aryan Papers* was also simultaneously too like *Schindler's List* and
23 too derivative of *Sophie's Choice*, the acclaimed Holocaust film directed by Alan J. Pakula,
24 released in 1982. "It's just not Kubrick to be unoriginal," Ovitz has written.⁵⁴

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41 While Frederic Raphael claims in his controversial memoir *Eyes Wide Open* that Kubrick
42 dismissed *Schindler's List* by saying it was about "success," while the Holocaust is about "six
43 million people who get killed," Kubrick took Spielberg's film more seriously and looked closely
44 at the film's rollout in the United States where it was doing well.⁵⁵ "Oh, not another Jewish
45 movie about the Holocaust," he thought. When *Schindler's List* arrived in the UK in February
46 1994, he sent Emilio D'Alessandro to monitor how many people were queuing to see it on the
47 opening weekend before the box office statistics were released. "When I told Stanley what I'd
48 seen, I thought he would be happy to learn that a film dealing with such a delicate subject was so
49 successful. He seemed to be pleased for Steven, but he didn't ask me as many questions as usual.
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3 He didn't get angry like he had done when *Platoon* had compromised the release of *Full Metal*
4 *Jacket*.”⁵⁶

6 There seems to be more at play than simply the competition that *Schindler's List* offered,
7 however. As Emilio D'Alessandro pointed out, “he hadn't even started filming *Aryan Papers*, so
8 it wouldn't have come out for two or three years. There was no way that *Schindler's List* could
9 have been a real problem. Nevertheless, I continued to see a new look of perplexity on his face.”
10 It became apparent that Kubrick was having doubts and his indecision was holding up the entire
11 production.⁵⁷ Stanley faltered,” D'Alessandro recalled. “Something strange was happening. It
12 was almost as if he didn't want to start work on the film. I don't know what it was: perhaps the
13 story, or the fact that he would have to move to [continental] Europe for some of the scenes.
14 Anyway, it was clear that he was not happy about something.”⁵⁸

15 Jan Harlan believes that Kubrick “may have been secretly thankful [...] as he had found the
16 topic increasingly difficult to face.”⁵⁹ His widow, Christiane felt, “*Schindler's List* is a hard act
17 to follow” so it offered him a “way out.” There may have been other reasons but mainly relief
18 not to do a project that finally overwhelmed him, that was too painful.

19 I read all the material Stanley collected with his usual care and became depressed, even
20 though I knew everything,” Christiane recalled. “He was also in a state of depression, because
21 he realized it was an impossible film. It's impossible to direct the Holocaust unless it's a
22 documentary. If you show the atrocities as they actually happened, it would entail the total
23 destruction of the actors. Stanley said he could not instruct actors how to liquidate others and
24 could not explain the motives for the killing. I will die from this,” he said, “and the actors will
25 die, too, not to mention the audience.”⁶⁰

26 Christiane added, “he felt it just couldn't be told. ‘If I really want to show what I've read and
27 know happened.’ And he read everything. ‘How can I even film it? How can you even pretend
28 it?’ He became very depressed during the preparations and I was very glad when he gave up on it
29 because it was really taking its toll.”⁶¹ He was ill reading up on the detail and studying the
30 photographs.⁶²

31 Kubrick simply could not bring himself to depict the horrors of the Holocaust on film.
32 “The reason Stanley gave up on it,” Christiane Kubrick said, “is because Steven's film is about
33 Jews who lived, and just a few. If you tell the whole truth in the film, which is the only way you
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3 could honor all these dead people, and be respectful enough, you would have to tell the whole
4 truth.” And that, she concluded, would be “absolutely unsurvivable.” She continued to say:

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6 Like most Jewish families, Stanley’s family came from all over that part of the continent.
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8 His mother came from Kiev, his father from today’s Romania. There were also relatives
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10 from Poland. When Stanley was a young man he would very much have wanted to see all
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12 these countries, which was then impossible. The reason he did not do the Holocaust film
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14 was quite different. He wanted to be totally informed. Of course, he was informed, most
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16 Jews know the story. He had thought about it for a long time. Stanley had had many
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18 experiences of anti-Semitism as a journalist in America. He was beaten up as a child. All
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20 the typical things – Christian and Jewish gangs. And he feared anti-Semitism. Even
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22 professionally. And when he came to the Holocaust story, there was a moment when he
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24 realised he could not imagine it at all. He was too frightened, too horrified. And then you
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26 have to show it on the screen. And this is why he said he could not make it. He was too
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28 scared.” Christiane recalled, “he felt it just couldn’t be told. ‘If I really want to show what
I’ve read and know happened.’”⁶³

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30 Christiane, the person who came to know Kubrick best throughout their four-decade relationship,
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32 understood how Kubrick’s Jewishness held him back from confronting the very thing he had
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34 been contemplating for so long. But, as she suggests, there was something more to the picture,
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36 that Kubrick realized that the story was untellable, especially if he wanted to maintain his
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38 commitment to historical veracity, authenticity, and realism.

38 **Epilogue**

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40 Kubrick never entirely gave up on his Holocaust film. When, on November 18, 1993, Jan
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42 Harlan wrote to Tamara Holoubkova, his contact in Bratislava, to explain there had been a
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44 change of plan, he explained, “The film will still be made but at this stage I can’t say where and
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46 when.”⁶⁴ Kubrick then got in touch with the Holocaust historian, Raul Hilberg, saying that
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48 Spielberg had not made the right film. He even invited Hilberg to his home at Childwickbury but
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50 Hilberg declined to say that he did not have the time. Kubrick suggested Hilberg read the novels
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52 of John Dos Passos to see how characters could disappear in the middle of a film and be replaced
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54 by other characters, implying that he imagined *Aryan Papers* as a variation on Dos Passos’s
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56 novel *U. S. A.* (1938), which fused fiction with documentary genres and cinema with literature
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58 by making the hybrid text function like a newsreel. But Hilberg thought this would be too
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3 “panoramic” and reminiscent of the flawed 1978 television miniseries *Holocaust*. Subsequently,
4 Hilberg thought that a film simply called *Auschwitz* and chronicling the mass destruction would
5 be compelling. Hilberg almost called him “to remind him we were mortal,” but did not because
6 by that point Kubrick had moved onto *Traumnovelle* (a.k.a *Eyes Wide Shut* [1999]).⁶⁵ In
7
8 December 1993, Kubrick sent a Christmas card to Barbara Baum, optimistically writing, “I will
9
10 keep you informed. All this work will not have been in vain.”⁶⁶ In response to a letter of March
11
12 28, 1994, Jan Harlan wrote to Lynn H. Cox, saying, “at present the film has been postponed until
13
14 Mr. K completes the film he is presented.”⁶⁷ Kubrick, however, realized (as would happen with
15
16 *A.I.* which he eventually passed on to Spielberg), that he was not the director capable of realising
17
18 *Aryan Papers* and drew up a list of those whom he thought could.⁶⁸
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21 Could *Aryan Papers* have succeeded had Kubrick and the studio not been scared off?
22 Holocaust film historian Rich Brownstein, author of 2021’s *Holocaust Cinema Complete: A*
23 *History and Analysis of 400 Films, with a Teaching Guide*, is dubious. “First,” he says, “the story
24 of Jewish boys and men hiding their circumcision was not new. This was a theme in Claude
25 Berri’s great autobiographical feature *The Two of Us - Le vieil homme et l'enfant* (1967). In fact,
26 a gruesome reverse circumcision was the key plot point in Agnieszka Holland’s *Europa Europa*
27 (1990), which was Oscar-nominated for best screenplay in 1992, during *Aryan Papers*’ pre-
28
29 production. More importantly, the hallmark of great Holocaust filmmaking is narrowly focused
30
31 plots, not sprawling or epic approaches, *Schindler’s List* notwithstanding. Fortunately, Kubrick
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33 withdrew before making a disaster, not unlike Jerry Lewis’ aborted *The Day the Clown Cried*
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35 (1972), which was halted during production. So, in this way, Kubrick fans should be grateful that
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37 *Aryan Papers* was never produced.”⁶⁹
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44 I would like to thank Robert P. Kolker and Rich Brownstein for their very helpful feedback on
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46 earlier drafts of this article.
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² Nathan Abrams, *Stanley Kubrick: New York Jewish Intellectual* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018).

³ Video Cassette Research, SK/18/2/3/5, The Stanley Kubrick Archive, University of the Arts, London (hereafter “SKA”).

⁴ Petrus Schaesberg, “Stanley Kubrick: Inventor of Facts,” in Rainer Crone, ed., *Stanley Kubrick: Drama & Shadows* (London: Phaidon Press, 2005), 244.

⁵ Michael Herr, *Kubrick* (New York: Grove, 2000), 7– 8, 10; emphasis in original.

⁶ Jan Harlan, “From *Wartime Lies* to ‘Aryan Papers,’” in Alison Castle, ed., *The Stanley Kubrick Archives* (Cologne: Taschen, 2005), 512.

⁷ Anthony Frewin, Empyrean Films, April 29, 1991, SK/1/2/3/2/85, SKA.

⁸ Stanley Kubrick, quoted in Michael Ovitz, *Who Is Michael Ovitz?* (New York: Portfolio, 2018), no pp.

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¹⁰ See Grinberg, “Kubrick and Jewishness,” 208-10.

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“a monstrously difficult subject”: Stanley Kubrick’s *Aryan Papers* (1991-1993)

Stanley Kubrick was obsessed with all things German. Whether this was because he was a Jew growing up in the post-Holocaust era or because of his marriage to Christiane Harlan, the niece of the director of the notoriously antisemitic *Jud Süß* (dir. Veit Harlan, 1940), or both, we cannot precisely know. But Harlan’s family background had a major influence on Kubrick. Her uncle had been a Nazi filmmaker – Kubrick watched all his films and even met him. Her parents were cultured performers. Born in New York in 1928, Kubrick grew up as Hitler rose to power in Germany and as the war raged in Europe. An awareness of the war was something he was familiar with: Fifteen years old in 1943, he was surely alert to Allied advances, German defeats, and the fate of the Jews. The radio in his home gave constant updates, and war remained a topic of conversation in his family. “I’ve never seen a history of Nazi Germany I didn’t like,” he said.¹

Kubrick’s preproduction research was legendary and exhaustive. Over previous films, he had mastered a diverse range of topics including nuclear disarmament, the space race, Napoleon, and the Vietnam War and his research for *Aryan Papers* was no different. Kubrick’s interest in history as well as where we were headed as a species is firmly grounded in his approach to filmmaking as a New York Jewish intellectual as discussed by Nathan Abrams.² In some ways, Kubrick’s research for his Holocaust film was more intense and lasted longer because he took such a personal interest in the topic and had been considering making a movie on the topic for such a long time. Kubrick ordered and watched videotapes of documentaries on the Second World War, the Nazis and antisemitism, as well as copies of newsreel and archive footage from the 1930s and 1940s. Feature films of Polish, Czech, Danish, German, Russian, and American origin with subject matter largely oriented around the Second World War and its consequences on the everyday life of places occupied by the Third Reich. ~~Some were official releases, and some had been recorded from the television.~~³ His personal library contained hundreds of books on the topic.

But this research failed to translate into a concrete project. For decades, Kubrick struggled to make a film about the Second World War and more specifically, the Holocaust. It has even been suggested that his interest was sparked as early as his time between 1945 and 1950 as a rookie photographer for *Look* magazine when “Henry Koerner’s eyewitness account of the persecution of the Jews, the horror of the concentration camps, and the devastation of the

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3 bombed-out cities more than likely had sown the first seeds of a film project” about the
4 Holocaust.⁴ Such a topic, however, understandably presented obvious logistical problems but
5 also clashed with Kubrick’s long-held refusal to tackle Jewish issues directly and head-on. How
6 would a director who famously wrote the Jewish characters out of his screenplays only to
7 reinsert them in a subtextual fashion tackle a film specifically about the persecution and
8 extermination of Jews? Indeed, he had talked about the problems involved in it with many of the
9 writers he had worked with on his other films: Diane Johnson, Michael Herr, David Cornwell
10 (John Le Carre), and Riccardo Aragno but he failed to find a way to channel everything he had
11 read and studied into a single story. Kubrick told Michael Herr that Raul Hilberg’s *The*
12 *Destruction of the European Jews* (1961) was “monumental” and “that, probably, what he most
13 wanted to make was a film about the Holocaust, but good luck in getting all that into a two- hour
14 movie.”⁵ He approached various individuals like Isaac Bashevis Singer but to no avail. His
15 search intensified following *The Shining* (1980) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) when his interests
16 included such topics relating to the Second World War as Josef Goebbels’s propaganda machine,
17 the film industry in Germany during the Third Reich, the brilliance of the British codebreakers,
18 intrigue within the British Intelligence Service, and the Holocaust. After years of looking for a
19 suitable story to adapt, the search ended on January 3, 1991, when, through Michael Herr,
20 Elisabeth Sifton at Knopf sent Kubrick the bound galleys of Louis Begley’s *Wartime Lies* five
21 months before its release. Begley’s semi-autobiographical story of the struggle for survival of a
22 young Jewish boy and his aunt in Nazi-occupied Poland struck Kubrick as the ideal story and
23 starting point for his Holocaust project.⁶

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By July 1991, Kubrick began assembling the necessary components to pitch *Wartime Lies* as his next project and to obtain the necessary financing. He asked Warner Brothers, the studio that had been financing his films since *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), to option the rights (which they still own today) and set about working on the screenplay by himself. He tasked the host of readers he employed with undertaking “Polish research.”⁷ Kubrick kept his preparations secret and confined to his inner circle (even his readers did not know who they were working for) that ~~included~~ including his brother-in-law Jan Harlan and his son-in-law, Philip Hobbs, as co-producers, his assistant, Tony Frewin, Roy Walker who was hired as production designer and Terry Semel and Eric Senat at Warner Bros. Chris Brook was hired as director of photography and Barbara Baum as costume designer. Work on the screenplay, locations, casting, and

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3 extensive preproduction was proceeding smoothly towards a Fall 1993 start date for the shooting
4 until when, in November 1993, the project, now entitled, *The Aryan Papers*, was abruptly put on
5 indefinite hold and, on November 15, it was officially announced that *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*
6 was set to be Kubrick's next project.
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10 Kubrick, however, was consistently unable to confront the Holocaust ~~directly head-on~~
11 and this project was no different as he could not bring himself to complete his Holocaust film. It
12 was, in his words, "a monstrously difficult subject," which had depressed him too deeply.⁸
13 Whether this was because it made him confront his own status as a Jew, the darkness in his
14 wife's family's history, ~~or~~ the logistical issues, ~~because~~ *Aryan Papers* would have been
15 Kubrick's only film to feature more than one explicitly Jewish character for which there was no
16 precedence or because Warner Brothers, his backers, asked him not to, we will ultimately never
17 know. In exploring Kubrick's attempt to adapt *Wartime Lies*, this article will draw upon the
18 latest insights in the emerging field of Kubrick Studies. Specifically, it will utilize but also add to
19 the growing work on Kubrick's Jewishness, as well as the "new historical turn," which is based
20 on exploiting material now deposited in the Stanley Kubrick Archive (SKA) at the University of
21 Arts, London.⁹
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33 **Why *Wartime Lies*?**

34 Louis Begley's semi-autobiographical novel was based on his own life story. Born Ludwik
35 Begleiter in 1933 in Styry, Poland, Begley ~~had~~ survived the Holocaust before emigrating to the
36 United States in 1947. After attending prestigious private schools and Harvard College, as well
37 as serving in the military and being stationed for some time in Goppingen, he studied at Harvard
38 Law School. By the time, he published *Wartime Lies*, he had a career as a brilliant lawyer
39 specializing in international joint ventures and was a partner in the prestigious firm of Plimpton
40 & Debevoise in New York.
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46 *Wartime Lies* follows a young boy named Maciek, the son of a fully assimilated
47 respectable Jewish doctor in the Polish town of T, as he grows up in a Jewish family in Nazi-
48 occupied Poland. Maciek, along with his beautiful aunt Tania, assumes a Catholic identity to
49 obtain their "Aryan papers" – forged identity documents that Jews hiding in Nazi-occupied
50 Europe had to obtain to prove their non-Jewish origins – to evade Nazi persecution by hiding in
51 plain sight. Maciek conceals his circumcised penis – lest he fails the "trouser test" – and even
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3 considers a skin graft while Tania pretends to be a prostitute. Maciek takes communion and
4 studies scripture with a pastor, while Tania leads a group huddled in a cellar singing Polish
5 hymns to the Virgin. Understandably frightened, and enduring hardship, they travel from city to
6 city to avoid being caught, and eventually come to work as black marketeers in a remote peasant
7 village. They survive owing to a combination of chutzpah, sheer luck, and a gift for deceit,
8 ~~pretense~~pretense, and mimicry. Lying is so key to his survival, that Maciek loses his sense of self
9 and hence it is a core theme of the novel itself.

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12 The novel's first-person, intimate, and contemplative tone presented a possible way to
13 make a two-hour Holocaust film and, as a piece of fiction, it offered more possibilities than a
14 factual account. It also appealed on other levels. As Marat Grinberg has written, "Begley's prose
15 is devoid of any pathos in presenting the picture of the mundane hell of survival, interspersed
16 with ruminations on Dante's *Inferno*."¹⁰ Kubrick was also attracted to its notion of the fallibility
17 and perishability of memory and its characters as "adepts of fraudulence," in the words of
18 Frederic Raphael who collaborated on Kubrick's final film, *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999): "Its routines
19 of evasive deception must have appealed to Stanley; he maintained his unique standing in the
20 movies by the creation of an elusive persona who no one, not even studio heads, cared (or,
21 finally, dared) to challenge."¹¹ Given that the story was mostly about Jews masquerading as
22 gentiles, these elements of disguise and concealment offered Kubrick a way for him to avoid
23 having to deal with Jewishness explicitly – something he successfully achieved over his entire
24 career, *Eyes Wide Shut* notwithstanding. Kubrick deliberately and systematically erased overt
25 Jewishness from his source material. He repeatedly ~~wrote~~removed Jewish characters from his
26 screenplays, including ~~out of his screenplays from~~ *The Killing* (1956), ~~through~~ *Paths of Glory*
27 (1957), *Spartacus* (1960), *Lolita* (1962), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *Barry Lyndon* (1975), and
28 *Full Metal Jacket* (1987).

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31 Religion, and specifically Catholicism, had also featured in Kubrick's work from his
32 photography and earliest documentaries through to *Full Metal Jacket*. The Stanley Kubrick
33 Archive contains a series of reviews of *Wartime Lies* which Kubrick read and annotated. They
34 also provide some insight into what appealed to him about the novel and how he was thinking of
35 adapting it. In a June 1991 review by Janet Malcolm in the *New York Review of Books*, for
36 example, he highlighted the following sentence, "What happens to a child's soul when he lives
37 his childhood in constant fear for his life and witnesses atrocities that no child should know of,
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3 no less witness?"¹² Further highlighting revealed a fascination with the character and
4 temperament of Tania who acts as a surrogate mother to Maciek whose Oedipal wishes appear to
5 have been fulfilled as a result. Kubrick was well-read in the work of Sigmund Freud, whose
6 many themes and motifs had been included in his previous films and, as Geoffrey Cocks points
7 out, Begley drew "extensively on Freud to describe the heavily charged Oedipal scenario of a
8 young boy living alone and being protected by his audacious and courageous aunt Tania, who
9 had always been his surrogate mother, replacing the real mother who had died giving him
10 birth."¹³ As with both sides of Kubrick's family – the Kubricks and the Pervelers – Maciek's
11 family are prosperous and distinguished assimilated Jews and Maciek is the son of a doctor and
12 hails from Galicia just like Kubrick's father and his relatives. Finally, the horror of the Holocaust
13 as refracted through the prism of the fairy tale story of survival also appealed.
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24 **Story Development**

25 Kubrick commenced work on the development of a film treatment, working on the
26 screenplay alone, something he had done on only three previous occasions for his realized
27 projects – *Napoleon*, *A Clockwork Orange*, and *Barry Lyndon*. In his pre-release copy of the
28 novel, he annotated the margins, scribbling down his initial ideas wondering whether to narrate
29 the movie from the perspective of Tania or Maciek. His notes contained more than just questions
30 about the narrative, dates, and possible endings but also included considerations of characters,
31 casting, props, and costumes. Kubrick's notes reveal that he aimed to depict the nine key
32 characters as they appear in a "pampered comfortable childhood sequence" before attempting to
33 "show the mild bureaucracy leading to murder." At this stage, as he wrote down, he was not sure
34 whether to show immediate random cruelty and killings" or to build suspense by showing how
35 "relatively peaceful" some places were in the first days of occupation. By August 20, 1991, he
36 had completed the first draft. Others soon followed, aided by correspondence with Louis Begley
37 in September 1991 to confirm story points and areas of historical accuracy.¹⁴ Significantly,
38 Kubrick never communicated with Begley directly, leaving this task up to Jan Harlan. On a fax
39 from Begley to Harlan, dated August 31, 1991, Kubrick wrote: "Does the book read as if the
40 story is told by a 9-year-old, or by a grown Maciek? The film will have to have a more objective
41 reality." Begley answers the question by writing back, "Maciek's understanding of the actions of
42 grownups is limited. The lack of an omniscient narrator leads to a sort of child's logic." By
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3 February 1992, Kubrick's breakdown of the novel led him to conclude that he could not tell the
4 story purely from Maciek's viewpoint. He wanted to include more dramatic elements, revealing
5 events that Maciek had not witnessed firsthand, including some sexual material.¹⁵ By June 1992,
6 Kubrick had developed a 126-page draft treatment, including some camera annotations scribbled
7 in the margins, as he began to think about turning the screenplay into a film.¹⁶
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12 Kubrick did not stray far from the novel's structure, sticking closely to what he would
13 have described as Begley's "beats," meaning the rhythm of the text. But, as he had done with all
14 his adaptations from *The Killing* (1956) onward, Kubrick removed many of the novel's scant
15 specific references to Judaism, and in only a few cases added to them. Significantly, Tania joins
16 the partisans, telling them, "I have never particularly thought of myself as a Jew, but now I know
17 I am. Hitler taught me that. I'm tired of running like a frightened animal. I want to join you."¹⁷ In
18 becoming a resistance fighter, Tania defies the stereotypical image of the Jewish victim,
19 participating in their undercover missions, during which she exposes a Nazi collaborator. In later
20 treatments, however, these elements were pruned. Kubrick's October 5, 1992, 126-page
21 treatment included 208 scenes, including an epilogue in which Maciek and Tania are rescued by
22 Jewish partisans and, in what appears to be a strongly Zionist ending, make Aaliyah.¹⁸ "Their
23 ordeal finally ended in 1948 when they reached the new state of Israel... They were then free to
24 pick up the pieces of their lives. The End," Kubrick wrote.¹⁹
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34 By April 14, 1993, the length of the draft remained the same but now contained 256
35 scenes. Kubrick had penned the following prologue:

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37 "The Final Solution, Hitler's plan to systematically kill Europe's ten million Jews, was
38 initiated in the summer of 1941.
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41 Though it was given the highest priority there were still many practical problems
42 to solve in order to find the shortest way to kill so many people.
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45 But the ingenuity and resourcefulness of German bureaucracy were put to work
46 and factory-efficient death camps were built where thousands of Jews would arrive on a
47 train in the morning and be gassed and cremated by afternoon; their clothes and
48 belongings sorted, their hair shorn, their gold teeth pulled, and the killing mess washed
49 away not to alarm the next arrivals.
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53 When the war ended six million Jews had been killed.
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3 The outside world did remarkably little about this, the Allies even refusing to
4 bomb the few railway lines the Germans depended on to maintain the flow of victims to
5 the death camps.
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8 Thus it was left to every Jew to survive as best as they could.²⁰
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10 This version ends in 1945 with an epilogue in a forest somewhere in Poland. The reference to
11 Israel has been dropped. With every new draft, Kubrick never departed or differed significantly
12 from Begley's book, other than suggesting that events were not to be narrated in the first-person
13 voice of Maciek. Kubrick, though, did give more presence to the character of Tania who, at
14 times, developed into a more dominant character than Maciek, possibly because of the need of
15 the lead actor to bear the weight of the acting in the film.
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22 Realism

23 Kubrick was committed to authenticity as befitting a director who had meticulously recreated the
24 interior of a B-52 bomber in *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the*
25 *Bomb* (1964), the view of Earth from outer space in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), eighteenth-
26 century interiors and exteriors in *Barry Lyndon* (1975) and the bombed-out city of Hue (in then-
27 South Vietnam), in *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). Ever since the 1950s, especially with his film noir,
28 *Killer's Kiss* (1955), Kubrick expressed a desire for cinematic realism. And when it came to the
29 war genre, Kubrick was convinced that the movies have never really treated war with genuine
30 realism. By contrast, his war (and other) movies were praised for their authenticity. While he
31 favored voiceover narration, little dialogue, **and** a documentary visual style, combined with
32 maps, his approach was flexible enough to abandon documentary for the dramatic (and even
33 melodramatic at times) and the artistic in his depiction of history.
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43 Realism and authenticity guided Kubrick's thinking when engaged in the pre-production
44 for *Aryan Papers* and would have been at the movie's core, especially in the need to get the
45 details right. Kubrick, for example, insisted on original uniforms that were almost impossible to
46 obtain at times, at least not in the quantity he required, but which were sourced in London,
47 Vienna, Munich, and Berlin. His Production Manager, Philip Hobbs, was tasked with finding
48 1000 Mauser rifles, as well as Schmeisser submachine guns, MG 34s and MG 42s, and numerous
49 Soviet, German, and Polish artillery. Such particulars were important to his vision of
50 representing war and history with realism and authenticity. Among the many books he read on
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3 the subject were two editions of George Markham's *Guns of the Reich: firearms of the German*
4 *forces, 1939-1945* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1989/1991).

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6 The desire for realism guided his search for suitable and authentic locations. Despite
7 having reproduced the war-torn South Vietnamese city of Hue in a disused London gasworks
8 complete with transplanting palm trees for *Full Metal Jacket*, Kubrick never considered making
9 his Holocaust film in England. Why not is a question that has yet to be fully answered but surely
10 one of the reasons for this was the lack of authentic locations required in Britain, hence why
11 continental Europe was more desirable than British cities. A second reason was that Kubrick
12 required Maciek's role for a longer period than was allowed for child actors by unions in the
13 United Kingdom. Together, these considerations necessitated a search for locations in
14 continental Europe, so Kubrick instructed Philip Hobbs to gather research on film studios in The
15 Netherlands.²¹ So important was the project to him, that Kubrick even took the unusual step of
16 leaving England – something he rarely did – with Jan Harlan and his erstwhile assistant Leon
17 Vitali to look at the Dutch locations himself. Harlan was later sent to scout locations in Poland,
18 Hungary, and Slovakia where hundreds of photographs of locations were taken because Kubrick
19 wanted a central European look for his Holocaust film something ~~which was possibly~~
20 unattainable in the UK. Kubrick also sent his assistants around continental Europe to take photos
21 of the towns and villages described in the book and studied the style and architecture of buildings
22 and interiors of the period with his art director Roy Walker. In Berlin, Austria, and Potsdam, for
23 example, hundreds of photographs of locations were taken.²² Given that in the years after World
24 War II and during his planning for the film, European cities would have been completely rebuilt,
25 Kubrick had to discover places whose architecture remained intact.

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27 Following Spielberg's decision to shoot *Schindler's List* (1993) in Central and Eastern
28 Europe, Kubrick dispatched Harlan and Hobbs to scout for locations and studios in the region
29 directly inspired by the younger director's decision. They concentrated their efforts in the cities
30 of Brno and Bratislava in the Czech Republic and Slovakia respectively with Kubrick flip-
31 flopping between the two locations.²³ This was where the scenes that take place in Maciek and
32 Tania's hometown – now renamed Nikolaev in Kubrick's script rather than "T" as in Begley's
33 novel – were to be shot. Eventually, Kubrick settled on the cities of Brno, Bratislava and Prague
34 and negotiations on locations, film permits, and technical requirements commenced with the
35 relevant Czech and Slovak authorities and companies. Harlan arranged deals with local
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3 authorities to be able to undertake location shooting, including an extensive and costly deal with
4 the Brno city council to close the center for one weekend and recreate Nazi-occupied Warsaw.
5 Nazi flags were to be placed on buildings and authentic 1940s trams were to be borrowed from a
6 local museum. Indoor scenes were to be shot in a film studio in Bratislava.²⁴
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10 **Casting**

11 As the locations were being finalized and Kubrick was working on the script, he was also in the
12 process of casting. Understanding why Kubrick cast for certain roles is a black hole in studies of
13 his films. He left few casting notes and was not always forthcoming in interviews about his
14 reasoning. Consequently, in their absence, scholars, critics, and fans fill the gaps with their own
15 speculations. However, on a sticky note on a folder labelled “Jewish Partisan Woman,” Kubrick
16 wrote, “Top actors for every part.”²⁵ Along these lines, Kubrick’s initial thoughts about who
17 should play the lead role of Tania contained a mixture of well-known Hollywood, British, and
18 Eastern European actors. But early in the process, his preference for the lead was either Uma
19 Thurman or Julia Roberts.²⁶ By December 1992, however, Kubrick changed his mind and
20 approached the lesser-known Dutch actor Johanna Ter Steege.²⁷ Born in May 1961, she had
21 featured in various movies but was most familiar to audiences for her role in George Sluzier’s
22 1988 film *The Vanishing*. Kubrick watched all her films several times and perhaps was drawn to
23 what Janet Maslin described as “a radiant and compelling figure” whose “unaffected loveliness”
24 and “captivating warmth” was captured by Ter Steege in *The Vanishing*.²⁸ “He was convinced
25 that he had found an actress whose performance would catapult a new star to the forefront of
26 international stardom and give this dark and serious film the needed ‘gloss,’” Jan Harlan said of
27 Ter Steege.²⁹
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41 For the role of her nephew, Maciek, Kubrick wanted Joseph Mazzello. Born in
42 September 1983, in Rhinebeck, and raised in Hyde Park, New York, he had first appeared in a
43 small role in *Presumed Innocent*, in 1990, starring Harrison Ford. He then went on to appear in
44 *Radio Flyer*, *Jersey Girl*, and the TV film *Desperate Choices: To Save My Child* in 1992. But
45 his big breakthrough was his casting as Tim Murphy in Steven Spielberg’s *Jurassic Park* (1993).
46 Mazzello had the Spielberg imprimatur and having met and auditioned Mazzello, Kubrick was
47 convinced he was “perfect for the role as well as polite, intelligent, and calm, which were three
48 indispensable qualities in his opinion,” his right-hand man, Emilio D’Alessandro, recalled.³⁰ The
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3 consideration here seemed to be less about performance than about the character of the child
4 actor with whom he was required to work.
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7 In terms of the other roles, there is less information. Kubrick had Heritage Films in
8 Warsaw send him screen tests they had done for *Schindler's List*. He considered casting Armin
9 Mueller-Stahl as a German officer, even though he was too old to play the part. Steven Berkoff,
10 the Jewish actor who had appeared in *A Clockwork Orange* and *Barry Lyndon* says he was
11 offered a role, but which role exactly is not known. Undoubtedly, Kubrick would have hired
12 locals as extras.
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17 It is significant how few of these choices were Jewish. But then Kubrick had never cast
18 for an explicitly Jewish role up to this point in his career possibly because of commercial
19 considerations. More than just an intellectual, Kubrick wanted to mainstream his material. A
20 serious filmmaker as well as a businessman and later a producer, he felt constrained by the need
21 to make a commercial return on his films. And his initial desire for a big-name and non-Jewish
22 star for *Aryan Papers* may well have been the result of profit imperatives guided by his backers
23 at Warners as it was not imperative for a Holocaust movie.
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32 **“Holocaust, The Movie”** 33

34 What would this film have looked like and what sort of detail about the genocide would it
35 have contained? Was *Aryan Papers* going to be about the Nazi extermination of the Jews?
36 Looking at the source text and draft screenplays, we can draw several conclusions. There is what
37 might one describe as an element of typical Kubrick avoidance, as well as something resonant, in
38 taking the story of a Jew passing as a gentile, thus avoiding direct treatment of Jewishness and
39 Judaism. In terms of the mechanics of the extermination, the film was to feature epic scenes of
40 the Jewish ghettos in Warsaw being cleared, with Kubrick using aerial filming, as well as a mass
41 shooting with graphic scenes of mass rape. “They raped them publicly, singly, in groups, on the
42 ground, leaning them against broken walls of houses. Some women were made to kneel, soldiers
43 holding them from the back by the hair, their gaping mouths entered by penis after penis.”³¹
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51 A Kubrick screenplay, however, only tells us so much. One of the reasons for this is that
52 it was typically changed during shooting, owing to rehearsals, improvisations, and other factors
53 unaccounted for in the pre-production process. It is by no means a blueprint and typically did not
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3 contain much information on cinematography (although, as noted above, the treatment dated
4 June 12, 1992, did include some scribbled camera annotations³²) and, most importantly, music
5 which was essential to Kubrick's aesthetic, particularly his use of preexisting rather than
6 composing new music. There was the consideration of voiceover narration, as had featured in
7 many of Kubrick's films, as well as in the use of newsreel and maps were to be used to depict the
8 Anschluss and German advance into Sudetenland and Poland.
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11 To gain further insight, we can also look to the past for clues, and these are presented by
12 Kubrick's proposed but never realized *Napoleon* project. Kubrick explained to Joseph Gelmis in
13 1970 how he planned to return to the use of a narrator and even animation or charts to illustrate
14 and explain the battle tactics and campaigns for his abortive *Napoleon* script for the film that was
15 to follow *2001: A Space Odyssey* in 1968, but was shelved sooner after.³³ He had, by that point,
16 directed two war movies – *Paths of Glory* (1957) and *Spartacus* (1960) – both historical films
17 that respected realism but also manifested his elision of direct Jewish references. The latter was
18 noted, in 1960, for its brutality and many scenes were cut in the original release version only to
19 be restored in 1991. Kubrick had also rejected earlier offers to direct a Spanish Civil War epic, a
20 biography of Simon Bolivar, and a biopic of the life of Oliver Cromwell.³⁴ In rejecting them, he
21 had written to MGM's Ron Lubin that, "representing a broad panorama of history has always
22 proved to be the undoing of film makers." He recommended that such a movie must have
23 voiceover narration, little dialogue and a "documentary visual style." He added that "costume
24 war scenes tend to look like so many extras thoughtlessly dressed on a beautiful hill... the thing
25 that usually makes movie battles idiotic is that the terrain is senseless. Almost all battles are
26 shaped and finally decided by the terrain itself."³⁵ Narration, little dialogue, documentary visual
27 style, and terrain were all central concerns for Kubrick's vision of the Holocaust in *Aryan*
28 *Papers*.
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32 Kubrick's notes on the *Napoleon* screenplay offer further hints. The massacre of 3,000
33 captured Turkish soldiers at Jaffa on March 7, 1799, caught Kubrick's attention when he read it
34 in Felix Markham's 1963 biography of the emperor, *Napoleon*. He noted that this event seemed
35 like a "good scene," and wondered how a mass shooting of this kind could have been managed
36 from a purely logistical point of view. In subsequent conversations with Markham, Kubrick
37 grilled the historian about the size of the task involved in killing three thousand men: "How do
38 you suppose he did it? I mean, was it done methodically, or was it just 'run amok,' or...how was
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3 it done?" In addition to the mechanics, Kubrick wanted to know if the soldiers knew they were
4 going to be shot and requested from Markham "a lot of details."³⁶ Kubrick displayed a morbid
5 fascination with the technicalities and a version of this event found its way into his *Napoleon*
6 which, according to Eva-Marie Magel "provide[d] a very explicit, indeed cynical picture" in
7 keeping with Kubrick's approach of juxtaposing extreme violence with "macabre, cool, almost
8 playful elements of comedy."³⁷ Although this screenplay was written some two decades before
9 *Aryan Papers*, the discussion and interest in the logistics of mass killing provide some insight
10 into how Kubrick would have approached this in his own Holocaust film.

11
12 We can also look at his completed films. This is illustrated in *Full Metal Jacket* where
13 production designer Anton Furst recalled:

14
15 We saw about 6,000 photographs of the Vietnam War. We took what we thought were
16 the most powerful images with the most impact. For instance, when the squad went into
17 the burned-out city of Hue, we had every building on fire. That was probably an
18 exaggeration. We had seen some shots where it looked like everything was on fire. We
19 weren't going for complete historical accuracy. So we built sculptural images and lit that
20 whole section of the film with available light and fire. We didn't want blue skies. If the
21 sun came out, Stanley didn't shoot. It was supposed to be the image of hell.³⁸

22
23 Despite the extent of the research to recreate an authentic Vietnam, realism was subsumed by the
24 need to produce a heightened image of spectacle as a key component of Kubrick's realist
25 photographic aesthetic. As Jan Harlan said of *Aryan Papers*, "Stanley was not interested in a
26 documentary. He wanted a dramatic and artistic depiction of the lowest point in human history."
27 But at the same time, he described Kubrick's screenplay thus: "It is not a drama that is over-the-
28 top and has lots of action. It is a very silent film, a very serious film. The tension is in this
29 horrendous, low valley of humanity that existed because of the Nazis."³⁹

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31 That Kubrick admired the sixteen-hour German television serial about a small town
32 during the Third Reich, *Heimat*, which aired in 1984, is telling, and may have guided his
33 thinking about cinematography.⁴⁰ Jan Harlan recalled how Kubrick was impressed by how the
34 story had been told and how its director, Edgar Reitz, had convincingly conveyed the *mise en*
35 scene without special effects.⁴¹ *Heimat* provided a model for a cost-effective yet credible
36 recreation of history so key to Kubrick's historical realist vision. Kubrick kept a still image taken
37 from *Heimat* that he especially liked: an image of a coffin standing in the street in the rain. What
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3 exactly appealed is not known but it is a ghostly, spectral, and haunting black and white image,
4 suggesting more than it reveals: The loneliness of extermination; the Jews on their own,
5 unprotected, dead in the rain, un-mourned, and unwanted. As photographer Diane Arbus, who
6 took a rookie Kubrick under her wing, said “a photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it
7 tells the less you know.” We can hear an echo of this in Kubrick’s explanation, “I think for a
8 movie or play to say anything really truthful about life, it has to do so very obliquely, so as to
9 avoid all pat conclusions and neatly tied up ideas.”⁴² On the recommendation of Reitz, Kubrick
10 hired *Heimat*’s designer and set dresser, Fritz Bauer, who would have achieved this blend of the
11 realist with the dramatic.
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32 Kubrick was also a fan of director Krzysztof Kieślowski’s ten-part series for Polish
33 Television on the Ten Commandments, released in 1988 and 1989. Each episode based on one of
34 the Ten Commandments, *Dekalog* wove narratives of loss, blunders, missteps, human frailty, and
35 missed opportunities in its moody and melancholic reflections. The films of the *Dekalog* are tightly
36 framed and, while there is much dialogue, it is pointed and poignant, spoken without melodrama,
37 understated, as is the complex morality ~~the-that~~ undergirds each of the episodes. Kieślowski’s
38 visual style and use of color relieved the potential claustrophobia of the films, which take place
39 in and around a huge apartment block in Warsaw. Kubrick recognized the emotion latent in the
40 *Dekalog* and wrote a preface to the published screenplay by Kieślowski and his coauthor,
41 Krzysztof Piesiewicz:
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49 I am always reluctant to single out some particular feature of the work of a major
50 filmmaker because it tends inevitably to simplify and reduce the work. But in this book of
51 screenplays by Krzysztof Kieslowski and his co-author, Krzysztof Piesiewicz, it should
52 not be out of place to observe that they have the very rare ability to dramatize their ideas
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3 rather than just talking about them. By making their points through the dramatic action of
4 the story they gain the added power of allowing the audience to discover what's really
5 going on rather than being told. They do this with such dazzling skill, you never see the
6 ideas coming and don't realize until much later how profoundly they have reached your
7 heart.⁴³
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11 It was a rare occasion that Kubrick undertook such writing outside of his films, and he did it at
12 precisely the same time as he was embarking on *Aryan Papers* suggesting a key cinematic
13 influence on Kubrick: conciseness; concentrated, suggested emotion.
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16 These two series pointed to the minimalist, almost journalistic, Kafka-esque style that had
17 guided Kubrick's other movies most explicitly *The Shining* (1980). Kubrick was especially
18 attracted to what he called Kafka's "almost journalistic" accounts of the grotesque inherence of
19 horror in the quotidian and like Kafka's works, his films consistently combined irony, the
20 absurd, the uncanny, elements of surrealism, and black humor that undercut his simultaneous
21 insistence on realism – consistent features of Kubrick's cinema and central to the works of
22 Kafka.⁴⁴
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29 Here we must also remember Kubrick's beginnings as a photographer because a
30 photographic aesthetic permeated his work. As Djana Metlič has pointed out, his "cinematic
31 style was undoubtedly shaped during the years he spent as a staff photographer at *Look*."⁴⁵ And
32 Pratap Rughani argues that the Stanley Kubrick Archive demonstrates Kubrick's interest in the
33 Vietnam War was culturally processed in photography but also news and documentary footage,
34 including the 1980 CBS TV mini-series *A Rumor of War*. The work of photographer of Philip
35 Jones Griffiths whose 1971 *Vietnam Inc.* was a key source for Kubrick.⁴⁶ He even cut eighty-five
36 pages out of it as a reference for source imagery, just as he did with the artwork featured in *Barry*
37 *Lyndon*. The pages focused on the soldiers when not in battle, on women and children around the
38 U.S. presence and above all the impact of the war on civilian life and the extent of Vietnamese
39 casualties.
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48 No doubt *Aryan Papers* would have drawn heavily on wartime and documentary footage
49 with a striving for realism. Indeed, as noted above, his October 1922 treatment contained the
50 word "stock" indicating that intended to use documentary stock footage sequences throughout
51 the movie. As Marat Grinberg has written, "The treatments reveal his deep engagement with the
52 history and dilemmas of representing the Holocaust on screen, such as the inclusion and purpose
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3 of documentary footage of the atrocities, an issue central to *A Clockwork Orange* and *Full Metal*
4 *Jacket*, which Kubrick might have learned from Sam Fuller's *Verboten!* (1955).⁴⁷ Yet, at the
5 same time, Kubrick was, in general, ambiguous about cinematic "realism" which was never as
6 important for Kubrick as the perfect image. Jack Nicholson reports how Kubrick told him, "In
7 movies you don't try and photograph the reality [. . .] you try and photograph the photograph of
8 the reality."⁴⁸ He told Mathew Modine while filming *Full Metal Jacket* that "real is good;
9 interesting is better."⁴⁹ After all, in his early career as a photojournalist, his job was to make the
10 real interesting, to turn what there is in the world into something unusual within the photographic
11 frame. And although he admired the style and methodology of the Hollywood studios, none of
12 Kubrick's films fits comfortably into the confines of the conventional style of Hollywood
13 realism with its transparent editing; its eye-level, rarely moving camera; its neutral color palette;
14 its dependence on over-the-shoulder cutting for simple dialogue scenes.

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17 Thus, as Grinberg, one of the few scholars to have considered the aesthetic of *Aryan*
18 *Papers*, points out,

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20 In preparation for *Aryan Papers*, Kubrick was poring over, cutting from books, and
21 copying hundreds and hundreds of reproductions of photos dealing with the Holocaust
22 and pre-war life. The entire film was meant to have the look of a photograph, the defining
23 art of the 20th century, of which he was a supreme practitioner and the primary means by
24 which we have come to view the Holocaust. Like *Full Metal Jacket*, which presented
25 "Vietnam, the movie" by replicating much of the Vietnam-era photography and film
26 journalist footage, *Aryan Papers* would have been "Holocaust, the movie."⁵⁰

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28 Grinberg shows how, while realism and authenticity would have underpinned the mise en scene
29 (costumes, locations, props), in terms of style and aesthetic, in *Aryan Papers* Kubrick would
30 have photographed the photograph of the reality to produce something interesting, something
31 better than just real. It is significant, then, in this respect that Kubrick was planning to shoot over
32 the winter months as the lack of sunlight would have had a significant impact on the look of the
33 film, giving it a darker and colder feel, more in keeping with the black and white photography of
34 Holocaust-era film and still pictures. Yet, Kubrick was not going to shoot the film in black and
35 white.⁵¹

36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 **Reasons for Failure**

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3 The main reason cited for the failure of *Aryan Papers* was the prospect of Steven
4 Spielberg's *Schindler's List* looming on the horizon. As Kubrick was dithering over the
5 preproduction minutiae of the screenplay, locations, casting, and even when and where to shoot
6 his film, *Schindler's List* went into production on March 1, 1993, in Krakow, Poland. By
7 November, influenced by the enormous amount of publicity ahead of *Schindler's List*'s release in
8 the United States later that month, Kubrick decided to suspend work on the project indefinitely.
9 "were still shuffling index cards," Kubrick's assistant Tony Frewin told *Vice*.⁵² Kubrick, who
10 had seen Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (dir. ~~Oliver Stone~~, 1986) come out just before *Full Metal*
11 *Jacket*, was concerned about having his Holocaust picture and Spielberg's being released so
12 close together. Kubrick and Warner Bros. decided that it was a poor business decision to follow
13 *Schindler's List* with a similar topic. Jan Harlan feels it was Terry Semel, then co-chief of
14 Warner Bros., who suggested that Kubrick abandon *Aryan Papers*, aware of the problems of
15 preproduction and because they were pressuring him towards projects, they believed to be more
16 commercially viable.⁵³ For his part, super-agent Michael Ovitz claims credit. "I knew there was
17 room for only one Holocaust film; two would dilute the box office and spark unfortunate
18 comparisons [and] 'The Aryan Papers' wasn't as good – or as commercial – as 'Schindler's
19 List.' It had no complex protagonist, no Oskar Schindler, for an audience to engage with. And
20 because Stanley took longer than Steven in development, plus forty weeks or more to shoot
21 (roughly twice the norm), he'd be in theaters second, putting him at a major disadvantage." Ovitz
22 claims he told Kubrick that *Aryan Papers* was also simultaneously too like *Schindler's List* and
23 too derivative of *Sophie's Choice*, the acclaimed Holocaust film directed by Alan J. Pakula,
24 released in 1982. "It's just not Kubrick to be unoriginal," Ovitz has written.⁵⁴

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41 ~~While Although~~ Frederic Raphael claims in his controversial memoir *Eyes Wide Open*
42 that Kubrick dismissed *Schindler's List* by saying it was about "success," while the Holocaust is
43 about "six million people who get killed," Kubrick took Spielberg's film ~~more~~ seriously.
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46 ~~According to his brother-in-law, Jan Harlan, Kubrick thought it was "a tremendous~~
47 ~~achievement"; "leave it to Steven to make such a dark story palatable," he is reported to have~~
48 ~~said.~~⁵⁵ ~~Kubrick~~ ~~and looked~~ closely ~~monitored~~ at the film's rollout in the United States where it
49 was doing well.⁵⁶ "Oh, not another Jewish movie about the Holocaust," he thought.⁵⁷ When
50 *Schindler's List* arrived in the UK in February 1994, he sent Emilio D'Alessandro to ~~monitor~~
51 ~~count~~ how many people were queuing to see it on the opening weekend before the box office
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3 statistics were released. “When I told Stanley what I’d seen, I thought he would be happy to
4 learn that a film dealing with such a delicate subject was so successful. He seemed to be pleased
5 for Steven, but he didn’t ask me as many questions as usual. He didn’t get angry like he had done
6 when *Platoon* had compromised the release of *Full Metal Jacket*.”⁵⁸
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10 There seems to be more at play than simply the competition that *Schindler’s List* offered,
11 however. As Emilio-D’Alessandro pointed out, “he hadn’t even started filming *Aryan Papers*, so
12 it wouldn’t have come out for two or three years. There was no way that *Schindler’s List* could
13 have been a real problem. Nevertheless, I continued to see a new look of perplexity on his face.”
14 It became apparent that Kubrick was having doubts and his indecision was holding up the entire
15 production.⁵⁹ “Stanley faltered,” D’Alessandro recalled. “Something strange was happening. It
16 was almost as if he didn’t want to start work on the film. I don’t know what it was: perhaps the
17 story, or the fact that he would have to move to [continental] Europe for some of the scenes.
18 Anyway, it was clear that he was not happy about something.”⁶⁰
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28 We can only speculate as to the state of Kubrick’s mind when he decided to abandon the
29 project but those close to him do give us an insight (however uncritical it may be). Jan Harlan
30 believes that Kubrick “may have been secretly thankful [...] as he had found the topic
31 increasingly difficult to face.”⁶¹ His widow, Christiane recalled how I read all the material
32 Stanley collected with his usual care and became depressed, even though I knew everything.”
33 Christiane recalled: he became ill as he read up on the detail and studied the photographs.⁶² “He
34 was also in a state of depression, because he realized it was an impossible film. It’s impossible to
35 direct the Holocaust unless it’s a documentary. If you show the atrocities as they actually
36 happened, it would entail the total destruction of the actors. Stanley said he could not instruct
37 actors how to liquidate others and could not explain the motives for the killing. I will die from
38 this,’ he said, ‘and the actors will die, too, not to mention the audience.’”⁶³ Christiane added,
39 “he felt it just couldn’t be told. ‘If I really want to show what I’ve read and know happened.’
40 And he read everything. ‘How can I even film it? How can you even pretend it?’ He became
41 very depressed during the preparations and I was very glad when he gave up on it because it was
42 really taking its toll.”⁶⁴
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3 felt, "*Schindler's List* is a hard act to follow" so it offered him a "way out." There may have
4 been other reasons but mainly relief not to do a project that finally overwhelmed him, that was
5 too painful.
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8 I read all the material Stanley collected with his usual care and became depressed, even
9 though I knew everything," Christiane recalled. "He was also in a state of depression, because he
10 realized it was an impossible film. It's impossible to direct the Holocaust unless it's a
11 documentary. If you show the atrocities as they actually happened, it would entail the total
12 destruction of the actors. Stanley said he could not instruct actors how to liquidate others and
13 could not explain the motives for the killing. I will die from this," he said, "and the actors will
14 die, too, not to mention the audience."⁶⁵
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17 Christiane added, "he felt it just couldn't be told. 'If I really want to show what I've read and
18 know happened.' And he read everything. 'How can I even film it? How can you even pretend
19 it?' He became very depressed during the preparations and I was very glad when he gave up on it
20 because it was really taking its toll."⁶⁶ He was ill reading up on the detail and studying the
21 photographs.⁶⁷
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24 Kubrick, Christiane says, simply could not bring himself to depict the horrors of the
25 Holocaust on film. "The reason Stanley gave up on it," Christiane Kubrick said, "is because
26 Steven's film is about Jews who lived, and just a few. If you tell the whole truth in the film,
27 which is the only way you could honor all these dead people, and be respectful enough, you
28 would have to tell the whole truth." And that, she concluded, would be "absolutely
29 unsurvivable." She continued to say:
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32 Like most Jewish families, Stanley's family came from all over that part of the continent.
33 His mother came from Kiev, his father from today's Romania. There were also relatives
34 from Poland. When Stanley was a young man he would very much have wanted to see all
35 these countries, which was then impossible. The reason he did not do the Holocaust film
36 was quite different. He wanted to be totally informed. Of course, he was informed, most
37 Jews know the story. He had thought about it for a long time. Stanley had had many
38 experiences of anti-Semitism as a journalist in America. He was beaten up as a child. All
39 the typical things – Christian and Jewish gangs. And he feared anti-Semitism. Even
40 professionally. And when he came to the Holocaust story, there was a moment when he
41 realised he could not imagine it at all. He was too frightened, too horrified. And then you
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3 have to show it on the screen. And this is why he said he could not make it. He was too
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5 scared.”

6
7 Christiane ~~realled added~~, “he felt it just couldn’t be told. ‘If I really want to show what I’ve read
8 and know happened.’⁶⁸ ~~But, as she suggests, †There was something more to the picture, that~~
9
10 ~~Kubrick realized that the story was untellable, especially if he wanted to maintain his~~
11 ~~commitment to historical veracity, authenticity, and realism.~~
12
13 ~~As Schindler’s List was “a hard act to follow,” she said, it offered Kubrick a “way out” of a~~
14 ~~project that was too painful and which, even after the extreme violence of *A Clockwork Orange*~~
15 ~~and *A Full Metal Jacket*, was even too overwhelming, too “monstrous,” for him.~~

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19 ~~_____~~ But maybe there was something Christiane failed to understand despite being
20 ~~Christiane~~, the person who came to know Kubrick best throughout their four-decade relationship
21 ~~and that was, understood~~ how Kubrick’s Jewishness held him back from confronting the very
22 thing he had been contemplating for so long. ~~Conscious avoidance seems to be at work here.~~
23
24 ~~Kubrick chose a story in which Jews hide behind Gentile identities. *Wartime Lies* described how~~
25 ~~a young Polish Jewish boy avoided extermination by masquerading as a Catholic just as~~
26 ~~Redmond O’ Barry passes using faked identity papers in *Barry Lyndon*. And, as Marat Grinberg~~
27 ~~has argued, successive iterations of the screenplay progressively diluted its Jewishness, almost~~
28 ~~entirely scrubbing it away by the final draft. Maybe Kubrick did not make his Holocaust film~~
29 ~~because direct references to Jews were necessary, something he purposely evaded throughout his~~
30 ~~filmmaking career. As Jan Harlan said, “If Kubrick was ever afraid of anything, it was to be~~
31 ~~carried away by those emotions. Maybe deep down that’s why he took so long in his decision to~~
32 ~~make the film.”⁶⁹~~

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41 ~~_____~~ That Kubrick habitually wrote Jewish characters out of his films was in part due – as he
42 ~~himself indicated, to his desire to appeal to movie audiences the majority of which were non-~~
43 ~~Jewish, not to mention his own universalizing modernism. It also almost certainly had to do with~~
44 ~~his ambivalence and conflict over his own background, both familial and cultural, just like~~
45 ~~Kafka. Kubrick it seems could not bring himself to insert the word “Jew” in his films. The only~~
46 ~~certain instance emerges in the epithet “kike” in *Full Metal Jacket*. There is a story his daughter~~
47 ~~Vivian tells. She first chose “Moses Lumpkin” for her screen name as the composer for that film.~~
48 ~~It “horrified” Kubrick possibly because it sounded “too Jewish.”⁷⁰~~

Kubrick's failure to make a film explicitly about the Holocaust resembled the response of many American Jewish intellectuals of the forties and fifties who did not explicitly address the Holocaust in their work. This silence, or absence, signified a response nevertheless. The impact of the Holocaust registered and is apparent in his films nonetheless. Topics such as Jewish identity, antisemitism, the ability to pass, social ostracism, power and its abuses, the nature of evil, violence, and genocide are approached obliquely, often via analogies and metaphors, if not outright misdirection, sometimes by overt, albeit brief, moments, but which are the very same issues raised by Jewish history, in particular the Shoah.

~~But, as she suggests, there was something more to the picture, that Kubrick realized that the story was untellable, especially if he wanted to maintain his commitment to historical veracity, authenticity, and realism.~~

Epilogue

Kubrick never entirely gave up on his Holocaust film. When, on November 18, 1993, Jan Harlan wrote to Tamara Holoubkova, his contact in Bratislava, to explain there had been a change of plan, he explained, "The film will still be made but at this stage I can't say where and when."⁷¹ Kubrick then got in touch with the Holocaust historian, Raul Hilberg, saying that Spielberg had not made the right film. He even invited Hilberg to his home at Childwickbury but Hilberg declined to say that he did not have the time. Kubrick suggested Hilberg read the novels of John Dos Passos to see how characters could disappear in the middle of a film and be replaced by other characters, implying that he imagined *Aryan Papers* as a variation on Dos Passos's novel *U. S. A.* (1938), which fused fiction with documentary genres and cinema with literature by making the hybrid text function like a newsreel. But Hilberg thought this would be too "panoramic" and reminiscent of the flawed 1978 television miniseries *Holocaust*. Subsequently, Hilberg thought that a film simply called *Auschwitz* and chronicling the mass destruction would be compelling. Hilberg almost called him "to remind him we were mortal," but did not because by that point Kubrick had moved on to *Traumnovelle* (a.k.a *Eyes Wide Shut* [1999]).⁷² In December 1993, Kubrick sent a Christmas card to Barbara Baum, optimistically writing, "I will keep you informed. All this work will not have been in vain."⁷³ In response to a letter of March 28, 1994, Jan Harlan wrote to Lynn H. Cox, saying, "at present the film has been postponed until Mr. K completes the film he is presented."⁷⁴ Kubrick, however, realized (as would happen with

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3 A.I. which he eventually passed on to Steven Spielberg), that he was not the director capable of
4 realising *Aryan Papers* and drew up a list of those whom he thought could.⁷⁵

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6 ~~Could *Aryan Papers* have succeeded had Kubrick and the studio not been scared off?~~
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8 ~~Holocaust film historian Rich Brownstein, author of 2021's *Holocaust Cinema Complete: A*~~
9 ~~*History and Analysis of 400 Films, with a Teaching Guide*, is dubious. "First," he says, "the story~~
10 ~~of Jewish boys and men hiding their circumcision was not new. This was a theme in Claude~~
11 ~~Berri's great autobiographical feature *The Two of Us – Le vieil homme et l'enfant* (1967). In fact,~~
12 ~~a gruesome reverse circumcision was the key plot point in Agnieszka Holland's *Europa Europa*~~
13 ~~(1990), which was Oscar-nominated for best screenplay in 1992, during *Aryan Papers*' pre-~~
14 ~~production. More importantly, the hallmark of great Holocaust filmmaking is narrowly focused~~
15 ~~plots, not sprawling or epic approaches, *Schindler's List* notwithstanding. Fortunately, Kubrick~~
16 ~~withdrew before making a disaster, not unlike Jerry Lewis' aborted *The Day the Clown Cried*~~
17 ~~(1972), which was halted during production. So, in this way, Kubrick fans should be grateful that~~
18 ~~*Aryan Papers* was never produced."⁷⁶~~
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31 I would like to thank Phyllis Lassner, Victoria Aarons, Robert P. Kolker, and Rich Brownstein,
32 as well as the two anonymous peer reviewers, for their very helpful feedback on earlier drafts of
33
34 this article.
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